

“It Is Enough”—“Satis Est”

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Augsburg Confession Article VII

Every since the days of World War II the problems of church union have in increasing measure become the subject of discussion among theologians. Invariably in these discussions attempts are made to interpret the statements of the *Augsburg Confession* on the presuppositions for uniting the Christian churches to mean that for such union it is not necessary to agree in all points of the Christian, Lutheran doctrine, but only in the central doctrine (even here not in every point) and in the administration of the sacraments.

We have taken it upon ourselves in this doctrinal dissertation to investigate and set forth, both as to its history and its content, what *Augustana* VII (“the doctrine of the Gospel”) considers adequate for uniting Christian churches.

The Purpose and Character of the Augsburg Confession

The ecclesiastical cleavage in Emperor Charles V's realm had continued for thirteen years since the beginning of the Reformation, nine years since Luther's decisive stand at Worms. Though Luther had been excommunicated by the Pope and outlawed by the Emperor, and these judgments against him had not been rescinded, neither the Pope nor the Emperor had been able to suppress the Reformation. This situation troubled the Emperor no end. The Turks were threatening. For political reasons, therefore, he sought to bring about peace between the Romanists and the Protestants. To that end the diet was held at Augsburg in 1530. A good-natured person himself, the Emperor was under severe pressure from the Roman Church. With all possible mildness he sought to deal with the religious differences in the hope that Protestants would again return to the old Roman Church.

The Lutherans had intended to prepare for the Diet a document in which they would deal chiefly with the abuses which they themselves had already discarded: the Mass, monastic vows of monks and nuns, compulsory celibacy of priests, etc. The draft for this document was ready when they realized that they ought also to give a positive presentation of their doctrine. By this they wanted to show themselves to be a true Christian church.

As we examine the nature of this Confession, we must observe also the following special factors:

1. Because of the political and ecclesiastical state of affairs there could be no thought whatsoever of any kind of religious freedom. Luther was in fact surprised that the evangelicals were able to get home after the Diet.¹ The Emperor would have agreed to the removal of the grossest abuses; apart from this, however, his aim was “to allay divisions ... hearing, understanding, and considering with love and kindness the opinions and views of everybody ... to reduce them to one single Christian truth and agreement ... that we may adopt and hold one single and true religion; and may all live in one communion, church, and unity.”² Thus there should be and remain one church—*ecclesia romana*.

¹ *Luthers Predigt gehalten zu Coburg 1530, Luthers Sämtliche Schriften* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1885–1910), VII, 2454–55.

² *Kaiser Karls V. Ausschreiben zu dem Reichstag nach Augsburg*, St. L., XVI, 622.

2. If this ecclesiastical unity could not be achieved, the Emperor felt that he would have to reckon seriously with the possibility of war.³

3. Professor Werner Elert pointed out in his dogmatics⁴ that the theological systems of the Middle Ages contained no section on the church. Also, Melanchthon's *Loci* (1521) do not include the doctrine of the church. The first definition of this doctrine is to be found in the *Ansbach Counsel* of 1524. The *Augustana* speaks of the church as *una sancta* and pictures its appearance through the use of its *notae*.⁵

4. Luther taught and confessed the doctrine of the Gospel or the Word of God, as the need for it arose. The systematic presentation of the true doctrine came much later.

It was under these circumstances and in such a theological setting that the *Augustana* came into being. We shall not at this time present the history of its origin, nor what transpired at the Diet and the Emperor's final ruling and its consequences. The following, however, needs to be said for a proper understanding of the document: This Confession was a confession only over against the Church of Rome. It is to this extent limited in content; yet it was a doctrinal confession intended to "bring about Christian concord."⁶ The articles followed the customary Romanist arrangement of doctrines.⁷ The first part of the Confession bears the title "Chief Articles of Faith." On the basis of this Confession the Lutherans wanted to show themselves to be a true Christian church. With this confession of faith and these articles of faith they held out the basis for true Christian church unity.

Statements in the Interest of Church Unity Found in the First Confessions of the Reformation

Prior Statements of Luther and Melanchthon:

Already in 1521 Luther spoke about the church and about church unity in words similar to those used in CA VII and VIII. We find expressions as "God's Word" (*verbum dei*) and "doctrine of the Gospel" (*doctrina evangelii*). In the year 1524 he wrote that the church of Christ would continue to exist where He teaches and governs it through *His Word* and *His Spirit*.⁸ It has also been established that Melanchthon was fond of making the *articles of faith* the immediate subject of preaching in place of the *Word of God* or *the Gospel*.⁹

*The Schwabach Articles (1529):*¹⁰

"To obtain this faith (Art. VI "a work and gift of God"), or to bestow it upon us men, God has instituted the *ministry*, or the *oral word*, viz., the *Gospel*..." (Art. VII).¹¹

"This (holy, Christian) Church is nothing else than believers in Christ, who hold, believe, and teach the above-mentioned articles (I-XI) and parts, ..." (Art. XII).¹²

³ Eg., *Luthers Antwort. Den 26. Aug. 1530*, St. L., XVI, 1402ff..

