

## ***Satis est*: Ecumenical Catalyst or Narrow Reductionism?**

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It is also taught among us that one holy Christian church will be and remain forever. This is the assembly of all believers [or “saints”] among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. For it is sufficient [*satis est*] for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word [or, “are administered rightly”]. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places. It is as Paul says in Eph. 4:4,5, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism.”<sup>1</sup>

Prior to 1997, when the ELCA was to vote on various full communion proposals both with the Episcopal Church, USA (the former Concordat of Unity, as the defeated document was called) and with various Reformed Churches in the United States, as well as the Joint Declaration on Justification with the Roman Catholic Church, I wrote a short article in the *Lutheran Forum* in which I suggested that the phrase “*satis est*” from *Augustana VII* would be cited over and over again at various synodical assemblies both in favor of or in disagreement with these proposals. I also indicated that the contents of that appeal to *Augustana VII*, would tend to differ widely according to the theological positions of those who made it. *Satis est* would be invoked both by those who see *Augustana VII* as a liberating catalyst for the further pursuit of visible communion between Lutherans and other ecclesial traditions and by those who view it in a more restrictive, limiting, or reductionist manner, according to which, nothing *other* than full *doctrinal* agreement with the Lutheran dogmatic position on the “purity” of the gospel and the “right” administration of the sacraments could serve as a unifying basis. Or, as we still hear it invoked today in some quarters of American Lutheranism, especially now in the aftermath of Called to a Common Mission, if the principle of *satis est* is true, then for Lutherans to embrace something like the historic episcopacy for the sake of Christian unity with another Christian ecclesial body, the

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<sup>1</sup>*Augsburg Confession [Augustana] VII:1-4*, in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 32. The text cited above is from the German version. Words in brackets are added from the Latin.

principle is being compromised. That is, “more” is being required than proclamation of the gospel and administration of the sacraments.

What has generally not been done in such contexts, however, is what I suggested then and continue to suggest; i.e., a *liturgical* reading of *Augustana VII*. For, as I shall attempt to demonstrate in what follows, the description of the church and its unity in *Augustana VII* primarily is about the church’s very self-expression in its worship, in its word and sacrament liturgy. And because this is so, *Augustana VII* provides *liturgical*—not specifically dogmatic—criteria by which ecumenical relationships and proposals are to be discussed and/or evaluated. In other words, if my reading of *Augustana VII* is correct, it is, primarily, the living *lex orandi*, and only, secondarily, the official *lex credendi* of various ecclesial traditions—including our own—that must be taken into account in any ecumenical movements toward full communion. And, by the way, my title is purely rhetorical. I believe that the principle of *satis est* is not narrowly reductionist but should function as an ecumenical catalyst.

### *Augustana VII as a Liturgical Description of the Church*

When liturgists read in *Augustana VII* that the church is “the assembly of all believers [or ‘saints’] among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel,” they recognize here what certainly might be called a liturgical ecclesiology. That is, the church itself is defined here in liturgical terms as an assembly for gospel proclamation and sacramental celebration. Such liturgical acts, that is, the gospel as actually *proclaimed* and the sacraments as actually *administered* within and to the gathered *assembly*, are the marks of the church, the very *events* in which, through which, and by which the nature and identity of the church are revealed.

Lutherans themselves, however, are not always aware there is nothing distinctly *Lutheran* about this definition of the church’s identity as a liturgical assembly. In similar language, Article XIX of the *Articles of Religion* of the Church of England states:

The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ’s ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Cited from *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 871.

