

## Fourth session.

[Scripture passages on the church in the proper sense — separation from the Lutheran church].

...[CPH p. 89/2] After their appointment, the decision was made to discuss the theses already published in *Der Lutheraner*.

In the introduction to the following discussion, the reason was given which had induced the President to write and present precisely these theses. Hitherto we had been compelled to promote the doctrine of the invisible church as the congregation of the saints, as the one, holy, Christian, catholic church, and to defend [CPH p. 90/1] ourselves against the error that the <page 40> visible Lutheran church is the one holy Christian church. For the sake of this struggle we have often been regarded and suspected as those who hold little regard for the true visible Lutheran Church and are of an impure mind, as if we did not care to which visible ecclesiastical body we belonged.

That battle has now, thank God, been victoriously fought, since in recent times no one dares to publicly describe the visible Lutheran Church as the One Holy Christian Church, apart from which there is no salvation; even Pastor Grabau has not for a long time expressed this as nakedly and decisively as he used to do.

In order to counter the misunderstanding that we have no interest in the true visible church, and that all ecclesial communities are of equal importance to us, we should now also go to work with joy, and once again, to explain the doctrine of the Lutheran church, as the true visible church of God on earth, from the Holy Scriptures and from the confessions. Scripture and from the confessional writings of our church, and to hold it up to ourselves for the purpose that we may not only be certain of it, but also be glad that we are not members and servants of a false church, but of the true church, building on the true Zion. After these and similar introductory remarks, **Thesis 1** was read:

**The one holy Christian church on earth, or the church in the proper sense of the word, apart from which there is no life and no salvation, is, according to God's Word, the totality of all those who truly believe in Christ and are sanctified by this faith.**

Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 5:23-27; Heb. 3:6.

and read the biblical passages quoted and explained with a few comments.

The summary of what was said in Matthew 16:18 was as follows:

This passage, which the pope cites for himself as his stronghold, judges the papacy most decisively. Here our Savior says that the church is that which is built on Him; but to be built on Him means nothing else and can mean nothing else than to believe in Him. One cannot be built on Him visibly, only invisibly through faith in the heart. The Church is the congregation [*Gemeinde*] of believers in

Christ; for there can be no other connection, no other way of being built up than through faith.

The Pope says that that Church is the true, right Church, which adheres to him, recognizes his priests at Mass and his bishops, and especially adheres to him as the head of this Church.

It has been remarked that it is wrong to assume that this passage refers to a mere oral confession as that by which someone becomes a member of the congregation of Christ or the Christian Church; [90/2] rather, what is meant here is a true confession, which is a sign, a testimony, a fruit of faith in Christ in the heart. Peter's confession revealed the very faith that Peter had in his heart. The rock is none other than Christ. Just as Peter, because he believes in Christ, therefore stands on this rock, so all believers stand on the same foundation through their faith. The Holy Spirit Himself (1 Cor. 3:11, Eph. 2:20, cf. 1 Cor. 10:4) <page 41> has interpreted that Christ is the rock on which the church rests; for where the Holy Spirit speaks of the matter without an image, Christ is always referred to as the foundation of the church. We therefore need not puzzle over the correct meaning of this image, because the Holy Spirit, the only correct interpreter, has himself indicated that Christ is the rock.

The following comment was made on the second passage, Eph. 5:

This passage interprets the previous one. If the image of a building is used to indicate the relationship between Christ and his members, one could still think of an outward, visible connection; but if the image of the exact connection between head and body is also used, let it be clear that we are not speaking of a visible, outward communion, but of a spiritual connection; for head and body are not only connected outwardly, but are connected in that the same life, light, warmth, power, etc., flows from the head through the whole body and all the members. Thus only those who have the same life, the same light, the same Spirit flowing through them are united to Christ. Anyone who is not spiritually united with Christ does not belong to the church. Now only the believer has this Spirit, this life in Christ; therefore only the believer belongs to the church.

Since it is said in this passage that the body of Christ is holy and unblameable, etc., it can also be seen from this that only those who are justified by faith in Christ are united with Christ and belong to the church, for only the believer grasps Christ's merit and righteousness. He who is not justified does not belong to the church, for he is not holy and blameless. Christ is not the head of a dirty, stinking body, but of a sun-bright, pure body. But this purity is given to the Church by Christ, and she receives it through faith. —

Here the error was pointed out that a body is something visible; because the church is compared to a body, it must also be something visible.

However, in a figurative comparison one must also look at the actual point of comparison, which is why a certain image is actually used. This image of the body is not used here because the body is a visible, outward connection of the individual members, but to illustrate the intimate, inward, life-giving [91/1]

connection of the invisible head with the members, that is, Christ with his believers. As, for example, in the parable of the unjust steward, the point of comparison was not injustice and deceit, but prudence, so here it was pointed out that the body has the same light, the same spirit, as the head.

It was also pointed out how monstrous this opinion is that the suffering of the church must be visible, while the head is invisible.

Then it was also remarked how all those who still like to describe the church as an institution could not yet have firmly established the doctrine that faith alone unites with Christ.

One should not think that this doctrine is only of interest to theologians, but rather that it is also a very important doctrine for life; for this doctrine, that only the believer is a member of Christ and his church, <page 42> is the most powerful sermon on repentance. If, on the other hand, we conceal this doctrine or lead a false one to the contrary, all hypocrites think that they are also members of the true church, for outwardly they belong to the Lutheran, orthodox church.

This teaching is also very comforting for those challenged in their loneliness. Such lonely people easily come to the conclusion that we are outside the church, but know that if you are with Jesus, if you have Jesus in your heart through faith, then you are in the church, united with all the saints and the blessed. We are a thousand times better and more intimately united with Christ through faith than if we were all together in one bed. The assembly in faith is much more intimate than the outward union, no matter how close, and even more intimate than the union of body and soul. One and the same Jesus is in all of us. The apostle therefore calls us One Bread; and in another place he says: You are all one in Christ Jesus.

