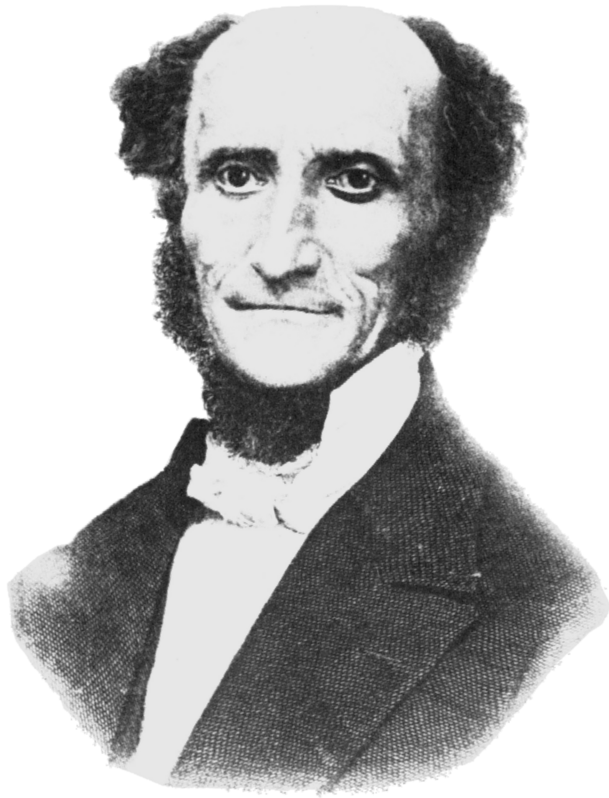


# **Walther on the Church**



**SELECTED WRITINGS  
OF C. F. W. WALTHER**

# **Walther on the Church**

John M. Drickamer, Translator

Aug. R. Suelflow, Series Editor



Publishing House  
St. Louis

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations in this publication are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyrighted 1946, 1952, © 1971, 1973 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and used by permission.

Quotations from *The Book of Concord* translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert, copyright 1959, Fortress Press, used by permission.

Copyright © 1981  
Concordia Publishing House  
3558 South Jefferson  
Saint Louis, Missouri 63118

Manufactured in the United States of America

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 89 88 87 86 85 84 83 82 81

---

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Walther, C. F. W. (Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm), 1811-1887.

Walther on the church.

(Selected writings of C.F.W. Walther)

1. Church—Collected works. 2. Lutheran Church—Doctrinal and controversial works—Collected works. I. Title. II. Series: Walther, C. F. W. (Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm), 1811-1887. Selections. English. 1981.

BV600.W26213

262'.041322

81-3210

AACR2

ISBN: 978-0-7586-1821-4

---



## Contents

Introduction	6
Translator's Preface	8
The Voice of Our Church on the Question of Church and Ministry	11
Part One: Concerning the Church	17
Part Two: Concerning the Ministry	73
The Proper Form of an Evangelical Lutheran Local Congregation Independent of the State	123
Chapter I: Concerning the Rights of an Evangelical Lutheran Local Congregation Independent of the State	126
Chapter II: Concerning the Duties of an Evangelical Lutheran Local Congregation Independent of the State	128
Chapter III: Concerning the Exercise of the Rights and Duties of an Evangelical Lutheran Local Congregation Independent of the State	132
The Evangelical Lutheran Church, the True Visible Church of God on Earth	155



## Introduction

It is an ambitious project to permit C. F. W. Walther (1811—87) to address English readers. Efforts to do so have occurred in the past from time to time. But this English edition constitutes one of the most significant contributions made to the study of the theology of Lutheranism in America within past years. The stereotype of Walther heretofore imposed upon him by those who were unable to read his German writings will now be significantly altered! It is to be regretted that a rich treasury of many other works from Walther's pen still await a future project.

Dr. Henry E. Jacobs (1844—1932), late president of Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pa., said of Walther:

He is as orthodox as John Gerhard, but as fervent as a pietist, as correct in form as a university or court preacher, and yet as popular as Luther himself. If the Lutheran Church will bring its doctrines again to the people, it must be as faithful and as definite in its doctrine and as interesting and thoroughly adapted to the times in form, as is the case in Walther. He is a model preacher in the Lutheran Church ("Dr. Walther as a Preacher, *Lutheran Church Review*, III [October 1889], 319).

In each of the volumes a special effort was made to select the most significant and relevant materials and to have Walther speak contemporary English. We have further endeavored, wherever possible, to quote from the American Edition of *Luther's Works* and to utilize the Revised Standard Version of the Bible for Scriptural references. Quotations from the Lutheran Confessions were keyed to the Tappert edition of the *Book of Concord*. It was helpful to be able to consult some resources which Walther had in his own library.

