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“Satis est” (CA 7)

The Confessional Unity of the Church and the Augsburg Confession Today

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This chapter provides a rereading of the ecclesiological key article of the Augsburg Confession, preceded by some reflections on why present-day theologians still consider the confessional writings from the Reformation period to be meaningful for their work in the early twenty-first century. In doing so, they seem to subscribe to a *historical* view of the Reformation as a model for interpreting the present. This is what may at first sight seem odd in the *doctrinal* approach I will be following in these pages, since that view is somewhat in danger of overestimating the normative role of the confessional writings (*norma normata*) in comparison with the biblical writings (*norma normans*).¹

I will not dwell on the issue of Scripture and Confession here, but content myself with a precursory remark. It deserves note that common understandings of the relationship between the two pose serious problems in terms of logic. Once we concede that the confessional writings have an edge over the Bible *hermeneutically* in that they offer a model interpretation of it, we cannot escape the conclusion that the normative character of the Bible is a product of interpretation and the Bible itself embedded in the

1. I am indebted to Ramona Schließer for her editorial support in the work with this chapter.

tradition from which that interpretation springs, i.e. the ecclesial tradition.² Obviously this argument dissolves the Reformers' categorical differentiation between scripture and tradition. To be sure, it is true that the Bible is a product of tradition just like the confessional writings are, but the doctrinal relationship between these two is not. There is no linear development leading from the Bible to the writings of the Reformers, so the latter do not directly interpret the Bible, but only the faith it provokes. Consistently, the theological dignity of the Bible as Word of God³ is not in prompting confessional writings, but in provoking people to believe.⁴

Therefore, to consider the Reformation a model for interpreting the present does not mean to revisit the *fundamentals of faith* (word and sacrament), but rather to renovate the edifice of *life in faith* that is built on these fundamentals. In order to express the difference between the two, theological consultations within the Leuenberg Church Fellowship have suggested refining the Reformers' doctrine of the *notae ecclesiae* by making a distinction between *marks of the church* and *marks of Christian life*.⁵ I will come back to this distinction in the course of my chapter, but will be defining the latter in the sense of Christian values. Since values are always controversial in a secular and pluralist society, my approach to the model character of the Reformation through the Leuenberg doctrine of the *notae ecclesiae* embraces a twofold thesis about the transition the Lutheran tradition is about to face in the not too distant future.

In order to interpret the present through the lens of the Reformation, (1) Lutherans will have to engage both with the Leuenberg model of

2. This conclusion has been drawn explicitly in a number of ecumenical convergence documents between Protestant and Roman Catholics in Germany. Cf. a document issued by the Ecumenical Working Group of Protestant and Catholic Theologians (ÖAK): *Verbindliches Zeugnis III. Schriftverständnis und Schriftgebrauch*, 361 (§ 184). A similar argument can be found in a joint declaration by the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany (VELKD) and the Catholic Conference of Bishops in Germany (DBK): *Communio Sanctorum. Die Kirche als Gemeinschaft der Heiligen*, 34–35 (§ 53–54).

3. For a comprehensive discussion of the problem of the theological status of the Bible as Word of God, cf. the masterly Ph.D. thesis by Michael Coors, see Coors, *Scriptura efficax. Die biblisch-dogmatische Grundlegung des theologischen Systems bei Johann Andreas Quenstedt*.

4. That God's word provokes belief is a fundamental line of argument in Luther's teaching on the sacraments, cf. Luther, *De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae praeludium*, WA 6, 543:31–543:33. It is particularly important for Luther's defense of infancy baptism, since if faith is provoked by God's word and baptism is, according to Luther, nothing but God's word embracing water, then personal belief is not a prerequisite for baptism, but its result.

5. Cf. *The Church of Jesus Christ*, 96–97.

ecumenism and with the values of secular modernity like individuality and pluralism. (2) In return, the Lutheran understanding of word and sacrament will provide a theological argument as to why and how this engagement should be put into practice.

These precursory remarks give an idea of the consequences that might ensue from considering the Reformation a model for interpreting the present. Logically, prior to this is the question as to what presuppositions such an understanding of the Reformation makes. I will turn to these now, presenting the presuppositions first and then a few brief remarks on the possible corollaries for the model character of the Reformation. The second section of my chapter will follow the same substructure with a discussion of CA 7 first, and then some reflections on its significance for interpreting the present.

PRESUPPOSITIONS FROM REFORMATION THEORY

As recent debates among Reformation theorists in Germany⁶ indicate, the problem with the alleged model character of the Reformation is about the unity of the Reformation. In terms of Reformation theory, this unity covers both confessional and territorial units, but what is controversial is how far their respective range is. In a doctrinal perspective, the easiest way to settle such controversies is to define Reformation unity by the unity of the true church. This is also what can be found in the debates themselves.

