

3-1-1963

## The Voice of Augustana VII on the Church

Frederick B. Mayer

*Concordia Seminary, St. Louis*

Herbert T. Mayer (Translator)

*Concordia Seminary, St. Louis*

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



Part of the [History of Christianity Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Mayer, Frederick B. and Mayer (Translator), Herbert T. (1963) "The Voice of Augustana VII on the Church," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 34, Article 15.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol34/iss1/15>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact [seitzw@csl.edu](mailto:seitzw@csl.edu).

# The Voice of Augustana VII on the Church

By FREDERICK E. MAYER

Translated by HERBERT T. MAYER

**EDITORIAL NOTE:** This article was among the papers of the sainted Dr. Frederick E. Mayer, professor of systematic theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo., and managing editor of this journal for many years. The present historic essay was read by him in 1948 before a gathering of American and European theologians at the first of the meetings known as "Bad Boll Conferences." The translation substantially reproduces the original essay and is the work of the author's son, Herbert T. Mayer, who now holds a position on the teaching staff of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

Other discussions of the doctrine of the church by Dr. Mayer include "The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel and the Terminology Visible and Invisible Church" in this journal, Vol. XXV (1954), 177—198, and the section on the church and the ministry in the chapter, "The Soteriological Approach to Christian Doctrine," in his *The Religious Bodies of America* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House), pp. 172—174.

**I**N Europe as well as in the U. S. A. the question concerning the nature of the church is as much alive as the question concerning the nature of the Gospel. Fundamentally one's ideas about the church are determined by one's position toward the Gospel. In the United States the Reformed theologians are concerning themselves with the question of the church from two points of view: the theological and the practical. As to the theological aspect of the question, the Reformed bodies offer a variety of answers, among which three stand out. Far to the right one finds churches which claim a *ius divinum* for their particular form of organization, e. g., the Episcopalians and the Presbyterians. Far to the left are church bodies which

reject every kind of ecclesiastical organization as unscriptural, e. g., the Congregationalists. These designated, originally, the local congregation as the elect group at that place and claimed for this group full sovereignty. The Baptists believe each Christian individually, even the children, must enjoy complete freedom, and that therefore no ecclesiastical authority can be permitted in the church. The Disciples of Christ reject any kind of organization which is not specifically commanded in the New Testament. Between these two groups are the various apocalyptic and separatistic sects which insist that their own pattern of church fellowship is the one commanded in the New Testament.

The practical aspect of the doctrine of the church is causing the Reformed theologians of the U. S. A. much difficulty in two respects. Liberal Protestant theologians have made the *social gospel* the main burden of their message. Since in the United States the church cannot rely on the government to carry out its social programs, at least in theory, leaders of the social gospel movement were led to emphasize the practical, activist side of the church and to deemphasize the otherworldly aspects of the church's character. The ecumenical movement has underscored a second practical dimension of this discussion. At the Amsterdam meeting of the World Council of Churches, Lutheran theologians had proposed that churches be



admitted on a confessional, rather than on a geographical, basis. Reformed leaders in the United States, in contrast, insisted that all member churches should be united into one great church. Therefore also for practical reasons the ecumenical movement must concern itself with the nature of the church. The discussion of this question revealed differing attitudes toward the Gospel and therefore very different ideas regarding the nature of the church. In the end, then, the practical question must be answered theologically. The great number of books by Reformed theologians in the U. S. A. offers abundant proof of their determination to come to grips with this question at the theological level.

The question has also been debated vigorously in Lutheran circles. In the Missouri Synod, for example, such discussion has always been triggered by three fundamental propositions: (1) the doctrine of the universal priesthood of all believers and the consequent rights and privileges of all Christians and the proper relationship of the church to the holy ministry; (2) the question whether Word and Sacrament belong to the essence of the church, or to put it differently, whether the church also has a visible dimension; and (3) the question whether the Lutheran church is the only true church. C. F. W. Walther and other American Lutheran theologians discussed these questions at length. And in the 19th century the doctrine of the church was for a time the central concern among the Lutheran bodies in America. Today, too, the doctrine of the church is a live issue, in part because some theologians stress the organizational aspects of the church so strongly that they are in danger of losing sight of the proper re-

lationship of the synod to the holy Christian church.

