

Concordia Seminary - Saint Louis

## Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary

---

Master of Sacred Theology Thesis

Concordia Seminary Scholarship

---

5-1-1981

### Augustana VII and the Unity of the Church Major Interpretive Accents in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century American Lutheranism

Mark Wangerin

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/stm>



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Wangerin, Mark, "Augustana VII and the Unity of the Church Major Interpretive Accents in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century American Lutheranism" (1981). *Master of Sacred Theology Thesis*. 366.  
<https://scholar.csl.edu/stm/366>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Concordia Seminary Scholarship at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master of Sacred Theology Thesis by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact [seitzw@csl.edu](mailto:seitzw@csl.edu).

AUGUSTANA VII AND THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH:  
MAJOR INTERPRETIVE ACCENTS  
IN NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURY  
AMERICAN LUTHERANISM

---

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Systematic Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Sacred Theology

---

by  
Mark Edward Wangerin  
May 1981

Approved by: Ralph A. Bohlmann  
Advisor

William J. Schaller  
Reader

05/2004  
PHOTOCOPY

BV  
4070  
C69  
M3  
1981  
no. 9

205058

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION . . . . . 1

Chapter

I. THE BACKGROUND AND TEXT OF AUGUSTANA VII;  
THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH . . . . . 4

II. AUGUSTANA VII AND THE OTHER LUTHERAN SYMBOLS;  
THE CONFSSIONAL ACCENT . . . . . 21

III. ACCENTS IN LUTHERAN ORTHODOXY; THE MARKS OF THE  
CHURCH AND THE DOCTRINE OF THE WORD OF GOD . . . . . 31

IV. AUGUSTANA VII AND NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICAN  
LUTHERANISM; CONTINUITY AND A CHANGE IN  
VIEWPOINT . . . . . 42

V. AUGUSTANA VII AND TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICAN  
LUTHERANISM; THE MINIMALISTIC EMPHASIS ON  
THE SATIS EST . . . . . 61

VI. AUGUSTANA VII AND ADDITIONAL TWENTIETH CENTURY  
INTERPRETATIONS; THE COMPREHENSIVE ACCENT . . . . . 90

VII. AUGUSTANA VII AND THE CHURCH TODAY;  
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION . . . . . 110

APPENDIX . . . . . 119

BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . . 121



## INTRODUCTION

The theme of this thesis was suggested in the course of the author's research into the question of church fellowship among the Lutheran Churches in the United States. Among all the works cited in defense of the position of complete fellowship and greater cooperation, the words of the Seventh Article of the Augsburg Confession appeared regularly: "For the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments."<sup>1</sup> These words, taken by themselves and out of context of the rest of the article or out of the context of the Augsburg Confession itself, do seem to give a very simple formula for achieving unity among churches. For this reason, Augustana VII has become a very popular topic for discussion and debate in recent years in connection with the whole question of Christian union.<sup>2</sup> In some discussions, the article has assumed an almost normative quality--the final word on the subject. For example,

---

<sup>1</sup>Augsburg Confession, VII, 2. English translation from The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, trans. and ed. by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959).

<sup>2</sup>As an example, two of the nine articles in the special 450th anniversary issue of The Sixteenth Century Journal are devoted to Augustana VII. Vol. 11, no. 3 (1980). David G. Truemper, "The Catholicity of the Augsburg Confession: CA VII and VC X on the Grounds for the Unity of the Church," and Robert C. Schultz, "An Analysis of the Augsburg Confession, Article VII, 2 in It's Historical Context, May & June 1530."

one author in his discussion of the question of fellowship between the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, has gone so far as to insist that

Those well-meaning critics who oppose fellowship with the American Lutheran Church on the grounds that the Gospel and the sacraments are an inadequate basis for unity are in effect altering the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, which says, "It is enough."<sup>3</sup>

Those three words are so important to him that he closes his essay, which is styled after the 95 Theses, with the words: "If there were 95 theses here, we would want to repeat 35 times: 'The Gospel . . . and the sacraments . . . it is enough.'"<sup>4</sup> In this instance, the words have assumed an almost mystical quality with power in themselves to convince the recalcitrant.

But this use of Article VII and the frequent reference to it in other writings raise some serious questions. Is such an interpretation really in harmony with a full Scriptural and confessional understanding of the doctrine of the church and the unity of the church or does it tend to downplay certain key aspects? Does Augustana VII really mean what many contemporary writers say it means? Also, since Article VII seems to have acquired such importance in the current debate over church fellowship the previous understanding of this article needs to be taken into account. How have earlier generations of Lutheran theologians understood and interpreted this article?

---

<sup>3</sup>John George Huber, "Theses on Ecumenical Truth and Unity," Concordia Theological Monthly 40 (1969):296.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 299.

It is the intent of this thesis to examine the meaning of the Seventh Article of the Augsburg Confession on the basis of the article itself, its Scriptural and creedal antecedents, and its context within the corpus of the Lutheran Confessions. The interpretation of this article by key theologians of the period of Lutheran Orthodoxy as well as by nineteenth century American Lutherans will then be presented. Finally, the clashing and sometimes bitter debate regarding the interpretation of this article in the twentieth century will be fully presented both from the viewpoint of official church documents and from the pen of theologians. The conclusion will present a summary of the findings of this study.

Article VII is an extremely important article. It has much to say to the church today regarding the body of Jesus Christ, His holy church. But as this study intends to show, it has much more to say than "It is enough."

## CHAPTER I

### THE BACKGROUND AND TEXT OF AUGUSTANA VII:

#### THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

Before discussing accents in the history of the interpretation of Augustana VIII, it is necessary to look at the background of this article within the context of the development of the Augsburg Confession itself. From what sources can this article be traced? Are there important themes evident in the writings of Martin Luther and the early documents which form the basis for the Augsburg Confession which contribute to the wording and intent of this article? Are there political and historical considerations which may provide additional information? While it is always difficult to say with certainty what the intent of a particular article was in its historical context when the intent is not clearly stated, certain evidences can lead to important deductions. As these questions are addressed in this chapter the overall theme of the doctrine of the church and its unity will be kept in mind. This is particularly important as the Scriptural and creedal antecedents of Augustana VII are examined. A comparative study of the text of the article in German and Latin will also be presented. Finally, emphases which are similar to Augustana VII in the remainder of the Augsburg Confession will be set forth.



Within the writings of Martin Luther there are many statements which speak of the church. A brief examination of some of the statements of Luther made before the presentation of the Augustana in 1530 will show some points of convergence between his thought and that of Article VII. Luther makes use of the same Biblical citation (Eph. 4:5) as the Augsburg Confession when addressing Alveld of Leipzig on the question of what constitutes the church:

According to Scripture, the church is the assembly of all those on earth who believe in Christ, just as we pray in the Creed. . . . This community or assembly consists of all who live in true faith, hope and love, so that the essence, life, and nature of the church is not a bodily, but a spiritual assembly of hearts in one faith, as St. Paul says, Eph. 4:5: "One Baptism, one faith, one Lord," . . . Now this is what is properly called a spiritual unity, because of which men are called a "communion of saints." And only this unity is sufficient to make a church; without it no unity--be it of place, of time, of person, of work, or of whatever it may be--makes a church.<sup>1</sup>

It is significant that here is the appearance of a statement regarding what is enough (gnug ist) or sufficient to make a church, namely, the unity of faith. It is clear that Luther is speaking in this instance about the una sancta ("all those on earth"). His concept of the church in connection with this Bible passage is universal in scope for it is not constituted by time or place.

In the same essay, Luther also addresses the question of the marks of the church, for that is the way whereby this invisible church is made evident.

---

<sup>1</sup>What Luther Says: An Anthology, compiled by Ewald M. Plass, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959) 1:260. For the German citation see Martin Luther, D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe 58 vols. (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1883- ) 6:292-93. (Henceforth abbreviated WA.) The statement cited comes from Luther's publication of 1520 The Papacy at Rome: An Answer to the Celebrated Romanist at Leipzig.

The external marks, whereby one may perceive where this church is on earth, are Baptism, the Sacrament of the Altar, and the Gospel, and not Rome or this or that place. For wherever Baptism and the Gospel are, no one is to doubt the presence of saints, even if they were only babes in their cradles.<sup>2</sup>

It is the marks of the church which produce faith and they are therefore signs of the presence of the church. Once again, it must be noted that this is a universal vision of the church not located in one particular place and only circumscribed by the presence of the Gospel and the sacraments. This essay gives some important indications of Luther's doctrine of the church in ways similar to those expressed by Augustana VII.

An even more striking similarity of language between the words of Luther and Article VII is found in his Confession Concerning Christ's Supper written in 1528.

I believe that there is one holy Christian Church on earth, i.e. the community or number or assembly of all Christians in all the world, the one bride of Christ, and his spiritual body of which he is the only head. . . . This Christian Church exists not only in the realm of the Roman Church or pope, but in all the world, as the prophets foretold that the gospel of Christ would spread throughout the world. . . . Thus this Christian Church is physically dispersed among pope, Turks, Persians, Tartars,<sup>3</sup> but spiritually gathered in one gospel and faith, under one head.<sup>3</sup>

The Christian Church so defined has the forgiveness of sins for "in it are found the gospel, baptism, and the sacrament of the altar, in which the forgiveness of sins is offered, obtained, and received."<sup>4</sup> In the conclusion of this treatise, Luther also treats of such external items

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 1:262; For the German see WA 6:301.

<sup>3</sup>Martin Luther, Luther's Works, general editor Helmut T. Lehman, 55 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955- ) 37:367. Hereafter cited as LW. For German text see WA 26:506.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 368.

as images, bells, eucharistic vestments, church ornaments, and altar lights, and declares them indifferent matters. They do not contribute to the substance of the church.<sup>5</sup> Here again, the vision of the universal church, the una sancta, is evident for it is spiritually gathered under Jesus Christ.

From these examples we proceed to the known sources of the Augsburg Confession itself. One of the most direct references is the twelfth article of the Schwabach Articles of 1529. The church is described once more in terms of its universal and eternal significance as the assembly of believers in Christ of all times and places--a church made evident by its marks. This is another confession of the una sancta.

There is no doubt that there is and remains upon earth until the end of the world a holy Christian church, as Christ declares, Matt. 28: 20: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." This church is nothing else than believers in Christ, who hold, believe, and teach the above-mentioned articles and parts, and for this suffer persecution and martyrdom in the world; for where the Gospel is preached and the Sacraments used aright, is the holy Christian church, and it is not bound by laws and outward pomp, to place and time, to persons and ceremonies.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 371.

<sup>6</sup>Quoted in J. M. Reu, The Augsburg Confession: A Collection of Sources with an Historical Introduction (Chicago: Warburg Publishing House, 1930), p. 43\*. (The \* indicates the "Collection of Sources" portion of the work.) For the German text see Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche, 6., durchgesehene Auflage (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), p. 61-62. The Schwabach Articles were written in the summer of 1529 and presented at Schwabach on October 16, 1529 in connection with a proposed federation of evangelical princes. Luther had a hand in the writing of these articles, as well as Philip Melancthon and Justus Jonas. See Reu, p. 27-29. It is of note that the Bekenntnisschriften call Luther's Confession Concerning Christ's Supper the "Grundlage" of the Schwabach Articles.

Contemporaneous with the writing of the Schwabach Articles was the colloquy held at Marburg in the fall of 1529 between representatives of the Wittenberg faculty and the Swiss theologians. From this conference came the Marburg Articles which also contain phrases similar to those found in Augustana VII. The thirteenth article addresses the question of human ordinances:

. . . what is called tradition or human ordinances in spiritual or ecclesiastical matters, provided they do not plainly contradict the word of God, may be freely kept or abolished in accordance with the needs of the people with whom we are dealing, in order to avoid unnecessary offense in every way and to serve the weak and the peace of all, etc.<sup>7</sup>

Human ordinances of themselves are not significant and are not a matter regarding the substance of the church itself.

The final major source for the Augsburg Confession is the Torgau Articles of March 1530. It was written at the request of Elector John of Saxony as an exposition of the position of the evangelical estates to be presented to the Diet of Augsburg if necessary. It is apparent that in the writing of this document Luther again played a part as well as Melancthon and Justus Jonas. The document was delivered to the elector on March 27, 1530.<sup>8</sup> The Torgau Articles in many respects form the basis for the second half of the Augsburg Confession. Again there is a statement which speaks to the subject addressed by Augustana VII:

---

<sup>7</sup>LW, 38:88. For the German text of this article see WA 30III: 168. See also A. F. C. Vilmar, Die Augsburgische Confession, hrsg. von K. W. Piderit (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1870, p. 84).

<sup>8</sup>For a discussion of the Torgau Articles and the search for the document itself see Reu, p. 48-52. See also Theodore E. Schmauk and C. Theodore Benze, The Confessional Principle and The Confessions of the Lutheran Church as Embodying the Evangelical Confession of the Christian Church (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1911), p. 322.

. . . the unity of the Christian Church consists not in external, human ordinances; and therefore we are not members cut off from the Church, if we observe dissimilar ordinances from one another; and for this reason, the Holy Sacraments among us are not invalid. For dissimilarity is not contrary to the unity of the Christian Church, as is clearly proved by the article which we confess in the Creed: "I believe the Holy Catholic Church." For since we are here commanded to believe that there is a Catholic Church, that is, the Church in the entire world and not bound to one place, but that wherever God's Word and ordinances are, there is a Church, and yet the external human ordinances are not alike, it follows that this dissimilarity is not contrary to the unity of the church.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout these documents several themes have become evident which will play a major role in the discussion of the meaning of Augustana VII itself. One is the emphatic reiteration of the existence of the una sancta, the one holy Christian church. The other is the absolute assurance that the Church exists no matter what the form of outward ceremonies and customs might indicate. The Church is not dependent upon these manifestations but upon the Gospel and the Sacraments. It is these important principles which come together in the earliest known draft of the Augsburg Confession, the so-called Nuremberg document (Na), which already contains all the major sections of the final draft of Article VII.<sup>10</sup> It speaks of the fact that the one holy Church is to continue forever. This church is the communion of saints, "in which the Gospel is preached and the sacraments administered." Regarding the unity of the church, "it is enough to agree concerning the Gospel and

---

<sup>9</sup>Quoted in Reu, p. 81\*. For the original German text see Karl Eduard Förstemann, Urkundenbuch zu der Geschichte des Reichstages zu Augsburg im Jahre 1530, 2 vols. (Halle: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1833) 1:70.

<sup>10</sup>For a discussion of the history and origins of this document see Schmauk, p. 221-50 which is a translation and comment upon Theodore Kolde, Die älteste Redaktion der Augsburger Konfession mit Melanchthon's Einleitung (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1906).

the sacraments." At the same time, "it is not necessary that the ceremonies or other human observances should be everywhere alike."<sup>11</sup>

Besides the background of the sources to Augustana VII, consideration must also be given to the question of what political and theological considerations might have played a role in this important article of the Augsburg Confession. The work of Schmauk is especially helpful in this area as he discusses in detail the relationship that existed between the theological and political parties in the development of the confession. He points out several factors which may have been important. In the first place, there is the steadfast confession of the Elector John who throughout the entire proceedings at Augsburg was determined to give a forthright declaration of his faith. "What the Augsburg Confession finally became, it became through and by way of, and as representing the faith of the Elector . . ."<sup>12</sup> From the point of view of the Elector, theological concerns were far more important than political ones and it was upon this basis that the other rulers and estates finally entered into the joint signing of the confession.

Yet it must not be lightly overlooked that there is also a significant political factor connected with Augustana VII. This is clear already from the summons of Charles V to the Diet of Augsburg. Not only is the threat of the Turk hanging heavily upon him, but he also has a concern regarding the unity of the church. The emperor makes it apparent that

---

<sup>11</sup>Schmauk, p. 261. For the German text see Bekenntnisschriften, p. 61.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 303.

in the matter of errors and divisions concerning the holy faith and the Christian religion we may and should deal and resolve, and so bring it about, in better and sounder fashion, that divisions may be allayed, antipathies set aside, all past errors left to the judgment of our Saviour, and every care taken to give a charitable hearing to every man's opinion, thoughts, and notions, to understand them, to weight them, to bring and reconcile men to a unity in Christian truth, to dispose of everything that has not been rightly explained or treated of on one side or the other, to see to it that one single, true religion may be accepted and held by us all, and that we all live in one common Church and in unity.<sup>13</sup>

Charles wished to see the question of unity addressed. So it is not surprising that it was addressed in the Augsburg Confession. This is evident already in the preface of the Augustana where Chancellor Brück indicates the willingness of the confessors to discuss the differences between the various parties so that "we may be united in one, true religion, even as we are all under one Christ and should confess and contend for Christ."<sup>14</sup> It is noteworthy that even in this statement while the hope is expressed for a unity in "one, true religion" the fact is also stated that all are under "one Christ." He is the one Lord of Eph. 4:4 as explicated below. So it is that the reformers state their willingness not to "omit doing anything, in so far as God and conscience allow, that may serve the cause of Christian unity."<sup>15</sup>

In a real sense then, the statements of Article VII are the central focus of a doctrinal presentation of the position of the Protestant

<sup>13</sup>Quoted in Reu, p. 72\*. The summons was dated January 21, 1530.

<sup>14</sup>Augsburg Confession, Preface, 10. (Hereafter cited as AC.) English translation from The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, trans. and ed. by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959).

<sup>15</sup>AC, Preface, 13.

estates regarding the unity of the church--a unity which they were accused of disrupting. The language of the article is a defense of a unity which goes beyond the problems caused by the Reformation. In fact, it has been argued that Article VII is a carefully formulated position adhering to the legal definition of a Christian as opposed to a heretic. The Protestant princes and estates wished to be considered loyal subjects of the Holy Roman Empire. This argument has been used to shed some light upon the wording of the section of Article VII regarding the "doctrine of the Gospel."<sup>16</sup>

So the Protestant princes were intent on saying to the Emperor Charles V that though they did not follow all the ordinances and ceremonies of the Roman church--a fact brought sharply into focus by the refusal of Elector John of Saxony to obey the Emperor's command regarding the Corpus Christi procession and the banning of evangelical preaching from the churches of Augsburg--they were still members of the church, a church which had a firmer foundation than that of Rome. The church was not to be considered a political organization under the headship of the pope but a spiritual communion under the lordship of Jesus Christ. In this regard, the words of Augustana VII prove to be a bold confession of an indisputable fact regarding the church, the una sancta.

---

<sup>16</sup> Robert C. Schultz, "An Analysis of the Augsburg Confession Article VII, 2 in It's Historical Context, May & June 1530," Sixteenth Century Journal, 11 (1980):25-30. Schultz argues persuasively that the wording of Augustana VII regarding the doctrina evangelii was used specifically as a confirmation of the Lutherans being in conformity with imperial law, especially the Code of Theodosius which speaks of doctrinam evangelicam (p. 29).



In the second place, the work of Philip Melanchthon must not be overlooked. Throughout the last weeks of the discussion at Augsburg until the presentation of the Augustana itself, Melanchthon was engaged in the process of attempting to "smooth out every trace of unnecessary roughness."<sup>17</sup> Interested in compromise and hoping to be able to find some common cause to reunite with Rome, Melanchthon attempted to exclude Reformed teaching from the document. In this he succeeded but he failed in his attempt to make the document more of a compromise due to the firmness of the political leaders, especially Elector John.<sup>18</sup> Yet from his learned and scholarly hand emerges a concise definition of the church in Augustana VII which serves not only as a political message to the emperor but as a theological definition which is faithful to its Scriptural foundation.

It is to that Scriptural foundation that we turn next in our understanding of the background of this article. The entire Augsburg Confession is filled with concern for a faithful witness to the Holy Scriptures. This is evident from the Preface where it is stated that the confession is offered "on the basis of the Holy Scriptures."<sup>19</sup> to the conclusion where the signatories state their readiness to "present further information on the basis of the divine Holy Scripture."<sup>20</sup> It is this same spirit which is manifest in Article VII in the use of Eph. 4:4-6 as the concluding quotation to the article. A brief exposition of this passage will be of great assistance in gaining further knowledge of the doctrine of the church as expressed by Augustana VII.

---

<sup>17</sup>Schmauk, p. 421.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 435.

<sup>19</sup>AC, Preface, 8.

<sup>20</sup>AC, Conclusion, 7.

The Apostle Paul in speaking to the Christians at Ephesus reminds them of their calling and urges them to be eager to "maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." The main theme of this section of the epistle is unity--a unity which is expressed in terms of a lofty and rhythmic statement:

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.<sup>21</sup>

The statement gives a clear enunciation to the unity of the church as the una sancta--the body of Christ. This unity is seen in the light of the Holy Trinity. There is one Spirit who calls us to the hope of our calling; as well as one Lord--the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the center of the one faith and into whom we are received in the one baptism; and the one God and Father of us all who is above, through, and in all. These verses express "the objective unity belonging to the Christian dispensation in all its aspects."<sup>22</sup> Or, as another commentator states, "The unity is spoken of as a thing which already exists. It is a reality of the spiritual world."<sup>23</sup> Yet it is good to keep in mind that with this vision of the spiritual unitas of the church the Apostle in the following verses admonishes the church to strive continually for concordia or external peace.

---

<sup>21</sup>Eph. 4:1-6 (Revised Standard Version)

<sup>22</sup>T. K. Abbott, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897), p. 107.

<sup>23</sup>J. Armitage Robinson, St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, a Revised Text and Translation with Exposition and Notes (London: Macmillan, 1909), p. 92.

until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles.<sup>24</sup>

So it is evident that St. Paul in this chapter reminds the church not only of the unity it has, but also of the unity into which it must grow and ever strive to remain faithful.

Given the fact that both of these concepts are evident in this chapter of Ephesians, it is noteworthy that the first concept, that of the spiritual unity of the church, is the one which is used in Augustana VII in connection with its definition of the church. This factor should be kept in mind in the further discussion of this article. For the confession of the church as the una sancta is fundamental to this article.

Besides its Scriptural foundation, Augustana VII also has antecedents in the words of the Apostles' Creed. The first clause in the German text uses the very same words in describing the church--"ein heilige christliche Kirche."<sup>25</sup> Also the phrase in the Latin text "congregatio sanctorum" is similar to the "communio sanctorum" of the Apostles' Creed.<sup>26</sup> Once again this is indicative of the effort evident

---

<sup>24</sup>Eph. 4:13-14.