The most recent of these debates was launched in 2005 when Gunther Wenz made a case for the Augsburg Confession as an expression of confessional unity within the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), arguing that it was the Augsburg Confession that explained the Leuenberg-based concept of church fellowship among the EKD member churches.⁷ The Theological Board of the EKD disapproved Wenz's proposal in 2009 claiming that Wenz mistakenly reduced the ecclesial quality of the EKD to a mere church fellowship rather than a church in its own right.⁸

6. Cf. the debate about Gunther Wenz's proposal (2005) to agree on the Augsburg Confession as a common confessional writing for all member churches of the Evangelical Church in Germany, Wenz, "Die Confessio Augustana als evangelisches Grundbekenntnis? Ein Beitrag zur Strukturdebatte der EKD [2005]," 19–30.

7. Cf. *ibid.*, 25: "Der gemeinsame Bezug auf die Confessio Augustana— welcher der Leuenberger Konkordie jenes inhaltliche Format zu verleihen vermag, das sie für sich genommen nicht hat—kann, so mein ceterum censeo, einer solch kommunikativen Wahrnehmung evangelischer Einheit in hohem Maße dienlich sein."

8. Cf. *Soll das Augsburger Bekenntnis Grundbekenntnis der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland werden?*, 11: "Und ebenso wie alle ihre Gliedkirchen am Leib Christi teilhaben, hat auch deren Gemeinschaft daran teil. (...) In diesem Sinne hat auch die EKD kirchlichen Charakter und ist Kirche."

The whole incident takes us back to an open question from earlier theological debates: what is the range of an ecclesial unit that is based on confessional unity? It is a question characteristic of Reformation theory, as can be learned from the following rough estimate. *Before* the Reformation it was not a question at all, since in those days there was (at least officially) no need to reflect on confessional diversity in a Europe that considered itself a homogenous Christian body (even if this body had two heads: the Emperor and the Pope). *After* the Reformation at the beginning of the confessional age in Europe our question was no longer a question, since the Peace of Augsburg (1555) at least in theory (*cuius regio, eius religio*) divided Europe into confessionally homogenous principalities, thus only transposing the pre-Reformation ideal of coextension between territory and confession to a smaller scale. However, for the time of the Reformation itself, our question turns out to be crucial. I will approach this problem in three steps to show that when Dorothea Wendebourg's writing gave rise to a vivid dispute among church historians in 1992, the controversy was basically about the range of confessional unity in Reformation churches.

a) Wendebourg argued (particularly against her Göttingen colleague Bernd Moeller) that the unity of the Reformation was only *extrinsically* constituted.⁹ Her point was that to articulate the common theological grounds for the different strands of the Reformation presupposed an external standpoint, which was *not* on that same common ground. In historiographic terms, so Wendebourg argued, it was the Catholic Reform that constituted the unity of the Reformation. This openly provoked churches that consider themselves to live in *unity* with the Reformers' tradition, but it has prodded others to consider the constructive corollaries of Wendebourg's thesis as well. Berndt Hamm of Erlangen has argued in favor of the internal diversity of the Reformation as an expression of its liberating potentials.¹⁰ The *Augsburg Confession*, we might then say, alluding to Ernst Käsemann's canon theory, does not account for the confessional unity of the Reformation, but for the diversity of its interpretations.¹¹ To interpret the present in the light of the Reformation would thus foster pluralism and *diversity* within the church and outside of it.

9. Wendebourg, "Die Einheit der Reformation als historisches Problem," 34–35: "Zu kaum einem der umstrittenen Topoi gab es damals bereits eine verbindlich definierte Doktrin: Weder war die Lehre von Rechtfertigung, Gnade und Glauben dogmatisch festgelegt (. . .)."

10. Cf. Hamm, "Die Einheit der Reformation in ihrer Vielfalt. Das Freiheitspotential der 95 Thesen vom 31. Oktober 1517."