European theologians, too, have been discussing this question at great length. Indeed, it seems that for the church in Germany the question *de ecclesia* is a much more burning question than for us in America. You speak, for example, of the guilt of the church. You are dealing with the question of the church and social and political relationships, with the church and the churches, with the future of the church, with the rebuilding of the church.

In an attempt to make some contribution toward answering these vital questions we shall discuss the main points touched on in *Confessio Augustana*, Article VII, under four New Testament concepts and images: ἐκκλησία, βασιλεία, σῶμα τοῦ χριστοῦ and οἰκοδομή.

## I

### THE CHURCH AS ECCLESIA:

#### THE GATHERING OF ALL BELIEVERS

The Lutheran Christian learns this truth about the church at his mother's knee. Hence Luther could say: "A child of seven knows what the church is, namely, the holy believers and the lambs who hear the Shepherd's voice" (SA III, Art. XII). The doctrine of the justification of the poor sinner is so central in Luther's theology that all his theological thought, including his teaching on the church, flows from this article and returns to it again. The doctrine of justification is the material principle of his theology and as a consequence he can think of the church as nothing other than the gathering of those who through faith have been justified and sanctified. Wilhelm Walther correctly says that Luther himself did not answer those questions



concerning the church which are burning issues today. Luther was concerned only with the decisively fundamental questions concerning the essence and the manifestations of Christ's church. He insisted that the basic understanding of what the church really is must become part and parcel of our being before we can be in any position to decide correctly on individual questions. In Luther one finds only great granite blocks and foundation stones and not little pebbles which could serve for rounding out or embellishing the doctrine of the church. Grisar asserted that Luther developed a concept of the church as an invisible and metaphysical congregation in order to have a harbor of refuge for himself after the church of his day placed him under its ban. This judgment represents a total misunderstanding of the theology of Luther. His ecclesiology is in complete harmony with his teaching on faith. Karl Holl has demonstrated from Luther's Commentary on the Psalms (1513—15) that his doctrine of the church was already fully developed before 1517. Just as soon as Luther had reached his position on *sola fide* as the material principle, he had to treat the doctrine of the church from this completely new perspective and could regard the church as nothing but the gathering of believers. It is not at all accidental that in his New Testament Luther never renders *ἐκκλησία* with *Kirche* but always with *Gemeinde*. In this translation, Luther, whether consciously or unconsciously, hit upon the correct term, for the *ἐκκλησία* of the New Testament is the congregation or community of the saints, the *congregatio sanctorum*.

The question of the etymology of *ἐκκλησία* need not detain us here, nor

the question of whether *sanctorum* is masculine or neuter. The New Testament usage makes it clear that *ἐκκλησία* always means those who through faith have been called out of the perishing mass of humanity and have been sanctified (1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1, 4; 2 Thess. 1:4; Acts 2:47; etc.). Faith, whether it is strong or weak, always embraces the entire Christ and His total obedience, that righteousness which He earned for us by His life, suffering, and death. Through this *justitia aliena* the Christian is completely holy in the judgment room of God. In his Large Catechism Luther confessed his faith concerning the church as follows:

I believe that there is on earth a little holy 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. Of this community I also am a part and member, a participant and co-partner in all the blessings it possesses. I was brought to it by the Holy Spirit and incorporated into it through the fact that I have heard and still hear God's Word, which is the first step in entering it. Before we had advanced this far, we were entirely of the devil, knowing nothing of God and of Christ. Until the last day the Holy Spirit remains with the holy community or Christian people. Through it he gathers us, using it to teach and preach the Word. By it he creates and increases sanctification, causing it daily to grow and become strong in the faith and in the fruits of the Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> LC II, 51—53; *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert in collaboration with Jaroslav Pelikan, Robert H. Fischer, and Arthur C. Piepkorn (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), p. 417.



