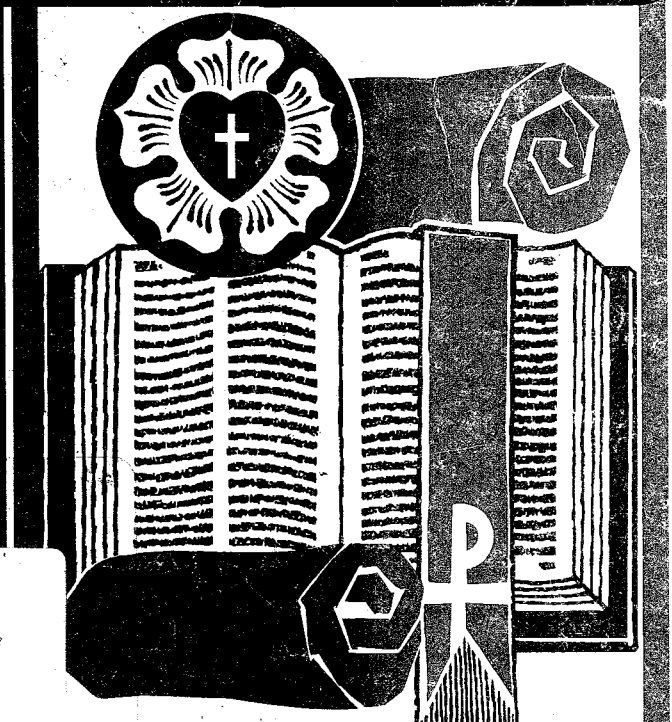


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ESSAYS

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THE BASIS FOR CONCORD

by Dr. Robert Preus

Karl Rahner once said¹ that if the doctrine of the Trinity were no longer taught in the Roman Catholic Church today, there would probably be no real change in the worship and practice of contemporary Roman Catholics. With some modifications the same might be said of the Lutheran doctrine of the church as it affects modern Lutheran doctrine and practice. For generations now Lutherans all over the world have acted and lived without apparent awareness of the necessary implications of our historic confessional Lutheran ecclesiology on the life and practice of the church. This fact is nowhere more apparent today than in Lutheran discussions and activities relative to the formula for concord in contemporary Lutheranism and in Lutheran ecumenical involvement as a whole. Such activity has often been carried on as though there were no Lutheran doctrine of the church, as though there were no clear and infallible marks of the true church, or as though the church were no more than some sort of external *societas* comparable to a club or lodge or nation.

A study of the Lutheran Confessions will reveal with clarity that a close relationship exists between what the church of Jesus Christ is and what its activity will be in its constant efforts toward doctrinal unity and concord. In fact, the nature of the church is a constitutive element, a paradigm, or model, in the church's formula for concord. When the doctrine of the church is ignored or distorted there will accordingly be no effective or God pleasing (Lutheran) efforts toward achieving purity of doctrine and unanimity in the doctrine.

It will be the purpose of this essay to demonstrate from the Confessions this relationship between the nature of the church and its quest for doctrinal purity and unity and to present the position of the Confessions on this issue which is crucial also today.

I. What Is the Church?

What is the church? Who are members of the church? This is the fundamental question of all ecclesiology, recognized by Melancthon

¹Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, Tr. by Joseph Donceel (London: Burns & Oates, Ltd. 1970), pp. 9-10.

in the Augsburg Confession and by the Roman Catholics in the Confutation.² One cannot speak to the subject of unity, concord, marks or anything else pertaining to the church until one has determined definitely what the church is. Accordingly, Melanchthon begins Article VII of the Augsburg Confession with a definition of the church and repeats the definition in Article VII.

This definition of the church is very simple and straightforward, so much so that a theologian might erroneously conclude that the doctrine of the church was never thought through totally and a finished definition never presented in our confessions.³ But the doctrine of the church in our confessions is a finished position and well thought through. And the Lutheran stand concerning the right approach to unity is also clear in our confessions, albeit briefly put. And the relationship between the nature of the church and its quest for doctrinal unity, though not explicitly stated, is, I believe, adumbrated with sufficient force and clarity that there should be no question about it.

The church, according to Melanchthon in the Augsburg Confession, is the assembly of all believers (AC VII, 1; VIII, 1; Ap VII, 1, 8, 28), or communion of saints (*congregatio sanctorum*). That is the simple definition. In the same vein Luther defines the church as "a little holy flock or community of pure saints under one head, Christ" (LC II, 51), a "holy community or Christian people" (LC II, 49-50, 53). Again he defines the church as the "holy believers and sheep who hear the voice of their shepherd" (SA III, XIII, 2; cf. Apol. VII, 14). In every case Melanchthon and Luther in their definition of the church are attempting to be faithful to the catholic creeds, but especially to the Scriptures as they spoke of the *ἐκκλησία*, and likened it to the body of Christ (Apol. VII, 7, 29; LC II, 47-50).

Having *defined* the church as the Christians or community of believers, the confessions more fully *describe* the church, especially in relation to the Holy Spirit and the righteousness of Christ which the church and its members possess through faith. The church is not merely an association (*Gesellschaft*) of outward ties (*rerum*) and

²CR 27, 102ff. Roman Catholics today too acknowledge as much. See Karl Rahner, "Membership in the Church according to the Teaching of Pius XII's Encyclical 'Mystici Corporis Christi'" in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. II, Tr. Carl-H. Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1963), pp. 1-88.

³This seems to be the position of Arthur Carl Piepkorn "What the Symbols Have to Say about the Church" in CTM, Oct., 1955 (XXVI, 10), pp. 721-763. Piepkorn's essay does not answer the question posed by its title, but is rather a very thorough, if at times inaccurate, word study of the word *ecclesia* (*Kirche*) as used in the confessions.

rites, like some political organization, although it may resemble something like this externally, but it is *principaliter* a community (*Gemeinschaft*) of faith and of the Holy Spirit in men's hearts (Apol. VII, 5). Christ renews, sanctifies and rules this church through His Spirit (*ibid.* Eph. 1:22,23). The Spirit brings to the church all the blessings that Christ through His obedience has procured for the church, notably forgiveness and the righteousness (obedience) of Christ offered through the Gospel (LC II, 54-59; Apol. VII, 8, 36). Through the Gospel the Spirit creates, calls and gathers the Christian church (LC II, 45, 53). The church is the locus of the Spirit's work; through it He gathers believers and by it creates and increases sanctification (LC II, 53), "and outside it no one can come to the Lord Christ" (LC II, 45, cf. 56).

