

# What Church Do You Mean?

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“Thank God, a child seven years old knows what the Church is, namely, the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd. For the children pray thus: *I believe in one holy Christian Church.*”<sup>i</sup>

With this quotation from Luther’s Smalcald Articles Heinrich Bornkamm introduces the chapter entitled “What Is the Church?” in his book, *Luther’s World of Thought*. “It cannot be denied,” Bornkamm adds, “that theological research has always viewed this seven-year old child with some envy or perhaps with a bit of doubt.”<sup>ii</sup>

Bornkamm’s wry comment is substantiated in part by the voluminous body of literature that has been produced on the subject of the Church and that so often stands in striking contrast to the simplicity of Luther’s definition of the Church. The underlying reason why theologians so frequently have become lost in a vast and trackless wilderness of words is not that it is actually so difficult to determine from Scripture what the Church is. The difficulty arises because the doctrine of the Church is, as is every doctrine of the Holy Scriptures, an *article of faith*.

Foolish human reason, which casts its captivating spell on all of us inasmuch as we are sinners by nature, is never content to let the doctrines of Scripture stand. They are addressed to faith. They can be apprehended only by faith. But reason wants to grasp, it wants to master, yes, it wants to establish doctrine. Reason is not content to walk by faith. It wants to walk by sight. It insists on seeing now. It is not content to wait for the life to come when we will no longer know in part but will know even as also we are known (I Cor. 13:12).

In the seven-year old child reason has not yet come into its own. It does not yet exercise the dominating role it seeks to play as the child matures. Because of their unquestioning faith Jesus calls little children the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. He holds them up as an example for us all. “Except ye be converted, and become as little children,” He says, “ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3).

We wish to emphasize at the very outset of our discussion that the doctrine of the Church is an article of faith in order that we may be content to let Scripture speak. In this doctrine, as in every other article of our most holy faith, it is not only folly but rank disobedience and sin if we add to God’s inspired Word or subtract from it.

Reason, indeed, would tempt us to do violence to the Word in one direction or the other, if not in both. Because of the *opinio legis* of the Old Adam, reason in the Christian too ever seeks to transform the Gospel of the glorious liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free into a new law, into a legal code, into a stringent set of rules and regulations, statutes and ordinances. How vital it is for us, therefore, in discussing this doctrine, too, to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (II Cor. 10:5).

We have been asked to pick up the discussion which was begun last year when this Free Conference devoted itself to the subject, “The Holy Christian Church and True Ecumenicity.” Our assigned topic, “What Church Do You Mean,” actually raises the question; What is the “church” to which Jesus committed the Ministry of the Keys? Did He give the Keys to the Holy Christian Church so that every individual believer possesses them, or did He give them only to one specific functioning form of the Church, the local congregation?

The Program Committee has asked us to study three points in particular. Our discussion will, therefore, be divided into these three parts:

- I. The “Church” in the New Testament;
- II. The “Church” in Luther’s Theology;
- III. The “Church” in the Lutheran Confessions.

## I. The “Church” in the New Testament

The Greek word *Ecclesia* is used some 115 times in the New Testament. It is a common word also in secular Greek. It denotes an assembly of people. In Athens the *Ekklesia* was an assembly of the *Demos*, the body of citizens. *Ekklesia* is derived from *Ekkalein*, to call out. According to K. L. Schmidt, “The etymology is both simple and significant. The citizens are the *Ekkletoi*, i.e., those who are summoned and called together by the herald.” He adds, “This teaches us something concerning the biblical and Christian usage, namely, that God in Christ calls men out of the world.”<sup>iii</sup>

*Ekklesia* is used in this secular sense in the New Testament itself. In Acts 19 Luke uses it three times in the account of the riot incited against Paul at Ephesus by the silversmith, Demetrius. The mob which came together is called an *ekklesia*, a gathering of people, an assembly (Acts 19:33,39,41).

In the Septuagint *ekklesia* occurs about 100 times. Here it almost always represents the Hebrew word *gahal*, which means an assembly or convocation of the people. Quoting Schmidt again, “In the LXX *ekklesia* is a wholly secular term; it means ‘assembly,’ whether in the sense of assembling or of those assembled...Only the addition *kyriou* makes it plain that the *ekklesia* is the people or congregation of God.”<sup>iv</sup>

We find Stephen using the word in a wholly analogous way when he refers to the people of Israel as “the church (*ekklesia*) in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38). Gradually, however, the word *synagoge* replaced *ekklesia* in this sense in ordinary usage (e.g., Acts 13:43).

Closely related to the root meaning of *ekklesia* is its use in the New Testament to designate the assembling of Christians for worship.

In I Corinthians 11:18, for example, Paul says, “When ye come together in the *church*, I hear that there be divisions among you.” The context shows that Paul is here speaking of the coming together of the Corinthian Christians to celebrate the Lord’s Supper. Prof. J. P. Meyer’s observation is entirely correct, “‘Assembly’ is the original meaning of *ekklesia*, and the word never seems to have lost that meaning completely.”<sup>v</sup>

### Matthew 16:13-20

The first time the word *ekklesia* appears in the New Testament it is used by Jesus in the familiar passage in Matthew 16:18, “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

What does Jesus here mean by *mou ten ekklesian*, “my church”? A clear understanding of what the Savior Himself means ought to be of considerable help to us in understanding what His apostles mean when they use the word *ekklesia*.

In the wider context we find the Pharisees and Sadducees demanding that Jesus give them a sign from heaven as proof of His claim that He had come from God. They made this demand in the face of the many signs which Jesus had already given them. Just a short time before He had fed four thousand men, besides women and children, by miraculously multiplying seven loaves of bread and a few small fish. Nevertheless, the Pharisees and Sadducees obstinately, yes, maliciously refused to believe in Jesus. Their opposition and enmity were the products of blind and stubborn unbelief. Most earnestly Jesus warned His disciples against the leaven, the soul-destroying doctrine, of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Now, when Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He set about strengthening His disciples in the conviction that He was indeed the Christ, the promised Messiah. He began by asking, “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” (v. 13). They replied, “Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets” (v. 14). Then, in order to induce His disciples to search their own hearts, Jesus asked the probing question, “But whom say ye that I am?” (v. 15).

This was a question directed to all of them. It was, so to speak, an examination at the end of a certain period of their training at Jesus’ feet. How thoroughly Jesus had prepared them for this examination! They had been eyewitnesses of a truly astonishing array of signs by which Jesus attested His divine power and authority. They had heard Jesus point the disciples of John the Baptist to these signs as proof that He was in truth the

Servant of the Lord whose coming Isaiah had foretold; “The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them” (Matt. 11:5).

Voicing the unanimous conviction of the entire little circle of Jesus’ followers, Simon Peter, their spokesman, now made the forthright confession, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (v. 16). What a clear and unequivocal confession this was of Peter’s faith that Jesus of Nazareth was the very Son of God, the promised Messiah for whom God’s people had waited so long! In what striking contrast Peter’s firm conviction stands to the uncertain surmisings of the Jewish populace and the outright unbelief of the religious authorities of the day! Peter does not pussy-foot. Peter does not attempt to formulate a diplomatic reply that will leave room for a strategic retreat later. A straightforward, rock-like faith marks the impulsive, unhewn man to whom Jesus had given the name Peter, the Rock, or Cephas in his native Aramaic tongue. True, that faith had not yet been tried by fire. There was still room for growth. But the faith to which Peter gave expression would bring untold, eternal blessings to him and all others who shared his conviction. “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona,” Jesus declares (v. 17).

At the same time, however, Jesus pointedly reminds Peter that this faith is not the product of his own natural powers. It is a gift of God. Flesh and blood did not reveal the truth to Peter that Jesus was the Christ. The Father in heaven gave him this faith.

Now Jesus adds an important truth. He introduces it by drawing attention to Himself as the speaker. He uses the personal pronoun “I” which is not employed with a Greek verb unless special emphasis is to be laid on the person of the speaker. The force of Jesus’ words is, therefore, something like this. “And I, the Son of the living God, as you have just confessed, also say to you, You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church.”

Jesus here makes a play on the word “rock” He uses two similar yet different words. The first, *petros*, is a masculine form. It is the proper name, “Peter.” When used as a common noun, it means a large stone, a rock, a boulder. The second word, *petra*, is a feminine form. It means a rocky ledge. *Petra* is an integral part of the earth’s surface. It is solid bedrock of the kind which builders seek out when they want to erect a building on a firm foundation.

Jesus, we see, is a builder. “I will build my *ekklesia*,” He says. We need to take note of the possessive pronoun, “my.” The *ekklesia* belongs to Him. He is its Builder or Creator. Scripture frequently speaks of it as a house or a temple (I Tim. 3:15, Eph. 2:19-22).

To get at the meaning of *ekklesia* we need to be clear on what the *petra*, the solid footing, is on which Jesus builds it. From the fact that He uses two different words for “rock” we see that He wishes to distinguish between the person of Peter and the *petra* on which He builds His Church. Jesus does not say: Upon you, Peter, I will build my Church. What an unstable foundation for Christ’s Church the person of a weak and sinful human being like Peter would have been! Think, for example, of how Jesus had to rebuke Peter just a short time later when he permitted Satan to use him as a tool in tempting Christ (Matt. 16:21-23)! Think of Peter’s foolish and fleshly attempt to defend Jesus at His arrest (John 18:10), of his shameful denial (Matt. 26:69ff.), of his dissimulation at Antioch (Gal. 2:11ff.)! No, Jesus did not build His Church on the man, Peter.

Scripture interprets Scripture. Turning to Peter’s First Epistle, chapter two, we see how Peter himself understood these words of Jesus. He reminds the believers to whom he is writing of how the Lord has placed them as living stones into the spiritual house He is building: “To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house” (I Pet. 2:4,5). Peter speaks in these words both of Christ and of those who believe in Him as “living stones,” using this time the Greek word *Lithos*. He draws his readers’ attention to several Old Testament prophecies which refer to Christ as the rock or stone chosen by God to be the foundation and corner stone of His Church (Is. 28:16; Ps. 118:22).

Paul, also, in writing to the Corinthians about the foundation on which the Church is built, says, “Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (I Cor. 3:11).

Luther is, therefore, on solid exegetical ground when he says of Matthew 16, “One must understand then that Peter is here called a rock, and Christ also. For Christ is the whole rock, Peter a part of the rock....Therefore He here calls Peter a rock also because he stands on the Rock and through Him also becomes a rock.”<sup>vi</sup>

Thus, Christ builds His Church by bringing one believer after another into His *ekklesia*. His *ekklesia* is the assembly, the gathering, of all those who have the same attitude toward Him, the same God-given faith, that Peter manifested when he confessed, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

To bring out the thought that Christ’s *ekklesia* is an assembly of people Luther consistently translated it in his German Bible with *Gemeinde* rather than with *Kirche*. *Kirche*, he explains in his Large Catechism, to most German people meant a building for worship, whereas in Scripture it denotes the assembled multitude of Christ’s people, His holy Christendom.<sup>vii</sup>

Jesus, furthermore, assures Peter that the powers of hell will utterly fail in all their attempts to destroy His Church. His *ekklesia* is invincible because of the unshakable foundation on which it stands. Each and every stone that Christ sets into the walls of this mighty edifice is bound to Him by the same firm tie with which Peter was bound to Him, the bond of faith.

Faith is such a strong, uniting bond that by it Christ and His people actually become one. Jesus empowers His *ekklesia* to act in His name. He gives Peter, as the representative of all the disciples,<sup>viii</sup> the Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven. What he will bind on earth will be bound in heaven. What he will loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. The Keys are, of course, the authority to forgive and to retain sins. Subsequently on two separate occasions (Matt. 18:18; John 20:22,23), Jesus made it unmistakably clear that these Keys were not given to Peter alone, but to all His disciples. When the *ekklesia*, therefore, forgives or retains sins, it is in reality Christ Himself who is doing this, for He and His believers are one.

Matthew 16 is of prime importance for our understanding of the term *ekklesia*. It is the Savior’s name for the entire body of those who are joined to Him by faith. Faith is the distinguishing mark of the *ekklesia*, faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God.