Because the doctrine of justification had become such a thoroughgoing reality for Luther he could think of the holy Christian church as nothing other than the *communio sanctorum*. In a sermon for St. Thomas' Day we find one of Luther's finest passages on the imputation of the "foreign righteousness of Christ."

What are these strange works which prevail before God? They are the works of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom God the Father sent from heaven to provide satisfaction for our sins through His suffering and death. . . . He has also satisfied the Law; He has fulfilled it completely. . . . Therefore when the Law comes and accuses you because you have not obeyed it, point it to Christ and say: "There is the Man who has done it; I cling to Him. He has fulfilled it in my place and now bestows His fulfillment on me." . . . From this we see perfectly what kind of works make us pious and righteous before God, only these foreign works. . . . (SL XI, 1965; W 17, II, 291)

In his Commentary on Galatians (5:19) Luther says that God hid the church under the evil, the sins, the errors, and the frailties of mankind so that we would never be tempted to find the church in some external community of self-righteous saints.

The *ἐκκλησία* is the congregation or community of saints also because each Christian also has His *justitia propria*. The *ἐκκλησία* is the community of those who are sanctified through love. In the final analysis this is also a holiness of faith since the good works of the Christians are holy only because they are the victories of Jesus Christ and because Christ's righteousness must cover for the unrighteousness which spoils even our best works. Thus in the New Testament un-

derstanding, *ἐκκλησία* includes the entire Gospel *in nuce*. One therefore could rightly make the doctrine of the church the point of departure in the presentation of dogma because at this point one is at the center of all of Lutheran dogmatics. This emphasis needs constant repetition by Lutherans in America.

Theologians today display a great deal of interest in the empirical church. For Luther it was a secondary issue. The problem of the visible-invisible church rises only when one gives up the definition of the church in CA VII, or to put it differently, when one permits the New Testament concept *ἐκκλησία* to be transferred to the German usage of the word *Kirche* ("church"). One must insist again and again that in the real sense of the word the church (*Kirche*) as *ἐκκλησία* is the congregation or community of believers. As far as I know, Luther never spoke of the visible church. Wilhelm Walther has shown that Luther was in favor of distinguishing between an "essential" church and a "creaturely" church, a distinction which is also found in the introduction to the Augustana. The Apology speaks of the church in the *proper* and in the *large* sense, and the dogmaticians now regularly use the adjectives *visible* and *invisible*. We must see very clearly that our concern here is with the invisible church only; indeed, that actually there is only one church and that church is invisible.

Unfortunately the concept invisible is frequently defined in a negative way to mean that the church is not statistically perceptible. It is easy to identify invisibility with unreality and then accuse Luther of so spiritualizing the concept of the church that no congregation or holy com-



munity remains. However, we must remember that the word invisible also has a very positive side. Though the church is invisible for natural man, it is, as Luther maintains, recognizable and tangible for faith. He who like Luther lives through faith alone can also say with him: "Therefore just as that rock [Christ] is invisible and spiritual, perceptible only through faith, so of necessity also the church must be without sin, invisible and spiritual, perceptible (*percipibilis*) only through faith." (W 7, 710)

The authors of the Symbols did regard "by works alone" as the material principle of their Papalist opponents. Those works which make me holy are the commandments prescribed by the church. Where this material principle is endorsed the proponents must not only criticize CA VII but reject it lock, stock, and barrel, as the *Confutatio* indeed did. For the authors of the *Confutatio* and for American liberal theologians, the church as described in CA VII is a platonic figment of the imagination and a metaphysical abstraction. From Rome's point of view the *corpus mixtum* is the *ecclesia mixta*. To this belong all those who seek to justify themselves by being obedient to the Pope and by fulfilling the commandments of the church. The *Confutatio* argues as follows: Since the tares will be separated from the wheat at Judgment Day, it follows that prior to that event they must belong to the church, and thus the tares with the wheat form an *ecclesia mixta*. To this argument Melancthon replied: Would it follow that since Christ is going to reveal His full glory only on Judgment Day, that He does not now possess it? By the same principle the church

now possesses its full majesty, and it is indeed the congregation of the saints although its majesty will be revealed fully only in the future (Apology IV, 18, 19). In essence the church is now what it will be when it is perfected, since the *ecclesia* in the proper sense of the word is the congregation or community of the saints.