11. Cf. Käsemann, "Begründet der neutestamentliche Kanon die Einheit der Kirche? [1952/53]."

b) A closer look at the debate reveals that the problem with the model character of the Reformation cannot be settled in a rather harmless interplay between unity and diversity, but touches upon the contradiction between true and false church. The reason why Wendebourg says there is only an extrinsic unity of the Reformation is that there was no formal doctrine of justification before the Council of Trent, which the Reformers' criticism could have addressed.¹² This suggests that the unity of the Reformation is primarily a doctrinal unity. Even if Wendebourg emphasizes that the Reformation denotes a whole "way-of-life," its cultural or social factors appear subordinated to its religious and spiritual moments.¹³ Thus Wendebourg's argument seems to provide a dogmatic analogy for the historiographical thesis of an extrinsic unity of the Reformation: the object of doctrine, the Word of God, too, is extrinsic to the Reformation (*extra nos*).

c) However, this analogy is dubious. Following Wendebourg's opponent in the Göttingen debate, Bernd Moeller, Thomas Kaufmann argues that the cities that adopted the Reformation in the sixteenth century must be considered "small corpora christiana" (Moeller). Here the Reformation established a homogenous cultural paradigm, which reached far beyond the intellectual sphere of theological doctrine into people's everyday life to create an intrinsic (not extrinsic, as in Wendebourg) "confessional cultural" unity of the Reformation in terms of architecture, craftsmanship, music, arts, and education alike.¹⁴ If anyone considered this sort of confessional culture to weaken confessional unity, such an objection would reveal a rather narrowed idea of confession in the sense of a written statement. Against such an idea, it is worthy of note that some of the papers delivered to the Theological Board of the EKD during the debate about Wenz's aforementioned proposal stressed a wider meaning of the term "confession." For example, Wolf-Dieter Hauschild emphasized that the Augsburg Confession has always had a political function in identifying those religious groups or units that enjoyed protection by the Habsburg emperors.¹⁵

Comparing this with Wendebourg's and Kaufmann's argument, it turns out that their dissent is not essentially about the status of doctrine in comparison with other factors of Christianity, but about the range of confessional units in the Reformation era. While Wendebourg considers

12. Cf. Wendebourg, "Die Einheit der Reformation als historisches Problem," 34–35.

13. Ibid., 37; Wendebourg, "Replik," 135 ("way-of-life"), 133.

14. Cf. Kaufmann, "Das Bekenntnis im Luthertum des konfessionellen Zeitalters," 298–300.

15. Cf. Hauschild, "Die Geltung der Confessio Augustana im deutschen Protestantismus zwischen 1530 und 1980 (aus lutherischer Sicht)."

the Reformation on a rather large scale, measuring its confessional unity by its external counterpart in the Catholic Church, Kaufmann focuses on the much smaller cities. In a way, this controversy will remain open, since it can hardly be denied that there have been examples of confessional unity in either range.

What may take us further forward here is to turn from these historical reflections to a doctrinal perspective, which reveals an interesting affinity between Wendebourg and Kaufmann. As Wendebourg's opponent and Kaufmann's teacher, Bernd Moeller, has noted in the Göttingen dispute, arguments like those of Wendebourg define the unity of the Reformation in retrospect¹⁶ by placing the unity of the Reformation in sharp contrast to the Catholic Church. This contrast marks a threshold between a reform (within the Catholic system) and a Reformation that trespasses the system boundaries of the Catholic Church.¹⁷ This system-theory-based differentiation seems to have been consensual in the debate, but it means doctrinally that the unity of the Reformation, whether extrinsic or intrinsic, is always the *unity of the true church in opposition to the false church*. This does not only apply to Wendebourg's findings, but also to Kaufmann's. Wendebourg argues that the distinction between the true and false church is inherent in the visible (!) church.¹⁸ Kaufmann is more hesitant, but provides historical evidence that where the cultural paradigm of the Reformation was imposed on particular cities, it turned into a hegemonic paradigm, including coercive measures against dissenters.¹⁹

Summarizing these debates, it can be argued that the historical phenomena of confessional unity in the Reformation, whether on a larger or smaller scale, presuppose the doctrinal understanding of unity in the sense of the true church in opposition to the false church.

16. Cf. Moeller, "Replik," 55–56.

17. At least this is what Berndt Hamm's contribution to the debate suggests, cf. Hamm, "Einheit und Vielfalt der Reformation—oder: was die Reformation zur Reformation machte," 64–66.

18. Wendebourg, "Kirche," 412: "Schließlich gibt es in der sichtbaren Kirche noch einen dritten Unterschied, der bei der verborgenen Kirche ausgeschlossen ist, die Differenz zwischen 'wahrer' und 'falscher' Kirche (*ecclesia vera et falsa*)."

19. Kaufmann, "Das Bekenntnis im Luthertum des konfessionellen Zeitalters," 290–91 says with reference to Eike Wolgast that under these circumstances "Verzicht auf Glaubenszwang bedeutet nicht Verzicht auf religionspolizeiliche Maßnahmen überhaupt."

A MARKET OF TRUTHS?