Only sectarians think that those alone are Christians who gather around the right preaching office; but no, Christians are those who have the right faith in Christ. Luther remained so lukewarm in the papacy because he did not know the doctrine of the church. Finally he realized: the church is the believers; by leaving the papacy I do not leave the church; that saved him. In the Church, which is really the Church, you are in faith with your spirit, not with your body.

Concerning the third passage, Heb. 3:6:

It was noted that it first says, "we are the house"; but then comes the qualification, "if we hold fast the confidence and the glory of the hope firm to the end." Here we can see that in the most genuine sense those who persevere in the faith belong to the church. Those who [91/2] persevere in the true faith only for a time are also true members of the church, but only those who persevere in the faith are permanent and eternal members. Luther therefore also expressly declares that he has nothing against the assertion of the blessed John Huss that the elect are actually the Church.

Reference was made to the sentence in the Formula of Concord (on the election of grace), where it says: "The article on the election of grace teaches what the true Church of God is."

Since it had been remarked that the sectarians said that if you separate yourself from the preaching office, you separate yourself from Christ, the comment was made that the sectarians were probably in error, because the people who separate themselves from the sects separate themselves from the false teaching there, but could of course have the right faith themselves; but we in the orthodox church could well say that whoever separates himself from the visible Lutheran church is undoubtedly lost or separates himself from Christ.

But it was replied that this could only be said if one added: willfully or against better knowledge and conscience; if one had precise and unmistakable evidence that the person had also lost faith in Christ or had never had faith in Christ. One can only say to someone who separates himself from the visible Lutheran church that you are lost because he leaves the recognized truth, not because he leaves our person, our visible community. We must be able to say that you depart from us in such a way that we can see that you are no longer in the faith, for that alone is the reason why one is lost.

Whoever separates from the Lutheran church out of an erroneous conscience does not necessarily fall away from faith in Christ. If he goes to a church of false faith, he is certainly in urgent danger of losing salvation - but one cannot say absolutely in every case that he is lost. It is possible for someone to fall away from the Lutheran Church and yet still remain in Christ; if he is to be regarded as lost, then there must be signs that he is no longer a Christian. In such an act we must condemn the apostasy, but not the person, unless it is quite certain according to God's Word that the person has fallen away from God. Thus we cannot condemn all Methodists etc., or put them under ban, because there are believing children of God among them. If all those who have left the Lutheran Church were to be regarded as children of death, it would have to be shown that no one could fall away out of an erroneous conscience. It depends on whether someone leaves God or whether he leaves our fellowship solely because of bias. If I am among the Turks and have the Lutheran faith, then I belong to the true church, even though outwardly [92/1] I do not belong to the Lutheran church. It is simply said: he who believes will be saved.

Here you can clearly see the difference between the law and the gospel. The Gospel says: Believe and you will be saved. But now the question arises: What should I do as a believer? It says: Stay with the orthodox church, avoid all false teaching. The commandment to remain with the orthodox Lutheran church is part of the law. Everything that I now unknowingly sin against the law, I include in the Lord's Prayer, and the Gospel absolves me of all my sins and errors.

The right doctrine of the church is also important for pastoral and congregational practice. We can express ourselves quite correctly in theory, but act quite wrongly in practice. It is also so strange in man; take St. Bernard, for example, how beautifully he can speak of faith in Christ, and yet what errors he has harbored along the way! A true Christian who, out of an erroneous conscience, steps out of an orthodox church into a false one, does not

necessarily depart from the truth in such a way that his spiritual life could not still be preserved by the main elements of truth that are also present in the false church.

Then compare the sects with our own congregations: do not whole groups of members in our own congregations often have completely confusing misconceptions? But it does not occur to us to condemn them because of this. There are also thousands among the sects who basically hold to Christ with simplicity, and yet have completely wrong ideas about various individual articles of doctrine. -

Whether one contradicts the truth against one's better judgment depends on everything. All sin is forgiven if we only stand in faith, as is all doctrinal error. It is the same with those who are put under ban; they are not all condemned; a false ban is not a ban for the one it is supposed to affect. Only those should be excluded in whom it can be seen from clear signs that they no longer have faith. <Page 44> But he who stands in faith is not in fact under ban, even if all the Lutheran preachers in the world had excluded him.

Again, if sin is forgiven, error is also forgiven. It is different with willful standing or persisting in sin, or in error. A willful sinner or one who willfully persists in error is lost.

It was also shown that, if one wanted to speak strictly theologically, the expression was not correct when one said that belonging to the visible orthodox church was necessary for salvation. It is incorrect, or rather imprecise and misleading, to say that good works are necessary for salvation and therefore to avoid this way of speaking, and one cannot even say of Baptism that it is absolutely necessary for salvation. One could tolerate this way of speaking, but strictly speaking, [92/2] one could only say that only faith, and what it absolutely presupposes, is necessary for salvation.

Because Christ says that one should confess him, I adhere to the orthodox church - but in the strictest sense, belonging to the Lutheran church is not necessary for salvation. How easily, for example, a weak Lutheran Christian is offended by the life of his preacher and therefore leaves the Lutheran Church, but in spite of this sin in life retains faith in Christ. How serious errors we find in the disciples of the Lord Jesus before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon them, and yet they were already believers at that time; they remain with the Lord, and the Lord still regards them as His disciples, as members of His spiritual body." The Synod then adjourned until 2 o'clock in the afternoon with the Lord's prayer.

*[The "Fifth Session" is on a different topic, excommunication or the ban. The Sixth Session continues after Walther answers questions on excommunication.]*

Now the evidence from the confessional writings on the first thesis was read out,

a. Augsburg Confession: "It is also taught that there must always be and remain one holy Christian church, which is the assembly of all believers." ([Art. 7.](#)) [*According to the German*]

The same: "Although the Church properly is the congregation of saints and true believers... (*sanctorum et vere credentium*)." (Art. 8.)