Nor can American Calvinists agree with Luther's concept of the *ἐκκλησία*. For the strict Calvinist the material principle of theology is the exaltation of God's glory. When one begins with this principle the concept of the church suffers. Thus for the Calvinist the church is conceived of as an agency by which men are guided and, if necessary, compelled to live to God's honor. An invisible church obviously cannot perform that function. In his *Institutes* Calvin already concerned himself almost exclusively with the visible church. In the American legal code the influence of the Calvinist position is frequently discernible. Nor can the concept of the "folk church" (*Volkskirche*) be derived from the New Testament or Luther's ecclesiology. The church in the proper sense, the church with which pastors and theologians alone concern themselves, is the church as the congregation or community of saints. "She, yes she, is dear to me, the worthy maid. I can ne'er forget her."

## II

### THE CHURCH AS BASILEIA

The doctrine of the church is like a highly polished diamond which catches and reflects beams of glorious light in ever more brilliant fashion the more one works with it. The concept *ἐκκλησία* reveals only one facet of the church. The



church as βασιλεία introduces us to a second important aspect.

Βασιλεία and ἐκκλησία are correlatives in that they both call our attention to the spiritual blessings which the church brings to us. Each does so, however, from a specific point of view. The church as βασιλεία fastens our glance on the Giver of the spiritual gifts, and the church as ἐκκλησία focuses our attention on those who receive them. When one speaks of the church as βασιλεία, one thinks primarily of the Lord of the church who distributes His salvation through Word and Sacrament. When one thinks of ἐκκλησία, one thinks of the congregation or community of those who have received this salvation. Logically, βασιλεία precedes ἐκκλησία; the order is never the reverse.

In classical Greek the word βασιλεία was essentially a verbal noun as it is also in the New Testament. It should not be translated kingdom but rather kingly power or kingly rule. Thus βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ does not emphasize the church as a gathering of people but rather the rule of God and particularly the gracious rule of God in the hearts of men. Both John the Baptist and our Lord place βασιλεία and εὐαγγέλιον alongside one another as synonyms. Just as the Gospel is the power of God to salvation, so βασιλεία is the power of God which effects salvation.

When viewed as βασιλεία, the church is defined as the gracious rule of the Holy Trinity in the hearts of its subjects. By nature all men were under the tyrannical rule of Satan, who maintains a totalitarian control over his people for the express purpose of leading them to their own total destruction. Before Christ can establish His gracious rule, His βασιλεία, in us, He

must destroy the power of Satan. Christ therefore announced the coming of His kingdom when He destroyed the power and the rulership of Satan in the sick and possessed people (Matt. 4:23; Luke 10: 9, 10; 11:20). And the real founding of the βασιλεία took place on the cross when Christ in complete obedience to His Father presented us with the Magna Charta of our glorious freedom—freedom from the curse of the Law, from the power of the devil, and from the fear of death. Through the proclamation of this gracious victory He brings to us this freedom and establishes His royal rule in the hearts of Christians. This freedom is not only a negative concept of a free-from but also a positive sharing in the resurrection of Christ and in His session in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:6, 7). Thus the King of Grace triumphs over all His enemies in us. And our faith and the good works which flow from faith are the precious booty of our King.

