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## The Catholicity of the Augsburg Confession: CA VII and FC X on the Grounds for the Unity of the Church

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The interpretation of article VII of the Augsburg Confession has been a matter of controversy among theologians of the churches of the Augsburg Confession--controversy made more acute in the ecumenical climate of the mid-twentieth century. "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." So reads the key sentence of that article. Some have argued<sup>1</sup> that the church's true unity here refers to a spiritual unity of faith, a unity shared by an invisible church; accordingly, they assert that article VII of the CA has really nothing to do with the business of ecumenical relations, but only with the essential and spiritual unity which holds together Christians of differing communions and confessions in spite of their lack of apparent concord or fellowship or *communio in sacris*. Others, contrariwise, have insisted<sup>2</sup> that the article states the normative conditions both for the existence and for the unity of the church, and that it is indeed relevant to the contemporary ecumenical discussions of the churches of the Augsburg Confession.

In recent years advocates of the first view have invoked the concluding section of the tenth article of the Formula of Concord of 1577 as a kind of authoritative gloss on CA VII, indicating the understanding of the Augsburg Confession held by its adherents a generation and a half later. The Solid Declaration reads:

<sup>1</sup>From the recent literature, notably Ralph Bohlmann, "The Celebration of Concord," in Samuel F. Nafzger, ed., *Formula for Concord* (St. Louis: Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, 1977), pp. 55-89; Robert Preus, "The Basis for Concord," in Nafzger, pp. 11-30; and Kurt Marquart, "Article X: Confession and Ceremonies," in Robert Preus and Wilbert Rosin, *A Contemporary Look at the Formula of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1978), pp. 260-270.

<sup>2</sup>This view is paradigmatically argued by Edmund Schlink, *The Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. Paul F. Koehnke and Herbert J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Muglenberg, 1961), pp. 194-225. See also Schlink's recent essay, "The Ecumenical Character of the Augsburg Confession," in *LWF Report*, 6 / 7 (1979), 1-28.

CONFESSIO  
FIDEI EXHIBITA INVICTISS.  
IMP. CAROLO V. CAESARIS  
AVG. IN COMITIIS  
AVGVSTAE,  
ANNO  
M. D. XXX.

*Addita est Apologia Confessionis.*

*Beide / Deutsch  
vnd Latinisch.*

*Pfalm. 119.*

*Et loquebar de testimonijs tuis in conspectu Regum, & non confundebar,*

VVITBERGAE.

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.<sup>3</sup>

If the latter view were correct, a serious challenge would have been raised to the claim of the Augsburg Confession to present nothing but the catholic faith, for it would mean that agreement in theological formulation would replace the gospel and the sacraments as that which "*satis est*" for the unity of the church. And the confessors at Augsburg would apparently be guilty of no small insincerity in using words which seem to state a catholic principle but which actually intend to establish a narrower view as essential for the true unity of the church, namely, full agreement in all the larger and smaller parts of Christian doctrine.

The present study proposes to offer and defend a reading of both CA VII and FC SD X which understands both documents to agree in asserting that the sufficient grounds for maintaining and regaining and preserving the unity of the church is the actual preaching of the gospel and the actual administration and reception of the sacraments--and not a doctrine or doctrines about the gospel and about the sacraments. To do this, it will first examine FC SD X in order to sketch its understanding of the key term "doctrine." It will then rehearse the claims to catholicity of CA VII. Finally, it will seek to show the essentially Catholic nature of these two articles of the Lutheran confessional writings. In this manner a case is made for arguing that any insistence on full doctrinal agreement as a precondition for church fellowship is an insistence alien to the confessional writings of the churches of the Augsburg Confession, as contained in the Book of Concord.

## I. The Doctrine and All its Articles

Article X of the Formula of Concord is addressed to the central issue in the inner-Lutheran controversy over the Augsburg and Leipzig Interims.<sup>4</sup> Was it permissible for the churches in Lutheran lands to reintroduce otherwise indifferent matters of ceremony or canon law, so long as they were then able to continue to preach and teach in accord with the gospel as they had come to understand it? The Formula's answer points to the fact that such reintroduction was compelled by imperial edict and therefore an attack upon Christian freedom and, as a consequence, an attack upon the

<sup>3</sup>FC SD X, 31. Unless otherwise noted, English quotations are from *The Book of Concord*, Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1959).

