The Historical Development of the Church from the Reformation to the Present on the Congregational and Synodical Level

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The Historical Development of the Protestant Churches of the Reformation Era: the Lutheran, the Reformed, and the Anabaptist Churches

The Lutheran Reformation brought two Scripture doctrines to light that are closely related to one another, the doctrine of justification by faith and the doctrine of the Church. The Church, according to Luther, is a congregation or assembly of those who are justified by faith, and all who are justified by faith go to make up the Church. Consequently the definition of the Church gets its direction from the doctrine of justification through faith, and Elert is undoubtedly right in saying that here is the first time in history that a definition of the Church is given.[1]

Luther could give this definition because it became clear to him, certainly only after an intense study of the Scriptures under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, what the doctrine of justification by faith really is. When he defined the Church as to its spiritual aspect, viz., that it is composed of saints, he did not regard these saints as sinless, holy men, as men who by means of the *infusio gratiae* and *infusio caritatis* set their affection on things above, on God as the *summum bonum*, but simply regarded them as justified sinners. And for Luther the sinner is justified altogether. For Augustine, whose definition of justification was influenced by Plato's doctrine of the two worlds, the world of phenomena and the world of ideas, the sinner was only justified in part. Augustine says this with so many words: *Ex parte justificati*. Again he says: *Justificati sumus, sed ipsa justitia, cum proficimus, crescit*. Thus Augustine speaks of our righteousness as growing and not yet being complete. Luther declares that the justified sinner is justified altogether, and that at the same time he still is a sinner in the full sense of the word. Luther sums it all up with his *totaliter iustus, totaliter peccator*. Man is altogether just, because the righteousness of faith is a *iustitia aliena*. There is no fragmentary justification. Again, man is not in need of forgiveness because of an evil remnant in him, but because of his own sinful self, which Luther defined as a *selbstische Gekrümmtheit*, an *incurvatio in se*, equal to unbelief. Therefore God the Father in His mercy does not redeem fictitious (*eingebildete*) sinners but real sinners in that He sustains us in our sins and regards our work and life with pleasure, although they deserve to be rejected.[2] Possessing this knowledge of justification by faith, the true church as taught by Luther is the church of justifying faith, the work of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. "Luther's concept of the church," as one writer puts it, "was so profound that for him it meant the same as the gospel of justification through faith."[3]

From the foregoing it is quite evident that for Luther the Church was nothing less than the *Gemeinde der Gerechten*, the עֲדַת צַדִּיקִים of Psalm 1:5, or the *Gemeinde der Heiligen*, the קְהַל קְדֹשִׁים of Psalm 89:6, and the קְהַל חֲסִידִים of Psalm 149:1. It is a well-known fact that Luther in his translation of these and all related passages both of the Old and the New Testament did not use the term *Kirche*. He rendered קְהַל and עֵדָה as well as ἐκκλησία with *Gemeinde*. This term meant, and in certain Upper- German dialects still means, *die aufgerufene Gemeinde*, the "call-up" of the people. The יְהוָה קְהַל in Numbers 16:3 is according to Kittel's

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[1] Willard Dow Allbeck, *Studies in the Lutheran Confessions*, Muhlenberg Press, Philadelphia, 1952, p. 80.
[2] *Die Heidelberger Disputation*, St. Louis XVIII, 62.
[3] *This Is The Church* Edited by Anders Nygren, Muhlenberg Press, Philadelphia, 1952, p. 184; also Nygren's *Simul Justus et peccator bei Augustin und Luther* in *Zeitschrift für sytematische Theologie* 1939, pp. 364ff.

Wörterbuch[4] the *Volksgesamtheit*, the united people of the Lord, the call to unity coming from the Lord. This קְהַל or ἐκκλησία, as the LXX often renders our word, this convocation or assembly, to which men, women, and children belonged (Jer. 44:15), possessed all the covenant promises of the Lord. To it the New Testament ἐκκλησια hearkens back as to the holy remnant in Zion and Jerusalem (Isa. 4:4; 6:13; 10:20ff.), the ἐκκλησία θεοῦ of Acts 20:28 being "the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood" (cf. Ps. 74:2), "the church of the saints" (I Cor. 14:34; cf. 1:2), "the church which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ" (I Thess. 1:1). Christ is the life-center of this Church and it therefore is "church of Christ" (Rom. 16:16), "subject to Christ" (Eph. 5:24), which Christ loved and for which He gave Himself (v. 25). Here we have on the one hand the doctrine of Christ who is our righteousness (I Cor. 1:30) and by whose obedience we were made righteous (Rom. 5:18) and on the other hand the doctrine of the Church inseparably united with one another, Christ the head of the Church, the Church His body and He its Savior (Eph. 5:23). This ἐκκλησία, this *Gemeinde*, this congregation was discovered by Luther, and God grant that we may never lose sight of it, but always see it as the true Israel, the priestly kingdom, the royal priesthood, the peculiar people, to which, as Luther would say, children, lowly people, who are not able to know and do anything by themselves, belong.

But this Church is invisible, although a blessed reality, while according to Roman-Catholic doctrine the Church is visible. Not as if Roman-Catholics in confessing the *Third Article* that they believe in the "one holy Christian Church, the communion of saints," do not declare that the inner life of the Christian is spiritual and therefore invisible, as invisible as the grace of God, the power and work of the Holy Spirit, as invisible as true faith and love are invisible. They do declare this. But this invisibility of the Church is something that God alone sees and judges. Yet He who said: "Tell it unto the church" (Matt. 18:17), certainly did not refer His disciples to an invisible church body, but to one which they could find and see and which is vested with an outward visible ministry of the keys. Jesus established this visible church by according the primacy of jurisdiction to Peter over all other priests and bishops, who will succeed him unto the end of days. A primacy of Peter, Prof. Pieper says in a 1917 *Quartalschrift* article, is an undeniable Scripture fact: *Der Primat Petri ist in der Schrift ein unleugbares Faktum*. It is only a question whether one regards this primacy as an outward, legal one, or as an internal, natural, free evangelical one. The same holds in regard to the organization of the churchly offices in Eph. 4. Everything depends on our seeing in these offices either lasting, outward institutions, or spiritual gifts. The rulings of the individual apostles or of the Apostolic Convention (Acts 15), the appointment of elders, the commissioning of preachers and rulers, for instance of Timothy and Titus by Paul, the laying on of hands, etc., etc., are clear facts; our only concern is whether these things are internal or external, legal or evangelical, essential or unessential, necessary as means of grace or free and useful in the sense of I Cor. 3:22: "All are yours."[5]

Luther recognized the ministerial authority of the Roman-Catholic hierarchy, the apostolic succession of the papal church, as such an outward, legal power, which had developed into a power over all law, both canon and secular, over all doctrine, both divine and human, as the power of "wrong keys," as the power of the "Antichrist," against which he made his great frontal attack in his writing on *The Keys*.[6] For it is this power of the papacy and the Roman-Catholic priesthood which represents the visibility of the church, always supplemented by an ardent submission on the part of the faithful as the other visible side of the church. This visible church Christ is said to have created, of this church according to Roman-Catholic teaching Christ said: I will build my church. There is no salvation outside of this church. *In ecclesia salus, extra ecclesiam nulla salus!*

In contrast to this visible church we have the invisible church as taught by Luther, especially in his treatise *Concerning the Ministry*[7] written to the Bohemian Brethren and addressed to the Senate in Prague. In

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[4] *Bible Key Words from Gerhard Kittel's Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* transl. and edited by J. R. Coates, Harper & Brothers, Publishers, New York, *The Church*, p. 56.
[5] *Luthers Lehre von Kirche und Amt* in *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 1917, p. 215f.
[6] *Luther's Works*, Volume 40, *Church and Ministry* II, Muhlenberg Press, Philadelphia, pp. 348, 354.
[7] *Luther's Works, ibid*., p. 19ff.

this invisible Church "all Christians are priests, and all priests are Christians." In it the ministry of the Word, which Luther designates as the first and highest office in the Church, "is common to all Christians." Consequently "there is no other proclamation in the ministry of the Word than that which is common to all, that of the wonderful deed of God," and "there is no other priesthood than that which is spiritual and universal." Likewise "the office of the keys belongs to all of us who are Christians… The keys belong to the whole church and to each of its members, both as regards their authority and their various uses." For "if the office of teaching be entrusted to anyone," Luther continues, "Then everything accomplished by the Word in the church is entrusted, that is, the office of baptizing, consecrating, binding, loosing, praying, and judging doctrine. Inasmuch as the office of preaching the gospel is the greatest of all and certainly is apostolic, it becomes the foundation for all other functions, which are built upon it, such as the offices of teachers, prophets, governing (the church), speaking with tongues, the gifts of healing and helping, as Paul directs in I Cor. 12 [:28].… For since the church owes its birth to the Word, is nourished, aided and strengthened by it, it is obvious that it cannot be without the Word. If it is without the Word it ceases to be a church. A Christian, thus, is born to the ministry of the Word in baptism." Christ did not have to establish a visible church to insure this preaching of the Word, for "from His Word resulted the faith of many, since the Word of God does not return in vain (Isa. 55:11). From faith sprang a church, and the church through the Word received and exercised a ministry of baptizing and teaching, and of all the other functions enumerated above. All these things a eunuch accomplished through no other right than that inherent in baptism and faith, especially in places lacking any other ministers… And in Paul's view he is certainly a bishop who takes the lead in the preaching of the Word."