And, while the Roman Catholic response to the *Augustana*, the *Confutation*, did, indeed, reject Article VII, it did so on the grounds of the use of the term “saints” or “believers” in defining the assembly, *not*, it must be noted, on the basis of the assembly, preaching, and sacraments themselves as constitutive of the church.<sup>3</sup> It is in defense of this term—not the role of assembly, gospel, and sacraments—that Melancthon writes in *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* VII and VIII.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, how could the Roman *Confutation* quibble with such a liturgical definition of the church in general? From the Emmaus account in Luke 24, to the description of the primitive Jerusalem Christian community in Acts 2:42, to the sixteenth-century Reformation context, all the way to our own day, the identity and nature of the church is described in liturgical terms, that is, by its continual assembling around word and table for the proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments. Because it is a liturgical definition, *Augustana* VII’s *Lutheran* definition of the church, at heart, then, is already an *ecumenical* definition. As such, it bears a remarkable similarity to what is said about the relationship between liturgy and the church in the Roman Catholic *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* from the Second Vatican Council:

... it is the liturgy through which ... “the work of our redemption is accomplished,” and it is through the liturgy, especially, that the faithful are enabled to express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the *real nature* of the *true Church*... The liturgy daily builds up those who are in the Church, making of them a holy temple of the Lord, a dwelling place for God in the Spirit, to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ. At the same time it marvelously increases their power to preach Christ and thus show forth the Church, a sign lifted up among the nations, to those who are outside, a sign under which the scattered children of God may be gathered together until there is one fold and one shepherd.<sup>5</sup>

And again, as such, *Augustana* VII’s definition also finds resonance within Eastern Christian theology. The great Russian Orthodox liturgical theologian, Alexander Schmemmann wrote:

Christian worship, by its nature, structure and content, is the revelation and realization by the Church of her own real nature. And this nature is the new life in Christ—union in Christ with God the Holy Spirit, knowledge of the Truth, unity,

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<sup>3</sup>See *The Book of Concord*, 168, note 1.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>5</sup>*The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, Introduction, par. 2, in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, new rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1975), 1–2, emphasis added.

love, grace, peace, salvation.... In this sense the Church cannot be equated or merged with 'cult'; it is not the Church which exists for the "cult," but the cult for the Church, for her welfare, for her growth into the full measure of the "stature of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). Christ did not establish a society for the observance of worship, a "cultic society," but rather the Church as the way of salvation, as the new life of re-created mankind. This does not mean that worship is secondary to the Church. On the contrary, it is inseparable from the Church and without it there is no Church. But this is because its purpose is to express, form, or realize the Church—to be the source of *that grace which always makes the Church the Church*, the people, the Body of Christ, "a chosen race and a royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9).<sup>6</sup>

Liturgy, of course, is not all that church does, but it is, nevertheless, the very word and sacrament *source* where the church—which must live faithfully in the world in both *martyria* (witness) and *diakonia* (service)—finds revealed its identity and self-understanding. On this basic issue there appears to be little difference among the various churches, a basic issue underscored by a liturgical reading of *Augustana VII*. While Lutherans may have a distinct theological understanding of the "purity" of the gospel and of what constitutes the "right" administration of the sacraments, the very fact that such liturgical terminology is used to define the church points to what is clearly a common ecumenical focus and tradition.

#### *Augustana VII as a Statement about Legitimate Liturgical Diversity in Unity*

If it is the means of grace—the gospel as *preached* and the sacraments as *administered*—that defines the "assembly of believers" called church, then the next section of *Augustana VII* is perfectly logical:

For it is sufficient [*satis est*] for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word [or, "are administered rightly"]. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places.

But it is here, primarily, where a liturgical reading of this article is most needed today in order to avoid confusion about what is and what is not being said.

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<sup>6</sup>Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, 2d. ed. (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1975), 23, emphasis added.

Often times the second sentence of the above quote—“it is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places”—is taken as an independent theological “proof text” by itself, without paying attention either to the context of the article itself or to the whole historical context out of which the *Augustana* arose. As such, this sentence has at times been interpreted as a kind of license for doing in worship whatever it is that one wants to do. For, after all, it does not matter, we hear it said, “we are *free* from such human ceremonies like liturgy and free to choose what we will or will not do in our worship.” Or, we hear from others, who, at least, while not ignoring the first part of this article entirely, still say “it does not matter what we do as long as the gospel is preached and the sacraments administered.” Correct as it may be, such a principle can only go so far since, of course, the actual *doing* of the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments *does* matter, and it matters a great deal.