<sup>4</sup>For a thorough recent discussion of the controversy over the Interims, see Robert Kolb, "Historical Background of the Formula of Concord," in Preus and Rosin, pp. 12-87.

very gospel itself. Under such circumstances, the concordists argued, to yield by cooperating with the Interim would have been to abandon the understanding of the gospel that had emerged in the course of reformation. The occasion became “a time of confession;”<sup>5</sup> to yield would have been faithless, apostasy. The stalwart, ready to face the consequences of their disobedience of imperial authority, were not to imply by any tacit cooperation at the level of ceremonial or canon law that the differences which had emerged between themselves and the reforming church of Rome were of no consequence. The concordists sought to uphold “the truth of the gospel” in all that they taught and did, and in no way to give support to “enemies of the gospel,” either in ceremonies or in doctrines.<sup>6</sup> Then, as a way of indicating a sort of limit or boundary to the hard line the article was taking, the authors conclude the article with the words referred to earlier:

In line with the above, 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>7</sup>

In what sense, we must ask, does this constitute a gloss on the ecclesiology of the Augsburg Confession? What sort of a program for relationships between churches does the Formula of Concord in fact here offer? And what, indeed, is meant by agreement “in (the) doctrine and in all its articles”? The whole question of the hermeneutical relationship of the CA and the FC is shot through with special pleading, dogmatic considerations, and confusion. Those who accept the FC as a binding confession are more or less bound to read it as an authoritative interpretation of, or gloss on, the CA. Those who do not receive the FC as a confession are more inclined to hold the CA as basic and to read the FC in the light of the CA. Given the radically altered situation of 1577 from that of 1530, it seems wise to take the advice of the FC itself when it elevates the CA to unique status as a norm and allocates to all other writings the status of witnesses to the way in which “at various times the Holy Scriptures were understood in the church of God by contemporaries.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup>FC SD X, 10.

<sup>6</sup>“Likewise we hold it to be a culpable sin when in a period of persecution anything is done in deed or action to please enemies of the Gospel contrary to and in opposition to the Christian confession, whether in things indifferent, in doctrine, or in whatever else pertains to religion.” FC SD X, 29.

<sup>7</sup>FC SD X, 31; the crucial phrase is “in der Lehre und allen derselben Artikel.”

<sup>8</sup>FC Ep Summary Rule and Norm, 8.

<sup>9</sup>FC SD X, 2.

There is compelling evidence within article X itself to support the contention that “doctrine” here means the gospel that is in fact proclaimed and sacramentally acted out in the churches. The article frequently links the words “doctrine” and “gospel” in such a way as to suggest that the terms are essentially synonymous. It speaks of a time “when enemies of the holy Gospel have not come to an agreement with us in the doctrine.”<sup>9</sup> It refers to “the pure doctrine of the Gospel” as the property of the Evangelical churches in contrast with the churches prior to reformation.<sup>10</sup> Later it speaks of “the pure doctrine of the Gospel,” which is opposed by “enemies of the Word of God” who “desire to suppress it.”<sup>11</sup> In frequent quotation of Galatians 2:5 the article makes reference to “the truth of the Gospel;”<sup>12</sup> there the antithesis is the legalistic insistence of the “Judaizers” on the requirements of the Mosaic legislation. Another section focuses on “the chief article of our Christian faith, so that . . . the truth of the Gospel might be preserved.”<sup>13</sup> It is striking that in this passage the formulations point to the “chief article,” i.e., the word of forgiveness, as that which will preserve the truth of the gospel—rather than insisting on agreement in a whole range of doctrinal formulations as a way of protecting or preserving that truth. A later paragraph sets in antithesis “agreement in doctrine” and “conforming in external things;”<sup>14</sup> in the setting of the Interim this referred not only to ceremonies and matters of canon law and polity, but also, to a certain extent, to theological formulations. Again, “true bishops” would be “concerned about the church and the Gospel;” this is said in contrast with the work of “enemies of the holy Gospel”—who were clearly those who opposed the central notion of the gospel as that was recovered in the reformation.<sup>15</sup>

From all of this it should be clear that the term “doctrine” in article X of the Formula of Concord is primarily and essentially an equivalent term for the “gospel,” and that that term is used by the Evangelical theologians as the label for the central insight of the reformation, the notion of the forgiveness of sins “by grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith.”<sup>16</sup> The word “doctrine” is always used in the singular in the article under discussion, and consistently with the same connotation and against similar antithesis.