<sup>25</sup>Cf. Bekennnisschriften, p. 21, 61.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid. For a summary statement on the interpretation of the phrase "communio sanctorum" see note 4 in the Bekennnisschriften, p. 61. While the phrase has been variously interpreted to refer either to the church or to the Sacraments (holy things), the usage of the Augustana, as well as Luther's usage and the wording in the Schwabach Articles, would indicate a preference on the part of the Reformers to understand the phrase as appositive to the statement on the church. For an extended discussion of "communio sanctorum" see J. N. D. Kelly, Early Christian Creeds, 3rd ed. (London: Longman, 1972), p. 388-97.

in the Augustana to be faithful to the doctrine of the catholic church. In addition to its Scriptural foundation, Article VII has at its core one of the basic creedal assertions of the Christian faith, "I believe in one, holy, Christian church."

Having discussed the historical, Scriptural, and creedal background of the article, it is also necessary to look at the German and Latin texts of Augustana VII. The two versions while essentially similar in concepts presented, also have enough differences in wording to make the two versions complementary to each other.<sup>27</sup> Following the introductory confession in each text that the church is and remains for all time, the article then takes up the discussion of the marks which distinguish the church. The Latin text describes these marks as "in qua evangelium pure docetur et recte administrantur sacramenta." The German text says, "bei welchen das Evangelium rein gepredigt und die heiligen Sakrament lauts des Evangelium gereicht werden." Perhaps the most significant part of this phrase is the inclusion of the words pure and recte in the Latin text with the corresponding words rein and lauts des Evangelium in the German. These words are not present in the earliest editions of the Augsburg Confession (Na), but they are in the edition of June 15, 1580.<sup>28</sup> The inclusion of these words is significant and it has been asserted that "Melanchthon inserted them . . . in the official version because the opponents had maintained that they, too, taught

---

<sup>27</sup> See Appendix for the complete German and Latin texts of Article VII as well as an English translation of each. All following quotations of Article VII are taken from the Bekenntnisschriften.

<sup>28</sup> See Reu, p. 175-75\*..

that the church comes into being where the Gospel is preached and where the Sacraments are administered."<sup>29</sup> The pure and recte of Augustana VII indicate that there is a concern for the way in which the Gospel is preached and the sacraments administered. These words will play a major role in later discussions of the meaning of this article.

The final section of Article VII deals with what is enough (satis est--ist gnug) and what is not necessary (nec necesse est--ist nicht not) for the true unity of the church. What is enough is "consentire de doctrina evangelii et de administratione sacramentorum." The German text is expanded at this point and says in more detail, "dass da einträchtiglich nach reinem Verstand das Evangelium gepredigt und die Sakrament dem gottlichen Wort gemäss gereicht werden." The Latin text speaks of the teaching (doctrina) of the Gospel while the German stresses the preaching of the Gospel according to a pure understanding of it. While using different terms, both of these expressions stress thereby the content of the message. It is what the Gospel is that is important. In regard to the Sacraments, the German text defines their administration by adding the phrase "in accordance with the divine word."

The Seventh Article also includes the statement of what is not necessary for the unity of the church, namely ceremonies and human traditions being alike everywhere. When taken with the earlier assertion of what is enough, this clause forms the centerpiece for the second half of the article, the meaning of which will be discussed in the interpretations given to this article. It should be pointed out here, however,

---

<sup>29</sup>Paul M. Bretscher, "The Unity of the Church (Article VII of the Augsburg Confession)," Concordia Theological Monthly 26 (May 1955):330.

that this clause is essential for a proper understanding of the article. The quotation of Eph. 4:4-6 concludes the article (see above).

Before proceeding to the interpretation and use of Augustana VII by others, the context of this article within the Augsburg Confession itself must be examined. Several other articles speak to similar issues of the church and its unity and are therefore instructive. Article VIII provides a further definition of the congregatio sanctorum when it states that this is the church "properly speaking" (proprie). The clear confession of the una sancta is again notable. Even though there may be hypocrites within the church mingled among the believers, the church is still present and the sacraments and Word are efficacious because of the institution of Christ.<sup>30</sup> This article is basically a refutation of the position of the Donatists which in the process presents a broader view of the church (large dicta). While Article VII presents the church as an article of faith, Article VIII looks at the human dimension.

One word used in the German text of Article VII, "einträchtiglich," may be better understood when its usage is compared with that of Article I concerning the doctrine of God. There the word is used in the sense of unanimously. "We unanimously hold and teach, in accordance with the decree of the Council of Nicaea . . ." The Latin text at this point uses the phrase magno consensu, "with great unanimity."<sup>31</sup> The use of this term is significant at this point in that it indicates an

---

<sup>30</sup>AC VIII.

<sup>31</sup>AC I, 1. German text reads: "Erstlich wird einträchtiglich gelehrt und gehalten, lauts des Beschluss Concilii Nicaeni . . ." The Latin text reads: "Ecclesiae magno consensu apud nos docent, decretum Nicaenae synodi . . ."

agreement which is unanimous about an article of doctrine. For this reason, the phrase in Augustana VII could well be understood in the sense of "unanimous" preaching. Tappert's translation of the text of Article VII at this point may be weak in that it does not emphasize the unanimity of the confession in a pure understanding of the Gospel. The word "einträchtiglich" does not permit a casual interpretation but instead stresses a "harmonious unanimity."<sup>32</sup>

Finally, there are several statements in the Augsburg Confession which emphasize the fact made clear by the closing section of Article VII that spiritual unity is not disrupted by different traditions. Regarding the distinction of foods it says, quoting Irenaeus, "'Disagreement in fasting does not destroy unity in faith,' and there is a statement . . . that such disagreement in human ordinances is not in conflict with the unity of Christendom."<sup>33</sup> A similar statement is made in connection with the question of clerical celibacy: "It would therefore befit the clemency of the bishops to mitigate these regulations now, for such change does not impair the unity of the church inasmuch as many human traditions have been changed with the passing of time, as the canons themselves show."<sup>34</sup> It is this basic emphasis on the place of human rites in the Christian church which becomes the crucial point in later

---

<sup>32</sup>Cf. the definition of "einträchtig" in The New Cassell's German Dictionary (New York: Funk & Wagnall's, 1958, 1962), p. 126.

<sup>33</sup>AC XXVI, 44. Translation from the German text.

<sup>34</sup>AC XXVIII, 74. From the Latin text. The German text at this point reads "die Einigkeit Christlicher Kirchen" (the unity of Christian churches).

discussions of Augustana VII. When this point is omitted or confused the argument itself becomes confused.

Article VII has been viewed in its Scriptural, creedal and historical context, as well as in the light of other articles of the Augsburg Confession. It is clear that the article is speaking first of the una sancta; second, of the marks of the church; and third, of the non-necessity of ceremonies. These are the emphases which are also evident in the remainder of the Lutheran Confessions.



## CHAPTER II

### AUGUSTANA VII AND THE OTHER LUTHERAN SYMBOLS:

#### THE CONFSSIONAL ACCENT

The important themes raised by Augustana VII regarding the question of the church, human rites, and the unity of the church are also addressed by the other Lutheran Confessions. While only some of these assertions, such as those of the Apology, can be directly traced to Article VII, all of them contribute to the confessional understanding of the issues raised in the interpretation of the article. This chapter will present these additional statements of the Lutheran Confessions as examples of an interpretation of Augustana VII from the same generation. Also, a discussion of how the confessional concept of the defense of the truth and the refutation of error has a part in the understanding of this article, especially in the light of modern approaches to it, will be presented.

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession is self-evidently the most important document to refer to in any interpretation of the Augsburg Confession. Written by Philip Melancthon himself, it serves as a useful commentary on the articles of the Augustana. Yet it was not originally intended to be a direct interpretation, but rather it was a defense of the Augustana in the face of the publication of the Confutatio

Pontificia.<sup>1</sup> The Confutation itself is important in that it shows what were the points of the Augsburg Confession which were affirmed or rejected by the Roman Church. As an aid to the understanding of Article VII of the Augustana both the Confutation and the Apology prove to be extremely helpful.

The Confutation makes two points regarding Article VII. In the first place, it takes issue with the definition of the Church whereby the wicked are excluded, quoting in support of their position the words of John the Baptist where the Church is compared to a threshing floor upon which the wheat and the chaff are to be separated on the Last Day. Secondly, while the Confutation praises the article for not regarding "variety of rites as separating unity of faith," it does this only if they mean special rites.

But if they extend this part of the Confession to universal Church rites, this also must be utterly rejected, and we must say with St. Paul: "We have no such custom," 1 Cor. 11:16. "For by all believers universal rites must be observed." St. Augustine, whose testimony they also use, well taught of Januarius; for we must presume that such rites were transmitted from the apostles.<sup>2</sup>

The Apology responds to both objections. In response to the first, Melancthon rightly points out that the points raised in the Confutation regarding evil men and hypocrites are addressed in the eighth

---

<sup>1</sup>The Roman Confutation was read before the Diet of Augsburg at Augsburg on August 3, 1530. Melancthon began work on the Apology soon thereafter and it was published in its final form in late April or early May 1531. See The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, trans. and ed. by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 97.

<sup>2</sup>Quoted in J. M. Reu, The Augsburg Confession: A Collection of Sources with An Historical Introduction (Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, 1930), p. 353-54\*. (The \* indicates the Collection of Sources portion of the work.)

article, which was added "to avoid the impression that we separated evil men and hypocrites from the outward fellowship of the church or deny efficacy to the sacraments which evil men or hypocrites administer."<sup>3</sup>

But the Apology does not merely dismiss the argument as unfounded, rather it goes to great lengths to show that the definition of the church as the assembly of saints is correct.

The Apology carefully defines the church strictly speaking (stricta dicta) and broadly speaking (large dicta). In so doing it indicates that the Augustana in Article VII is dealing with the church in the narrow sense.

The church is not merely an association of outward ties and rites like other civic governments, however, but it is mainly an association of faith and of the Holy Spirit in men's hearts. . . . This church alone is called the body of Christ.<sup>4</sup>

The same point is reiterated when in relationship to the words of the Apostles' Creed, "the communion of saints," it is stated that this particular phrase "seems to have been added to explain what 'church' means, namely, the assembly of saints who share the association of the same Gospel. . . ." <sup>5</sup> Therefore the catholic church is "made up of men scattered throughout the world who agree on the Gospel and have the same Christ, the same Holy Spirit, and the same sacraments, whether they

---

<sup>3</sup>Apology of the Augsburg Confession, VII and VIII, 3. (Hereafter cited as Ap). English translation from Tappert. Other confessional references in this chapter will be cited in the same manner using the following abbreviations: LC-Large Catechism, SC-Small Catechism, SA-Smalcald Articles, FC SD--Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration.

<sup>4</sup>Ap VII and VIII, 5.

<sup>5</sup>Ap VII and VIII, 8.

have the same human traditions or not."<sup>6</sup> "Thus the church, which is truly the kingdom of Christ, is, precisely speaking, the congregation of the saints."<sup>7</sup>

The Apology also addresses the accusation of the Confutation that the church thus described is only an idealistic illusion. Rather, it is made visible by certain marks, the Word and sacraments.

We are not dreaming about some Platonic republic, as has been slanderously alleged, but we teach that this church actually exists, made up of true believers and righteous men scattered throughout the world. And we add its marks, the pure teaching of the Gospel and the sacraments. This church is properly called "the pillar of truth" (I Tim. 3:15), for it retains the pure Gospel and what Paul calls the "foundation" (I Cor. 3:12), that is, the true knowledge of Christ and faith.<sup>8</sup>

Regarding the marks of the church, the Apology in an earlier instance uses words which are nearly identical with those of Augustana VII: "To make it recognizable, this association has outward marks, the pure teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments in harmony with the Gospel of Christ."<sup>9</sup> In essence then, the Apology affirms the position that Augustana VII is speaking primarily about the una sancta. For the definition of the church that is propounded here is of a body

---

<sup>6</sup>Ap VII and VIII, 10.

<sup>7</sup>Ap VII and VIII, 16.

<sup>8</sup>Ap VII and VIII, 20.

<sup>9</sup>Ap VII and VIII, 5. The Latin text reads: ". . . puram evangelii doctrinam et administrationem sacramentorum consentaneam evangelio Christi." Quoted from Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche, 6., durchgesehene Auflage (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967). All further German and Latin quotations in this chapter will be cited from this edition.

of saints which is of itself not observable but whose marks point to its existence and presence.

The Apology also addresses the second objection of the Confutation regarding the necessity of universal rites. Here valuable insight is given into the meaning of Augustana VII and the question of the satis est. The question again pivots on the doctrine of the unity of the church, the una sancta.

We are talking about true spiritual unity, without which there can be no faith in the heart nor righteousness in the heart before God. For this unity, we say, a similarity of human rites, whether universal or particular, is not necessary. The righteousness of faith is not a righteousness tied to certain traditions, as the righteousness of the Law was tied to the Mosaic ceremonies, because this righteousness of the heart is something that quickens the heart. To this quickening human traditions, whether universal or particular, contribute nothing, . . .<sup>10</sup>

Just prior to this statement, the Apology quotes in full the second half of Augustana VII and significantly places the satis est together with the nec necesse est. It treats the entire phrase as an undivided unit.

This same emphasis is reiterated even when affirming that some rites are indeed useful:

But as the different length of day and night does not harm the unity of the church, so we believe that the true unity of the church is not harmed by differences in rites instituted by men, although we like it when universal rites are observed for the sake of tranquility.<sup>11</sup>

What is worth noting is the fact that the contrast in this passage is not between some doctrines and others but between doctrine and ceremonies.

---

<sup>10</sup> Ap VII and VIII, 31.

<sup>11</sup> Ap VII and VIII, 33.

\* This is made even clearer when the Apology states later, "Apostolic rites they want to keep, apostolic doctrine they do not want to keep."<sup>12</sup>

Not only does the Apology give direct references to the words of Article VII but it also illuminates the meaning and usage of the words pure and recte which Melancthon uses in connection with the Word and the Sacraments. On the one hand, the opponents "neglect the state of the church, and they do not see to it that there is proper preaching and administration of the sacraments in the churches."<sup>13</sup> But in contrast, "We know that the church is present among those who rightly teach the Word of God and rightly administer the sacraments," while it is not present among those "who seek to destroy the Word of God with their edicts" and who even "butcher anyone who teaches what is right and true . . ."<sup>14</sup> In comparing these quotations with Article VII, it is significant that the word recte (and pure) is used in connection with the teaching of the Gospel, with the teaching of the Word of God, with preaching, and with the administration of the sacraments. It is also contrasted with false teaching and those who would by force of arms destroy the work of Christ. There is never any conflict between these various emphases or even a placing of greater importance of one aspect above the others. What is evident, however, is that Melancthon placed great stress upon proper preaching and doctrine, for the use of the words pure and recte in Article VII is not an isolated occurrence.

---

<sup>12</sup>Ap VII and VIII, 38.

<sup>13</sup>Ap XXVIII, 3. The Latin text reads: "Non curant recte doceri ecclesias et sacramenta rite tractari."

<sup>14</sup>Ap XIV, 4. The Latin text reads: "Qui Verbum Dei recte docent et recte administrant sacramenta."

The Apology then, as the most closely related of the other Lutheran Confession to the Augsburg Confessions, continues with the theme of Article VII regarding the unity of the church and the non-essential nature of ceremonies. This same thought is also present in the other Confessional writings. The Catechisms of Luther, while antedating the Augustana by one year, also stress this concept of the unity of the church, the una sancta. The Small Catechism includes with the work of the Holy Spirit the fact that He "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."<sup>15</sup> Echoes of Eph. 4:4 are present in this passage for there is reference to the one Lord and the one faith. Also this faith is called "true" (recht). The same thought is expressed in the Large Catechism in more detail;

I believe that there is on earth a little flock or community of pure saints under one head, Christ. It is called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, mind, and understanding. It possesses a variety of gifts, yet is united in love without sect or schism. . . . Through it he gathers us, using it to teach and preach the Word. . . .

Further we believe that in this Christian church we have the forgiveness of sins, which is granted through the holy sacraments and absolution as well as through all the comforting words of the entire Gospel.<sup>16</sup>

This assertion of the church as the una sancta again appears in the Smalcald Articles but with the important addition of the question of human ceremonies in that

. . . a seven-year-old child knows what the church is, namely, holy believers and sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd. So children pray, "I believe in one holy Christian church." Its holiness

---

<sup>15</sup>SC, Creed, 6. The German text reads: "Im rechten einigen Glauben"; the Latin says, "Per rectam unicam fidem."

<sup>16</sup>LC, Creed, 51, 53, 54.

does not consist of surplices, tonsures, albs, or other ceremonies of theirs which they have invented over and above the Holy Scriptures, but it consists of the Word of God and true faith.<sup>17</sup>

Note that the holiness of the church does not consist in human rites which are "above the Holy Scriptures" but in the "Word of God and true faith."

A final emphasis from the Lutheran Confessions which helps to elucidate Article VII is the confessional understanding of the need to defend the truth and refute error. In this regard, an understanding and recognition of the important distinction between unitas, the true spiritual unity of the church which is a God-given fact, and concordia, the external harmony of the church which must be constantly striven for, is absolutely essential. For it is by this distinction that the Lutheran Confessions can speak with absolute assurance and faith of the unity (unitas) of the Christian church on the one hand, and on the other hand, of the need to strive for harmony (concordia). So the Formula of Concord declares:

. . . churches will not condemn each other because of a difference in ceremonies, when in Christian liberty one uses fewer or more of them, as long as they are otherwise agreed in doctrine and in all its articles and are also agreed concerning the right use of the holy sacraments, according to the well-known axiom, "Disagreement in fasting should not destroy agreement in faith."<sup>18</sup>

The congruence of this passage with Augustana VII is striking in their similar approaches to the question of ceremonies which are again shown

<sup>17</sup>SA, III, XII, 2-3.

<sup>18</sup>FC, SD, X, 31. German text reads: "In der Lehre und all derselben Artikel, auch rechtem Gebrauch der heiligen Sakrament miteinander einig." Latin: "In doctrina et in omnibus illius partibus atque in legitimo sacramentorum usu concordēs fuerit."



to be unnecessary for the unity of the church. But it is also important to note the fact that this statement also speaks of agreement in "doctrine and all its articles," and in the "right use of the holy sacraments." It is apparent from the context that disagreement in these areas should lead to condemnation.

This emphasis is even more apparent when the Formula of Concord in contrast to the Augsburg Confession, also declares what is necessary: "In order to preserve the pure doctrine and to maintain a thorough, lasting, and God-pleasing concord within the church, it is essential (Latin: necessarium est; German: vonnöten ist) not only to present the true and wholesome doctrine correctly, but also to accuse the adversaries who teach otherwise . . ."<sup>19</sup> Thus while the Augustana posits what is not necessary for the unity of the church, namely agreement in ceremonies, the Formula of Concord declares what is necessary for harmony within the church (concordia), namely agreement in doctrine. The Apology similarly deals with this subject when it declares that "we cannot surrender truth that is so clear and necessary for the church."<sup>20</sup> Or later in the Apology, Melancthon declares, "Despite our most earnest desire to establish harmony, we know that to satisfy our opponents we would have to reject the clear truth."<sup>21</sup>

So it is evident that the Lutheran Confessions not only reiterate and re-emphasize the confession of Article VII in regard to the

---

<sup>19</sup>FC, SD, Rule and Norm, 14.

<sup>20</sup>Ap, Preface, 16.

<sup>21</sup>Ap XXIII, 59. Latin text has concordia for harmony.

unity of the church and the question of the non-necessity of ceremonies, but they also have a concern for the preservation of the true doctrine and the refutation of error. This was in fact the motivation for the Book of Concord itself since

our disposition and intention has always been directed toward the goal that no other doctrine be treated and taught in our lands, territories, schools, and churches than that alone which is based on the Holy Scriptures of God and is embodied in the Augsburg Confession and its Apology, correctly understood, and that no doctrine be permitted entrance which is contrary to these.<sup>22</sup>

There is therefore no contradiction between the position of Augustana VII which speaks of unitas and other sections of the Lutheran Confessions which are dealing with concordia. For it is in connection with the latter that the Formula of Concord can quote approvingly from Martin Luther on the question of the Sacramentarians and their beliefs concerning the Real Presence, "Whoever, I say, will not believe this, will please let me alone and expect no fellowship from me. This is final."<sup>23</sup>

In the later discussions of Article VII of the Augsburg Confession, it will be necessary to refer again to these important principles which are so much a part of the Lutheran Confessions and their understanding of unitas and concordia. For it is these distinctions themselves which have often become blurred or have been forgotten entirely. When the emphasis of Article VII is no longer placed primarily in the unity of the una sancta confusion is bound to arise. In proceeding to the examination of various interpretations of this article in the following centuries there will be numerous examples of faithful understanding as well as numerous examples of confusion.

---

<sup>22</sup>Preface to the Book of Concord, Tappert, p. 12.

<sup>23</sup>FC, SD, VII, 33.

### CHAPTER III

#### ACCENTS IN LUTHERAN ORTHODOXY;

#### THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH AND THE DOCTRINE OF THE WORD OF GOD

The interpretation of Augustana VII in the period of Orthodoxy marks a strong continuity with the emphasis of the Augsburg Confession itself and the other Lutheran symbols. In fact, the same emphases can be seen in the stress on the doctrine of the church, its marks, and the non-essential nature of ceremonies. This is apparent in the response of the period to criticism from without. The first response was directed against the views of the Roman Catholic Church on the nature of the church and its marks as this was epitomized in the theology of Robert Bellarmine. In answer to these attacks, the Lutheran theologians called upon Augustana VII to point out that the two marks of the church, which are the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments, are all that are necessary. Secondly, the period was marked by the controversy with George Calixt and his minimizing views of the doctrinal consensus needed for Christian union. Against this position, a marked view which emphasized the consensus of doctrine arose.

As the positions of this period are examined in this chapter, it will be evident that there is a stronger continuity in the interpretation of Augustana VII with the period that preceded the age of Orthodoxy than there is with some of the viewpoints which follow, especially

in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. There is also surprisingly little interest in the satis est of Article VII except in relation to the question of ceremonies. In examining this period, a summary of the works of several authors will be presented, as well as a more detailed presentation of the thought of Johann Gerhard.

As a summary statement, the view of Aegidius Hunnius (1550-1603) in his Disputations on several of the articles of the Augustana is very helpful. He states what he believes the unity of Article VII is and what it is not.

And first of all, for constituting this unity, a communion with the head is required, which head is Christ Jesus, Ephesians 1 and 5.  
 . . . Also the unity of the Spirit (is required) through whom we are grafted into the society of the mystic body under the one head Jesus Christ.

. . . Also a consensus in doctrine is required, or the unity of faith, on the basis of which we are one in Christ, one in truth, John 17, and one in the same mind and in the same judgment, I Corinthians 1.

. . . Moreover the statement in the Augsburg Confession that for the unity of the Church it is sufficient to consent concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments is not opposed to the communion of the Spirit and the mystic body but much rather included in it.

. . . However, it is opposed to the fictitious unity which the papists urge and imagine to be situated in a congruence of ceremonies.