To this the following remarks were made:

In the seventh article two things are stated: first, what the nature of the church is, the definition of the church; then the marks by which the church may be recognized, and where it is to be sought, are given. The words: "[in which the Gospel is rightly taught](#)" etc. etc. are therefore not to be regarded as an addition to the definition of the church, but as an addition in which the marks of the church are indicated. That this is the correct interpretation of this seventh article is already taught by the following [eighth article](#), where it is affirmed without that addition that the church "is actually nothing other than the assembly of all believers and saints"; but it is particularly decisive that in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession [it is repeatedly and expressly affirmed](#) that in the article of the Confession it is firstly stated what the church is, i.e. the nature of the church, and then its characteristics. But the interpretation which the Apology gives is the only authentic one, because it comes from those who delivered the Confession themselves and is recognized as such by our church.

It is therefore an error on the part of many moderns to think that [page 50](#) the sentence of the seventh article of the Augsburg Confession: "[in which](#)" etc. belongs to the definition of the essence [93/1] and does not merely contain the indication of the marks. It is also inconsistent to say that the characteristics of a thing are its constituent parts; for example, to make a rational judgment is a characteristic of a rational soul. For example, making a rational judgment is a characteristic of a rational soul, but the judgment itself is not yet a constituent part of the soul; furthermore, that trees and other movable objects are moved by the wind is a characteristic of the wind, because one can perceive from the movement of these objects that the wind is there and blowing, but the movement itself does not belong to the essence of the wind, so the specification of this characteristic is not part of the definition of the wind.

If there are only believers, then the church is there, even in Turkey or elsewhere where there is no public preaching. The believers make up the church; the definition of the nature of the church therefore only includes this: it is an assembly of believers. Never again are the means of grace, Word and Sacrament, the constituent parts of the Church, and therefore do not belong to the definition of its essence. The means of grace are only the means by which the Church comes into being and exists. The church is a number of people who believe in Jesus Christ — nothing more belongs to the definition of the church or to the answer to the question of what the church is.

The wrong understanding of this kind would have it that the definition of the Church is the gathering of believers around the Word and Sacrament or the orthodox preaching ministry. But it cannot be denied that there are still believers among the false believers, even among the unbelievers. But this would have to be denied if that interpretation were correct. But neither Pastor Grabau, nor any other of the Romanizing Lutherans, nor the Pope himself denies it. Just look at the words: in the eighth article it says that the church is the assembly of all the believers, wherever they are, but not only the believers visibly gathered around word and sacrament.

By the word "assembly" the Romanizers understand the visible assembly, but nothing else is meant than the invisible assembly of all believers in the whole world. The word "believers" is not taken here in the sense of the papists, who even speak of believing fornicators, adulterers, thieves, etc., for the Latin text of the eighth article expressly says: "of all true believers." In the quoted passage of the Apology it is stated what the church is or consists of, then the marks are reported by which it is recognized, not what the church is, but where it is. But here the clearest, and indeed the most unmistakable marks of the church are given, marks by which the church can certainly not be lacking.

But if the marks are not present in all their distinctness, this does not mean that the marks and the sacrament revealed by them are not there at all, just as I cannot say, if I find a person with only one leg, one arm, etc., that there is no person there at all; [93/2] the mark is defective, but the person can still be recognized by it and is certainly present. Thus a visible church community tainted with error does not have the stated marks so perfectly, but there is still something of the marks <page 51> and therefore the church. It may well be, however, that it lacks so much, that the marks are so weak, that one would almost always like to say: this church is dying; but where there is still so much of the Word of God that people can still come to faith in Christ, there the church is also still there, and its presence is indicated by what is still there of the Word of God, or also of the holy sacraments. The dear children, who do not willfully resist God and his working in Baptism, are members of the Church; that the Church is still there can therefore be seen from the fact that the children are baptized. It is different where there is no Word of God and no Sacrament, there is no Church.

From the fact that we confess the existence of the Church even among heterodox fellowships who do not have pure Word and Sacrament, it does not follow that one should now join such communities. O no! We do not fight for the false teachers and deceivers, but only for the children of God hidden in such communities.

Since in the seventh article of the Confession it is said: "in whom the Gospel is preached purely" etc., the remark [by Walther] was made that this is by no means intended to deny that the Church is also there where the Word of God is not preached without the admixture of false teaching, but that it indicates the characteristics of the Church as it should actually always be or appear, the



Church in its ideal state, when it is in its full bloom. Thus Gerhard and other older theologians. The same theologians, however, still call a church a church when the marks are not in their full splendor; just as a man is still called a man when he has lost a member of his body, that is, a mark, or when the powers of his spirit are no longer in a perfect state. But when I want to describe a human being, I am certainly not describing a human being with all kinds of defects, faults and imperfections, but how he should be.

The following explanation of this article of the Augsburg Confession was also attempted: The Lutheran Church was mentioned here; the confessors of the Augsburg Confession at that time were the orthodox, visible church; now, under the papacy and elsewhere, where God's Word was not preached purely and clearly, etc., there were still children of God who also had the right to have God's Word preached purely, but they were prevented from exercising this right by the tyrants under whom they languished.

On the other hand, it was remarked that this interpretation was somewhat artificial and especially opposed to the interpretation of the Apology, and [94/1] then that it was not a mere right to administer the sacraments and preach the Word that was being spoken of, but a real administration and exercise of the means of grace.

Still from another side the matter was understood as if the first part of the seventh article spoke of the universal holy church, but in [the second part](#) (from the "in which" etc. onwards) the orthodox visible church was to be described. To this, however, it was answered that the orthodox, visible church could not possibly be meant and described here exclusively and in contrast to the invisible church; rather, the characteristics of the invisible church must be indicated, for since [page 52](#) there are not two different churches, one visible and one invisible, whenever and wherever the church is spoken of in a certain place, the invisible church is always meant according to a single part and in a certain respect.