⁴ Werner Elert, *Der christliche Glaube* (Berlin, 1941), p. 485.

⁵ Cf. C. F. W. Walther, *Kirche und Amt* (Zwickau i. Sa., 1894), 4. Auflage, p. 54 (Carpzov).

⁶ CA Preface, 13. *Triglotta*, p. 41. All references to the Confessions are given in the translation from the *Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1921) unless otherwise noted.

⁷ Hj. Homquist, *Kirchengeschichte*, Finnish translation (Porvoo, 1931), II, p. 83.

⁸ Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1962), p. 264. In this connection Elert brings a complete study of this, which we cannot reproduce here in detail.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

¹⁰ St. L., XVI, 564–69. The *Schwabach Articles* formed the basis for the first part of the *Augsburg Confession*. Cf. *Triglotta*, "Historical Introduction," p. 17.

¹¹ Henry E. Jacobs, *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: G. W. Frederick, 1893), II, p. 71.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 73.

The Augsburg Confession (1530):

“And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments” (*satis est consentire de doctrina evangelii et administratione sacramentorum*) (Art. VII, 2).

Other statements which are an expansion of the previously cited passages from the *Schwabach Articles* are the following:

“This power (of the Keys) is exercised only by *teaching* or *preaching* the Gospel. (German: *Gottes Worts*; Latin: *Verbum*) ... thereby are granted ... eternal things ... by the *ministry of the Word*” (Art. XXVIII, 8–11).

“... by divine right there belongs to the bishops ... to forgive sins, to judge doctrine, to reject doctrines contrary to the Gospel ...” (Art. XXVIII, 20–21).

The Apology (1531):

The Christian church “has outward marks so that it can be recognized, namely, the pure doctrine of the Gospel” (German: *wo Gottes Wort rein gehet*) (Art. VII and VIII, 5).

“... to explain what the Church signifies, namely, the congregation of saints, who have with each other the fellowship of the *same Gospel or doctrine*” (Art. VII and VIII, 8).

“... this Church ... is and abides truly upon earth.... And we add the marks: *the pure doctrine of the Gospel* (the ministry of the Gospel) *and the Sacraments*. ... *Therefore, the Church consists of those persons in whom there is a true knowledge and confession of faith and truth*” (Art. VII and VIII, 21–22).

“... the kingdom of Christ exists only with the Word and Sacraments” (Art. IX, 52).

“... the special command ... to preach ... God’s Word and the Gospel” (Art. XXVIII, 18).

“When, therefore, they (the bishops) teach wicked things, they are not to be heard.”

The German has the addition: *Denn das Evangelium redet nicht de traditionibus, sondern von Gottes Wort zu lehren*” (Art. XXVIII, 21).

Synonymous Terms

As previously indicated, we must concentrate on explaining the term “Gospel” or “Gospel preaching.” We need to establish whether “Gospel” is here to be understood in the narrow sense of only the doctrine of Justification or in the wider sense of the entire doctrine related to it and based upon it.

The above selections from the confessions show the Christian church to be the confessor and witness of God’s Word and all its truth.

These quotations contain the following synonyms for “Gospel” or “Gospel preaching”: ministry or the oral word; the above-mentioned articles; teaching and preaching the Gospel (*Verbum*); forgive sins, judge doctrine (false doctrine is what is contrary to the Gospel); pure doctrine of the Gospel (*wo Gottes Wort rein gehet*); Gospel or doctrine; doctrine or ministry of the Gospel; confession of faith and truth; preach God’s Word and Gospel; teach God’s Word.

Not once do these confessions use the word “Gospel” in the narrow sense, as distinguished from other points of doctrine. More on this later. At this juncture we call attention to the fact that in CA VII the expression *doctrina evangelii* is used for the “Gospel.” Also the term “ministry” shows that what is meant is everything which this ministry is to carry out: “teaching ... all things whatsoever ...” (Matt. 28:20). Already the *Small Catechism* included all chief doctrines.

The statements cited above show us that the word “Gospel” is used in a wider sense.

Professor Elert, commenting on the formulation of the unity in doctrine in the *Schwabach Articles*, writes: “Accordingly, the questionable words in the twelfth of the *Schwabach Articles* are not a foreign

substance (*Fremdkörper*); they correspond to the total view of the church on which these articles are based.”¹³ In other words, the points of doctrine in question belong to the doctrine of the Gospel and were always implicit in it.