The concept βασιλεία directs our attention to the entire plan of God, that gracious royal rule of His grace, which He planned in eternity, established in time through the atonement by Christ and through the proclamation of His grace, and lets proceed to its eventual and final goal at the end of time. The traditional dogmatic distinction of the threefold kingdom of Christ should be understood also in this sense. We are not to think of three separate kingdoms but of only one, for in the so-called kingdom of power Christ rules over His foes so that He might establish and expand His holy Christian church. Actually the kingdoms of grace and glory are distinct only in terms of degree, not in quality or essence. Just as Christ in His appearance on the Last Day



will not be a wholly other than He was in His incarnation, so there is no essential difference between the subjects of the kingdom of grace and those of the kingdom of glory. Βασιλεία should be regarded as an eschatological concept only in the sense that in the eschatological fulfillment Christ's gracious rule will be revealed to all men, but not as indicating an essentially different kind of rule. Moreover, the kingdom of Christ should not be viewed as a sociopolitical entity as if the ἐκκλησία were to establish the βασιλεία as a well-organized sociological, industrial, cultural, and political body.

Therefore, whether one views the church as ἐκκλησία or as βασιλεία, there is no fundamental difference involved. Some feel that ἐκκλησία is the richer concept; others, βασιλεία. If a distinction were to be made, one could perhaps think of ἐκκλησία as the church viewed horizontally or sociologically, that is, as the congregation or community of saints, and of βασιλεία as the church viewed vertically as the gracious gift of God to men. In the term βασιλεία the sanctifying activity of God through Word and Sacrament is more clearly in the foreground than in ἐκκλησία. Viewed as ἐκκλησία, the church is the congregation or community of saints; seen as βασιλεία, the church is our spiritual mother which nourishes and bears us all, as Luther confesses in the explanation of the Third Article in his Large Catechism.

Luther developed this concept of βασιλεία brilliantly. In a Christmas sermon on Isaiah 9 he says that the rule of Christ is a kingdom of grace and comfort in which God works in the hearts of Christians through the Gospel and through faith (SL XI, 1997; W 19, 152). Only when

one has learned to recognize sin as a dreadful rebellion, indeed, as an attempt at deicide, can he properly cherish the blessings which Christ has gained for us in His kingdom. In this kingdom He has set us free from the curse of evil, He has made us an object of God's love and has awakened in our hearts consuming love for Him. (Cf. LC III, 51; II, 27—30.)

It is only through the Gospel that Christ becomes our King. Thus in viewing the church as βασιλεία one proceeds naturally to observe that the real marks (*notae*) of the church are the Gospel, the Word and the sacraments. The church viewed as βασιλεία is indeed invisible since it does not consist in the eating of certain foods, in specified ranks of officeholders, or in other external features. Since Christ establishes His gracious rule only through the means of grace we can be as certain as are Luther and the Apology that the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments are the sure identifying marks of the church.

It doesn't seem particularly important whether one thinks of the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments as marks of the church in the sense that they are the *causa* of the church or that they are the *effectus* of the church. In the final analysis the marks of the church, whether one views it as βασιλεία or ἐκκλησία, exist only for believers. The unbeliever has no interest in the church or in her marks. Only the believer understands that the Gospel is the *causa* of the church because for him God's Word is always the power of God. Only the believer understands that where the church is, there *eo ipso* the Word is being publicly preached and the sacraments are being ad-



ministered. In this sense Luther's epigrammatic sentence is to be understood: "God's Word cannot exist without God's people, nor can God's people exist without God's Word" (SL XVI, 2276; W 50, 629). At this point it must also be emphasized that only the preaching of the *Gospel* is the mark of the church. Wherever the Gospel has been transformed into "a new law," there is no church, for the law cannot establish the βασιλεία, nor can the church transform the Gospel into law.