Walther was an exceedingly involved church leader. A founding father of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, he served as its first president 1847—50 and 1864—78. He was Concordia Seminary's (St. Louis) foremost instructor from 1849 until his death in 1887, and served as its president 1850—87.

His concern for Lutheran unity is demonstrative. He conceived the "Free Conferences" in the aftermath of the confessional crisis in 1855. Later, in 1872, he was elected the first president of a new pan-Lutheran federation, the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference.

The project to translate Walther into English received support from The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in 1962, when a special committee was formed. When funds were not available, the project was transferred to Concordia Publishing House. It has now become a pioneer in publishing both Luther's and Walther's select works in English.

Walther's classic *Law and Gospel*, generally considered one of the most important books produced within American Lutheranism, deserves a volume of its own. In it we see him as theological professor, with his students gathered around him.

Another volume acquaints us with Walther the preacher. He made a great impact on his hearers, and much of his sermonic and homiletical material was published in German during his lifetime and in the years following his death. In spite of this, several thousand sermon manuscripts still remain untouched.

In a further volume we see Walther the convention essayist. None of these essays, presented to Western District conventions between 1873 and 1886, with their ever-recurring theme "To God All Glory!" have seen the English light of day until now.

Of particular importance were Walther's writings on the church, and one of our volumes brings a condensation of these. *Church and Ministry* (1852), *The Proper Form* (1863), and *The True Visible Church* (1866) give the theological foundation for the Missouri Synod's strong emphasis on the congregation and on lay involvement.

We include a volume of Walther's correspondence. It lets us see him in his intense and complex relationships with many different people. Concordia Historical Institute, with funds provided by the Aid Association for Lutherans, has in recent years transcribed several hundred original *Fraktur* letters. Only a few have been published in English heretofore, and we too can bring only a selection.

Finally we take a look at Walther the editor—one of his most important functions. Through *Lehre und Wehre* (from which we bring articles never before presented in English) and *Der Lutheraner* Walther exerted a strong influence toward orthodox Lutheranism.

The translators of this edition hope that readers and users will develop a new appreciation for this 19th-century hero of faith, but above all, that Walther, as the preceptor of Luther in America, will direct the readers to the very cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, his and our only hope.

Aug. R. Suelflow, *Series Editor*



## Translator's Preface

C. F. W. Walther had deep roots in the past and equally deep involvements in his contemporary situation. He was extremely well-versed in the Bible, the Lutheran Confessions, the writings of Dr. Luther, and the whole history and theology of the Lutheran Church. He was also very active in the life of the Lutheran Church in his day, having influence both in Germany and in the United States. Most of his career was spent in America as pastor, theological professor, seminary president, and president of the Missouri Synod.

Walther's writings on the church grew directly out of his experiences. The reader would do well to consult a biography of Walther or a history of Lutheranism in America to learn more about the Saxon immigration, the colonists' experiences with their leader Martin Stephan, the Altenburg Debate of 1841 (where Walther first enunciated his teaching about the church), and the controversies of the "Missourians," under Walther's leadership, with J. A. A. Grabau of Buffalo, N. Y., and J. K. W. Loehe in Germany. Suffice it to say that the latter men (particularly Grabau) believed in a more authoritarian ministry and held that Walther's views, emphasizing the rights of the congregation and the laity, would tend toward what many called "mob rule." Walther, however, remained true to the principles expressed in his writings, and they contributed much to the Missouri Synod's vitality and growth.

Walther produced three famous works on the church. The first was *The Voice of Our Church on the Question of Church and Ministry*, known as *Kirche und Amt (Church and Ministry)*. It was published in Erlangen by the Verlag von Andreas Deichert in 1852. This book also indicated the official position of the Missouri Synod, for its theses were discussed and approved by the 1851 synodical convention.

The second of these books was *The Proper Form of an Evangelical Lutheran Local Congregation Independent of the State*, known as *Die Rechte Gestalt (The Proper Form)*. Prepared originally for discussion at conventions, it was first published in book form by August Wiebusch (St. Louis, Mo.) in 1863. The topic of this work was the local congregation and the structure it was to have according to the Word of God.

The third of these works was *The Evangelical Lutheran Church the*

*True Visible Church of God on Earth*. Prepared for discussion at the 1866 convention of the Synod, it was published in St. Louis by August Wiebusch und Sohn in 1867. Walther was well known for thoroughly rejecting the idea that one must be a Lutheran to be saved. But in this work he guarded against the equally wrong idea that it was unimportant to recognize and join the true, orthodox, visible church.