Since a corrupt church had been compared to a man lacking a member, it was noted, in order to avoid misunderstanding and misapplication, that while Word and Sacrament alone are marks but not parts of the church, arms and legs and other members are not only marks but also parts of the human body and being.

Finally, it was added that our old teachers could not have spoken otherwise, for they had the duty to indicate the marks of the Church in such a way that people would be led to the orthodox Church, but they could not have been responsible if they had indicated the marks of the Church in such a way that through their fault the weak would have been seduced to remain with or join heterodox fellowships. — Postponed with the Lord's Prayer.

## Seventh session.

(Part 2:) Nature of the Church according to the Apology and the ancient teachers].



Monday, Nov. 5, morning, the Synod assembled for its seventh session. ... Following a remark in the last minutes, it was expressed that a person who does not want to comply with an order made must at least be taken into church discipline in any case. It was replied that the difference between a fraternal admonition and the actual church discipline procedure should be noted. One should never begin with church discipline in a case where one could not, if necessary, be prepared to take the final step of expulsion. Since a dear brother in the last session did not want to give a round answer to the question put directly to him: whether he believed that one should exclude every erring person, he was asked, after he had had the opportunity to become clearer through the discussion that had taken place, to now express his conviction, which was done to the satisfaction of the Synod, in that he now testified his complete agreement with the Synod on this point as well. However, the same brother made the request that the same subject be taken up again at a pastoral conference. The synod also designated the next Wednesday evening for this purpose.

[Part 2: back to "The True Visible Church" topic]

The discussion of the theses, or rather the reading of the supporting documents for the first thesis, then continued.

The passage from the Apology [[Ap VII-VIII, 8 ff.](#)] reads as follows:

"So we also confess in our holy symbols and faith: 'I believe in a holy, Christian church'. There we say that the church is holy, but the ungodly and wicked cannot be the holy church. In our creed this is soon followed by: 'communion of saints', which interprets even more clearly what the church means, namely, the group and the assembly that confess one gospel, [<page 53>](#) likewise have one knowledge of Christ, have one Spirit that sanctifies, sanctifies and governs their hearts....

"If we were to say that the church is only an outward police (civil society), like other regiments, in which there are good and evil, etc., no one will learn from this, nor understand that Christ's kingdom is spiritual, as it is, in which [\[94/2\]](#) Christ governs, strengthens, comforts the hearts within, distributes the Holy Spirit and various spiritual gifts; but it will be thought to be an outward manner, a certain order of some ceremonies and worship. Item, what difference would there be between the people of the law and the churches if the church alone were an external police force? Now Paul distinguishes the church from the Jews by saying that the church is a spiritual people, that is, a people which is not only distinguished from the Gentiles by its police and civil nature, but a true people of God, enlightened in heart and born again by the Holy Spirit. Item, among the Jewish people, all those who were Jews by nature and born of Abraham's seed had, in addition to the promise of spiritual goods in Christ, also much promise of bodily goods, as of the kingdom, etc., and for the sake of the divine promise even the wicked among them were called God's people; for God had separated the physical seed of Abraham and all born Jews from other Gentiles by these physical promises; and these ungodly and wicked were not the true people of

God, nor did they please God: But the gospel which is preached in the church brings with it not only the shadow of eternal goods, but every true Christian becomes partaker here on earth of eternal goods themselves, also of eternal consolation, eternal life and the Holy Spirit and the righteousness which is of God, until he is fully saved there.

"Therefore, according to the gospel, only those who have received spiritual goods and the Holy Spirit are God's people, and this church is the kingdom of Christ, distinct from the kingdom of the devil. For it is certain that all the ungodly are in the power of the devil and members of his kingdom, just as Paul says to the Ephesians that the devil reigns powerfully in the children of unbelief. And Christ says to the Pharisees (who were the holiest and also had the name that they were God's people and the church, who also did their sacrifice): 'You are of your father the devil! Therefore, the true church is the kingdom of Christ, that is, the assembly of all the saints, for the ungodly are not governed by the Spirit of Christ. —

"But what need is there for many words in such a clear, public matter? Only the adversaries contradict the plain truth. If the church, which is certainly Christ's and God's kingdom, is distinct from the devil's kingdom, then the ungodly, who are the devil's kingdom, cannot ever be the church; even though in this life, while Christ's kingdom is not yet revealed, they are among the true Christians and in the church, in which they also have the teaching office and other offices. And the ungodly are therefore not yet a part of the kingdom of Christ, because it is not yet [<page 54>](#page54) revealed (nor invisible). For the true kingdom of Christ, the true hand of Christ, is and always will be those whom God's Spirit has enlightened, strengthened and governed, even though it has not yet been revealed to the world, but [\[95/1\]](#95/1) is hidden under the cross. Just as there is and always will be one Christ, who was crucified in time and now reigns and rules in eternal glory in heaven. And Christ's parables rhyme with this, when he clearly says in Matthew 13 that the good seed are the children of the kingdom, the tares are the children of the devil, the field is the world, **not the church**.... And since Christ says: "The kingdom of heaven is like a net, like the ten virgins, he does not want the wicked to be the church, but teaches how the church appears in this world" (*de specie ecclesiae dicit*, i.e. he speaks of the outward appearance of the church); "therefore he says that it is like these" (to be compared with them, similar to them). "Just as the good and the bad are mixed together in a heap of fish, so the Church is hidden here among the great heap and multitude of the ungodly, and does not want the pious to fret, but wants us to know that the Word and the sacraments are not without power, even though the ungodly preach or administer the sacraments. And so Christ teaches us that the ungodly, though they may be in the church according to outward society, are not members of Christ, not the true church, for they are members of the devil....

"And since the true church is called Christ's body in Scripture, it is not possible to speak of it in any other way than the way we have spoken of it. For it

is certain that the hypocrites and the ungodly cannot be the body of Christ, but belong to the kingdom of the devil, who has taken them captive and drives them wherever he wills." (Art. VII.)