The church is a "spiritual people, separated from the heathen . . . by being God's true people, reborn by the Holy Spirit" (Apol. VII, 14). Thus we find Melancthon often calling the church the "kingdom of Christ" or likening it to the kingdom of Christ "which is righteousness of the heart and the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Apol. VII, 13; cf. 16). Obviously the kingdom of Christ is not something external, but is spiritual, something that has not yet been revealed (*ibid.* 17).

Precisely this is the point of debate with the Roman Catholics. And at just this point the Confutation criticizes the Augsburg Confession. According to Roman opinion the church consisted of those who professed the Christian faith, who assembled around the sacraments and who were under the rule of legitimate pastors and especially the Roman Pontiff.⁴ This doctrine which made only the *profession* of dogmatic faith a criterion for membership in the church and which made submission to the juridical authority of the papacy a *sine qua non* for membership meant in effect that the church was essentially a visible, palpable, empirical entity.⁵ And it meant as well that

⁴This position has remained the doctrine of the Roman Church ever since the Reformation. It was more precisely set forth after the Reformation by Robert Bellarmine "Liber Tertius de Ecclesia Militante" in *Disputationes de Controversiis Christianae*, Paris, 1615, I, 982.

⁵See Bellarmine *ibid.* "The church is an assembly of men, an assembly which is visible and perceptible to the senses just like an assembly of the Roman citizenry, or the kingdom of France or the Republic of Venice." This position, with only minor qualifications and modifications, is still held by Roman Catholic theologians. See Rahner *ibid.* p. 17. "Since the visibleness and visible unity of the Church are constituted by the sacramental and juridical authority of the Church (which latter includes in its turn the teaching and ruling authority of the church), all and only those belong to the Church as members who are visibly, i.e. in the external forum, subject to these two powers of the Church. And everyone who, on the social plane, is cut off or has withdrawn himself from one or both of these powers, is not a member of the Church."

unregenerate and wicked people and hypocrites are true members of the church.⁶ At every point Melanchthon takes strong exception to the Roman Catholic doctrine, and Apology VII is in fact a polemic against Rome's teaching that the church is a kind of external society (*politia*) and that therefore hypocrites can be members of it (Apol. VII, 16-19, 22, 29).

II. The Church *Proprie Dicta* and *Late Dicta* (Invisible and Visible)

But if evil men and hypocrites are not the church or a part of it, they must nevertheless not be separated from it and its outward fellowship (*externa societas*) (Apol. VII, 1, 9, 28). And against the ancient Donatists Melanchthon contends that the sacraments performed by evil men and hypocrites are indeed valid and efficacious (Apol. VII, 2, 3).

This contention of Melanchthon's leads to a highly significant distinction in his ecclesiology, the distinction between the church *proprie dicta* and the church *late dicta*. Against the papal doctrine Melanchthon is forced to state over and over again what the church, strictly speaking, really is, namely, the assembly of saints (Apol. VII, 8, 16), the living body of Christ (12, 29), a spiritual people who are God's true people, born again by the Holy Ghost (14). The church properly speaking is that which has the Holy Spirit (22, 28). The term "Church catholic" does not denote an external government (*externa politia*) "but is made up of men scattered throughout the world who agree on the Gospel and have the same Christ, the same Holy Spirit, and the same sacraments, whether they have the same traditions or not" (10).

At the same time Melanchthon is compelled to use the term "church" in a broad sense meaning territorial churches or groups of congregations. This is no doubt the meaning of the oft used phrase in the Augsburg Confession, "Our churches teach with great unanimity . . ." (AC I, 1; II, 1; III, 1 etc.), or "Our churches condemn . . ." (AC I, 5; II, 3; V, 4 etc.; cf. also AC Summary, 1; Ap. IX, 2; Tr. 12, 14, 16; SA II, IV, 4). In such cases the term no doubt denotes an external entity which calls itself church and professes to believe in

⁶Henrick Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolarum*, Friburg: Herder, 1957, 424; 485ff.; 588; 627; 629; 631; 838; 1522-25; 1515.

Christ. This broader meaning of the term which all the Lutheran confessions employ regularly and with a variety of connotations was recognized and in vogue prior to the Reformation, and Melanchthon cites with favor a Decree of Gratian which says that "the church in the larger sense (*late dicta*) includes both the godly and the wicked and that the wicked are part of the church only in name and not in fact, while the godly are part of the church in fact as well as in name" (Apol. VII, 10).

Perhaps the best account of the distinction is found in Apology VII, 12-13 which we quote: "Hypocrites and evil men are indeed associated with the true church according to external rites. But when it comes to defining the church we must define it as the living body of Christ; and this is the church in fact and in name. We must understand what it is that first of all (*principaliter*) makes us members, that is, living members of the church. If we were to define the church as only an external organization of good and evil persons, then men would not understand that the kingdom of Christ is the righteousness of the heart and the gift of the Holy Spirit, but would judge it to be only an external observance of certain forms of worship and rituals." It is important to note throughout Melanchthon's discussion that he never uses the adjective *externa* to describe the church in the proper sense, but rather to describe what the true church is not, or a caricature of the church, or that which mingles with the church *per accidens* (such as evil men and hypocrites, church rites, the papacy, human traditions and adiaphora, cf. AC XXVI; Apol. VII, 34, 37; XXVII, 27; TR II; SD X, 15, 27). Meanwhile, the church in the strict sense remains the congregation of believers. Thus, Melanchthon speaks of hypocrites and evil men being mingled with the church (*admixti ecclesiae*, Apol. VVII, 47), being in the church (9) and holding office in the church (*in ecclesia*, 17), of wolves and ungodly teachers running rampant in the church (22), and of hypocrites and wicked men sharing with the church an association of outward marks and being members of the church according to such an association of external marks (28). In this latter case it is obvious that hypocrites cannot be members of the church, strictly speaking, but only in the metonymical sense that chaff will be present among wheat (1). The distinction is often made that hypocrites are in the church but not of the church.