The Gospel as *proclaimed* and the sacraments as *administered* do not take place within a ritual vacuum or in isolation from, but, rather, within the very context of the Christian *assembly* gathered together for that expressed purpose. After all, for the gospel to be preached, the scriptures must be read, and they must be read and preached to a gathered community; for the sacraments to be rightly administered they will have some kind of ritual context. There will be some kind of “ceremony,” some kind of ritual. That is simply inescapable! At the very least, someone must be sure that water is ready for baptism, someone must prepare bread and wine and set the table, someone must pray a prayer of thanksgiving with its interpretive words identifying and explaining what it is that is happening here and now, and somewhere in all this there will be some form of sharing the meal now identified as Christ’s body and blood given and shed for us for forgiveness, life, and salvation. Indeed, as *Apology XXIV* reminds us: “A sacrament *is* a ceremony or act in which God offers us the content of the promise *joined to the ceremony....*”<sup>7</sup> In other words, one cannot truly speak of word and sacrament as disembodied entities floating somewhere above us, separated from their intended context; one cannot speak of word and sacrament as divorced from their liturgical setting in the assembly. Without preaching, the gospel is not proclaimed. Without the ceremony of washing, baptism is not baptism; without the ceremony of the ritual meal—eating and drinking in faith with praise and thanksgiving—the

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<sup>7</sup>*Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, XXIV:18, in *The Book of Concord*, 252, emphasis added.

Lord's Supper is not the Lord's Supper no matter how *pure* one's doctrinal positions on these issues may or may not be. Sacramental theology, our understanding and interpretation of the sacraments, cannot be separated from sacramental *practice*, from the actual *doing* of the sacraments. It is the great mistake of medieval scholasticism to the present which thinks that we can actually talk about the meaning of the sacraments without realizing we need to talk about the liturgy. *How* particular communities actually *do* this gospel preaching and sacramental administering may legitimately differ within the church—but the actual *doing* of it is confessionally non-negotiable, and that does, indeed, imply that *some* ceremony, some ritual, will be *done!* The question, then, in *Augustana VII* is not with ceremonies *per se*, but, rather, with the proper identification of *which* ceremonies are to be observed.

In dealing with the *satis est* aspect of *Augustana VII*, Lutherans also tend not to notice that the principle enunciated here is primarily a *liturgical* principle and is a very catholic and even Roman Catholic principle about the legitimacy of diverse and distinct rites within the universal church. Yes, the gospel and the sacraments—of course not separated from their appropriate liturgical contexts—are *enough, satis est*, for the *true* unity of the church, both locally and universally. But because this is written in a *liturgical* context and the issue is the use or non-use of particular “human” rites and ceremonies vis-à-vis the Church of Rome, it is important to underscore the actual point being made. That is, the *Augustana* was addressed to a situation in which the division of the Western church was threatened but had not yet formally occurred and would not formally take place for another twenty-five years until the Peace of Augsburg (1555) ratified it. Hence, this “confession” is not that of a specific separate “church” but the statement of a group *within* the one Western catholic church in which the princes and magistrates of the free cities were defending the liturgical diversity brought about by their reforms, and claiming that such diversity was acceptable, as long as the gospel was preached in its *purity* and the sacraments administered *rightly*. In other words, these Lutheran Reformers were arguing that they did not need to use the Roman Rite, or any of the other numerous rites and usages that existed in the late sixteenth-century medieval Western church, in order to be in union with the Western church. And, by the way, at this time period of 1530 and 1531, the dates of the *Augustana* and *Apology*, respectively, the so-called *Roman Rite* for the Mass itself was in a period of great decadence and transition and would not be standardized or universally imposed until after the Council of Trent in 1570 (some 40 years after the

*Augustana*) when Pope Pius V promulgated what became known as the *Missale Romanum Tridentinum* (the Tridentine Roman Missal). But even here, this Missal—which remained in effect until the 1960s reforms of Vatican II—was *not* universally imposed on even those Western churches in union with Rome or on religious communities who could demonstrate a two-hundred year old tradition of their own distinct rite.