The latter two of these works have appeared in English in their entirety, translated by the late Prof. J. T. Mueller of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis: *The Form of a Christian Congregation* (1963) and *The True Visible Church* (1961), both published by Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis. *Walther and the Church* by Wm. Dallmann, W. H. T. Dau, and Th. Engelder (CPH, 1938) also contains quite a bit of this material.

The translation in this volume makes use of Dr. Mueller's work. His translations have been exhaustively compared with the original German, and numerous revisions have been made.

In view of space limitations, it has been necessary to present only selections from these works. All of the theses from each work have been included. All or nearly all of the Biblical material has also been included. Numerous quotations from Dr. Luther and the Lutheran Confessions have been retained. Some of the material from Lutheran theologians has also been included in the selections from *Church and Ministry*, because that work has not previously appeared in English translation.

Several notes of gratitude are in order. I would like to thank my wife for her encouragement as I worked on this project. I am very grateful to Mrs. Mark Elliott for her excellent work in typing the text. I am deeply indebted to Mr. Mark Elliott and Mrs. Duane Voorman for valuable assistance in proofreading. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. August Suelflow, the series editor and director of Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, for all of his help and encouragement. *Soli Deo Gloria!*

John M. Drickamer





# **The Voice of Our Church on the Question of Church and Ministry**

**A Collection of Testimonies About this Question  
from the Confessions of the  
Evangelical Lutheran Church  
and the Private Writings of Its Orthodox Teachers  
Published by the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States  
as a Witness of Its Faith  
in Defense Against the Attacks  
of Pastor Grabau of Buffalo, New York**

Presented by  
C. F. W. Walther

professor of theology at Concordia College in St. Louis  
and pastor of the Evangelical-Lutheran congregation there

Third edition, published by resolution  
of the Synod, newly revised and enlarged

Erlangen 1875  
Publishing House of Andreas Deichert

## Foreword to the First Edition of 1852

The doctrines of the church and the office of the ministry have become a question which currently divides Lutherans into two camps. Particularly among those who are regarded as the most faithful protagonists of the precious inheritance of our church a striking difference has manifested itself regarding these two doctrines. It has therefore not only so appeared, but it has actually been expressed quite frequently that the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church is still not fully developed or cleared up so far as these articles are concerned, hence that it needs not only development and completion but even clarification and correction. In the present controversy among Lutherans on the doctrines just mentioned, it is believed, there are definite indications that now the time has arrived when finally also these points must and shall be clarified within our church and be placed into their true relationship to the whole body of doctrine.

We, the members of the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, cannot share this last conviction. We are rather persuaded that the present differences among Lutherans concerning the doctrines of the church and the ministry, and whatever is immediately connected with them, stem from the fact that the doctrine set forth in the public Confessions of our church and in the private writings of its orthodox teachers has been disregarded and abandoned. We are convinced that neither has our church failed to discuss the doctrines of the church and the ministry nor do they now require development. Nor has our church—and this much less—obscured these doctrines in any way or assigned to them a wrong relation to the whole body of doctrine so that they must now be clarified and interpreted. We are also convinced that the great decisive battle of the Reformation which our church fought against the papacy in the 16th century centered in the doctrines of the church and the ministry, which have now again been called into question, and that the pure and clear teaching concerning them constitutes the precious spoils that our church gained from this struggle. We indeed do not deny that the doctrines of the church and the ministry are capable of further unfolding, as are all other doctrines of Scripture. Nevertheless we solemnly disavow any pretended doctrinal development, which quite frequently is now demanded under the pretense of necessary development of church doctrine, if it does not return to and begin with the place where our church left off.

Now we Lutherans in the distant west, separated by the ocean from the land of scholarship and living off the crumbs which fall from the table of the rich mother church, are certainly more convinced than anyone else can be that in our poverty we least of all have the call to contribute our

share to the great battle which is being fought in our old German fatherland on the field of theological science and to send it across the sea. But just in the very circumstances in which we find ourselves and which place upon us the tragic necessity to remain behind the onward hastening mother church, there lies also the blessing that we, more than our brethren on the other shore, though incapable of supplying original works, are obliged all the more eagerly to sit at the feet of our old teachers and to seek out the treasures already gathered and won by our church. If we can add little or nothing to them, we will hold and preserve them all the more faithfully.