This clear distinction in the Lutheran Confessions between the *una sancta (ecclesia proprie dicta)* and local and territorial churches,

entities possessing external empirical order, discipline, rites and membership (*ecclesia late dicta*), conforms precisely with the later Lutheran distinction between the invisible and visible church.⁷ And a very useful and necessary distinction it is. Both Walther and Pieper employ the distinction as being confessional and insist on the basis of Apology VII, 14-19 that the adjective "invisible" must be attributed to the church *proprie dicta* inasmuch as the church, as the Apology stresses, is a spiritual assembly of believers dispersed over the entire world (Apol. VII, 10) and often hidden under the cross (18) and is known only to God.⁸ Lutherans today who call the distinction unconfessional simply because its later formulation is not found in the confessions *expressis verbis* seem not to have grasped the total implications of the Lutheran doctrine of the Church *proprie dicta*.

⁷Actually, Luther himself followed the distinction, although perhaps not always consciously and in an adumbrated form, as we can see even from his writings in the confessions. And he used the adjective invisible to describe the *una sancta*. See WA &, 710: "Just as the rock [Christ] is without sin, invisible and spiritual, so the church which is without sin, must be invisible and spiritual, and is grasped only by faith." Cf. WA 7, 684; 2, 552; 26, 506. Cf. also Jacob Heerbrand, *Compendium Theologiae*, Wittenberg, 1582, p. 761 ff. The distinction between the church invisible in which "all members and true and living members, who are known only to God" and the church visible "which outwardly professes [the faith] and assembles to hear the Word", but "in which are many rotten and dead members, and yet among whom there is a [certain] consensus in doctrine" is clearly articulated by Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, Frankfurt, 1604, *De ecclesia*, Cap. III (III, 308). And Chemnitz attributes the distinction to Luther! It is interesting that this distinction is found stated so explicitly among Lutherans, and in the writings of one who helped author the Formula of Concord. The Reformed theologians to whom the general use of the distinction has often been attributed make much less of it than the Lutherans do. For instance, Amandus Polanus, who debated with Cardinal Bellarmine just as John Gerhard and so many Lutherans had done (See Gerhard, *Loci Theologici*, Tuebingen, 1762, IX, 54ff.) does not employ the distinction, although he would have done well if he had (See Polanus, *Systema Theologiae Christianae*, Geneva, 1612, Lib. 7, Cap. 2ff. [II, 506ff.]). Also William Bucan, *Institutiones Theologicae*, Geneva, 1609, p. 456, who does not use the distinction. Unlike Luther and Chemnitz, Melancthon does not use the adjective invisible in speaking of the *una sancta*. Rather, in his later writings he persistently speaks of the church as visible. However, he does so either because against the Enthusiasts he is viewing the church in relation to its marks which are external (CR 24, 365ff.) or, in opposition to the Roman contention that the Lutheran ecclesiology made the church a mere Platonic idea, Melancthon is denying that the church viewed as the outward assembly gathered around the Word is an invisible fiction or idea (CR 21, 825). In every case he is speaking of what was commonly referred to as the assembly of the called, later termed the church visible. For instance, he defines this visible church as such: "The visible church is the gathering of those who embrace the Gospel of Christ and rightly use the Sacraments. In this gathering God is at work through the ministry of the Gospel and causes many to be reborn unto eternal life, but in the gathering are also many who have not been reborn but go along with the pure doctrine" (CR 21, 826). Thus, there is no difference between Melancthon's ecclesiology on this point and the earlier teaching of Luther and the later teaching of Chemnitz, Gerhard, and the later Lutherans.

⁸See C. F. W. Walther, *Kirche und Amt* (Erlangen: C. A. Ph. Th. Bläsing, 1852), p. 16ff. Francis Peiper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Tr. Walter Albrecht (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), III, 401 *passim*. I do not understand why Schlink, whose understanding of the Confessions' doctrine of the church seems to be quite perceptive, and Piepkorn refuse to call the *una sancta* invisible on the basis of the Lutheran Confessions, especially since the term invisible has been so clearly defined by the vast number of orthodox Lutherans since Chemnitz and identified exactly with the confessional definition of the *una sancta*. See Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, Tr. Paul F. Koehnke and Herbert J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), p. 218; Piepkorn, *op. cit.* In the light of history since the Reformation insistence that the adjective "invisible" be ascribed to the church *proprie dicta* illustrates not only a correct understanding of the doctrine of the church against the Roman Catholic heresy, but also indicates that one has not succumbed to the pressures of constant Roman caricaturing of the Lutheran position.

The distinction between the church *proprie dicta* (invisible) and *late dicta* (visible) only helps us to bear in mind at all times what the church really is.

III. The Marks of the Church

Although the church is invisible and, as the communion of saints, known only to God, it is a reality together with its unity and all its attributes, just as God is real. Its reality and presence are known by certain marks (*notae* Apol. VII, 5, 7, 20; XIV, 3; also IV, 400). These marks are external (*externae*), visible, audible, empirical. If the church were visible, a mere external association (*externa monarchia, externa politia*, Apol. VII, 23, 13), there would be no need for external (empirical) marks.

What are the marks of the church? Melanchthon consistently lists two. They are the pure doctrine of the Gospel and the Sacraments through which the Holy Spirit creates and sustains the church in the first place. Melanchthon says (Apol. VII, 5): "And this same church [the *una sancta*] has also external marks whereby one can recognize it, namely, where God's Word is pure, and the Sacraments are administered in conformity with the same, there certainly is the church and there surely are Christians" (German Text). Luther, in speaking of the marks of the church, has mentioned seven: 1) the true preaching of the Gospel, 2) the right administration of the Baptism, 3) the right use of the Sacrament of the Altar, 4) the right use of the keys, 5) the legitimate calling of ministers to teach and administer the sacraments, 6) public prayer, psalmody and instruction, and 7) crosses and tribulations from without and within.⁹ There is no difference on this point between Luther and Melanchthon in the Apology. Luther is obviously speaking of both accidental and essential marks. The former indicate that the church is present, but they are not infallible and not always present (Luther's last four), depending as they do on times and conditions. The latter are constant, essential and infallible.¹⁰

What is the precise function of a mark (*nota*)? According to Melanchthon in the statement previously cited, it is simply an external sign by which something (otherwise not perceived or seen)

⁹Von den Künzllis und Kirchen, WA 50, 628.