. . . To be sure as far as the sacraments are concerned, they are rites and ceremonies required for the substance of Christianity.

. . . However, in the remaining ceremonies which are not commanded by the Word of God but which subserve the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments, we say that one characteristic is necessary, namely order. . . . In the meantime whatever pertains to these or those rites, just as their congruence does not produce the unity of the church, so also their divergence neither disturbs nor breaks up the church.

. . . Although therefore for various reasons it was hoped, as far as such things could come about, that an exact conformity in ceremonies would exist in the churches of the Augsburg Confession, nevertheless until now it was not necessary to fabricate some

necessity for such a course nor is it prudent. Let this therefore be the first thing that comes into consideration in the exegesis of this article.<sup>1</sup>

We see here the emphatic point that a difference in ceremonies is not to be considered divisive for the unity of the church, which is a unity of faith and a consensus in doctrine. In the process of saying this, Hunnius equates the consensus de doctrina evangelii with consensus in doctrine.

A similar understanding of Augustana VII is seen in the work of Balthasar Mentzer (1565-1627) who in his interpretation of the Augustana says in analyzing this article that the church is born by the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Rites which are not alike or ceremonies instituted by men do not dissolve the unity of the church.<sup>2</sup> What may be even more remarkable than what he says here is the fact that in the remainder of the chapter on Article VII he writes in great detail about the doctrine of election and the errors of the Roman Catholics as well as the Photinians, but little more on the question of the satis est and the unity of the church.

Johann Benedict Carpzov (1607-1657) in his commentary on the Lutheran Confessions also addresses himself to the interpretation of this

---

<sup>1</sup>Aegidius Hunnius, "Some 16th Century Theses Based on Articles 5, 7, and 8 of the Augsburg Confession," trans. Philip K. Press, Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly 64 (1967):181-83.

<sup>2</sup>Balthasar Mentzer, Exegesis Augustanae Confessionis cuius articuli XXI breviter et succinte explicantur . . . (Giessae Hassorum: Nicolai Hampelii, 1616), p. 286. The Latin text reads: "Unde nascitur Ecclesiae, nimirum ex doctrina Evangelii & administratione Sacramentorum. Ubi additur illustratio a dissimilitudine rituum sive ceremoniarum ab hominibus institutarum, qua non dissolvit Ecclesia unitatem."

article in a catechetical format. The questions which are asked and the responses show the emphasis which he wishes to make as well as point out that he was responding in large part to the attacks of Bellarmine and Calixt. So it is that he emphasizes that the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments are adequate marks of the church. The simple affirmation of this point is in strong contrast to the position of Bellarmine that the church has more than two marks.<sup>3</sup> In the same way Carpzov affirms that the consensus concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments are sufficient for the true unity of the church.<sup>4</sup> He also affirms that differences in rites and ecclesiastical traditions do not affect the true unity of the church.<sup>5</sup> What is interesting again is not the fact that Carpzov affirms these points but rather the little space he takes in doing so. He simply affirms a simple and straightforward understanding of Article VII. At the same time, he also refutes a minimalistic understanding of the consensus in doctrine. It does not consist solely in the teachings of the Apostles' Creed or only in fundamental teachings. This is in direct response to the thought of Calixt.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>Johann Benedict Carpzov, Isagoge in libros ecclesiarum Luther-anorum symbolicos . . . (Lipsiae: Joh. Wittigau, 1665), p. 323. The question reads: "An praedicatio Verbi & administratio Sacramentorum notae adaequatae sint Ecclesiae visibilis?" Augustana VII is cited as an affirmative response.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 324. "An ad veram unitatem Ecclesiae satis sit consentire de doctrina evangelica & administratione Sacramentorum?"

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 325. "An vera unitas Ecclesiae dissimilibus ritibus & traditionibus Ecclesiasticis laedatur?"

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 324. "An solus consensus in Literam Apostolici Symboli sufficiat ad unitatem Ecclesiae?" While Calixt is cited in the affirmative, the AC and the Ap are cited as opposing this view. Also, "An

In understanding the thought of the period of Lutheran Orthodoxy on the question of the interpretation of Augustana VII, we also turn to the work of Johann Gerhard (1582-1637). In his monumental Loci theologici he has dealt extensively with the question of the doctrine of the church. This locus displays strong affinities with the Augustana and also to a certain degree expands upon its thought. Gerhard's work is basically in response to Cardinal Bellarmine and also to the thought of Calixtine syncretism. As such it is a useful and illuminating document. It also gives the classical Lutheran doctrine of the church a definitive basis.

In describing the church's epithets or descriptive terms, Gerhard uses the passage from Ephesians 4 which is contained in Article VII. He says that the church is called "one"

because one Lord has reduced her through one baptism into one mystic body under one Head; because one Holy Spirit rules her and binds her together with the unity of faith, hope and love; because she confesses one faith and is called by one call to one heavenly inheritance. That unity of faith relies on one foundation of prophetic and apostolic doctrine. Because of this she is said to be "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets." Eph. 2.20.<sup>7</sup>

Gerhard refers to the Augsburg Confession directly when he says that the universal church is called the "congregation of the saints."<sup>8</sup>

---

consensus & unitas Ecclesiae ad sola fundamentalia dogmata a sese extendat, minime vero coeterorum divinitus revelatorum negationem & impugnationem excludat?" Calixt is again cited in the affirmative and the Apology in the negative.

<sup>7</sup>Johann Gerhard, Loci theologici, trans. Richard Dinda (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), p. 91. Copy consists of microfiche edition of a typescript manuscript. The translation is based upon the edition edited by Ed. Preuss, 10 vols. in 5 (Berolini: Gust. Schlawitz, 1863-1885). For this citation see 5:276.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 192. ". . . Qui in Augustana confessione exponitur, quod ecclesia catholica sit congregatio sanctorum."; Preuss, 5:301.

The most lengthy part of his work, however, is a defense of the assertion by the Augsburg Confession and other Lutheran theologians that the church is made known by only two marks, namely, the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. This is in direct confrontation with Roman Catholic theology's assertion that there are more than two marks. In effect, Gerhard is engaging in a debate with Catholicism in general and with Robert Bellarmine in particular in this locus. In the process, many of the thoughts of Augustana VII are incorporated into his reasoning as well as a commentary upon them. In speaking to Bellarmine's charge that Luther had seven marks while the Augsburg Confession and the Apology only speak of two, Gerhard replies that the marks which Luther spoke of had different values and could all be subsumed under the two marks of the confessions.

Furthermore, those marks which Luther divides others list together. We tie the lawful use of baptism and the Eucharist into a single mark, namely, the legitimate use of the sacraments. The preaching of the Gospel, instruction, the selection of ministers and invocation likewise belong to one mark, the pure preaching of the Word.<sup>9</sup>

What is of importance in this quotation is not only the way in which Gerhard harmonizes the supposed contradiction between one passage of Luther and the Confessions regarding the number of marks of the church but also the broader interpretation which he gives to the first mark. For he subsumes the preaching of the Gospel in the narrow sense under the mark which he calls the pure preaching of the Word. Such an

---

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 472-73. The Latin text reads in part: "Evangelii praedicatio, catechismus, ministrorum electio, invocatio itidem pertinent ad unam notam, scilicet puram verbi praedicationem."; Preuss, 5:370.



interpretation of the preaching of the Word will be seen in other sections of Gerhard's work on the church.

There are many times when Gerhard uses the terms "preaching of the Gospel" and "preaching of the Word" interchangeably. This can be seen in the following summary of the marks of the church:

If we are talking about characteristic and essential marks, we say unanimously that there are two such marks of the church, the pure preaching of the Word and the legitimate use of the sacraments. Third, we should note here that the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments considered by a different rationale are the formal cause of the church and are the effect or function of the church.<sup>10</sup>

Not only does Gerhard connect the Gospel with the Word; he goes on further in this section to connect the Word with the Holy Scriptures.

We are speaking here about such marks with which those must properly and immediately consider who are involved in and familiar with the Christian church, who are the assembly of Christians who are the sincere and uncorrupted church - that is, those who accept the Scriptures. As far as the heathen who do not accept the authority of the Holy Scriptures are concerned, we must first demonstrate to them that authority on the basis of the testimony of the church and the internal criteria of Holy Writ. Then they will be able to pass judgment about the sincere and uncorrupted church on the basis of its teaching, that is, on the basis of the harmony of its teaching with the Holy Scriptures.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 473. "Si de propriis et essentialibus notis sermo sit, omnes uno ore dicimus, tales ecclesiae notas esse duas, puram verbi praedicationem, et legitimam sacramentorum administrationem. 3. Notandum hoc loco, praedicationem evangelii et administrationem sacramentorum κατ' ἄλλον καὶ ἄλλον ἐποληψέως τρόπον diversa considerandi ratione esse causam formalem ecclesiae et esse effectum seu officium ecclesiae." Preuss, 5:370.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 473. "Monendum etiam illud, nos hoc loco de talibus notis agere, quae proprie et immediate ab illis attendendae sunt, qui in ecclesia Christiana versantur et ambigunt, quinam Christianorum coetus sint vera, sincera et incorrupta ecclesiae, hoc est qui admittunt Scripturae. Quod enim [sic] gentiles attinet, qui Scripturarum sacrarum auctoritatem non admittunt, illis ex testimonio ecclesiae et *Χρητῆριος* internis Scripturae s. auctoritas prius demonstranda est, antequam ex doctrina, hoc est ex congruentia doctrinae cum scripturis sacris, de ecclesia sincera et incorrupta judicare possint." Preuss, 5:371.

It is evident that in the above quotation Gerhard is speaking about the church in the narrow sense, that is, of the una sancta. This is clear from his statements about the "sincere and uncorrupted church." Yet what is also of importance is the establishment by Gerhard of the principle of how one determines whether the church is preaching the Word purely. For he says that he is in agreement with those who say that "we must learn of the church from Scripture," and "what is the same, 'The revealed and communicated Word of God is the mark by which we can arrive at the recognition of the true church.'"<sup>12</sup>

For one must pass judgment about the pure preaching of the Word on the basis of Scripture or, what is the same, on the basis of the revealed Word of God as it is set forth in the Scriptures. Whether and to what extent the preaching of the Word is pure we cannot determine except from the Scriptures. Therefore, whoever claims that the pure preaching of the Word is a mark of the church, he is thereby saying that one must pass judgment about the truth and sincerity of the church on the basis of Scripture.<sup>13</sup>

Gerhard sees the Scriptures as the norm of the teaching of the church and they hold a position which complements rather than contradicts the preaching of the Gospel for the Gospel is normed by the Sacred Scriptures.

Gerhard also clearly indicates that the marks of the church, namely, the pure preaching of the Gospel and the legitimate use of the

---

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 475. "Ab hac sententia nostra de ecclesiae notis non discedunt, qui dicunt, ex Scriptura discendam esse ecclesiam, vel quod idem est, verbum Dei revelatum et communicatum esse notam, qua in verae ecclesiae notitiam pervenire possumus . . .; Preuss, 5:371.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid. ". . . Quia pura verbi praedicatio ex Scriptura sive quod idem est ex verbo Dei revelato in Scripturis proposito dijudicanda est. An et quatenus pura sit verbi praedicatio, non potest aliter nisi ex Scripturis cognosci; qui ergo statuit, puram verbi praedicationem esse ecclesiae notam, eo ipso dicit, ex Scriptura de veritate et sinceritate ecclesiae iudicium faciendum esse . . ."; Preuss, 5:371.

sacraments are the marks of the whole church, the una sancta. For "wherever we find the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments, there the church is . . ." <sup>14</sup> But this position must also take into account those who do not have the Word purely or who do not administer the sacraments legitimately. To this point Gerhard says that "the church has its own levels in purity of the Word. In some places it is more sincere and pure, less so in others." <sup>15</sup> Here then he distinguishes between the church as a whole and the pure and uncorrupted church as he speaks of the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments on the one hand, and the pure preaching of the Word and legitimate administration of the sacraments on the other hand.

As the preaching of the Word and administration of the sacraments distinguish the church from secular assemblies which are outside the church, so also the pure preaching of the Word and legitimate administration of the sacraments distinguish the church from heretical assemblies which are within the church. <sup>16</sup>

So it is that Gerhard can speak of churches which are corrupt and must therefore be restored "according to the norm and form of the Word."

---

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 489. "Ubi est praedicatio verbi et sacramentorum administratio, ibi est ecclesia . . ."; Preuss, 5:374.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 489-90. ". . . Habere ecclesiam in puritate verbi suos gradus, ut alias magis, alias minus sincera sit et pura . . ."; Preuss, 5:375.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 490. "Ut per praedicationem verbi et sacramentorum administrationem ecclesia distinguitur a coetibus profanis, qui sunt extra ecclesiam; sic per puram verbi praedicationem et per legitimam sacramentorum administrationem distinguitur a coetibus haereticis, qui sunt in ecclesia."; Preuss, 5:375.

From this point he moves to the conclusion that "pure doctrine is the form and mark of the church."<sup>17</sup>

In this lengthy presentation of the Lutheran position on the two marks of the church by Johann Gerhard, there has been a consistent theme evident. It is clear that in no way does Gerhard see any tension between understanding the preaching of the Gospel in a narrow or broad sense. In fact, it is obvious that even his opponents conceded that point.<sup>18</sup>

The fact that there is no such tension is likewise evident in the work of Abraham Calov (1612-1686) on the Augsburg Confession. When he describes the marks of the church he also addresses himself to the relationship of the preaching of the Gospel and the teaching of the Scriptures. He calls the doctrine of the Gospel "the cardinal chapters of the Christian religion and the fundamental matters."<sup>19</sup> The doctrine of the Gospel is "the nucleus and scope of the entire Scripture."<sup>20</sup> In this way, Calov adds his voice to that of Gerhard in maintaining the close relationship between the Gospel and the Scriptures--a relationship which should not be seen as one of conflict but rather in harmony.

---

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 534. ". . . Ideoque corruptae ecclesiae secundum normam et formam verbi restituendae sunt, ex quo ipso firmiter colligitur, doctrinam puram esse ecclesiae formam et notam." Preuss, 5:381.

<sup>18</sup>Gerhard quotes several Catholic authors who speak of the mark as the "teaching of the Gospel," "the pure preaching of the Word," and "sound doctrine." Ibid., p. 514. See also Preuss, 5:381.

<sup>19</sup>Abraham Calov, Exegema Augustanae Confessionis, Editio altera (Wittebergae: Johannis Borckardi, 1665), Articulus VII, Caput V, XIV misnumbered XIII. The Latin reads: "Nomine doctrinae Evangelicae intelliguntur capita Religionis Christianae Cardinalia, & fundamentalia . . ."

<sup>20</sup>Ibid. "Doctrina enim Evangelii, quae est nucleus, & scopus universae Scripturae . . ."

The interpretation of Augustana VII in the period of Lutheran Orthodoxy does not offer many startling revelations in addition to the understanding of the article as expressed in the Confessions themselves in regard to the una sancta. Much of what is expressed in the writings of the Lutheran dogmaticians is indeed merely a reaffirmation of just that position. But the fact that this is indeed the case, even in the face of attacks from outside the Lutheran Church, is striking. For the teaching of Augustana VII regarding the church is upheld as dealing primarily with the una sancta. The unity of this church is not disturbed by differences in rites or ceremonies. That is the meaning of the satis est to the Orthodox theologians examined in this chapter. In fact, they pay little attention to the significance of that phrase, which may well indicate that they thought it had little significance outside of the discussion of ceremonies.

On the other hand, they express much interest and are greatly concerned with the explication and defense of the two marks of the church. For the unity of the church as well as its very existence is predicated upon the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. So the defense of the understanding of the two marks of the church is a logical outgrowth of that position. At the same time, it also is abundantly clear that the preaching of the Gospel is never seen in a minimalistic way that is opposed to an understanding of the doctrine of the Word of God. In light of the fact that the doctrine of the Gospel finds its normative basis in the authority of the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures, it is not at all surprising that such a defense is made.

## CHAPTER IV

### AUGUSTANA VII AND NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICAN LUTHERANISM: CONTINUITY AND A CHANGE IN VIEWPOINT

Given the rather remarkable uniformity of understanding displayed among Lutheran theologians of the Orthodox period regarding the meaning of Article VII of the Augsburg Confession, the viewpoints emerging in nineteenth century American Lutheranism show one marked difference. There are still many who interpret the article in much the same way as earlier generations, but a different emphasis and interpretation also emerges. These changes in understanding are most logically explained as part of the tension among various groups as well as the result of the attempts at unity within a fragmented but rapidly growing Lutheranism on American soil. The attempts to bring together various synods and organizations in the nineteenth century as well as the discussions which were part of these attempts would naturally be viewed as an arena for the discussion of the doctrine of the church and its unity. In such discussions, it was natural that Article VII with its statements about the church and its unity would play an important role. For example, the article appears in several official documents cited below where its interpretation is plainly evident from the context. In these instances, an interpretation largely in harmony with earlier interpretations of the article is evident.

There is also a striking difference of interpretation present in the nineteenth century and the focus of this difference is most clearly seen in the views of two of the leading theologians of the nineteenth century. On the one hand, the position of C. F. W. Walther holds to a large extent to the approach of the writers of the period of Lutheran Orthodoxy. His views were shared in large part by other theologians of the Missouri Synod as well as by theologians within other branches of American Lutheranism. On the other hand, the position of George Fritschel of the Iowa Synod can best be characterized as the beginnings of a minimalistic understanding of Augustana VII to be used in addressing the question of church fellowship. In his writings, the main emphasis of Article VII appears to narrow from the wide viewpoint of the church as a whole, the una sancta itself, to the point of contact or contention between two or more particular churches. The problem of fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines, as well as the theory of "open questions," is inserted into this entire debate. The position theoretically espoused by Fritschel also finds its practical application in a significant speech given by Henry Eyster Jacobs. That these changes in understanding Article VII are of great importance is clear from the fact that much of the debate seen in this century in its beginning stages continues into the twentieth century with even greater fervor and more marked differences of opinion.

In the light of the earlier discussion of this article, however, the question has to be addressed whether the emerging interpretation of Article VII grows more from a real understanding of the article in light of the Lutheran Confessions or from the influence of the times.

In comparing the views of this century as they are expressed both in official documents as well as in the writings of theologians, this chapter will address this point.

An early nineteenth century reference to Augustana VII occurs in the response of the Ohio Synod to the "Plan Entwurf" of the General Synod in the year 1821. They objected to the General Synod's requirement that only certain hymnals and catechisms be used. As a basis for their objections, the Ohio Synod appealed to the Augustana:

Who does not see with us that it would be far better if we continued with the . . . 7th article of the . . . Augsburg Confession in which we are permitted to act according to our own discretion, that is, as long as we do not act contrary to the word of God, to use ceremonies and regulations, which--even if they should be very different--are nevertheless not to be regarded as grounds for causing a separation. . . . Therefore we conclude that the proposed plan repudiates the Augsburg Confession--or at least part of it.<sup>1</sup>

While neither the Ohio Synod nor the General Synod of 1821 could be termed exceptionally faithful confessional churches, it is significant that in this reference the main emphasis of the Article is seen to be in distinguishing between doctrinal questions and ceremonies. As such, this document is similar in understanding to the earlier interpretations of Augustana VII which have been noted.

Another document which demonstrates a similar understanding of Article VII was presented to the preliminary meeting of the General Council in Reading, Pennsylvania and adopted by that body. Written by

---

<sup>1</sup>Cited in Richard C. Wolf, Documents of Lutheran Unity in America (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 62. The document was adopted in 1821.



Charles Porterfield Krauth and entitled "The Fundamental Principles of Faith and Church Polity," this document describes the nature of the unity referred to in Augustana VII:

The true Unity of a particular Church, in virtue of which men are truly members of one and the same Church and by which any Church abides in real identity, and is entitled to a continuation of her name, is unity in doctrine and faith and in the Sacraments, to wit: That she continues to teach and to set forth, and that her true members embrace from the heart, and use the articles of faith and the Sacraments as they were held and administered, when the church came into being and received a distinctive name.<sup>2</sup>

This statement emphasizes the marks of the church--an emphasis which clearly is founded upon Augustana VII and its understanding of the marks of the church. At the same time, however, there is a certain unclarity regarding just which church is being referred to here. Is it the una sancta? Apparently not, in so far as the reference is to a church which came into being at a specified time with a distinctive name.

Perhaps the best understanding of the use of Article VII in a traditional, confessional sense comes from the writings of C. F. W. Walther. In many ways, the thoughts of this Missouri Synod theologian wielded considerable influence among the various groups that comprised American Lutheranism in the nineteenth century in both a positive and negative way. His understanding of this article was shared by other theologians whose position will also be examined, but Walther's view must be set forth first.

Many of Walther's writings dealt with the subject of the church. Two of his major essays in fact are a presentation of the topic of

---

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 144. The statement was adopted in the year 1866.

church and ministry and a defense of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as the true visible church on earth. In both of these documents an understanding and use of Article VII emerges which is quite similar to that seen in the writings of the Orthodox dogmaticians. In fact, in many respects, Walther bases his position upon them, quoting extensively from their writings, as well as upon a strict, traditional interpretation of the Lutheran Confessions themselves.

In his study of the question of church and ministry, Walther makes only one reference to Augustana VII. This occurs in connection with Thesis V. "Although the true Church in the proper sense of the term is invisible as to its presence, yet its presence is perceivable, its marks being the pure teaching of the Word of God and the administration of the holy Sacraments in accordance with their institution by Christ."<sup>3</sup> First, note should be taken of the fact that the reference here is to the whole church, the una sancta, and to the marks which make this church visible. Secondly, it is noteworthy that Walther here exchanged the term "pure preaching of the Word of God" for the "pure teaching of the Gospel." It is clear that Walther's usage of these terms is like Johann Gerhard's, who saw no conflict between referring to the Gospel and the teaching of the Word of God. The two phrases are not mutually contradictory or exclusive.

---

<sup>3</sup>C. F. W. Walther, Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt (Erlangen: Andreas Deichert, 1865), p. 54. "Obwohl die wahre Kirche im eigentlichen Sinne des Wortes ihrem Wesen nach unsichtbar ist, so ist doch ihr Vorhandsein (definitiv) erkennbar, und zwar sind ihre Kennzeichen die reine Predigt des Wortes Gottes und die der Einsetzung Christi gemässe Verwaltung der heiligen Sacramente." The citation of Article VII occurs on p. 56. English translation of Thesis V from Walther and the Church, ed. Theodore Engelder (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938), p. 60.

