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AUGUSTANA VII: THE CHURCH AND FELLOWSHIP

by Albert B. Collver III

“Our churches teach that one holy Church is to remain forever. The Church is the congregation of saints [Psalm 149:1] in which the Gospel is purely taught and the Sacraments are correctly administered. For the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree about the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments.”¹ — Article VII of the Augsburg Confession

THE 1530 AUGSBURG CONFESSION brought the Reformation to the world in multiple ways. Here, we want to see how in particular Article VII of the Augsburg Confession brought the Reformation to the world. Prior to the Augsburg Confession, Article VII, the Church confessed in the Apostles’ Creed, “I believe in the holy Catholic Church,”² and in the Nicene Creed, “[We believe] in one holy catholic and apostolic church.”

³The German translation of the creed renders “catholic” as “Christian.” Apart from the creeds, no specific confession or doctrinal loci existed on the Church until the Augsburg Confession (AC), Article VII. ⁴The Augsburg Confession brought a definition of the Church to the world, to which, at least in some ways, the Western church has been commenting or reacting

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ever since. At the heart of Augustana VII’s definition of the Church is the Gospel. Most recent discussions on AC VII have focused on what the confessors meant by the Gospel. This has far-reaching implications both for the definition of the Church and for church fellowship. Is the Gospel narrowly defined to mean “the forgiveness of sins” or does the Gospel mean “all articles of Christian doctrine that are revealed in the Holy Scriptures”?⁵ The

answer to this question divides the ecumenical world and gives a basis for understanding the division certain ethical positions have caused within the Church today.

Hermann Sasse observed that from around 1830, “a generation was captivated by the question of the church and experienced a living interest in the church.”⁶ Sasse connects the beginning of the ecumenical movement to “the collapse of the churchless Enlightenment and in view of the increasing urgency of the social needs of a modern world, all Christendom began to weigh anew the question concerning the essence and the reality of the one church of God.”⁷ The captivation over the question of the Church, beginning in the 19th century, continued through the ecumenical movement of the 20th century and into the 21st century, where people are asking what the Church looks like in a post-denominational era. In the present era, a force similar to the

ecumenical movement to “the collapse of the churchless Enlightenment and in view of the increasing urgency of the social needs of a modern world, all Christendom began to weigh anew the question concerning the essence and the reality of the one church of God.”⁷ The captivation over the question of the Church, beginning in the 19th century, continued through the ecumenical movement of the 20th century and into the 21st century, where people are asking what the Church looks like in a post-denominational era. In the present era, a force similar to the

¹ Paul Timothy McCain, ed., *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), 34.

² “Credo ... sanctam ecclesiam catholicam.” *Triglotta*, 30.

³ “εις μίαν ἁγίαν καθολικὴν καὶ ἀποστολικὴν ἐκκλησίαν.” “The Nicene Creed — Agreed at the Council of Constantinople in 381.” Early Church Texts. Accessed September 20, 2015. http://www.earlychurchtexts.com/public/nicene_creed.htm.

⁴ Werner Elert, “Die Kirche,” in *Der Christliche Glaube: Grundlinien Der Lutherischen Dogmatik* (Hamburg: Furche-Verlag, 1956), 397. “Die System der mittelalterlichen Theologie kennen keinen besonderen Abschnitt von der Kirche. Aber die mannigfachen Kundgebungen der Päpste wie ihrer Gegner beweisen ebenso wie die von den Systematikern den Dogmen der Kirche beigelegte Autorität, daß über dem Ganzen der Geist Augustins schwebte... Auch Melanchthons Loci von 1521 kennen noch keine Lehre von der Kirche.”

⁵ Francis Pieper, “On Unity in the Faith 1888,” in *At Home in the House of My Fathers*, trans. Matthew C. Harrison (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 572.

⁶ Hermann Sasse, “The Question of the Church’s Unity on the Mission Field,” in *The Lonely Way: Selected Essays and Letters* (1941-1976), 2:179–195. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), Kindle location: 4940.