Similarly, the *Rituale Romanum* (Roman Ritual), containing the rites for other sacraments such as baptism, did not become either standardized or universally normative for Roman Catholics until the official *editio typica* of 1614.<sup>8</sup> The Lutherans believed, then, that they had the freedom to become a separate *rite* themselves, not apart from, but *within* the church universal, whose own liturgical self-expressions would reflect their legitimate and distinct theological understanding of the gospel. Such a recognition of legitimate liturgical diversity, in fact, is granted by Rome to many of those ancient churches of the Christian East—not Orthodox but known widely as Eastern Catholic—who, while having entered into union with Rome, continue to live out their faith, govern their communities, and celebrate their liturgies according to Eastern, not Western or Roman, Christian doctrine and theology.

One must be careful, then, about attributing a kind of sacramental or ceremonial minimalism to *Augustana VII* or seeing it as a license to do whatever one “wants” or “feels” like doing in worship. A *liturgical* reading of this article suggests that the issue is about legitimate *liturgical* diversity in the church as long as the central *ceremonies* of preaching and sacramental administration are done. In other words, the “true” unity of the church does not consist in a universal liturgical uniformity of human ceremonies. Its “true” unity already exists by God’s gracious gift in word and sacrament, a gift that calls all churches to an ecumenical fidelity to this liturgical center where the gospel is proclaimed and the sacraments are administered. But this fidelity can be and is lived out in numerous and richly diverse “ceremonial” ways, in different “rites”—distinct ecclesial traditions—throughout the world. Here, again, it should be noted that there is nothing specifically *Lutheran* about this reference to the non-essential nature of “human” rites and ceremonies. *Article XXXIV* of the Church of England’s *Articles of Religion* makes a similar point, saying:

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<sup>8</sup>The best available summary of the development of the “Tridentine” liturgical books is that of Hubert Jedin, “Das Konzil von Trient und die Reform der liturgischen Bücher,” in *Kirche des Glaubens, Kirche der Geschichte: Ausgewählte Aufsätze und Vorträge*, vol. 2 (Freiburg: Herder, 1966), 499–525.

It is not necessary that Traditions and Ceremonies be in all places one, or utterly like; for at all times they have been divers, and may be changed according to the diversity of countries, times, and men's manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's Word ...<sup>9</sup>

But let's go a step further. It is often assumed by contemporary Lutherans that the references in this article to the "holy sacraments" being "administered according to the Gospel" or "administered in accordance with the divine Word [or, 'rightly']" are clear references only to baptism and the Lord's Supper, as the two "evangelical sacraments," and to their "words of institution" as the proper "divine Word" in their administration.<sup>10</sup> But the contents of both the *Augustana* and the *Apology* suggest that a bit of caution should be exercised about such a narrow interpretation. Indeed, not only does *Augustana* XIII not bother to specify the precise number of sacraments in general, but, in response to the *Confutation*, Melancthon's *Apology* XIII specifically lists "absolution (which is the sacrament of penitence)" as one of "the genuine sacraments" and suggests ways in which "ordination" and even "prayer," for that matter, might also be considered as "sacraments."<sup>11</sup> Regarding the relationship between the *satis est* and the "right administration" of the sacraments themselves in *Augustana* VII, then, the question appears to be more open-ended than is usually thought, and, indeed, open to a broader interpretation than simply baptism and Lord's Supper. As Melancthon himself notes, "no intelligent person will quibble about the number of sacraments or the terminology, so long as those things are kept which have God's command and promise."<sup>12</sup>

Within this context it is intriguing to look at the question of ordination itself in relationship to the *satis est* and the "sacraments." Regarding ordination, specifically, Melancthon writes:

If ordination is interpreted in relation to the ministry of the Word, we have no objection to calling ordination a sacrament. The ministry of the Word has *God's command and glorious promise*: "The Gospel is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith" (Rom. 1:16), again, "My word that goes forth from my mouth shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,

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<sup>9</sup>Cited from *The Book of Common Prayer*, 874.