What practical consequences did Luther draw from this his view of the Church, or rather, what is it, to use his own words, that Christ decreed? "He takes," Luther tells the congregation at Leisnig,[8] "from the bishops, theologians and councils both the right and the power to judge doctrine, and confers them upon all men, and upon all Christians in particular. He does this when He says in John X, My sheep hear my voice; and My sheep do not follow a stranger, but flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers." From this we are to "conclude, then, that where there is a Christian congregation which has the Gospel, it not only has the right and the power, but is in duty bound, according to the obedience it pledged to Christ in Baptism, and under pain of forfeiting its salvation, to shun, to flee, to put down, to withdraw from, the authority which our bishops, abbots, monastic houses, foundations, and the like exercise today; since it is plainly to be seen that their teaching and rule are opposed to God and His Word.… A Christian congregation, however, should not and cannot be without the Word of God. It follows therefore logically enough from the foregoing, that it must have teachers and preachers to administer this Word. And since in these last accursed times the bishops and false spiritual rulers neither are nor have any intention of being such teachers, and are moreover unwilling to give us or to suffer us to have such teachers; and since we ought not to tempt God to send down anew preachers from heaven: therefore," Luther concludes, "we must do as the Scriptures say, and call and appoint from among ourselves men who are found fit for this work, and whom God has enlightened with understanding and endowed with the requisite gifts… (And since) a Christian not only has the right and power to teach God's Word, but is in duty bound to teach it on pain of losing his salvation and forfeiting God's favor … how much more does an entire Christian congregation have the right to call a man to this office whenever it becomes necessary! And it is always necessary, and never more than now. But even if now the bishops were the right sort of bishops and desired to have the Gospel and to appoint the right sort of preachers, they could not and should not," Luther argues, "do this without the consent, choice and call of the congregation; except in cases of necessity… But where no such necessity exists, and where there are those who have the right, the power, and the gift to teach, no bishop ought to appoint anyone without the consent, choice and call of the congregation; it is his duty rather to confirm the man whom the congregation has elected and called." And now Luther concludes with this argument: "If the election and call of their congregation can make a man a bishop, and if the pope is pope solely by virtue of his election without confirmation by any other authority, why should not a Christian congregation

[8] *The Right and Power of a Christian Congregation or Community to Judge All Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers, Established and Approved from Scripture*, 1523, in *Works of Luther*, A. J. Holman, Philadelphia, Vol. IV, pp. 76, 79, 81ff.

make a man a preacher solely by virtue of its call… Who has granted this right to them and withheld it from us? The more since our call has Scripture in its favor, while theirs is but a human fable without Scripture, whereby they rob us of our rights."

Here are the principles that Luther laid down for a true reform of the church and of individual congregations as manifestations of the Church. On the strength of these principles he could say: "We on our part have never asked for a council that it should reform our church. We have the Word pure, Baptism pure, the Sacrament pure, the keys pure, and all that belongs to the right Church we have holy and pure without the addition and adulteration of men's teaching. The life indeed … does not perfectly measure up to it… That will reach perfection in heaven."[9] All that was left to be done was to learn to know what form a Christian congregation should take on. In his *Church-Postil* Luther describes this form with a few simple words: "If a common chest is to be established (we would say today, if a constitution is to be set up), we must learn what offices are needed for the government of the congregation. The bishop (and Luther defines a bishop as an *Amtmann Gottes*, one who holds a divine office) is commissioned by God to dispense the divine and spiritual blessings, to preach the Gospel and nourish the people with the Word of God. And he must have assistants; these are deacons, who serve the congregation in this way, that they keep a list of the poor, supply their need out of the common chest, visit the sick and take good care of the church's possessions."[10] Such a *Kastenordnung*, common chest, the congregation in Leisnig had. The first paragraph of this constitution deals with the calling of pastors by the congregation, paragraph 2 with the use that is to be made of the Word of God in a family on the part of the father or the mother, paragraph 3 with church discipline, paragraphs 4–33 with the budget of the congregation and the moneys to be raised for subsidizing the pastorate and the schools, while paragraphs 34–36 provide for three annual congregational meetings, specify the duties of the 10 elders, and advise the newly elected elders to obtain advice and counsel from their predecessors. It would be worthwhile, Dr. Dau says in his essay on *Luthers frühester Versuch, eine christliche Ortsgemeinde zu gründen,*[11] to have this constitution circulate among our present-day congregations in the form of a tract.

The *Leisniger Kastenordnung*, which was imitated by many others throughout Germany, makes one fact quite evident: Luther did not think of separating a congregation, even after it had taken on a definite organizational form, from the civic community in which it was imbedded. The very same persons who were members of the political organization were also members of the ecclesiastical organization. And Luther did not attempt a separation of the two. In this respect he was not a Separatist. Still less did Luther attempt to take the whole church out of the political framework of the *republica Christiana* and to assign a separate place to it, let us say as a *Freiwilligkeitskirche*, as a free church. He did distinguish clearly between both state and church, and when he appealed to the Elector to take the initiative in ordering a visitation of all of his churches, he did not deem the Elector "obligated to do so as a temporal sovereign," not obligated "to teach and rule in spiritual affairs," but regarded him as one who was "to be guided by love's office which," as Luther adds, "is a common obligation of Christians."[12] There was, of course, a second reason for turning to the Elector: "While His Electoral grace is not obligated to teach and to rule in spiritual affairs, he is obligated as temporal sovereign so to order things that strife, rioting, and rebellion do not arise among his subjects… Even though the finest spirit of unity prevails among us we still have our hands full to do good and to be established by the power of God. What would happen if there were to be disunity and disagreement among us? The devil has become neither pious nor devout this year, nor will he ever be so. So let us be on guard and anxious to keep (as Paul teaches) the spiritual unity in the bond of love and of peace (Eph. 4:3)."

Now we can understand why Luther rejected the *Homberger Kirchenordnung* submitted to him by Philip of Hesse in 1526, which provided for a regular synodical organization of *Sakramentsgemeinden*, of sacramental congregations. Although Luther recognized many good features of the *Kirchenordnung* and he himself, at least in passing, was to give thought to the organization of a confessional church, the members of

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[9] St. Louis Ed., Vol. XVII, 350; cf. *Walther and the Church*, St.Louis, Mo., 1938, p. 128.
[10] St. Louis Ed., Vol. XI, 2066; *Walther and the Church*, p. 109.
[11] *Lehre und Wehre*, Dezember 1927, pp. 353ff.
[12] *Luther's Works*, op. cit. pp. 271 and 273.

which would declare in writing their resolve to become communicant members, nevertheless he realized that both pastors and laymen of his day were not yet far enough advanced in their Christian knowledge and experience to meet the demands of and responsibilities for a church organization with its many rules and regulations. What an insight did Luther display into the dangers and temptations besetting Christians in their endeavor to unite and to organize! Still von Ranke says concerning this plan which is described as the Congregational System with an infusion of Presbyterian elements: "The ideas are the same on which French, Scotch, and American Churches were afterward founded, and indeed on which the existence and development of North America may truly be said to rest. Their historical importance is beyond all calculation. We trace them in the very first attempt at the constitution of a church; they were adopted by a small German Synod."[13]