### **Matthew 18:15-20**

We come now to the second passage in the New Testament in which the word *ekklesia* occurs, Matthew 18:15-20. In this chapter Jesus speaks of the length to which His disciples are to go in their efforts to win back an erring brother. He reminds them of how a shepherd who has a hundred sheep will leave the ninety and nine and go in search of the one that has gone astray.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He deeply loves every one of His sheep and lambs. He does not want to see a single one perish. Should any of His sheep stray from the fold, the others are to be just as concerned about it as the Shepherd Himself is. Christians are to make every effort to rescue an erring brother. The one most directly involved will make the first attempt. If he fails, he will draw in one or two others. If their earnest, conscientious efforts also prove to be in vain, they are not yet to give up the fallen brother as a hopeless case. “If he shall neglect to hear them,” Jesus says, “tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican” (v. 17).

What, now, is the meaning of “the church,” *Te Ekklesia*, in this passage? Is Jesus using it here in a different sense from that which it has in Matthew 16? Does it here, perhaps, mean a local congregation, as we use the word “church” when we speak of Calvary Lutheran Church of Thiensville or Christ Lutheran Church of Milwaukee? By “church” in this familiar way of speaking we mean all those who are members of such a visible organization. All of them profess faith in Jesus Christ, although, as we well know, there may be hypocrites among them. If *ekklesia* here in Matthew 18 means such a visible organization composed of true believers and hypocrites, then the sense is quite different from what we found in Matthew 16.

Luther, to be sure, here translates *ekklesia* with *Gemeinde* (“congregation”), a word that immediately suggests to our minds a local group of professing Christians. But Luther invariably translated *ekklesia* with *Gemeinde*, as we heard—also in Matthew 16. He avoided the word *Kirche*, you will remember, because he

wanted to stress the fact that *ekklesia* denotes a *group of people*, not a building of bricks and stone. The best translation for *ekklesia*, he suggested, would be “holy Christendom.”<sup>ix</sup>

When all previous efforts to win back the erring have failed, therefore, the holy Christendom is to be drawn in, the brotherhood of believers. This will not be the entire *Una Sancta*, of course, but those members of it who come into immediate consideration, those who are directly involved because the offending brother has enjoyed their fellowship. He has been one of their group. “Tell it to the church” means: Tell it to those who are Christ’s *ekklesia* in this place. Their combined testimony is to be brought to bear on the fallen brother. This is the last hope. No one else will be concerned about the impenitent sinner’s soul. The members of Christ’s *ekklesia* will, however, be concerned, just as deeply concerned as is Christ, their Head.

Nothing is said here, we see, about the kind of fellowship or grouping of believers that this may be. In most cases it will, of course, be the sinner’s home congregation. It may, however, also be some other kind of group. It may be a conference of pastors or teachers. It may be an association of Christians operating a Lutheran high school or doing some kind of Christian welfare work. It may be a synod. Which group it will be that is called upon for help depends entirely on the circumstances. But we will come back to this point a little later on.

If the combined testimony of the brotherhood is of no avail, then the believers can no longer consider the impenitent sinner a brother. “Let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican,” Jesus says. Each and every disciple of Jesus will deal with him as with an unbeliever. They will withhold the assurance of forgiveness from him. On the other hand, if he acknowledges his sin, they will comfort him with the assurance of the Savior’s full pardon, for Christ has given to them, to each and every one of them personally, the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. “Unto thee” shows that the individual members of Christ’s *ekklesia* are to apply the binding Key. Every believer possesses the power to forgive and to retain sins by virtue of his union with Christ. “Verily I say unto you,” Jesus declares, “Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (v. 18). The actions of the believers, Christ’s *ekklesia*, are, therefore, as valid and certain in heaven also as if Christ were dealing with the sinner Himself.

The believers will, of course, seek the aid of Christ, their Head, in this entire matter of administering the Keys. They will take it to Him in prayer. They will pray not only individually, but jointly. They will bring their petitions with regard to the administration of the Gospel to the Father’s throne in a joint, united plea in the full confidence that their prayers will be heard. “For,” Jesus adds, “where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (v. 20).

When are Christians gathered together “in Jesus, Name”? This solemn expression does not refer, of course, to their getting together to play dartball or baseball. From the context we see that Jesus refers with this brief expression, “in my name,” to a gathering of Christians in the interest of the Ministry of the Keys. Jesus’ name means, in short, His revelation of Himself in the Gospel as the Savior of the world. We are reminded, for example, of how God proclaimed His name to Moses on Mt. Sinai, revealing Himself as the God of all mercy and grace, who, at the same time, however, will call to strict account all those who despise His word of forgiveness and pardon (Ex. 34:5-7). When Christ’s people come together, then, to be strengthened by His Gospel in Word or Sacrament, or when they come together to join forces in order to bring that Word of life more effectively to others, they are gathered together in His name, and they have the Savior’s promise that He will be in their very midst. He Himself will bless their endeavors in the interest of His Kingdom.

Here we have an answer, then, already to the question that will inevitably arise; How can one locate the *ekklesia*? How is it possible to “tell it unto the church”? The Church will be found where two or three or more are gathered together in Jesus’ name. Where the Gospel is in use, Christ Himself is present; and there His Church is present.

In our study of Matthew 16 we saw that faith in Jesus as the promised Savior from sin is the distinguishing mark of those who belong to His *ekklesia*. Faith is, however, a matter of the heart. Faith can not be seen by the eyes of men. “Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart” (I Sam. 16:7). Only the Lord, therefore, “knoweth them that are his” (II Tim. 2:19).

Since it is only through the means of grace, through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, that faith is created and sustained, believers will be found only there where these means of grace are in use. From God's promise that His Word will not return unto Him void (Is. 55:10) we may be certain, however, that where the Gospel in Word and Sacrament is in use, believers in Christ will surely be present. Here is His *ekklesia*. For this reason we speak of the means of grace as *the marks of the Church*.

This does not mean, however, that through the use of the means of grace the *ekklesia* becomes visible. Neither should we speak of the marks of the Church as the "visible side" of the Church. Hypocrites use the marks also, but hypocrites are never a part of Christ's *ekklesia*.

That the *ekklesia* exists is an article of faith, as we emphasized earlier. Nevertheless, it makes its presence known in this world. It is not a figment of the imagination. It is no mere intellectual abstraction. It is a reality. It actually exists. One can appeal to the *ekklesia*. The *ekklesia* may admonish. The *ekklesia* administers the Keys.

Where the means of grace are in use we have a manifestation, then, of Christ's Church, an outward sign of its presence. But we will never be able to establish its precise boundaries. We can never identify this or that person as a member of the *ekklesia* beyond all doubt. As was said, we can not read the heart. Hypocrites, who by their confession and life give the outward appearance of genuine Christian faith, will deceive us. The law of love, of course, requires that we accept a man's profession at face value unless his life shows that his words are insincere.

"Tell it to the church" means, then, in practical terms, tell it to the assembly of believers, the *Una Sancta*, as this becomes manifest or discernible through the use of the means of grace.

That Luther, too understood Jesus to be speaking here of "the holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints," is clear from the Treatise appended to the Smalcald Articles. In this Treatise Melancthon, Luther's close colleague and collaborator, translates our passage using the German word *Kirche*. He writes, "Christ gives supreme and final jurisdiction to the Church (*Kirche*) when He says: *Tell it unto the Church (Kirche)*."<sup>x</sup>

If Jesus were speaking of a local congregation in the sense of a visible, organized group of professing Christians, would not some word of explanation have been necessary for the disciples? Would not *ekklesia* self-evidently have meant the same thing to them as it did when Jesus spoke of it in Matthew 16, the assembly of those who believe in Him? There was no local congregation, as we know it, in existence at the time when Jesus spoke these words. The disciples certainly had no conception at that time of church organization and polity as we know it today!

It is important to note that no limitations, no restrictions of any kind are placed by Jesus on the term *ekklesia*. No local boundaries are set. "Tell it to the church" simply means: Tell it to the believers, whatever the group may be that comes into consideration and in whatever practical way they can be reached.

Naturally, this will, under ordinary circumstances, in the first instance be the group of believers with whom the impenitent sinner is outwardly associated in the local congregation. They will normally be the first ones to whom an appeal for help in regaining the sinner will be directed.

There may, however, also be other gatherings of believers entirely apart from the organized local congregation. For example, the student body at a Christian college gathers for chapel services every day. They are gathered together in Jesus' name. One student, however, despises the Word and is regularly absent from the devotions. His roommate speaks to him about it. When he fails to convince the delinquent of his wrong, he chooses a friend or two to help in trying to bring the sinner to repentance. They too fail. Then the administration and the entire student body are drawn in. Their help is also enlisted, but to no avail. Finally, the student is expelled from school. Since he is a member of a local congregation, the observance of good order requires that these Christians also be drawn in. If he neglects to hear them, they too will then regard him as a heathen man and a publican. We call this excommunication. In practical terms, however, the school's action is similar. But it is not the end of the road in this case because the student is also associated with the Christians of his home congregation, and they too will be concerned about him. In both of these instances we find Christians, royal

priests, employing the Keys which Christ has entrusted to them and observing brotherly love and good order in their administration.

The believers who live near one another in a community will, naturally, be drawn together by the Holy Ghost first of all into a local congregation. They will seek to edify one another through mutual use of the means of grace. They will work together to carry out Christ's commission to bring the Gospel to others.

There are also many other ways, however, in which believers may be drawn together by the Spirit in the interest of Christ's Gospel. We may think, for example, of mission societies, day school or high school associations, welfare agencies, synods, federations of synods, and other groupings. No single specific form of organization is prescribed for doing the Lord's work.

Of course, no group will work in competition with another. Brotherly love and good order will be observed. One group will not undertake work or interfere with work that another group such as the local congregation is already doing.

We see, then, that Matthew 18 does not contain any indication that Christians are bound to a particular form of gathering together, or that one form is more God-pleasing than another. But we are told that when Christians come together in Jesus' name, either to be nourished by His Gospel or to promote its spread, He is present, even if they number only two or three. Here His *ekklesia* is in evidence through its worship or its work.

### **Ekklesia in Acts**

Just before Jesus ascended into heaven He instructed His disciples to remain in Jerusalem until they had been baptized with the Holy Ghost. Here at Jerusalem, then, was Christ's *ekklesia*. Here was a group of believers. On the day of Pentecost about 3,000 more came to faith. That Christ's Church was present here was evident from the fact that "they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). The growth of the Church is recorded in approximate numbers. Within a short time, it is reported, the number grew to about 5,000 men, not counting women and children (Acts 4:4).

This assembly of believers in Jerusalem is designated by the term *ekklesia*. In Acts 8:1 we read, "There was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem."<sup>xi</sup>

From Jerusalem the *ekklesia* spread to the adjoining territories. In 9:31 the AV reads, "Then had the churches (plural) rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria." It is noteworthy that the Nestle Greek text here has the singular, "Then had *the church* throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria rest." The believers of all three regions are viewed as one group, a homogeneous community. They are Christ's *ekklesia*. In this passage the plural also has some textual support, however.

The plural is the well attested reading in 15:41, where we read that Paul "went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the *churches*." In 16:5 the congregations which Paul had established on his first mission journey in Galatia are referred to individually in an undisputed plural, "And so were the churches established in the faith."

Generally, however, the singular is predominant. It is used for the community of believers at Jerusalem, as we have seen, at Antioch in Syria (e.g., 11:26; 13:1), at Caesarea (18:22), and at Ephesus (20:17). In Acts 14:23 it is reported that Paul and Barnabas "ordained them elders in every church." The expression used here actually means "church by church" and implies the plural.<sup>xiii</sup>

In Acts 20:28 we have an interesting and instructive combination. "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the *flock* (poimnio), over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed *the church of God* (*Ten ekklesian tou Theou*; alternate reading: *Tou Kyriou*), which he hath purchased with his own blood." Here the individual flock over which the Holy Ghost has set an overseer is contrasted with the entire *ekklesia*. Not only this or that individual congregation was purchased with Christ's blood, of course, but the whole Church, the entire community of believers. By shepherding his own flock, that particular part of the *ekklesia* which has been entrusted to his care, each bishop (*episkopos*) is, in reality, serving the Church at large. He is shepherding, tending, nurturing Christ's *ekklesia* as such.