This accords with usage elsewhere in the Formula of Concord and the other documents of the Book of Concord, and in contemporary usage by other Evangelical theologians as well. In the “Summary Formulation” which precedes the numbered articles of the Formula of Concord, we read that the “churches of the pure Christian religion” agree in their confession of the “pure doctrine of the Word of God.”<sup>17</sup> The Apology of the Augsburg

<sup>10</sup>FC SD X, 5.

<sup>11</sup>FC SD X, 10.

<sup>12</sup>FC SD X, 11, 12, 13, 14.

<sup>13</sup>FC SD X, 14.

<sup>14</sup>FC SD X, 16.

<sup>15</sup>FC SD X, 19, 28, 29.

<sup>16</sup>CA IV, 1. Eric Gritsch summarizes the point this way: “‘gospel’ means the promise that man is saved without any human merit.” Eric Gritsch and Robert Jenson, *Lutheranism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), p. 114.

<sup>17</sup>FC SD Summary Formulation, 1, 2, *et passim*.

Confession contrasts papal claims to the right to establish “articles of faith” with the Evangelical churches’ claim to “preach the blessing of Christ, that we obtain forgiveness of sins through faith in him and not through devotions invented by the pope” as articles of faith.<sup>18</sup> It is a commonplace to observe that almost wherever the Book of Concord uses the word “article” or “article of faith” the referent is either the second article of the Creed (i.e., that concerning Jesus Christ) or the preaching of justification / forgiveness as the chief “article.”<sup>19</sup> Similarly, “the doctrine of the Gospel” is, according to the Apology, the proclamation that sinners “have a gracious God not because of works but freely for Christ’s sake;” the contrast here is between what “the gospel teaches” and the merit-by-performance notion invented by human tradition.<sup>20</sup>

One finds the same conception in the *Six Sermons* of Jacob Andreae which were in effect an early draft of many of the articles in the Formula of Concord. Particularly in the fourth sermon, dealing with the problem of the Interims, Andreae contrasts the “Truth of the holy Gospel” with the “command and obligation” to observe otherwise indifferent things. To accept the imposition of such things under the weight of imperial command (whether ceremonies or doctrinal statements) “means the abrogation and diminution of Christian freedom.” One may not yield, Andreae says, to “enemies of God’s Word;” rather, one “is obligated to maintain his Christian freedom--and with it the truth of the holy Gospel--and to confess it publicly,” for “the Lord certainly knows how to preserve pure doctrine and his church.”<sup>21</sup>

Similar statements can be found in the *Loci communes* of Melancthon, which in its several editions stands as evidence of the way in which many Lutherans in the times prior to 1577 used and understood words like “doctrine” and “gospel.” Just as in the Formula of Concord, the term “doctrine” is used regularly in the singular, and its frequent association with “gospel” and related terms and ideas suggests that its normal referent is the faith as the Lutherans understood it--or, as we shall argue below, the catholic faith in Evangelical garb. For example, in the dedicatory epistle of the 1555 edition, Melancthon announces,

My intention was to relate only that doctrine contained in the confession of the churches of Saxony, which was delivered at Augsburg in 1530.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Ap VII, 23-27.

<sup>19</sup>Cf. Ap IV, *passim*.

<sup>20</sup>Ap XV, 5, 6, 11. Cf. also CA XXVIII, 20-27 (Latin), where bishops are called upon to “reject doctrine which is contrary to the Gospel.” Cf. also SA III, x, 1; Ap XIV, 5; Tr 77; SA III, xv, 5; and Melancthon’s qualified signature to the SA.

<sup>21</sup>Jacob Andreae, *Six Sermons*, in Robert Kolb, *Andreae and the Formula of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1977), pp. 94-96.

<sup>22</sup>Philip Melancthon, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. Clyde L. Manschreck (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. xlv. Cf. also, on the same page: “After the almighty Son of God, Jesus Christ, graciously allowed his doctrine to shine again through the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther, . . . .”