In connection with the visitations in Saxony and neighboring territories the need for synodical conventions became apparent. Consequently the church ordinances of most of the German territories make provisions for such conventions. These synods were, however, *synodi pastorum*, and in general only questions pertaining to doctrine and discipline were placed on the agenda. Legal matters the ruling prince reserved to himself and to his consistory. As long as the Wittenberg faculty with Luther at its head exercised sole authority, these synods did not have much influence. But after Luther's death and during the time of the Interim the synods gained the importance and influence that the university faculties formerly had. Still a general German synod remained a desideratum. Melanchthon, who in contrast to Luther had always been much in favor of synodical conventions, now defines a synod as a *coetus testificans de doctrina*.[14] Its main purpose is to give a *Lehrentscheidung* in matters of dispute. In view of the controversies between Gnesio-Lutherans and Philipists there were indeed many doctrinal differences to be resolved. But the question that again and again demanded an answer and which was raised by the princes themselves, was: Who is to convene and conduct a synodical meeting? Melanchthon always stressed the participation of the territorial prince or of his representatives and thereby paved the way for the territorial church of the 17th century with the prince as its *summus episcopus*. The result was that not the university, not the synod, not the congregation, but the consistory as the magistracy of the prince exercised church authority. This became the answer to Melanchthon's question *De norma iudicii in Ecclesia*. It became the answer because Melanchthon placed next to Luther's definition of the church as an invisible entity a second definition: The church is like unto the state, the civic communities, the guilds; it is a visible sociological entity. And the magistrate or the state is the "minister and executor of the church" (*magistratus in republica minister et executor ecclesiae est*). This is, as Elert calls it, "a pure theocracy."[15]

In a still higher sense of the word the churches of Zwingli and Calvin took on a theocratic form, so that the individual congregation recedes into the background. Not as if Zwingli and especially Calvin gave no thought to the rights of an individual congregation. But since the basic theology of both of these reformers was essentially different from that of Luther's, their efforts at an organization of their churches led them without fail to a theocratic form of church government.

Zwingli in *An Exposition of the Faith*,[16] written in the closing period of his life, offers this definition of the Church:

> We also believe that there is one holy, catholic, that is universal Church, and that this Church is either visible or invisible. According to the teaching of Paul, the invisible Church is the church that came down from heaven, that is to say, the Church that knows and embraces God by the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. To this Church belong all who believe the whole world over. It is not called invisible because believers are invisible, but because it is concealed from the eyes of men who they are: for believers are known only to God and to themselves.
> And the visible Church is not the Roman pontiff and others who bear the mitre, but all who make profession of faith in Christ, the whole world over. In this number there are those who are called

[13] Leopold von Ranke, *Deutsche Geschichte im Zeitalter der Reformation*, Meersburg und Leipzig, 1933, Bd. 2, p. 260.
[14] Robert Stupperich, *Kirche und Synode bei Melanchthon* in *Gedenkschrift für D. Werner Elert*, Berlin, 1955, p. 207.
[15] *Morphologic des Luthertums* von D. Dr. Werner Elert, Bd 1, 332.
[16] *The Library of Christian Classics*, Vol. XXIV, pp. 265ff.

> Christians falsely, seeing they have no inward faith. Within the visible Church, therefore, there are some who are not members of the Church elect and invisible. For in the Supper there are some who eat and drink to their own condemnation, although their brethren do not know who they are. Consequently the visible Church contains within itself many who are insolent and hostile, thinking nothing of it if they are excommunicated a hundred times, seeing they have no faith. *Hence there arises the need of government* (italics ours) for the punishment of flagrant sinners, whether it be the government of princes or that of the nobility. For the higher powers do not bear the sword in vain. Seeing then, that there are shepherds in the Church, and amongst these we may number princes, as may be seen from Jeremiah, it is evident that without civil government a Church is maimed and impotent. Far from undermining authority, most pious king, or advocating its dissolution, as we are accused of doing, we teach that authority is necessary to the completeness of the body of the Church…
> To sum up: In the Church of Christ government and prophecy are both necessary, although the latter takes precedence. For just as man is necessarily constituted of both body and soul, the body being the lesser and humbler part, so there can be no Church without government, although government supervises and controls those more mundane circumstances which are far removed from the things of the Spirit.

In other words church and state, according to Zwingli, are one. The church is not superior to the state as Thomas Aquinas taught, church and state are not two separate entities as Luther taught, but church and state are geared to such an extent into one another that Zwingli can equate church and state: *In nostra familia, hoc est, in ecclesia republica*.[17] The same family appears once in the form of the church, then again in the form of the state. Consequently both have one and the same aim: *utraque requirit quod altera*. Only the manner is different in which both seek to attain this aim, the one by means of laws, the other by means of an "inward faith." For both, however, the Bible is the revelation from which they draw the *iustitia, das Recht,* the law. According to Zwingli, Christianity is God's supreme revelation as set forth in the Bible, which is the Word of God, not because it contains the Gospel of God's forgiving love in Christ, but because it reveals God's Will. It is no means of grace in Luther's sense, but a guide for Christian faith and life. The work of Christ consisted chiefly in the revelation of the divine Will. The Gospel is God's total revelation and includes the Law. The two are in principle one. The Gospel is itself a new law. The magistrate as the commissioner of God executes the Law, the minister as God's servant preaches the Law. The magistrate must know what God has revealed in His Law and therefore is in constant need of the church. The minister as watchman on the walls of Zion must keep watch that this Law is not being transgressed. Zwingli sought to create a theocracy in which church and state, state and church have one and the same task, the task to establish God's rule here on earth. If the church alone cannot carry out this task, then the civic authorities are to aid her. Consequently the government can take over those rights and duties which Zwingli recognized as being particularly those of a congregation. In principle every *Kilchhoere,* every *Einzelgemeinde,* every individual congregation has the right to manage its own affairs, to judge in matters of doctrine according to God's Word, and to declare doctrine. Still these ideal rights of a congregation were never realized in Zürich. The city council always seemed to have been the best suited to represent both the political community and the congregation. And then Zwingli did not want the church to become a separate entity over against the state. On the contrary, she was to permeate the state with the power of God's Word, even as the soul animates the body. As a result the church in Zwingli's work of reform was to take on no independent organizational form, it was to be a State-Church κατ' ἐξοχήν, a Theocracy.[18]

Even the organization of a regular synodical church government in 1527 did not work an essential change, since this body represented church and state alike. It was composed of all ministers of the city and

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[17] Heinrich Schmid. *Zwinglis Lehre yon der göttlichen und menschlichen Gerechtigkeit,* Zwingli Verlag Zürich, p. 37. Cf.. *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, January 1960, p. 78.
[18] *Zwingli und Calvin* von August Lang, Bielefeld, p. 63.

canton, two lay delegates of every parish, four members of the small and four members of the great council. It was to meet twice a year, in spring and fall, in the City Hall of Zürich, with power to superintend the doctrine and morals of the clergy and the laity.[19]

Calvin's church in Geneva has gone down into history as the Genevan theocracy. It was a theocracy on two counts. First of all because it assumed responsibility to God on the part of both the secular and the ecclesiastical authority alike, seeking to subject the lives of the people to God's Will, and then because after 1555, when Servetus was burned at the stake, Calvin became the absolute spiritual and secular ruler in Geneva. As such he united the two realms, the secular and the ecclesiastical, although theoretically he could and did distinguish between both. Nevertheless, state and church went to make up the *civitas Dei*, the *Christiana politia* in Geneva.

In order, however, to be able fully to evaluate Calvin's theocracy, we must keep in mind the theological premise on which he built his state-church. The three basic principles of his theology as summarized by Erik Wolf in an article, *Theologie und Sozialordnung bei Calvin*,[20] are these: The doctrine of the sovereign majesty of God, the doctrine of the divine predestination, and the doctrine of the divine *iustitia, das göttliche Recht*, the justice of God. These three principles represent a departure from Luther's emphasis on the love of God to an emphasis on God's omnipotence, from Luther's emphasis on the justification of the individual to an emphasis on the congregation as a body of the elect of God, and from an emphasis on redeeming grace to an emphasis on the justice of God.