<sup>10</sup>See Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. Paul F. Koehneke and Herbert J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), 199.

<sup>11</sup>*Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, XIII:3-16, in *The Book of Concord*, 211-213.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, XIII:16, 213.



and prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Isa. 55:11). If ordination is interpreted this way, we shall not object either to calling the laying on of hands a sacrament. *The church has the command to appoint ministers; to this we must subscribe wholeheartedly, for we know that God approves this ministry and is present in it.*<sup>13</sup>

And, immediately before treating the issue of “human” rites and ceremonies in his defense of *Augustana VII*, Melancthon makes the strongest argument ever made in Lutheranism regarding ordained ministers, saying: “They [i.e., the ordained] do not represent their own persons but the *person of Christ*, because of the church’s call, as Christ testifies (Luke 10:16), ‘He who hears you hears me.’ When they offer the Word of Christ or the sacraments, they do so in *Christ’s place* and *stead*.”<sup>14</sup> Similarly, it is not without significance that within the sequence of articles in the *Augustana* itself, Article V, called either “The Office of the Ministry” (German) or “The Ministry of the Church” (Latin), in which this “office” is explicitly identified as “The Gospel and the sacraments” themselves, actually *precedes* Article VII on the identity and unity of the church. And, while Article V does not refer specifically in this context to “ordained clergy,” Article XXVIII, “The Power of Bishops,” certainly identifies the “power” of the ordained with the exercise of this “office”:

Our teachers assert that according to the Gospel the power of keys or the power of bishops is a power and command of God to preach the Gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer and distribute the sacraments. This power of keys or of bishops is used and exercised only by teaching and preaching the Word of God and by administering the sacraments ... In this way are imparted not bodily but eternal things and gifts, namely, eternal righteousness, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life. These gifts *cannot be obtained except through the office of preaching and of administering the sacraments* ...<sup>15</sup>

Does the relationship between the *satis est* and the “preaching” or “teaching” of the gospel and the “administration” of the sacraments in *Augustana VII*, then, at least by implication, suppose and include also the “sacrament” of ordination itself, almost as a necessary precondition for

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., XIII:11–12, 212, emphasis added.

<sup>14</sup>*Apology of the Augsburg Confession VII and VIII:28*, in *The Book of Concord*, 173, emphasis added. This is about as close as one can come to an “*in persona Christi*” understanding of ordained ministry without using the explicit theological phrase from the Medieval scholastic tradition.

<sup>15</sup>*Augsburg Confession XXVIII:5, 8–9*, in *The Book of Concord*, 81–82, emphasis added.

gospel preaching and sacramental administration?<sup>16</sup> Whether it is called a “sacrament” or not, it does, after all, have “God’s command and glorious promise,” and the very gifts of God’s salvation, according to *Augustana XXVIII*, “cannot be obtained” without it. Indeed, without the actual *preaching* of the gospel by *someone* and without the actual *administration* of the sacraments by *someone*—and that *someone*, according to the Lutheran Confessions, is an *ordained* person—there is neither gospel proclaimed nor sacraments administered! Such an interpretation, that the *satis est* in *Augustana VII* also implies the church’s ministry in some form, seems plausible, indeed. Talking about gospel *preaching* and sacramental *administration* implies that one must also talk about the *preacher* and *administrator*. As Roman Catholics like to say, “The Eucharist makes the church, and the church makes the Eucharist.” We Lutherans might say, “Word and sacrament make the church but, at the same time, it is the *church* that proclaims the word and celebrates the sacraments.” If the church and its ministry result from word and sacrament, there is a certain sense in which it is a never ending circle, and church and ministry precede the actual *doing* of word and sacrament. In other words, one cannot talk about word and sacrament without talking about who does word and sacrament! And if such an interpretation is correct, then ecclesial bodies in ecumenical dialogue with Lutherans and in proposals regarding “full communion” with Lutherans have every right to push Lutherans toward greater theological clarity and precision regarding this “office of ministry” and how this office is and is to be “ordered” in service to the gospel and sacraments.