⁷ Hermann Sasse, “On the Problem of the Union of Lutheran Churches,” in *Letters to Lutheran Pastors, Volume 1: 1948–1951*, ed. Matthew Harrison, trans. E. Reim (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), Kindle Location: 5038.

churchless Enlightenment, the rise of neo-paganism and godlessness in society, drives a desire for unity among the churches.

The 20th century increased the pressure to unite the churches. Werner Elert, reflecting on this pressure, said, “It is proclaimed in hundreds of different variations that the greatest sin of Christianity is to split churches. To resist the unity of all the churches that is being called for means to resist the will of God. Confessional segregation is as opposed to the unification of churches as sin is to good works.”⁸ This desire for unification drove the union in Germany and later in North America.

Dr. Conrad Bergendoff, a notable Lutheran in 20th century North America, stated, “It may appear tautological to say that unity in the church will be achieved if we could agree on the nature of the church.”⁹ The way to agree on the nature of the Church is to agree on the Gospel. Dr. Frederick Mayer noted, “Fundamentally one’s ideas about the church are determined by one’s position toward the Gospel.”¹⁰ This is particularly true when considering what the “doctrine of the Gospel” means in AC VII. Simply put, the Gospel shapes ecclesiology and ecclesiology shapes the Gospel. An incorrect understanding of the Gospel will cause a malformed or distorted the image of the Church. An incorrect understanding of the Church will lead to a different definition or different image of the Gospel.

These sorts of relationships in theology have other parallels. For instance, a Nestorian doctrine of Christ, that is, a doctrine of Christ that separates the natures, produces a Pelagian anthropology in the doctrine of man. These relationships form a hermeneutical circle, where one input produces an output that further feeds the input. A reductionist Gospel produces a reductionist church, whereby the bar or standard for church fellowship is lower. This is why unionism, either by force or desire, of churches with different confessions reduces the definition or understanding of the Gospel to the lowest levels. Ultimately, “where the confession of the Reformation falls, as always,

the *sola Scriptura* falls as well.”¹¹ When the Church falls away from the Reformation confession of the Church, the teaching that the Scripture is the inspired, inerrant Word of God also falls. This explains what has happened in so many church bodies that now teach doctrines and ethical positions such as same-sex marriage that would have been unthinkable to their forefathers.

Hermann Sasse explains the relationship between doctrinal loci in this way:

The article of justification cannot be rightly taught where the great articles of the Apostles’ and the Nicene Creed are not kept. The denial of the Virgin Birth leads to a false doctrine of the incarnation. A false doctrine of the incarnation leads to a false understanding of justification and of the sacraments. Thus the article of the standing and the falling Church keeps together all articles of the Christian faith and illuminates them. For Lutherans the consensus required should always be regarded as the doctrinal content of the Book of Concord.¹²

Any reduction or alteration to this view of the “doctrine of the Gospel” results in a different understanding of the Church, for the Church is the place where the “Gospel” is found.

During the past century and a half, four primary interpretations of AC VII’s “doctrine of the Gospel” (*doctrina evangelii*) have emerged.

Each of these four interpretations of the “doctrine of the Gospel” affects the shape and understanding of the Church, and consequently, the standard for church fellowship. If the Gospel is compromised, the Church will be compromised. If the Church becomes compromised, over time the Gospel also becomes compromised. Dr. Roland Ziegler summarizes these four interpretations:¹³

1. Emphasis on the “Gospel” and not on “doctrine.” The “doctrine of the Gospel” does not mean unity in teachings or in the Lutheran Confessions. Ziegler identifies Albrecht Ritschl as developing this model:

From the cross, Jesus spoke, “It is finished.” All the sins of the world were atoned for. Salvation had been accomplished, the work was finished.

⁸ Werner Elert, “Ecclesia Militans Three Chapters on the Church and Its Constitution,” trans. Karl Böhmer, *Logia* 20:4 (2011), 31.

⁹ Conrad Bergendoff, “The True Unity of the Church,” *The Lutheran Church Quarterly* 12:3 (1939), 266.

¹⁰ F. E. Mayer, “Voice of Augustana VII on the Church,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 34: 3 (March 1963), 135.

¹¹ Hermann Sasse, “On the Problem of the Union of Lutheran Churches,” Kindle location: 5276.