Here are the following remarks:

It is incomprehensible how Lutherans could still say that the wicked also belong to the church. The wicked cannot be members of the church, because the church is the congregation of the saints, a holy congregation. Our present-day false Lutherans are led to this false assumption that the wicked also belong to the church by the fact that they believe that the Lord Jesus wanted to establish an external, religious kingdom, which was to be set up like a worldly kingdom with a certain gradation among the officials (by which the holders of the office of preaching and government are to be understood), with the distinction between those who govern and those who obey, etc.,—only with the distinction between those who govern and those who obey. The only difference is that in a worldly kingdom earthly things are dealt with, whereas in this kingdom religious things are dealt with. They think that the church is something similar to a state. But the church is not a bodily, visible kingdom in which, however, only religious things are dealt with, but a spiritual kingdom in which only holy people belong.

In order to bring the wicked into the concept of the church, reference is usually made to the parables in which the Lord himself described the kingdom of heaven, namely of the wise and foolish virgins, of the good and rotten fish, of the tares among the wheat. But by this the Lord Jesus does not mean to teach that this is the nature of the church, but only that it has such an [95/2] outward appearance <page 55>. It is expressly taught in God's Word that the field is the world, not the church; but it does seem as if the church is a field in which weeds also grow and to which the weeds also belong.

If it is said that the Church is a spiritual kingdom hidden in the world, then it is clearly known that the Church is invisible. I can certainly notice that and where there is a rational spirit, that and where there is a soul, from their effect; but I cannot therefore see the soul and spirit: so also I can certainly sense or notice where Christians are, but I cannot see the Christians themselves, i.e. that which makes them Christians. The Church is a kingdom which Christ has established in the souls of men. But I do not see Him sitting on His throne, nor do I see His subjects, for the faith by which they are united to Christ in their hearts is hidden. For example, there are two people who give alms to a poor person, but I do not know which one does it in obedience to Christ, in the right faith, as a Christian and which one does not.

It is remarkable that the Apology says that one cannot speak of the church in any other way than that it is a holy, spiritual, and therefore invisible kingdom, because it is the body of Christ. It therefore takes it for granted that the Church is invisible because it is the body of Christ. Today, the opposite conclusion is drawn, namely that the Church must be visible precisely because it is called a body. But people do not take into account that Scripture does not say that the Church is

something physical, but that it is the body of Christ, the invisible Head. The word visible is always taken by our old teachers to mean recognizable. In order to become quite firm in the doctrine of the invisibility of the Church, one should be very careful to note that it means: "I believe One, holy, Christian Church", not: I see it; for what I see, I do not need to believe. No true Lutheran teacher has ever claimed that one can really see the Church, but only that one can recognize it by certain characteristics.

Reference was made to a lovely picture in the Old Testament which explains the invisibility and yet recognizability of the Church, namely how the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies was concealed by the curtain, but how it could be seen from the handles of the carrying poles protruding beyond the curtains that the actual sanctuary was behind the curtain.

Nowadays it is customary to say that the church has two sides, one visible and one invisible. But it is quite incongruous to use this way of speaking of two sides to the Church, for what is visible cannot have an invisible side, and what is invisible cannot have a visible side, although a being, like man, can consist of two parts, one visible and one invisible. It is also something quite different when the old teachers, e.g. Gerhard, say that the Church can be called visible in certain respects and invisible in certain respects (*certo respectu*). — [96/1]

Those false teachers of modern times always bring the characteristics and preconditions of the Church into the description of the nature of the Church. But this procedure is as foolish as if, because a man needs bread for his nourishment, I wanted to include bread in a definition of the nature <page 56> of man.

The Synod recognized that, speaking strictly of the Church, one must therefore say that the Church is always invisible until it will be revealed with Christ in that life in glory. I see a lot of people who I believe in charity to be Christians, i.e. who have faith, but I do not see their faith, nor can I identify the believers from the crowd of people. Indeed, if God Himself said: this person belongs to the Church, I would not be able to see in him what actually makes him a member of the Church, I can only see the sinful body, the sinful tongue, and so on. Membership of the church is precisely a special relationship of the soul to Christ. Because God says he is a member, I believe it, but I cannot see it. It is the same with baptized children, for example. Outwardly there is no difference between a baptized and an unbaptized child; that the baptized child has become an heir of heaven through baptism, I believe God alone. The ancients never said that the church can be seen, but only that it can be recognized. Nor do you need to ask: how can I find the church if it is invisible? You can find it easily, because it has its marks.

Concerning the passage in the Large Catechism [[LC III Creed, 49-51](#)]:

"The word *communio*, which is attached to it" (to the word "church" in the third article) "should not be called communion [*Gemeinschaft*], but congregation [*Gemeinde*: updated orthographically from *Gemeine*]; and is nothing else than

the gloss or interpretation, since someone has wanted to interpret what the Christian church is called. [51] But this is the meaning and substance of this addition: I believe that there is upon earth a little holy group and congregation of pure saints, under one head, even Christ, called together by the Holy Ghost in one faith, one mind, and understanding, with manifold gifts, yet agreeing in love, without sects or schisms." ([Third Article](#))

The following remarks were made:

It seems and is regarded by many today as if three points, which are made known in the first words of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed, were actually true: 1. faith in the Holy Spirit, 2. faith in the existence of the Church, 3. faith in the communion of saints, so that the Church and the congregation [*Gemeinde*: *updated orthographically from Gemeinde*] of saints are conceived as something separate. The last sentence, however, is only a supplement to the explanation of the preceding words. The new false teachers on the subject of the church also say, of course, that the church is holy, but only because the church deals with holy things. According to God's Word and our confession, however, this is [96/2] not the real reason why it is called holy, but because it is a congregation of saints or a congregation in which there are nothing but saints.