#### *The Ecumenical Implications of a Liturgical Reading of Augustana VII*

The *liturgical* reading of *Augustana VII* that I have attempted to provide in the preceding paragraphs suggests that any appeal made to the *satis est* in ecumenical relationships and in evaluating various proposals for “full communion” between Lutherans and others should be done rather

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<sup>16</sup>According to Peter Brunner, “Sacerdotium und Ministerium,” in *Bemühungen um die einigende Wahrheit* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 32, “the gospel cannot come on the scene at all without its concrete human bearer.” So also Luther says: “. . . the church cannot exist without bishops, pastors, preachers, and priests, and in turn they cannot exist without the church: they must be together with one another” (*D. Martin Luthers Werke* 50:641). English translations by David Yeago, “The Papal Office and the Burdens of History: A Lutheran View,” in *Church Unity and the Papal Office*, ed. C. Braaten and R. Jenson (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), 104.

cautiously and in full awareness of its primary liturgical context about “human” *versus* “divine” rites and ceremonies vis-à-vis sixteenth-century Rome. In other words, one should be suspicious when this principle is taken out of that context and applied to every imaginable ecumenical situation in the church today. When, in response to the Roman *Confutation*, Melancthon speaks about Christian unity, it does not appear he has our modern *ecumenical* questions about *visible* or *structural* unity in mind. His concern is *not*, and simply *could* not be, about what may or may not be necessary to bring about greater or “full communion” between churches visibly separated from each other for centuries. His overall concern, as it is clearly expressed in this section of the *Apology*, is with the “spiritual” unity of the church! He writes:

We are talking about *true spiritual unity*, without which there can be no faith in the heart nor righteousness in the heart before God. For *this* unity, we say, a similarity of human rites, whether universal or particular, *is not necessary*. The righteousness of faith is not a righteousness tied to certain traditions, as the righteousness of the law was tied to the Mosaic ceremonies, because this righteousness of the heart is something that quickens the heart.<sup>17</sup>

For *this* unity, which transcends all Christian divisions and already *unites* all Christians in the one body of Christ, the gospel and the sacraments, indeed, are “sufficient,” *satis est!* Even Rome acknowledges this, at least in principle, saying, in the Second Vatican Council’s *Decree on Ecumenism*:

[I]n spite of [various obstacles] it remains true that all who have been justified by faith in baptism are incorporated into Christ; they therefore have a right to be called Christians, and with good reason are accepted as brothers by the children of the Catholic Church.<sup>18</sup>

But to assume from this that when another ecclesial tradition, for example, makes something like Lutheran acceptance of the entrance of Lutheran bishops into the succession of the “historic episcopacy” a necessary precondition for “full communion,” Lutherans are somehow being forced to reject their *satis est* in favor of additional criteria for unity

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<sup>17</sup>*Apology of the Augsburg Confession* VII and VIII:31, in *The Book of Concord*, 174.

<sup>18</sup>*Vatican Council II*, 454. For additional references see Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, in *Origins* 23.9 (1993), 129; and John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, in *Origins* 25.4 (1995), 49, 51–72.

does not necessarily follow. Nor does it follow that the *satis est* would be rejected if, for the sake of furthering visible Christian unity with Rome, some form of “communion” with the Bishop of Rome himself would be expected as a condition. (Indeed, it can be assumed definitely that some form of such communion *would* and will continue to be expected.<sup>19</sup>) While there may be good and legitimate theological reasons why Lutherans might not want to embrace either the “historic episcopacy” or some form of “communion” with the Bishop of Rome for the sake of visible Christian unity,<sup>20</sup> the *satis est* of *Augustana VII* should not be one of them. Why? If my reading of this article is correct, or, at least, plausible, then the answer is simply that *Augustana VII* is not talking about *this* kind of *visible* unity, not about unity for the sake of common visible witness and service, but rather of the “true” and “spiritual” unity that *already* exists by God’s own gracious favor and gift in word and sacrament. It is on the basis of *this* unity, already given by God through the very sacramental-liturgical means of grace, that Lutherans and others are not only enabled but also called to find concrete and *visible* ways to express this unity together in a “full” and “visible” form of communion.