¹² Hermann Sasse, “Theses on the Seventh Article of the Augsburg Confession,” *The Springfielder* 25:3 (1961), 16.

¹³ Roland F. Ziegler, “Doctrinal Unity and Church Fellowship,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 78:3–4 (2014), 59–79.

For Ritschl, AC VII does not mean that agreement in all the articles of the Augsburg Confession is necessary for the true unity of the church. Ritschl wants to emphasize *doctrina evangelii*, not *doctrina evangelii*. For him, the confession and the word of God are not to be equated. Confession is a human product; the word of God is the power of God. The word of God is not identical with human knowledge of it.¹⁴

Ritschl argued against the Confessional Lutherans of his day in the 19th century, such as Theodosius Harnack, who believed doctrinal agreement was necessary for fellowship. Harnack writes, “It is the essence of the Lutheran church to be a church of the Confession, and based on the Word of God, to be the church of the scriptural confession.”¹⁵ The problem of the union prompted much discussion in German lands over the nature of the Church and what was necessary to bring the churches together. Eventually, the arguments for joining Lutheran churches together made their way to North America and finally around the world.

2. The second school of thought on the meaning of AC VII sees the necessity of a doctrinal consensus, not just an agreement in the preaching of the gospel, but restricts it to a consensus on what the gospel (in the narrow sense) and the sacraments are. This is the interpretation and the ecumenical model that was first proposed by some theologians of the Prussian union and much later by the Leuenberg Agreement (1973), by which the churches that subscribed to it entered into full church fellowship.¹⁶

Mauer’s interpretation in commentary on the Augsburg Confession seems representative of Leuenberg Agreement when he writes on the Gospel, “The heart of this doctrine does not refer to Christ’s rules about what

we should do and permit; it refers to the gospel with its promise of grace.”¹⁷ His view on the Sacraments also seems representative when he says, “In addition to the pure Word, to ‘administer the holy sacraments in accordance with the gospel’ is a constitutive sign of the one holy church. In this case, therefore, it is a matter not of a formulation of doctrine but of a proper administration of baptism and the Lord’s Supper as they were instituted.”¹⁸ He concludes his section on AC VII by saying, “The unity of the body of Christ rests on the faith of those who accept the gospel and the sacraments; this bond of faith cannot be broken.”¹⁹

3. “A third interpretation of AC VII states that the required consensus consists in ‘recognizing the Holy Scriptures as the norm and standard of teaching and in regarding the Lutheran Confessions as the correct exposition of the Scriptures — that much and not more.’ This

means that other questions that are not addressed in the confession should not be divisive.”²⁰

4. “A fourth understanding of AC VII is that the consensus necessary for the unity of the church consists in everything that the Scriptures teach.”²¹ Francis Pieper of the Missouri Synod proposed this approach in his essay, “On the Unity of the Church,” where he connects AC VII and FC SD X. Pieper writes, “By unity in the faith we understand the agreement in all articles of the Christian doctrine revealed in Holy Scripture.”²²

The approach taken in the interpretation of AC VII will determine how much agreement is needed for church fellowship. Although the *satis est* of AC VII was discussed a great deal in the 19th and mid-20th centuries, the question seems settled for many Lutheran communions, either because it was decided by their predecessors or because it

The Augsburg Confession was written under the very real threat and possibility that those who confessed would be wiped out of existence. In the midst of this threat, AC VII clung to the promise that “one holy church is to remain forever.”

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁵ Theodosius Harnack, *Die Kirche, Ihr Amt, Ihr Regiment* (Nürnberg: Bertelsmann, 1862), 88. “*Es ist der lutherischen Kirche wesentlich, Kirche des Bekenntnisses zu sein, und sie ist sich dessen aus Gottes Wort gewiß, die Kirche des schriftmäßigen Bekenntnisses zu sein.*”

¹⁶ Ziegler, 63.

¹⁷ Wilhelm Maurer, “The Church and Its Sacraments,” in *Historical Commentary on the Augsburg Confession*, trans. H. George Anderson. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 385.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 387.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 388.