When Luther in the above quotation says of the church of the Third Article that it is united in love, without factions and divisions, it is clear from this that the Third Article, according to Luther, speaks only of the invisible church, for only in the invisible church, which is truly holy, is there never separation and division, there love is never divided; but in the visible church, as experience teaches, there are only too many divisions of love.

Regarding the passage in the Smalcald Articles:

"We do not confess to them" (the papists) "that they are the Church, nor are they, nor do we want [<page 57>](#) to hear what they command or forbid under the name of the Churches. For, praise God, a child of seven years knows what the church is, namely the saints, the faithful and the little sheep who hear the voice of their shepherd. For thus the children pray: I believe in One, holy, Christian Church" ([Part III. Art. XII](#), [Ggl Bks](#)) —

The following was noted:

Whoever does not hear the voice of Christ is not a member of the Church, even if he administered the highest office in the Church; even the highest ecclesiastical official and dignitary is for his person in the Church only like filth on his body, if he is not a true Christian, a true believer. As the word "papists" was used in the passage, it was asked what was meant by it, and it was answered that these are precisely those who recognize the pope as the head of the Church in opposition to the Lord Christ, but not the children of God in the papacy. —

From this the following words of Luther were read:

"The Christians are a special, called people and are not called badly (merely) *ecclesia*, church or people, but *sancta, catholica, christiana*, that is, a Christian, holy people, which believes in Christ, therefore it is called a Christian people,

who sanctifies them daily, not only by the forgiveness of sins, which Christ has acquired for them (as the antinomians foolishly think), but also by the putting away, sweeping away and killing of sins, from which they are called a holy people. And now the Christian church is as much as a people that is Christian and holy, or as it is also customary to speak, holy Christendom, item the whole of Christendom. In the Old Testament it is called God's people. Isaiah 1, 11, 12, 43, etc.. [244] And if such words had been used in childhood creed: I believe that there is a Christian, holy people, then all the misery would have been easily avoided, which is torn under the blind, unclear word 'church'. For the phrase "Christian, holy people" [97/1] would have brought with it clearly and powerfully both understanding and judgment as to what was or was not church. For whoever had heard this word 'Christian, holy people' could have quickly judged: the pope is not a people, much less a holy, Christian people. So also the bishops, priests and monks are not a holy, Christian people, for they do not believe in Christ, nor do they live holy lives, but are the devil's evil, shameful people; for whoever does not believe in Christ properly is not Christian or a Christian; whoever does not have the Holy Spirit against sin is not a Christian. Therefore they cannot be a Christian, holy people, that is, *sancta et catholica ecclesia* (i.e. the holy and universal church). (*On the Councils and the Churches* of 1539, XVI, 2778 ff. [[StL 16. 2269 f.](#); [LW 41. 143 f.](#)])

In consideration of this passage, the Synod at first lingered with this:

Luther said here that if Christendom had not lost the pure doctrine of the Church, then the papacy could not have arisen, so the pope could never have dared to say: whoever does not follow the Church, i.e. the pope and bishops, is a heathen and a publican; but the Christians no longer knew that the Church was a holy people, otherwise they would have had to say: You are not the Church, and if you banish us, do not banish the Church. —

Pastor Grabau also says that the church is holy (namely because of the holy acts that are performed in the church), and yet he wants the evil persons to be [<page 58>](#) regarded as belonging to the church and his ban to be a ban on the holy church at all times; why do the Christians in those congregations put up with this? Answer, because they do not know that only the sheep of Christ who hear the voice of the Shepherd are the true Church.

It is well to note in the passage quoted from Luther that in it the Christians themselves are called a holy church not only because they are partakers by faith of the righteousness and holiness imputed to them, but also because of the inward holiness of life in Christ. Whoever has not yet made a beginning in this sanctification, does not belong to the church, Heb. 12:14.

After hearing such glorious, clear words from Luther, the Synod expressed its astonishment that there could still be Lutheran theologians today who claim that the doctrine of the church was not yet properly developed at the time of the Reformation, that it still needed to be perfected. [i.e. Loehe] Luther could not have waged the battle against the heresies of his time, which among other things

concerned precisely the point of the church, if he had not known exactly what the church actually was according to God's Word.

The following was also read from Luther:

"As man is of two natures, body and soul, so he is not reckoned a member of [97/2] Christendom according to the body, but according to the soul, even according to faith. Otherwise one would say that a man is a nobler Christian than a woman, just as the bodily person of a man is better than that of a woman. A man is a greater Christian than a child; a healthy man is a stronger Christian than a healthy man; a lord, wife, rich man, and mighty man is a better Christian than a servant, maid, poor man, and subject; whereas St. Paul contradicts Gal. 3:27, 28: 'In Christ there is no male, no female, no master, no servant, no slave, no Gentile, no heathen', but as far as the bodily person is concerned, all are equal. But whoever believes, hopes and loves more is a better Christian; so that it is evident that Christianity is a spiritual church, which cannot be counted among worldly churches any more than spirits are counted among bodies, faith among temporal goods.... If Christianity were a physical assembly, then one could see by his body whether he was a Christian, Turk or Jew, just as I can see by his body whether he is a man, woman or child, black or white." (*On the Papacy at Rome...* von 1520. XVIII, 1212. ff.)

The following remark was recently made on this passage:

I can certainly see the people who call themselves Christians and want to be taken for Christians, but not what actually makes these people Christians. —

Concerning Luther's words:

"They (the papists) will argue about the church, the church also means the godless bunch that is in office; which they argue that they may interpret the promise from themselves" (Concerns of the Theologians on the Day of Smalcald, March 1, 1540. XVII, 413 [*StL* 17, 322]) —

It was reminded that one should only make it quite clear why the papists and papist Lutherans so eagerly insist that the church is visible and that therefore those who are not <page 59> in the faith also belong to the church; this happens for no other reason than so that they can say: what we do and order and command, the church has done, and our church cannot perish, for it has divine promises, and whoever does not follow us, whoever separates himself from us, is lost.