Commenting on the promiscuous use of the singular and plural, K.L. Schmidt remarks, “it is not that the *ekklesia* divides up into *ekklesiai*. Nor does the sum of the *ekklesiai* produce the *ekklesia*. The one *ekklesia* is present in the places mentioned.”<sup>xiii</sup>

Prof. Meyer illustrates this point as follows: “If we speak of the Church of a given time, e.g., the Church of the Middle Ages, of the Reformation, of the time of the Enlightenment, it is the universal Church as it manifested itself in that specific era. The same applies to space. If we speak of the Church of Europe or of America, of Arizona or of Wisconsin, of Tucson or of Thiensville, it is always the universal Church of Christ, that one Church which Christ promised to build, as it happens to come to the fore in a certain locality. The Church, being built by the Gospel, manifests itself by the use of the Gospel, by hearing and proclaiming it. Word and Sacrament are thus known as ‘marks of the Church.’ ...All local groups of people, then, which show the identifying marks of the Church, manifest thereby the presence of the universal Church of Christ (called the *UNY Sancta*), and are themselves also simply called churches (in the singular or in the plural), literally, assemblies.”<sup>xiv</sup>

As a translation of *ekklesia* both “congregation” and “church” are subject to misunderstanding. “Congregation,” which Luther chose (*Gemeinde*), would be fine, except for the fact that it is now commonly used to distinguish the local group from the entire body of believers. “Assembly” or “gathering” perhaps conveys the sense more adequately, but neither is entirely satisfactory either.

As we observed in connection with Matthew 18:17, the *ekklesia* manifests its presence in this or that place through the use of the means of grace, and consequently, such local gatherings of professing Christians are also called *ekklesiai*, congregations, or churches. It must be emphasized, however, that they have this name *only because of the believers* who are in them. Unbelievers may be outwardly associated with the true Christians, but they are no more a part of the *ekklesia* than is the mud on a dirty car a part of the car itself. They are no more a part of the *ekklesia* than is the chaff which may be found in a bag of wheat true wheat.

Dr. Franz Pieper brings this point out clearly in his *Christian Dogmatics* when he defines a congregation as “the assembly of *believers* who congregate about Word and Sacrament at a particular place.”<sup>xv</sup> This definition is exact in that it clearly excludes from the *ekklesia* hypocrites who may be outwardly associated with the believers in the use of the means of grace.

### **Ekklesia in the Epistles**

In Paul, too, we find an easy interchange of the singular and the plural. In Galatians 1:13 he confesses, “I persecuted the *church* of God.” In verse 22 of the same chapter he says that he was unknown by fact “unto the *churches* of Judaea.” By using the plural he sets the individual congregations alongside one another. These are frequently identified by the name of the city or territory in which they are located, e.g., “the church which is at Cenchrea” (Rom. 16:1); “the church of God which is at Corinth” (I Cor. 1:2); “the churches of Galatia” (I Cor. 16:1); “the churches of Asia” (I Cor. 16:19); “the churches of Macedonia” (II Cor. 8:1).

It is interesting to note that *ekklesia* in the singular is used both with and without the article without any discernible difference in meaning.<sup>xvi</sup> Similarly, with the plural we find that the article is both used and omitted within the context of a few verses.<sup>xvii</sup> A careful examination of the passages indicates the correctness of Schmidt’s conclusion, “Obviously *ekklesia* is almost a proper name, so that the article may be left out.”<sup>xviii</sup>

Even so small a group of believers as those who assemble in one house is called an *ekklesia* (Rom. 16:5; I Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philem. 2). Here, too, Christ’s Church is in evidence. The use of the means of grace is proof of the presence of believers in Christ.

The Church of Christ, the *Una Sancta*, is comprised of all those in all ages and in all places who believe in Him. It began with Adam and Eve. It is scattered over the whole earth. Some of its members are still in this world, others are already in heaven (Heb. 12:22,23). In the believers at this or that place the *Una Sancta* is present.

This is reflected in the salutations of Paul’s Epistles to the Corinthians. They are addressed “unto the church of God which is at Corinth” (I Cor. 1:2, II Cor. 1:1). Literally translated, the Greek here does not mean,



as Schmidt points out, “the Corinthian congregation,” but “the congregation, church, assembly, as it is in Corinth,”<sup>xxix</sup> The oppositional phrases which are added make it clear that Paul is addressing his letters to people whom he regards as saints, as believers in Jesus Christ.<sup>xx</sup> He is addressing the Church as it appears at Corinth, just as a pastor does today when at the beginning of his sermon he addresses the members of his congregation with the words, “Dear fellow Christians.” He is confident on the basis of the marks that Christ’s Church is present here.

In these Epistles to the Corinthians we have a practical example of how to handle a case of church discipline. Paul had heard of the scandalous case of incest that was tolerated by the Corinthian congregation. “Put away from among yourselves that wicked person,” he admonishes (I Co. 5:13). In his Second Epistle, noting with joy that the application of this discipline had had the desired effect and that the man guilty of this flagrant offence had repented, Paul urges them to forgive and comfort him lest he despair (II Cor. 2:7).

We must not overlook the fact that II Corinthians is addressed not only to the church in Corinth, but to all the believers in the entire province of Achaia. II Corinthians 1:1 reads, “Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia.” We know that there was a congregation at Cenchrea (Rom. 16:1). There was also a group of believers in Athens (Acts 17:34). Paul’s frequent references to the Christians of this area, using the name of the province, suggest that there were believers in other cities and villages of Achaia also. The case of excommunication concerned not only the congregation in Corinth. The offender had grieved them all, at least in part, Paul says (II Cor. 2:5). All to whom II Corinthians is addressed, namely, the saints of the entire province of Achaia, are, therefore, also to forgive him.

In the salutations of both of the letters to the Corinthians we have the modifying genitive which is found so frequently with *ekklesia*, namely, *Tou Theou*. The *ekklesiai* is called “the church of God.” *Tou Theou* is also used with the plural, “the churches of God” (I Cor. 11:16). Even when this modifier is not specifically added, it is implied whenever *ekklesia* refers to the Church. The force of this genitive is brought out clearly in Acts 20:28, “the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” What a price He paid for it! It belongs to Him by right of purchase. He gathers His own together in it. This assembly is His people. He is at work in their midst, as we see from I Corinthians 12:28, “*God* hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers...”

In Matthew 16 we heard Jesus speak of the Church as *His* assembly. “I will build *my* church,” He told Peter. The modifying genitive, “church of God,” is an exact equivalent. In fact, we find an even closer parallel in the expression, “the churches of Christ” (Rom. 16:16). This does not mean merely “Christian churches,” in contrast to others. It implies the full, rich thought expressly stated in Acts 20:28. They are Christ’s assemblies because He purchased them with His own blood.

Similar in force is the phrase, “in Christ,” which we find in Galatians 1:22, “the churches of Judaea which were *in Christ*.” God acts in and through His Son in carrying out His eternal plan for the building of His Church. In I Thessalonians 2:14 we have the full and significant combination of terms, “the churches of God which in Judaea are *in Christ Jesus*.” The living stones that He places one by one into His holy Temple have been elected, redeemed, called, justified, and sanctified by God. The various manifestations of the Church in this or that place are, therefore, simply called “churches of the saints” (I Cor. 14:33). He has clothed them with the garments of salvation and covered them with the robe of righteousness.

We heard Paul equate the *ekklesia* with the saints (I Cor. 1:2; II Cor. 1:1), On occasion, therefore, Paul omits the word *ekklesia* and simply addresses himself to the saints, as in the salutation of his epistle to the Ephesians: “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, *to the saints* which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.”<sup>xxxixii</sup>

In this Epistle to the Ephesians, as in that to the Colossians, we have a rich unfolding of the Savior’s words, “On this rock I will build my church.” Believing Gentiles are full sharers in its blessings together with those who are descendants of Abraham according to the flesh. They “are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the *household of God*.” They “are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone, in whom *all the building* fitly framed

together groweth unto an *holy temple* in the Lord.” Thus they “are builded together for an *habitation of God* through the Spirit” (Eph. 2:19-22). They belong to the *ekklesia*, which, as Stoeckhardt says, “is the communion of believers, of all the elect children of God upon earth.”<sup>xxiii</sup>

This *ekklesia* is Christ’s Body (Eph. 1:22,23). This is “the *Corpus Christi Mysticum*, as the theologians of the Middle Ages put it; the spiritual body of Christ, to quote the Fathers of our Church.”<sup>xxiv</sup>

Dr. Adolph Hoenecke discusses this term, the Body of Christ, in an essay presented at the 20th convention of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod in 1870. He points out that “this is also a figurative expression, but the reality is here wholly identical with the figure taken spiritually, as the nature and character of the heavenly, spiritual Head, the Lord Christ, require. How could the Holy Ghost have pictured and portrayed the living fellowship of believers with Christ and the Triune God in a more refreshing, comforting, and appealing way than to call them the members which make up the Body of Christ?”<sup>xxv</sup>

What a blessed fellowship this is! What a close communion exists between Christ and His own! He, as it were, identifies Himself with His Church. He is the head of the body, the church? (Col. 1:18). The saints are his members (I Co. 12:27). We are reminded of His words, “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him”(John 14.23).

In another figure, Christ is the Bridegroom; the Church is His Bride (John 3.29; Rev. 21:9).

Time does not permit us to explore here the deep significance of these and the many other expressions which are used by the holy writers to lead us to appreciate the blessedness of being a part of Christ’s Church. Neither can we take the time here to dwell on its unique attributes; its unity, which, like the Church itself, is a matter of faith (Eph. 4:3-6); its perfect holiness, which is, likewise, hidden from the eyes of men (Eph. 5:25-27); its catholicity (John 10:16); and its apostolicity (Eph. 2:20). Certainly no member of this Church will think of it as a mere Platonic idea, without any basis in reality. All of these wondrous truths are far too precious to every believer to allow any such thought to arise.

We are firmly convinced of the Church’s existence even though we have not yet seen it with our eyes. Its glory, its splendor, yes, even its existence are still for us matters of faith. But our faith rests squarely and firmly on God’s holy, infallible, inerrant Word.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Is the Church, then invisible? Yes, indeed, even as Christ’, its Head is invisible. It is invisible even as the faith by which sinners are born into the Church when they are born again of water and of the Spirit is invisible. The Church comes into being through the coming of the Kingdom of God when “our Heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word, and lead a godly life here in time and hereafter in eternity” (Second Petition). “The kingdom of God cometh not with observation,” Jesus tells us (Lk. 17:20). One can not observe the Spirit’s gracious working in the hearts of men as He brings them to faith and preserves them in faith. “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth,” Jesus told Nicodemus; “so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).

Men have been deceived about the presence of the Church. Even the prophet Elijah was deceived. He did not see the Church. He believed that he was the only one left who still served the Lord. Yet God assured him that there were still 7,000 in Israel who had not bowed their knees to Baal (I Kgs. 18:9-18).

Although men can not put their finger on the Church and say with unflinching certainty of any particular person, “This is a member of Christ’s Church,” nevertheless the Church is not unnoticeable. It makes its presence known. We saw that the use of the means of grace is an indication of its presence. The unity of the Church, that invisible, spiritual unity for which Christ prayed in His high priestly prayer as He was about to begin His *Passio Magna*, also has outward, visible effects which make it evident to the world that the Father sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world and that He loves those who believe in Jesus even as He loves the Son Himself (John 17:20-23).

The presence of the Church becomes evident also through the confession of believers. Their faith expresses itself in confession. “With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession

is made unto salvation” (Rom. 10:10). Because of the possibility of hypocrisy, of course, confession is not an infallible indicator of the attitude of a man’s heart.

Through the believers’ use of Word and sacrament, then, through their confession, and through their Christian life it was apparent that Christ’s *ekklesia* was to be found in the *ekklesiai* at Jerusalem, at Corinth, at Thessalonica, in Galatia, and elsewhere.<sup>xxvii</sup>

We are accustomed to speak of the entire group of those who gather about the marks of the Church as the *visible* church. We differentiate between this and the *invisible* Communion of Saints. This is useful terminology. There is no reason why we should discard it. Our theologians also speak of the visible church as the *ecclesia late dicta* and of the invisible Church as the *ecclesia stricte dicta*. Such a distinction has a Scriptural basis. Although the adjectives “visible” and “invisible” are never used in Scripture with *ekklesia*, we do find that *ekklesia* is also used in Scripture of an outward, visible assembly of professing Christians.