A very basic question in any discussion of the church is not only the question, What is the church? but also the question, Where is the church? It is a glorious comfort for Christians to know that God's gracious rule is established where the means of grace are used. What joy must fill our hearts when we stand in the pulpit before the ἐκκλησία as the congregation of saints and realize that in spite of the worst efforts of God's enemy, God has indeed established His βασιλεία in our midst. We rejoice also in the assurance that in this Kingdom one victory after the other will be gained. It is a tremendous encouragement for the faithful to know that wherever the Word is proclaimed and the sacraments are administered, there God's children are being born as is the morning dew.

### III

#### THE CHURCH AS SOMA TOU CHRISTOU

In this section we will, in the light of the New Testament, examine what CA VII says about the *unity* of the church. The concept of the church as σῶμα τοῦ χριστοῦ provides even better guidance for this purpose than does the concept κοινωνία. All members are closely joined to Christ,

the Head. All the movements of the members are controlled by the Head. All members live and work so that the Head will be honored. Whatever the members possess are the gifts of the Head and are placed into His service. One thinks here of a variety of New Testament passages such as Col. 1:18; 2:19; 3:15; Eph. 1:22, 23; 4:15, 16; 5:30; 1 Cor. 6:15. Actually the concept σῶμα τοῦ χριστοῦ contains no essential thought which is not already expressed in ἐκκλησία and βασιλεία. What is new in this expression is the special emphasis on the unity of the members of the Christian church with Christ the Head.

But the church as σῶμα τοῦ χριστοῦ or simply as σῶμα also directs our attention to a corollary of what has just been said. If the church is the body of Christ, then this term also expresses the intimate unity of the members with one another. The church is not to be regarded as a scattered and unconnected mass of people or as so many individual atoms or as a great company of unrelated individuals. The church as σῶμα is a tightly knit whole. In Christ the individual Christians are as closely bound to one another and are as dependent on one another as are the members of a human body. In Christ all Christians are knit together in a transcendental unity of faith, love, service, and hope (Rom. 12:13; Eph. 4:16; Col. 1:24; Eph. 4:4; 5:30). Therefore the church as σῶμα τοῦ χριστοῦ is the totality of those who through faith have been united with Christ and thereby also with one another in a community of faith. This term, then, presents the New Testament concept of the church as a third facet and permits us to consider a third point of view of the doctrine of the church.



The Augustana has as its purpose to emphasize the unity of the church. In opposition to the Roman doctrine of the church it was necessary for the Augustana to make it unmistakably clear that Christ, not the Pope, is the head of the church. At the same time the Augustana insists that only faith in Christ, not obedience to the Pope or his human ordinances, unites us with Christ. For that reason the Augustana confesses:

"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 and ceremonies, instituted by men, should be alike everywhere. It is as Paul says, 'One faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all,' etc. (Eph. 4:5, 6)."<sup>2</sup>

By citing Eph. 4:5, 6, the Augustana established the point that the unity of the church consists in faith, indeed, in faith as *fides qua creditur*, not in conformity in ceremonies. Every Christian possesses the complete Christ, whose perfect obedience cannot in any way be fragmented. Every Christian, whether his faith be strong or weak, possesses all the spiritual blessings which Christ gained for us. Through faith every Christian is implanted in Christ and most intimately united with Him and thereby with all Christians. Through faith each Christian receives the gift of heaven and along with every other Christian enters heaven in the unity of the faith. God has only one kind of grace. The epitaph on the grave of Copernicus at first hearing sounds wonderful: "I do not ask

for grace equal to Paul's; I do not demand Peter's mercy; earnestly I ask for the forgiveness which You have given to the thief on the wood of the cross." However, as you consider it further, you realize that it does not do justice to the conception of the church as *σῶμα τοῦ χριστοῦ*, according to which all Christians without distinction possess one and the same grace and have the same share in Christ, their Head. Every distinction is eliminated between so-called "great sinners" and "small sinners," between Jew and Aryan, between servant and master, between Negro and Caucasian, between man and woman. Indeed, the unity is so transcendent that even the differing confessions of church bodies cannot divide the body of Christ. The oneness in Christ is the closest bond on earth and cannot be torn asunder by any human or devilish powers.