Therefore we believe that, despite our poverty compared with the mother church, we have a talent with which we can and should earn interest. And since today in our church so many raise their voice to resolve the controversy concerning the doctrines of the church and the ministry, but hardly anyone, so far as we know, has thought of letting the church of our fathers also express its opinion, and since the opinion is becoming ever more general that our church has left the doctrines in question unanswered, we therefore do not consider it superfluous if in this present book, according to the humble talent entrusted to us, we seek to make a contribution so that in the present important controversial question concerning church and ministry *the voice of our church* in its official Confessions and in the private writings of its teachers may also be heard and considered.

We regard ourselves as compelled to do this especially since Pastor Grabau of Buffalo in the state of New York, particularly in the second synodical report edited by him, has grievously slandered us before the whole church on account of our doctrines of the church and the ministry and several other teachings closely connected with them, as also our practice based thereon. Hence our synodical convention held in St. Louis in the fall of 1850 asked this writer to compose the present book. Its contents were presented to the synodical convention held last year at Milwaukee, either literally or substantially, and after they had been examined and respectively revised, it was resolved to publish the manuscript in our name and as our unanimous confession.

It was of course not our intention to present the doctrines of the church and the ministry in their completeness. Whoever desires this will find such a presentation in the larger dogmatic works of the teachers of our church, among others in the masterworks of men like Chemnitz and Gerhard. It was our purpose to stress only those points concerning which a difference has arisen and to embody only so much noncontroversial material as is demanded by the context. We therefore hope that on account

of this intentional incompleteness we shall not be charged with one-sidedness in our interpretation and presentation. In order to avoid misunderstanding, we declare expressly that in this work we are not so much concerned about how the church is to be constituted but rather about its *essence* and the principles according to which the phenomena are to be judged and upon which its policy should be based.

Perhaps some things in this book at first glance may appear doubtful and subject to misunderstanding and misuse. But whoever wants to be upright, and go to the trouble of considering the individual matters in their *context* and according to the *intention* with which they have been incorporated into the whole, will soon, as we hope, have his doubts disappear if he is in general devoted to the doctrine of our church. But whoever will not be fair, but intends to remain attached to his preconceived notions of what is supposed to be truly Lutheran, cannot be satisfied, not even with all sorts of cautions by which in this Foreword we might try to guard against misunderstandings.

We are willing to admit that the conditions in which we live here in America decidedly influenced us to appreciate deeply the doctrines of the church and the ministry set forth in this book, so that we adhere to them as a precious jewel and confess them before all the world. Nevertheless, we definitely repudiate the charge made against us that we twisted and patterned them to favor our conditions. Since we here do not live under inherited church conditions, but rather must first lay the foundation, and *are able* to lay it unhindered by anything already existing, the circumstances rather compelled us to search most earnestly for the principles on which according to God's Word and the Confessions of our church the polity of a truly Lutheran fellowship is based and according to which it must be constituted.

The question facing us is not: "What may we retain without sinning?" but: "How should it be according to God's Word and the principles set forth and proved in our official Confessions?" In view of this, our need for clarity and certainty of faith concerning the principles regarding the doctrines of the church, the ministry, the power of the keys, church polity, and others became all the more urgent. We did not pattern the doctrine of our church after the conditions prevailing here, but we established the church according to the doctrines of our church. Whoever doubts this, we confidently ask: "Come and see!" And whoever is astonished to find these principles and doctrines presented as principles and doctrines of the *Lutheran Church*, when until now he may have rejected them as *enthusiastic*, we can trustfully refer to the proofs with which we support them, leaving him the choice either to concede to us the honor of being

orthodox or to deny this honor to a whole cloud of witnesses from Luther down to Baier and Hollaz.

We have chosen the form of theses in order to present to our readers in brief and plain words the chief points which here are of primary importance. Though the immediately following Scripture proof contains in the main only suggestions, which in the following witnesses are further explained, we nevertheless believed that these suggestions should not be missing. The witnesses of the church from the private writings of its teachers stem for the greater part from the writings of the 16th and 17th centuries. It would not have been difficult to find assenting witnesses also in the following periods up to the present time, and these we might have added. But with Professor Schmid of Erlangen we regarded it as more fitting, as he did in his *Lutheran Dogmatics*, to present witnesses only from the works of those teachers who are rightly recognized by all true Lutherans as absolutely faithful to the doctrine of our church, indeed as representatives of Lutheran orthodoxy.

That we have been intent on presenting excerpts from *Luther's* writings in special abundance will be surprising to no reader who through God's grace has recognized with us that Luther, and no one but Luther, was the divinely called Reformer of the church. We are proud to be called by his name, not because we believe in him but because we have learned to know that the doctrine he proclaimed is not his own but the pure Word of the everlasting God. We also hope to have proved that Luther by no means, as it is so often said today, abandoned the doctrines of the church and the ministry which he taught in his earlier years after having been convinced by many experiences of something better. But this precious tool of God remained consistently true to the truth which he had learned to know. However, according to the condition of those to whom he addressed himself, he more or less stressed now this aspect of the doctrine and then again another.