¹⁰This is Gerhard's explanation and is quite correct. See *Loci Theologici Loc. XXIII*, Cap. X, Par. 126.

can be recognized (*agnosci potest*). Since in the present case these marks are the very means through which the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the church, they are indeed constant, essential and infallible, as Gerhard had said.¹¹ The external marks are what indicate to us that the church, for all its dispersion and hiddenness, really exists (*existere*) and is made up of those who truly (*vere*) believe and are justified (*iustos*). It is no mere idea, or Platonic state (Apol. VII, 20). One can see the practical importance of Melancthon's doctrine and its great comfort in times of trouble and persecution when so many parties cry, "We are the church." For the marks reveal what the church is and that the "foundation" (1 Cor. 3:12) is Christ; and so long as Christ remains the foundation the church exists and stands (20, 21). But when the article that the forgiveness of sins is received by faith is denied the foundation is also overturned.

The marks must not be confused with the church itself, nor are they to be considered mere attributes of the church. Rome made certain marks — not merely doctrine and sacraments, but also papal jurisdiction and certain church rites — a part of the very nature of the church. Thereby they obscured the doctrine of the church, denying that it was simply the total assembly of believers, and made its unity and membership in it depend upon submission to the juridical authority of the papacy and other man-made traditions and rites.

IV. The Unity of the Church

What is the unity of the church? The term "unity" when applied to the church is analogous to its meaning when applied to God who

¹¹See also Leonard Hutter, *Systema Universae Theologiae*, Ulm, 1664, II, 557ff. Hutter lists four criteria for a true mark: 1) it must be adequate to denote its object, 2) it must mark off and distinguish its object from everything else, 3) it must be coextensive with its object, neither broader nor narrower, 4) it must be separable from its object which it denotes. See also Olav Laurelius, *Syntagma Theologicum*, Uppsala, 1641, p. 420 who speaks even more extensively about the nature and function of the marks of the church. We know what the church is, he says, from the definition and description given in Scripture. The marks function to inform us that the church does in fact exist, where it is present, and that it is the true church that is being designated. He says, "The church, since it is the company of those who have been called and chosen and who live in the one fellowship of Word and Sacraments will consequently have marks of such a nature that the church can be distinguished from all other gatherings and these marks will proceed from the essential structure of the church itself." Laurelius' is perhaps one of the most perceptive and complete delineations of the confessional Lutheran doctrine of the marks of the church and the implications of this doctrine for external church unity. The marks show us only where and what the church is. They cannot be used to denote sects — although Christians may be outward members of sects — since they are not founded on the Word, but upon human opinion (423). This does not imply that only the Lutheran church is the church *proprie dicta*. And the Word does not cease being a mark when it is for some reason not taught in all its truth and purity. The intrusion of error does not automatically or immediately destroy the marks of the entire congregation. Paul struggled with this situation at Corinth and Galatia (426). This seems to be essentially what Melancthon is saying throughout Article VII.

has brought the church into being. As there is only one God, there can be only one Gospel, one way of salvation, one faith, one baptism (Eph. 4:5-6) — one church (AC VII, 4).¹² The church is therefore one and undivided in essence and in number, “without sect or schism”, as Luther puts it (LC II, 51). There cannot be two or three or four churches of Christ, only one. In analogy with the unity of God, the church is one also in the sense that it is unique, *sui generis*. There is nothing, no *societas* or entity whatever, that is like the church. And it is, like the One who brought it into being, indivisible. No Lutheran would possibly speak of “fracturing” or dividing the church, the body of Christ, although there may well be divisions in its outer manifestations. The church is one “holy flock or community of pure saints under one head, Christ” (*ibid.*). “*Gemeine*” which Luther uses in this context is a very conscious interpretation of the biblical phrase “body of Christ.” So as a body has only one head and a head one body, so it is with the church (*Gemeine*) and Christ, its head.

The church has been called together by the one God, the Holy Ghost, into “one faith, mind and understanding” (*ibid.*). Here we have a description of the church’s unity. Luther refers here to both objective faith (doctrine) and subjective faith by which one is justified and brought into the church. The means whereby the church is gathered are the Word and Sacraments, and the church (perceived by its signs, or marks) becomes the locus of the Holy Spirit’s gathering and sanctifying His church (LC II, 56). One faith, one doctrine, one Gospel, one baptism, one forgiveness of sins, one church, one God. The church’s oneness, like the church itself, is monergistically the work of the Spirit who continually sustains, forgives and comforts the church (LC II, 52-5, 57-9) “through God’s Word in the unity of the Christian Church” (55), and continually brings to the church all the treasures and blessings Christ has procured for it (54).

Melanchthon in the Apology describes the unity of the church in much the same way. It is a unity consisting of faith and the righteousness of Christ which is received by faith (Apol. VII, 31). This unity is not affected by differences of rites or customs (33, 34, 36), although uniformity of liturgical rites is beneficial for the tranquility in the church. Without faith in Christ and the Gospel and without the imputed righteousness of Christ in the heart there is no unity in the

¹²The unity of God presupposes the unity of the church in Lutheran theology and calls for unity of worship and doctrine in the church. See Abraham Calov, *Systema Locorum Theologicorum*, Wittenberg, 1655-77, II, 290.

church at all, just as there is no church (31). There is no question that Melanchthon in his entire discussion of the church and its unity relates it all to his previous article in the *Apology* on justification by faith. Thus, what is necessary for the church's unity is simply that which brings about man's justification before God, and that which brings about the unity itself, namely the Gospel Word (*doctrina evangelii*) and the Sacraments (*administratio sacramentorum*, See Apol. VII, 30; cf. 5; AC VII, 2). And the unity of the church is expressed simply by the agreement (*consentire*) in this doctrine of the Gospel and in the administration of the Sacraments (AC VII, 2). Or, to put it differently, the unity of the church consists in the fact that men scattered throughout the whole world have the same Christ, the same Holy Spirit, the same Sacraments (Apol. VII, 10). It is a spiritual unity of faith.