This summary is preceded by a paragraph in Wolf's article which is basic not only for a correct evaluation of Calvin's theology, but also for an evaluation of the development of the Reformed churches in Europe and America. In it Erik Wolf tells us that Calvin's political ideas are determined by the Bible, i.e., rooted in his understanding of the Scriptures according to his Reformed theology. In this sense we cannot speak of these political ideas as only being biblical, but also as being Christocentric. What we are to understand by Christocentric in this connection he says with these words: The political assembly or the civil community is according to Calvin not only and in a secondary sense a Christian assembly, a Christian community, but rather the congregation of Christ, who is the present and future ruler of the world, is also as such and essentially a political assembly, a civil community. In other words, Calvin equates the two, *Christengemeinde und politische Gemeinde*, Christian congregation and civil community. Despite the fact that Calvin draws a dividing line between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world, between the *spirituale Christi regnum* and the *civilis ordo*, yet there is a connection in Calvin's theology between the heavenly *polis* and the worldly state, so that every political entity demands a religious evaluation. God does not only suffer the state to exist because of sin, but God instituted the state in view of his plan of salvation of mankind. Calvin's state is a Christian state with the purpose of fostering the *vita Christiana*, the communion in and with Christ. As such it is instituted *ex iure divino*, and as a *politia Christiana* it represents the political form of God's covenant with His elect, while the church represents the spiritual form of this covenant. In this *sacrum regnum* state and church are one, the theocratic state of the Old Testament presenting the political pattern, the pneumatic communion of the ancient New Testament congregations the churchly pattern. This church-community constitutes itself as an assembly which creates four offices, mentioned in Acts and the Pastoral Letters as those of the ancient church. They are: Pastors, who are to preach the Word and practise *Seelsorge*; Doctors, who are to guard the purity of doctrine and to do research work; Elders, who are associates in discipline and administration; Deacons, who minister to the sick and the needy, are active in social welfare-work. These office-bearers together with laymen, who were considered officers of the church and the state, formed a synod, which conducted the affairs of the church and which Calvin designated in his Genevan Catechism as an *ordo gubernationis* of the church. The condition or form in which God wants to have His Church—as if God had given His Church such a form—Calvin called the *Christiana politia*, which Erik Wolf translates with *christliche Verfassung oder Lebensgemeinschaft*. All social entities and especially the state gain a rating only in so far as the *Christiana politia*, the community organized

[19] Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. VIII, p. 68.
[20] *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, Jahrgang 42, 1951, Heft 1/2; , p. 17.

along fraternal lines, is realized, a community in which one is neighbor to his fellowman and in which everyone may regard his fellowman as his neighbor. Only then does the state fulfill its divine vocation. While Luther only regarded the state as a *Schwertmacht*, as a *Büttel Gottes*, a jailer of God, to keep outward order and to preserve the evil world for the day of judgment, Calvin regarded the state as a *Gemeinschaft*, a community, in which the believer is to prove his moral worth, making every effort to see realized the *Christiana politia* as the glorious work of God, of that God who wants to be glorified and praised as its creator.

This theology of Calvin had far-reaching results. Erik Wolf puts it thus: The Reformed doctrine, according to which the congregation of believers recognizes no one else as Lord but Jesus Christ and is also by the grace of God a political entity, this Reformed doctrine gave the ancient and early medieval idea of the sovereignty of the people a new lease on life. Dependent on it is the moral buoyancy of the "glorious revolution," the resistance-movement of the Scottish Puritans and the French Huguenots, the insurrection of the Netherlands, and in a certain sense the War of Independence of the New England States. Especially in the Anglo-American realm, the Scottish reformation of Calvin's co-worker, John Knox, developed a characteristic mode of life, which is known as Puritan and Puritanism. Self-discipline, a moral conduct of life, and an indomitable austerity of the believer were instrumental in permeating and forming everyday life and in endeavoring to profess and propagate the rule of Christ. This religious attitude framed many sociological institutions, not only the churchly association of the Dutch and English Congregationalists and of the Lower Rhenish free churches, but also the primitive type of the Presbyterian churches of England and North America (p. 29).

Erik Wolf finally calls attention to the fact that we have inherited from Calvinism the idea of the Christian *Oekumene*, and reminds us that Hugo Grotius as a Reformation theologian was the spiritual father of international law, which presupposes the principles of both the divine and national law and sponsors the medieval mission of fostering *Pax et Iustitia* in the world with a resulting world order, in which Calvinism sees the three basic ideas of the *Christiana politia* realized: Freedom of the individual who is responsible to his God, regard for one's brother in Christ, and equality of all on the strength of the divine law developing into the law of the social order. These sociological and political forces of Calvinism are not yet extinct. Reports from the ecumenical movement, Erik Wolf concludes, also make us cognizant of the participation of World-Lutheranism in coping with these ecumenical problems, cognizant of a common knowledge of the Christian's political responsibility and of a common political sociological action (p. 30f.). Indeed, we shall do well not to underestimate the forces of the Calvinism of our day.

There was a third development of Protestant churches in the Reformation period, that of the Anabaptist free churches, *die Täufersekten der Reformation*. Anabaptist historiography since the mid-nineteenth century has done much to give us a clearer picture of the beginnings of the Anabaptists and their free church development. The year 1523 was already the year in which there was a parting of ways between Zwingli and Zürich, who favored a system of state-church government, and the radical movement in Switzerland, which favored the system of free church government. Two years later in the village of Zollikon the first Anabaptist congregation came into being. From house to house the villagers celebrated the Lord's Supper in apostolic simplicity. In the cottages the farmers read the words of institution and shared the bread and wine. Such a celebration of communion was indeed a revolution. For it was not until the Easter week in 1525 that Zwingli and his colleagues ceased to celebrate the Roman Mass. In addition to the communion services there also were evangelistic meetings in the cottages of Zollikon. In one of these cottages the rebaptism of those present took place on the 21st of January, 1525, Grebel, one of the elders, baptizing Georg Blaurock and Blaurock baptizing several of the others present.[21] In the eyes of these first Anabaptists the *pura ecclesia*, the *ecclesia piorum*, had come into being. It was to differ from the traditional *Volkskirche* by its *purus cultus*, its calling of a pastor by the congregation, and its exercising of apostolic church-discipline. In short, it was to be a community of saints, not Luther's "communion of saints," or those of our Confessions, but saints who once justified cannot lose the

[21] *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision* edited by Guy F. Hershberger, Herald Press, Scottdale, Pennsylvania, p. 61f.

Holy Ghost, whose justification was based on man's piety, a community of perfectionists, who claimed to have reached the stage where they were able to keep from sinning.[22]

Although after 1530 this movement was destroyed in the city and canton of Zürich, it formed congregations in other parts of Switzerland and from there fanned out in many directions, in the East to Tyrol, in the North to the territories of southern Germany, in the Northeast to Moravia, and in the Northwest to Alsace and down the Rhine Valley until contact was made with the people from Holland, from where in the fall of 1530 it rapidly spread throughout Friesland and. North Holland, and then crossed the channel into England and from there across the Atlantic to America. Until 1534 this was a spontaneous movement more than a well-organized church. In this period spiritualism was dominant among the Anabaptists. Obbe Philips, eider from 1533 to the time of his defection in 1540, was the champion and promoter of spiritualism and describes it well in his *Bekenntnisse*:

> In the beginning of Anabaptism each disciple tried to revere and serve God as best he could. After some time however, in which many pious hearts had served God in this simple way after the pattern of the patriarchs without preachers, elders, and a visible church, … some of them were not satisfied with this quiet service of pure hearts, but desired visible gods which they could hear, touch, and feel, and they suggested that a visible church, congregation, ministerial office, and ordination … should be established, as if one could not be saved unless he stood within such a congregation.[23]

This is the thinking of a spiritualist who only knows the "inner word," and despises the "outer word," who considers it sufficient to believe that God's Spirit will move and act without the means of grace as administered by the ministry of the visible church.

But after 1534, i.e. after the Münster debacle and derailment, congregationalism prevailed. Dirk Philips and Menno Simons opposed this spiritualistic view both in their preachings and their writings, placing increasing emphasis on the significance of the visible congregation as the church of God. Menno Simons pointed out "that ministers should not exercise their office of their own accord … but only after having been chosen in a regular way by the brethren of the congregation. Without true ministers there can be no true congregations."[24] Dirk Philips in particular was at great pains to keep the ministerial office in safe hands, i.e. in the hands of the elders, even if it meant the abridgement of the rights of the congregation.