It may appear tedious to some readers that we have presented testimonies, originally written in Greek and Latin, in a German translation. But since, especially here in America, many who do not know the ancient languages are also greatly interested in the questions treated in this book, a translation of the quotations had to be given. With regard to these translations the venerable reader who knows the ancient languages is asked to exercise tolerance since they do not claim to have any literary merit. The translator was concerned above all to supply a faithful translation which could not be criticized for departing from the original in any way in favor of a specific opinion. We have also presented, as appendices to most of the theses, testimonies from the writings of the

teachers of the ancient church, as far as we could present them exactly in view of our great lack of patristic literature. It is also because of this lack that we have presented some quotations of the Greek church fathers only in Latin.

May the rich blessing of Him who regards the lowly rest upon this humble contribution from poor America, which otherwise only asks for gifts from the German motherland, to the upbuilding of our Evangelical Lutheran Zion. May this book above all help somewhat so that people will seek and exalt the treasures of wisdom and knowledge which for so many, alas! lie buried in the dust-covered tomes of our pious and learned fathers. That would be a gain of unspeakable value for our church. We however, to whom God in His infinite mercy and by the grace of His precious Holy Spirit, as also through the service of those faithful servants of God who now see what they believed, has made known the pure doctrine of His holy Word, ask Him to keep and strengthen us in His truth against all deceitful wisdom and trickery of men, as we thank, praise, laud, and honor Him through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

### **Foreword to the Second Edition [1865]**

The present second edition differs from the first partly by the correction of printing errors which crept into the former edition, partly by the deletion of some repetitions found in it, and partly by a number of new quotations as also by an added index of the Christian authors quoted and an alphabetical subject index.

May God for Jesus' sake bless this humble contribution also in its new form toward the spread of the truth.

### **Foreword to the Third Edition [1875]**

This third edition differs from the second revised and enlarged edition only by the elimination of printing errors that were overlooked also in it, as also by the addition of some Greek originals in places where in the former editions the patristic quotations could be given only in Latin.

We humbly commend to the continued blessing of the invisible Head of His church also this newly reprinted anthology of testimonies of orthodox teachers concerning two such very important articles of Christian doctrine as those of the church and of the ministry.

St. Louis in the state Missouri, Sept. 29, 1874.



## PART ONE

### Concerning the Church

#### Thesis I

*The church in the proper sense of the term is the congregation (Gemeinde) of saints, that is, the totality of all those who have been called by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel out of the lost and condemned human race, truly believe in Christ, and are sanctified and incorporated into Christ through this faith.*

#### 1. Proof from God's Word

Thus writes the holy apostle Paul, Eph. 1:22-23: "And He (God) has put all things under His feet and has made Him (Christ) the Head over all things for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." If, according to these words, Christ is the Head of the congregation or church, and the latter is His body, then the true church in its proper sense is the sum total of all those who are joined to Christ the way the members of a body are joined to the head.

The same apostle writes, Eph. 5:23-27: "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the Head of the church, His body, and is Himself its Savior. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish."

The same apostle writes, 1 Cor. 3:16-17: "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are." For this reason the same apostle also calls the church "the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven" (Heb. 12:23).

The Lord Himself says of His church, Matt. 16:18: "On this rock I will build My church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it." Accordingly, the church in its proper sense is in its members built upon the

Rock of Christ and His Word. But upon this only he is built who is built upon it in a living *faith*.

Finally, the evangelist St. John writes in John 11:51-52: "Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad." The church, for whose founding and gathering Christ came into the world and died, is therefore the sum total of God's children.

## 2. Testimonies of the Church in Its Official Confessions

Apostles' Creed: "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints." By this addition, "the communion of saints," there is not indicated a new article of faith, as the Romanists teach, but it explains the word "church." The Large Catechism [of Luther] explains it thus: "Thus the word 'church' (*Kirche*) really means nothing else than a common assembly; it is not of German but of Greek origin, like the word *ecclesia*. In that language the word is *kyria*, and in Latin *curia*. In our mother tongue therefore it ought to be called 'a Christian congregation or assembly,' or best and most clearly of all, 'a holy Christian people.' Likewise the word *communio*, which is appended, should not be translated 'communion' but 'community.' It is nothing but a comment or interpretation by which someone wished to explain what the Christian church is. . . . To speak idiomatically, we ought to say 'a community of saints,' that is, a community composed only of saints, or, still more clearly, 'a holy community.' . . . This is the sum and substance of this phrase: I believe that there is on earth a little holy flock or community of pure saints under one head, Christ. It is called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, mind, and understanding." (Part II, par. 34, 48-51; Tappert, pp. 416-17)