This doctrine of the unity of the church is evangelical. The Gospel creates the unity, and faith in the Gospel constitutes it. Francis Pieper reflects the spirit of the confessions when he says that wherever there is a denial or diminution of the vicarious satisfaction of Christ a false doctrine of the church results and a distortion of what constitutes its unity.¹³ The unity is then based upon human jurisdiction and law, not Gospel. This comment faithfully reflects Melanchthon's constant emphasis in his polemic against the Roman doctrine of the church's unity. Melanchthon's concern and question in his discussion of the church's unity is simply: What brings a poor sinner forgiveness and Christ's righteousness (Apol. VII, 31, 34, 36, 39)? How does the Holy Spirit make a sinner righteous before God? It is by the means of grace, the doctrine of the Gospel and nothing else. That is how the Spirit gathers the church and that is how He makes it one. Thus, Fagerberg¹⁴ is correct when he says, "The consequences of the Lutheran view of justification, the sacraments, and the ministry are revealed in the doctrine of the church . . . That the church is conceived of at all points as God's direct work through Word and sacrament without itself mediating grace is the basic view of the church's essence and membership, its origins and unity."

Fagerberg is correct in another point as he comments on the confessional position regarding the unity of the church. He points out, as

¹³*Christian Dogmatics*, III, 405.

¹⁴Holsten Fagerberg, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions 1529-1537*, Tr. Gene J. Lund (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), p. 251.

does Schlink,¹⁵ that the Gospel is never *mere* proclamation devoid of doctrinal content but is always doctrine (*doctrina evangelii*). Therefore the church, the true church and *una sancta*, even though it may be dispersed throughout the world, hidden and suffering under persecution and heretical teachers, and thus invisible, will be not only a believing community, but also a confessing community. As Schlink says, "Since the Confession grows out of the unanimity of the preaching of the Gospel and of faith and serves the preservation of the preaching of the Gospel and of faith, the unity of the church is essentially also the unity of Confession." This conclusion must be drawn from the *consentire* of AC VII, 2. The two attributes of unity and apostolicity ascribed to the church are therefore closely connected, if not identified by the Lutheran confessions. For the unity of the church consists in agreement in the apostolic doctrine (Apol. VII, 38-39).

V. Concord in the Church: The Formula for Concord

The formula for concord in the church as worked out so carefully by the later writers of the Lutheran Confessions is based solidly on the ecclesiology of the earlier Lutheran Symbols. The ecclesiology of the earlier Confessions, including the definition of the church, the unity of the church and the marks of the church, becomes the paradigm or pattern for later confessional and faithful Lutherans in their striving under God to achieve God-pleasing doctrinal agreement and unity among the divided and quarreling churches of the Augsburg Confession in their day. This formula for concord in the churches is both biblical and ecumenical (i.e. applying to the universal church, not just a situation in Saxony at a certain time in history). The writers of the Formula of Concord consciously and consistently *apply* the ecclesiology of the earlier confessions as they attempt to solve under God the problem of divided churches (Lutheranism) in their day. They present no basic ecclesiology themselves — there is no need to do so — but they clearly assume the doctrine of the church articulated in the earlier confessions.

The earlier confessions, on the other hand, do not address themselves explicitly to the matter of achieving doctrinal unity and harmony

¹⁵*Op. cit.*, p. 270. Cf. Schlink, *op. cit.*, p. 206. Cf. Leif Grane, *Confession Augustana* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1903), pp. 74-5 for the contrary opinion.

among divided churches, although implicit in their doctrine of the church and throughout the documents themselves is a concern for consensus in doctrine and a program identical to that spelled out expressly by the later symbols. This fact is perceived as these early confessions warn against heretics and false doctrine. Although false teachers are in the church, they are a curse and scourge upon it. Mingled as they are with the church (*admixti ecclesiae*), these false ministers do administer the sacraments efficaciously; nevertheless (*doch*) they are not to be received nor listened to (Apol. VII, 47-48 [Matt. 7:15; Gal. 1:9]. Cf. also Tr. 38, 41-44, 54, 56, 72; SC III, 5; LC I, 55ff., III, 47). Melancthon and Luther are directing such warnings against Romanists and Zwinglians as well as ancient heretics such as Donatists, Pelagians and the like, who are condemned explicitly in the *Augustana*.

Obviously, just as hypocrites and bad ministers (*mali ministri*), mingled with the church are to be avoided (Ap. VII, 22), so also false doctrine. Only the true doctrine should be taught in the church and adhered to. This fact is brought out in the early confessions by their deep concern for purity of doctrine, even in minutiae, but also by the confession making process itself. And the goal of this concern and this process, namely consensus in the doctrine by the evangelical churches, is actually achieved by the Confessions themselves. The catechisms and the Smalcald Articles are witness of this fact. And the *Augustana* too, with its impressive introductory formula, *Ecclesiae magno consensu apud nos docent . . .* (AC I, 1). So the formula for concord, which embraces the avoidance of false doctrine and the consensus in the pure doctrine of the Gospel and all its articles, later explicitly spelled out, is clearly by the grace of God being employed and carried out by that early *Magna Carta* of the Protestant Reformation, the Augsburg Confession.

What precisely is the formula for concord as it is so carefully worked out by the writers of the *Formula*? And how does the church apply this formula (or model for action) in a given situation? As noted before, the writers of the Formula of Concord clearly take the ecclesiology of the earlier confessions, specifically *Augustana VII* (and also Apology VII and perhaps SA II, IV; 9) as their starting point and model.¹⁶

¹⁶See Appendix.