In his work on the Evangelical Lutheran Church as the true visible church, Walther quotes portions of Augustana VII in the first two theses regarding the one holy church and the marks of the church. In these instances, he is again following the concept that Augustana VII is primarily addressing the question of what constitutes the church, strictly speaking. For the church "in the proper sense of the word, outside of which there is no salvation, is, according to God's Word, the total of all that truly believe in Christ and are sanctified through this faith."<sup>4</sup> The first citation following the Scripture references is Augustana VII. The same primary emphasis on Article VII occurs in Thesis II where the marks of the church are described which make the presence of the invisible church known. These marks are the "pure preaching of God's Word and the unadulterated administration of the holy Sacraments."<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup>Walther, Die Evangelisch-lutherische Kirche die wahre sichtbare Kirche Gottes auf Erden (St. Louis: August Wiebusch u. Sohn, 1867), p. 3. "Die Eine heilige christliche Kirche auf Erden oder die Kirche in eigentliche Sinne des Wortes, ausser welcher kein Heil und keine Seligkeit ist, ist nach Gottes Wort die Gesamtheit aller an Christum wahrhaft Glaubenden und durch diesen Glauben Geheiligten." The citation of Article VII occurs on p. 4. English translation of Thesis I from Walther and the Church, p. 117.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 10-11. "Zwar kann die Eine heilige christliche Kirche, als ein geistlicher Tempel, nicht gesehen, sondern allein geglaubt werden, es gibt jedoch untrügliche äusserliche Kennzeichen, an denen ihr Vorhandensein erkannt wird, welche Kennzeichen sind die reine Predigt des Wortes Gottes und die unverfälschte Verwaltung der heiligen Sacramente." The citation of Augustana VII occurs on p. 13. English translation in Walther and the Church, p. 117. Note should be taken of the similarity between the statement here and in Kirche und Amt and of the substitution of the term "God's Word" for "Gospel." Similar phraseology also occurs in his Die rechte Gestalt einer vom Staate unabhängigen Evangelisch-lutherischen Ortsgemeinde (St. Louis: Aug. Wiebusch u. Sohn, 1863), p. 1.

Walther also draws the corollary from statements regarding the church as a whole to his understanding of particular churches. For a "true visible church in the absolute sense is that only in which God's word is preached right and the holy Sacraments are administered in accordance with the Gospel."<sup>6</sup> What is said of the church as a whole must also be said of its individual manifestations. A church body that says it is faithful to the Word of God and the Gospel must show that faithfulness in its use of the marks of the church.

Finally, Walther also refers to the second part of Article VII, the satis est, in connection with Thesis XVIII. "The Ev. Lutheran Church distinguishes sharply between what God's Word commands and what it leaves free."<sup>7</sup> Walther applies this section to the question of ceremonies and church usages. There is no hint here that the satis est deals with one doctrine being set over against another or with the greater importance of one doctrine as compared to another. Rather the point of comparison is between doctrine on the one hand and ceremonies on the other.

---

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 42. ". . . Eine wahre sichtbare Kirche aber in einem uneingeschränkten Sinne, im Gegensatz zu den falschgläubigen Kirchen oder Secten, ist nur diejenige, in welcher Gottes Wort rein gepredigt und die heiligen Sacramente laut des Evangelii gereicht werden.: The citation of Article VII occurs on p. 43. English translation from Walther and the Church, p. 120. Walther uses the same terminology regarding the "visible church" in an essay presented to the Western District of the Missouri Synod in 1870. For an English translation see Theses on Communion Fellowship with Those Who Believe Differently, trans. by Lawrence L. White (Pittsburgh: n.p., 1980), p. 1.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 123. "Die ev.-luth. Kirche scheidet streng, was in Gottes Wort geboten und freigelassen ist (Adiaphora, Kirchenverfassung)." Citation of Augustana VII on the same page. English translation from Walther and the Church, p. 126.

This same point is also addressed in an essay by Walther's successor, Franz Pieper, on the interpretation of Augustana VII. He stressed on the one hand that nothing more should be promoted for the essential unity of the church, as, for example, the Catholics and Episcopalians do in their insistence upon unity in "church usages, forms of worship, and outside organization." On the other hand, nothing less should be promoted than the "right preaching of the Word of God and a proper administration of the Sacraments." Such a situation, according to Pieper, is not the case in the Reformed churches, or in the German Lutheran state churches. While there may be some faithful pastors and members in these churches, the organizations as such "do not have the form which they should have according to God's Word and our confession." Pieper then defines the word "einträchtiglich" which occurs in Augustana VII by saying that it means "everything preached according to a pure understanding of the Gospel." Every Christian is therefore bound to "leave such congregations which do not hold to this confession, and join himself to one which holds in all parts to the Word of Christ."<sup>8</sup> It is clear that

---

<sup>8</sup> Franz Pieper, Das Grundbekenntnis der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche. Mit einer geschichtlichen Einleitung und kurzen erläuternden Anmerkungen versehen, 2 pts. in 1 v. (St. Louis: Luth. Concordia Verlags, 1880), 2:21. The translation is the author's. The German text reads in full:

Man darf nicht mehr, als zur wesentlichen Einigkeit gehörig, fordern, Die Papisten und die Episcopalen fordern fälschlich auch Einerleiheit in den kirchlichen Gebräuchen, Formen des Gottesdienstes und der äusseren Verfassung. Man darf aber auch nicht weniger fordern als die rechte Predigt des Wortes Gottes und die stiftungsgemässe Verwaltung der Sacramente. In den unirten Kirchengemeinschaften wird nämlich auch die falsche reformirte Lehre geduldet, und in den deutschen sogenannten lutherischen Landeskirchen finden auch solche Lehrer Herberge, die in vielen Stücken den reinen Verstand des Evangeliums verlassen haben, ja auch heinisch-rationalistische Lehre in Wort und Schrift vortragen. In

Pieper sees the reinem Verstand des Evangeliums in a broad sense, that is, as all parts of doctrine which is not seen as contradictory to the understanding of Augustana VII. It is also significant that he stresses unanimity of confession on the part of all members of a church body. The satis est of Article VII is manifestly not being used in a minimalistic way, but again must be viewed in light of ceremonies and church usages. Not only is there agreement with the emphasis of Article VII regarding the satis est, but Pieper also develops the relationship between the article and the question of church fellowship and even church membership. For each church body must be judged to see whether it is faithful in allen Stücken. This use of the article is a subsidiary argument but it indicates that he held to a comprehensive understanding of what is meant by Article VII regarding the doctrine of the Gospel.

Other Lutheran theologians of the nineteenth century shared similar viewpoints with those expressed by these two Missouri Synod theologians. Matthias Loy of the Ohio Synod addressed himself to the question of the relationship of other church bodies, which by virtue of the presence of the preached word and Sacraments are also churches, with the church of the Reformation which

has no authority to alter the terms of visible fellowship, and if a congregation would not accept the truth which they taught and which

---

diesen Kirchengemeinschaften gibt es daher wohl einzelne lutherisch-gläubige Glieder und einzelne lutherisch-gläubige Prediger, aber die Gemeinschaften als solche haben nicht die Gestalt, welche sie nach Gottes Wort und unserm Bekenntnis haben sollen. Es wird in diesen Gemeinschaften wohl hin und wieder und von diesem oder jenem Pastor, aber nicht einträchtiglich, dass heisst, von allen, nach reinem Verstand das Evangelium gepredigt. Darum ist jeder Christ verbunden, diese Gemeinschaften zu verlassen und sich an solche anzuschliessen, die in allen Stücken an Christi Rede bleiben.

the Church declared in the Augsburg Confession as its faith, they would not and could not recognize it as a sister church, but insisted that as a prime condition of fellowship it must be loyal to the Head of the Church and accept the truth of the Gospel. The Lutheran Church in its humble devotion to that Gospel could no more concede the right of Reformed parties to depart from the Holy Scriptures than it could make such a concession to the Romanists. . . . Therefore the Church of the Augsburg Confession insists that the visible churches must rightly teach the Gospel and rightly administer the Sacraments, and that refusal to abide by the Lord's Word on the part of any professedly Christian congregation must constitute a barrier to fraternal fellowship with it so long as it persists in such unfaithfulness to the Head of the Church.

When this principle of the exclusive authority of the Lord as he has spoken in Holy Scripture is understood and appreciated, it is not necessary to enter upon an extended exposition of the proposition concerning the unity of the Church. . . . Because the Lord who builds and rules the Church does His work by His Word and the Sacraments which He has instituted, the Church comes into existence only by their use, and only thus can we be sure that there is a congregation of saints, or a church, in any given place; and only when the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered can we recognize the congregation as a church that is faithful to the Lord.<sup>9</sup>

In this quotation, Loy makes clear the relationship between the church as a whole and individual churches. He states that each church must be judged on the basis of how rightly it preaches and administers the sacraments. Yet this is done in light of the fact that it is the Gospel and Sacraments as the marks of the church which make the church in the first place. Also, it is evident that there is no tension between understanding the Gospel as a mark of the church and speaking of faithful adherence to the Word of God. Loy also gives indication of seeing the satis est in reference to the question of ceremonies when he states, "The Lutheran Church insists on the pure Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments according to the divine institution. All the rest must be free,

---

<sup>9</sup>Matthias Loy, The Augsburg Confession: An Introduction to Its Study and an Exposition of Its Contents (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1908), p. 596-97.

because the Lord has not ordained it, and must not be a condition of church unity, because the Lord has not required it."<sup>10</sup>

Charles Porterfield Krauth of the General Council shared many of the same views as those expressed by Loy and the theologians of the Missouri Synod. At the same time, he also spoke in terms of fundamental doctrines when speaking of the unity of the church in relationship to Article VII. "To the true unity of the Church, is required hearty and honest consent in the fundamental doctrine of the Gospel, or, in other words, in the Articles of Faith."<sup>11</sup> Taken at face value, this statement appears to represent a minimalizing of the understanding of the satis est but in the explanation which follows, it is clear that Krauth is referring to fundamental doctrines in contrast to human traditions.

Over against the unity of Rome under a universal Head, the unity of High-Churchism under the rule of Bishops, the unities which turn upon like rites or usages as in themselves necessary, or which build up the mere subtleties of human speculation into articles of faith, over against these the Lutheran Church was the first to stand forth, declaring that the unity of the Church turns upon nothing that is of man. . . .

Our fathers clearly saw and sharply drew the distinction between God's foundation and man's superstructure, between the essential and the accidental, between faith and opinion, between religion and speculative theology, and, with all these distinctions before them, declared, that consent in the doctrine of the gospel and the administration of the Sacraments is the only basis of the unity of the Church. This basis, the Lutheran Church has defined and rests on it, to abide there, we trust, by God's grace, to the end of time.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 599.

<sup>11</sup>Charles Porterfield Krauth, The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1871, 1899), p. 181.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 182.



Krauth is even more explicit when he shows that this understanding should not be taken as an attack against the teaching of the Word of God or as a minimalistic understanding of the same.

We protest, therefore, alike against the basis which does not propose the fundamental doctrine of the gospel as essential to unity, and the basis, which, professing to accept the gospel fundamentals as its constituent element, is, in any degree whatever, dubious, or evasive, as to what subjects of gospel-teaching are fundamental, or which, pretending to define them, throws among non-fundamentals what the Word of God and the judgment of His church have fixed as Articles of Faith.<sup>13</sup>

It is clearly the Word which is the norm for any articles of faith.

Krauth makes this clear when he states that "the Bible is the rule of faith, but not the confession of it; the Creed is not the rule of faith, but is the confession of it."<sup>14</sup>

The very fact that Charles Porterfield Krauth can be perceived in the above quotations as defending himself against association with a particular position would indicate that such a position was being advocated as an alternate understanding of Article VII. Such an alternative position was in fact strongly proposed by Sigmund Fritschel of the Iowa Synod. In 1868 he presented an essay on the question of what the Lutheran Church meant by unanimity in doctrine "which according to Article VII . . . is necessary for church unity."<sup>15</sup> Already in the

---

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>15</sup>The German title reads in full: "Worin besteht nach dem Sinne der älteren lutherischen Kirche die Übereinstimmung in der Lehre, welche nach Artikel 7 der Augsburgischen Confession zur kirchlichen Einigkeit nöthig ist?" The English translation of this essay is taken from Theodore G. Tappert, Lutheran Confessional Theology in America, 1840-1880 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), Cf. p. 79.

title there is a shift evident in the use of the word "nōthig" rather than "genug" to describe the meaning of the satis est. Such a shift would seem to denote an emphasis upon what is needed rather than upon what is already there.

The essay also exhibits a change in emphasis away from the given unity of the church to the external unity or concordia among church bodies. In the process, Fritschel takes an additional step when he adds the following words to Augustana VII regarding ceremonies:

The Augsburg Confession had declared that it was "not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places." Gerhard put less important points of doctrine in the same category as ceremonies, and applied to the former what the Augsburg Confession declares concerning the non-necessity of agreements with reference to the latter. Gerhard asserted that one must distinguish between an absolute and complete unity, which no longer knows any differences at all (such as will only come to be in the church triumphant), and a fundamental unity that consists of agreement in the chief articles of faith although less important articles (ceremonies and adiaphora) of the interpretation of many Scripture passages remain in dispute.<sup>16</sup>

Fritschel has added something here to the actual intent of Article VII, a point he readily admits, and he uses as his justification the work of Johann Gerhard on fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines. He applies this discussion to the question of which doctrines are necessary for the true unity of the church. The corollary which he has drawn from the words of the Augustana to Gerhard's teaching on non-fundamental doctrines is a non-sequitur. For it is apparent from the previous chapter that Gerhard understood Article VII primarily in the context of the una sancta. Secondly, although he recognized various levels of purity in the church

---

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 83-84.

and various understandings of doctrine, he in no way excused these things as matters of little interest but rather said that churches which are corrupt must be restored "according to the norm and form of the Word."<sup>17</sup>

Practically, Fritschel's understanding of Article VII appears to be more concerned with the fact that complete unanimity in doctrine is an ideal which can never be attained than with anything else. For he says:

Although it would be desirable if one could reach an amicable agreement even in secondary and academic questions, and if the bond of unity among orthodox and pure theologians could be brought to complete perfection so that, in accordance with St. Paul's exhortation in I Corinthians 1:10, there may be no dissension among them in all questions they may be united in the same mind and in the same judgment, in the imperfections of our world this is to be neither expected nor looked for.<sup>18</sup>

Such a pragmatic view takes little interest in the words of St. Paul and appears to make them a pious saying with no real foundation.

In his argument Fritschel also makes a great deal of the fact that differences in teaching which do not affect the foundation of faith do not break the bond of the Spirit.

The unity has reference to the foundation of the faith, that which belongs to the substance itself is of the articles of faith. If this substance is damaged, the unity is at once torn to pieces. Whoever here runs into conflict with the truth begins to be a heretic and to depart from the church, but the truth will remain if the antitheses in matters of faith pertain only to secondary details.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup>Johann Gerhard, Loci theologici, trans. Richard Dinda (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979, p. 534. A microfiche edition of a typescript manuscript.

<sup>18</sup>Fritschel in Lutheran Confessional Theology, p. 86.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

What Fritschel has done is to take the orthodox distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines, which in its simplest definition deals with the questions of which doctrines may be in ignorance denied or ignored without danger to saving faith, and has applied this concept to the question of church fellowship or unity. In so doing, he departs from the traditional understanding of Augustana VII which bases unity upon the pure preaching of the Gospel and the legitimate administration of the Sacraments. There is a change in the meaning of unity-- for the unity of the una sancta has been replaced by a discussion about what is necessary for unity between particular churches.

Not only has the meaning of unity been changed in this essay but also its basis. For in answering the question "what are the teachings that are necessary for church unity? . . .," the following response is given: "They are the articles of faith and chief parts of Christian doctrine that make up the contents of the church's confessions."<sup>20</sup> The Confessions thus become the basis for unity in the church and only the chief articles at that, as Fritschel's subsequent discussion of the contradictions within the Confessions themselves makes clear.<sup>21</sup> The unitas ecclesiae apparently no longer has anything to do with the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments.

This is a radical departure from any of the other interpretations of Article VII which have been presented in this thesis. While others such as Pieper and Krauth have seen the connection between the unity of the church as a whole and the question of individual particular churches,

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 90-91.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 92-99.

what Fritschel has done is to make the particular churches the focus of the article. His position is based not so much upon what Article VII itself says as upon a predetermined understanding of what it cannot mean. This is best illustrated in a summary of his essay by George J. Fritschel who states that the pure doctrine of the Gospel means the cardinal articles of the Christian faith and cannot mean absolute doctrinal agreement.<sup>22</sup>

The attitude of the Fritschel's was to a great extent a response to the position of the Missouri Synod and especially of C. F. W. Walther in the insistence upon complete doctrinal agreement. In Walther's response to the Iowa Synod regarding open questions, the points raised by Sigmund Fritschel in his essay regarding the understanding of Article VII are answered.

Walther's main point is that even the rejection of non-fundamental doctrines or an error concerning them involves a far more serious matter.

Through nothing does an erring person manifest more clearly that his error is of a fundamental nature than by showing that in his error he rejects the Word of God, a thing which may take place in opposing non-fundamental as well as fundamental Bible teachings. . . . And, we repeat, can there be a clearer proof that a body is not a true church of God than if it will not unconditionally submit to the divine Word?<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup>George J. Fritschel, Quellen und Dokumente zur Geschichte und Lehrstellung der ev.-luth. Synode von Iowa u.a. Staaten (Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, n.d.), p. 281. The German text reads at this point: "Was nun ist die 'reine Lehre des Evangeliums'?--Darauf geben die Dogmatiker verschiedene Antworten, die aber darauf hinausgehen: die Kardinalstücke des christlichen Glaubens. Es ist damit nicht absolute Lehrübereinstimmung gemeint."

<sup>23</sup>C. F. W. Walther, "The False Arguments for the Modern Theory of Open Questions," trans. by William Arndt and Alex Guebert. First appeared in nos. 1-11 of the Concordia Theological Monthly 10 (1939). Reprinted in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Proceedings . . . 1971, p. 228.

Walther therefore rejects the idea that for "ecclesiastical unity not more is required than agreement in the teachings laid down in the public confession of the Church" for this opposes

the clear teaching of the Word of God that the Church at all times is one, and one only. Clearly and definitely Christ says: "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold. Them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold and one Shepherd," John 10:16. This unitas ecclesiae which all Christendom confesses in the Nicene Creed is before everything else a unity in the doctrine of faith.<sup>24</sup>

Here is evident an appeal to the fundamental unity of the church--a unity clearly expressed in Augustana VII. It is a God-given unity but as Walther emphasizes it is manifested as a unity in doctrine.

Therefore the Lutheran Church must not merely accept the doctrines of the Lutheran Confessions and say that that is enough for

if our Church insists only upon symbolical and not at the same time upon canonical unity . . . on Biblical unity, then our Church is, we repeat it, not an orthodox Church, but a miserable sect, which does not bind itself to accept the whole Word of God but only certain doctrines thereof.<sup>25</sup>

In addressing the question of "open questions" and in refuting the position of Sigmund Fritschel, it is noteworthy that Walther does not appeal to Article VII at all. While his position is based upon the Scriptural and confessional understanding of the defense of the truth, this is not a position that can be traced to Article VII. Walther's understanding and use of it has been shown above in his explication of the una sancta.

Finally, the end of the nineteenth century also witnessed what may well be the first practical application of Article VII to a fellowship discussion in a minimalistic sense. This occurred in a

---

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 233.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 240.

speech delivered by Henry Eyster Jacobs to the First General Conference of Lutherans in America in 1898. The meeting was held between representatives of the General Council, the General Synod, and the United Synod in the South, and served as a formative step in the founding of the United Lutheran Church in America. Jacobs came right to the heart of the issue when he stated:

There is only one essential to the true unity of the Church, and that is, as the Augsburg Confession declares, "not that human traditions or rites and ceremonies be everywhere alike" . . . but that "they agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments." When our agreement within these spheres is established, our separation into diverse organization may serve to increase our efficiency, instead of retarding it; while union in organization without such agreement will tend only to strife and confusion.<sup>26</sup>

The church whose unity Jacobs is describing when he states that Article VII sets forth "only one essential" is not the una sancta. It is rather the churches whose "diverse organization may serve to increase our efficiency." Just as Fritschel did, this perspective downgrades Augustana VII from the viewpoint of the one, holy Christian church to the everyday discussions regarding Lutheran synods. Not only does this position lead to a minimalistic understanding of Article VII, it is itself a minimal understanding of that article.

In nineteenth century American Lutheranism, the interpretation of Augustana VII took a significant turn. In this debate the question of Scripture itself became important. Not only this but the role of Article VII was applied to the question of inter-Lutheran relationships and church fellowship. In the process, it acquired a meaning which was

---

<sup>26</sup>Wolf, p. 266. Cf. p. 259 for historical background.

far different from the emphasis seen in the previous chapters. This new understanding had a different motivation and different goals. In fact, Article VII was no longer viewed as a confessional statement of the existence and unity of the church of God on earth but instead it became part of a bitter debate about what is and is not necessary for church fellowship. The original intent of the article, as still propounded for example in the thought of Walther and Loy became obscured in the minimalistic emphases of Fritschel and Jacobs in regard to church fellowship. The twentieth century use of the article will obscure its understanding even further.



## CHAPTER V

### AUGUSTANA VII AND TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICAN LUTHERANISM:

#### THE MINIMALISTIC EMPHASIS ON THE SATIS EST

There are several striking elements present in the interpretation of Augustana VII in the twentieth century. In the first place, the article becomes much more popular in its treatment of both official church documents as well as in individual theological essays. Secondly, the emphasis in the interpretation of the article shifts from an understanding of the first section concerning the una sancta to the second part of the article regarding the satis est. The most obvious reason for this change in emphasis can be found in the pressures brought by the ecumenical movement upon world Lutheranism in general and upon American Lutheranism in particular. The stress in American Lutheranism often had its basis in the question of the relationship between the major Lutheran church bodies in the United States and the reasons for the lack of unity manifested by these bodies.

In such a situation, the words of Article VII which seem to say that for the true unity of the church "it is enough" would understandably become important. As an example of this, reference is made by David Scaer to the use of this article at the Lutheran World Federation Assembly in Evian:

"Augustana VII" or "CA VII" is a code word in theology for identifying the seventh article of the Augsburg Confession, the most prominent of the Lutheran Confessions. Continued reference was made to this article during the assembly with the contention that here the Lutheran Church could find a manifesto in its own tradition for wider participation in ecumenical activities. It was Gustaf Wingren, more than anyone else, who provided a dogmatic interpretation of Augustana VII that allowed for the widest degree of ecumenical participation not only with other churches but with the world.<sup>1</sup>

As will be seen in this chapter, this particular understanding of Article VII did not begin in the twentieth century with the 1970 assembly of the Lutheran World Federation. In fact, the roots of such an interpretation can be traced back to Sigmund Fritschel's understanding of the article in his discussion of the question of fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines as well as in his understanding that the acceptance of the Lutheran Confessions themselves was enough to achieve unity.