We must also take into consideration the innumerable statement in Luther’s writings in which he uses expressions for “Gospel” in its broader sense. We cite only two:

And that alone is the Church, which has *the pure Word* and the pure Sacraments.¹⁴

... the true Church is there where the little company of those is who know Christ, that is, who are united in the *doctrine, faith, and confession* of Christ.¹⁵

The Augustana as Instrument for Church Union

The *Schwabach Articles* were intended to serve as a basis for union of the Protestants. The *Augustana*, on the other hand, was a defense of the Lutherans, yet at the same time in a broader sense a confession in the interest of true church unity.

The first part (Art. I-XXI) of this Confession was to lay down the true foundation of the church, as it stated in the conclusion of this part in the German text:

This is just about a summary of the doctrines that are preached and taught in our churches for proper Christian instruction, the consolation of consciences, and the amendment of believers ... nor should we wish to bequeath to our children and posterity any other teaching than that which agrees with the pure Word of God and Christian truth.¹⁶

The following words from the Latin text also are of significance here:

This is about the Sum of our Doctrine, in which, as can be seen, there is nothing that varies from the Scriptures, or from the Church Catholic, or from the Church of Rome as known from its writers.¹⁷

To this Professor Elert says:

It is impossible to express more sharply than is done in the introductory statement and in this concluding statement that the doctrinal articles of the *Augsburg Confession* propose to formulate just what, according to the seventh article, true church unity requires, namely, “agreement with respect to doctrine” (*consensus de doctrina*).¹⁸

The conclusion of the *Augsburg Confession* contains the words:

These are the chief articles which seem to be in controversy ... from which the rest may be readily judged ... Only those things have been recounted whereof we thought that it was necessary to speak, in order that it might be understood that in doctrine and ceremonies nothing has been received on our part against Scripture or the Church Catholic ... The above articles we

¹³ *The Structure of Lutheranism*, p. 271. The sentence in the German concludes: *Sie entsprechen der diesen Artikeln überhaupt zugrunde liegenden kirchlichen Gesamtfassung.*

¹⁴ St. L., VI, 579.

¹⁵ St. L., XI, 1017.

¹⁶ Theodore G. Tappert, *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Muehlenberg, 1959), p. 47. Translated from the German.

¹⁷ *Triglotta*, p. 59.

¹⁸ *The Structure of Lutheranism*, p. 272f.

desire to present ... in order to exhibit our Confession and let men see a summary of the doctrine of our teachers.¹⁹

In this way, through unity in the entire doctrine of the Word of God, the Lutherans sought to establish church fellowship (cf. Apology VI, 27–29, 32, German text). Also in the following words they say this: “And we know that the Church is among those who teach the Word of God aright” (XIV, 27).

“Gospel” Used in a Twofold Sense

Even in Holy Writ both “Gospel” and “Law” are used in a variety of ways. The Law properly understood (*lex proprie accepta—stricte*) presents God’s total demand upon man, but in a wider sense (*latius*) it means *tota scriptura*, the entire doctrine of Scripture (Ps. 1:2; John 15:25; Isa. 2:3; I Cor. 14:21; Lk. 24:44). Compare “the law of the Spirit ... of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2), “the perfect law of liberty” (Jas. 1:25; 2:12).

The Gospel in its proper sense (*evangelium proprie acceptum—stricte*) teaches the grace of God in Christ (Justification), but in a wider sense (*latius*) it means “the entire doctrine of Christ which He proposed in His ministry, as also did His apostles” (FC V, 5, 6). Thus it includes the entire Christian doctrine (Mark 1:1, 14; 16:15; Matt. 28:19, 20; Luke 9:6; Acts 20:21). In a synecdochical sense, the whole is designated according to its principal part.²⁰

In the days of the Reformation men joyfully gave thanks to God for His kindness in causing the Gospel again to be restored in all its fullness. From the very first, the Gospel and the correct understanding of doctrine were inseparable, as Dr. E. A. W. Krauss also states: “In the beginning of the Reformation all who had accepted the Gospel were completely agreed in the pure doctrine.”²¹

There is extant a series of articles (I–XVII) from the year 1530 in which the doctrine of the Lutherans is presented in opposition to the Roman doctrine.²² Who the author of this sharply worded document is, is not known. Our interest is to show how the word “Gospel” is used in these articles. Almost every individual article begins, “The Gospel teaches ...” regardless of whether the matter concerns the central doctrine of Scripture or, e.g., the marriage of priests. Also, monastic life and similar things are spoken of as “militating manifestly against the Gospel” (Art. XI), because such ordinances “in the church are put on a par with the worship service.”