How do these presuppositions influence the model character of the Reformation? If the Reformation represents the true church, interpreting the present through its lens expresses the demand to live in truth. Such life in truth seems impossible without demarcation from that which is false. Demands for truth can be addressed to others, but must always be applied to the one who utters them as well, and will then turn into truth claims. Such claims need not necessarily lead to intolerance, either in theory or in social practice, but at least in social life they will endorse clearly defined institutions that allow for deciding whether a given social life form is good or not, and whether it is just or unjust. One might therefore expect that to interpret the present through the lens of the Reformation favors a competitive society, but if so, then also a society where different religious, moral, and political convictions coexist and compete—and in this respect such a view of the Reformation would also lead to a society of freedom and market.

The overall picture of such a society is pluralist, but to what degree, exactly? Its pluralism is certainly not for ignorance of truth claims, but will be a pluralism of truth-seeking communities. This means that the "freedom" and "market" aspects of such pluralism will primarily apply to religious convictions. In a societal framework of functional differentiation such as exists in a system-theoretical approach, such religious pluralism will also be less likely to entail pluralist demands on other segments of society like the economic sector.²⁰ In return, an understanding of religious pluralism that includes particular corollaries for political or economic power to be pluralized is unlikely to subscribe to a system-theoretical background.²¹

TOWARDS A LUTHERAN STANCE ON MODERNITY

The above conclusions from current Reformation theory are only conjectural unless put to the test of an actual reading of the Reformation's self-understanding. Therefore, I now turn to the central ecclesiological article

20. E.g., Herms, *Gesellschaft gestalten. Beiträge zur Sozialethik*, 248, conceives of Lutheran social ethics as a system-theory-based pluralist theory of institutions that sketches religious pluralism as a sort of market for the different religious institutions, although the overall impression is certainly that of reluctance to accept the present day prevalence of the economic sector (260–65; 360–61). This would be unthinkable unless the different societal systems are considered more or less segregated from one another.

21. A good example from a Lutheran background is Geyer, "Wahrheit und Pluralismus," 294–305, who draws precisely the socio-ethical conclusions mentioned in the text. However, his basic argument is a dogmatic one. Following Geyer, the basic Christian conviction of loving one's enemy is the only way of representing God's omnipotence in the world which demands that all earthly powers be pluralized.

of the Augsburg Confession, CA 7, and its concept of the true unity of the church (*vera unitas ecclesiae*). The unity of the church, according to CA 7, is its *truth*.

CA 7,1: *Item docent, quod una sancta ecclesia perpetuo mansura sit.*

While most of the doctrinal articles of the Augsburg Confession begin with “*Item/de (. . .) docent*” and thus echo the “*Ecclesiae magno consensu apud nos docent*” (CA 1), only CA 5, 8, and 20 directly continue the articles that precede them. In the case of ecclesiology, this enclitic structure has contributed to the influential assumption that the Lutheran doctrine had a twofold concept of the church, one in faith (dealt with in CA 7) and one in experience (dealt with in CA 8). How else could the *ecclesiae* from CA 1 (i.e. the territories supporting the Confession at the Diet) teach that there was only one *ecclesia*? However, the point which CA 7,1 makes here is different, pointing less to the oneness (*una*) than to the holiness (*sancta*) of the church and interpreting the latter as perpetuity (*perpetuo mansura*). In a preparatory study for his great historical commentary on the Augsburg Confession, Wilhelm Maurer has argued that this perpetuity in the sense of temporal universality expressed a consensual attitude between Protestants and Roman Catholics and thus contributed a lot to the irenic character of the Augsburg Confession. Following Maurer, the real ecclesiological controversy in the days of the Reformation was about the alternative understanding of universality in spatial terms since to claim such universality was to openly defy Roman “catholicity.”²² However, I wonder if there is not already an unmistakably Protestant point in the teaching of the *ecclesia perpetuo mansura*.

This point, I suppose, is that the demarcation line between holy and profane is not the line of death, but the line between God and man, which runs right through the church. This makes it difficult—if not impossible—to draw a clear-cut distinction between true and false church. Unlike the Roman Confutation of CA 8, which considers the church of the saints (*congregatio sanctorum*) a purely otherworldly community of people who have passed away in a state of personal holiness, the Reformers attest sanctity to living sinful people merely due to what God effects in them. The further development of CA 21 speaks volumes in this respect. While in 1530 King David’s warfare appeared as an example of holiness,²³ the Apology turned to

22. Cf. Maurer, “*Ecclesia perpetuo mansura im Verständnis Luthers*,” 68–69. Unsurprisingly, for Maurer the two lines of understanding the universality of the church also make the difference between Luther (68) and Melancthon (69n23).

23. *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 83b.