Augsburg Confession: "What the Church is."—"Again, although the Christian church, properly speaking, is nothing else than the assembly of all believers and saints," etc. (Art. VIII; Tappert, p. 33). While the Augsburg Confession in Art. VII desires not so much to describe the church according to its essence, but merely wishes to state *that* at all times there is and must remain a holy Christian church, *where* it is, and by what *marks* it can be recognized, Art. VIII tells us *what* the church is, and indeed, what it *properly* is. This must be well observed when defining the concept which our church has set forth in its Symbols regarding the church.

Smalcald Articles: "Thank God, a seven-year-old child knows what the church is, namely, holy believers and sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd. So children pray, 'I believe in one holy Christian church.' " (Part III, Art. XII; Tappert, p. 315)

### 3. Testimonies of the Church in the Private Writings of Its Teachers

Thus Luther writes: "Now there are many peoples in the world; the Christians, however, are a people with a special call and are therefore called not just *ecclesia*, 'church,' or 'people,' but *sancta catholica Christiana*, that is, 'a Christian holy people' who believe in Christ. That is why they are called a Christian people and have the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies them daily, not only through the forgiveness of sin acquired for them by Christ (as the Antinomians foolishly believe), but also through the abolition, the purging, and the mortification of sins, on the basis of which they are called a holy people. Thus the 'holy Christian church' is synonymous with a Christian and holy people or, as one is also wont to express it, with 'holy Christendom,' or 'whole Christendom.' The Old Testament uses the term 'God's people.'

"If the words, 'I believe that there is a holy Christian people,' had been used in the Children's Creed, all the misery connected with this meaningless and obscure word ('church') might easily have been avoided. For the words 'Christian holy people' would have brought with them, clearly and powerfully, the proper understanding and judgment of what is, and what is not, church. Whoever would have heard the words 'Christian holy people' could have promptly concluded that the pope is no people, much less a holy Christian people. So too the bishops, priests, monks are not holy, Christian people, for they do not believe in Christ, nor do they lead a holy life, but are rather the wicked and shameful people of the devil. He who does not truly believe in Christ is not Christian or a Christian. He who does not have the Holy Spirit against sin is not holy. Consequently, they cannot be 'a Christian holy people,' that is, *sancta et catholica ecclesia*." (*On the Councils and the Church, Luther's Works, American Edition, Vol. 41, pp. 143—44*)

John Gerhard: "We define the church as the communion of saints in order that no one may think that the church is merely a certain outward polity of good and bad persons, since it is, to speak properly and accurately, the holy assembly of those who are united by the bond of the Holy Spirit in true faith and true love. But we by no means use the expression 'of saints' in the sense of the Anabaptists or Pelagians. Nor do we fictitiously teach that the true members of the church in the weakness of this life are perfectly or altogether sinless. Nor do we change the church into a Platonic concept and an empty picture which exists only in one's imagination, but we distinguish between sins of weakness with which faith, repentance, and zeal for sanctification may coexist, and sins against

conscience by which the regenerate cease to be true and living members of the church.” (*Loci theologici, De ecclesia*, par. 51)

Quenstedt: “Properly and principally the church is the assembly of saints and true believers” (*Theologia didactico-polemica*, Part IV, ch. 15. sect. 2). “We prove our judgment that the church properly is the assembly of saints by the nature and peculiarity of the church; for in Holy Scripture the church is called 1. Christ’s mystical body. . . . 2. The church is the mother not of the [spiritually] dead, but of the living, or the true believers. . . . 3. The church is Christ’s fold and the true members of the church are Christ’s sheep. . . . 4. The prophets and apostles often bestow upon the church such expressions of praise as cannot be referred to the whole assembly of the called, comprising both the good and the evil. . . . Therefore we must assume a church, properly and primarily so called, to which principally and immediately these expressions of praise and these ascribed properties belong; for here and there in the Old Testament and in the New it is called ‘Christ’s bride’ (Song of Sol. 4:8-10; Is. 61:10; Hos. 2:19-20; John 3:29; 2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 21:9); ‘Christ’s fair and flawless love’ (Song of Sol. 4:7); ‘a chaste virgin’ (2 Cor. 11:2 KJV); ‘one body with Christ; as are husband and wife (Eph. 5:30). None of these epithets applies to the godless. [Moreover, the church is called] ‘the household . . . of the living God’ (1 Tim. 3:15); ‘a spiritual house’ (1 Peter 2:5); ‘a people of His own who are zealous for good deeds’ (Titus 2:14); etc., to which none belong but those who are ‘living stones . . . built upon . . . Christ Jesus . . . the cornerstone’ (Eph. 2:20; 1 Peter 2:5).” (Ibid.)