Twice toward the end of August 1530 certain articles (presumably dealt with in Luther’s “Reflections on Certain Controversial Articles—August 1530”)²³ were sent to Luther for examination. Luther suspected duplicity and trickery on the part of the Romanists. He advised Spalatin: “For if you hold to this one thing, that you will not or did not concede to anything *contrary to the Gospel*, what of their (the Papists’) machinations?”²⁴

In his evaluation of the Emperor’s first Recess (Sept. 22, 1530)²⁵ in reference to the article pertaining to religion, Luther underscores that “great care must be exercised ... that on our part nothing is assented to or conceded which would be contrary to *the faith, the Gospel, and divine honor*.” In the Recess it was forbidden to receive adherents to the Lutheran Confession. Naturally Luther could “by no means approve” of this prohibition. He designates these new adherents as such “who were ready to accept *the true doctrine of the Gospel*,” and further on says: “moreover we must confess, that the *doctrine taught and presented* at Augsburg is *the pure and genuine Word of God*, and that all who believe it and hold to it are children of God and will be

¹⁹ Triglotta, p. 95.

²⁰ J. W. Baier, *Compendium* (St. Louis, 1879), III, p. 342. *Lehre und Wehre*, 1887, p. 317. Adolf Hoenecke, *Ev.-Luth. Dogmatik* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1909), IV, p. 163. F. Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1920), III, p. 261. Cf. Harold Romoser, *Lutheran News*, July 7, 1966, p. 10.

²¹ E. A. W. Krauss, *Lebensbilder* (St. Louis, 1913), p. 378.

²² *Die Artikel oder der kurze Begriff von der Protestanten und des Gegentheils Lehre*, St. L., XVI, 754ff.

²³ St. L., XVI, 1407.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1457.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1536–44.

saved...” Further on we read the following: “Accordingly all who believe and live *according to the doctrine of the Confession (CA) and the Apology* are according to such faith and doctrine our brethren...”

Furthermore, Luther, in speaking of the nature of the controversy, emphatically states: “This *concerns doctrine and confession*, what is to be acknowledged as right or wrong...” Here we also find the term “the *evangelical doctrine*.” Finally, Luther says that in the *concilio* requested by the Emperor “nothing dare be assented to or acknowledged as right but that which is *in agreement with* and *coincides with the Word of God*.”

In this free manner Luther and the theologians of the Reformation period employ the term “Gospel” even in the widest sense of the word for everything that is taught according to the Word of God. In one of his lectures Dr. K. F. A. Kahnis characterizes the *Augustana* by saying that in it Melanchthon “presents Luther’s doctrine in agreement with the Gospel...”²⁶

The other confessional writings continue in the sense and terminology of the *Augustana*. The authors and subscribers of the *Book of Concord* confirm this. They mention all previous confessions and confessional writings and assert that they have introduced “nothing new” and that they have not deviated from them “either in *rebus* (matter) or in *phasibus* (expressions).”²⁷

In the same Preface, the particular point we are trying to make in this study of the Lutheran Reformation is substantiated by the following synonymous terms: the pure doctrine of God’s Word, holy Gospel, pure evangelical doctrine, the truth which we professed at Augsburg in the year 1530, the true doctrine and confession of faith. It is also expressly stated, “they received this *Book of Concord* ... as expressing the godly and genuine meaning of the *Augsburg Confession*.”

The Importance of the Chief Article for All Doctrine

In his warning to his dear Germans relative to the Diet Recess before him, Luther in concluding pointed out the importance of the chief article of faith for the church.

For when this article falls, the Church falls, and no error can be withstood, because without this article the Holy Ghost will not and can not be with us; for He is to reveal Christ to us.²⁸

With reference to I Corinthians 1:23 and 2:2, Dr. F. Pieper says:

Christ crucified is our righteousness and our salvation, and this is the heart and core, the sum of Christian doctrine. All other doctrines either lead to this doctrine, or they issue forth from it... The other doctrines have value only inasmuch as the doctrine of justification is adhered to.²⁹

The basic importance of the chief article not only has positive value, but it also stands in absolute opposition to every false doctrine. So Luther comments on John 6:53:

This article (forgiveness of sins through Christ) tolerates no error next to it; the Holy Spirit is also there, and those who believe this, tolerate no error.³⁰

In his *Vorträge* (I, 47–48) Dr. F. Pieper makes the following comment with reference to these words:

The article of justification, once it enters the heart, produces *true fear of God*. It makes us children of God and consequently effects a child-like attitude toward God in us. Now, an

²⁶ K. F. A. Kahnis, *Die Kirche—Vorträge* (Leipzig, 1866), p. 129.

²⁷ *Triglotta, Preface*, pp. 22–23.

²⁸ St. L., XVI, 1664. Cf. Pieper, *Dogmatik*, II, pp. 617ff.

²⁹ F. Pieper, *Vorträge* (St. Louis, 1916), I, pp. 6–7; II, pp. 97–99.