The focus of interpretation has shifted to the question of "What is enough?" In answering this question, various approaches surfaced which have been summarized well in the following statement of the Church of the Lutheran Confession issued in 1961:

Under the influence of this movement [the Ecumenical movement] a . . . dissension arose among the Lutheran Churches on the question of church fellowship. Using the "it is enough" of the Augsburg Confession, various groups have developed conflicting teachings as to the extent of agreement necessary for church fellowship. Some maintain that it is enough to agree that Jesus is the Lord. Others contend that this means we are to avoid as heterodox only such as teach falsely concerning the cardinal doctrines of salvation. Still others make a distinction between errorists who err in fundamental doctrines, contending that it is an infringement on Christian Liberty to demand unity also in non-fundamental doctrines. Still others would make the Augsburg Confession the standard of unity to the exclusion of other symbols of the Lutheran Church, particularly the Formula of Concord. In opposition to these varying views as to the extensiveness of agreement necessary for true unity, some have maintained

---

<sup>1</sup>David P. Scaer, The Lutheran World Federation Today (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), p. 23.

that full agreement on all doctrines revealed in Scripture is necessary for that true unity on which alone the exercise of church fellowship may be based.<sup>2</sup>

This is a good representation of the varying viewpoints regarding the satis est. What is interesting however is that it too takes for granted the point that the satis est is applicable. This is the case with many of the interpretations of Article VII in the twentieth century. Many views fail to take into account the context of the satis est within the entire article. This chapter and the following chapter will critically examine the various viewpoints mentioned in the above quotation.

While there are many degrees of understanding, they can be basically divided into two main groups, each of which address the question of the satis est from a different perspective. On the one hand, there is the minimalistic understanding of the satis est which is often connected with a strong ecumenical viewpoint. On the other hand, there is a comprehensive understanding of the satis est in connection with the consentire de doctrina evangelii of Augustana VII. While even this viewpoint represents to a certain extent a narrowing in the meaning of Augustana VII in that it too emphasizes inter-church relations often at the expense of the una sancta, it is within this view that there is still most evident an understanding of the article in connection with the question of the necessity of human rites and ceremonies and within the greater context of the doctrine of the church.

---

<sup>2</sup>1961 Statement on Church Fellowship quoted in Richard C. Wolf, Documents of Lutheran Unity in America (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 450.

Because a strict chronological presentation of the various views expressed regarding Article VII would be exceedingly confusing since conflicting views are present throughout the twentieth century, the minimalistic viewpoint will be presented first in this chapter. The next chapter will discuss the comprehensive understanding as well as several positions which can be said to belong to neither position, but which place strong emphasis upon the article's doctrine of the church.

A minimalistic understanding of Augustana VII as a basis for church fellowship is very evident in several important church union documents of the twentieth century. The first example may also be the most striking. In 1912 the Madison Agreement was reached by the various Norwegian Lutheran Synods in America as their settlement of the question of how to interpret the doctrine of predestination.

WHEREAS, our confessional writings establish that "to the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments"; and  
 WHEREAS, our previous committees by the grace of God have attained unanimity with respect to the doctrines concerning the call, conversion and the order of salvation as a whole, and we all confess as our sincere faith that we are saved by grace alone without any cooperation on our part; and  
 WHEREAS, the deliberations of our new committee have led to a satisfactory agreement concerning the doctrine of election and to an unreserved and unanimous acceptance of that doctrine of election which is set forth in Article XI, Part II of the Formula of Concord and Question 548 in Pontoppidan's Truth unto Godliness . . . , we therefore declare hereby, that the essential agreement concerning these doctrines which has been attained is sufficient for church union  
 . . . .<sup>3</sup>

The Madison Agreement is a striking use of Augustana VII. For here all the heated debate of the Predestinarian Controversy was glossed over and

---

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

the matter was brought to an amicable conclusion without ever really solving the problem, although a minority within the Norwegian Synod could not go along with this agreement since it did not settle the doctrinal issue.<sup>4</sup> Nelson Fevold has succinctly called this a "practical rather than a theological resolution."<sup>5</sup> In the end, two different understandings of the doctrine of predestination are left standing side by side by appealing to Augustana VII and the assurance that the agreement reached "is sufficient." Article VII becomes the ecclesiastical justification for the ignoring of a problem. It is not the last time that the article will be used in this way.

Another statement from the same era which also takes a minimalistic view of Augustana VII in that it follows the principle that confessional subscription is enough for true unity is the Knubel-Jacobs statement of 1919. This statement arose from the discussion held at a meeting of the National Lutheran Council in which the representatives of the United Lutheran Church in America (President F. H. Knubel and Prof. C. M. Jacobs) introduced a statement entitled "The Essentials of the Catholic Spirit of the Church" as more representative of the position of the United Lutheran Church. While this statement was not formally adopted by that church body, it is important in that it became the basis for the Washington Declaration. The statement says in part:

No one of these Bodies has any reason to believe that any other subscribes these confessions insincerely, or teaches any other doctrine

---

<sup>4</sup>The Evangelical Lutheran Synod traces its origin to this time when a group of theologians refused to accept the Madison Agreement.

<sup>5</sup>The Lutherans in North America, ed. by E. Clifford Nelson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 323.

than that set forth therein. We therefore declare that each of these Bodies is in unity of the Lutheran faith with every other, and that these Bodies together do form one church, according to the principle set forth in the Augsburg Confession, Art. VII,--"To the unity of the Church it is enough . . ."<sup>6</sup>

The authors follow the principle that the conditions for church union or fellowship within American Lutheranism already exist on the basis of their confessional position. The statement has turned the unity of the una sancta into a definition of the relationship of church bodies.

The same reasoning is followed in the Washington Declaration of 1920 which declares, ". . . We believe that a clear definition of what is meant by 'Gospel' and 'Sacrament' must precede any organic union of the Churches."<sup>7</sup> There is at least apparent here a concern for a definition of terms, but the basis for church fellowship is still the same as that advocated by Fritschel and Henry Eyster Jacobs in the nineteenth century. The common confessional position claimed by the different churches is enough.

The position enunciated by the Knobel-Jacobs statement and the Washington Declaration is also evident in an article from the Lutheran Quarterly in 1906. There the author speaks with disdain of those who "beginning with the simple, direct, liberal, Scriptural statement of the article . . . go from one deduction to another, until they arrive at the conclusion that agreement concerning the doctrines of the gospel means entire agreement in the whole system of Christian theology . . ."<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup>Wolf, p. 306. Cf. p. 293 for historical background.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 351.

<sup>8</sup>L. B. Hafer, "The Church, Article VII of the Augsburg Confession," The Lutheran Quarterly 36 (October 1906):535.

It is clear from the context of the quotation that the author is especially referring to the position of the Missouri Synod and its demand for doctrinal consensus.<sup>9</sup> Hafer then proceeds to describe what he believes the doctrine of the Gospel is, using as his basis a definition from the Formula of Concord of the Gospel in the narrow sense, as the "explanation which stands out in contrast with the utterances of those who count the gospel identical with theology."<sup>10</sup> However, there does seem to be confusion evident in exactly what he is referring to in that he says that "whatever we may expect of pastors and teachers, for membership in the Church it is sufficient to know that we are 'dead in trespasses and sins,' and to believe that we have salvation through Christ alone."<sup>11</sup> If Hafer is referring to membership in the Holy Christian Church, then his statement is correct. But then he has misunderstood the comprehensive statements which have reference to church fellowship as referring to church membership. This is another example of the blurring of distinctions between the una sancta and the churches.

But even if there is some ambiguity in his statement regarding the gospel, his minimalistic understanding of the "proper administration of the Sacraments" is evident when he states:

It matters not whether our understanding of the sacraments be small or great, so long as we believe the words of Christ. Where this is done there is the true church, and there the Church is to be recognized. To do otherwise marks us as sectarians. How can we take upon ourselves the responsibility of shutting the door upon those

---

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 533-34. He accuses the Missouri Synod of consigning churches other than Lutheran ones to perdition.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 536.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

who, according to our own acknowledgement, have a faith sufficient to secure acceptance by Christ himself?<sup>12</sup>

Such a position makes the barest essentials necessary for admittance to the Sacraments. As such, it is a weak position which cannot stand beside a confessional understanding of the Sacraments and the great stress which the Lutheran Confessions place upon a mature and proper understanding of the Sacraments.

The positions quoted above are representative of the development of the minimalistic requirement for church fellowship in the United Lutheran Church in America. Another theologian, whose position is also close to that of the Washington Declaration and who emphasizes the point that the Lutheran Confessions are the foundation of fellowship, is Conrad Bergendoff. He refers once again to the satis est and gives it this definition:

For the unity of the Lutheran Church it is sufficient to accept the Confessional interpretation of Word and Sacrament, and thus, of the church. We are still in a period characterized by some doubt as to the implication of this unity. Some Lutherans in America do not want to draw the consequences and recognize a unity of all who accept the Confessions, or would like to add new statements to the Confessional literature which are to be accepted before fellowship is granted. In either case the desire is not in accord with Lutheran teaching. For to withhold fellowship where unity of doctrine is present is to set up new requirements for fellowship which the Confessions do not require. And to demand some further doctrinal statements, a sort of extra-Lutheranicum, is to assume for a fraction of the church what belongs to the whole church.<sup>13</sup>

The position here espoused sees in Lutheran unity the barest of essentials necessary for agreement. The acceptance of the Confessions

---

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Conrad Bergendoff, "The True Unity of the Church," The Lutheran Church Quarterly 12 (July 1939):270-71.



themselves is enough for unity in doctrine. By such a position the Confessions become the norm for theology and nothing should be added to them. Once again this view is dependent upon Augustana VII at least in the sense of a starting point from which to present a minimalistic view.

The views expressed in these examples from the pens of American theologians are representative of the minimalistic understanding of Article VII in the period preceding World War II. Following the war the ecumenical spirit which was germinating came into full flower. In this atmosphere it will prove helpful to view the minimalistic approach to Article VII not only in its American context but also in its use elsewhere. For the major emphases evident in world Lutheranism are echoed by American theologians also. Augustana VII has played a significant role in the doctrinal outlook of the Lutheran World Federation, as noted above. One of the most significant statements from the Lutheran World Federation regarding Article VII came from the 1956 assembly in Minneapolis in the so-called Minneapolis Theses. Here again great emphasis is placed on the satis est:

Here the words, "it is enough", witness to our freedom: wherever we hear the Gospel preached in its truth and purity and see the Sacraments administered according to the instruction of Christ, there we may be assured that the one church of Christ is present. There nothing separates us from our brethren, and both faith and love constrain us to overcome our dividedness.

For our Lutheran Churches with a diverse past and different situations and commitments in the present, this "it is enough" transcends local, national and synodical traditions, and urges us to express our unity at the Lord's Table where we partake of the one Body.

The words, "it is enough," also give the Lutheran Churches a freedom also in relation to other Churches. Bound by them we are led to the Scriptures and so rescued from the pressures of institutional expediency as well as from complacent acceptance of the status quo. In an ecumenical study of the Scriptures we find the most hopeful means toward a fuller realization of the unity of Christ . . . as found in and behind our confessional statements. On this basis

also the questions of inter-communion and the nature of the Sacraments can be brought out of the present deadlock. For our Lutheran Churches, it is a congenial and timely task to participate in and initiate such ecumenical studies--on the highest theological, as well as on the parish, level.<sup>14</sup>

This position is significant and also not unexpected in that once again it exhibits the trait of beginning with the statement of the essential unity of the church which is in complete harmony with the position of Article VII and proceeding from this unitas to a complete concordia on the basis of the simplest understanding of the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. This is obvious from the fact that in this ecumenical understanding even the deadlock regarding the nature of the Sacraments can be overcome. The words "it is enough" by themselves have great influence and by themselves are apparently able to do great things for the union of Christendom.

Another significant aspect of the minimalistic understanding of Article VII which can be seen in a non-American context is the militant anti-doctrinal stance which is often affirmed as a corollary to it. This is seen strikingly in the position of Leif Grane, who says that "there can be no doubt that consentire de doctrina evangelii means proclamation."<sup>15</sup> The understanding of the "pure doctrine in the sense of a proper theology as the criterion for the true Church" is dismissed as the position of Lutheran Orthodoxy, a position which has nothing to

---

<sup>14</sup>Wolf, p. 603.

<sup>15</sup>Leif Grane, Die Confessio Augustana: Einführung in die Hauptgedanken der lutherischen Reformation (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959), p. 68. "Es kann kein Zweifel daran bestehen, dass 'consentire . . .' die Verkündigung meint."

do with that of the Augustana.<sup>16</sup> Grane in this context describes the Augustana as being "vorkonfessionalistisch"--pre-confessional. He states in this regard that the question of different fellowships was not part of the view of the Augustana.<sup>17</sup> This is a significant point, but it is made in the context of an attack upon the concept of doctrinal consensus. For if the Augsburg Confession does not address the questions raised in the issue of fellowship then why should it be used as an instrument to attack a particular approach to church fellowship? Grane's position is significant however in that his understanding of doctrine as proclamation will also be met in several other theologians as well as in response to his position.

A somewhat milder viewpoint, but one which again confuses the concept of unitas and concordia is found in an address delivered by August Kimme at the Lutheran Theological College in Makumira, Tanzania. Speaking of the divisions present within Christendom and also within the Lutheran World Federation, he says:

In this desperate situation of Ecumenism today we can only invite them to re-discover the helpful way to the true unity of the church we all long for. The Reformation has pointed out this right path in the Augsburg Confession article 7 sentences 3 and 4: "For it is sufficient . . ." The scope of this statement is the true unity of the Church Universal over against the possible but not necessary uniformity of the Church. Following the rule "First things first" AC 7 insists peacefully but inflexibly on the fundamental fact that Christendom has been and is being created and fostered by the saving message of the Gospel and its sacraments. So it is the only

---

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid. "Die CA ist also als vorkonfessionalistisch zu bezeichnen insofern, als die CA all das, was im Begriff Konfession (im Sinne einer gegenüber anderen abgegrenzten Kirchengemeinschaft) liegt, gar nicht im Blick hat."

spiritual way of healing the ecclesiological separations within Christendom that the church bodies search commonly for the unadulterated understanding and practice of these essentials of God's ministry. The plain doctrinal consent regarding the preaching of the Bible's saving message and the administration of Baptism, Absolution, and Lord's Supper adequate to the divine Word is and remains the sole way to discover the true unity of the Church. Because genuine unification of differing church bodies is God's own work, such unity can only be brought about by God's own ministry, i.e., the unadulterated doctrine and practice of this ministry.<sup>18</sup>

There are several points which exhibit confusion regarding the main emphases of Augustana VII concerning the una sancta and the doctrine of the Gospel. First, the unity of the church is seen as both a given as well as something which must be sought after and manifested. The true unity of the church is not something that needs to be discovered--it is present. Secondly, Kimme reduces the Gospel to "the Bible's saving message" and in the process exhibits a minimalistic understanding of doctrina evangelii.

The American theologian George Forrell expresses himself in much the same way. His position is somewhat vague in that he fails to give a concise definition of what he means either by the term Gospel or by the expression of unity which the church possesses.

One of the most exciting aspects of our age is the new ecumenical spirit. Christians seem to have rediscovered their sense of belonging together: their unity in Christ. We are learning to think of other Christians as brothers rather than as enemies or heretics. But in this wonderful new mood we should remember that the source of our new unity is not our good feeling for one another or even our brilliant plans for a great and all-inclusive church; we are joined only in the Gospel of Christ.

The Augsburg Confession states that where this Gospel of grace and forgiveness is preached there is unity now, even if institutions and ceremonies differ. Thus Christian unity is reached by way of

---

<sup>18</sup> August Kimme, Theology of the Augsburg Confession (Berlin and Hamburg: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1968), p. 52-53.

the Gospel, not by some detour around it. As we try to discover the unity that God has given his church, we must concentrate on this Gospel; even the best paved and broadest detour will only keep us from reaching the goal.<sup>19</sup>

On the one hand, this view can be seen as a corrective to the often idealistic goals of the ecumenical movement. For Forrell is correct in centering the discussion of Christian unity in the Gospel but once again, as in Kimme, there is a great deal of obfuscation present. Even though it appears that there is just one meaning to the word unity in these essays, it is also clear that two senses are really present. For the unity being discussed is both present and also needs to be discovered. Also, the understanding of unity "by way of the Gospel" is unclear in that it has not been stated what the Gospel is or how it unites, or even how it has failed to unite.

Another example of the use of Augustana VII as part of a comprehensive ecumenical view of the church is seen in the writings of Martin J. Heineken who served as professor of systematic theology at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. Heineken's position itself shows development in several major essays written first in the 1950's and then in the 1970's. Some of the points he makes are essentially in agreement with the understanding of Augustana VII regarding doctrine and ceremonies, but serious problems are present in his understanding of the doctrine of the Gospel.

The main emphasis of Heineken is that there must be a stress upon a qualitative rather than a quantitative understanding of doctrine

---

<sup>19</sup>George W. Forrell, The Augsburg Confession: A Contemporary Commentary (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1968), p. 38.

in the question of unity. He sees two extremes that must be avoided. One is the "mere feeling of unity" which says "it doesn't make any difference what you believe, just so you believe."<sup>20</sup> The other extreme is represented by those who insist upon "complete agreement in every detail of an entire system of dogmatics."<sup>21</sup>

Unity of faith does not depend upon the quantitative degree of agreement upon an aggregate of separate doctrines, but it is a qualitative matter of the total orientation and total understanding of the gospel and of the way in which the God relationship is established and maintained. This will make nothing a matter of indifference in so far as it is really related to the center, and is part of the total orientation.<sup>22</sup>

This statement on the surface is a good defense of the centrality of the Gospel and how many different doctrinal loci are related to that center. But Heinecken's understanding of the Gospel itself is indistinct. He readily admits his indebtedness to Kierkegaard and so he has an existential understanding of faith.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, when he speaks of the fact that the fides qua creditur is inseparable from the fides quae creditur<sup>24</sup> it is still not an organized system of theology about which he is speaking but rather a "consistent understanding of the gospel, and a working out of all its implications."<sup>25</sup> This consistent understanding is not fixed in one doctrinal system but it is something that must "in each

---

<sup>20</sup>Martin J. Heinecken, "Doctrinal Formulations" in The Unity of the Church: A Symposium. Papers presented to the Commission on Theology and Liturgy of the Lutheran World Federation (Rock Island: Augustana Press, 1957), p. 24.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

generation become apparent as men wrestle with God to hear and understand what it is he has to say to them."<sup>26</sup>

Theological comprehension and formulation is therefore a matter for each generation to decide. There is no fixed formula of doctrine. In this regard, the creeds and confessions of the church are to be understood as the confession of a certain historical context.<sup>27</sup> This theme is fully explicated in a latter essay by Heinecken in which his approach greatly weakens the whole concept of confessional subscription.

The confessions are subscribed to as historical documents and, therefore, in a sense, time-bound since they address the situation of that day in the terms of that day on the issues in controversy in that day (see the introduction to The Formula of Concord). Then, if one puts himself back, as best he can, and sees the issues as they were then put, one chooses to stand where the confessions stand rather than with the opponents. Admittedly the passage of time may alter the Fragstellung, the way of putting the question, and throw additional light on the issue, as happened for example, with respect to the Lutheran-Calvinist dispute concerning the "real presence". . . . This opens the door to a faithful address to a new situation, while at the same time it affirms a certain basic understanding of the Gospel (e.g. justification by grace alone, for Christ's sake, through faith). And therefore, confessional subscription must mean more than just accepting one's heritage--both good and bad--and living with it.<sup>28</sup>

This position makes the Confessions totally historically-conditioned documents. It is possible thereby to accept almost any new doctrinal understanding and say that the Confessions would have viewed the issue in the same way had they been in the same position.

---

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 34. The same thought is also expressed in his Christ Frees and Unites, Knobel-Miller Lecture for 1957 (Philadelphia: Board of Publication of the United Lutheran Church in American, 1957), p. 49.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Martin J. Heinecken, "A Vision of Lutheran Unity Based on the Folly of Preaching (1 Cor. 1:18-21)" Currents in Theology and Mission 3 (February 1976):25-26.

It is in this context that Heinecken states that the satis est must be understood as "not one hundred percent quantitative agreement upon an aggregate of separate doctrines, but means full agreement on a certain understanding of the gospel and of how the God relationship is established and maintained."<sup>29</sup> But even understanding what is meant by full agreement in the Gospel is fraught with difficulty because Heinecken's approach leads to a totally subjective understanding of the Gospel. For he states, "Part of the difficulty in the Church today, as we shall see, is the confusion of a particular doctrinal expression of the Gospel with the Gospel itself."<sup>30</sup> He defines the one essential mark of the church in the context of Article VII to be the "viva vox evangelii."

So it is not a matter of what is assimilated intellectually in the classroom or concocted by ivory tower scholars more intent upon promulgating their own systems than upon fidelity to the Gospel. What matters is what actually takes place on the firing line where people are struggling with sin, death, and the devil. Is what is proclaimed as gospel so that it remains gospel, as fresh and startling today as on the first day of its proclamation? This is why the Bible as the written precipitate of the first witness is indispensable. It remains the norm by which to judge the continuing witness of the Church. Fidelity to the norm, however, is not achieved by mere repetition of the original words. . . . The Gospel requires ever new translation into all kinds of vernaculars if it is to say the same thing in a new situation.<sup>31</sup>

There is here a common strand of thought with Leif Grane's understanding of the Gospel in Article VII as proclamation. However, that proclamation does not have to be in conflict with a doctrinal expression of it

---

<sup>29</sup>Heinecken, "Doctrinal Formulations," p. 35.

<sup>30</sup>Heinecken, "A Vision," p. 22.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 27-28.



if the Scriptures themselves are accepted in their entirety as God's Word which is both source and norm of all proclamation. Indeed, the Bible is more than the "written precipitate of the first witness."

The practical application of Heinecken's position in the question of inter-Lutheran fellowship follows basically the line of argument proposed by the Washington Declaration--the acceptance of the Lutheran Confessions is enough. For, "if we trust one another in the sincerity of our confessional subscription, then no other tests of Lutheranism can very well be demanded and we ought to be able to proceed to the practical questions of actual union."<sup>32</sup>

Heinecken offers the following summary of his position regarding Article VII in this context with the following:

We have risen to the defense of Article VII of the Augsburg Confession. To be sure the Lutheran Church cannot be proud of its record, but this is not the fault of Article VII. The issues raised there must first be settled. Is anything else to be essential to the church beside the right proclamation of the gospel and such an administration of the sacraments as is in harmony with it? With what else do we propose to build the church? With gimmicks and brass bands and shots in the arm? What is there that will meet man's existential need if not the right proclamation of the gospel which all of us must always be straitened to proclaim?

