

At the August 1990 meeting of ELCA Teaching Theologians, Gerhard Forde and Michael Root each gave addresses on the ecumenical implications of *satis est* in CA VII.

That fall ELCA staff (William Rusch) sent the Forde and Root papers to the Standing Committee on Ecumenism. In addition, ELCA staff sent a privately solicited postscript (attached below) by Michael Root to Forde's paper.

Upon learning of this postscript, Forde wrote to the Committee (attached below), pointing out that Root's postscript was simply an *ad hominem* dismissal of the real issues.

(In Root's postscript, third paragraph, fourth line: The word "monates" is computer jargon for isolated items.)

## Root:

It may be useful as a postscript to note where I think the issue lies between Professor Forde and myself. The issue is not Melanchthonian pietism; I have little sympathy with Melanchthon on free will, although I think we need to get beyond using Melanchthon and pietism as undifferentiated pejorative labels. The issue is not that our sole righteousness before God is that of Christ ours through Faith alone, which I agree is the heart of the Reformation understanding of justification. The issue is not directly the advisability of any particular church order, which is not directly at stake in what is being said. Nor is the issue that the existence and unity of the church is a gift of grace through the gospel, which we both affirm.

The issue is what the gospel or, better put, Christ through the gospel, does in creating the church. I am convinced, and I am convinced that I have the New Testament and the Reformers on my side, that the gospel creates a community, a community as a real, existing within history fellowship or communion called together by word and sacrament. In word and sacrament, and, as Luther says on other occasions, in a number of other signs, this church is visible, even though no institution of this community is to be simply identified with the community of true saints. Essential for the unity of this community is agreement in word and sacrament, but that agreement is itself paradigmatically an historical reality and, more fundamentally, it is agreement in a gospel which is oriented to the creation of fellowship. If the gospel is oriented to real, historically existing community, then agreement on the gospel is the sufficient center of the fellowship it creates, but cannot be rightly understood if it is isolated from the fellowship it creates. Thus, what Professor Forde sneers at as a theological and sociological mish-mash in the description of full communion in the ELCA Ecumenism Statement is rightly enough a description of what agreement in gospel and sacraments concretely looks like as the center of agreement in really existing churches.

What I miss in Professor Forde's presentation is any sense that the gospel actually creates a community that can be called the Body of Christ. I can find in his presentation only a series of discrete monates of gospel proclamation which is then placed in opposition to any really existing human community. But without such a sense that the gospel creates community I do not think the satis est clause, or for that matter, the unity of the church, can be rightly interpreted.

## Forde:

I will assume, for charity's sake, that it was due simply to administrative oversight that I was not accorded the privilege similar to that of Mr. Root either of being informed (or asked, for that matter) about the presentation of my paper to the Committee on Ecumenical Affairs or to provide a postscript. So to serve the integrity of theological conversation in the church--which seems to come at great premium these days--I somewhat hastily volunteer the following.

The issue in this instance is simply what the satis est of the Augsburg Confession, Article 7, means and to what it obligates those who confess it. Does the satis est propose a limit to what can be demanded as necessary to the true unity of the church or does it not? My contention is that the history leading up to the confession, the manifest intention of its authors and subscribers, and the appropriate interpretation of it, lead unmistakably to the conclusion that they intended to fix just such a limit. I have repeatedly proposed historical, hermeneutical, and theological arguments to make that case.

Most depressing and disappointing is the persistent refusal directly to engage the central historical and theological arguments. Instead one picks up only counterfeit arguments, diversionary tactics, smoke screens, and various attempts to discredit opposition: ad hominem arguments; innuendo; regional, ethnic, and other sorts of insults ("upper midwest virus," insular Scandinavian pietism, mainline Protestantism, denominationalism, ignorance of seminary faculties in ecumenical affairs, chagrin of faculties--particularly mine--at having lost the hegemony it once had, and Lord knows what all). Yes we have heard them all and it won't do. Continuance of such nonsense does not bode well for the ELCA. Patience is wearing thin.

Mr. Root's argument is at least more respectable in that it attempts some theological assessment. However, it is largely another diversionary tactic. Now the problem seems to be that Forde has a faulty ecclesiology! Even if true, it would be quite irrelevant. The issue is not Forde's--or for that matter Root's--ecclesiology. (If you want a lecture on my ecclesiology I would be happy to oblige!) The issue is what the satis est constrains us to hold vis a vis demands coming from various sides in the oikumene that we must pay this or that price for what is now called "full communion." What the smoke screen hides seems to be the fact that satis est is really to be by-passed and rendered "inoperative." I have heard it said that some high-placed persons among us have opined that the satis est must simply be surrendered if we want to get anywhere ecumenically. Such a position at least has the virtue of honesty. If that is what proponents of "full communion" actually think, well and good. But then what we must have is straight-forward and clean argument about whether the Augsburg Confession is actually to be our confession on these matters any more. And then one had best consider whether the gospel is to be the price we pay for such ecumenism. That is where the issue lies.

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