³⁰ St. L., VII, 2347.

essential part of this child-like attitude toward God is this, that we adhere firmly to the Word of our God, that we do not surrender it in even one point of doctrine. In our day (1900) people judge and act in an entirely different manner. Unionism is now in the air; its atmosphere, so to speak, pervades all of external Christendom. Nowadays those are called spiritual, holy, pious people who content themselves with a few “essentials” and “yield” in a number of articles of doctrine, and are able to tolerate error. Those, on the other hand, who adhere firmly to *every* article of Christian doctrine are not considered spiritually, but carnally minded. This is done because men set up their own conception of the fear of God and piety. This is the situation: As absurd as it would be to say that one is a true Christian even though he engages in stealing, just so absurd is it to say that such a one is a true Christian who can tolerate some error in a few articles of doctrine. For just as clearly and unmistakably as stealing is forbidden to every Christian in Holy Scripture, just as clearly and unmistakably is the Christian told in Holy Scripture that he should cling firmly to God’s Word and that he should not depart from it in one point. What is more, the latter is emphatically enjoined in more passages of Holy Scripture than the former, because it is far more necessary. That a Christian is not to steal, this he knows from the law of nature; this also his reason tells him; but it is again and again so easily forgotten that a Christian also with respect to doctrine is not to harbor and tolerate an error. The truly pious and God-fearing says with Luther (We are bringing the entire statement—Pieper has only the last sentence.): “If they (Oecolampadius, Zwingli, and others) were not such wanton despisers of the Scriptures, one clear passage of Scripture would move them just as much as though the whole world were full of Scripture; which is actually true. For with me it is thus, that every passage makes the world too narrow for me.”³¹

Thus everything rests on Christ, the true cornerstone, foundation, and center. This “evangelical doctrine” is not a system of doctrine of the Lutheran reformers but the true doctrine of God’s Word. Therefore no other doctrine can be tolerated beside it in the church (*Gemeinde*) of God.

Several Observations and Testimonies

The antithesis to “the Gospel” in Article VII of the *Augustana* is not the Law or any individual point of doctrine, but solely and alone uniform rites or ceremonies (CA VII, cf. *Apology* VII and VIII, 31–46). This, too, shows that here the entire “evangelical doctrine” is to be understood as included. The entire context—as we have learned—makes it clear that no antithesis is intended between the Gospel, *proprie acceptum*, and other points of doctrine in the Word of God.

The *Formula of Concord* underscores this point of the *Augustana* and presents this “agreement concerning the doctrine of the Gospel” as agreement “in the doctrine and all its articles,” and this also in opposition to the demand for complete uniformity in outward ceremonies (FC, S.D., X, 31; F. Pieper, *Vorträge* II, 26–27).

In the debate with the Lutherans during the Diet at Augsburg, Dr. Eck tried to dismiss clear doctrines of God’s Word as adiaphora. Luther opposes this in no uncertain terms. What God’s Word teaches is no adiaphoron but a command of God. “The whole Word of God is more than the Church.” Luther will have no “negotiating with regard to agreement *in the doctrine*,” since this would be possible only in case “the Pope would consider his papacy to be abolished.” This would, of course, be entirely impossible and thus Luther sees only this possibility: “... we came to hear whether or not they approve our doctrine (*das Unsere*)....”³²

Thus what is involved in the “Gospel” of the *Augustana* is the whole doctrine of the Confession.

³¹ St. L., XX, 788.

³² St. L., XVI, 1402.

In his anniversary *Festschrift*, Rector Martin Willkomm (d. 1946), Rector of the then Theological Seminary of the German Lutheran Free Church, makes reference to the manner of preaching the Gospel (CA VII) “rightly with one consent” (the German has: *einträchtiglich nach reinem Verstand*). This, he writes, is to be understood as referring to the whole doctrine and the refutation of error. He draws from it his practical application: “This sentence in our Confession states the justification of our church’s position especially over against the German territorial churches. For this ‘rightly with one consent’ is not to be found there, not even in the best of them.”³³

The founder of the first confessionally bound (free) Lutheran congregations in Germany, also the founder and director of the seminary at Steeden, Pastor Friedrich Brunn (d. 1894), defines his position on this question (of CA VII) by taking note especially of “two little words” in the *Small Catechism*:

The Holy Ghost ... keeps the whole Christian Church on earth *in the one true faith*... For as surely as the whole Christian faith (*aller Glaube*) must be founded clearly and firmly alone on God’s Word, and as surely as holy Scripture does not contain a variety of different, contradictory doctrines, so surely also can only this one doctrine and this faith ... be the correct one.³⁴

In addition we might refer to Ephesians 4:4, 5, cited in *Augustana* VII: “One ... one ... in one ... one ... one ... one.” The unity in the preaching of the Gospel spoken of in the *Augustana* accordingly concerns the Gospel in the wider sense.

In general, genuinely Lutheran writings, following the *Augustana*, define the church in this or a similar way: Where God’s Word (pure doctrine) is taught (Baier, Walther, Hoenecke, Pieper, Guenther, Carl M-Zorn, etc.). We have already shown that this corresponds exactly to the sense of the *evangelium recte docetur* of *Augustana* VII.