Finally, the following words of Luther were read:

"Johannes Huß confessed at that time that there was one, holy, Christian church, and that if the pope were not pious and holy, he could not be a member, much less the head of the holy church, even if he had the office therein; therefore he must burn and be accursed as a heretic." (Interpretation of the 118th Psalm of the year 1530. V, 1792 [*StL* 5, 1234; *LW* 14, 92])

In this statement Luther contrasts the false teaching of the papists with the teaching of John Hus. The deal between Hus and the papists was also about the Church. The pope said: I am the head of the church, whoever adheres to me and



is [98/1] obedient to me therefore belongs to the church. Hus said: whoever is not holy does not belong to the Church; if a pope is not holy, he therefore does not belong to the Church either; if he is not a member of the Church, let alone the head of the Church, he may still have an office in it; and for this he had to burn.

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So even now a Christian can say to a tyrannical preacher who wants to frighten him by saying that if he leaves him, he will leave the Church: you may have a proper office in the Church, but you are not a member of the Church, as is proved by your tyranny, your false banns, your false teaching; therefore, if I despise your banns, I do not despise the Church.

The following testimonies of later pure teachers of our church were then read out and discussed:

Calov:

"Although the hypocrites are in that multitude in which the church is, yet they are not properly in the multitude which is the church.... We do not make a twofold church, one of saints, another which would be a mixed one; but we say that ours make this distinction only in so far as the word 'church' is taken as a homonym" (i.e., that two quite different things bear one and the same name) "on the one hand for a multitude of believers, on the other for an assembly in which hypocrites are found mixed with believers. i.e., that two quite different things bear one and the same name) "is taken on the one hand for a body of believers, and on the other for an assembly in which hypocrites are found mixed with the believers." (*Systema*, loc. 8.. p. 253. ff.) —

The following remark was made in this connection:

Calov makes a sharp distinction in the passage read out, whereby the hypocrites are entirely excluded from the church, i.e. from the group which is actually the church. The hypocrites are said to be in the church only in the sense that they are found in a heap which is called the church, but which is not the church in the proper sense, but bears this name only in an improper sense, namely, solely because this heap contains the church, that is, true believers, in it; just as a piece of metal is called a piece of gold, although copper is mixed with it. But just as the copper does not therefore become gold or a part of it, but only gold belongs to gold, so also the non-believers never become parts or members of the church in the proper sense, are only outwardly mixed with it <page 60> and outside that holy church which is governed by Christ's Spirit, to which only born-again Christians belong.

Gerhard:

"As Christ says of his disciples, John 17:14, that they are in the world, but not of the world, so we also say, on the contrary, that the wicked are in the church, but not of the church." (*Loc. de eccl.* § 64.) —

According to J. Gerhard, therefore, the wicked are in the church, but not of the church. To be of the church means to belong to the [98/2] church, to be in the church means to be in outward communion with the church, just as Christ says

that his Christians are in the world, but not of the world, i.e. not worldly-minded.

Quenstedt: "The evil humors are not members of the body; the wicked are like evil humors; therefore they are not members of the body, namely of Christ, but they are attached to the church, like ulcers to the body, from which they can be separated without injury, indeed to the great advantage of the body." (*Theol. P. IV. c. 15. s. 2. fol. 1634.*)

The same:

"The wicked and hypocrites can indeed be called members of the true church, but by no means members in the proper sense." (*L. c. fol. 1637.*)

Quenstedt teaches that the wicked can be called members of the church, as they are only connected to the church in an external, mechanical way; but they are not members, for members are only the parts of a living body that are organically connected to a whole, in that they all have the same life flowing through them from a center, which is precisely what the ungodly and hypocrites lack. But if one were to assume, contrary to the concept of a member, that the ungodly are members of the body of the Church, Christ would have rotten, stinking members; but would it not be terrible to say of Christ that he has stinking, rotten, dead members, dead in sins? It was pointed out that, strictly speaking, the ungodly could not even be called members of the church, for the members were the parts of the body — an ungodly person was not a member, and therefore not a part of the church.

However, Quenstedt's way of speaking was defended against this, because with the word 'part' he was only looking at the mechanical, external connection, but with the term 'member' he had the intimate, organic connection in mind. The meaning of this designation can be made clear by saying, for example, that a hypocrite is a part of the orthodox church, but not a member of it - conversely, a true Christian can be a part of a sect, but is not a member of a sect. The term member is applied to living, self-moving bodies as a designation of their organic parts; there are only members of such bodies where a spiritual or mental life connection takes place. A tree or a rock has no self-moving power, therefore one does not speak of its parts as limbs, but merely as parts.

[Question:]

Where does it come from that we speak of church members, which is the name we give to all those who belong to a church, although we have no certain knowledge of their state of faith?

Answer:

We look at what a member of the church should be like, but the judgment is made according to the love that believes all things. However, no one should <page 61> actually belong to a church except those who are in the living faith. For example, when we speak of the Trinity Church in St. Louis, we are really only speaking of the children of God in this assembly. The [99/1] hypocrites are only mixed in with them. They are only as much a part of it as the ulcer is of the body, which is not a member, but only a part, the removal of which from or from the

body is not in the least harmful, but beneficial. —

How comforting this teaching is for all poor preachers who stand in congregations where perhaps a large majority is hostile to the Word or does not want to be governed and led by the Word! How easily a preacher in such a case would think of leaving the people and looking for a field of work elsewhere where his work would be more promising! But how grievously he would sin, because he would leave the children of God, who are actually only his congregation and church, who are still in this place and to whom he should actually prove himself useful! If he were to leave such a place, it would be as if a tenant were to say: I see the wolf coming, I must flee, I am not doing it for the sake of the poor sheep, but only for the sake of the evil wolf. No, if he does not want to be a hireling, he must stay all the more.