Peter’s renouncement, forgiven by Jesus,²⁴ and the variant of CA 21 (1540) returned to David’s holiness again, but this time to his confession of sins before Nathan.²⁵

CA 7,2: *Est autem ecclesia congregatio sanctorum, in qua evangelium pure docetur et recte administrantur sacramenta.*

In its grammatical structure, this sentence looks like an Aristotelian definition with the congregation of saints as generic term and the gospel and sacraments as specific difference of the church against other congregations of saints. However, if the Reformers only draw the line of holiness between God and man, as CA 7,1 revealed, any congregation of saints will by definition be identical with the church. Therefore, the relative clause about good practice in gospel teaching and administering of sacraments does not provide any criteria to sever true church from false church, nor do the attributes of “pure” gospel teaching and “right” administering of sacraments, and this also applies to the following core sentence of CA 7—the famous *satis est*.

CA 7,3: *Et ad veram unitatem ecclesiae satis est consentire de doctrina evangelii et de administratione sacramentorum.*

In his Apology (1531), Melancthon referred to gospel and sacraments as “marks” of the church (Latin: *notae*).²⁶ This again suggests a demarcation line between true church and false church and has led to the question as to what further criteria are required to decide whether a given Christian community teaches the gospel purely and administers the sacraments rightly. Many suggest that the *satis est* expresses only a “minimum definition” of confessional unity,²⁷ which needs supplementary criteria or a third *nota*

24. Ibid., 317–18.

25. *Evangelische Bekenntnisse. Reformatorische Bekenntnisschriften und neuere Theologische Erklärungen*, 1:57.

26. *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 238:22–23. “Et addimus notas: puram doctrinam evangelii et sacramenta.”

27. In this respect, a 1967 article by contemporary church historian Klaus Scholder proved very influential at least in Germany: Scholder, “Die Bedeutung des Barmer Bekenntnisses für die evangelische Theologie und Kirche.” Scholder’s overall thesis was that it was not until the Declaration of Barmen that the Protestant churches had a theological definition of the church—the minimum criteria given in CA 7 were obviously insufficient, according to Scholder. His argument does not only attribute great ecclesiological value to the German Church Struggle in general, but particularly to the third thesis of the Barmen Declaration, which we will see contains all the elements of the church contemporary Protestant ecclesiology has suggested to amend CA 7.

ecclesiae like a formal consent in doctrine²⁸ or the ordained ministry²⁹ or the experience of communion³⁰ in the communities. It seems that most of these proposals are in one way or another inspired by ecumenism—be it in the sense of interconfessional relations or of international, worldwide relations of the church. The dogmatic problem with these ecumenical amendments to the Reformers' doctrine of the *notae ecclesiae* is, in my opinion, that they operationalize the doctrinal function of the *notae* for the purposes of the ministry issue.

While it is true that Melanchthon, both in the Augsburg Confession and its Apology, conceives of the *notae* as criteria for the unity of the church, Luther's use of them is methodologically far less strict, which accounts for the much higher number of *notae* in Luther: whereas Melanchthon restricts the *notae* to word and sacrament, Luther offers lists of seven³¹ or even ten³² *notae*. For Luther, the *notae* seem to have a pastoral function rather than a doctrinal one since he introduces them as a helpful device for perplexed Christians to detect the church in circumstances where Christ's presence with his people has been dissimulated. "Woher wil oder kan doch ein armer irriger Mensch mercken, wo solch Christlich heilig Volck in der welt ist?"³³

Recognizing these internal differences in the two Wittenberg Reformers' understanding of the *notae* can help avoid at least two of their most common operationalizations. First, it would be unwise to use a list of

28. It seems that this is still in the background of Wenz's aforementioned thrust for the Augsburg Confession, since his basic argument is that any concept of the church needs doctrinal expression in order to be implemented in an ecumenical discourse.

29. The issue of ministry has certainly been the most prominent in ecumenical discourse ever since the Reformation. It was already included in Robert Bellarmine's doctrine of the three bonds (*tria vincula*) holding the church together (1590).

30. That a full Protestant understanding of the church requires the experience and notion of communion in the sense of brotherhood has been a characteristic idea of numerous Pietist arousals, but has also proved influential on ecclesiologies in the Moltmannian vein that have an affinity to grassroots processes in worldwide church life, cf. Weth, "Theologische Ekklesiologie nach 1945 im kritischen Horizont des Barmer Bekenntnisses (Barmen III) [1980]," 156.

31. Luther, *Von den Konziliis und Kirchen*, WA 50, 628:29–643:26. 1. "Gotteswort" (628:30), 2. "Sacrament der Tauffe" (630:22), 3. "Sacrament des Altars" (631:7), 4. "schliesseln" (631:37), 5. "empter" (632:36), 6. "gebet" (641:21), 7. "Kreutz" (. . .) (642:1).