The same: “Those who have been excommunicated truly are members of the church if they have faith and love.” (Ibid.)

## **Thesis II**

*No godless person, no hypocrite, no unregenerate person, and no heretic belongs to the church in the proper sense of the term.*

### **1. Proof from God’s Word**

Thus writes St. Paul, Rom. 8:9: “Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him.” But whoever does not belong to Christ is also not a member of the true church, which is His spiritual body.

So also John writes in 1 John 2:19 of the hypocrites who finally left the fellowship of the church also outwardly: “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that it might be plain that they all are not of us.”

Again the Lord says, John 15:6: “If a man does not abide in Me, he is

cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned.”

## **2. Testimonies of the Church in Its Official Confessions**

The Apology: “Thus those in whom Christ is not active are not members of Christ. . . . The Creed also defines the church this way, teaching us to believe that there is a holy, catholic church. Certainly the wicked are not a holy church! . . . If the church, which is truly the kingdom of Christ, is distinguished from the kingdom of the devil, it necessarily follows that since the wicked belong to the kingdom of the devil, they are not the church. In this life, nevertheless, because the kingdom of Christ has not yet been revealed, they are mingled with the church and hold office in the church. . . . Though wolves and ungodly teachers may run rampant in the church, they are not, properly speaking, the kingdom of Christ. . . . Nor do we see how it could be defined otherwise, since the church, properly so called, is termed the body of Christ. It is clear that the wicked belong to the kingdom and body of the devil, who drives them on and holds them captive.” (Art. VII and VIII, par. 5, 7-8, 17, 22, 29; Tappert, pp. 169—73)

## **3. Testimonies of the Church in the Private Writings of Its Teachers**

Luther: “Good and well, the pope declares that he is the Christian Church. We deny this, although we admit that in the papacy there are some people who are members of the Christian Church, just as there are many such among the Turks, in France, or in England. They are baptized, they have the Gospel, they use the Sacraments properly, and they are true Christians. But we object to their condemnation of us, to their assertion that our doctrine is false. We object to this, that meanwhile they whitewash and justify themselves with their laws, their inventions, their monastic orders, and their good works, and with their claim that he who observes these is a true Christian and that this is the true Christian Church.

“We are ready to concede that they are in the Christian Church, but not that they are the true members of the church. To be sure, they have the pulpit, Baptism, the ministry, the Sacrament, and they are in the church; but they are not genuine members. Similarly, among us there are many who are baptized and partake of the Lord’s Supper, who pose as Christians, but who are still knaves through and through. They are not sincere. Therefore we say that they are numbered among the Christians, and that they bear the name and have the outward appearance and semblance of the church and of Christians. But for all that, they are not the church and are not Christians.

“ . . . No, we say that he is found in the Christian Church just as mouse droppings are found among the pepper or cockleburrs among the grain. They merely help to fill the bushel. A body may possess fine, sound, and useful members which man can employ for his various needs; but that same body may also contain perspiration, secretion from the eyes, nasal mucus, scabs, abscesses, and other filth.

“ . . . Thus the heretics, the false teachers, or the ungodly in the church are not its natural and genuine members but the filth which the body exudes.” (*Sermons on the Gospel of John, Luther’s Works*, American Edition, Vol. 23, pp. 286—87)

Gerhard: “We believe that the hypocrites, the wicked, the hidden unbelievers, and in general all reprobates, as long as they are and remain such, are not true members of the true church, though outwardly they confess the same faith as the saints and use the same sacraments.” (*Loci theologici de ecclesia*, par. 51)

The same: “As Christ says of His disciples, John 17:14, that they are in the world but not of the world, so we say contrariwise that the wicked are in the church but not of the church.” (*Ibid.*, par. 64)

Abraham Calov: “Though the hypocrites are in the group in which the church is, they are not properly the group which is the church. . . . We do not make a twofold church: one of the saints and another that is mixed. But we say that we make this distinction only insofar as the word ‘church’ is taken homonymically (that is, that two altogether different things have one and the same name) now for the group of believers and then again for the group in which hypocrites are mingled with the believers.” (*Systema locorum theologicorum*, VIII, 253 ff.)