Various Interpretations of Augustana VII and Conclusions Drawn from Them

As we stated earlier (footnote 8), Professor Elert brought precise historical proof that Luther from the outset defined the church and church unity with the same terms used in Articles VII and VIII of the *Augustana*. Elert recognized that also for Luther and Melancthon the content of the Gospel was the pure doctrine of God’s Word. This correct historical judgment of Elert is of special significance and value since he gives evidence of an aversion to pure doctrine.³⁵ He views the course of events as step-by-step stages of development.

Does not the Christian “in the Gospel” possess everything that pertains to the kingdom of God: the entire Word of God, the means of grace, prayer, congregation, ministry, etc.? When the heart has through the operation of God accepted the Gospel and the sinner has become a child of God, it is all there *implicite*.³⁶ Thus it sufficed in the beginning of the New Testament church when someone said, he believed in Christ. Today such a confession must be examined more closely. Yet it is the same faith.

That more conservative and modern theologians are not inclined to bind themselves to pure (Lutheran) doctrine or have any appreciation for Luther’s confessional struggle, stems from the fact that, while Luther and his successors take their doctrine from God’s Word, all modern theologians have a completely different approach to the Bible. Consequently their paths must go apart, and remain so. This is the point.

In his dogmatics Professor Elert takes the “Gospel is rightly taught” (CA VII) to mean the influence (*Vollziehung*) of Christ and His Spirit upon the world. The unity of the churches (CA VII, 2) “is, to begin with,

³³ Martin Willkomm, *Das Augsbürgische Bekenntnis—1530–1930* (Zwickau i. Sa., 1930), pp. 54–55.

³⁴ Fr. Brunn, *Erklärung des Kleinen Katechismus* (Zwickau i. Sa., 1892), 2. Auflage, pp. 339–40.

³⁵ *The Structure of Lutheranism*, pp. 267ff.

³⁶ Dr. C. F. W. Walther remarks that the *Augustana* does not explain every doctrine, but they can all be there *implicite*. *Lehre und Wehre*, 1866, p. 312.

not at all to be understood as opposed to possible splits ... to ‘confessional’ multiplicity, but as inner unity. It consists in this, that it (the carrying out of the functions: Gospel and Sacraments) is done with unanimity.”³⁷

Professor Edmund Schlink very likely had Professor Elert’s historical study before him, but he did not make use of much of it nor of its context. In that case one can of course be freer in his interpretation. Schlink restricts the conditions for unity of the churches to the preaching of the Gospel in the narrower sense. He even states this in words such as these: “that ... here (CA VII) not the Word of God in general, nor the Law, but only the Gospel is mentioned...” Thus one can understand that Schlink, calling upon *Augustana* VII, pursues an entirely different, modern course: The *Augustana* according to him gives the impulse for modern “ecumenical activity without ecclesiastically valid obligation (*kirchenrechtliche Verpflichtung*.)”³⁸ *This does not come into consideration at all in Augustana VII.*

In *Popular Symbolics* only this is said by way of explanation of the expression “the pure doctrine of the Gospel”: “Where the Gospel is preached in its purity, the marks of the Church stand out the more distinctly.”³⁹ Here, too, the context was not utilized. This brief presentation in its conclusion quotes the following statement from Gerhard’s explanation of *Augustana* VII: “Definitions, rules, and canons ought to be given with respect to the ideal.” In some circles that was applied so, that the officially adopted doctrinal confession of a church is only an ideal, which the church need not follow. It merely states what a church *ought to teach*, but *not* what it *must* teach. This is exactly what has on principle been taught and practiced in the doctrinally loose territorial churches and their kind. This, however, is an arbitrary and subversive interpretation of a confession of faith and a presumptuous declaration in the matter of the unity of churches (doctrine and faith). Gerhard’s sentence appears to point out only this, that believers in Christ, real members of the *una sancta*, are to be found in a heterodox church, even though the “ideal,” the whole pure doctrine, does not prevail. At that time chiefly the Roman Church came into consideration. But this has nothing to do with the God-intended purity of doctrine in the congregation and the church. And so, says Hoenecke, “the seventh Article of our *Augustana* is not to be called into question.”⁴⁰

It is the pure Lutheran doctrine that students ought to be taught at orthodox colleges and seminaries. To it they pledge themselves before God and the church at their ordination. Ought this to be only a formality as in the territorial churches? Men who teach other than true doctrine cannot be pastors in the orthodox church.