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.

But is not the *satis est* an unrealizable

<sup>2</sup> Trans. of the Latin text of CA VII in Tappert, p. 33.



condition? "In full agreement (*einträchtiglich*) according to the clear intent," *pure docetur et recte administrantur*; how can the CA demand so much for true unity? Is it not presumptuous for Lutherans to insist that the Gospel must be proclaimed as it is set forth and formulated in the *Confessio Augustana* and that the sacraments must be administered according to the institution of Christ as explained in Articles IX and X? Is it not presumptuous that such agreement be considered essential for the unity of the church? How can Luther with his well-known broadmindedness and ecumenical outlook countenance the deliberate insertion of *recte* in the final form of the Augustana? For Luther it was self-evident that the public proclamation of the truth, the common confession, must make us one. Unity of confession was such a serious matter for Luther that he was willing, if necessary, to suffer the bitterest death to establish it, as he wrote to the duke of Lüneburg. Two considerations persuade us to subscribe without qualifications to CA VII. First, the pure Gospel can be present in a greater or lesser degree. Indeed, the Sacrament of Baptism is "pure Gospel," and this Gospel is the power of God to salvation. It is the power of God to salvation whether the Gospel be in the brief form in which it came to the jailer at Philippi or in the expanded form in which Paul received it when he was transported into the third heaven. Whoever speaks the Word of God in the church, be it Gretel behind the fireplace or the most learned theologian, must always be aware that he is to speak it as the Word of God (1 Peter 4:11). For the doctrine is not his but God's, and the church in which he reads it is the house of God, the

congregation of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth. (1 Tim. 3:15)

In the second place, we agree completely with Luther when he states that one word of God makes all heaven and earth too narrow for him. This statement demonstrates his adamant opposition to every form of false teaching. Not only can false doctrine save no one, but it can also come to dominate the theology of a church group so completely that faith itself will be destroyed. For that reason we make the same sharp distinction which Luther made between faith and love. Love can suffer being deceived; love can endure harm and weakness and can forgive, for love does not thereby lose Christ. Faith, on the contrary, cannot yield to anyone, for faith concerns itself with eternal truth, on which it is built. If faith gives ground it loses eternal salvation. It is in this sense that Luther had to say: "Cursed be that kind of love and harmony which to maintain entails a giving up of the Word of God" (SL IX, 555; W 40, I, 642). 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. Thus at Marburg Luther was concerned not only with the real presence but in the final analysis with Christology and, indeed, with all its nuances. In the Augustana we have the true meaning in accordance with which the Gospel must be preached. And, thanks be to God, every Christian so believes and preaches the Gospel.

Those who err from weakness will be



borne by us in love and patience so long as they stand on the foundation of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:9-15). Against those who stubbornly and consistently deny a single article of the Gospel we must defend the truth firmly and unyieldingly, and we must condemn false teaching, for the doctrine itself is not ours. If we are thoroughly convinced that CA V is a correct presentation of the Gospel, for example, we will tolerate no Romanizing, legalistic, or "enthusiastic" (emotionalism in all its forms) tendencies in the church. These tendencies militate against *sola Scriptura* and therefore also against *sola gratia* and *sola fide*. As Lutheran Christians we keep a firm hold on these three *solas* as characteristics of the Lutheran Church. Every Reformed confessional body with which I am acquainted permits a person to say: "One may also disagree with this view." But 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. Therefore the true unity of the church exists wherever the Gospel is preached in unanimity and in accordance with its clear intent and wherever the sacraments are administered in keeping with the Word of God.

It is further true that this unity which is pleasing to God and which God desires cannot be brought about by a man-made *tour de force*. No Roman *fiat*, no unmediated "enthusiasm," certainly no naked activism can produce the ecumenical church. The true unity of the church is a gift of the Holy Spirit and comes into existence and is preserved only through faith. According to CA VII this true faith can exist only where the Gospel is rightly

taught in accordance with its true meaning and where the sacraments are rightly administered. In this way and in this way only can the high-priestly prayer of Christ reach its fulfillment among us, through us, and in us.