### **Thesis III**

*The church in the proper sense of the word is invisible.*

#### **1. Proof from God’s Word**

Thus says the Lord, Luke 17:20-21: “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, ‘Lo, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”

Again, St. Peter writes, 1 Peter 2:5: “And like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” According to these words the true church is a spiritual building and therefore not a visible one.

The holy apostle Paul moreover writes, 2 Tim. 2:19: “But God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’

and, 'Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.' " According to these words, only the Lord knows those who are His. But only those who are the Lord's are the true church. Therefore no one can see the church.

Compare also the Scripture proof under Thesis I.

## **2. Testimonies of the Church in Its Official Confessions**

In the first place we read in the oldest confession of the church, the Apostles' Creed: "I believe . . . the holy Christian church, the communion of saints" (Tappert, p. 18). But if, according to these words, the church is something that must be *believed*, it cannot be visible, for "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). For this reason Augustine writes: "That is faith to believe what you do not see" (*Tract.* 10 on John); and in another place: "You fool, that which you see is not faith."

The Apology: "If we were to define the church as only an outward organization embracing both the good and the wicked, then men would not understand that the kingdom of Christ is the righteousness of the heart and the gift of the Holy Spirit but would think of it as only the outward observance of certain devotions and rituals. Then, too, what difference will there be between the church and the Old Testament people? Yet Paul distinguishes the church from the Old Testament people by the fact that the church is a spiritual people, separated from the heathen not by civil rites but by being God's true people, reborn by the Holy Spirit. Among the Old Testament people, those born according to the flesh had promises about physical well-being, political affairs, etc., in addition to the promise about Christ. Because of these promises even the wicked among them were called the people of God inasmuch as God had separated these physical descendants from other nations by certain outward ordinances and promises. Nevertheless, these evil people did not please God. But the Gospel brings not the shadow of eternal things but the eternal blessings themselves, the Holy Spirit and the righteousness by which we are righteous before God.

"According to the Gospel, therefore, only those are the true people who accept this promise of the Spirit. Besides the church is the kingdom of Christ, the opposite of the kingdom of the devil. . . . But why belabor the obvious? If the church, which is truly the kingdom of Christ, is distinguished from the kingdom of the devil, it necessarily follows that since the wicked belong to the kingdom of the devil, they are not the church. In this life, nevertheless, because the kingdom of Christ has not yet been revealed, they are mingled with the church and hold office in the

church. The fact that the revelation has not yet come does not make the wicked the kingdom of Christ. What he quickens by his Spirit is always the same kingdom of Christ, whether it be revealed or hidden under the cross, just as Christ is the same, whether now glorified or previously afflicted. Christ's parables agree with this. He clearly says in Matt. 13:38 that 'the good seed means the sons of the kingdom, the weeds are the sons of the evil one.' The field, he says, is the world, not the church. . . . Christ is talking about the outward appearance of the church when he says that the kingdom of God is like a net (Matt. 13:47) or like ten virgins (Matt. 25:1). He teaches us that the church is hidden under a crowd of wicked men so that this stumbling block may not offend the faithful and so that we may know that the Word and the sacraments are efficacious even when wicked men administer them. . . . Nor do we see how it could be defined otherwise, since the church, properly so called, is termed the body of Christ. It is clear that the wicked belong to the kingdom and body of the devil, who drives them on and holds them captive." (Art. VII and VIII, par. 13-19, 29; Tappert, pp. 170—71, 173)

### 3. Testimonies of the Church in the Private Writings of Its Teachers

Luther: "Therefore we correctly confess in the Creed that we *believe* a holy church. For it is invisible, dwelling in the Spirit, in an 'unapproachable' place (1 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." (*Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Luther's Works, American Edition, Vol. 27, p. 84*)

The same: "This I shall show you in regard to one argument which you thought the very best: since I had called the Christian church a 'spiritual assembly,' you mocked me as though I wanted to build a church just as Plato built a city which is nowhere. And you were very pleased with your idea, thinking you had hit the mark. You say, 'Would it not be a nice city, with spiritual walls, spiritual towers, spiritual cannons, spiritual horses, and everything spiritual?' It is your final opinion that the Christian church cannot exist without a physical location, space, and goods. My answer, dear fool Murner, is: Should I deny Scripture for the sake of reason and put you above God? Why do you not respond to my passages? For example: 'There's no partiality before God' [Rom. 2:11]; 'The kingdom of God is in the midst of you' [Luke 17:21]; and 'The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, "Lo, here it is!" or "There!"' [Luke 17:20-21]. . . .