In 1560 and 1565 the *Schleitheim Articles* were translated into Dutch and printed. These Articles, which had been drawn up in the northern canton of Switzerland in Schaffhausen as early as 1527 and are Anabaptism's oldest confessional document, state that the congregation should be united around one shepherd, who should perform all the spiritual duties. The congregation that appointed the shepherd should also support him. The pastor is responsible to the congregation, which has the power to dismiss him if he falls into sin.[25]

This congregation, however, is the visible church of professed believers, much like the visibility of the Roman-Catholic Church. Dirk Philips in his *Refutation* of spiritualism defines it thus: "Christ Himself has commanded the founding of the church which is on earth and visible; He Himself commissioned His apostles to

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[22] *Concordia Triglotta*, pp.49 and 1097.
[23] Hershberger, op. cit., p. 17.
[24] *Ibid*., p. 79.
[25] Concerning civil authorities the sixth article of the seven Schleitheim Articles has this to say: "In the law the sword was ordained for the punishment of the wicked and for their death, and the same sword is now ordained to be used by the worldly magistrates." There were Anabaptists who found the sword of the government "good and necessary," other Anabaptists, however, specifically condemned any use of capital punishment. "It appears that the prevailing conviction among Anabaptists was that magistrates should abandon the use of the sword in the punishment not only of religious dissenters but also of common criminals" (Hershberger, op. cit., p. 192). The *Formula of Concord*, which condemns 17 erroneous and heretical teachings of the Anabaptists, lists as the 12th error "that magistrates cannot without injury to conscience inflict capital punishment on evildoers" and as the 9th error "that a Christian cannot with a good, inviolate conscience hold the office of magistrate" (Trigl. p. 1099). In conclusion, it informs us that the Anabaptists are "divided into many bands (sects), and one has more and another fewer errors" (*Ibid*., p. 1101).

gather the believers in a visible church and to baptize them: and according to His own word the apostles did organize congregations, providing them with elders, ministers, and deacons."[26] This by way of contrast brings us back to the invisible church as taught by Luther, in which alone "all Christians are priests and all priests are Christians," Luther's *Gemeinde der Gerechten*, concerning which we expressed the hope in the beginning "that we may never lose sight of it, but always see it as the true Israel, the priestly kingdom, the royal priesthood, the peculiar people" (p. 259). It is on the strength of this discovery that Emil Brunner can say: "Of all the great teachers of Christianity, Martin Luther perceived most clearly the difference between the *Ecclesia* of the New Testament and the institutional church, and reacted most sharply against the *quid pro quo* which would identify them."[27]

The Historical Development of the Protestant Free Churches from the Reformation to the Present

In our study of the historical development of the Protestant churches of the Reformation Era we have seen that both the Lutheran and the Reformed institutional churches took on the form of state churches, while the Anabaptists chose the system of free church government. This free church development was, however, not limited to the Anabaptist movement. The Anabaptists were the first to organize free churches on the principle of free-church concepts. They therefore undoubtedly also became a pattern of later free churches, especially of those in England and Holland. Independent of the Anabaptist influence, however, refugees from various countries of Europe organized themselves into free churches. Thus we have the church of French refugees in Strasshurg, of whom Calvin took charge during the three years from 1538 to 1541, in which he was banished from Geneva. Calvin sometimes called this congregation the *ecclesiola Gallicana*. It seems to have numbered a little less than 500 members. Here he was able to give thoughtful attention to its discipline and worship, and to shape these in accordance with his principles and the demands of the conditions obtaining in Strassburg. The Strassburg authorities gave him a free hand with the one exception that they did not permit him to conduct weekly but only monthly communion services. From his communicants Calvin could require a personal examination before admission to communion. A plan of discipline was also introduced apparently by action of a congregational meeting. He also encouraged the members when in trouble to come to him for counsel and consolation. The hearty congregational singing of these French refugees, by which many visitors were deeply impressed, was another outstanding feature of this free-church congregation. It was to be one of the first free churches in Rhenish territory.[28]

English refugees from the persecutions in England under Bloody Mary founded free-church congregations in Zürich, Basel, Geneva, Emden, Wesel, Strassburg, Duisburg, and Frankfort-on-the-Main.[29] In 1554 a group of these exiles obtained permission from the Frankfort magistrates to conduct religious services in their own language. They elected their deacons and a temporary pastor, and then undertook to call two or three pastors invested with equal authority. One of these was John Knox, who had found refuge in Geneva. The letter informing him of his election was written in the name of the congregation and signed by twenty-one of its principal members. Since they had obtained permission to perform religious services in their own language upon the condition of their conforming to the mode of worship used by the French church in Frankfort, with whom the congregation occupied a joint place of worship, the members under Knox's guidance agreed upon a common form of worship, the agreement being subscribed to by all the members of the congregation. Here we again have an example how members of a free-church congregation, whether consciously or unconsciously, are making full use of their high-priestly rights of calling their own pastors, rights of which Luther had spoken so eloquently in his writings to the Bohemian Brethren and the Leisnig congregation.

Likewise the Foreigners' Church, which John a Lasco established in 1551 in London, was organized on a voluntary basis, was a free church in the essential idea of this term, and became a pattern for later free

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[26] Hershberger, op. cit., p. 77.
[27] *The Misunderstanding of the Church*, translation by Harold Knight, Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, p. 15.
[28] *Johannes Calvin, Lebensbeschreibung* von R. Stähelin, pp. 172ff.
[29] McCrie, Thomas, D.D., *The Life of John Knox.* Fourth Edition, Vol. I, pp. 142ff.

churches.[30] All of these congregations remained independent with separate existence, having their own services and practice according to an order and discipline agreed upon by all their members. These refugee congregations as well as the conventicle groups in England arose out of necessity and did not always consciously build on the principles of the free church concepts, such as the Anabaptists did. Yet in the struggle of Calvinistic Puritanism against uniformity and the high church ideas there always lay a tendency towards separatism. And then the question was not basically over the liturgy and the vestments but the administration of the church and the order of the congregation. Therefore it was not altogether a surprise when Congregationalism appeared in England in the 1580's.

The man behind this Congregational free church concept was Robert Browne. He undoubtedly learned from Anabaptists in Norwich, refugees from Holland, about their doctrine concerning the church. There Browne came to a congregational point of view, which resulted in the organization of a church in Norwich in 1581. The church of believers ("gathered church"), according to Browne, was to be autonomous, following the pattern of the New Testament. The members of this free church united themselves together in a solemn vow and covenant in the presence of God, a custom which became characteristic of the separatist Puritans, both in England and in North America. The Anabaptists also used such a "contract," signed by believers. In this way *the first free church that practiced infant baptism* emerged in the post-Reformation period.[31]

After Browne's arrest and because of continued opposition the members of this congregation left for Holland in the summer or autumn of 1593. But Henry Barrow was a second Separatist who struggled to establish a free church. His separation ideas were established on clearer principles than those of Browne and are set forth in his book, *A True Description*. "Conformity," he said, "should not be demanded in any form by the state church. The church should never be associated with the state, nor should the state have anything to do with the affairs of religion. The state should attend to secular matters, but the citizen's conscience should be left alone. In the second place, there ought not to be a centrally controlled and authoritative free church that attempts to create uniformity. Every independent congregation should be of equal status. The New Testament ἐκκλησία shows that devotion, doctrine and practice should be autonomous. Certainly, congregations could voluntarily associate in common tasks and fellowship, but in this fellowship there is no church authority that can take charge and direct the free churches. Furthermore, Barrow emphatically stated that in each autonomous free church all of the members are granted equal rights. The pastors have no special position in the church but they serve as they are fitted for the tasks. Laymen may also attend to all the religious functions in the church, even the interpretation of the scriptures."[32]

Barrow had to suffer a martyr's death in 1593, and the severe persecution during the time of Elizabeth hindered the radical Puritans from developing a congregational type of organization in England. They either lived underground or migrated to Holland, where their free church was a natural form for church government. During the decade following the strict Conventicle Act of 1593, several assemblies traveled to Holland, and in 1609 a famous congregation was established in Leyden under the leadership of John Robinson. It was this congregation from which the so-called Pilgrim Fathers in 1620 left to cross the Atlantic on the Mayflower and settle in New England. It was the congregationalism that had developed in Holland in their organization of churches that was then transplanted to the New England colonies. These separatists in their new environment in America were able to show their fellow believers in England how to organize a free church and develop its organization. As a result, the congregationalist pattern of church organization was already established in North America when the great Puritan-Stream in the 1630s came from England to New England.