It seems to me there is no conception of the church which will give it greater flexibility than this. Nothing matters really--no altar, no vestments, no choir, no cute little cherub putting out the light of God for another week, no starched patterns of congregational life, no hard and fast dogmas fixated in outmoded categories--nothing matters but that the gospel be rightly proclaimed and all its implications spelled out for all of life, that it be taken seriously what it means that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us in order that men might be restored to their true humanity and so minister to each other in a universal priesthood of love.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup>Heinecken, Christ Frees and Unites, p. 54.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

On the one hand, this summary does present the proper distinction between the Gospel and ceremonies. However, it is of some significance that "hard and fast dogmas" find themselves in the same category as the choir or "cute little cherubs." In view of the understanding of Heinecken on what the Gospel is, such a position is not surprising. The move to place dogma and doctrine in the category of human rites and ceremonies is not new as shown by Sigmund Fritschel. As will be seen, others will also stress this point.

In some respects, Heinecken's understanding of Article VII still shares some things in common with earlier interpretations. He is quick to affirm the one church which remains forever, a church which is more important than "outward, organizational oneness."<sup>34</sup> But his understanding of the consensus concerning the doctrine of the Gospel is minimalistic which in principle has no connection with any organized theological system or with any specific doctrinal formulations. In one sense it is true that the Gospel cannot be measured quantitatively but qualitatively for it is a Gospel which must be preached purely. At the same time, however, it cannot be separated from its Scriptural intent or proclamation.

Other theologians of the 1960's and 1970's have also seen Article VII as indispensable to an understanding of the road to Lutheran or even Christian union. John Tietjen in his work on Lutheran unity sees Article VII as very important. "The Lutheran Confessions make the oneness of the whole church depend on agreement in the teaching of the

---

<sup>34</sup>Heinecken, "A Vision," p. 31.

Gospel and the administration of the sacraments . . . "35 On this basis he proceeds to outline the steps he considers essential for achieving unity:

Let the Lutheran church bodies of America discuss what the Confessions say the Christian faith is. If they are agreed, nothing more should be required either for pulpit and altar fellowship or for organic union. Rather, if there is agreement, full fellowship ought to be practiced immediately. What right does any Lutheran church body have to deny the hand of fellowship to those whose espousal of the faith of the Lutheran Confessions marks them as fellow Lutherans?<sup>36</sup>

It is clear from this quotation that Tietjen would elevate the common acceptance of the Confessions above any other norm or basis for church fellowship. In this respect, he again shares the viewpoint of Fritschel. This becomes evident from the following explanation of the minimalistic view:

Those who have traditionally insisted on complete agreement in doctrine and practice as the basis for union may have problems accepting a basis for union limited to the Scriptures and the Confessions. The Lutheran Confessions do not deal with all doctrines of the Scriptures in detail or in a fully systematic fashion. Examples are the doctrines of the church and the ministry. In the course of Lutheran history there have been theological controversies over issues not treated in the Lutheran Confessions, for example, the inspiration of the Scriptures.

Misreading the thrust of Article VII of the Augsburg Confession, some have understood consensus in the doctrine of the Gospel and the right administration of the Sacraments to mean complete agreement on every Christian doctrine and a resolution of all theological disagreements. To make such a demand is to ask for the impossible. Consensus is not to be equated with complete conformity. There must be room for theological diversity within the framework of consensus in the faith. It has not been the historic role of the Confessions to spell out every doctrine in complete detail. Thus the Lutheran Confessions do not claim to be the complete exposition of all

---

<sup>35</sup>John H. Tietjen, Which Way to Lutheran Unity?: A History of Efforts to Unite the Lutherans of America (St. Louis: Clayton Publishing House, 1966, 1975), p. 151.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 154.

doctrines in the Scripture, but they do claim to be the exposition of the doctrine of the Gospel and to define the essential nature of the Christian faith. They are Confessions, not theological systems. They define what Christian faith is. They post the limits within which theological diversity may flourish and beyond which doctrines may no longer be regarded as Christian.<sup>37</sup>

In the first place, the author moves from speaking about the basis for union as the Scripture and the Confessions to the Confessions alone. For if the Confessions set the bounds for theological diversity, then such questions as the church and ministry and the inspiration of the Scripture are outside of those bounds. But such questions are not outside the bounds of the Scriptures themselves. It may well be true that those who insist upon complete doctrinal agreement on every article of faith are misreading the thrust of Article VII (that matter will be discussed in the next chapter), but the approach offered here is just as wide of the mark. Secondly, the logic employed is that since the church is one and this unity is made evident by the marks of the church this must be all that is necessary for the discussion of inter-church union. The jump from the una sancta to the complex question of particular churches is made with little consideration for the original meaning of Article VII. It is difficult to imagine that theological diversity flourishing within a church can be seen as a wholesome situation, unless of course one has totally ignored the Scriptural injunctions regarding the truth and refuting error, let alone the confessional understanding of this issue.

The viewpoint of E. Clifford Nelson in his history of Lutheranism in North America shares many similarities with the view of Tietjen and

---

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 154-55.

thereby with the minimalistic view. In his discussion of twentieth century Lutheranism in the United States he sees two approaches evident in the question of church unity.

The question that remained unanswered was whether confessional unity required theological uniformity. Some answered the question in the language of the confessions themselves; for the unity of the church it is enough . . . (Augsburg Confession, Article VII). Others insisted that confessional unity meant theological uniformity, that there could be no church unity until it could be demonstrated that the churches agreed in theology and practice.<sup>38</sup>

Here we see the differentiation between "confessional unity" and "theological uniformity." This understanding becomes very important in understanding the view by some within American Lutheranism regarding the question of fellowship. This becomes clear in Nelson's discussion of the view of the Lutheran Church in America of the discussions being held between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church:

To insist on such discussion as a prerequisite to fellowship among Lutherans was considered redundant. This was not to say that all Lutherans were in theological accord. In fact, numerous issues needed airing and clarification, but such issues were not or ought not to be divisive of fellowship among those who affirmed Article VII of the Augsburg Confession. Moreover, to rest the case for Lutheran unity on formal confessional subscription was not to admit theological bankruptcy nor to capitulate to a theological rigor mortis. Rather, this was to declare that the church could say satis est confessionally but not theologically; it could affirm that within confessional unity there must be room for theological diversity. Or, to put it another way, the theology in which agreement in "the doctrine of the gospel" (Augsburg Confession, VII) is stated should be an adiaphoron. Therefore it was argued, the unresolved theological problems could best be discussed in an atmosphere of confessional unity which all American Lutherans possessed.<sup>39</sup>

-----  
<sup>38</sup>The Lutherans in North America, ed. E. Clifford Nelson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 458. The quotation is from Nelson's chapter on "The New Shape of Lutheranism 1930- ."

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 529.

The position which is expressed here is similar to that of Heineken in that theology is equated with a ceremony, or in this instance, an adiaphoron. Such an interpretation is quite different from that offered by the Apology, the Formula of Concord and the orthodox theologians, for example. It must also be pointed out that such a position does not place proper emphasis upon the satis est in its original intent. Secondly, in this instance confessional subscription has been raised above the consensus de doctrina evangelii. Finally, the distinction made between "confessional" and "theological" is the same as John Tietjen's understanding of theological diversity. But it is not that simple to separate the two concepts. For confession is really nothing more than a confession of theology in a faithful witness and proclamation of the Holy Gospel as revealed in the Word of God.

This position is also shared by Robert Jenson in an article prepared for discussion between Lutherans and Episcopalians. He states that the satis est does not "single out some set of essential doctrines on which there must be agreement, as against other less essential doctrines on which there need not be agreement."<sup>40</sup> Rather when it can be said that the Gospel is preached

together (einträchtlich) by a group of persons, any party within the group must recognize other parties therein as actualizations of the one church, and so as entitled to the communion of holy things, despite whatever "ceremonial" (including dogmatic!) controversies may otherwise divide them.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Robert W. Jenson, "Dann dies ist genug . . . Lutheran Conditions for Communion in Holy Things," Concordia Theological Monthly 42 (1972): 688.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

To Jenson, controversies not immediately contained in the narrowest definition of Gospel or Sacrament can be worked on after full communion fellowship is established. His one concern in this regard is the Episcopalian demand for the episcopacy which runs counter to the injunction of Article VII that human rites are not necessary. He says in effect that if the Episcopal church could recognize the legitimacy of Lutheran sacraments (since there is no episcopal succession to authorize them) for whatever reason,

this would be in itself all the recognition of their ministries that Lutherans, within their theology, need or should demand. There are, therefore, no Lutheran conditions to be met at this point; or rather, if the Episcopalian can at all approve communion, that in itself satisfies the only Lutheran condition in this connection for approving communion.<sup>42</sup>

This application of Article VII should be compared with the great concern which the Confessions exhibit in their treatment of the doctrine of the Lord's Supper and the Real Presence for the right administration of the Lord's Supper. To Jenson, the very act itself makes it a sign of the unity of the church whether the doctrinal understanding of the sacrament is present or not. Jenson's essay displays the same confusion or refusal to recognize the different emphases regarding the una sancta and particular churches. In so doing, he makes the requirements for Christian union and inter-communion as least demanding as possible.

To conclude this chapter's discussion on the minimalistic interpretation of Article VII an example from an official inter-church relationship will be cited. Many of the points referred to in previous essays will be apparent in this action. In the years of discussion

---

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 692.

leading to the declaration of altar and pulpit fellowship between The American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod many papers and essays were presented and many resolutions were adopted. In the course of these events, it is significant to see how Augustana VII entered into these discussions time and again and often in a minimalistic way. This is not to say that this was all that was being written or said about Article VII in official statements of the Missouri Synod at this time. But it is intriguing that in these crucial documents which had great influence over the decision regarding the establishment of fellowship the minimalistic emphasis is predominant.

The Missouri Synod and The American Lutheran Church or its predecessors had been in negotiations for many years.<sup>43</sup> All previous attempts to achieve fellowship had failed for one reason or another, but the basic reason was the inability to assure the members of the Missouri Synod that there was actual agreement in doctrine and practice. Following the 1965 convention of the Missouri Synod, however, a major breakthrough occurred. A series of essays and a "Joint Statement and Declaration" were prepared by the commissioners of the Missouri Synod and The American Lutheran Church. An important essay in this series was entitled "The Doctrine of the Church in the Lutheran Confessions." Augustana VII predictably played a major role in this document.

---

<sup>43</sup>Various efforts included the 1938 fellowship resolution of the Missouri Synod seeking fellowship on the basis of the Brief Statement and the Declaration of the American Lutheran Church as well as the Common Confession of 1950 and the Common Confession Part II of 1953. Cf. Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Proceedings . . . 1938, p. 231; 1950, p. 585; 1953, p. 528-35, for pertinent resolutions which serve as a background for the discussion of the 1960's.



Lutheran bodies engaged in endeavors to overcome their division need to be guided by the principles enunciated in Article VII of the Augsburg Confession: "It is sufficient. . ."

Where Lutheran bodies have discovered or have been granted a genuine consensus in the preaching of the Gospel . . . and in the administration of the sacraments . . . they not only may but should enter into altar and pulpit fellowship.<sup>44</sup>

The "Joint Statement and Declaration" therefore concluded, not unexpectedly, that "consensus and mutual trust in their understanding" of the areas discussed had been reached, and "the time has come for the participating churches to consider action on a declaration of altar and pulpit fellowship with each other."<sup>45</sup> This consensus could exist even in the face of problems for

when churches establish pulpit and altar fellowship, they acknowledge their oneness of faith and their agreement in the doctrine of the Gospel. Church bodies that have developed their separate traditions will always manifest certain diversities. Diversity, such as participation or non-participation in certain inter-church agencies and enterprises, may exist without disrupting fellowship among our churches, provided that such participation or nonparticipation<sup>46</sup> does not constitute a denial or contradiction of the Gospel.

"Consensus in the Gospel" had been discovered as a way around many sticky problems which had plagued the two churches for at least twenty years.

The resolution of the New York convention of the Missouri Synod in 1967, which set in motion the procedure for the establishment of fellowship, recognized not only the consensus in the Gospel which was present according to Article VII, but also certain diversities of practice which still needed some attention. Among these diversities was the

---

<sup>44</sup>Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Convention Workbook (1967), p. 419. (Hereafter the Missouri Synod will be abbreviated LCMS).

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 420.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 422.

understanding of unChristian and anti-Christian societies, and the need to work "toward a unified evangelical position and practice" in this area.<sup>47</sup> If there already was consensus the question remains why it was still necessary to work toward a unified position. The view that consensus and diversities could coexist was definitely being advocated, an understanding not unlike that expressed by Tietjen and Nelson, for example.

Between the 1967 and 1969 conventions of the Missouri Synod, a document entitled Toward Fellowship was produced and distributed by the President of the Missouri Synod which once again indicated what the basis for fellowship consisted in.

It is unity in the Gospel and in the administration of the sacraments that constitutes a basis for altar and pulpit fellowship. . . . When the Holy Spirit leads two churches to wholehearted consensus

---

<sup>47</sup>LCMS, Proceedings (1967), p. 102-103. The resolution reads in part:  
 WHEREAS, the "Joint Statement and Declaration" . . . reveals consensus in the preaching of the Gospel "in conformity with a pure understanding of it" and in the administration of the sacraments "in accordance with the divine Word" (A.C. VII); and  
 WHEREAS, It is incumbent upon Christians who discover a wholehearted consensus in their understanding and proclamation of the Gospel to confess their Lord with one mind and one voice and to live together in unity and mutual assistance; and  
 WHEREAS, Diversities of practice which do not constitute a denial or contradiction of the Gospel can be understood better, and agreement can be developed more easily toward a consistent evangelical practical for mutual edification, when Christians are united in the work of the Lord under the Word and Sacraments . . . therefore be it  
 RESOLVED, That the Synod recognize that the Scriptural and confessional basis for altar and pulpit fellowship . . . exists, that the Synod proceed to take the necessary steps toward full realization of altar and pulpit fellowship . . .

in the Gospel, then various diversities and difficulties can properly be understood and resolved in a God-pleasing manner.<sup>48</sup>

It is significant that apparently there can be "wholehearted consensus" and "various diversities and difficulties" at the same time. Toward Fellowship also states what the position of the Missouri Synod should be regarding the involvement of The American Lutheran Church with other churches: "In this area of diversity we must also operate with the Gospel and the standards which this Gospel sets for us."<sup>49</sup> Once again, this is viewed as an area of diversity which does not affect the consensus. Secondly, there is some difficulty in this statement regarding the Gospel. Either the term Gospel is being used in the broad sense or else this statement is a confusion of Law and Gospel for the Gospel in the narrow sense does not set standards. In the process of using Augustana VII as a basis for this position and therefore in the attempt to keep the terminology of that article regarding the Gospel, confusion has arisen over the use of the term Gospel.

Before the Denver convention of the Missouri Synod in 1969 a significant addition was made to Article VII in an article which appeared in the Fellowship Supplement published in the Lutheran Witness Reporter. This major change also found its way into the resolution adopted by the convention declaring fellowship. "That which is necessary and sufficient for the church's true spiritual unity is also necessary and sufficient

---

<sup>48</sup>Toward Fellowship: The Current Quest of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and The American Lutheran Church for Altar and Pulpit Fellowship (St. Louis: n.p., 1968?), p. 19.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

for altar and pulpit fellowship."<sup>50</sup> This statement markedly changes the meaning of Article VII and destroys the content of the article regarding the una sancta by making altar and pulpit fellowship fulfill the same conditions as true spiritual unity. By this reasoning, there is no una sancta since not all churches are in fellowship. Secondly, the statement adds a necesse est to the satis est.

This same addition occurs in the Denver convention resolution of the Missouri Synod:

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Confessions declare: "It is sufficient . . ."  
 WHEREAS, This statement in the Augsburg Confession VII defines the necessary and sufficient basis for fellowship . . .  
 WHEREAS, Our church looks to Augsburg Confession VII for instruction and guidance with respect to sound Biblical and Lutheran principles for the establishment of pulpit fellowship with The American Lutheran Church . . .<sup>51</sup>

This resolution leaves no doubt but that Article VII is seen as the basis for altar and pulpit fellowship. Such an understanding of the article is again a departure from the interpretation of this article by other theologians like Walther and Loy. The original intent of Article VII has been lost regarding the una sancta. In that sense, the article does not give "instruction and guidance with respect to sound Biblical and Lutheran principles" concerning altar and pulpit fellowship because the article was written to address other concerns. Also, the addition of "necessary" to the article changes its meaning. Article VII states what is enough. It states what is not necessary. It does not say anything

---

<sup>50</sup>Quoted in Ralph A. Bohlmann, "Confessional Ecumenism," in Evangelical Directions for the Lutheran Church (Chicago: n.p., 1970), p. 91, note 11.

<sup>51</sup>LCMS, Proceedings, 1969, p. 97.

about what is necessary. That concern is taken up in other parts of the Lutheran Confessions.<sup>52</sup>

The overriding problem with the minimalistic position examined above is the fact that it often uses Article VII in a context different from that in which it was originally written. The main stress is placed upon the satis est as a formula for denominational union and ecumenical relations. But in the process, the historical context, the rest of Article VII, and the context of the remainder of the Lutheran Confessions are for the most part ignored except when the confessions become the basis for a definition of consensus. The minimalistic position also downplays the doctrine of the una sancta in its emphasis upon contemporary problems of church union.

---

<sup>52</sup>Cf. Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Rule and Norm, 14.  
(See above p. 29)

## CHAPTER VI

### AUGUSTANA VII AND ADDITIONAL TWENTIETH CENTURY

#### INTERPRETATIONS: THE COMPREHENSIVE ACCENT

In addition to the minimalistic interpretations of Augustana VII with their emphasis upon the satis est presented in the last chapter, other viewpoints have also been expressed in the twentieth century. These views have seen Article VII's use of the term doctrina evangelii in the context of other confessional statements and so tend to what can be termed a more comprehensive view of the satis est. Some of these positions are in fact formulated in response to the minimalistic view. Other writers have emphasized other aspects of Article VII, such as the relation of doctrine to ceremonies or that the article is speaking primarily of the una sancta. In that respect, they share a similarity with the interpretations of earlier generations. This chapter will present the interpretation of several groups who hold to one or more of the above mentioned viewpoints. First, the interpretation of several non-American theologians will be presented. Secondly, the work of theologians of the Missouri Synod as well as official Missouri Synod documents which share in this view will be examined. Finally, those views which emphasize other aspects of Article VII than the satis est will be presented.

The interpretation offered of Augustana VII by Hermann Sasse will serve well as an introduction to the views of several non-American theologians. Sasse holds that the Augustana was written as "a restoration for the unity that had been lost . . .," and so had to answer the question: "How can the unity of the church as a societas externarum rerum ac rituum be restored?"<sup>1</sup> It was not to be restored as the Roman Church claimed with the acceptance of not only doctrine but also of "constitution, liturgy, and other traditions" but rather as the second part of Article VII answers the question.<sup>2</sup> "This implies clearly that the consensus . . . et de administratione . . . is absolutely necessary for the true unity of the church. The 'Satis est' in contrast with 'Nec necesse est' means: This is enough because only this is necessary."<sup>3</sup> Here again we see the stress laid upon the differentiation between doctrine and ceremonies which is the most obvious meaning of Article VII. The unity of the church is not dependent upon the rites which are performed but upon the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Yet, even in saying this, there is still a misplaced emphasis in Sasse, for, when he speaks of the church as an "external society of ties and rites," he fails to show that this is exactly what the Apology said the church was not, as it stressed the true spiritual unity of the congregatio sanctorum as the primary emphasis of Article VII.

---

<sup>1</sup>Hermann Sasse, "Theses on the Seventh Article of the Augsburg Confession," Springfielder 25 (Autumn 1961):14-15.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

Sasse also gives clear indication of how he interprets the consentire or consensus mentioned in Article VII:

Not any consensus will do, but the consensus in the pure Gospel and the right administration of the sacraments. As in the New Testament (cf. the petitions of Christ, John 17, "sanctify them in the truth" and "that they all may be one" and the apostolic injunctions concerning heretics) so in the Augsburg Confession the quest for unity is the quest for truth. Ubi veritas, ibi unitas. If two church bodies find that they agree concerning the Word and sacraments and establish a union on this basis, this would not necessarily serve the true unity of the church. . . . Even if two Lutheran churches reach an agreement in matters of doctrine, and establish a merger on this basis, this does not necessarily mean true church union. For it could be that they agree to disagree in such doctrines as the doctrine of Holy Scripture as the Word of God . . . , or the Real Presence. Only such agreement reached in the church as the association of external ties and rites serves the true unity of the church which preserves the means of grace in their purity.

What does it mean that we must agree in the pure doctrine of the Gospel and in the right administration of the sacraments? Is it enough that the article of justification, the articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae is correctly preached and taught, or must there be also agreement in other doctrines? The answer must be: The article of justification cannot be rightly taught where the great articles of the Apostles' and the Nicene Creed are not kept. . . . Thus the article of the standing and the falling church keeps together all articles of the Christian faith and illuminates them. For Lutherans the consensus [ sic ] required should always be regarded as the doctrinal content of the Book of Concord.<sup>4</sup>

From the above, it is clear that Sasse interprets the consensus in the Gospel in a broad sense and ties it to the doctrinal content of the Book of Concord. But this joining of consensus with the Confessions should not be seen in this instance as a minimalizing attempt but rather as a way of expressing more fully the unity of doctrine. For Sasse shows no hesitation in saying that dogma must be accepted and preached, for he concludes, "Only where the Church . . . obeys the divine imperative, 'endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit,' remaining in the Word

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 15-16.



of Christ and rejecting false doctrine, will the divine promise be fulfilled that the Una sancta perpetuo mansura is with us."<sup>5</sup> When the marks of the church are pure there can be no doubt concerning its presence.