In accordance with this model the formula for concord for churches that are divided is very simply to achieve consensus in the doctrine and administration of the sacraments. This fact is clearly put by the Formula of Concord in its Summary Formulation (SD, Rule and Norm 1): "The primary requirement for the basic and permanent concord within the church is a summary formula and pattern, unanimously approved (*unanimi consensu approbatus*), in which the summarized doctrine commonly confessed by the churches of the pure Christian religion is drawn from the Word of God" (cf. also Preface, Tappert, p. 6). In other words, concord in the church consists of consensus, and this consensus is expressed and represented by a formal confession (Epit. Rule and Norm, 3-4). This confession is drawn always and only from the Word of God, Scripture (Tappert, p. 6; SD Rule and Norm, 5, 9). And it is unanimously, that is, with total commitment and without qualification (*unanimi consensu*), subscribed by the churches (*ibid.* 1, 2, 6, 8). This consensus means that the churches will never depart nor deviate from the formal confessions (Tappert, p. 9; SD XII, 40).

This formula for concord which takes in hand controverted articles in the churches and settles them in a document (the Book of Concord) on the basis of God's Word is clearly delineated in the Preface to the Book of Concord (Tappert, p. 7ff.). We can trace this process as it was concretely carried out by citing at some length the Preface. "In a Christian fashion they [Christian teachers representing the churches] discussed with one another the articles in controversy and also the just cited written agreement composed with reference thereto. Finally, after invoking almighty God to his praise and glory and after mature reflection and careful diligence, they brought together in good order, by the singular grace of the Holy Spirit, everything that pertains to and is necessary for this end and put it down in one book" (p. 7). "As indicated above, our disposition and intention has always been directed toward the goal that no other doctrine be treated and taught in our lands, territories, schools, and churches than that alone which is based on the Holy Scriptures of God and is embodied in the Augsburg Confession and its Apology, correctly understood, and that no doctrine be permitted entrance which is contrary to these" (p. 12). "We desire particularly that the young men who are being trained for service in the church and for the holy ministry be faithfully and diligently instructed therein, so that the pure teaching and confession

of the faith may be preserved and perpetuated among our posterity through the help and assistance of the Holy Spirit until the glorious advent of our only Redeemer and Saviour Jesus Christ" (*ibid.*). "Since this is the way things are, and since we are certain of our Christian confession and faith on the basis of the divine, prophetic, and apostolic Scripture and have been adequately assured of this in our hearts and Christian consciences through the grace of the Holy Spirit, the most acute and urgent necessity demands that in the presence of so many intrusive errors, aggravated scandals, dissensions, and long-standing schisms a Christian explanation and reconciliation of all the disputes which have arisen should come into being. Such an explanation must be thoroughly grounded in God's Word so that pure doctrine can be recognised and distinguished from adulterated doctrine . . ." (p. 13). "Therefore, just as from the very beginning of this Christian agreement of ours it was never our disposition or intention — as it is not now — to keep this salutary and most necessary effort toward concord hidden and concealed in darkness, away from everyone's eyes, or to put the light of divine truth under a basket or a table, we ought not suspend or postpone its printing and publication any longer. We do not have the slightest doubt that all pious people who have an upright love for divine truth and for Christian, God-pleasing concord will, together with us, take Christian pleasure in this salutary, most necessary, and Christian effort and will allow nothing to stand in the way of this cause and the promotion of God's glory and the common welfare, both eternal and temporal. In conclusion, we repeat once again that we are not minded to manufacture anything new by this work of agreement or to depart in any way at all, either in content or in formulation, from the divine truth that our pious forebears and we have acknowledged and confessed in the past, for our agreement is based on the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures and is comprehended in the three Creeds as well as in the Augsburg Confession, submitted in the year 1530 to Emperor Charles V, of kindest memory, in the Apology that followed it, and in the Smalcald Articles and the Large and Small Catechisms of that highly enlightened man, Dr. Luther. On the contrary, we are minded by the grace of the Holy Spirit to abide and remain unanimously in this confession of faith and to regulate all religious controversies and their explanations according to it. In addition, we have resolved and purpose to live in genuine peace and concord with our fellow-members, the electors and estates in the Holy Roman Empire, and also with other Christian

potentates, according to the content of the ordinances of the Holy Empire and of special treaties into which we have entered with them, and to demonstrate toward everyone, according to his station, all affection, service, and friendship. We likewise purpose to cooperate with one another in the future in the implementation of this effort at concord in our lands, according to our own and each community's circumstances, through diligent visitation of churches and schools, the supervision of printers, and other salutary means. If the current controversies about our Christian religion should continue or new ones arise, we shall see to it that they are settled and composed in timely fashion before they become dangerously widespread in order that all kinds of scandal might be obviated" (pp. 13-14).

I have quoted at length these words from the Preface to the Book of Concord because the entire Lutheran program for concord is clearly spelled out there. Article X of Formula of Concord simply applies these basic principles as it responds to the controversy concerning adiaphora in the Lutheran churches. A few observations might be made about the basis for concord as the Confessions speak of it in the above citations and elsewhere. 1. Concensus in the church is clearly the work of the Holy Spirit, and it is only by His grace and guidance that confessions are formulated and accepted on the basis of the divine Word. 2. The Confessions which are worked out by the grace of God actually settle doctrine and become the basis, or formula, for concord. 3. Those who identify with these confessions and subscribe them do so without reservation; and they commit these confessions to their posterity and for all times (SD Rule and Norm, 16; cf. SD VII, 30-31). 4. This common and unanimous summary of the churches' faith becomes a rule and judge for all other books and writings for every age (SD, Rule and Norm, 10, 11). 5. A formal confession bringing about concord and exhibiting consensus in the churches will not only present the pure doctrine correctly, but will also accuse adversaries who teach otherwise (1 Tim. 3:9; Titus 1:9; 2 Tim. 2:24; 3:16) and condemn false doctrine (*ibid.* 14ff.). 6. The acceptance of confessions based on Scripture which serve as the basis for concord always entails a *certainty (unanimi consensu, Tappert, p. 9 passim)* of the doctrine contained therein; thus *Bekennntnis* becomes *bekennen*, a formula for confessing and witness, the confessional church becomes a confessing church. And this is the very burden and mission of the church: to share and witness to the pure doctrine of the Gospel