In III John 10, for example, we are told of a man by the name of Diotrephes who is described as loving to have the preeminence. Diotrephes did not receive John or the brethren. Those who did receive them he cast “out of the church.” This was, of course, a flagrant abuse of the Keys. It is obvious, however, that Diotrephes could not cast such people out of the *Una Sancta*. He put them out of the organized group of professing Christians of which he was the head. This visible group is called *ekklesia*, but only because of the true believers in it.

This is an example of the figure of speech known as synecdoche. The entire group is called “church” because of that -part of it which is actually Christ’s Church, just as a coin is called a silver dollar even though it is not 100 per cent silver. It is essential to remember, however, that the unbelievers and hypocrites who are joined together with the true Christians in the outward organization are by no means a part of the Body of Christ.

Another point to be noted is that in the outward manifestations of the *Una Sancta* in this world many weaknesses, blemishes, and faults are apparent. We do not yet see the perfect holiness, beauty, and glory of the Church. There are weaknesses and defects in the life of the individual Christian. There are weaknesses and defects then naturally also in groups of Christians.

In the letters which are directed to the seven churches of Asia Minor in Revelation 2 and 3, for example, five of the seven churches are faulted by Jesus for some deficiency. He admonishes them to repent. Their sinful weakness could thoroughly undermine and destroy their faith and lead to their rejection by the Son of Man, who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, these seven churches.

Here, again, we have an example of synecdoche. These congregations are called “churches.” They are called by this lofty title in spite of the fact that there were many hypocrites and wicked persons among the members. In Pergamos and Thyatira people who held the faith-destroying doctrines of Balaam and of the Nicolaitanes were tolerated. No discipline was exercised there. the congregation in Sardis had many hypocrites in its midst. “Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead,” Jesus says (Rev. 3:1). Even in Sardis, however, there was a small group of faithful Christians who had not defiled their garments. Believing in Him whose blood cleanseth us from all sin, they had washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. These faithful Christians are admonished to strengthen those whose faith, though not yet dead, was on the verge of dying.

It is *because of these believers* that a congregation like Sardis is called a “church.” In other words, the presence of the hypocrites is ignored, just as we ignore the chaff when we call a sack of grain a sack of wheat even though it has a considerable amount of chaff mixed with the wheat. As Prof. August Pieper explains, “The synecdoche employed here is therefore not really an inclusion, but rather an exclusion which ignores the presence of foreign elements.”<sup>xxviii</sup>

Dr. Hoenecke, too, explains that such a mixed group which assembles around the Word is called a “church” according to its essence and according to its essential part, and thus a visible local congregation consisting of good and bad, of holy and unholy persons, and likewise the whole church at large as the visible

group of the called who have the Word and Sacraments are called church for this reason that in this mixed group the congregation of the saints, that is, of the believers, of the true members of Christ, is hidden.”<sup>xxxix</sup>

In his *Dogmatik* Hoenecke also makes this point, “Just as the particular visible congregation containing ungodly persons who have not yet been exposed and have not yet been excluded actually is and is called church on account of the believers, so also the particular visible congregation rightfully exercises the authority given to the believers alone.”<sup>xxx</sup>

The entire group of those who profess to be Christians is not called an *ekklesia* or “church,” therefore, because it has a certain form of organization, but solely because of the true believers who are present, though hidden, inasmuch as the means of grace are in use. These believers have the Keys. Though hypocrites may participate outwardly in administering them, they do so without any right. Only God knows, however, who these hypocrites are. Unless He exposes them, as He exposed Ananias and Sapphira, or unless they expose themselves by a manifestly un-Christian life (and then they are no longer hypocrites), the Church must bear with their presence as a part of its cross in this world.

Peter does not use the word *ekklesia* in his epistles, though, as we heard, he does speak of Christ’s Church in such Old Testament terms as “a spiritual house” (I, 2:5), “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people” (I, 2:9), and “the people of God” (I, 2:10).

Before we leave the subject of the meaning of *ekklesia* in the Scriptures, it is vital for us to bear in mind the nature and spirit of the New Testament. In striking contrast to the Old Testament, which prescribed and governed the life of the Church under the Old Covenant in minute detail, the dominant note of the New Testament is liberty, the glorious liberty of the children of God. This does not mean that the Old Testament did not have a glory of its own. But its many regulations, laws, and ordinances were a yoke which, Peter confessed, “neither we nor our fathers were able to bear” (Acts 15:10). When the Galatians were misled by Judaizers who insisted that they must keep the laws of Moses also if they hoped to be saved, Paul asked, “how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?” (Gal. 4:9). Faith in Christ, the Judaizers claimed, was not enough. Thus, they preached another gospel, which was, in fact, no Gospel at all.

Reminding the Galatians of their deliverance from the Law and of their new status as sons of God, Paul points out that “when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal. 4:4,5). As sons of God, we are no longer under tutors and governors. We are heirs of God through Christ (Gal. 4:7). We are now citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. And Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all” (Gal. 4:26). Earnestly he admonishes, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5:1).

The New Testament is not a new law, as Rome, Calvin, Barth, and many others hold. It is not a code of rules and regulations. Rather, “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (II Cor. 3:17). The thought that God has prescribed certain forms of church organization for His mature New Testament sons and daughters is utterly foreign to the entire spirit of the New Testament. God does not prescribe to His New Testament children what they are to eat or drink nor when they are to worship (Co. 2:16,17). Neither does He decree that they must organize congregations or synods according to a certain pattern, such as that, for example, which is so familiar to us in our American church life. The Gospel creates its own forms.

Consider for a moment what a rich variety of forms of worship the New Testament presents to us! In I Corinthians 14 Paul speaks of the services at Corinth and says, “When ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation” (v.26). Paul does not condemn this variety. It is an evidence of the wealth of spiritual gifts with which this congregation was blessed. But Paul does insist, “Let all things be done unto edifying” (v. 26). He criticizes the confusion which prevailed when many of these gifts were exercised simultaneously.

So also, as Sasse has shown, there is a rich variety in the forms of the “local congregation” in the New Testament. It may be a “house-congregation”; it may be a “city-congregation” with a number of churches; and it may be a regional church.<sup>xxxi</sup> In the discussion that followed the essay read by Prof. Hoenecke in 1870 the

question was raised: What is meant by a particular church (*Particularkirche*)? The answer was given that this could be either a local congregation, a provincial church, the church of an entire realm, or a church body subscribing to a certain confession.<sup>xxxii</sup>

The Holy Ghost draws Christians together. The Gospel is a unifying power. The New Testament is replete with examples of inter-congregational concern, consultation, and cooperation. For example, as soon as the congregation at Jerusalem heard that there were believers in Antioch, it at once established contact with them by sending Barnabas to encourage and exhort them (Acts 11:22). Again, when the Church at Antioch was disturbed by Judaizers from Jerusalem, the congregation sent a delegation to Jerusalem with Paul and Barnabas for a joint study of the question. They had a common problem, consulted with one another, and then took joint action.

On occasion the Apostle Paul also finds it necessary to admonish those in one community not to act independently of those elsewhere. To the Corinthians, who manifested such an independent spirit, Paul writes, "What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?" (I Cor. 14:36). He reminds the Ephesians of the precious unity which the Spirit has created and encourages them to cultivate and preserve it (Eph. 4:3). God does not want believers to isolate themselves from one another. The Epistle to the Hebrews admonishes some who were doing this not to forsake the assembling of themselves together (10:25).

Nowhere in the New Testament, however, do we find any directive as to the *form* in which Christians are to work together. They are to exercise their spiritual priesthood. They are to use the Word and the Sacraments for their mutual edification. They are to maintain the public ministry in their midst. They are to pool their efforts in bringing the Gospel into all the world. They are to administer the Keys which have been entrusted to them, an authority which each of them possesses in equal measure. But no form or method for carrying on these activities is prescribed. Prof. Meyer is correct: "We scan the New Testament in vain for a word of institution prescribing some form, nor do we find any record that such an institution ever took place."<sup>xxxiii</sup>

With regard to the organizational structures Christians may establish in order to carry on their work, they are to be guided solely by their sanctified Christian wisdom, proving all things and holding fast that which is good (I Thess. 5:21), the royal law of love, serving one another in this spirit (Gal. 5:13), and the necessity of doing all things decently and in order (I Cor. 14:40). "All things are yours," they are told (I Cor. 3:21). All things may not, however, be expedient (I Cor. 6:12). The Lord leaves it to them as His free, full-grown sons and daughters to search out the most effective means and forms for doing the work He has given them to do with the ability and gifts that He provides.

Certain activities will, naturally, fall into the province of the local congregation, the basic and most immediate group into which the Holy Ghost gathers Christians. The congregation administers the Keys in their most comprehensive form, preaching the Word, administering the Sacraments, instructing the young, strengthening the weak, admonishing the erring, reaching out to the unchurched, and ministering to the sick and the dying. For Gospel work which the congregation does not or can not undertake Christians may form synods, federations of synods, or associations either of congregations or of individuals.

In all such forms the Holy Ghost is gathering believers together to carry out the holy task the Savior has entrusted to them, namely, to preach the Gospel to every creature. In all such groupings believers are responding to the will of their Lord that they should not forsake the assembling of themselves together. Since in all of these groupings Christians are gathered together through the Gospel and in its interest, they are assured of Christ's presence and blessing in accord with His promise, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20).<sup>xxxiv</sup>

This, then, is the picture of New Testament gives us of the Church. It is Christ's *ekklesia*. It possesses the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. It administers them by Christ's authority and in accord with His will. It is at once "heavenly and earthly, spiritual and corporeal, eternal and temporal," as Sasse has said, being "the *one* Church of which it can be said that while its life is hid with Christ in God, it nevertheless is the greatest reality

in all the history of the world,—a mass of sinners in the sight of men and even in their own eyes, yet at the same time a communion of saints in the justifying verdict of God.”<sup>xxxv</sup>

## II. The “Church” Luther’s Theology

What did Luther mean when he spoke of the “church”? Was he speaking of the *Una Sancta*? Did he apply the name “church” to an ecclesiastical organization? Did he make a distinction between the visible and the invisible Church? In this year in which we are commemorating the 450th anniversary of the Reformation it ought to be of particular interest to us to investigate Luther’s concept of the Church.

At the very beginning of this essay we heard his classic definition of the Church in the Smalcald Articles: “Thank God, a child seven years old knows what the Church is, namely, the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd.”<sup>xxxvi</sup> It is obvious that Luther here has the *Una Sancta* in mind. The Church is the flock of Christ, the Good Shepherd, who says, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish; neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:27,28).

In his Large Catechism Luther calls the whole body of believers a congregation (*Gemeinde*). Not once, as we heard, in his translation of the New Testament did Luther translate *ekklesia* with *Kirche*.<sup>xxxvii</sup> His aim was to prevent his readers from associating the New Testament *ekklesia* with a visible organization, such as the Church of Rome. God, he says, “has a peculiar congregation in the world, which is the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God.”<sup>xxxviii</sup>

In his Large Catechism, also, Luther discusses the two expressions in the Creed, “the holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints.” “Both expressions, taken together,” he says, “are identical.”<sup>xxxix</sup> In an outburst of irrepressible, ecstatic joy he explains the meaning of the appositive, “the Communion of Saints”: “I believe that there is upon earth a little holy group and congregation of pure saints, under one head, even Christ, called together by the Holy Ghost in one faith, one mind, and one understanding, with manifold gifts, yet agreeing in love, without sects or schisms. I am also a part and member of the same, a sharer and joint owner of all the goods it possesses, brought to it and incorporated into it by the Holy Ghost by having heard and continuing to hear the Word of God, which is the beginning of entering it.”<sup>xl</sup>

Here Luther points to the function of the -Word of God in the creation and growth of the Church. Through the Word they are born again. The essence of the Word is God’s gracious promise of the forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation in Christ. This promise itself begets faith. “It is the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16). “Faith cometh by hearing,” “*aus der Predigt*,” as Luther so aptly translated this passage (Rom. 10:17). Faith means nothing more than taking God at His word. “It is our grateful amen to God’s friendly promise,” in Bornkamm’s beautiful summary of Luther’s concept of faith.<sup>xli</sup>

For Luther, then, the heart of Christianity is to be found in these two simple elements: God’s promise and man’s faith. God’s promise is called the Gospel. It is good news for doomed, despondent sinners. The Sacraments, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, are visible forms of this promise. They are, in Augustine’s familiar words, the “visible Word.”