It is as Dr. F. Pieper teaches, “that in all Scripture there is not a single text permitting a teacher to deviate from the Word of God or granting a child of God license to fraternize with a teacher who deviates from the Word of God.”⁴¹

Since the *Augsburg Confession* in Article VII, 2, states what is enough for true unity of the church, this article contains the more precise expression “rightly with one consent” (*einträchtiglich nach reinem Vetstand*). This is to be understood *de facto*, and there is not a single word, likewise not in the *Formula of Concord*, that one may after all yield in some point of the pure doctrine. Otherwise one would be dealing with apostates. *One feels ashamed to have to speak of such things “in our midst.”*

An ecumenical yielding in the doctrine (even the ecumenical basis is no definite doctrine, rather every church is free to interpret it as it pleases) *means defection from God’s will and command.*

In September 1966 an International Theological Seminar was conducted in Strassburg. Here a Professor Kantzenbach, research professor of the Strassburg Institute, proposed the following (in the Analysis of the Ecumenical Decree):

According to Lutheran understanding there is only one essential *nota ecclesiae*: Gospel and Sacraments. Both are without question present also in the Roman Church. Therefore she cannot but be striving after the fullness of Christ, even as the churches of the Reformation.⁴²

³⁷ Elert, *Der christliche Glaube*, pp. 485, 495.

³⁸ Edmund Schlink, *Theologie der luth. Bekenntnisschriften* (Muenchen, 1946), 2. Auflage, p. 281.

³⁹ Th. Engelder et. al., *Popular Symbolics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1945), p. 102.

⁴⁰ Hoenecke, op. cit., IV, pp. 162–64.

⁴¹ Pieper, *Dogmatik*, III, p. 486.

Thus he heartily approves of the Ecumenical Decree, which advocates that new steps be taken.

In the above statement the professor uses the word “gospel” in the narrowest sense while at the same time ignoring the fact that the doctrine of the Roman Church is everywhere contrary to the Gospel. We need only call attention to Luther’s examination of the Roman doctrine in his “Wider Hans Wurst” of the year 1541. There he takes up all the chief doctrines, also Baptism and the Sacrament of the Altar, and shows that the Roman Church, though its baptism is the baptism of the ancient church, etc., just in the question concerning Baptism teaches and practices wrongly in many ways. In this connection Luther says:

For you know (*hörest*) that it is intolerable to teach anything other than the Word of God... The Church should not and cannot lie nor teach error, not even in one point. If she teaches one lie, then everything is wrong.⁴³

If one understands the mark of the church, “preaching the Gospel,” only in the narrow sense, then some doctrines could be eliminated from the basis of church union, thus resulting in an arbitrary decision on the part of man as to which doctrines are essential for such union. The Word of God is to decide all doctrine. If next to the true doctrine the church tolerates any other, “it renounces the truth itself.”⁴⁴

Therefore it is also necessary to speak of doctrinal discipline in the church. If this is not practiced, but even set aside by a Gospel in the narrow sense, the real Gospel itself is adulterated. If it sufficed to think of the Gospel only in the narrow sense, the *Augsburg Confession* with its twenty-eight articles and the rest of the confessional writings would have been drawn up, accepted, and confessed in vain. Among genuine Lutherans, Christian doctrine based on God’s Word is still looked upon and adhered to as something not subject to change. Doctrine, faith, and confession belong together.

When a church holds its doctrine to be nothing more than an arbitrary “ideal,” and no longer *de facto* confesses it as its faith, we are no longer dealing with a fellowship of faith, but with a more or less human institution such as the territorial churches. Such a church may at one time have been a Lutheran church, but now obviously belongs to such as have fallen away. There would seem to be nothing to hinder these from joining the LWF.

Luther and Doctrinal Unity in the Church

In his comments on the second Bull of the Pope in the golden anniversary year 1525 Luther wrote concerning indulgences:

It is impossible to reconcile and at one and the same time to hold to both, *the doctrine of the Pope and the Gospel of Christ...* Therefore whoever does not want to be eternally lost and go to the devil must diligently and earnestly beware of the Papacy and its doctrine and not accept again the least and smallest of its teachings.⁴⁵

We already note here contrasted the doctrine of the Pope and the Gospel of Christ, with which obviously the pure doctrine of the Word of God is meant.

At the Marburg Colloquy in 1529 the *Schwabach Articles* (I-XV) served as basis. Zwingli and his followers had expressed themselves in agreement with all these articles, also concerning the Lord’s Supper, but

⁴² *Information, LWB Pressedienst*, Sept. 22, 1966, pp. 7–8.

⁴³ St. L., XVII, 1343.

⁴⁴ Pieper, *Dogmatik*, III, pp. 489–92.

⁴⁵ St. L., XIX, pp. 766–83.

not on the real presence. This was enough to move Luther and his party to withhold the hand of fellowship.⁴⁶ This happened about nine months before the reading of the *Augsburg Confession* at the Diet of Augsburg.