contained in her confessions (Ap. VII, 8), to preach the Gospel according to a pure understanding of it and to administer the Sacraments in accordance with the divine word (AC VII, 2). Thus the marks of the church will be in conformity with the pattern of sound doctrine found in the churches' formal confessions. 7. Although it is the Gospel in the narrow sense that creates the church, the *una sancta*, as we have earlier shown, it is Spirit-wrought agreement in the Gospel in the wide sense ("the doctrine and all its articles") which brings about *concordia* in the visible church. 8. Using the terminology of Chemnitz, the seventeenth century dogmaticians and our Missouri Synod fathers (Walther, Pieper, *et al*), it is quite proper to say that the writers of the Confessions saw the churches of the Augsburg Confession as the true visible church of Christ on earth, and this by virtue of their formal orthodox symbols. If one does not believe that an orthodox visible church is possible, it would appear that one does not consider the consensus (exhibited in a formal confession) in the doctrine and all its articles a possibility either. In such a case one cannot be a truly confessional Lutheran. Again we see the relationship between the ecclesiology of our Confessions and the program for concord in divided churches.

APPENDIX

The similarity between AC VII and SD X, 31 is striking and the writers of the Formula deliberately carry out the implications of AC VII as they address themselves to the problem of church fellowship and consensus in doctrine in Article X and elsewhere in the FC (especially, Rule and Norm and Introduction to the Book of Concord). Both affirm that differences in church customs and adiaphora do not affect that unity. Both refer to the marks of the church and agreement in these marks. But are there differences also between the two statements? Does the statement in the FC at all points correctly understand and interpret AC VII? Does it employ the crucial terms (church, unity, Gospel) precisely as does the AC VII? Let me now compare these two formative statements, pointing to what appear to be parallels, similarities, dissimilarities and difficulties in interpreting the two in harmony. We may then better understand the relationship between the two.

1. The two passages do not speak to the same situation. The AC, though considered to be just as ecumenical as the Creeds, is written as an apology or confession of the doctrinal position and understanding of the Gospel held by the Lutherans. The FC serves to settle doctrinal controversies between a divided Lutheranism. These differences in situation and purpose must not be overemphasized, however. Both confessions are consciously catholic and evangelical (although the FC is not so all-embracing in scope, confining itself to the consideration only of controverted articles). And both are written and considered to be adequate symbols in the strict sense of the Word.

2. The term "church" cannot have the same referent in both statements. Melancthon defines the church *proprie dicta* in AC VII and no doubt uses the term in that sense throughout the short article. The FC, if not using the term in the usual *late dicta* sense, as the total number of those who outwardly profess to be Christians and gather about the means of grace, is obviously using it as something other than the *una sancta*. It is using the term in the sense of local or territorial churches. The German text has "churches" in the plural and the Latin says that "no church" can condemn another because of differences in ceremonies. The usage here seems quite the same as the plural in AC I, 1 and similar introductory formulae throughout the AC (cf. Epit. X, 4 *ecclesiae* [Gemeine] in *ubivis terrarum*).

3. The terms "Gospel" and "doctrine" seem to be used indiscriminately and interchangeably in the two contexts as the Gospel in the wider sense, and not simply in contrast to the Law (as, e.g., in Apol. IV, 5; SD V, 1, 17-20 *passim*). This definitely is the thinking of the writers of the FC at this point as they try to apply in their day the implications of Apol. VII, 2-4. In Article X they employ indiscriminately and interchangeably such terms as "pure doctrine" (*die reine Lehre*; *sincera doctrina*, 3, 14), "the pure doctrine of the Gospel" (5, 10; cf. SD Intro. 3), "the doctrine and all that pertains to it" (*die Lehre und was zur ganzen Religion gehöret*; *pia doctrina iuxta verbum Dei et quicquid omnino ad sinceram religionem pertinet*, 10), simply "doctrine" (16), or "the doctrine and all its articles" (*die Lehre und allen derselben Artikel*; *doctrina et in omnibus illius partibus*, 31); and in every case they have in mind the Gospel in the wider sense, as the entire Christian doctrine (See SD V, 3-6).

Does Melancthon mean the same thing by "*doctrina evangelii*" in AC VII, 2? I believe he does. But there are some difficulties in my

interpretation which I should mention before making my case. And there are some arguments for taking "doctrine of the Gospel" in VII, 2 in the narrow sense which need to be mentioned first.

If Melanchthon uses the term "*doctrina evangelii*" as the Gospel in the broad sense, then he is making the Gospel in this wider sense a mark of the church; and then the means of grace *per se* cannot be the marks of the church. Otherwise, the law would be a means of grace together with the Gospel, a position utterly unevangelical and contrary to Melanchthon's theology (Apol. IV; XII; Cf. FC IV, V, VI). I suspect that Lutheran scholars have perceived that these are indeed the unpleasant consequences of interpreting Melanchthon's usage of "*doctrina evangelii*" in the broad sense here. Therefore they have jumped at the opportunity of interpreting the term in the narrow (and at time minimalistic, even anti-doctrinal) sense (Grane, *op. cit.*, 74). This might be a neat and consistent explanation if one were dealing only with the AC and not the Apology or Formula of Concord. Melanchthon thus appears consistently evangelical and orthodox in never ascribing to the Gospel in the broad sense (the Christian doctrine) the office of bringing a sinner to faith, something he never would have intentionally done (See AC V, Apol. XII); to ascribe to the Law the function of working faith would be a denial of the Christian faith. Furthermore, Melanchthon would then be using the term "Gospel" in the same sense he apparently does in AC VII, 1 and most certainly employs in AC V, 1-2.