The Church is a creation of God, for God is the one who works faith in the sinner’s heart through the Gospel. In his famous pamphlet of 1520, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Luther wrote, “The Church is born of the Word of promise through faith, and is nurtured and preserved by this same Word.”<sup>xlii</sup> The Church comes into being through the New Testament reign of God (*Basileia Tou Theou*), which, for Luther, as F.E. Mayer observes, denotes “God’s gracious rulership, the Savior’s redemptive work, and the Spirit’s reign in the hearts of men.”<sup>xliii</sup>

There is, then, a direct relationship between the doctrine of justification, the central doctrine in Luther’s theology and in the Scriptures, and the doctrine of the Church.<sup>xliiv</sup> In the Preface he wrote for Brenz’s exposition of Amos Luther calls the righteousness of faith “the chief point and the corner stone, which along begets, nourishes, builds, preserves, and defends the Church of God; and without it the Church of God can not continue for a single hour.”<sup>xliv</sup>

The Church, thus, for Luther is simply “the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd.” The Church is God’s people. God’s people and God’s Word are inseparable. “God’s Word cannot be without God’s people; on the other hand, God’s people cannot be without God’s Word.”<sup>xlvi</sup> Luther held to the Scriptural truth that “they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham” (Gal. 3:7). God’s people are His Christendom. In them the promise is fulfilled, “I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God” (Hos. 2:23).

The Church, for Luther, therefore, consists of believers in Christ, and believers only. In his exposition of Psalm 118, written during his stay at the Coburg in 1530, Luther says, “No one can enter the Christian congregation or be a member of Christendom unless he is a believer, that is, is righteous and holy, as the article of the Creed says. ‘I believe in the holy Christian Church.’ He who does not believe and is not holy and righteous does not belong to the Holy Christian Church.”<sup>xlvi</sup> In his vigorous style he counters the objection that although the pope, bishops, and others sin grievously, they do not belong to the devil but are members and heads of holy Christendom, with the comment, “Verily, they are members of the church, just as spittle, snot, pus, sweat, excrement, urine, stench, mange, smallpox, boils, syphilis, and all diseases are members of the body. They are in and on the body, like blemishes and filth, which the body must bear with great danger, trouble, and unwillingness.”<sup>xlvi</sup>

The Church is holy. As long as the members of the Church live in this world, however, they will also be sinners. The Christian is at once a sinful saint and a saintly sinner, or, in Luther’s familiar phrase, *simul peccator et iustus*.<sup>xlvi</sup> Christians are holy because by faith in Christ they are clothed in the spotless robe of His perfect righteousness.

In his exposition of Psalm 45 Luther emphasizes that as a beautiful queen is clothed in costly gowns, so the Church is decked in Christ’s righteousness from head to foot. “God sees no wrinkles in her because He sees nothing in her besides His Son, in whom the church is clothed, from whom she has salvation, life, and glory, which is in Christ. If sin is present, the devil sees it and we feel it, each in his own conscience. But God does not. For on account of His Son, Christ, with whom the church is clothed, she is altogether beautiful, without spot and wrinkle, because Christ is altogether beautiful and without spot.”<sup>li</sup> In this connection he cites Isaiah 61:10, “He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with jewels.” “This,” Luther explains, “is the ‘wedding garment’ that is spoken of in the Gospel, namely, the great trust and righteousness through which we are clothed with Christ Himself as with a gift.”<sup>li</sup>

Luther is quick to point out, however, that this holiness of the Church is not apparent to the eyes of men. In his commentary on Galatians of 1535 he says, “We believe a holy church. For it is invisible, dwelling in the Spirit, in an ‘unapproachable’ place (I Tim. 6:16); therefore its holiness cannot be seen. God conceals and covers it with weaknesses, sins, errors, and various offenses and forms of the cross in such a way that it is not evident to the senses anywhere... We teach that the church has no spot or wrinkle (Eph. 5:27), but is holy, though only through faith in Jesus Christ; in addition, it is holy in its life, in the sense that it refrains from the desires of the flesh and practices its spiritual gifts. But it is not yet holy in the sense of being delivered and rescued from all evil desires or of having purged out all wicked opinions and errors.”<sup>lii</sup>

Luther emphasizes that the holiness of the Church is an article of faith. “Our holiness is in heaven, where Christ is; it is not in the world, before the eyes of men, like a commodity on the market.”<sup>liii</sup>

In Ephesians 1:22,23 Paul teaches that God gave Christ “to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body.” It is only natural that Luther would find it necessary to stress this truth again and again in his controversy with Rome. In 1520 he wrote a pamphlet, *The Papacy at Rome*, in answer to Alveld of Leipzig, an ardent champion of Rome. In this treatise he takes up this point: “Now let us consider the head of Christendom. From all that has been said it follows that the first-named Christendom, which alone is the true church, may not and cannot have a head on earth, and that no one in earth, neither bishop nor pope, may rule over it. On the contrary, only Christ in heaven is the Head, and He alone rules.”<sup>liiv</sup>

It is to this Church, to the believers, that Jesus gave the Keys. “The keys belong to the whole church and to each of its members, both as regards their authority and their various uses. Otherwise we do violence to the words of Christ, in which he speaks to all without qualification or limitation: ‘Let him be to *you*,’ and ‘*You* will have gained your brother,’ and ‘Whatever *you*,’ etc.... This word also, ‘If two of you agree on earth,’ and ‘Where two or three are gathered in my name there am I in the midst of them’. In all of these declarations we find established the fullest authority and the most immediate exercise of the right to bind and to absolve. Were this not true we would be denying to Christ himself the right and use of the keys as he dwells among even a couple of his disciples.”<sup>lv</sup> Prof. August Pieper summarizes Luther’s thought exactly when he says, “What already is present with the individual as such, becomes the joint possession of the body of the Church. Whatever a Christian as an individual possesses, that and nothing else, nothing more, nothing less, also two or three Christians possess, or all Christians taken together, the Church.”<sup>lvi</sup>

Does Luther teach that the Church is invisible? He certainly does! We heard him describe the Church as invisible in his comments on Galatians 5:19, which we cited a few moments ago. In 1521 we find him comparing the holy Church of Christ with the “mad” church of the pope on this score: “The holy church of Christ says. I *believe* a holy Christian Church. The mad church of the pope says: I *see* a holy Christian Church. The former says: The church is confined to neither this nor that place. The latter says: The church is here and there.”<sup>lvii</sup>

In *The Bondage of the Will* Luther declared the Church to be hidden (*abscondita*) from the eyes of men: “The church is hidden away, the saints are out of sight.”<sup>lviii</sup> He says, “The saints are pearls and precious jewels, which the Spirit does not cast before swine; but (as the Scripture puts it) He keeps them hid, that the wicked may not see the glory of God.”<sup>lix</sup> With regard to those who profess to be members of the Church Luther plainly states, “It cannot be proved that they really are saints... It is left completely uncertain.”<sup>lx</sup> Nevertheless, he adds, “I call them saints, and so regard them; I call them the church, and so judge them—but by the rule of charity, not by the rule of faith.”<sup>lxi</sup>

Repeatedly Luther emphasizes the point we made at the very beginning of this essay, namely, that “the existence of the church is an article of faith; for it is apprehended by faith, not by sight.”<sup>lxii</sup> For Luther the Church is always an *object faith*, not of sight. He insists that no one but God knows who the saints are. “No one sees who is holy or believes.”<sup>lxiii</sup> “In this sense,” as Elert correctly presents Luther’s teaching, “the church always remains ‘invisible’ (WA 7,722,6).”<sup>lxiv</sup>

Continuing with his discussion of this aspect of Luther’s thought, Elert writes, “The church, which, as he demands again and again, should be believed, is ‘invisible’ in exactly the same sense as all the other constituents of faith are invisible. It must be believed contrary to all appearances. Therefore it is not ‘invisible’ in the Platonic-idealistic sense, but in the evangelical-realistic sense it is ‘hidden’ (*abscondita*).”<sup>lxv</sup> Elert cites Luther’s statement, “Therefore in Psalm 9 the church is called *Almuth*, hidden, and the article of faith which believes in the holy catholic church confesses that the church is never visible anywhere and takes away from it every place and person.”<sup>lxvi</sup> On the other hand, Elert notes, “When here and often Luther says that the church is not bound to a definite place, to definite times, not even to ‘persons,’ this, of course, cannot mean that no persons at all belong to it. What he denies is that the church ‘is seen’ (*apparere*) in these persons.”<sup>lxvii</sup>

In his aforementioned treatise, *The Papacy at Rome* Luther clearly stated, “The Church is a spiritual assembly of souls in one faith... The true, real, right, essential Church is a spiritual thing, and not anything external or outward, by whatever name it may be called.”<sup>lxviii</sup>

Nevertheless, Luther also taught that we need not be in doubt about where to look for the Church. “We should with certainty recognize the presence of the Christian Church wherever the pure Gospel is being preached. For just as we recognize by the flag, as a certain sign, which lord and army are keeping the field, so we by the Gospel also recognize with certainty where Christ and His army are. We have a sure promise from God to this effect in Is. 55:10-11.”<sup>lxix</sup>

For Luther the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments were marks of the Church. “Wherever this Gospel is truthfully and purely preached, there is the kingdom of Christ; and this mark



of the church or the kingdom of Christ cannot deceive you...For the Word has ever been the one constant and infallible mark of the church.”<sup>lxx</sup> Again he says, “Where God’s Word is, there the church must be; therefore, where Baptism and Holy Communion are, there God’s people must be.”<sup>lxxi</sup> Also, “The external marks, whereby one can perceive where this Church is on earth are baptism, the Sacrament, and the Gospel.”<sup>lxxii</sup>

But Luther also speaks of our inability to locate the Church with respect to individuals. “These marks may still fail us if we are to judge of every person in particular...A man’s spirituality can only be recognized by that faith within the heart which considers Christ its Good Shepherd. But who recognizes the people who have this faith? You will not see this faith on me nor I on you, for no one can look into the heart of another...No one can know and designate the sheep and the flock but this Shepherd Christ alone.”<sup>lxxiii</sup>

We come now to the question: Did Luther apply the name “church” to an outward, visible organization, to the entire group of those who *professed* to be Christ’s Church? This involves the question; Did Luther make a distinction between the invisible and the visible church?

This is a problem that has stirred up considerable theological dust. F. E. Mayer, for example, says, “As far as is known, he never distinguishes between a visible and an invisible church as we are wont to do.”<sup>lxxiv</sup> In another article the same author asserts, “It is foreign to Lutheran theological thinking to compare or to contrast an invisible and a visible Church. To do so is a false antithesis, since the word *Church* has an entirely different connotation in each term: in the one it is the communion of saints, in the other it is a *corpus mixtum*, not even an *ecclesia mixta*, in fact, strictly speaking, no Church at all.”<sup>lxxv</sup>

Bornkamm holds a similar view: “For Luther there are neither two groups in the church (believers and unbelievers), nor is there a church in the narrower and in the wider sense (as Lutheran orthodoxy held in a later age) or a church in a primary and in a secondary sense. For him there is only one definition of the church.”<sup>lxxvi</sup>

Schwiebert also enters into this question. Basing his opinion to a large extent on Ernst Rietschl’s investigation,<sup>lxxvii</sup> Schwiebert says, “He (Rietschl) seems to prove his point that Luther know of only one type of Church worthy of that name, The Invisible Church of Jesus.”<sup>lxxviii</sup> Schwiebert also quotes the *Ansbach Counsel* of 1542 as a correct explanation of what Luther meant by invisible: “This Church is spiritual and invisible, not in the sense that we cannot see its members, but rather in that no one knows who really belongs to the Christian Church,”<sup>lxxix</sup> K.L. Schmidt informs us that “Luther himself equated the *ecclesia invisibilis* with the *ecclesia (spiritualis) sola fide perceptibilis*.”<sup>lxxx</sup>

Ferdinand Kattenbusch, on the other hand, attempted to show that Luther thought of the Church on two levels, an outward body comprising all those who profess Christianity, and within this a group of true believers.<sup>lxxxi</sup>

Where, now, in this confusion of claims and counter-claims does the truth lie? What was Luther’s concept of the Church?