The *locus* on the church contains this instructive parallel use of “gospel” and “doctrine”:

The visible church is a gathered company of men who confess and obey the gospel . . . Hypocrites mingle in such a gathered company, and are included in the confession of true doctrine with the saints if they keep and confess [the] true doctrine.<sup>23</sup>

And in the same *locus* Melanchthon writes that Isaiah 59:21 teaches

not only that there will always be a true Church and people of God, but also shows where and how it will be, namely, where the correct, true doctrine of the gospel rings out.<sup>24</sup>

It is evident that for Melanchthon the common and decisive referent for the term “doctrine” is the proclaimed gospel, the key and central notion of the Augsburg Confession.

For all of these reasons one must conclude that the tenth article of the Formula of Concord uses the term “doctrine” as another word for the gospel preached from the pulpits and visibly enacted in the sacraments. This is what is called “the chief article of our Christian faith,” and it is the common core, the center to which all other doctrinal statements must relate.<sup>25</sup> Thus, far from stating maximalist conditions for church unity, FC SD X, 31 actually *assumes* agreement in the gospel; churches will not condemn each other, will not break the unity of the faith, over a difference in such external matters as vestments or ceremonies or theological formulations, “so long as they are one with each other in the doctrine and all its articles (my translation) as well as the right (viz. Evangelical) use of the holy sacraments.” That is, churches that can recognize each other’s preaching of the gospel and administration of the sacraments as authentically that, and not as “enmity” against Christ, are bound not to condemn one another’s practices, canon law, or theological formulations. The statement is addressed to churches which *are* “one with each other” in their preaching of the gospel and use of the sacraments, and they will not break their unity over more or fewer or differing external matters.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 267. Cf. also p. 270: “where there is true doctrine some saints . . . must also be present . . . the Church, or the true people of God, is bound to the gospel. Where the gospel is truly acknowledged, there are some who are holy.”

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup>FC SD X, 14. This point is seen as a distinctive and characteristic feature of the churches of the Augsburg Confession by many commentators, recently also in an analysis of the role of the CA in Lutheran / Roman Catholic dialogue, by Guenther Gassmann, “Die Rechtfertigungslehre in der Perspektive der Confessio Augustana und des lutherisch-katholischen Gesprächs heute,” *Luther*, L (1979), 49-60; see especially p. 52.



## II. The Ecclesiology of CA VII

In CA VII the grounds for the church's very existence, and the grounds for the church's "true unity," are the same: "that the Gospel be preached *eintraechtlich*," i.e., harmoniously, agreeably, with unanimity, and that the sacraments be administered accordingly. The Latin version reads, "to consent concerning the doctrine of the Gospel"; "doctrine" here means the activity of teaching or preaching the gospel, since *de doctrina evangelii* is paired with *de administratione sacramentorum*. One ought perhaps translate, "concerning the preaching of the gospel and the administering of the sacraments", since this is the evident intention of the German version's phrase, "that the Gospel be preached." Thus the primary referent here for "doctrine" is the gospel as it is actually proclaimed and sacramentally enacted, not theoretical doctrinal formulations about which scholars might or might not agree.<sup>26</sup>

In light of this the qualifying words "purely" and "rightly" and their parallels in CA VII are, strictly speaking, tautologies. Impure gospel is, in the view of the reformers, no gospel at all. Sacraments that are not administered "according to the gospel" are not proper sacraments but empty ceremonies. At best, "purely" and "rightly" serve to denote the reformers' evangelical understanding of the faith, over against what they regard as hopeless distortions thereof.<sup>27</sup>

A look at some of the background of CA VII will make this clearer. The twelfth of the Schwabach Articles, in effect an earlier stage of the article under discussion, asserts:

This church is nothing other than the believers in Christ, who hold, believe, and teach the above-named articles and parts, and who are on that account persecuted and tor-

<sup>26</sup>Schlink observes: "A comparison of the German and Latin versions shows that 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. Both statements are concerned with the worshipping assembly where the gospel is preached and the sacraments distributed and received. The church is thus defined through God's action in word and sacrament." *LWF Report*, p. 22.