²⁰ Ziegler, 64–65.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Pieper, 572.

was inherited by a church body through the mission work done during this period. For example, Gustav Aulén said, “The unity of the Christian church is not a uniformity in doctrine. The Gospel is the unifying factor for the church, but it is not a finally formulated, doctrinal authority.”²³ This view would influence some of the Swedish mission work in places such as Africa. The large African churches, such as those found in Tanzania and Ethiopia, were the products of mergers and unions of the various mission efforts begun by the Scandinavians and Germans of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These churches often uncritically accepted the approach toward fellowship left to them by the missionaries.

The position that the *satis est*, that the unity of the Church consists in everything that the Scripture teaches, is frequently tied to FC SD X, 31, which says there can be differences in ceremonies “as long as they are otherwise agreed with one another in the doctrine and all its articles, and also in the right use of the holy Sacraments.”²⁴ For historical reasons not every Lutheran church has subscribed to the Formula of Concord. In and of itself, this is not a problem so long as its teachings are not rejected, as the Formula of Concord sees itself as an interpretation of the Augsburg Confession, not something in addition to the Augsburg Confession. At the very least, it would not seem that the Augsburg Confession would understand AC VII as agreeing with less than is contained in the other articles of the Augsburg Confession. Thus, it would seem that the agreement in the doctrine of the Gospel and the Sacraments would have to accord with what the Augsburg Confession says about the Gospel in AC IV, V and VI, and what it says about the Sacraments in AC IX (Baptism), X (the Lord’s Supper) and XI (Confession). This would seem to eliminate the possibilities of the first and second interpretations outlined above, which limit agreement to where the Gospel, that is, the forgiveness of sins, is preached despite other possible errors or disagreement in doctrine, and to where the sacraments, that is, where Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are carried out even if they are carried out in a symbolic way or in a way that denies baptismal regeneration or the

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empty.

presence of Christ’s body and blood in the Lord’s Supper.

The 2014 publication of the Lutheran World Federation, *Communion: On Being the Church*, brings together the first, second and third interpretation mentioned above regarding Augsburg Confession VII. This document is the report of the dialogs between the Lutheran World Federation and the World Communion of Reformed Churches. It builds upon the Leuenberg Agreement of 1973. The publication is intended for the preparation of the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, and it laments the divisions that the Reformation caused between the Lutheran churches and the Reformed churches.²⁵ The document states that matters that were once dividing are no longer dividing

with new articulations and understandings. The document states, “For instance, we no longer regard our distinct insights into the way in which Christ is present in the Lord’s Supper or the operation of God’s grace in predestination as divisive; there is no longer any need for our continued separation. We

celebrate that in many parts of the world Lutheran and Reformed churches live in communion with one another while churches in many other locations are also moving in this direction.”²⁶ Differences in teaching on the Lord’s Supper or predestination are not church dividing. What is important is that the Sacraments take place in both churches.

Communion: On Being the Church also provides a definition of the Church. “The church is wherever the marks of baptism, the Lord’s Supper and true preaching are. Christ is its only head. For the unity of the church to be visible, certain structures are required; these, however, are not a matter of divine right (*iure divino*). Wherever the gospel is preached, all who take part in this office are equal and no special office such as the magisterium or a

²³ Gustaf Aulén, *The Faith of the Christian Church* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1948), 341.

²⁴ Paul Timothy McCain, ed., *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), 602.

²⁵ *Communion: On Being the Church* (Geneva, Switzerland: The Lutheran World Federation, World Communion of Reformed Churches, 2014), 5. “This Commission has done its work as our communions prepare to celebrate the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation. We have found much to celebrate in our common legacy. Nevertheless, as we approach half a millennium, we recognize that our Reformation history has also had inadvertent consequences. Frequently we have formed divisive habits in the face of difference, disagreement or difficulty and have been content to live apart. Even within our two communities we have been divided.”

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

particular hierarchy are required.²⁷ The language sounds similar to Augsburg Confession, Article VII. The Church is wherever the marks of preaching the Gospel, Baptism and the Lord's Supper are. Any church that preaches the Gospel, administers Baptism and the Lord's Supper under this definition can and should be in fellowship with each other.