We have cited numerous statements in which Luther expresses his conviction that only believers belong to Christ’s Church. This is the vital point. We cull a few more statements from Luther’s answer to Alvelde in *The Papacy at Rome* to bear this out: “The Scriptures speak of the Church quite simply, and use the term in only one sense; these men have added and brought into general use two more. The first use, according to the Scriptures, is this, that the Church is called the assembly of all believers in Christ upon earth.”<sup>lxxxii</sup> Quoting Christ’s words, “My kingdom is not of this world,” he says, “This is indeed a clear passage, in which the Church is made separate from all temporal communities, as not being anything external. And this blind Romanist makes of it an external community, like any other.”<sup>lxxxiii</sup> “Whosoever maintains that an external assembly or an outward unity makes a Church, sets forth arbitrarily what is merely his own opinion, and whoever endeavors to prove it by the Scriptures, brings divine truth to the support of his lies, and makes God a false witness.”<sup>lxxxiv</sup>

The second sense in which the word “church” is commonly used is to denote a visible organization, and the third sense is a building for worship. With regard to the church as a visible organization, however, Luther emphatically declares “There is not one letter in the Holy Scriptures to show that such a purely external Church has been established by God...If they (Luther’s opponents) can show me that even one letter of the Scriptures speaks of it, I am willing to recant. But I know that they cannot do it. The Canon Law and human statutes,

indeed, give the name of Church or Christendom to such a thing... Therefore, for the sake of brevity and a better understanding, we shall call the two churches by different names. The first, which is the natural, essential, real and true one, let us call a spiritual, inner Christendom. The other, which is man-made and external, let us call a bodily, external Christendom: not as if we would part them asunder, but just as when I speak of a man, and call him, according to the soul, a spiritual, according to the body, a physical, man; or as the Apostle is wont to speak of the inner and of the outward man. Thus also the Christian assembly, according to the soul, is a communion of one accord in one faith, although according to the body it cannot be assembled at one place, and yet every group is assembled in its own place. This Christendom is ruled by Canon Law and the prelates of the Church. To this belong all the popes, cardinals, bishops, prelates, monks, nuns and all those who in these external things are taken to be Christians, whether they are truly Christians at heart or not. For though membership in this communion does not make true Christians, because all the orders mentioned may exist without faith; nevertheless this communion is never without some who at the same time are true Christians, just as the body does not give the soul its life, and yet the soul lives in the body, and, indeed, can live without the body. Those who are without faith and are outside of the first community, but are included in this second community, are dead in the sight of God, hypocrites, and but like wooden images of true Christians.”<sup>lxxxv</sup>

It was Luther’s firm conviction, therefore, that the Church in the true sense of the Word comprises only true believers. At the same time he recognized that the name “church” was also applied to visible groups of professing Christians. He found this usage also in the Scriptures. In his exposition of Galatians of 1535 he says that Paul called the congregations of Galatia “churches” synecdochically, that is, because of the true believers that were still present in them. “Even though the Galatians had been led astray,” he says, “Baptism, the Word, and the name of Christ still continued among them... Wherever the substance of the Word and the sacraments abides, therefore, there the holy church is present, even though Antichrist may reign there.”<sup>lxxxvi</sup> But the point is that even though *ekklesia* is used in the Scriptures of the external group, this is a *figure of speech*. This is a synecdoche, *a pars pro toto*. The whole group has the name from its principal part. The use of such a figure does not in any respect alter the fact which Luther so strongly emphasized in the statement we quoted a moment ago: “There is not one letter in the Holy Scriptures to show that such a purely external church *has been established by God*.”

There can be no doubt, then, that for Luther there never was, in reality, any other Church except that which Jesus calls “my Church,” the assembly of His saints. To this Church He gave the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. This Church is His body. This Church is truly ecumenical. It is one flock with one Shepherd. For though its members, as Luther said, “be a thousand miles apart in body, yet they are called an assembly in spirit because each one preaches, believes, hopes, loves, and lives like the other.”<sup>lxxxvii</sup> Theirs is a unity of faith. “That means in reality a spiritual unity, because of which men are called a communion of saints. And this unity is of itself sufficient to make a Church, and without it no unity, be it of place, of time, of person, of work, or of whatever else, makes a Church.”<sup>lxxxviii</sup>

It should hardly be necessary to add that Luther’s vision of the Church as the total community of believers, including those who were still to be found in the Church of Rome, did not mean for him that error was to be tolerated. “We must look to Christ and listen to Him,” Luther declared. “The Christian Church is a house in which God’s Word alone is heard.”<sup>lxxxix</sup> In his second exposition of Galatians he stresses this point: “Nor should any doctrine be taught and heard in the church except the pure Word of God. Otherwise, let the teachers and hearers be accursed along with their doctrine.”<sup>xc</sup>

What a blessing of God it would be if we, by His grace, could overcome our all-too-frequent practice of thinking of the Church as an outward, visible organization—that is the effect of our natural reason—and if we could recapture Luther’s living faith with its grand, clear vision of the Church, the Church in its beauty, the Church in its glory, the Church in its holiness, the Church of the “holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd”!

### III. The “church” in the Lutheran Confessions

Of vital importance to an understanding of the doctrine of the Church in the Lutheran Confessions is the basic statement in the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints." When the particular Lutheran Symbols treat of this doctrine, they are, in reality, merely unfolding this key sentence in this most ancient of the three Ecumenical Creeds.

In his Small Catechism of 1529 Luther stresses that the Holy Ghost "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."<sup>xc</sup> Within this Church the Holy Ghost does His gracious work of daily and richly forgiving all sins to me and all believers in Christ so that on the last day we will rise to eternal life.

In his Large Catechism, published in the same year, Luther adds the thought, as was pointed out earlier, that the Church is also the instrument through which the Holy Ghost functions. For "He has a peculiar congregation in the world, which is the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God, which He reveals and preaches."<sup>xcii</sup> Where the Gospel is not preached there can be no Church, "for where Christ is not preached, there is no Holy Ghost who creates, calls, and gathers the Christian Church."<sup>xciii</sup> The Church is the organ "by means of which He fetches us to Christ and which He employs to teach and preach to us the Word."<sup>xciv</sup>

In discussing the "church" in the Lutheran Confessions we need to recall, as was mentioned previously in another connection, that in his Large Catechism Luther plainly equates the two expressions in the Apostles' Creed, "the holy Christian Church" and "the Communion of Saints." "Both expressions," he says, "are identical."<sup>xcv</sup> He explains that the word *Kirche* (church) "means really nothing else than a common congregation or assembly, or, best of all and most clearly, holy Christendom."<sup>xcvi</sup>

Mention was made earlier, also, of Luther's beautiful definition of the Church in his joyous confession, "I believe that there is upon earth a little holy group and congregation of pure saints, under one head, even Christ, called together by the Holy Ghost in one faith, one mind, and understanding, with manifold gifts, yet agreeing in love, without sects or schisms. I am also a part and member of the same, a sharer and joint owner of all the goods it possesses, brought to it and incorporated into it by the Holy Ghost by having heard and continuing to hear the Word of God, which is the beginning of entering it."<sup>xcvii</sup>

Of particular significance are Articles VII and VIII of the Augsburg Confession, the charter of the Lutheran Church which was presented to Emperor Charles V on June 25, 1530.<sup>xcviii</sup> In Article VII the Lutherans teach "that *one holy Church* is to continue forever." The Church is defined as "the congregation of saints." The German text here has "*die Versammlung aller Glaebigen*," "the assembly of all believers." Attention is drawn specifically to the fact that in this assembly the means of grace are in use. In the Church "the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered."

Article VII then takes up the question whether it is necessary for the unity of the Church that human rites and ceremonies be everywhere alike. It answers with an emphatic No. Differences in such matters do not disrupt the unity of the Church. "To the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments."

While Article VII treats of the Church in the proper sense of the term, Article VIII discusses the Church as it is found "in this life." The opening sentence of Article VIII indicates the close connection between this Article and the foregoing one: "Although *the Church* properly is the congregation of saints and true believers, nevertheless, since in this life many hypocrites and evil persons are mingled there with, it is lawful to use the Sacraments administered by evil men."

Hypocrites and evil men are outwardly associated with the Church in this life. They may even hold positions as pastors and teachers. Nevertheless, Christians should not be troubled by the thought that the Word that they hear and the Sacraments that they receive are ineffectual if those who minister to them are hypocrites. The efficacy and benefit of these means of grace are not dependent on the person who administers them. They have their saving, life-giving power solely by virtue of the institution and commandment of Christ.

It would lead us too far afield to enter into all of the implications of what is here confessed. But several points are to be noted which are of special interest to us at this time.

A clear distinction is made, first of all, between the Church in the proper sense of the term and the form in which it appears in this life. Properly speaking, it is “the congregation of saints and true believers. Nevertheless, the Augsburg Confession clearly implies that the word “church” is also commonly used for the outward group of those who profess the Christian faith. This, it holds, is an improper use of the term, however, since hypocrites and evil men, though they are outwardly associated with the Church in this life, are not actually members of Christ’s Body. They are not a part of the Church in the true sense.

The Church in the true sense will continue forever. It will always remain (*perpetuo mansura sit*). It is *one* (*una*). It is not divided. It is catholic. It is the assembly of saints (*congregation sanctorum*). They are saints, of course, not in and of themselves, but only through faith in Christ Jesus. This was expressly stated in Article IV, “Of Justification”; “Men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ’s sake, through faith.”<sup>xcix</sup> Their sins are forgiven because Christ by His death has made satisfaction for them. Article V, “Of the Ministry.” brings out that the Holy Ghost works this faith, which God imputes for righteousness in His sight, through the Word and the Sacraments.<sup>c</sup>

This thought is also emphasized in Article VII: “The Church is the congregation of saints, *in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered.*” The little word “rightly” is extremely important.<sup>ci</sup> The point is that saving faith, faith which embraces Christ and His righteousness, is worked only by the *pure* Gospel and by the *right* use of the Sacraments. False teaching and corruption or perversion of the Sacraments do not work justifying faith. Only the *pure* Gospel and the *pure* Sacraments are sure marks by which the presence of the Church can be recognized. False teaching undermines and is an obstacle to true faith. Error does not build up, it tears down the Church. It may, in fact, entirely destroy the Church wherever it is permitted to take root.

This Seventh Article of the Augsburg Confession also declares that “to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments.”<sup>cii</sup> Some have interpreted this to mean that agreement in fundamental doctrines of the Gospel is all that is needed for church fellowship. In non-fundamental doctrines, they say, there is room for diversity of opinion and of teaching. What a misconception those who hold such views have of what this Article teaches!

The point is that Rome insisted on agreement not only in doctrine, but also in human traditions such as the date for the celebration of Easter.<sup>ciii</sup> Over against such claims of Rome the Article declares that only agreement in doctrine, not uniformity in human traditions is essential. To claim that the Article demands agreement in only *certain* doctrines is to read something into the text that is not there. It calls for a *consensus de doctrina*.<sup>civ</sup>

The doctrine of the Gospel is God’s revelation. Every bit of it is, even those parts which to us may seem less important. God considered these truths, too, important enough to be incorporated in the Holy Scriptures. “Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). Everything in the Scriptures has been given us by God as wholesome, spiritual food to nourish our faith. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (II Tim. 3:16,17). The Holy Scriptures are able to make us “wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”(II Tim. 3:15). How, then could we think of countenancing a denial of any part of God’s life-giving Word?

Neither Article VII nor Article VIII uses the words “visible” or “invisible.” Without a doubt, however, Article VII deals with what we generally speak of as the invisible Church. This is the Church in the proper sense of the term. Article VIII, on the other hand, speaks of the empirical church, the church as it is “in this life.” It recognizes that “many hypocrites and evil persons are mingled therewith.” This is the church in an improper sense. This is what our theologians refer to as the visible church.

Does this mean that the invisible Church becomes visible? Not at all! The members of Christ’s Body are known only to Him. Nevertheless, this is a real Church, consisting of actual persons living in this world. The members of this Church use the means of grace. They confess their faith. Thus, wherever the Church in the

proper sense exists here on earth, it will manifest its presence in a visible church where these activities are carried on. And wherever there is such a visible church, there, we may be assured, members of the invisible Church will be present. Where there is no visible church, however, there, under ordinary circumstances, the invisible Church will not be present either. There may, of course, be some true believers who are not members of a visible church but who nourish their faith with the Gospel privately.