<sup>27</sup>One sees a similar connotation in various passages from the *Loci communes* of Melancthon: "The churches of God are only those gatherings in which the holy gospel of the Lord Christ is rightly preached"; the saints of God are those "who also have external signs . . . , such as the true gospel, the right use of the sacraments, confession of true doctrine, and invocation of God with trust in Christ"; "God's people are bound only to the gospel, not to the precepts of men, to Rome or Antioch." Manschreck, pp. 142, 266, 267. Cf. also note 23 above. On this matter Robert Jensen observes, "There can be no such thing as an 'impure,' almost-unconditional gospel . . . The Lutheran reformers believed themselves to live in a time when most of what was claimed to be gospel had not *really* been gospel; it is that 'really' that the '*rein*' (pure) of the German text, or the '*recte*' of the Latin text enforces." Gritsch and Jensen, p. 132.

tured in the world. For where the gospel is preached and the sacraments are rightly used, there is the holy Christian Church.<sup>28</sup>

And the copy of an early draft of the Augsburg Confession sent to Nuremberg reads:

This church, however, is a gathering of the saints, in which the gospel is preached and the sacraments are given. And for the unity of the churches it is enough that people are agreed about the gospel and the sacraments.<sup>29</sup>

The qualifying adverbs *pure* and *recte* do not usually appear at this stage in the development of CA VII. They are a virtually gratuitous insertion into the final version (though, of course, there is a hint of *recht* in the Schwabach Articles). By the time the Variata was prepared a decade later, Melancthon was noticeably freer with the qualifying adverbs and adjectives; the introductory sentences of article seven read:

The church of Christ, then, is properly a congregation of members of Christ, i.e., of saints, who *truly* believe and obey Christ, even though there are many evil persons and hypocrites mixed in with this congregation until the last judgment. And the church, *properly* speaking, has its marks, namely, the *pure* and *wholesome* doctrine of the gospel and *correct* use of the sacraments. (Then follows the *satis est* sentence of the original.)<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup>"Solche Kirch ist nit ander dann die Glaubigen an Christo, welche obgenannte Artikel und Stuck halten, glauben und lehren und daruber verfolgt und gemartert werden in der Welt. Denn wo das Euangelion gepredigt wird und die Sakrament recht gebraucht, do ist die heilige christenliche Kirche, . . ." *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 4 ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959), pp. 61f; hereafter this volume will be abbreviated as *BSLK*.

<sup>29</sup>"Die Kirch aber ist ein Versammlung der Heiligen, darin das Evangelium gepredigt und die Sakrament gerecht werden. Und zu Einikeit der Kirchen ist genug, dass man des Evangeliums und der Sakrament halben ubereinkomm, . . ." *BSLK*, p. 61.

<sup>30</sup>"Est autem ecclesia Christi proprie congregatio membrorum Christi, hoc est sanctorum, qui vere credunt et oboediunt Christo, etsi in hac vita huic congregationi multi mali et hypocritae admixti sunt usque ad novissimum iudicium. Habet autem ecclesia proprie dicta signa sua, scilicet puram et sanam evangelii doctrinam et rectum usum sacramentorum." *BSLK*, p. 62; emphasis added. In the *locus* on the church Melancthon writes: "Up to now I have spoken about the visible church in which the doctrine of the gospel is pure and right use of the sacraments is kept without open idolatry. Although many hypocrites or ungodly people are now in this visible company and make this same confession, where there is true doctrine, some saints and heirs of eternal life who truly acknowledge and invoke God must also be present." Manschreck, p. 270.

From this summary we may provisionally conclude that CA VII stresses, not the purity and correctness of a church's doctrinal formulations, but the genuineness of the gospel and sacraments in its midst.

This is neither a reductionist principle, requiring only some minimal consent that the gospel has to do with Jesus; nor a maximalist principle, requiring complete and prior agreement in theological formulations as preconditions for church fellowship; nor yet a spiritualizing principle, pointing to an invisible and spiritual unity as a sort of "given" for the "real" (i.e., invisible) church. It is a simple and straightforward assertion that that which makes the church the church is also that which makes the church the one church.<sup>31</sup> Gospel and sacraments, as actually preached and done, require all that is essential for the church's being and for the church's oneness.<sup>32</sup>

Related to these concerns is the notion which Melancthon clarified in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, namely, that the church is not some "Platonic idea," but a real and visible / audible community, replete with characteristic distinguishing marks.<sup>33</sup> Those marks are regularly described, though in varying terminology, as the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments.<sup>34</sup> That the church is said thus to be recognizable, even visible--in opposition to Platonic idea--serves to maintain, as we shall later show, the essentially catholic character of the Augsburg Confession's view of the church, and thus to counter any non-catholic, i.e., sectarian, predilection for a really pure but hidden or spiritual body.<sup>35</sup> In this view the church is always an identifiable body of believers, a congregation actually proclaiming and hearing the gospel and actually celebrating the sacraments.