These Puritans were convinced that the work of reform in Wittenberg, Zürich, Geneva, England, even in Holland was nowhere fully perfect but had only attained to various degrees of perfection in restoring Primitive Christianity. But in view of the Thirty Years' War then raging they often asked themselves whether the period of reform would now approach its end prematurely, whether the nations engaged in that life and death struggle

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[30] *The Free Church Through the Ages*, by Gunnar Westin, trsl. by Virgin A. Olson, 1958, Nashville, Tennessee, p. 144.
[31] *Ibid*., p. 144f.
[32] *Ibid*., p. 146f.

would once more revert to barbarism and superstition before any one of them attained to the pure form of church government? But what was wanting in Europe could be supplied in America by the saints whom God had led out of Egypt to the new land of Canaan, whom Robinson in parting put in mind of their Church-Covenant whereby they promised and covenanted with God and one with another, to receive whatsoever light or truth shall be made known to them from His written Word, and then exhorted them to take heed what they received for truth, and well to examine and compare and weigh it with other Scriptures of truth, before they received it. For, said he, "it is not possible the Christian world should come so lately out of such thick Antichristian darkness, and that full perfection of knowledge should break forth at once."[33]

The Lord was granting them, thus the Pilgrims reasoned, the greatest opportunity afforded to any people since the birth of Christ "to enjoy the Churches and Congregational Assemblies by his Covenant to worship Him in all His holy Ordinances." "We the people of New England," wrote Peter Buckeley, "are as a City set upon a hill, in the open view of all the earth, the eyes of the world are upon us, because we profess ourselves to be a people in Covenant with God." John Cotton affirmed that "a greater face of reformation was to be seen in New England than anywhere else in the world, that here at last was simplicity," the simplicity of the best Church and the best Commonwealth growing up together. Thomas Shepard informed the General Court in 1638 that Massachusetts was set in the right way, having had "the help of all former ages, and other Nations as well as our own, godly and learned Divines in them, to take pattern and example from, in the laying our first Foundation, both of Religion and Righteousness, Doctrine and Discipline, Church and Commonwealth."[34]

Yet this very information betrays what it was that was to develop here. Nothing less than an Erastian form of church government, in which the Church, it is true, was only indirectly concerned in government, but the government directly concerned with the affairs of the Church. The magistrates as nursing fathers of the churches concerned themselves with the internal affairs of the congregations, settled disputes of many sorts whether of doctrine or polity, looked into the fitness of ministers, determined where newly arrived ministers should be located, and concerned themselves with heresy charges. They called synods and ordered the ministers to formulate a confession of faith and a form of discipline.[35] And as to the unregenerate the government was to act as a means "to set up and help forward the inward," as Hooker put it, was to act as a means of giving assistance to rational beings helping them to make up their minds, but not compelling them. The civil ruler could force them to go to church and listen, but he could not require that they believed. He could lead them to the water, but not make them drink. "Christ's people are a willing people, faith is not forced"[36] the Puritans assured themselves and others. Therefore this state had to permit individuals a fundamental freedom, the freedom not to believe. It had to recognize Voluntarism, the free will to keep away from this ideal state church if not in harmony with it. For this state knew no toleration, even when other Puritans had already learned to know and practice it. Therefore it expelled and banished Roger Williams in January of 1636 in the dead of a New England winter, who had to find shelter, food and clothing among the Indians with whom he had friendly relations and where he founded a settlement, Providence, Rhode Island, which was to become "shelter for persons distressed for conscience." Here he was busily engaged in putting his theory of state-church relationship into practice, sowing the seed for the declaration of the separation of church and state in our country. It was here that a group of Anabaptists first practiced rebaptism as had been done in Switzerland more than one hundred years before.

While Calvinism provides us with many instances of a free-church development in Europe, Lutheranism does not. Germany did not come under the influence of Pietism until a decade or more after the Thirty Years' War. When it did, Pietism at first had a similar influence as in England and the Netherlands. Spener in Frankfurt gave serious consideration to the formation of *Sakramentsgemeinden* as thought of by Luther in his *Deutsche Messe* and planned by Lambert of Avignon. Spener's conventicles were faint beginnings of a movement toward separatism from the state-church. While Spener, however, hesitated to draw a dividing line between his

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[33] *Congregationalism*, by Henry Martyn Dexter, Boston, 1865, p. 404.
[34] *Ibid*., p. 471.
[35] Sweet, William Warren, *Religion in Colonial America.* New York. 1953. p. 89.
[36] *The New England Mind, The Seventeenth Century*, by Perry Miller, New York 1939, p. 459.

congregation and his conventicles and conducted the latter within his congregation, his followers already in 1682 forced the issue, some of them separating themselves from the state churches, others emigrating to the Quakers in Pennsylvania. In the year 1716 ten congregations, so-called *Inspirationsgemeinden*, were formed in two counties north of the Taunus, which succeeded in maintaining a bare existence for 100 years, often decimated by emigrations to Pennsylvania.[37]

In short, Pietism in Germany did not form free churches and did not become a separate organization. The conventicles and *philadelphische Sozietäten* were at the most *ecclesiolae in ecclesia*. Only Zinzendorf, who had been reared in a strongly Pietistic atmosphere and educated at Halle, succeeded in forming a group of refugees from Bohemia and Moravia into a congregation in the village of Herrenhut in the Berthelsdoff parish, a congregation which had its own organization with its own bishops and with its distinct services and liturgy. When in 1736 most of the members were forced to emigrate and even Zinzendorf was exiled from Saxony, the latter established a second congregation in Herrenhag in the Wetterau, which was to continue the mission work of the Herrenhuter. In 1740 this Bohemian-Moravian congregation was legally sanctioned both in the Wetterau and in Prussia as a newly organized denomination, but was one that accepted both Lutherans and Calvinists as members. In 1748 Zinzendorf indueed the congregation to subscribe to the *Unaltered Augsburg Confession*, but in 1749 he also sought recognition from the English Parliament for the Moravians in England, which resulted in their being recognized as an Episcopal Church. Zinzendorf was a good unionist who according to his *Tropentheorie (tropoi paideias)* regarded all three Protestant churches, the Lutheran, the Reformed, and the Moravian as so many training centers for Christ's Kingdom.

It was in December 1741 that Zinzendorf, still in exile from his Saxon estate, arrived in Pennsylvania. His corning to America was motivated by many far-reaching aims, one of them to bring together the numerous German religious groups in Pennsylvania. His broad view of the Church and the Creeds was the basis upon which he attempted to accomplish the task and to create spiritual ties between the Pennsylvania Lutherans, Reformed, Dunkers, Ephrataites, Quakers, Mennonites, Schwenkfelders, and Moravians, i.e., to bring them into—what he termed—"The Church of God in the Spirit." The Pennsylvania Germans were the ones who could not understand Zinzendorf's "Church of God in the Spirit" and could not get it out of their heads that he intended to form an organic union with an overhead authority. Consequently the seven synodical conventions which Zinzendorf convened within a half-year's time only intensified their religious confusion.[38]

In the same year in which Zinzendorf reached America, Henry Melchior Mühlenberg was chosen by August Herrman Francke for work among the Lutherans in America. Arriving in Philadelphia November 25, 1742, he found the Lutherans in the state of confusion into which Zinzendorf had led them. Three churches known as "The United Congregations" now received him as their pastor. The congregation in Germantown was added as the fourth church in his charge. Mühlenberg took as his motto: *Ecclesia Plantanda*, the church must be planted. To this work of planting the church also belonged the opening of a Christian day school in each of his congregations. Another great step forward in the work of planting was the organization of a synod in 1748. It consisted of six ministers and 24 lay delegates and is known to this day as the *Ministerium of Pennsylvania*. In 1771 Mühlenberg reported 81 congregations in Pennsylvania and the adjacent provinces, but at the time of his death there were not more than 40 Lutheran ministers in all of America. Not all of them were in sympathy with Mühlenberg. The New York and New Jersey Lutheran ministers were opposed to Pietism and were therefore not in sympathy with Mühlenberg's pietistic point of view. His pietism was, of course, carried over to the congregations that he served. Consequently the piety of these congregations was neither truly evangelical nor soundly Lutheran, but of a legalistic and subjective nature. The congregation and synodical system was also subject to hierarchical tendencies. "It has been pointed out how this hierarchical trait plainly appeared already when the Pennsylvania Synod was founded; later on we meet it everywhere and in all synods organized prior to the General Synod. According to the conception then generally prevailing a synod had its real foundation, its essential part, not in the congregations, but in the preacher."[39] The preacher ruled the elders, the preacher and

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[37] *Die Geschichte des Christentums* von Johannes von Walter, 2. Hälfte. *Die Neuzeit*, Gütersloh, 1950, p. 573.
[38] William Warren Sweet, op. cit., p. 224.
[39] *American Lutheranism*, by P. F. Bente, p. 85.

the elders ruled the congregation, the College of pastors ruled the synod and the local pastor together with his elders and his congregation; and all of these were subject to, and ruled by the authorities in Europe.[40]

Also as a result of his Pietism Mühlenberg was not free from indifferentism and unionism, but fellowshipped with Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians and other Reformed sects in a manner that, as Dr. Bente in his *American Lutheranism* tells us, "cannot be construed as non-unionist in character and which cannot be justified as Lutheran." As late as 1866 the Pennsylvania Synod defended its intercourse with the Reformed Synod "as a measure introduced by the fathers in the time of Mühlenberg and Schlatter."