32. Luther, *Wider Hans Worst*, WA 51, 479:4–485:7, 1. "Tauffe" (479:5), 2. "sacrament des altars" (480:3–480:4), 3. "schlussel" (480:14), 4. "predigamt und Gottes wort" (481:7–481:8), 5. "Symbolon" (481:17), 6. "gleich gebot dasselb vater unser" (482:8), 7. "weltliche herrschafft ehren" (482:15), 8. "Ehstand loben" (483:9), 9. "leiden" (484:1), 10. "[Er]dulden" (485:4).

33. Luther, *Von den Konziliis und Kirchen*, WA 50, 628:19–21.

pastoral criteria (Luther) to amend a set of *doctrinal criteria* (Melanchthon). Against this background it seems safer to me to refrain from the entire issue of a third (or fourth, fifth (. . .)) *nota* besides word and sacrament. Secondly, it would be equally unwise to conclude that since the *notae* fulfill different functions in the two Reformers, they needed to be allocated to different groups of people within the church: word and sacrament to the ordained ministry, but such *notae* like intercession and self-surrender to the priesthood of all believers. If the different *notae* are allocated in this way, they will not serve confessional unity (which they ought to do according to CA 7), but detach it from the priesthood of all believers, which is not explicitly mentioned in the Lutheran confessional writings.³⁴ Thus detached, the freedom ministers enjoy in public will be transformed into an *external* ('public') representation of the church while according to the doctrine of the *notae* this public freedom is an *internal* freedom of conscience in that ministers moderate and integrate the different forms of Christ's presence with his people.³⁵

Either of the aforementioned problematic operationalizations can be avoided if the common ground between Luther's and Melanchthon's doctrine of the *notae* is respected. They disagree on the number of the *notae*: while Melanchthon confines them to two, Luther's divergent statements preclude a comprehensive list. At the same time, Luther does not extend the list arbitrarily, but arranges the *notae* he suggests concentrically around Melanchthon's exclusive list of two. This suggests that there is an implicit distinction in the two Reformers between that which is at the heart of the life of the church and its rather peripheral aspects. Periphery here does not evoke lesser importance, but only that which the terms denote literally: those aspects of the church where it comes into touch with the world outside the church. It is therefore in the line of the Reformers' argument to make a distinction between *notae* in the sense of "marks of the church" and *notae* in the sense of "marks of Christian life," which is actually what the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe has suggested in its aforementioned theological consultations on the doctrine of the *notae*. Before

34. The papers delivered at the ecclesiological symposium of the German *Luther-Gesellschaft* in 2005 (cf. Theißen, "Ich glaube die heilige christliche Kirche") provide an excellent overall picture of the type of Lutheran confessional culture that relates to this kind of argument. Meanwhile, the papers have been published outside the journals affiliated with the *Luther-Gesellschaft*. The most prominent of these is Müller, "Das Kirchenverständnis der lutherischen Reformation."

35. In a different context, I have argued in detail for this understanding of the ordained ministry: Theißen, "Bekenntnis und Bekennen als Fixpunkte kirchlicher Orientierung und Erfahrung," 218–25.

turning to the dogmatic significance of this distinction, I would like to stress that it may help settle the ecumenical debate about their number.

How hazardous this debate is dogmatically can be seen on a meta level. The mere fact that the churches involved in this debate disagree about what is a mark of the church and what is not turns these marks into something negotiable among churches. It turns pure gospel and right sacraments into requirements the churches have to meet in order to establish ecclesial unity. In logical terms, it turns criteria into necessary conditions (*conditio sine qua non*). However, the logical status of CA 7,3 is different. The famous “*satis est*” indicates that these conditions are not necessary, but sufficient (*conditio per quam*).³⁶ In contrast to necessary conditions, sufficient conditions of something denote that which constitutes that something. Thus the point in CA 7,3 is that gospel and sacrament are constitutive for the church and cannot therefore be negotiable in any discourse on ecclesial unity. In dogmatic terms, *pure* gospel and *right* sacraments are *God’s work in the church*. It is pointless to seek an ecclesial unity fuller than that which God works; such efforts have no influence on the true church, CA 7 concludes, thus emphasizing the contrast between human and divine institutions.