<sup>31</sup>Some have argued that "unity" is a hidden, spiritual phenomenon, a gift of Christ to the church, while "concord" or "fellowship" is an external, human affair to be achieved and maintained by Christians through doctrinal consensus. In addition to the essays by Bohlmann and Preus cited in note 1 above, see also Arthur Carl Piepkorn, "What the Symbols Have to Say about the Church," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, XXVI (1955), 721-763; note especially pp. 750, 751, 759. Against these views Kurt Marquart argues that no such distinction is proper. However, by using FC SD X, 31 as an authoritative gloss on CA VII, and by understanding the phrase "doctrine and all its articles" in a maximalist fashion, Marquart marks no net gain over those with whom he differs; see his essay in Preus and Rosin, pp. 268ff.

<sup>32</sup>"The question, therefore, is not about an ecclesiastical body's formal doctrine of the sacraments, but about its practice of them." Gritsch and Jenson, p. 133. "Spricht Melancthon von der *pura doctrina* Evangelii als einer nota der Kirche, so hat er immer die lebendig verkündigte und in der Kirche öffentlich vorgetragene reine Lehre des Evangeliums im Auge." Hellmut Lieberg, *Amt und Ordination bei Luther and Melancthon* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), p. 254.

<sup>33</sup>Ap VII, 20-26. Hellmut Lieberg comments on this passage: "Vielmehr ist die Kirche sichtbar, insofern in ihr das Evangelium und die Sakramente hör- und sichtbar sind und sie ja Sammlung von konkreten Menschen um dieses hör- und sichtbare Wort und Sakrament ist. Die Kirche ist nie ohne das hörbare Evangelium und die sichtbaren Sakramente und darum also immer *coetus visibilis*." Lieberg, p. 253.

<sup>34</sup>Ap VII, 20f.

<sup>35</sup>Cf. Jenson's comment: "The church is purified not by a Puritan discipline but the continuous encounter between the Word of God and the word of men." Gritsch and Jenson, p. 130.

## III. The Question of Catholicity

An essential key to the understanding of the Augsburg Confession--both as a whole and in the case of any particular article--is to see it as a confession of the catholic (i.e., universal Christian) faith, in the light of the Evangelical theology of the Saxon reformers. Though the Confession has since come to be regarded as the distinguishing document of a particular tradition, *viz.*, Lutheranism, the Confession's claims to catholicity must not be undervalued. Our purpose in this section is to pay attention to those claims, both of the Augsburg Confession as a whole and of article VII in particular.

At several key places the Augsburg Confession makes explicit claim to be a confession of the catholic faith, and this explicit claim is then supported by the several articles of the Confession. Indeed, the basic logic of the Confession was to demonstrate to the assembled estates that the reform in Saxon and other lands did not constitute, as Eck had charged,<sup>36</sup> a lapse from the catholic faith and therefore grounds for a breach in the unity of the church, to say nothing of being illicit in the empire. The Preface declares the confessors' readiness, in language echoing that of the imperial summons to the 1530 Diet, to maintain on church and one faith. Contrary to Eck's critique, the reformation had studiously avoided any innovation, either in doctrine or in practice; rather, the churches had maintained the catholic tradition while correcting certain abuses which had crept into the late medieval church.

This catholic claim is evidenced not least by the otherwise gratuitous condemnations of ancient heresies<sup>37</sup> and by the reiteration of the catholic creeds, by name or in substance, in the first three articles. Articles four through six indicate the confessors' decisive understanding of the gospel, the application of the benefits of Christ's work to the believer through the church's ministry in such a way as to issue in a life of obedience and holiness. One misses the confessors' intention entirely if one takes these articles as particular Lutheran views, rather than as the confessors' understanding of what the center of the catholic faith really is. In articles seven through fourteen there follows the confession concerning the church and the sacraments, which in extremely brief compass locates the reformers squarely (at least to their own way of thinking) in the catholic tradition. Accordingly, the epilogue to the doctrinal articles (after article XXI) says that nothing here departs from the teaching of the Scriptures or of the catholic church or even of the Roman church.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup>An English translation of Eck's *Articulos 404* appears in J. M. Reu, *The Augsburg Confession: A Collection of Sources* (Chicago: Wartburg, 1930), pp. 97-121. See especially the preface, which speaks of "false prophets" which have arisen in Germany "attempting to tear away the people from the unity of the Catholic Faith."