While Pietism had not formed free churches in Germany, the *Aufklärung*, the Enlightenment, the reign of rationalism, although it was offered every opportunity, was even less able to further the autonomy of the individual congregation. The *Prussian Land Law* of 1794, the work of Frederick the Great, has been described as "the first law book since the Reformation to recognize in a large way the ecclesiastical freedom of congregations and individuals."[41] Yet the Enlightenment had robbed the congregations and the church at large of the initiative to take advantage of the civil liberties offered to them by a king, whose scepticism made Prussia a pioneer of toleration.

Only when Frederick William the Third, who insisted on his rights as *summus episcopus*, decreed the Union of Lutherans and Reformed in 1817, did the unbroken testimony of Lutheran conviction come to its own. Klaus Harms of Kiel issued a manifesto in imitation of Luther's historic 95 Theses, in which he denounced Church Union as a threat to the Gospel teaching of Lutheranism. Prof. Scheibel of Breslau declared his opposition to the new Liturgy of the United Church of Prussia and proclaimed the Lutheran doctrine of the Lord's Supper as orthodox over against the Reformed doctrine as "an offspring of rationalism." And now we finally behold the beginning of the founding of Lutheran free churches in Germany. In 1835 there were already 100 and more localities in Prussia, esp. in Silesia, where larger and smaller groups of Lutheran Separatists emerged. Persecuted by the Prussian authorities they nevertheless were united into a synodical body in 1835, although their plea for toleration was not granted. They were, however, acknowledged as the Separate Lutheran Church in Prussia (known as the *Alt-Lutheraner* or *Breslauer Synode*) under Frederick William IV, after the Revolution of 1848 resulted in the proclamation of religious liberty. Now pastors who had been persecuted, imprisoned, separated from their congregations were permitted to return. Among them was Frederick August Brunn, who as early as 1846 had severed his connections with the Union State Church of Nassau and who after 1848 established a free-church congregation in Steeden. Here in Nassau the free church movement also spread and flourished. In 1876 some of these free-church congregations in Nassau united with those in Saxony, who had their beginnings in the *Lutheranervereine*, groups of confessional Lutherans who met to study Lutheran confessional writings and to lay the groundwork for independent Lutheran congregations.

In Hermannsburg Theodore Harms, the brother of Louis Harms, separated himself from the territorial church of Hannover, taking his congregation and his mission with him. Other pastors and their congregations joined him in founding the Hannoverian Free Church. In Hesse in 1873 forty-two pastors and several thousand church members left the Hessian State Church and were known as *renitente Gemeinden*. Their spiritual leader was August Frederick Vilmar. In 1880 the Independent Lutheran Church in Hessian lands came into being. In 1949 altar and pulpit fellowship with the Ev. Lutheran Free Church, the former Saxon Free Church, was established.

In Neuendettelsau, a Franconian village, Johannes Conrad Löhe bore testimony against the rationalism of his time and against the lax position of the state church, but never separated himself from the state church, although at different times a break seemed inevitable. His influence was not confined to Germany, but as a result of his diaspora work spread into America and Australia, resulting in the establishing of a theological school in Fort Wayne and finally in the founding of the Iowa Synod in 1854. The doctrine of the church and the ministerial office separated Löhe and the Missouri Synod as early as 1850, but also wrought separation among the German free churches. Thus matters pertaining to church government led to a serious split in the Breslau

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[40] *Quartalschrift*, 1942, p. 182.
[41] *German Protestantism since Luther*, by Andrew L. Drummond. London, 1951, p. 194.

Synod, so that 26 of the 59 pastors left their synod, seven of them in 1864 forming a free Lutheran synod, called the *Immanuel Synode*. Church government also resulted in the separation of pastors from the Hannoverian Free Church and in the founding of the *Hermannsburg Free Church* in 1891. Here the doctrine of the Inspiration of the Scriptures also played in. Intermittently doctrinal discussions were carried on between the free churches of Germany with the purpose of bringing about a God-pleasing union. Theodore Harms himself had initiated such discussions with the Saxon Free Church, which progressed favorably, only to be interrupted by his death in 1885. Further conversations were held in the following decades, especially between the Saxon Free Church, the Hannoverian Free Church, and the Breslau Synod. An agreement, however, was not reached until after World War II. In 1948 on the basis of the *Einigungs-Erklärung* of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church with the Breslau Synod church-unity with pulpit and altar fellowship between all the aforementioned free churches resulted.

This Union Declaration reads as follows: "The Ev. Luth. Church in former Old Prussia and the Ev. Luth. Free Church after a series of colloquies has reached complete agreement in faith and doctrine on the basis of unconditional submission to the Holy Scriptures and to the Lutheran Confessions, including the Formula of Concord. Both churches recognize the concept of the Church contained in Article VII of the Augsburg Confession as decisive, in which agreement (*consentire*) concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and concerning the administration of the Sacraments is demanded. On this basis they jointly erect church fellowship in the sense of pulpit and altar fellowship."[42]

A much greater and more rapid growth of Lutheran free churches developed in Australia and the Americas, to which lands thousands upon thousands of German Lutherans emigrated, there to establish their own free-church congregations. Already in 1838 Australia received its first 200 Lutherans led by Pastor A. L. C. Kavel and followed by many more. From 1862 to 1872 about 11,000 Pomeranians, Prussians, Brandenburgers, Silesians, Hannoverians, and Württembergers emigrated to Australia. After the First and the Second World War mass immigration followed, among which were many Lutherans. Of the five Lutheran synods in Australia four merged in 1921 and founded the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Australia (UELCA). Since 1941 this church has been carrying on regular meetings with our brethren of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia (E.L.C.A.) and in 1953 adopted "Theses of Agreement" concerning doctrinal principles governing Church Fellowship, Joint Prayer and Worship, Conversion, Election, the Church, the Office of the Ministry, Eschatological Matters, Scripture and Inspiration, and the Lutheran Confessions. The two Union Committees are continuing to meet, their discussions centering chiefly on "Principles Governing Co-operation between Churches not in Fellowship with Each Other."[43]

The largest group of German emigrants, however, sought refuge in North America. The first company of Prussian Lutherans came in July of 1839. Their leader was Pastor Grabau of Erfurt. They numbered nearly a thousand and settled in and near Buffalo, New York. A still larger group of Saxon Lutherans arrived in Missouri in January of 1839 and soon grew into one of the largest of Lutheran bodies, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and raised as none other the confessional loyalty in this country. The leadership of the entire settlement of Missouri Lutherans soon fell upon the youthful C.F.W. Walther. It is he who in his three classics, "The Church and the Ministry," "The Proper Form of an Evangelical Lutheran Congregation Independent of the State," and "The Evangelical Lutheran Church, the True Visible Church of God on Earth" answered those questions concerning church polity which had despite the separation of church and state caused both the Reformed and the Lutheran churches in our country much difficulty.

The Congregationalists, for instance, coped with the problems of church polity as no other Reformed group did. Already in Holland they studied the question of prayer fellowship with pastors and members of the churches of England and Scotland, and Robinson in 1614 published a treatise "Of Religious Communion Private and Public." In 1663 John Cotton on the passage over the Atlantic was face to face with the question

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[42] *Quartalschrift*, 1948, p. 202. *Die kirchlichen Zustände Deutschland*, Ein Rückblick auf die Geschichte der protestantischen Kirchen Deutschlands im 19. Jahrhundert von Lic. G. Stöckhardt (Abdruck aus *Der Lutheraner*), Zwickau, 1892, stood the undersigned in good stead in writing on the historical development of the Lutheran free churches in Germany.