Edmund Schlink devotes a section of his Theologie der lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften to Augustana VII. He also emphasizes the distinction between faith and rites. "The unity of the church does not require the unity of one man governing it (SA II IV, 7 ff), not even the identity of the church constitution in the various territories of the church. . . . The unity of the church is the unity of faith."<sup>6</sup> It is in this context that Schlink proceeds to show the relationship between unity and confession:

Even though in the statements of the Augsburg Confession about the unity of the church no direct mention is made of the unity of creed, this unity is incomparably more urgent than uniformity in external ordinances. For the Confession is nothing but the formulation of the "consentire de doctrina . . . et de administratione sacramentorum" . . . , which, though considered sufficient, is yet demanded as necessary for the true unity of the church. The Confession is nothing but the unanimous fixing of the "pure" and "recte" of the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments in accordance with the Scriptures. . . . The unity of the church does not exist without the unity of the creed. However, in accordance with the Lutheran conception of Scripture and Confession which always centers about the preached Gospel, the whole weight of this statement rests on the contents of the Confession, on the Gospel itself. . . . If only the one Gospel is preached with common consent! . . . However reticently the Confessions speak about the relationship of church unity and the acknowledgment of the same Confessions, they still lead unequivocally to the conclusion that there is no true unity of the church where the pure Gospel is not taught and the

---

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>6</sup>Edmund Schlink, Theology of the Lutheran Confessions, trans. by Paul F. Koehncke and Herbert J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), p. 205.

sacraments are not administered according to the Gospel. This applies also where Confessions are in force which teach falsely about the Gospel and the sacraments.<sup>7</sup>

The statement quoted above shows that the contents of the Confession is important and that it is not just a subscription formality. It is a Gospel which has been normed by the Scriptures.<sup>8</sup>

Holsten Fagerberg also deals at length with the meaning of Augustana VII in regard to church unity. He shows that the differences in interpreting the satis est have a practical consideration. For example, he explains that Leif Grane and Anders Nygren see the Gospel of Article VII as the dynamic powerful Word, "the proclaimed Word" rather than "a demand for pure doctrine." The Gospel according to them "is something other and more than purely theoretical statements. If this solution were correct, it would eliminate a large number of hindrances to church unity in a single blow."<sup>9</sup> Fagerberg has very concisely come to the heart of the argument of the minimalistic interpretation and the reasons for it. In response, he points out again the contrast set up by Article VII between ceremonies and doctrine:

According to the Catholic position, which is opposed in AC VII, church unity requires subjection to papal jurisdiction and obedience

---

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 206-207.

<sup>8</sup>These statements are in marked contrast to an essay by Schlink entitled "The Ecumenical Character and Claims of the Augsburg Confession" in The Augsburg Confession in Ecumenical Perspective, LWF Report 6/7 (1979), p. 22. In this essay he takes a very minimalistic and anti-doctrinal stance regarding Article VII. For example, "purity of the gospel refers to its preaching, its challenge, and not simply to a doctrine about the preaching of the gospel. Equally, in the administration of the sacraments what is important is the distribution and reception of the sacraments, not a doctrine of the sacraments or adherence to a certain liturgical order."

<sup>9</sup>Holsten Fagerberg, A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions (1529-1537), trans. Gene J. Lund (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), p. 270.

to the ordinances of the church. The Lutheran confessors replied to this by asserting that only that which gives birth to faith results in the true church and is necessary for unity. Spiritual unity requires unanimity concerning the Word, the Gospel, and the sacraments (cf. Ap VII 31). Unity therefore involves not only the fact that the Word is proclaimed and the sacraments are administered, but also what is proclaimed and administered.<sup>10</sup>

Once again content is important for

inasmuch as the Word and sacraments are God's work among us, all that does not originate with them is of no significance for the unity of the church. The Confessions include in this category everything that can be referred to as traditiones humanae. . . . The Confessions therefore resort to the Bible in order to tell the difference between God's work and man's. The teaching of the Gospel is certainly a proclaimed Word, but it has a specific content--which the confessional writers derive from Scripture. Doctrina evangelii is the same as doctrina apostolorum. . . .

It is obvious that "the Gospel" in this context cannot refer to a proclamation without doctrinal contours. It must have a distinct content--just as the administration of the sacraments must be associated with a clear idea of where the line between true and false sacraments runs.<sup>11</sup> The Confessions found their norms and criteria in the Scriptures.

The doctrine of the Gospel is not something insecure, for it is rooted in the apostolic Word. The argument of Fagerberg is essential in refuting the position of those who would separate the preaching of the Gospel from the doctrine of the Gospel.

A final viewpoint from a non-American author takes what can be called an extreme comprehensive view. Once again, though, the essay recognizes the root understanding of the minimalistic approach, but in the process of refuting it may well be going too far in the other direction. Seth Erlandsson says that Article VII is referring to the fides quae creditur, that is, "the doctrine, the objective truth of God's Word" which "is the basis for recognizing Christians and for exercising church

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 262-63.

fellowship . . . "12 Such a perspective leads directly to the rejection of the minimalistic interpretation which states that the basis for church fellowship in the doctrine of the Gospel

does not mean everything that Scripture teaches but only its central teachings, the truths of salvation. But the Lutheran confessions are plain and clear also in this question. What is contrasted to "the doctrine of the gospel" in the Augsburg Confession, Art. VII, is not other biblical doctrines but "human traditions, that is, rites and ceremonies, instituted by men." Only that which is prescribed by God is binding for the Christian church. Anyone who doubts that "the doctrine of the gospel" means everything that is clearly taught in the Bible, ought to read the Apology, which is written by the same author (Melancthon) and which was published less than one year later. There the word "gospel" is often used in the wider sense as a term for Christian doctrine . . . 13

Erlandsson's emphasis upon the distinction between doctrine and ceremonies is again a necessary corrective to the misunderstanding of the minimalistic view, but it must be pointed out at the same time that his emphasis is also misplaced. One does not identify Christians on the basis of the fides quae creditur or the Gospel in the wide sense. In fact, Christians are identified by their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, a faith which is fides qua creditur and comes through the preaching of the Gospel in the narrow sense. The problem of the relationship between church bodies is an important question, but it should not be discussed on the basis of Article VII alone. Article VII is addressing a different set of circumstances, especially the question of the una sancta. The comprehensive understanding of the article can also lead to confusion.

---

<sup>12</sup>Seth Erlandsson, Church Fellowship: What Does the Bible Say? trans. by S. W. Becker (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1979), p. 3.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

As far as some selected American theologians who take a comprehensive view of Article VII, they also look at the issue from differing perspectives and with different emphases. In many instances their view of the article can also be seen as a refutation of the minimalistic perspective. Dr. J. T. Mueller addressed the question directly when he wrote:

Does the Augustana mean to limit the requirement for church unity to certain doctrines pertaining to the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments, or does it merely desire to place the evangelical doctrine, which must be maintained, in opposition to man-made traditions that must be rejected, if they are insisted upon as necessary for justification? We believe that it is the latter which the writers of the Augustana had in mind. While emphasizing the evangelical doctrine as necessary, they regarded human traditions as not necessary for salvation. In other words, they did not hold that only certain Gospel fundamentals are necessary for the true unity of the church, while there need not be any agreement in nonfundamentals, but the antithesis is between doctrine and ceremonies.<sup>14</sup>

He sees the main point in the article as the distinction between doctrine and ceremonies, a point that is reemphasized when he says, "In Article VII Lutheranism bows to the divine Word, but turns its back upon all human traditions, especially if these are taken out of the realm of adiaphora and are inculcated as necessary for salvation."<sup>15</sup> In referring to the Apology when it says, "Apostolic rites they want to keep, apostolic doctrine they do not want to keep,"<sup>16</sup> Mueller states that

---

<sup>14</sup>John Theodore Mueller, "Notes on the 'Satis Est' in Article VII of the Augustana," Concordia Theological Monthly 18 (June 1947):403.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Apology VII and VIII, 38. English translation from The Book of Concord, ed. by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959).

"Melanchthon shows that the antithesis in Article VII is not between certain Gospel fundamentals and other, nonfundamental doctrines, but between the doctrine of the Apostles, which must be retained, and the papistic rites, which must be rejected."<sup>17</sup> This represents a good summary of the intent of Article VII. Mueller has grasped one of the major emphases of the article.

In the concluding portion of the essay, he shows how the Confessions themselves did not limit their agreement or discussion to fundamental doctrines as they insisted upon non-fundamental doctrines as well in other places in the Confessions.<sup>18</sup> In summarizing Article VII, the stress is upon the una sancta and the confessional regard for the truth:

Our Confessions recognize the existence of the una sancta wherever the Gospel is preached; for through the Gospel the Holy Ghost works faith in the hearts of men, and wherever there are believers, there is the communion of saints, the Church invisible. That is one very emphatic part of their teaching. But there is another which is no less emphatic, namely, that the visible churches, or groups of Christians organized into congregations, exist to preach the Gospel and confess the divine truth, as Christ commands this in Matt. 10: 32-33 and other Scripture passages. . . .

This means that these honest, rugged confessors of the divine truth aimed at complete unity in faith, or true doctrinal agreement, to the total exclusion of all uncertainty, indifferentism, and confusion.<sup>19</sup>

This essay exhibits a good grasp of the extent and purpose of Article VII in that it begins with the fundamental confession of the una sancta.

<sup>17</sup>Mueller, p. 406.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 408-409. As an example, he cites the doctrines of the descent into hell and predestination.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 410.

In an essay read at the Bad Boll conference in 1948, another Missouri Synod theologian, F. E. Mayer, also addressed the issue of Augustana VII. His remarks are instructive as they give a clear explanation of the distinction between the fides qua creditur and the fides quae creditur.

By citing Eph. 4:5, 6, the Augustan~~a~~ established the point that the unity of the church consists in faith, indeed, in faith as fides qua creditur, not in conformity in ceremonies. . . .

This unity, even though transcendent, is at the same time observable. It is the will of Christ that the inner unity should manifest itself externally (Eph. 4:3). According to CA VII this takes place when "the Gospel is preached in concord and peace in accordance with its clear intent and when the sacraments are administered in keeping with the Word of God." It is a unity that manifests itself in the fides quae creditur. The unity of the church does not consist in a uniformity of universal traditions, the observance of which Rome maintains is necessary for salvation. Nor does unity consist in agreeing on various meaningless pious phrases nor certainly in engaging in social services in common. Against every such false understanding the satis est raises its protest.<sup>20</sup>

This is a much better understanding of this relationship than that of Erlandsson. Again, it begins with the concept of the una sancta.

Mayer also makes several helpful comments regarding the pure and recte of Article VII, for although the Gospel "can be present in a greater or lesser degree," it is also essential that we oppose false teaching which threatens the Gospel.

Preaching the Gospel in all its purity or with one accord in its true sense is for Luther a golden ring which cannot be broken at any point. For him all the doctrines of the Gospel are like pearls strung on the string of the atonement of Christ. None of these pearls can be removed without destroying the entire necklace.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Frederick E. Mayer, "The Voice of Augustana VII on the Church," trans. by Herbert T. Mayer, Concordia Theological Monthly 34 (March 1963):143.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

Because of this interrelationship, "it is of the essence of the Lutheran confession to clearly say: 'One can believe only so and thus.' This attitude is not a kind of willfulness, but rather evidence of a deep reverence for the Word of God."<sup>22</sup> This essay manifests a clear understanding of the different levels of unity beginning with the una sancta, about which it is said that "the true unity of the church is a gift of the Holy Spirit and comes into existence and is preserved only through faith."<sup>23</sup> There is also a concern for a preservation of true doctrine for the sake of the Gospel. This is a major point, for the preservation of any doctrine is not for its own sake but for the sake of the Gospel. The message which is proclaimed should be proclaimed rightly as it is normed by the Sacred Scriptures.

Paul Bretscher also contributes several important points to the understanding of Article VII which can be seen as part of the comprehensive view. He gives the following interpretation of the satis est:

The satis est ("it suffices") suggests a minimum rather than a maximum condition for the establishment of the vera unitas. Since, however, the satis est stands in contrast to the nec necesse est in the fourth proposition, it may not be interpreted to mean that a consensus de doctrina evangelii is an insignificant and relative matter. It rather suggests that whereas the observance everywhere of the same traditions, rites, and ceremonies is not necessary, a consensus de doctrina evangelii is a requirement, even though a minimum requirement, for the establishment of the vera unitas.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Paul M. Bretscher, "The Unity of the Church (Article VII of the Augsburg Confession)," Concordia Theological Monthly 26 (May 1955):332.



Bretscher sees the consensus as a minimum requirement for unity and not as the only essential requirement as some of the minimalistic interpretations of this article have done.

Bretscher also gives a detailed explanation of the meaning of de doctrina evangelii. This is a significant contribution in that he gives cogent arguments from the other confessional writings for understanding this phrase not as merely proclamation, but in the broad sense.

We believe that Melanchthon's usage of doctrina in the Confessions, in the Apology, and in the early sketches of the preface point in the direction that he intended doctrina in the combination doctrina evangelii to denote doctrine. Evangelium is indeed with him a fluid and elastic term. Yet when one bears in mind Melanchthon's insistence on pure doctrine in the sketches referred to, his insertion of pure and recte in what is now the official Latin text of the Confession, his clearly stated position in the last proposition of Article VII that he regards traditions, rites, and ceremonies to be inconsequential for the vera unitas ecclesiae, and his minimum requirement for the establishment of the vera unitas, one cannot but conclude that he used the term evangelium in the combination doctrina evangelii in the sense of God's total revelation in Scripture.<sup>25</sup>

This position makes a clear case for seeing the term "Gospel" in a broader context.

Bretscher's understanding of this article and the phrase doctrina evangelii can serve as a transition to the position of two contemporary Missouri Synod theologians whose understanding of Article VII is closely connected with the interpretation of Formula of Concord Article X. Dr. Robert Preus sees the two articles as closely connected. He emphasizes the fact that when Melanchthon speaks of "the doctrine of the Gospel" in Augustana VII he is referring to the Gospel in the broad sense, "whereas he always speaks merely of the Gospel when referring to it in the

---

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 336-37.

narrow sense."<sup>26</sup> As an example of this, Preus points out that Melanchthon saw in the denial of things of the Law a danger to the Gospel and for this reason included other doctrines in his meaning of de doctrina evangelii. "Article II in the AC on original sin was in no sense part of the Gospel in the narrow sense. And yet it is clear that Melanchthon thinks that a denial of this doctrine or aberration concerning it is disruptive of the unity of the church and undermines the Gospel itself."<sup>27</sup>

At the same time, Preus does believe that Article VII is speaking about the church in the narrow sense, proprie dicta, and that the term Gospel is used in two senses, that is, in the narrow sense in the first part of the article on the marks of the church, and in the broad sense in the second part, the satis est.<sup>28</sup> In this connection, he says it is incredible that "Chemnitz, Selnecker, Chytraeus and other contributors to the FC would have deliberately misinterpreted Melanchthon" in referring to the Gospel in the broad sense in Article X of the Formula of Concord as they speak of "consensus in the doctrine and all its articles as necessary for fellowship and recognition among the churches."<sup>29</sup> In basing his opinion on the usage of Article X, he shows the following terms are used interchangeably: "pure doctrine," "the pure doctrine of the Gospel," "the doctrine and all that pertains to it," "doctrine," and "the doctrine and all its articles."<sup>30</sup> Seen in this context, the

---

<sup>26</sup>Robert D. Preus, "The Basis for Concord," Theologian's Convocation: Essays (St. Louis: n.p., 1977), p. 28.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 28-29.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 29-30.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

minimalistic approach to Article VII is shown to be seriously weakened for the article cannot be placed into a vacuum but must be understood in the context of the confessional writings. The Lutheran Confessions were not reticent in speaking of a doctrinal consensus.

Kurt Marquart shares in the opinion that Formula of Concord Article X is important for the understanding of Augustana VII. He points this out first when refuting the position that something can be confessional but not theological.

Are the Confessions themselves interested in "subscription" formalities or in actual doctrinal content. Clearly the latter. The much-tortured seventh article of the Augsburg Confession insists that "the Gospel be unanimously preached in its correct sense and that the Scriptures be administered according to the divine Word." In other words, the Christian doctrine "in all its articles," (Formula of Concord, S.D., X, 31) must be actually proclaimed, the sacraments actually administered. The living, dynamic Gospel cannot be imprisoned like a museum display in some "constitutional paragraph." Such formalities on patient paper mean nothing unless they are actually put into practice, that is, confessed. Doctrinal substance is primary, all else is secondary and subsidiary. Article VII demands not mere lip-service, but the actual sway of doctrine in pulpits and conferences, seminaries, and publications, synodical conventions and fellowship connections.<sup>31</sup>

He makes the same point in discussing Article X when he says that "it simply restates and applies the great, truly evangelical and truly ecumenical ecclesiology of AC VII."<sup>32</sup> In effect, he is saying that unitas and concordia are the same thing in that "the one church of Christ counts for everything. Separation is permissible only for the sake of

---

<sup>31</sup> Kurt Marquart, Anatomy of an Explosion: Missouri in Lutheran Perspective (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1977), p. 70-71.

<sup>32</sup> In Marquart's chapter of A Contemporary Look at the Formula of Concord (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), p. 268.

one, ecumenical Gospel of Christ."<sup>33</sup> Marquart sees the statement of Article X as a gloss which "safeguards the AC against any minimalistic understanding of what is meant by the 'Gospel.'"<sup>34</sup> While the Augustana is not merely requiring a formal subscription but correct proclamation, this

very proclamation, however, is necessarily dogmatic or doctrinal. No mere "minigospel" constitutes orthodoxy or justifies church fellowship. None of the Gospel's full-orbed splendor and integrity dare be sacrificed. The whole organism of Christian doctrine is to be maintained "in all its articles." The contrast is not between Gospel and other doctrines but between God-given Gospel-doctrine, all of it, and human traditions or ceremonies.<sup>35</sup>

While there is much in this argument to be commended, including the overriding concern for a pure Gospel and the proper distinction regarding doctrine and ceremonies which is a primary emphasis of Article VII, there is still an opportunity for confusion to arise as is evidenced in the merging of the una sancta with the concordia of particular churches. For while the two are undeniably related, the former is a God-given state while the latter is a matter which men can affect for good or ill. Augustana VII must still be seen primarily as the confessional statement of the una sancta, the church proprie dicta.

Not only have individuals within the Missouri Synod expressed themselves in favor of a comprehensive understanding of the doctrina evangelii in Article VII, but several study documents of the Synod do the same thing. This is in itself an intriguing point in that at the same time as some of these statements were being discussed the synodical policy was steering a course toward altar and pulpit fellowship with The

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

American Lutheran Church on the basis of a minimalistic understanding of the satis est of Article VII. This was done in spite of the caveats placed upon such an action in several of the documents. In discussing the question of "What is a doctrine?," the Missouri Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations included this statement regarding Article VII:

Since this article is speaking of "true spiritual unity, without which there can be no faith in the heart nor righteousness in the heart before God," it is not in the first instance a programmatic statement for the establishment of denominational fellowship. Nevertheless, it has important implications for the latter. A pure understanding of the Gospel, and therefore correct preaching of the Gospel, call for a correct understanding of the articles of faith treated in the Augsburg Confession, defended in its Apology, and explained in the remaining Lutheran Confessions, particularly the Formula of Concord. All articles of faith are integrally related to the Gospel and articulate the Gospel from different perspectives. Consequently the preaching of the Gospel according to a pure understanding of it is not possible where any article of faith is either falsified or denied.<sup>36</sup>

Here the concept of the doctrine of the Gospel is broadened to include at least all the teachings of the Lutheran Confessions and in its reference to "any article of faith" to much more than that. Article VII needs to be viewed within the context of the remainder of the Lutheran Confessions.

The same can be said for the treatment of Augustana VII in the Missouri Synod's study on the theology of fellowship. Calling Article VII "the basis for altar and pulpit fellowship, as it has been understood in the Lutheran Church where it was loyal to its confessions," the doctrine of the Gospel is seen not "as one doctrine among many" but rather

---

<sup>36</sup>Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Commission on Theology and Church Relations, The Review of the Question "What is a Doctrine?" (St. Louis, 196-), p. 7. Hereafter the commission will be abbreviated CTCR.

"as composed of a number of articles of faith."<sup>37</sup> Once again, Article X of the Formula of Concord is quoted in connection with Article VII with its stress on "doctrine and all its articles." Though the broad understanding of Gospel is again well presented, the question must be raised whether Article VII is actually the basis for church fellowship since even the document admits that the "subject of altar and pulpit fellowship is not discussed expressis verbis in the Lutheran Confessions."<sup>38</sup>

A final document to be examined is the Commission on Theology and Church Relations' study on ecumenism. Once again a comprehensive understanding is stressed in that agreement in doctrine is essential for true concord. But what makes this statement especially significant is the way in which it is sensitive to the concerns of both FC X and Augstana VII without confusing them. For the purpose is stated in the light of the Gospel.

Lutherans seek agreement in all the articles of faith not only for the sake of uniformity itself, or solely on account of the obedience we owe to God's Word in all that it teaches, but by the light and the power of the Gospel they seek agreement in all the articles of faith chiefly in order that "the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it."<sup>39</sup>

The point being made in this statement is extremely important and cannot be emphasized enough for the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the saving message of a gracious God to a sinful world, needs to be presented purely and rightly. In fact, this is a telling blow to any minimalistic understanding of Article VII.

---

<sup>37</sup>CTCR, Theology of Fellowship (St. Louis, 196-), p. 18.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>CTCR, A Lutheran Stance Toward Ecumenism (St. Louis, 1974), p. 12.

In conclusion, it is necessary to look at two views of Augustana VII which do not neatly fit into the comprehensive categories previously presented in this chapter. Both of these views are important in that they serve as a reminder of the principal purpose for Augustana VII--namely that it is about the church stricta dicta, the una sancta. Neither of these views see Article VII as directly addressing the question of fellowship or church union. The most dogmatic of these presentations is by David Scaer. He writes:

There is nothing "denominational" about Article VII at all. The reference is obviously to the one universal church consisting of all believers in Christ from all times and places. The article specifically speaks about the una sancta ecclesia, the "one holy church." The phrase is taken over from the Nicene Creed, which is endorsed by name in Article I. The una sancta ecclesia can never refer to the Roman Church, the Lutheran Church, or the LWF. The church in Augustana VII is also described as remaining forever, perpetuo mansura sit. What church organization remains forever? . . . The most telling argument is the inclusion of Ephesians 4:4-6. This Biblical quotation should not be considered lightly. . . . The church in this passage is referred to by "one body." Just as it would be impossible to have several "Holy Spirits," several "Lords," several "faiths," and several "baptisms," so it is impossible to speak of several "churches" that have been redeemed by Christ.<sup>40</sup>

Scaer also rejects any understanding of the satis est in a quantitative way. "Augustana VII should not be understood in a quantitative sense by stating maximum to minimum standards for fellowship between denominations."<sup>41</sup> He states that the pure preaching of the Gospel and administration of the sacraments in the article are references to the marks of the church, which no matter how impure, are evidence that the church

---

<sup>40</sup>David P. Scaer, The Lutheran World Federation Today (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), p. 24-25.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

(in the strict sense of the term) is present. From his statements, it is clear that he would not see any connection between this article and a discussion of church fellowship. "In no way can Article VII be said to be speaking about the churches."<sup>42</sup> The emphatic declaration of the primacy of the una sancta in the understanding of Article VII should not be taken lightly.

