

LAYMEN CONFESSING



John Frederick the Benefactor, a signer of the Augsburg Confession. Painting by Lucas Cranach the Elder.

In the 450th anniversary year of the Augsburg Confession it is worth while to reflect on the signers of this crucial document of Lutheranism. While theologians and scholars prepared this literary expression of faith, the list of those signing the confession is composed of laymen who placed their lives and property in jeopardy by their action.

Their courage was dramatized before the Emperor Charles V himself. When called together to Augsburg, Germany by the Emperor, who wanted the Diet to bring an end to what he considered a Lutheran rebellion, those laymen took the ultimate step of siding publicly with Martin Luther against the Emperor. If we recall that at this time the Reformer had been declared an outlaw by Charles V, the magnitude of their courage becomes the more apparent.

The religious drama which took place in Augsburg bears some resemblance to activity of the United States Congress. At that time the Emperor, along with the princes of the various states of the German Nation, concerned themselves with both political and spiritual matters. The princes had a voice in the choice of an Emperor; for this reason they were called "Electors." Quite unlike the political figures of our day, the German Electors of 1530 displayed a keen interest in religious as well as political matters.

The lives of some of the signers of the Augsburg Confession offer insight into the depth and breadth of their faith; their decisive action as laymen of the Church pleads for emulation from their modern counterparts. First to sign the