There is, of course, a “catch” in *Augustana VII* regarding ecumenical relationships, a “catch” that a liturgical reading of this article underscores clearly. Since this article appears to be concerned chiefly with a *liturgical* understanding of the church and with liturgical matters in general, it follows that it is *precisely a liturgical* criterion or test that must be operative in assessing the state of relationships between specific churches. That is, the question for Lutherans is not, primarily at least, about the *lex credendi*, the doctrinal stance of a particular ecclesial body. The primary question is about its *lex orandi*, that is, the liturgical expression of its faith. In other words, are word *and* sacrament visibly central? Are they constitutive of the life and mission of this assembly? In spite of what may or may not be said officially, is it the *gospel* that is proclaimed in their assemblies, or is it something else? Are the sacraments celebrated and administered “rightly” as the very means of God’s grace, or are they not? This is not about sacramental *theology*, not even about the contents of liturgical books—though one might hope for a correlation here—but about sacramental-liturgical *practice*! For the *satis est* is about the *gospel preached* and the sacraments—however many there may, in fact, be—*administered*, about the *gospel and sacraments in the process of their*

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<sup>19</sup>See John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, par. 97–98, p. 70.

<sup>20</sup>Personally, however, I cannot think of any.

being *done* in the gathered *assembly*. If there is, in fact, unity here, unity in the *satis est*, then it would be nothing short of sinful not to pursue that unity further, even if the implications of that unity for Lutherans might call for serious change in the very structure of their ecclesial life. But, if *Augustana VII* is to be used in this context, the existence of that essential unity of the church can only be determined by a *liturgical* test of the center of any church's life, including, perhaps especially, our own.

*Augustana VII* is primarily a carefully worded, *descriptive* statement about the liturgical identity of the church as *assembly* for the liturgical tasks of gospel *preaching* and sacramental *administration*. These means of grace are sufficient—*satis est*—for “true” or “spiritual” unity in the body of Christ, because these are the means by which salvation is mediated to human beings and by which they are united together as one in Christ. It is, thus, in, through, and by means of these liturgical “ceremonies” of gospel *preaching* and sacramental *administration*, not through “human” rites and ceremonies, where such “true” unity is given by God. As such, *Augustana VII* stands as the *first* word Lutherans speak in ecumenical relationships, not the final or only word. It is from this acknowledgment of the unifying centrality of the means of grace in the church that the quest for further unity arises.

If so, then *Augustana VII* is not a *prescriptive* norm for assessing contemporary ecumenical relationships and proposals and probably should not be quoted this way. Rather, *vis-à-vis* Rome in the sixteenth century, it is the Reformers' justification, no pun intended, as to how and why they as Reformed Catholics could continue as a legitimate expression of the one church and in *union* with the one church. Even if they did not accept all of the “human” (Roman) ceremonies, they accepted what was essential, namely, the gospel and the sacraments themselves. For the *true* unity of the church does not consist in liturgical uniformity, and unity with Rome, *the* “ecumenical” question on the mind of the Reformers themselves, still does not require such uniformity on the part of distinct ecclesial traditions. But to take this article out of context and turn it into a narrow dogmatic *norm*, which automatically excludes any proposals for visible unity that might have certain structural or organizational implications for Lutherans because they require “more” than the *satis est*, seems to be a questionable reading of the text, and, ultimately, it is a questionable ecclesiology. Since, as noted above, the historical context of the *Augustana* reflects a situation where formal division in the Western Catholic Church had not yet occurred, it is very questionable, indeed, to apply *Augustana VII* to our

own situation today where we are trying to overcome almost 450 years of formal schism!