The use of the means of grace and confession are activities which dissemblers may also engage in, however. Every true believer is by his very nature a confessor, but not every confessor is in point of fact a true believer.

The visible church, the church as it is found in this life, and the invisible Church are, therefore, not identical or congruent. Their boundaries are not co-terminous. Rather, the invisible Church is found within the visible church. The body of true believers is found within the larger group of those who profess to believe. We may conceive of this as two concentric circles, the outer circle representing the visible church, and the smaller, inner circle representing the body of believers, the Church in the true sense.

Jesus' parables of the wheat and the tares (Matt. 13:24-43) and of the net with both good fish and bad (Matt. 13:47-50) present a similar picture. It is important to remember, however, that Jesus does not give the name "church" to the mixed body of believers and hypocrites. He says, rather, "The field is the world" (Matt. 13:28). But He is speaking of the nature of the Kingdom of Heaven, of how He exercises His spiritual reign of grace. There are some who give the outward appearance of being true believers. The tares look like wheat. Jesus warns His disciples, therefore not to attempt to remove the tares lest they root up the wheat also. Only in the judgment on the last day will an unerring and permanent separation be effected by the Son of Man through His angels.

Edmund Schlink draws our attention to the fact that the Augsburg Confession speaks not only of *the* Church, but also of *churches* (Article I, 1), and comments, "Like the Christian church on earth the Christian congregation at a specific place, being an assembly of believers, is the church of Jesus Christ in the most real sense. The definition of A. C. VII does not deny this but from the beginning precludes an independentistic concept of the church which wrongly isolates the individual congregation."<sup>cv</sup>

Turning now to the Apology, we find that the distinction between the true Church of believers and the outward group of all who profess to be believers is repeatedly emphasized. We quote a few statements:

We grant that in this life hypocrites and wicked men have been mingled with the Church, and that they are members of the Church according to the outward fellowship of the signs of the Church, i.e., of Word, profession, and Sacraments.<sup>cvi</sup>

The Church is not only the fellowship of outward objects and rites, as other governments, but it is originally (*principaliter*) a fellowship of faith and of the Holy Ghost in hearts; which fellowship nevertheless has outward marks so that it can be recognized, namely, the pure doctrine of the Gospel, and the administration of the Sacraments in accordance with the Gospel of Christ. And this Church alone is called *the body of Christ*... Those in whom Christ does not act are not the members of Christ.<sup>cvii</sup>

Although, therefore hypocrites and wicked men are members of this true Church according to outward rites, yet when the Church is defined, it is necessary to define that which is the living body of Christ, and which is in name and in fact the Church.<sup>cviii</sup>

Taking issue with the Roman conception of the Church *proprie* as a *corpus mixtum*, the Apology makes a distinction between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of the devil. "The Church, which is truly the kingdom of Christ, is properly the congregation of saints."<sup>cix</sup> The wicked are members of the kingdom of the devil, even though they, like the Pharisees, may have outward fellowship with the Church. The Eighth Article was added to the Augsburg Confession, Melancthon tells us, "lest any might think that we separate the wicked and hypocrites from the outward fellowship of the Church."<sup>cx</sup> "In this life, because the kingdom of Christ has not yet been revealed, they are mingled with the Church."<sup>cxii</sup>

When the Apology speaks, on the one hand, of the Church as not yet revealed but "hidden under a crowd of wicked men,"<sup>cxii</sup> and, on the other hand, "of the outward appearance of the Church," referring in this

connection to the parables of the tares, of the net, and of the ten virgins,<sup>cxiii</sup> it is, if not *in expresso* nevertheless in fact, employing the concepts of the invisible and visible church.

The Apology takes pains to refute the charge that the Augsburg Confession's definition of the Church removes it from the sphere of reality. It is not a mere abstraction, a Platonic idea. It declares, "Neither, indeed, are we dreaming of a Platonic state, as some wickedly charge, but we say that this Church exists, namely, the truly believing and righteous men scattered throughout the whole world. And we add the marks: the pure doctrine of the Gospel and the Sacraments. And this Church is properly the pillar of the truth, I Tim. 3:15."<sup>cxiv</sup> This Church, therefore, is not merely an object of hope. It is a present reality. But it is not the papal kingdom. To avoid this thought the Lutheran Confessions substitute "Christian" for "catholic" in the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in the holy *Christian* Church."

We have previously cited the definition of the Church in the Smalcald Articles: "The Church is, namely, the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd."<sup>cxv</sup> Over against the Roman conception of the Church as a visible organization, its spiritual character is here strongly emphasized. In addition, it is emphatically denied that the Pope is "according to divine law or according to the Word of God the head of all Christendom."<sup>cxvi</sup>

A further statement in the Treatise, Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope, which has a bearing on our discussion is the remark that "the keys belong not to the person of one particular man, but to the Church, as many most clear and firm arguments testify. For Christ, speaking concerning the keys, Matt. 18,19, adds; *If two or three of you shall agree on earth*, etc. Therefore he grants the keys principally and immediately to the Church."<sup>cxvii</sup>

It is clear from this that the Keys have been given not to a local congregation in the sense of an organization comprising both believers and hypocrites, but to the Church of believers, "*to every Christian*," as Luther so clearly stated.<sup>cxviii</sup> No limitations, no restrictions, no qualifications of any kind are placed on this. There is no requirement that they be gathered together in this or that type of organization in order to exercise them.

Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession, indeed, teaches "that no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called."<sup>cxix</sup> But nowhere do the Confessions say that only the local congregation has the right to extend a call. They do not teach that other organizational forms which Christians may establish to preach the Gospel derive their authority to use the Keys only from that of the local congregation. "The Church is among those who teach the Word of God aright, and administer the Sacraments aright." The Apology declares,<sup>cxx</sup> and, in the words of the Treatise, "Wherever the Church is there is the authority to administer the Gospel (*ius administrandi evangelii*)."<sup>cxxi</sup>

There is, finally, also the clear statement in the Treatise that "the decisions of Synods are the decisions of the Church."<sup>cxxii</sup> The "Synods" referred to are, of course, not the permanent church bodies we have in mind when we speak of the Wisconsin Synod, the Missouri Synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, etc. The Treatise is speaking of Councils of the Church. But it is clear that such assemblies of representatives from various churches are also recognized as having the Character of being the Church, in spite of the fact that such Councils met for only a certain limited period of time and in spite of the fact that whatever organization (such as presiding officers and officials with responsibilities of various kinds) these Councils had, it was strictly limited as to duration, authority, and competence. This was the nature also of the "Synod" or Council of Jerusalem of Acts 15 attended by members of the Jerusalem congregation and a delegation from Antioch.

Despite the absence of a durative or permanent character on the part of a Council, however, the Confessions clearly and definitely identify decisions of Synods with decisions of the *Church*. The argument which is sometimes heard that gatherings in Jesus' name must have a permanent, durative, continuing nature like that of a congregation in order to qualify for the name "church", and that an occasional or a single gathering can not be called "church" has, therefore, no support whatsoever in the Confessions, even as it has no demonstrable basis in Scripture.

This year, for instance, quite a number of joint services will undoubtedly be held to commemorate the 450th anniversary of the Reformation. Some of these will probably be conducted by groups that have perhaps no other purpose except the arranging of such a joint Reformation service. Would we want to say that such a service is not a service of the Church, that this is not the Church at worship?

The Formula of Concord has no article dealing specifically with the Church. This doctrine is touched on only incidentally. All such references reaffirm what was presented in the preceding Confessions, however.

The Formula teaches, for example, that Christ is the Head of the Church.<sup>cxxiii</sup> The Church of believers is the Body of Christ.<sup>cxxiv</sup> “The Holy Ghost abides with the holy congregation or Christendom.”<sup>cxxv</sup> Unbelieving and impenitent, wicked Christians only bear the name of Christ but do not have true faith.<sup>cxxvi</sup> The Formula confesses that “the Church of God will exist and abide in opposition to all the gates of hell.”<sup>cxxvii</sup> Finally, the error of the Anabaptists is rejected “that a congregation in which sinners are still found is no true Christian assembly.”<sup>cxxviii</sup>

### Conclusion

“What church do you mean?” That is the question which was assigned for our study. To which “church” did Jesus give the Ministry of the Keys? Did He entrust the Keys to His believers, to the *Una Sancta*, to the members of His Body as such, or did He give them only to one specific functioning form of the Church, the local congregation?

It is clear from our study, first of all, that neither in the Scriptures, nor in the writings of Luther, nor in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church is there any support for the view that the church to which Jesus gave the Keys is a visible, outward organization. That would mean that He gave them also to hypocrites. Such a claim, as we have seen, has no Scriptural basis whatsoever.

Wholeheartedly we subscribe to Thesis IV of Walther’s theses on the Church and the Ministry: “This true Church of believers and saints it is to which Christ has given the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Therefore this Church is the real and sole holder and bearer of the spiritual, divine, and heavenly blessings, rights, powers, offices, etc., which Christ has gained and which are available in His Church.”<sup>cxxix</sup>

Although visible church bodies are also called “churches,” Luther and the Lutheran Confessions insist that they are called by this name not in the strict sense of the term, but in a wider, looser, so-called “improper” sense. Such a use of the word “church” is a legitimate figure of speech, found also in the Scriptures. In no way does it concede or imply that hypocrites are members of Christ’s Church.

Any view that externalizes the Church in any respect, that changes it, in other words, from an object of faith to an object of sight, is not Scriptural but Roman Catholic, as Hoenecke points out: “Papistical to a greater or lesser degree is, however, every teaching that considers something visible and observable, some outward form, arrangement, and order as the basis and reason why the name ‘church’ is properly given to a group of such who hear God’s Word and use the Sacraments.”<sup>cxxx</sup>

It is clear, secondly, that there is not a shred of evidence in Scripture that God has prescribed the form in which His saints are to gather together to exercise the Ministry of the Keys jointly. The prescribing of forms belongs to the Old Testament, not to the New.

The local congregation, as we know it, is, indeed a God-pleasing functioning form of the Church. It is the first group into which Christians who live in the same community will be drawn together. The local congregation, also, exercises the Ministry of the Keys in its most comprehensive form. But there is no word of institution in Scripture for this particular functioning form of the Church. Other functioning forms, other groupings of believers, are equally God-pleasing.” All such functioning forms of the Church may be called “church” in view of the fact that they are gathering of believers drawn together by the Holy Ghost through the Gospel and in its interest. Brotherly love and the observance of good order will prevent a conflict between these functioning forms with regard to their responsibility and work.

In the true, strict sense of the word the Church consists of believers only. This is the Church of which He is the Head. It is this Church of which He Himself is the foundation, which He builds, and to which He has

given the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. This Church has His promise that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Its members are “the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd.”

Blessed is he who can say with Luther, “I am also a part and member of the same”!

<sup>i</sup> Smalcald Articles, XII, 2, 3. *Concordia Triglotta* (abbreviated: Trig.), St. Louis, 1921, p. 499.

<sup>ii</sup> Translated by Martin H. Bertram, St. Louis, 1958, p. 134.

<sup>iii</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, G. Kittel, ed., Geoffrey W. Bromiley, tr.; Grand Rapids, 1965; Vol. III, p. 513.

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 527.

<sup>v</sup> “Synod and Congregation,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 61, October, 1964, p. 251.

<sup>vi</sup> Erlangen ed., XV, 392. Cf. also St. Louis ed., VII, 287: “‘Upon this rock,’ that is, upon myself, not upon you. For He does not say: You are Peter, and upon you, Peter; but, ‘upon this rock’ (that is, upon myself) ‘I will build my Church.’” This is also Dr. C.F.W. Walther’s interpretation. In *The True Visible Church* (John Theodore Mueller, tr.; St. Louis, 1961) he writes, “What is meant by ‘rock’ the Holy Spirit Himself explains to us in I Cor. 3:11 and Eph. 2:19-22, where *Christ* is expressly named as the Foundation of the church” (page 1).

<sup>vii</sup> Trig., p. 691.

<sup>viii</sup> Cf. Luther on Matt. 18:18, “It is clear that Christ here interprets His own words, and in this XVIII chapter explains the former XVI; namely, that the keys are given to St. Peter in the stead of the whole Church, and not for his own person” (Philadelphia ed., I, 373). Cf. also Sm. Art., Tract., 23: “In all these passages Peter is the representative of the entire assembly of apostles, as appears from the text itself” (Trig., p. 511). Valuable also is the discussion of this point by W. Rohnert, *Die Dogmatik der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, Braunschweig and Leipzig, 1902, p. 489.