CA 7,4: *Nec necesse est ubique similes esse traditiones humanas seu ritus aut ceremonias ab hominibus institutas; sicut inquit Paulus: Una fides, unum baptisma, unus Deus et pater omnium etc.*

Essentially, CA 7 is not an Aristotelian definition of the church, but a description of God’s work in the church. Consistently following its concept of sanctity as God’s work in man, the Augsburg Confession also confines its ecclesiological articles to the divine factors of the church. This ecclesiology is a bulwark against any attempt to demarcate true church from false church. The corollaries this has for an understanding of the true church are far-reaching when we only consider CA 8 and its idea of the church as an entity made up of good and of evil. As Wilhelm Maurer has pointed out in his historical research on the Augsburg Confession,³⁷ this article deals with the problem of Donatism (not of Novatianism, as parallels in Luther’s Confession of 1528 do) and thus points in particular to ministers who do not administer the sacrament rightly, but consider it a human sacrifice before God (*sacrificium missale*). The acceptance of these “*mali admixti*” (CA 8,1) is not due to an embarrassment before the Reformers ordained their

36. Cf. Kambartel, “Bedingung,” 762–65.

37. Cf. Maurer, *Historischer Kommentar zur Confessio Augustana*, vol. 2, 165.

own ministers,³⁸ but rather the ultimate consequence of their ecclesiological focus on God's work in the church, which can even be effected through unworthy or heterodox ministers.

A WEB OF TRUTH

Turning finally to the current significance of my proposed reading of CA 7, we have to ask: what remains of the model character of the Reformation if even ministers who do *not* administer the sacraments rightly are included in the church of "pure" gospel and "right" sacraments? While our first impression was that a Reformation-oriented understanding of the present led to a pluralistic and competitive coexistence of disparate truth-seeking communities and their relating institutions, our rereading of CA 7 offers a different picture where even contradictory convictions about what is "true" and "right" are suspended in the hope of God's work in the human community. The theological nature of this argument is obvious, and its optimistic attitude towards the reconciliation of opposing convictions seems plausible in an age when either side of the emerging confessional discord in Europe pleaded the truth of Christendom, which alone allowed for an inclusive line of argument such as in CA 8. But nowadays the Reformers' focus on God's work seems to disregard modern achievements like individualism and secularism, which openly defy the idea of a common truth. At the same time, it leaves those who still believe in such truth defenseless against obvious distortions of their belief.

Faced with these problems, present-day reaction to the Reformation should emphasize that the Reformers' understanding of the "true church" in CA 7 does not suspend the true/false dichotomy altogether, but reworks it from an outwardly-directed demarcation into a *self-differentiation* between word and sacrament as an *act of the church* and as *God's work*. To be the true church is thus not a possession of the church, but a challenging gift. In the light of such self-differentiation, to interpret the present following the model of the Reformation would not lead to a competitive "market of truths," but rather to a "web of truth," within the texture of which each truth-seeking community depends on the truth understanding of the others in order to fully express their own truth claim. This implies that the unity of God's work cannot be represented in the unity of a single unit and its truth claim in this "web," but only in the diversity of the fullness of the "web."

38. On this issue, cf. the Berlin Ph.D. thesis by Krarup, *Ordination in Wittenberg*, 100–104, who argues that there were Protestant ordinations well before the close of the Diet in 1530.

The proposed concept of truth as a “web” in which different communities interact is not meant to turn truth into a secular value whose authority is rooted in the interaction of societal powers. What it does do, however, is give a hint as to how the truth of the gospel (representing the “marks of the church”) relates to the values of modernity (being the “marks of Christian life”). I would like to conclude with some reflections on the relationship between truth and values.

There is a widespread Protestant reluctance to accept values, which is probably to a considerable extent fuelled by Eberhard Jüngel’s influential criticism of the “tyranny of values” (an expression borrowed from a joint publication with Carl Schmitt). Jüngel argues that the *theological* authority of the gospel as a mere request and invitation to *truth* and reconciliation³⁹ is in itself irreconcilable with the authority of *values* which regularly require the exercise of *political* authority. Perhaps there is an even more fundamental opposition beyond that between theological and political authority, and that is Jüngel’s struggle with atheism and secularism.

In this respect Jüngel’s juxtaposition of truth and values has also been a reply to the challenges atheist philosophers such as Jürgen Habermas in particular have posed for theology. However, Habermas’ position has developed further since the late 1970s, when Jüngel published his essay *Wertlose Wahrheit*. In particular, Habermas’ speech delivered on receiving the German Booksellers’ Peace Award in 2001 makes some important changes to his earlier statements.⁴⁰ Up until then Habermas used to emphasize the need for religious convictions to be translated into arguments of public reason. In his 2001 speech, which was given only a few weeks after 9/11, Habermas reckoned with a peculiar rationality in religion, too, which was not to be fully transformed into secular values. Public discourse therefore had to accept and learn the terms and logic of this religious rationality.