What happens, I fear, is that in the appeals made to this article two visions of Christian “unity” are often confused, that of the “true” and “spiritual” union already given to all Christians by the sufficiency of the gospel and the sacraments, and the ecumenical quest for *visible* unity or communion based on this prior unitive reality. It is important to keep both visions clearly in mind, but it is equally important to realize that the very unifying source of the quest for *visible* Christian unity is at the same time the goal of the quest. For the *assemblies* that gather for gospel *proclamation* and sacramental *administration* are public, *visible* assemblies already, assemblies that in their separate gatherings testify to the *divisions* of the one church. Even though the divine “ceremonies” that take place in these assemblies are enough—*satis est*—for the “true” unity of all the assemblies already, is not the ultimate goal, even while respecting legitimate diversity, the gathering together of one, visibly united, public liturgical assembly where the gospel is, indeed, *proclaimed* and the sacraments are “rightly” *administered* to all of Christ’s baptized body? Does not the “true” and “spiritual” unity given by “pure” gospel proclamation and “right” sacramental administration, in fact, call for a concrete, incarnational, visible, and public expression of that unity so that the world, indeed, may “come to believe” (John 17:21)? If so, then, the question of what are we *going* to do ecumenically together becomes very important.

A couple of years ago Bishop Robert Rimbo gave one of the keynote presentations to the annual Center for Pastoral Liturgy Conference at Notre Dame, called “Eucharist without Walls” in which he unashamedly plagiarized my earlier article on the *satis est*. I now return the favor. At the end of his presentation, he issued the following invitation to embrace what he called a “reverential iconoclasm”:

Just as the liturgical movement began at a grassroots level, so we too can not wait for the powers that be to approve of our understanding of what is sufficient or what shall be our practice of eucharistic hospitality. It is enough for the true unity of the church that the Gospel is preached and the Sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. *Satis est*. It is enough. It is time for a new liturgical movement, a movement away from liturgical archaeology and a movement toward action-reflection. It is time for us to think about our unity at the table only after we have lived it. It is time for us to begin communing together at the one table of the one Lord as the one church and consider the consequences of such when God reveals

them to us. It is the Lord's Table, it is the Lord's Supper, and I am profoundly convinced that the Lord is calling us to a Eucharist without Walls.<sup>21</sup>

I couldn't agree more with this proposal. But theologically, at least, we may be quite close to this even on an official level. Regarding this, note the following comment made by Karl Rahner and Heinrich Fries several years ago:

Pulpit fellowship is already being practiced in many cases; and it no longer presents a disquieting exception, even to Catholic Christians. But one really should think about this more than ever, *since it is precisely a pulpit fellowship which presupposes a community of faith*. Consider the reality of salvation of the Word of God; consider Christ's presence in its various forms, including the form of proclamation; finally consider the theological conformity of Word *and* Sacrament—sacrament as visible Word (*verbum visibile*), the Word as audible sacrament (*sacramentum audibile*).<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, the principle of *satis est* is an ecumenical catalyst for the pursuit of Christian unity and not the goal! And because of the *satis est*, the church is already **one in Christ**. But because it is already one, the challenge and goal is to allow that oneness to come to expression, even if it means that certain things must die in order for the church to be reborn. If, even officially, we can share ecumenically in the real communion of one baptism, the real presence of Christ in prayer, and the real presence of Christ in the “audible sacrament” of the proclaimed word (especially now with Roman Catholics in light of the Joint Declaration), then how tragic and, indeed, scandalous, not to share in the real presence of Christ in the visible word of the Eucharist itself. Because of the *satis est*, let's do word and sacrament together and then figure out where to go from there.

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<sup>21</sup>Quoted by permission.

<sup>22</sup>Heinrich Fries and Karl Rahner, *Unity of the Churches: An Actual Possibility*, trans. Ruth C. L. Gritsch and Eric W. Gritsch (New York: Paulist Press; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 125, emphasis added.