Communion: On Being Church also offers guidelines for church Communion. It says, "Unity in Word and sacrament is based on agreement on the understanding of the gospel. This agreement begins with the common understanding of the gospel as the message of God's justifying action in Christ through the Holy Spirit. If this is achieved, then churches, previously separated, recognize in one another the true preaching of the gospel and the true celebration of the sacraments of the one church of Jesus Christ."²⁸ Note Communion can be achieved if there is agreement in the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. As long as those activities go on in the various churches but not necessarily agreement in all their doctrinal points, it is enough for fellowship.

Communion: On Being the Church also includes the third interpretation discussed above, namely that the Holy Scriptures are the norm and standard of teaching. The document says, "Holy Scripture is the decisive source of criteria for the life, work, faith and order of the communion of believers, which is the church ('the rule that rules' *norma normans*)."²⁹ The document further defines what it means in saying the Holy Scripture is the standard of life, work and faith. "Holy Scripture shall be read, heard, interpreted and applied at every time and in every context and for each time and each context anew."³⁰ Note the Holy Scripture must be interpreted and applied "for each time and each context anew." It becomes nearly impossible to say "thus says the Lord" for all time, because each time and context requires a new interpretation. Thus, an interpretation appropriate to the time and context of Europe and North America in the 21st century might be different from an interpretation for Africa or Asia in the 21st century. It might allow the blessing of a same-sex marriage in Europe and North America, while at the same time due to the context found in Africa or Asia only allow the blessing of a marriage between a man and a woman. According

to *Communion: On Being the Church*, such differences would not necessarily be church dividing since the Gospel is being proclaimed and the Sacraments are being administered. Not only do differences in doctrine cease to be divisive but also differences in the ethical application of the Scriptures. The document states, "Christian doctrine and ethics seek to articulate the gospel of Jesus Christ in and for a given context."³¹ The context drives the understanding of the Gospel and the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures.

If the Holy Scriptures are to be interpreted within the time and context in which they are read, so too, must a church's confessional documents. *Communion: On Being the Church* also provides an understanding for the Lutheran and Reformed confessional documents. It says, "Confessional writings witness to collective interpretations of the Bible at specific moments in the history of the church. They convey the gospel of Jesus Christ under specific theological, historical, sociological and economic conditions."³² According to *Communion: On Being the Church*, the confessional documents in the Book of Concord are an interpretation of the Holy Scriptures at a given moment in history. This interpretation or expression of doctrine need not be agreed with today even if the Confessions are accepted by a given church. The guiding principle for interpreting a church's confessional writings is the Gospel. The document states, "Insofar as confessional writings convey the gospel of Jesus Christ under specific conditions, their authority is rooted in and as a consequence of Holy Scripture. Therefore, the nature of the authority of confessional writings is essentially mediated." The keyword here is "insofar as." "Insofar as the confessional writings convey the gospel of Jesus Christ" they convey the authority of the Scriptures. As one's interpretation of the Gospel or contextualized Gospel for a time and place changes, so too does the authority of the confessional writing. Thus, the doctrine confessed by a confessional writing is mediated or limited by the current or present contextual understanding of the Gospel. Former doctrinal differences evaporate under a common understanding of the Gospel. "If one understands the mark of the church, 'preaching the Gospel,' only in the narrow sense, then some doctrines could be eliminated from the basis of church union, thus resulting in an

²⁷ Ibid., 7.

²⁸ Ibid., 35–36.

²⁹ Ibid., 39.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 40.

³² Ibid.

arbitrary decision on the part of man as to which doctrines are essential for such union.”³³

The Lutheran World Federation’s *Communion: On Being the Church* is the culmination of more than a century of thought on how to interpret Augsburg Confession VII, beginning in the 19th century through the beginning of the 21st century. It allows for fellowship to be established among Lutherans with different doctrinal understandings, as well as with Reformed churches, so long as the Gospel is proclaimed and the Sacraments are administered. *Communion: On Being the Church*, along with *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, seem to indicate that the Reformation in 2017 will be the first so-called ecumenical Reformation celebration with the Lutherans and Reformed celebrating in the common Gospel and administration of the sacraments, and with Rome in a common understanding of the Gospel found in justification.