#### IV

#### THE CHURCH AS OIKODOME

In conclusion I should like to direct attention briefly to another facet of our diamond: the concept of the church as οἰκοδομή. We are well acquainted with the New Testament passages which refer to the church under the image of God's temple and holy building (Eph. 2:21; 1 Cor. 3:9 ff.). The church as the temple of God presents itself to us as a structure always in the process of being built through Word and Sacrament. This thought is particularly comforting for us at this time of apocalyptic lightning on the horizon. Because we believe that Word and Sacrament are not only the marks of this building but also the powerful means to erect it, we will have no fear or worry in spite of the efforts of the devil to destroy it. The gates of hell cannot prevail against this building. Neither nihilism standing on the brink of despair, nor proud humanism nor grandiloquent philosophy nor downright folly headed for chaos—nothing can halt the building of the church or demolish it. God Himself is the master builder, and in the hands of the Almighty God the Savior inscribed the blueprints of the church with the nails of the cross. God carefully watches over the walls of this building, and its builders will bring the building to completion regardless of what the destroyer seeks to do to prevent it (Is. 49:14-17). The plans of the heavenly building are spread out before the Builder,



and He will complete the building as originally planned. Every stone will be inserted at the proper time and the proper place. Therefore "it is taught by us that the holy Christian church must endure and remain for all time."

God gathers the stones for this building of His church from all nations. However, the grand plan often is concealed from us. When we consider how the Gospel is given to one nation and taken away from another, when we are forced to observe how this person comes to faith while another person hardens himself in unbelief, we are sometimes astonished at the marvelous and hidden ways in which God advances the building of His church. However, *all* the elect will and must be incorporated in the building of the church, for that building, which was planned from all eternity and has been founded in time, moves on day by day toward its completion. And there will come the glorious day when God will tear down the scaffolding of this building and remove from it every trace of sin and weakness, the evidences of creatureliness. Then He will let the church shine forth gloriously as His perfected building and temple. This will constitute the ecumenicity of heaven, and then Christ's high-priestly prayer will be answered world without end.

A discussion of the doctrine of the church is profitable only when it inspires us to bend every effort to be and remain members of this church. To this end we are encouraged to hold on in unanimity to the pure meaning of the Gospel. Therefore we should also do our utmost in proclaiming the true doctrine as fellow work-

ers in the construction of the heavenly temple. May God in His grace grant us this. Amen.

#### THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS AND THE PROBLEM OF THE AGE OF THE TRADITION CONTAINED THEREIN

Under this heading Prof. Oscar Cullmann in *Interpretation* (October 1962) offers a general survey of the Logia discovered in recent times by Egyptian peasants in an old cemetery. The article is well translated by Balmer H. Kelly. Dr. Cullmann believes that the Logia will occupy scholars for a long time in such areas as philology, the history of Gnosticism and of Jewish Christianity, the Synoptic problem, the exegesis of Jesus' words, and the Biblical manuscripts, since sometimes there is found in them a close relationship to Codex Bezae. Some of the Logia agree verbally with Jesus' words in the Synoptic Gospels. Others serve as parallel variants to the Synoptic sayings. More interesting still is a third class of Logia which are not found in any form in our Four Gospels, but which were cited in the apocryphal gospels, the church fathers, and the Manichaean writings, though they are not taken from any of the apocryphal gospels known to us. Of these the writer judges: "Here also it could be a matter of a common tradition." As a fourth category Dr. Cullmann mentions those Logia which up to now have been entirely unknown. On these he comments: "By far the majority of them can be explained simply as gnostic texts. . . . Here again the question is raised concerning the possibility of an independent older tradition, still without saying whether the word concerned comes from Jesus. This last question, which has often incorrectly been pushed into the foreground, may never be answered with certainty." JOHN THEODORE MUELLER