<sup>ix</sup> Trig., p. 691:48.

<sup>x</sup> Trig., p. 511:24.

<sup>xi</sup> Cf. “Great fear came upon all the church,” Acts 5:11. Note also 11:22; 12:1,5. In 2:47, “The Lord added to the church;: *Te ekklesia* is a doubtful reading not accepted in the Nestle Greek text.”

<sup>xii</sup> Luther translates: *in den Gemeinden*.

<sup>xiii</sup> TDNT, III, 505.

<sup>xiv</sup> Op. cit., p. 252f.

<sup>xv</sup> St. Louis, 1953; translated by a committee; Vol. III, p. 420.

<sup>xvi</sup> E.g., I Cor. 14:4, “He that prophesieth edifieth the church” (*ekklesian*, no article); and in the very next verse, “That the church (*he ekklesia*, with the article) may receive edifying.”

<sup>xvii</sup> II Cor. 8:19, “chosen of the churches,” (*cheirotoneis hypo ton ekklesion*, with the article); v. 23, “the messengers of the churches,” (*apostoloi ekklesion*, without the article); v. 24, “before the churches,” (*eis prosopon ton ekklesion*, with the article).

<sup>xviii</sup> TDNT, III, 506.

<sup>xix</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>xx</sup> I Cor. 1:2, “To them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours”; II Cor. 1:1, “With all the saints which are in all Achaia.”

<sup>xxi</sup> Cf. also, e.g., I Cor. 10:32; Gal. 1:13; I Tim. 3:5,15.

<sup>xxii</sup> Cf. also Rom. 1:7; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:2.

<sup>xxiii</sup> G. Stoeckhardt, *Commentary on St. Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians*, tr. By Martin S. Sommer, St. Louis, 1952, p. 110.

<sup>xxiv</sup> This quotation is from the ninth of Hermann Sasse’s “Letters Addressed to Lutheran Pastors,” translated by Prof. E. Reim in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 47, April, 1950, p. 113.

<sup>xxv</sup> *Verhandlungen der 20. Jahresversammlung der deutschen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Synode von Wisconsin und anderen Staaten*, 1870, p. 15.



<sup>xxvi</sup> Sasse: “The Church of Jesus Christ, the *Una Sancta Catholica perpetuo mansura*, which we confess in the Creed, is, as an object of faith, hidden from our earth-bound eyes. It can not be seen from without. It must be believed; and it can be believed only within the Church, by the believers in the Church. The Church is therefore at the same time the subject and the object of this faith,—a situation for which there is no parallel” (*op. cit.*, p. 118).

<sup>xxvii</sup> Cf. Sasse: “This Church, which is no mere intellectual abstraction, but a reality, becomes manifest in this world in the form of individual congregations which are confined to categories of space and time...Each of them is therefore not merely a part of the Church but *the* Church at that particular place” (*op. cit.*, pp. 118-119).

<sup>xxviii</sup> “Concerning the Doctrine of the Church and of its Ministry with Special Reference to the Synod and its Discipline,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 59, April, 1962, p. 103. The translation is by Prof. H. J. Vogel. Pieper cites Luther’s statement in his exposition of Joel 3 that the Scripture “designates as church generally all those who publicly confess the same doctrine (the Gospel) and use the same Sacraments, *although* many hypocrites and wicked persons are mingled with them” (St. L., VI, 1628). He comments, “Notice how precisely Luther expresses himself. Those who ‘publicly confess the same doctrine’ are for him the believers, and they are called the Church, although, i.e., *in spite of the fact that hypocrites...are mingled with them*” (*ibid.*). Luther expressly says, “This upright part also the Scripture calls the church, and the word ‘holy’ properly fits these” (St. L., VI, 1629).

<sup>xxix</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>xxx</sup> *Ev. Luth. Dogmatik*, Milwaukee, 1909, Vol. IV, p. 198.

<sup>xxxi</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 121.

<sup>xxxii</sup> *Verhandlungen* etc., 1870, p. 23.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 254.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Sasse: “A synod may also be Church, just as a little group of *duo aut tres* may be Church” (*ibid.*, p. 122). Note also C.F.W. Walther, *Lutherische Brosamen*, St. Louis, 1876, p. 391: “A synod is, indeed, to be a part of God’s Church on earth. Its mark, too, is therefore that in it ‘the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered.’ It, too, is to be built on nothing else than on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets with Jesus Christ as the Corner Stone. It, too, is to be a little band of those ‘holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd.’ To it, too, that assignment is given which the Savior at His ascension entrusted to His Church on earth: ‘Teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.’ Its final purpose, too, is the salvation of sinners, which is accomplished through nothing else than through the pure Gospel.”

<sup>xxxv</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Trig., p. 499.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> In his Old Testament translation Luther uses *Kirche* about 15 times, but only to designate the sanctuaries and gatherings of idol worshippers. He never uses it for the true believers or their assemblies. In the New Testament he uses *Kirche* only twice (“church dedication,” John 10:22; “church robbers,” Acts 19:37), never, however, as a translation of *ekklesia*.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Trig., p. 689:42.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Trig., p. 689:47.

<sup>xl</sup> Trig., p. 691:51,52.

<sup>xli</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 136.

<sup>xlii</sup> WA, 6:560.

<sup>xliii</sup> “The *Una Sancta* in Luther’s Theology,” *Concordia Theological Monthly*, Vol. XVIII, November, 1947, p. 805.

<sup>xliv</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 801.

<sup>xlv</sup> WA, 30, II:651.

<sup>xlvi</sup> WA, 7:721.

<sup>xlvii</sup> WA, 31:164; Am. Ed., 14:92.

<sup>xlviii</sup> WA, 31:165; Am. Ed., 14:93.

- xlix WA, 56:272, Cf. also 56:269, 347, 576; 40, I:368.
- <sup>l</sup> WA, 40, II:563; Am. Ed., 12:265.
- <sup>li</sup> WA, 40, II:601; Am. Ed., 12:294.
- <sup>lii</sup> WA, 40, II:107; Am. Ed., 27:84,85.
- <sup>liii</sup> WA, DB 7:420.
- <sup>liv</sup> WA, 6:297.
- <sup>lv</sup> WA, 12:184; Am. Ed., 40:27.
- <sup>lvi</sup> “Luther’s Doctrine of Church and Ministry,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 60, April, 1963, p. 94.
- <sup>lvii</sup> WA, 7:684. Cf. also, “*Invisible*, perceptible through faith is the Church,” 4:189.
- <sup>lviii</sup> “*Abscondita est ecclesia, latent sancti*,” WA, 18:652. Translated by J.I. Packer and O.R. Johnston, London, 1957, p. 123.
- <sup>lix</sup> WA, 18:651; Packer-Johnston, p. 122.
- <sup>lx</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>lxi</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>lxii</sup> WA, T2, No. 1969.
- <sup>lxiii</sup> WA, 6:301.
- <sup>lxiv</sup> Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, Walter A. Hansen, tr: St. Louis, 1962, p. 258.
- <sup>lxv</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.
- <sup>lxvi</sup> “Luther’s Doctrine of Church and Ministry,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 60, April, 1963, p. 94.
- <sup>lxvii</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261f.
- <sup>lxviii</sup> WA, 6:295f; Holman Ed., I:353f.
- <sup>lxix</sup> WA, 11:408.
- <sup>lxx</sup> WA, 25:97.
- <sup>lxxi</sup> WA, 50:631.
- <sup>lxxii</sup> WA, 6:301; Holman Ed., I:361.
- <sup>lxxiii</sup> WA, 21:332f.
- <sup>lxxiv</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 802.
- <sup>lxxv</sup> “The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel and the Terminology Visible and Invisible Church,” *Concordia Theological Monthly*, Vol. XXV, March, 1954, p. 185f.
- <sup>lxxvi</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 145.
- <sup>lxxvii</sup> “Das Problem der unsichtbar-sichtbaren Kirche bei Luther,” *Schriften des Vereins fuer Reformationsgeschichte*, CLIV, 1932.
- <sup>lxxviii</sup> E.G. Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times*, St. Louis, 1950, p. 458.
- <sup>lxxix</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>lxxx</sup> TDNT, III, 534. The reference is to WA, 7:710. Cf. also WA, 7:712.
- <sup>lxxxI</sup> *Die Doppelschichtigkeit in Luthers Kirchenbegriff*, Gotha, 1928.
- <sup>lxxxii</sup> WA, 6:292; Holman Ed., I:349.
- <sup>lxxxiii</sup> WA, 6:293; Holman Ed., I:349.
- <sup>lxxxiv</sup> WA, 6:294; Holman Ed., I:350-351.
- <sup>lxxxv</sup> WA, 6:296f.; Holman Ed., I:355f.
- <sup>lxxxvi</sup> WA, 40 I:70f.; Am. Ed., 26:25. This passage in Luther was apparently overlooked by Herman A. Preus, who offers a detailed discussion of the question of the visible and invisible Church in Luther’s theology in his book, *The Communion of Saints*, Minneapolis, 1948. He holds that Luther “does not admit the distinction between a visible and an invisible Church” (p. 87). His observation is correct that “much confusion exists because this problem has not been discussed strictly within the sphere of the *nature* of the Church” (p.85). *In this respect* it is true that “Luther knows only one Church, the invisible, spiritual Church, which is the communion of believers” (p. 87).
- <sup>lxxxvii</sup> WA, 6:293; Homan Ed., I:349.

- lxxxviii *Ibid.*
- lxxxix WA, 47:774.
- xc WA, 40 I:120; Am. Ed., 26:58.
- xc<sup>i</sup> Trig., p. 545.
- xc<sup>ii</sup> Trig., p. 689.
- xc<sup>iii</sup> *Ibid.*
- xc<sup>iv</sup> Trig., p. 693.
- xc<sup>v</sup> Trig., p. 689f.
- xc<sup>vi</sup> Trig., p. 691.
- xc<sup>vii</sup> *Ibid.*
- xc<sup>viii</sup> Trig., p. 47.
- xc<sup>ix</sup> Trig., p. 45.
- <sup>c</sup> *Ibid.*
- ci See Elert's valuable discussion, *op. cit.*, pp. 269-274.
- cii "Et ad veram unitatem ecclesiae satis est consentire de doctrina evangelii et administratione sacramentorum," Trig., p. 46.
- ciii Cf. Apology, Trig., pp. 237-243, par. 30-45.
- civ Cf. Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, tr. by Paul F. Koehneke and Herbert J.A. Bouman, Philadelphia, 1961, p. 207.
- cv *Op. cit.*, p. 203.
- cvi Trig., p. 227:3.
- cvii Trig., p. 227:5,6.
- cviii Trig., p. 231:12.
- cix Trig., p. 231:16.
- cx Trig., p. 227:3.
- cx<sup>i</sup> Trig., pp. 231-233:17.
- cx<sup>ii</sup> VII:19, so translated in the *Book of Concord*, Theodore G. Tappert, ed., Philadelphia, 1959.
- cx<sup>iii</sup> Trig., p. 233.
- cx<sup>iv</sup> Trig., p. 233.
- cx<sup>v</sup> Trig., p. 499.
- cx<sup>vi</sup> Trig., p. 471.
- cx<sup>vii</sup> Trig., p. 511.
- cx<sup>viii</sup> WA, 52:273.
- cx<sup>ix</sup> Trig., p. 49.
- cx<sup>x</sup> Trig., p. 315:27.
- cx<sup>xi</sup> Trig., p. 523.
- cx<sup>xii</sup> Trig., p. 521:56.
- cx<sup>xiii</sup> Trig., p. 987:44; 1031:47.
- cx<sup>xiv</sup> Trig., p. 993:59.
- cx<sup>xv</sup> Trig., p. 895:37.
- cx<sup>xvi</sup> Trig., p. 1013:123.
- cx<sup>xvii</sup> Trig., p. 1079:50.
- cx<sup>xviii</sup> Trig., p. 1099:14.
- cx<sup>xix</sup> Translated in *Walther and the Church* by Wm. Dallmann, W.H.T. Dau, and Th. Engelder, St. Louis, 1938, p. 58.
- cx<sup>xx</sup> *Verhandlungen*, etc., 1870, p. 19.