The change in Habermas’ argument has widely been considered to open up a new access for religion to public discussion in a secular society. Since 2001, religious motivations for decision and policy making seem to have gained more and more significance—in fact, more than the “overlapping consensus” which Habermas’ intellectual opponent from the 1980s, John Rawls, had already conceded in 1993: the possibility of arguing for *secular* values from the background of the divergent “comprehensive doctrines” of religious convictions.⁴¹ After Habermas’ Peace Award address, genuinely *religious* values appeared on the stage of public discourse. Scholars like Hans

39. Cf. Jüngel, “Die Autorität des bittenden Christus,” 179–88.

40. Cf. Habermas, *Glauben und Wissen*.

41. Cf. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 58–66, 133–68.

Joas, who has given a genetical account of the indispensable role different religious convictions have played in producing the values expressed in the General Declaration of Human Rights,⁴² give an example of this.

However, it would be misleading to tell this story as a contest between secular and religious values. At least Joas' argument is far more complex. The "generalization of values" he has in mind takes place when a rational discourse between opposing value systems incites either party to modify and renew their own tradition.⁴³ The renewals and modifications achieved in this mutual process will constitute values on a level beyond the parties' traditional ones as they will have to be *common values* between *opposing value systems*. Joas borrows the theoretical background of such a "generalization of values" from Talcott Parsons⁴⁴ and applies it to the genesis of the General Declaration of Human Rights, but it is perfectly possible to quote further examples of generalized values from religious traditions.

For example, if the theological value of the Sabbath and Sunday had not been controversial among the early Christians in their Jewish surroundings, there would probably be no Judaeo-Christian value of a weekly day off work that covers both the Jewish Sabbath and the Christian Sunday. Even though this example may be an oversimplification, it shows clearly the theoretical claim Joas makes when drawing on Parsons' "generalization of values." He certainly does *not* take a step *back behind* the difference between religious and secular values, but rather a step *forward beyond* it, since that common Judeo-Christian, thus religious, value is only established by mutual acceptance of the other's opposing value as literally of equal value to one's own. This pushes either party beyond the limits of their own value system. It would even constitute a preliminary, merely technical definition of religious values to consider them at the more generalized level that value controversies reach through mutual communication of their opposing values.

Following this line of argument, Habermas' modified position from 2001 cannot be considered to renounce secularization, nor can a theological adoption of his Peace Award address claim religious values by either shrinking back from secular values or skipping over them with a post-secular attitude. Quite the opposite: religious values would not emerge at all if it were not through controversy about other values. What theology and religion may therefore justifiably expect of those other values is that they can be

42. Cf. Joas, *Die Sakralität der Person. Eine neue Genealogie der Menschenrechte*.

43. Cf. *ibid.*, 264: "Erneut zeigt sich, daß das Resultat einer gelingenden Kommunikation über Werte mehr oder weniger ist als das Resultat eines rationalen Diskurses: zwar kein voller Konsens, aber eine dynamische wechselseitige Modifikation und Anregung zur Erneuerung der je eigenen Tradition."

44. Cf. *ibid.*, 261 et passim.

acquired in a religious way. This criterion precludes what are merely economic values from religious values, but leaves enough room for many other modern values like secularization itself, or pluralism.

My conclusion is that even the Lutheran tradition is particularly well-prepared for this kind of engagement with modernity and its values. The incessant controversy about values, which is so typical of modern pluralist societies, requires precisely the kind of communication Lutherans are perfectly acquainted with owing to what has earlier in this chapter been called the freedom of conscience in Protestant ministry. That is to say that there are no moral constraints for ministers to propagate some ecclesial belief publicly in the pulpit, which they would not be willing to confess privately according to their conscience. In their public proclamation of the gospel, ministers are not supposed to preach their individual convictions at all, but to hold together and even integrate divergent, perhaps opposing forms of confessing the truth of the Christian faith. It is particularly this integrative task of “unity in reconciled diversity” that requires theological expertise, and this is something that Lutherans, as is well known, have—at least in the second half of the twentieth century—been experts at.⁴⁵

Public communication of values in a pluralist society requires the same type of freedom, but not the same type of expertise, for unlike the proclamation of the gospel, such a public discourse does not aim at the unity of God’s work. Values do not belong to the *notae ecclesiae* in the sense of word and sacrament but in the sense of ‘marks of the Christian life,’ and as such they address every Christian, not just ordained ministers. However, their expertise in ‘unity in reconciled diversity’ can offer a model for every Christian who is called to contribute to the societal task of generalizing values. It will require of Lutherans to engage with the modern values of secularization, individualization, and pluralism on the one hand, but engaging with the controversies about them will also open up opportunities for Lutherans to detect their religious values anew.

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45. The phrase “unity in reconciled diversity” is widely considered to originate in the 4th General Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Dar es Salaam (1977).

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