[43] *Under the Southern Cross*, History of Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia by A. Brauer, Adelaide, p. 405.

concerning the true meaning of *Lokalgemeinde*, local congregation. He would not baptize in the ship the baby which was added to his family "(1) because they had no settled congregation there; (2) because a minister hath no power to give the seals but in his own congregation."[44] The year following that of his arrival in Boston Cotton issued the first series of statements touching the general question of church life and order, entitled "Questions and Answers upon Church Government."[45] And John Norton, one of the first pastors of the Plymouth colony congregation, phrased this syllogism: *Quod non est Ecclesia non potest exercere jurisdictionem Ecclesiasticam; Synodus non est Ecclesia: Ergo*.[46] But if we only think back to the hierarchical polity practiced by Muhlenberg and his coworkers, we learn to appreciate the necessity of Walther's classics. They became a dire necessity when Graban taught "that the church is a visible community, made up of two states, the ecclesiastical and the domestic, the first with the duty to teach and govern, the second with the duty to hear and obey the former."[47]

Walther in Thesis IV of his Church and Ministry shows that Christ has given the keys of heaven to all true believers. It reads: "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." Over against the claim of Grabau that the congregations have no right to call any man as pastor except one who has been divinely ordained by the laying on of hands of accredited clergymen, Walther shows that the ministry or the pastoral office is not a human ordinance, but an office established by God Himself, that it is not an arbitrary office, but its character is such that the Church has been commanded to establish it and that it is conferred by God through the congregation, as holder of all church power, and that "the ordination of those called with the laying on of hands is not by divine institution but is an apostolic church ordinance and merely a public solemn confirmation of the call."[48]

In his second classic, "The Proper Form of an Evangelical Lutheran Congregation Independent of the State," Walther seeks to allay the fears of those who believed that his "assertion of the dignities and rights of all true believers must necessarily lead to anarchy and mob-rule within the Church." His 25th Thesis reads: "In order that the Word of God may have full scope in the congregation, the congregation should lastly tolerate no divisions by way of conventicles, that is, of meeting for instruction and prayer aside from the divinely ordained public ministry."[49] He also defines the congregation's independence of the State in Thesis 2: "A congregation is independent of the State when the State leaves it to such congregation in all things to govern itself."[50] And in the last Thesis he tells the congregations to be ready to unite with the Evangelical Lutheran congregations of this country when there is opportunity for such union and this tends to serve and promote the glory of God and the building up of His kingdom.[51]

But in order to be able to recognize true Lutheran churches and to bring about a God-pleasing union we do well to consider Walther's third classic: "The Ev. Lutheran Church, the True Visible Church of God on Earth," and to note especially the last three Theses: Thesis XXIII: "True Ev. Lutheran churches are those only in which the teaching of the Ev. Lutheran Church, as laid down in its Symbols, is not only acknowledged officially but is also in vogue in the public preaching, Jer. 8:8; Matt. 10:32f." Thesis XXIV: "The Ev. Lutheran Church holds fellowship in confession and charity with all at one with it in faith, Eph. 4:3; " finally Thesis XXV: "The Ev. Lutheran Church has thus all the essential marks of the true visible Church of God on earth as they are found in no other known communion, and therefore it needs no reformation in doctrine."[52]

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[44] Henry Martyn Dexter, op. cit. p. 422.
[45] *Ibid*., p. 423.
[46] *Ibid*., p. 518.
[47] *Walther and the Church*, by Wm. Dallmann, W. H. T. Dau, and Th. Engelder (Editor), p. VI.
[48] *Ibid*., p. 74.
[49] *Ibid*., p. 101.
[50] *Ibid*., p. 89.
[51] *Ibid*., p. 115.
[52] *Ibid*., p. 127f.

No one can question the far-reaching importance of these three classics in view of the development of the Lutheran churches in America on the congregational and synodical level. We can but point out in chronological order the successive stages of this development as we see them first of all in the organization of the General Synod of the Lutheran Church in 1820, a church which in 1860 embraced a total of about two thirds of the Lutheran Church in this country and raised the hopes of not a few church leaders that in due time it would embrace all the Lutherans in America. After the Ministerium of Pennsylvania, however, had withdrawn from the General Synod, "the organization of a new general body that would be more thoroughly Lutheran in its spirit and more general in its extent than the old General Synod" was recommended.[53] This led to the organization of the "General Council of the Ev. Lutheran Church of North America" at Reading, Pennsylvania. The first regular convention of the General Council was held at Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 1867 and eleven synods including the Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota synods participated. The Missouri Synod had been represented at the preliminary meeting in Reading, but did not join.

The third stage in the development of Lutheran churches was, in protest against the lack of consistent Lutheranism in the General Council, the formation of the Synodical Conference in 1872 by the Synods of Ohio, Missouri, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, and the Norwegian Synod. Walther, president of the Conference, regarded this federation as a positive step toward Lutheran unity and toward the final realization of one united Evangelical Lutheran Church of North America.

The fourth stage was the merger of the General Synod, the General Council, and the United Synod of the South to be known as The United Lutheran Church in America. This union embracing 46 district synods was consummated in November of 1917, when the first convention of the United Lutheran Church in America was held. "A specific and fundamental principle of the organization is that the congregations are the primary bodies through which power committed by Christ to the Church is normally exercised. But by the provision of the constitution and bylaws wide jurisdiction is expressly delegated by the synods to the United Lutheran Church."[54]

In the same year the three Norwegian bodies, the Norwegian Synod, the United Church, and Hauge's Synod held their final conventions as separate bodies and then met together and organized "The Norwegian Lutheran Church of America," which name was changed in 1946 to "The Evangelical Lutheran Church." Our Norwegian brethren who refused to join the merger organized a new Norwegian Synod, now known as Evangelical Lutheran Synod, and became members of the Synodical Conference in 1920. The Slovak Ev. Luth. Synod, now known as Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, had already joined the Synodical Conference in 1908.

In 1919 the four synods in the federation of 1892 called the Joint Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Nebraska formed an organic union as the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States. At its convention in 1959 our synod changed its name to Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

The seventh and last stage in this development is the merger of the Joint Synod of Ohio, the Iowa Synod, and the Buffalo Synod, the ratification of which took place at Toledo, Ohio, in 1930, the new body taking the name "The American Lutheran Church." This merger was ratified a year after the Chicago Theses, after "this remarkable document," as Wentz in his *Basic History of Lutheranism in America* calls it, had been rejected by the Missouri Synod.

Even after this 1930 merger, forming the American Lutheran Church, the synods sought to bring about still larger mergers. One such merger has been consummated. Last April, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the American Lutheran Church, and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church completed a merger into The American Lutheran Church (TALC) of 2,258,000 members. The American Lutheran Church will begin to function officially January 1, 1961. A second and still larger merger is expected to bring together in June of 1962 the American Evangelical Lutheran Church of 24,000 members, the Suomi Synod, known officially as the Finnish Ev. Luth. Church of America of 36,000 members, the Augustana Lutheran Church, now a Centennial

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[53] *A Basic History of Lutheranism in America*, by Abdel R. Wentz. Philadelphia, 1955. p. 153.
[54] *Ibid*., p. 284.

Synod, of 600,000 members, and the United Lutheran Church in America, largest of the four bodies with nearly 2,500,000 members. This projected new Church of over 3,000,000 members is to be called the "Lutheran Church in America," and is to have 30 territorial synods and over 6,000 congregations.

In view of these far-reaching developments—and we have not yet mentioned the largest of these federations, the World Council of Churches, dealing at present through its Faith and Order Conference with "the reality of the Church and the churches"—in view of these developments we do not want to lose sight of the *Gemeinden*, the congregations as discovered by Luther, as described by Luther and Walther, and of the synod as defined by Walther in his *First Sermon at Synod Opening*: "A matter of greatest importance for a synodical body is pure doctrine and knowledge. A synod is known to be a part of the Church of God on earth, its marks are therefore also that in it the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel."[55]

This stress on doctrine is why our Theologians' Conference has as the wording for its theme: *The Doctrine of the Church*, the doctrine as found in the Scripture, reflected in our Confessions, whereby all development of the churches, also of our Lutheran churches, is to be judged.

[55] *Lutherische Brosamen*. Predigten und Reden von C. F. W. Walther, St. Louis 1897, p. 391.