During the Diet Luther composed an exhortation to the clergy assembled there. He conceded what he could in the hope of preventing the threatening conflict, yet was determined to preserve true doctrine in the church. He began: “We and you know that you are living without the Word of God, but we have the Word of God.” Yet Luther was willing to let the bishops be princes and lords providing that they would let the Lutherans carry out what their office obligated them (the bishops) to do, to let them “teach the Gospel without hindrance.”⁴⁷

Once again we find here the term “Gospel” used for the entire doctrine and proclamation in the church. Luther asked that they be allowed to teach the Gospel without interference. He was not seeking license for an evangelical movement or party beside the Roman doctrine. What he wanted was that *full and exclusive* right be given to the teaching of the Lutheran doctrine, the Gospel. Rector Martin Willkomm writes concerning this: “It is the same thing that the *Augsburg Confession* expresses in the words ‘to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel, etc.’”⁴⁸ The Roman Church could not go in on such a proposal.

Later (1535) this demand of Luther disturbed preachers in Westphalia. To get proper clarification they turned directly to Luther. This prompted Luther to publish a treatise, which appeared together with his letter to these preachers.⁴⁹ In this treatise Luther restates his demand to the Roman Church that the Pope “should give the pure Gospel free course.” This can only be intended to say that the Gospel, the true doctrine of God’s Word, is the only doctrine of the church:

This he (the Pope) does not like to hear. For he smells mice and likely tastes the roast, and is worried that he cannot remain Pope... *For let none think or assume that I am ready to become one with the Pope and the Papists, unless he and they become one with the Gospel...* Therefore I say: Unless they accept *the, the, the* Gospel, which I call mine and came to know through such great torture and peril, there is no hope for unity between poor sinful me and the holy father... (Luther added that the Papists in their conscience know) their gospel is human doctrine and ... that my gospel is God’s doctrine and the Holy Scripture.⁵⁰

“The gospel” here means in both cases (“their—my”) the entire doctrine, and the pure doctrine of the Gospel, and it alone should be taught and preached in the church.

Such insistence on complete purity of the doctrine, the Gospel, was to the genuine Lutherans from beginning to end a self-evident requisite for church union. This is what the Word of God teaches. This is what we believe. This is what we confess.

Luther teaches:

Thus in theology one little error overthrows the whole doctrine... The doctrine is not ours but God’s... Therefore we may not yield or change one tittle of it.⁵¹

“... The Word remained and we with the Word.”

⁴⁶ Cf. Armin Schuetze, “What Is the Meaning of ‘Gospel’ in Article VII of the Augsburg Confession?”, *Northwestern Lutheran*, June 12, 1966. Cf. also Luther on Gal. 5:9, St. L., IX, 643–44.

⁴⁷ St. L., XVI, 982–83.

⁴⁸ Martin Willkomm, *Darf Luther als Anwalt der “Gleichberechtigung der Richtungen” angerufen werden? Schrift und Bekenntnis*, 1926, p. 134.

⁴⁹ St. L., XIX, *Einleitung*, pp. 32–33.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 643–47.

⁵¹ Luther to Gal. 5:9, St. L., IX, 644.

We shall let the exiled Luther preach to us in a sermon he preached on October 2, 1530, before leaving Coburg, and in a sermon he preached on October 16 on his arrival in Wittenberg. At the close of both of these sermons he made some comments about the happenings and the outcome of the Diet:

Therefore we should primarily and above all thank and praise God that the Word remained and we with the Word... Moreover, God not only kept us true to His Word, but He also brought it about that the precious Word was spread and bore fruit in lands and among people who previously knew nothing about it. Of this I shall say no more at this time.⁵² ... Therefore, where the Word is, let happen what will.⁵³ Meanwhile we are content that the Lord strengthened us so that we in the highest place (the Diet) confessed our faith. As a result the best and worst among them must say that our doctrine does not contradict a single article of faith... Our doctrine (*verbum*) they could not censure.⁵⁴

God gave us more than the whole world could give. He will also continue to grant us only the best and will not forsake us His children, who desire to remain faithful to His Word, but will rescue, guard, and protect us from the devil and his members. May He grant us this through Christ, our Lord! Amen.⁵⁵

Also in these sermons we note expressions corresponding to the pure Gospel (CA VII): the Word remains, kept true to His Word, the precious Word, our faith, our doctrine (*verbum*), articles of faith.

Conclusion

Besides our study of the expression itself in *Augustana* VII, “agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel (*consentire de doctrina evangelii*),” also the facts we cited from contemporary history and authentic documents attest to the principle:

Church unity “in the doctrine and all its articles” (*Concordia ecclesiarum “in doctrina et in omnibus illius partibus.”*)⁵⁶

⁵² It may be that Luther is referring to the happenings in Denmark. Only two weeks before the reading of the *Augsburg Confession* a kind of confession was presented at Copenhagen, and the king issued a decree for the first time favorable to the Reformation. In Sweden and Finland the Reformation had progressed somewhat further, but just at this time a crisis had arisen there.

⁵³ St. L., VII, 2453ff.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2462f.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 2457.

⁵⁶ CA VII; F. C., S. D., X, 31.