<sup>37</sup>E.g., the condemnations in articles I, II, VII, XII.

<sup>38</sup>The German version reads, "So dann dieselbige in heiliger Schrift klar gegruendet und darzu gemeiner christlichen, ja auch romischer Kirchen, so viel aus der Vaeter Schriften zu vermerken, nicht zuwider noch entgegen ist, . . ." The Latin version reads, "nihil inesse, quod discrepet a scripturis vel ab ecclesia catholica vel ab ecclesia Romana, quatenus ex scriptoribus nobis nota est." *BSLK*, p. 83d.

For the Lutherans who submitted the confession, the twenty-one doctrinal articles were not thought to be controversial. The whole dispute, they insisted, was not over the 'Articles of Faith and Doctrine' at all, but "chiefly with various traditions and abuses" which were then dealt with in the final seven articles.<sup>39</sup> To be sure, the *Confutatio* of the papal theologians disputed that claim, but that only puts into bolder relief the reformers' claim to catholicity.

In the case of Article VII in particular, the claimed catholicity may be noted at several points. First, the Article says that "one holy church will be and remain forever."<sup>40</sup> This is an attempt to assert both the essential oneness of the church against all non-catholic schismatic notions, as well as the perpetual duration of that church as such. Second, it is said that this church is the assembly of believers or saints around the gospel and sacraments.<sup>41</sup> Here the *congregatio sanctorum* is tantamount to the *communio sanctorum* of the Apostolic Creed, and that in both the personal sense (developed particularly sharply in Luther) of a *communio* of the *sancti* (holy people) and in the objective sense, characteristic of the ancient church, of a *communio* in the *sancta* (holy things). Here the confessors, especially by identifying the *communio* in terms of the preached gospel and administered sacraments, make a claim to stand in the tradition of the *communio* ecclesiology of the ancient church.<sup>42</sup> Third, the "*satis est*" statement<sup>43</sup> locates the ground for the true unity of the church there where its very existence is grounded, namely, in the gospel actually preached and the sacraments actually in use. What makes the church church makes the

<sup>39</sup>"Inasmuch as our churches dissent from the church catholic in no article of faith but only omit some few abuses which are new and have been adopted by the fault of the times although contrary to the intent of the canons, we pray that Your Imperial Majesty will graciously hear both what has been changed and what our reasons for such changes are in order that the people may not be compelled to observe these abuses against their consciences." CA, Introduction to Part Two, 1 (Latin). See also the comments by Eugene Brand, "1980: Lutheran-Roman Catholic Kairos?" *Trinity Seminary (Columbus, Ohio) Review* (Summer 1978), pp. 38f.

<sup>40</sup>"Es wird auch gelehret, dass allê Zeit musse ein heilige christliche Kirche sein und bleiben." "Item docent, quod una sancta ecclesia perpetuo mansura sit." CA VII, 1.

<sup>41</sup>"Welche ist die Versammlung aller Glaubigen, bei welchen das Evangelium rein gepredigt und die heiligen Sakrament lauts des Evangelii gereicht werden." "Est autem ecclesia congregatio sanctorum, in quo evangelium pure docetur et recte administrantur sacramenta." CA VII, 1.

<sup>42</sup>Cf. Walter Kasper, "The Augsburg Confession in Roman Catholic Perspective," *LWF Report* 6 / 7 (December 1979), 165. Cf. also Jean Laporte, "The Ancient Notion of Unity in Communion and Communion with Rome," unpublished xerographic copy of an essay read at the joint meeting of the Theology Faculties of Notre Dame University and Valparaiso University, November, 1979.