Dr. Ralph Bohlmann echoes some of the same points but at the same time is quick to point out the relationship between the church in the narrow and the broad sense. For him, Augustana VII in the first instance is not "making a programmatic statement about our modern ecumenical problem." Rather it is speaking of the true spiritual unity as described in the Apology.<sup>43</sup> Or again, Article VII's "primary purpose was to state what is necessary for the true church to exist, and by implication to affirm that the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church was also present among Luther's followers."<sup>44</sup> The church of Article VII must be seen as the one church, the una sancta. The questions regarding the churches and their relationship are not directly addressed by this article.

Bohlmann also emphasizes the correct understanding of the satis est when he writes: "The antithesis to the doctrine of the gospel and all its articles (the gospel late dicta) is not some content of Scripture which happens not to be part of the gospel and its articles. Rather,

---

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>43</sup>Ralph A. Bohlmann, "The Celebration of Concord," in Theologians' Convocation, p. 61.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., see note 8.



the antithesis is 'ceremonies, instituted by men.'<sup>45</sup> He thereby affirms again the distinction between the Gospel and ceremonies.

This chapter has basically presented the comprehensive understanding of Article VII and in the process has served as a refutation of the minimalistic approach. While not all the authors or positions presented in this chapter totally agree in every point, it is clear that this position takes greater cognizance of the context of Article VII within the Lutheran Confessions and the whole of Christian doctrine. It has also been shown that the term doctrina evangelii cannot simply be interpreted as the Gospel in the narrow sense, but must also be seen in the context of the Confessional understanding of doctrine as a whole. To these theologians, the use of Augustana VII as a quick and easy solution to the problems of ecumenical relations is an unfortunate misuse of the article.

---

<sup>45</sup>Ralph A. Bohlmann, "The position of the LCMS on the Basis for Fellowship," in The Function of Doctrine and Theology in Light of the Unity of the Church (New York: Lutheran Council in the USA, 1978), p. 36-37.

## CHAPTER VII

### AUGUSTANA VII AND THE CHURCH TODAY:

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Article VII of the Augsburg Confession has clearly played a major role in the understanding and perception of the doctrine of the church throughout the history of Lutheranism. During most of that time, the article was seen primarily in the context of a statement regarding the one, holy Christian church, the una sancta. But other perspectives also arose, mainly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which placed far more emphasis on the latter part of the article, on the satis est. This thesis has demonstrated that this view by its very nature did not fully comprehend the meaning of the article and often used it merely as a pretext for the purpose of attaining the goals of a unified church, either Lutheran or completely ecumenical. Simultaneously, the doctrine of the Gospel was often perceived in a minimalistic sense, thereby obviating the difficulties caused when two diverse traditions attempted to come to an understanding of their varying doctrinal positions. That argument, however, had a shallow basis in that it was not grounded in a total confessional understanding of doctrine, or of the need to confess the truth according to the exhortations of the Scripture--a confession which also includes the refutation of error. Most significantly such a position only dilutes the statements of Article VII regarding

the locus de ecclesia and also ignores the real meaning of the phrase "the unity of the church."

But this study has accomplished more than merely giving a recitation of facts regarding the perception and use of Article VII throughout the generations. Many of the emphases expounded and reiterated by earlier generations regarding this article are just as important for this generation. The Lutheran church of today needs to consider seriously its heritage and the message of the confessors in the first generations which they spoke and wrote not only for themselves but also for their posterity.<sup>1</sup> Then the words of Article VII will have meaning for us today as they address questions of great significance for a church struggling in an age of indifferentism where the prevailing creed is one of pluralism. If confessional subscription is to retain any meaning at all, surely it indicates that the words of Augustana VII are also our words as they stand as a true and correct exposition of the Word of God.

In summarizing Article VII then, it is necessary to view it from both a negative and positive perspective. In this instance, in light of the forgoing interpretations, what it does not say has significance also. It is even possible for the purpose of summarization to divide the article into two parts, discussing the negative implications on the basis of the second part while affirming the positive on the basis of the first part. What then does Augustana VII have to say to the church of today, both negatively and positively, concerning its existence, its marks, and its unity?

---

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, XII, 40.

The primary emphasis of the second half of Article VII is a negative emphasis: Human rites are not necessary. Simply stated, that is the meaning of the satis est. For the satis est goes together with the nec necesse est. When everything else has been said and thousands of words written about the meaning of this one phrase it comes to this one point: The comparison of this section is between the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments on the one hand, and human traditions, rites, and ceremonies on the other. The unity of the church is not based upon human rites or ceremonies instituted by men. This was the emphasis placed upon this part of the article in the Confessions themselves and in the writings of the Orthodox dogmaticians which were examined. In fact, little attention was paid to this portion of the article outside of this one emphasis. It is therefore remarkable that the simple, obvious understanding of the satis est has been so misconstrued through the years and its meaning so distorted as to force the article to say almost anything but this. If that emphasis is kept foremost, there can be no misunderstanding of the satis est of Article VII. "It is enough" for the unity of the church to rely upon the works of God, His means of grace, His Gospel and sacraments, because these are what constitutes the church rather than the works of men.

This emphasis is closely connected with the second negative implication to be drawn from this article; namely, the doctrina evangelii of Augustana VII is not in conflict with the doctrine of the Word of God ("doctrine and all its articles"). It cannot be construed as a minimalistic formula opposed to a demand or concern for doctrinal agreement. Placing the "Gospel" of this article in opposition to a doctrinal or

theological understanding of it does great violence to the understanding of the Gospel and sacraments developed in the Lutheran Confessions. The Gospel there is not without content nor are the sacraments to be seen as a mere ceremony without a proper conception of their purpose and meaning. Therefore, the Gospel cannot be reduced to a neat formula which distills its necessary parts for the purpose of achieving a consensus based upon as little as possible. Nor is it merely the "proclamation" of a message as opposed to a theological formulation as, for example, Leif Grane or Martin Heineken would insist. Rather the Gospel is connected inseparably with the teaching of the entire Scripture, of which it is the heart and center and by which its proclamation is normed. It is a Gospel which must be preached purely and whose Sacraments must be administered rightly, as Article VII says. It must be proclaimed and taught unanimously, of one accord (einträchtiglich). These factors alone have been repeatedly demonstrated to be the most damaging to the minimalistic approach in that it fails to take the satis est of the article in the context in which it was written.

In this connection, the argument which would merely say that there is consensus because two groups formally adhere to the same confessional paragraph or recognize the same Confessions is not promoting real harmony (concordia). It is even further removed from what Article VII is speaking about when it refers to the "unity of the church." It is not only a matter of the same formulation but there must be unanimity of faith and practice. Any understanding which promotes "unity in diversity" or unity in doctrine and theological diversity at the same

time (for example, John Tietjen or E. Clifford Nelson) is not in accord with the spirit of the Lutheran Confessions. They state that they have

no intention (since we have no authority to do so) to yield anything of the eternal and unchangeable truth of God for the sake of temporal peace, tranquillity and outward harmony. Nor would such peace and harmony last, because it would be contrary to the truth and actually intended for its suppression. Still less by far are we minded to whitewash or cover up any falsification of true doctrine or any publicly condemned errors. . . . We desire such harmony as will not violate God's honor, that will not detract anything from the divine truth of the holy Gospel, that will not give place to the smallest error but will lead the poor sinner to true and sincere repentance, raise him up through faith, strengthen him in his new obedience, and thus justify and save him forever through the sole merit of Christ, and so forth.<sup>2</sup>

This is the confessional response to theological diversity. For the sake of the Gospel there can be no compromise with error. Consensus cannot be based upon a confessional paragraph for that would also mitigate against the true source of theology. We are best instructed in this matter by the attitude of the signatories of the Augustana itself. "If anything is found to be lacking in this confession, we are ready, God willing, to present ampler information according to the Scriptures."<sup>3</sup> This position does not limit the content to some confessional writings but rather states its willingness to show faithfulness in the whole counsel of God.

The final negative serves as a transition to the positive affirmations of Article VII. The church of this article is not primarily all the little or large denominations, groups, or synods who call themselves

---

<sup>2</sup>FC, SD, XI, 95-96. Translation is from The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, ed. and trans. by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959).

<sup>3</sup>AC, Conclusion, 7. From the Latin text.

churches. That is the unfortunate demeaning of the article when it is made the prescription formula for fellowship and union discussions. That is not the church discussed in Article VII, nor is it the context from which the article came. For the confessors at Augsburg proclaimed that they were members of a church, the una sancta; a church not constituted by human design or under the authority of any one man, but the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is its "one Lord" (Eph. 4:5).

This point is the great affirmation of Augustana VII. In the few words of its first sentence it encapsulates the Biblical doctrine de ecclesia. There is a church which transcends all human institutions and rites. It is the church confessed in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds --the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. It is the church of all believers of all times and places--the congregatio sanctorum. It is the church which is one by virtue of its "true spiritual unity" in connection with its one Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. That is precisely what the Apology says concerning the unity of the church in Article VII. This unitas ecclesiae is the result of the branches being one with the True Vine. It is the flock of sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd. It is not a unity which needs to be achieved or sought after in the manner of the Lutheran World Federation or the World Council of Churches. When Jesus prayed that his disciples would be one as he and the Father were one (John 17), he was stating a fact not a wish. Ubi ecclesia; Ibi unitas.

While that church cannot rightly be observed because it is the assembly of believers, it exists wherever its marks are present. It is therefore not a Platonic republic, but actually exists on earth. It is

by the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments that we perceive this church by faith. Indeed, it is by these very means that the church is brought into being for lacking them there could be no faith in the heart, and, obviously, without faith, there can be no church. Article VII therefore insists that the Gospel be preached purely (pure) and the sacraments be administered rightly (recte). When the Gospel and sacraments are corrupted the church is also corrupted. Consequently, for the sake of the holy Gospel there should be concern and great care taken in the church lest anything be preached or taught contrary to God's Word which would invariably corrupt the pure teaching of this Gospel. For where the Gospel is purely taught and the sacraments rightly administered there the church surely exists. For it is not founded upon its organization or its outward manifestations of harmony or unity but it exists where there are believers, saints who have been called by the Gospel to a living faith in Jesus Christ.

In this, Article VII may be said to have important implications for concordia. While the article is not directly addressing that question it points out the importance of the purity of the means of grace. Anything that is not serving that proclamation or which would obscure the light of the holy Gospel aids neither unitas nor concordia. That indeed must be a primary question in the pursuit of church fellowship discussions. Is the discussion being held for the sake of the una sancta, the saints of God, or for some other motivation? Will the union bring about a pure proclamation of the Gospel and a right administration of the sacraments or will these factors be diminished in some way? Is "true spiritual unity" really being served by such discussions or



organizational union or is it a union which may obscure and even suppress the truth?

Finally, the initial affirmation of Article VII regarding the church is also its greatest and most comforting. Though the church is assailed on all sides, by foes within and without, we confess that it will be and remain forever--ecclesia perpetua mansura. Nothing man can do will ever overthrow that church. For the church of God is His own, purchased with His own blood, and His promise stands sure: "The gates of hell will not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). To the estates at Augsburg their words concerning the church that it remains forever were a steadfast confession to pope and emperor alike that nothing could run them out of the church. The words are a confession of our generation also in the face of the onslaught of secularism and humanism regarding the church of Christ.

In the light of the great themes expounded by this article, a higher and more honored place should be reserved for Augustana VII than its current position in the midst of a debate over what is and is not enough. It has never belonged in that arena, especially being used as a not so subtle way of ignoring basic theological problems and as a foil for church union movements of all kinds. Rather the emphases upon the una sancta point to the unity of the church which is described by the Apostle Paul in the words which serve as the conclusion to Article VII: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4:4,5). There is really no need for any further statements regarding the

unity of the church which is expressed by Article VII than this, which is not the word of man but the Word of Him who has called out His church.

## APPENDIX

### The Text of Augustana VII

#### German Text

Es wird auch gelehret, dass alle Zeit müsse ein heilige christliche Kirche sein und bleiben, welche ist die Versammlung aller Glaubigen, bei welchen das Evangelium rein gepredigt und die heiligen Sakrament lauts des Evangelii gereicht werden.

Dann dies ist gnug zu wahrer Einigkeit der christlichen Kirche, dass da einträchtiglich nach reinem Verstand das Evangelium gepredigt und die Sakrament dem gottlichen Wort gemäss gereicht werden. Und ist nicht not zur wahren Einigkeit der christlichen Kirche, dass allenthalben gleichformige Ceremonien, von den Menschen eingesetzt, gehalten werden, wie Paulus spricht zun Ephesern am 4.: "Ein Leib, ein Geist, wie ihr berufen seid zu einerlei Hoffnung euers Berufs, ein Herr, ein Glaub, ein Tauf."

#### Latin text

Item docent, quod una sancta ecclesia perpetuo mansura sit. Est autem ecclesia congregatio sanctorum, in qua evangelium pure docetur et recte administrantur sacramenta. Et ad veram unitatem ecclesiae satis est consentire de doctrina evangelii et de administratione sacramentorum. Nec necesse est ubique similes esse traditiones humanas seu ritus aut

#### English translation

It is also taught among us that one holy Christian church will be and remain forever. This is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places. It is as Paul says in Ephesians 4:4, 5, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism."

#### English translation

Our churches also teach that one holy church is to continue forever. The church is the assembly of saints in which the Gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly. For the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions or rites or

ceremonias ab hominibus institutas;  
sicut inquit Paulus: Una fides,  
unum baptisma, unus Deus et pater  
omnium etc.

ceremonies, instituted by men,  
should be alike everywhere. It is  
as Paul says, "One faith, one bap-  
tism, one God and Father of all,"  
etc. (Eph. 4:5,6).<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>The texts are from Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche and from The Book of Concord, trans. and ed. by Theodore G. Tappert.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Books

- Abbott, T. K. A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians. The International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897.
- Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche. 6., durchgesehene Auflage. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967.
- The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Edited and translated by Theodore G. Tappert. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959.
- Calov, Abraham. Exegema Augustanae Confessionis. Editio altera. Wittebergae: Johannis Borckardi, 1665.
- Carpzov, Johann Benedict. Isagoge in Libros Ecclesiarum Lutheranorum Symbolicos. Lipsiae: Joh. Wittigau, 1665.
- A Contemporary Look at the Formula of Concord. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978.
- Erlandsson, Seth. Church Fellowship: What Does the Bible Say? Translated by S. W. Becker. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1979.
- Fegerberg, Holsten. A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions (1529-1537). Translated by Gene J. Lund. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972.
- Forrell, George W. The Augsburg Confession: A Contemporary Commentary. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1968.
- Förstemann, Karl Eduard. Urkundenbuch zu der Geschichte des Reichstages zu Augsburg im Jahre 1530. 2 vols. Halle: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1833.
- Firtschel, George J. Quellen und Dokumente zur Geschichte und Lehrstellung der ev.-luth. Synod von Iowa u. a. Staaten. Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, n.d.

The Function of Doctrine and Theology in Light of the Unity of the Church. New York: Lutheran Council in the USA, 1978.

Gerhard, Johann. Loci Theologici. Edited by Ed. Preuss. 10 vols, in 5. Berolini: Gust. Schlawitz, 1863-1885.

\_\_\_\_\_. Loci Theologici. Translated by Richard Dinda. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979. (Microfiche copy of typewritten manuscript)

Grane, Leif. Die Confessio Augustana: Einführung in die Hauptgedanken der lutherischen Reformation. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959.

Heinecken, Martin J. Christ Frees and Unites. Knubel-Miller Lecture for 1957. Philadelphia: Board of Publication of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1957.

Kelly, J. N. D. Early Christian Creeds. 3rd ed. London: Longman, 1972.

Kimme, August. Theology of the Augsburg Confession. Berlin and Hamburg: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1968,

Kolde, Theodore, Die älteste Redaktion der Augsburger Konfession mit Melanchthon's Einleitung. Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1906.

Krauth, Charles Porterfield. The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology. Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1871, 1899.

Loy, Matthias. The Augsburg Confession: An Introduction to Its Study and an Exposition of Its Contents. Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1908.

Luther, Martin. D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1883-

\_\_\_\_\_. Luther's Works. General editor Helmut T. Lehman. 55 vols. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955-

\_\_\_\_\_. What Luther Says: An Anthology. Compiled by Ewald M. Plass. 3 vols. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959.

Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Convention Workbook (Reports and Memorials) 47th Regular Convention. St. Louis: n.p., 1967.

\_\_\_\_\_. A Lutheran Stance Toward Ecumenism. By the Commission on Theology and Church Relations. St. Louis: n.p., 1974.

- \_\_\_\_\_. Proceedings of the Forty-Eighth Regular Convention. St. Louis: n.p., 1969.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Proceedings of the Forty-First Regular Convention. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Proceedings of the Forty-Second Regular Convention. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Proceedings of the Forty-Seventh Regular Convention. St. Louis: n.p., 1967.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Proceedings of the Thirty-Seventh Regular Convention. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938.
- \_\_\_\_\_. A Review of the Question "What is a Doctrine?" By Commission on Theology and Church Relations. St. Louis: n.p., n.d.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Theology of Fellowship. By Commission on Theology and Church Relations. St. Louis: n.p., n.d.
- The Lutherans in North America. Edited by E. Clifford Nelson, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975.
- Marquart, Kurt. Anatomy of an Explosion: Missouri in Lutheran Perspective. Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1977.
- Mentzer, Balthasar. Exegesis Augustanae Confessionis cuius Articuli XXI Breviter et Succincte Explicantur. Giessae Hassorum: Nicolai Hampelii, 1616.
- Pieper, Franz. Das Grundbekenntnis der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche. Mit einer geschichtlichen Einleitung und kurzen erklärenden Anmerkungen versehen. 2 pts. in 1 vol. St. Louis: Luth. Concordia Verlags, 1880.
- Reu, Johann Michael. The Augsburg Confession: A Collection of Sources with an Historical Introduction. Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, 1930.
- Robinson, J. Armitage. St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians: A Revised Text and Translation with Exposition and Notes. London: Macmillan, 1909.
- Scaer, David P. The Lutheran World Federation Today. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971.
- Schlink, Edmund. Theology of the Lutheran Confessions. Translated by Paul F. Koehnecke and Herbert J. A. Bouman. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961.

Schmauk, Theodore E., and Benze, C. Theodore. The Confessional Principle and The Confessions of the Lutheran Church as Embodying the Evangelical Confession of the Christian Church. Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1911.

Tappert, Theodore G., ed. Lutheran Confessional Theology in America, 1840-1880. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972.

Tietjen, John H. Which Way to Lutheran Unity?: A History of Efforts To Unite the Lutherans of America. St. Louis: Clayton Publishing House, 1966, 1975.

Toward Fellowship: The Current Quest of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and The American Lutheran Church for Altar and Pulpit Fellowship. (St. Louis: n.p., 1968?)

Vilmar, A. F. C. Die Augsburgische Confession. Herausgegeben von K. W. Piderit. Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1870.

Walther, Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm. Die Evangelisch-lutherische Kirche die wahre sichtbare Kirche Gottes auf Erden. St. Louis: August Wiebusch u. Sohn, 1867.

\_\_\_\_\_. Die rechte Gestalt einer vom Staate unabhängigen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Ortsgemeinde. St. Louis: Aug. Wiebusch u. Sohn, 1863.

\_\_\_\_\_. Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt. Erlangen: Andreas Deichert, 1865.

\_\_\_\_\_. Theses on Communion Fellowship with Those Who Believe Differently. Translated by Lawrence L. White. Pittsburgh: n.p., 1980.

\_\_\_\_\_. Walther and the Church. Edited by Theodore Engelder. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938.

Wolf, Richard C. Documents of Lutheran Unity in America. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966.

#### Essays

Bergendoff, Conrad. "The True Unity of the Church." The Lutheran Church Quarterly 12 (July 1939:257-77.

Bohlmann, Ralph A. "The Celebration of Concord." In Theologians' Convocation: Essays, p. 55-89. St. Louis: n.p., 1977.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Confessional Ecumenism." In Evangelical Directions for the Lutheran Church, p. 82-91. Chicago: n.p., 1970.



- Bretscher, Paul M. "The Unity of the Church (Article VII of the Augsburg Confession)." Concordia Theological Monthly 26 (May 1955):321-40.
- Hafer, L. B. "The Church, Article VII of the Augsburg Confession." The Lutheran Quarterly 36 (October 1906):525-42.
- Heineken, Martin J. "Doctrinal Formulations." In The Unity of the Church: A Symposium. Papers presented to the Commission on Theology and Liturgy of the Lutheran World Federation, p. 23-36. Rock Island: Augustana Press, 1957.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "A Vision of Lutheran Unity Based on The Folly of Preaching (1 Cor. 1:18-21)." Currents in Theology and Mission 3:1 (February 1976):20-34.
- Huber, John George. "Theses on Ecumenical Truth and Unity." Concordia Theological Monthly 40 (1969):294-299.
- Hunnius, Aegidius. "Some 16th Century Theses Based on Articles 5, 7, and 8 of the Augsburg Confession." Translated by Philip K. Press. Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly 64 (1967):169-92.
- Jenson, Robert W. "Dann dies ist genug . . . Lutheran Conditions for Communion in Holy Things." Concordia Theological Monthly 42 (1972) 687-92.
- Mayer, Frederick E. "The Voice of Augustana VII on the Church." Translated by Herbert T. Mayer. Concordia Theological Monthly 34 (March 1963):135-46.
- Mueller, John Theodore. "Notes on the 'Satis Est' in Article VII of the Augustana." Concordia Theological Monthly 18 (June 1947):401-10.
- Preus, Robert D. "The Basis for Concord." In Theologians' Convocation: Essays, p. 11-30. St. Louis: n.p., 1977.
- Sasse, Hermann. "Theses on the Seventh Article of the Augsburg Confession." Springfielder 25 (Autumn 1961):13-17.
- Schlink, Edmund. "The Ecumenical Character and Claims of the Augsburg Confession." In The Augsburg Confession in Ecumenical Perspective, p. 1-28. LWF Report 6/7. Stuttgart: Published on behalf of the Lutheran World Federation by Kreuz Verlag, 1979.
- Schultz, Robert C. "An Analysis of the Augsburg Confession, Article VII, 2 in It's Historical Context, May & June 1530." Sixteenth Century Journal 11 (1980):25-35.

Truemper, David G. "The Catholicity of the Augsburg Confession: CA VII and FC X on the Grounds for the Unity of the Church." Sixteenth Century Journal 11 (1980):11-23.

Walther, Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm. "The False Arguments for the Modern Theory of Open Questions." Translated by William Arndt and Alex Guebert. In Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Proceedings of the Forty-Ninth Regular Convention, p. 227-44. St. Louis: n.p. 1971. (First appeared in no. 1-11 of the Concordia Theological Monthly 10 [1939].)