But against this popular and facile interpretation let me offer a few solid arguments for interpreting "*doctrina evangelii*" in the wide sense in this context.

a) The fact that Melanchthon speaks of the *doctrine* of the Gospel here, whereas he always speaks merely of the Gospel when referring to it in the narrow sense as that through which the Holy Spirit converts the sinner and begets faith might bear weight (see also the German text); although such close exegesis of the usage of terms in the Confessions is often perilous and cannot stand by itself.

b) This interpretation does not ascribe to Melanchthon a slip whereby he ascribes to the law or to the Christian doctrine as a whole the office of declaring forgiveness or working faith. I am suggesting that "*doctrina evangelii*" should be taken as Gospel in the broad sense in paragraph 2 and "Gospel" in the previous sentence in the

strict sense. Paragraph 1 in the German text uses the term "*Evangelium*" twice, obviously in two different senses, so it is not at all strange to find Melanchthon switching meanings suddenly (See AC XXVIII, 5).

c) Melanchthon in all his confessional writings teaches that the Gospel in the strict and narrow sense cannot do its saving and justifying work unless the law has first carried out its *opus alienum*, of showing the sinner his lost condition and driving him to contrition (Apol. XII, 49ff. *passim*). Furthermore, Melanchthon insists, particularly in his monumental discussions of justification and repentance (Apol. IV and XII), that an error concerning the law and its function will *eo ipso* result in an error in one's understanding and application of the Gospel in the narrow sense. This is Luther's emphasis too as he demonstrates in the Smalcald Articles that the Roman aberrations concerning the invocation of the saints, monasteries, the papacy, etc. are contrary to the Gospel in the narrow sense, i.e. the article concerning Christ and His work (SA II, Iff.). Could Melanchthon, who was as anti-Antinomian as Luther or any of the later Lutherans and who saw clearly the organic unity of all Christian doctrine, have excluded all consideration of the Law and all the chief articles of faith which were not part of the Gospel in the narrow sense as he speaks of consensus in the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments as essential for the unity of the church and later calls the doctrine of the Gospel and the correct administration of the sacraments marks of the church? Article II in the AC on original sin was in no sense part of the Gospel in the narrow sense. And yet it is clear that Melanchthon thinks that a denial of this doctrine or aberration concerning it is disruptive of the unity of the church and undermines the Gospel itself (Apol. II, 33. Cf. SA III, I, 11 and SD I, 34-48 and SD V, 20, where the preachment of the Law is woven into the definition of the Gospel in the narrow sense).

d) Both the adversaries in the Confutation and the later Lutherans, so far as I can determine, understand "*doctrinae evangelii*" in the AC as a designation of the Gospel in the broad sense. Otherwise, the Confutation would not have let the matter go without comment. And it is incredible that Chemnitz, Selnecker, Chytraeus and other contributors to the FC would have deliberately or mistakenly misinterpreted Melanchthon as they draw from AC VII and in so doing consistently refer to the Gospel in the broad sense as they speak

of consensus in the doctrine and all its articles as necessary for fellowship and recognition among the churches.

e) Finally, the twelfth article of the Schwabach Articles, the precursor of AC VII, clearly refers to the invisible church while at the same time speaking of the unity as embracing faith in the doctrine and all its articles. The article reads: "This church is none other than the believers in Christ, *who hold, believe, and teach the above named articles, and items*, and are on that account persecuted and martyred in the world." (Bekenntnisschriften, p. 61) (Cf. J. T. Mueller "notes on the 'Satis Est' in article VII of the Augustana", *CTM*, XVIII, 6 (June, 1947), pp. 401-410.)

4. The term "unity" (German: *Einigkeit*; Latin: *unitas* in AC and Apol., *concordia, consonantia, consensio, consensus* in FC) is, I believe, used in essentially the same sense in AC VII and FC X. Surely the *agreement (miteinander einig; concordes fuerint)* in the doctrine and its articles is the same in the intention of the writers of FC X as the *agreement (consentire)* of AC VII. It is apparent, as Piepkorn points out, that the German *Einigkeit* is rendered by *unitas* in the AC and Apol. and by *concordia, consensio*, etc., never by *unitas*, in FC X (*op. cit.*, 759). Piepkorn also points out that Melancthon usually speaks of *Einigkeit der Kirche*, not *Einigkeit in der Kirche*. On the basis of these differences in expression he concludes that the FC is not speaking of the unity of the church at all, but merely of organizational integrity and harmony, external union or inter-communion, external unification which "Christians have a role in". This is a facile and fascinating theory. But it does not do justice to what the FC actually says about *Einigkeit (concordia)* in the church. Concord in the FC is not something organizational, not external union at all, but agreement in the doctrine and all its articles, precisely what Melancthon was talking about in the AC. I would submit that the difference in expression, if it has any significance at all, is due to the fact that the FC is using the term "church" in a different sense from Augustana VII, as we have already observed, not that the concept of unity is different in the two confessions. In the one case (AC VII) it is the unity of the *una sancta* the spiritual unity of the faith, perceived by the marks of the church, that is referred to; in the other (FC X) it is the same unity (*consentire de doctrina evangelii et de administratione sacramentorum*) in the territorial churches and congregations that is referred to.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

I. THE BASIS FOR CONCORD

1. Do you agree that the distinction which the confessional writings make between *proprie dicta* and *late dicta* can be appropriately termed “invisible” and “visible”?
2. Why is it important to distinguish the marks of the church from the church itself?
3. Do you agree with the statement that “the unity of the church is expressed simply by agreement (*consentire*) in this doctrine of the Gospel and in the Administration of the Sacraments (Aug. VII, 2)”?
4. Is the lack of concord in the Lutheran Church today due to a lack of consensus in “doctrine and all its articles”? (FC, EP.X.7)
5. What does the distinction between *Einigkeit der Kirche* and *Einigkeit in der Kirche* contribute to the whole discussion of unity and concord?
6. Do you agree fundamentally with Dr. Preus’ discussion on the nature of the church?
7. What questions pertaining to the Basis of Concord does this paper leave unanswered?
8. What insights does “The Basis of Concord” give us for resolving the doctrinal differences in our church today?

II. THE WAY TO CONCORD

1. The essay states that Luther chose two ways to concord:
 - 1) The appeal to already existing formulas of concord, and
 - 2) The affirmation of new formulas of the same concord.Do you agree? Do you see any tension between the two?
2. In what sense can it be said that “Confession is . . . a direct consequence of the unity of the Church”?
3. How is the principle of *analogia fidei* related to the unity of and concord in the church?