<sup>43</sup>"Dann dies ist gnug zu wahrer Einigkeit der christlichen Kirchen, dass da eintraechtlich nach reinem Verstand das Evangelium gepredigt und die Sakrament dem gottlichen Wort gemass gereicht werden." "Et ad veram unitatem ecclesiae satis est consentire de doctrina evangelii et de administratione sacramentorum." CA VII, 2. The argument developed by Robert Schultz in his essay elsewhere in this volume provides further support for the explicitly catholic claim of this statement.

church one. Just as article V defined the gospel materially ("it is not on account of our own merits but on account of Christ that God justifies those who believe"), so article VII defines the gospel formally as that which is actually preached and taught and done, rather than in secondary reflections and formulations about the gospel.<sup>44</sup> This is echoed in article XXIV where the claim is made that the mass "is observed with greater devotion in the confessors' churches; the decisive ecclesiological event is the mass, the *communio* in the *sancta* by the *sancti*."<sup>45</sup> Also the Council of Trent was able to argue that the gospel is not a code of doctrinal laws, but a source of saving truth.<sup>46</sup> Fourth, the condemnation of the Donatists in CA VIII not only makes a formal claim to catholicity but also underscores the confessors' material claim as well: only a neo-Donatist would require more than gospel and sacraments in practice; only a neo-Donatist would insist on something like agreement also in externals or perfection in doctrinal formulations.

Finally, we need to recall the situation in which the *satis est* statement is made, namely, the plea for Christian unity within the empire. The statement is an expression of concern for catholic unity. And the signatories were not calling for the breaking of *communio* with the Roman bishops in the interim between the imperial diet and the hoped-for free and general council of the church.<sup>47</sup> For all of these reasons, the seventh article of the Augsburg Confession must be understood as an attempt to confess a catholic ecclesiology and a catholic program for the preservation of the unity of the church.<sup>48</sup>

To conclude: article VII shares fully in the Confession's claim to be a statement of the universal Christian faith, and it does so most decisively by its appeal to the *communio* ecclesiology of the ancient church, with its focus on the sharing in the holy gospel and the holy things. Thus, the unity (like the very existence) of the church is said to depend, not on the mere possession of a proper doctrine about the gospel but on the actual proclamation of the gospel, not on a formal doctrine about the sacraments but on the actual use of the sacraments.<sup>49</sup> And that is precisely what we saw to be the case in the tenth article of the Formula of Concord.

<sup>44</sup>"The gospel does not merely convey historical information. Nor is it a collection of doctrines . . . the gospel occurs in preaching and in the administration of the sacraments." Kasper, *LWF Report*, p. 169.

<sup>45</sup>CA XXIV, 1, 9; cf. also Ap XV, 38-44.

<sup>46</sup>Walter Kasper summarizes the developments at Trent, as well as the secondary literature, concerning the decree on Scripture and tradition in the fourth session. There the gospel is called the "*fons omnis et salutaris veritatis et morum disciplinae*," where *fons* replaced the term *regula* which had appeared in the first draft of the decree. See Kasper, *LWF Report*, p. 174.

<sup>47</sup>Such readiness is reflected also in Ap XIV, 5 and in Melancthon's signature to the SA.

<sup>48</sup>To be sure, there is a decidedly non-hierarchical note to the view of the church in CA VII; the church is not pope and bishops and priests, but believers gathered around gospel and sacraments. Yet that polemical note is no denial of the essentially catholic claim being made.

<sup>49</sup>Edmund Schlink observes in this connection, "Not the silent possession of doctrine is meant here but the act of oral teaching and, again, not a teaching that ignores assurance and comfort but a teaching that is preaching." *Theology*, p. 199.

#### IV Conclusions

I have sought to read the texts of CA VII and FC X against the background of their respective situations, in order to show that a common and essentially catholic vision of the church and its unity is to be found in both articles. Just as the confessors at Augsburg in 1530 were prepared to preserve the unity of the church while reforming certain abuses by appealing to the gospel and sacraments in operation in their midst (and in the midst of the other churches of the empire as well), so also the concordists in 1577 were prepared to recognize the same criterion as sufficient grounds for the preservation of church unity. Even in the hardened and polemical climate of the 1570s the churches of the Augsburg Confession were not moved to a narrow non-catholic view of the church and its oneness; there was no insistence on total and prior agreement in formulation of doctrine as a condition for fellowship or *communio* or unity in the church. Rather, the gospel actually preached and the sacrament actually done were held up as the sufficient grounds. Recognizable authentic gospel and sacrament then constitute a *prima facie* case for mutual recognition of churches as church, and for expressions of unity such as *communio in sacris*. It is not to put words in their mouths to say, "Enough is enough!"