Where does this leave the churches of the International Lutheran Council (ILC)? This past year, the churches of the ILC have held two major conferences on the Reformation. The first was held in May 2015 in Wittenberg, Germany, with the theme, “Celebrating the Reformation Rightly.” The second is this conference in September 2015 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, with the theme, “Bringing the Reformation to the World.” What Reformation are we bringing to the world? The difference in approach between the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the ILC was reflected in the LWF’s greetings to the ILC for this conference by Dr. Martin Junge. He writes, “Yet, as I reflected deeper on the theme of your conference I could also detect that we seem to have different approaches between the LWF and the ILC — not really a surprise, isn’t it? Because while we in the LWF pledged to emphasize that ‘Reformation is a global citizen today,’ thereby underlining that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is today read, understood, lived out and proclaimed according to the Lutheran confessions all over the world, ILC seems to see this as a reality that lays ahead of us and requires our work.”³⁴

The difference in approaches to celebrating the Reformation between the LWF and the ILC comes down


to an understanding of the Gospel and what is enough (*satis est*) for fellowship. The two have a different understanding of what the Church is. The recognition of differences should not cause us sadness, for where differences can be recognized honestly, there is hope that dialog can be fruitful. This is, in fact, how the ecumenical movement began, by discussing differences with honesty and integrity. The recognition of differences is an opportunity to confess.

The recognition of differences has provided the ILC and the member churches a tremendous opportunity to bear witness to the Reformation understanding of the doctrine of the Gospel and to the Church which proclaims that Gospel. The seeking of unity and fellowship on the basis of doctrinal agreement is hard work. In fact, it is not a good work of the Church or even a work that the Church can do on her own. Rather, it is a gift of God that flows from the Gospel of Jesus. Unity and fellowship are not made; they are recognized by the Church. It is recognized in the pure preaching of the Gospel, that is, agreement in every doctrine the Scripture teaches and in the administration of the Sacraments. Where this occurs the Church is found and fellowship should be recognized, no matter how small or how large the church is. Both large and small churches are drawn to the voice of their Shepherd, Jesus. Where the voice of Jesus is heard, the Church will gather.

As the voice of the Scriptures and the confession of the Church become weaker and less clear in some places, now is the time for the ILC and the member churches to give a bold witness and proclamation to the world. Now is the time to speak clearly, but with kindness and genuine concern, the truths of the Scriptures with the full force of the Law that condemns the sinner and with the full comfort of the Gospel that delivers forgiveness to the troubled conscience. Now is the time to speak clearly regarding sexual ethics, marriage and the family. In the West, a cloud of darkness has overshadowed society and has even in some cases made the Church’s message indistinguishable from what is heard outside the Church. In some places, new persecution arises, or the threat of persecution, for those who speak against the trends in society. Now is the time for bold confession and an exchange of gifts the Lord has given the churches in the West and to the global South. The mutual encouragement of the brethren will benefit both and help continue the pure proclamation of the Gospel around the world.

³³ A. Aijal Uppala, “‘Is It Enough’ — ‘Satis Est,’” trans. Gerald Hoenecke, *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* XLIV (1968). <http://www.wlsessays.net/node/1488>, 10.

³⁴ Martin Junge, “Greetings from the Lutheran World Federation to the 25th Conference of the International Lutheran Council” Geneva, Switzerland: Lutheran World Federation, 2015.



The Church always has been under the cross of one sort or another since the day of Pentecost. Yet it is from the cross that the Lord delivered salvation. From the cross, Jesus spoke, “It is finished.” All the sins of the world were atoned for. Salvation had been accomplished, the work was finished. The Augsburg Confession was written under the very real threat and possibility that those who confessed would be wiped out of existence. In the midst of this threat, AC VII clung to the promise that “one holy church is to remain forever.” The Church that confesses the doctrine of the Gospel will remain. Although our efforts seem weak and ineffective, although the ILC appears small and insignificant at times, now is our moment to bear witness and to confess, for the Word of the Lord does not return empty. Where everything the Scripture teaches is proclaimed, the Church of Christ stands. Christ promises His Church will endure forever. This is how we bring the Reformation to the world.

The Rev. Dr. Albert B. Collver III is LCMS director of Church Relations and assistant to President Matthew C. Harrison.