Dannhauer:

"Those (the hypocrites) are not members of the invisible, nor of the true visible, but of the visible in so far as they form a whole with others as their members." (*Hodosoph. phaen. 2. p. 61.*)

Carpzov:

"One thing is a crowd consisting of hypocrites and true and sincere believers, something else is a crowd to which hypocrites are added. The church, properly so called, is a crowd to which hypocrites and non-saints are added, as the Augsburg Confession carefully explains at the beginning of the eighth article (in the Latin text)." (*Isagoge in libb. symbol. p. 305.*)

On this passage it was remarked:

All the misery, all the confusion in the dispute about the concept of the church came from the fact that this sentence was not held fast: The church is the congregation [*Gemeinde*] of saints. This doctrine is so easy that, as it says in the Smalcald Articles, a child of seven years can grasp it; but nowadays one hears so many complaints that the doctrine of the Church is so difficult that one cannot come to terms with it at all. Why is it so difficult and unclear? Answer: Because you would forsake the idea that the believers alone are the Church.

To the objection that, strictly speaking, one could not speak of a visible church at all, that the way of speaking was wrong, the answer was given:

This way of speaking is not wrong, for in so far as the people who are gathered together in different places are Christians, they are indeed invisible, but in so far as one looks at the outer assembly in which they are, hence the same is called church, it is visible. One must also bear in mind the difference between the statement: The church is visible, which means as much as recognizable, and: The visible church, which means as much as the visible multitude, to which the name church is due, because in it the children of God are hidden.

[99/2]

For the sake of those [<page 62>](#) who consider the visible local gathering around the orthodox preaching office to be the essence of the church, the following testimony was finally read out by Baier:

"The form of the church, or what makes the church the church, consists in the union of the true believers and saints with Christ through the true and living faith. Which (union) is not an outward and local (union) of bodies, but an inward and spiritual union of souls. For although the faithful also hold local, holy assemblies, these are not essential to the church." (*Compend. III, 13. 9.*) — Adjourned with the Lord's prayer.

<page 63>

## Ninth session.

[Marks of the Church. — Visible Church.]

<page 64>

After a brief discussion as to whether, due to the number of matters that still had to be dealt with, it would not be better to break off the discussion of the doctrinal matter at hand in order to deal with those matters first, the Synod decided to devote this morning's session to the discussion of the doctrine. The following was therefore read out:

### Thesis II:

**"Although the one, holy, Christian church, as a spiritual temple, cannot be seen, but can only be believed, there are unmistakable outward marks by which its existence is recognized, which marks are the pure preaching of the Word of God and the unadulterated administration of the holy sacraments." 1 Pet. 2:5. 2 Tim. 2:19. Gal. 4:26. Mark 4:26-27. (cf. v. 14. and Matt. 13:38.) Isa. 55:10-11. Matt. 28:18-20. Mark 16:16. 1 Cor. 12:13.**

In pointing out the connection between this thesis and the previous one, it was noted that this thesis closely follows on from the previous one; for if I hear that only the believers and the saints are the Church, and that the Church is therefore invisible, the thought will arise in my heart: yes, what do you expect me to care about the Church, since it cannot be seen! After this, we will either not care about the Church at all or join the first best.

But this must be answered with our second thesis: the Church is indeed invisible, but it has unmistakable marks, and it is not just marks, but unmistakable marks. So you can easily find and recognize the church.

First of all, the scriptural passages cited in this thesis were examined individually.

Concerning 1 Pet. 2:5 it would be noted:

The church is therefore a spiritual house. But it is part of the nature of the Spirit that he cannot be seen. The apostle Peter, whose successor the pope wants to be, claims that the church is a spiritual house, and in direct contrast to Peter he claims that the church is visible, bodily. The stones of which this spiritual house consists are said to be living stones, that is, Christians who have a new life through faith.

Concerning 2 Timothy 2:19 it was remarked:

"No man can know which are the true saints; the Lord alone knows those who are His; but this is precisely [100/1] the firm foundation of God, that He knows those who are His. If God Himself did not know who His own are, I would have no certain reason for salvation. But God knows His own, He does not lack them. I, man, cannot see the church, for I do not know who His own are. But how confident I can be when I know that God knows His own! If only God knows His own, then let men think and judge of me what they will.

On Gal. 4:26 it was remarked:

"The false Lutherans are in the habit of interpreting this passage as referring to the triumphant church in heaven, but because of the word 'above' we must know that in Scripture, when the kingdom of heaven is spoken of, <page 65> the expressions above and below are not to be understood locally, but in such a way that above is heavenly, below - earthly. E.G.: "Seek that which is above" means: Do not seek that which is earthly, but that which is heavenly, that which belongs to another, higher world, as the apostle writes: "You have been raised with Christ and transferred into the heavenly being" - so we are now already in the heavenly being, which is only still hidden under the cross. The Jerusalem that is above is therefore to be understood as the holy Christian church, because it is heavenly in nature and kind. These are the scriptural passages for the invisibility of the Church.

Concerning Mark 4:26-27 it was remarked:

This is an excellent passage to explain the doctrine that the preaching of the Word is the unmistakable mark of the church. V. 14 and Matt. 13:38 belong to this, where it is expressly said that the seed is the Word of God, from which the Christians or the children of the kingdom grow, as it were, from the germ, as wheat grows from the seed. The Christians are, as it were, in the Bible, like the fruit in the tree.

But since the Lord Jesus says: The sower does not know how the seed grows, it was remarked:

As the farmer scatters his seed in the fall and then the long winter passes over it; as the farmer only knows that he has sown wheat in this piece of land, it is a wheat field; but how the precious fruit sprouts forth without his help and knowledge: So also a preacher of the gospel does his work of scattering the seed; he can do no more; then he goes and leaves everything to God; he can contribute nothing to the sprouting; he cannot see whether and how his scattered seed germinates; he must believe God alone that Christians will grow out of the seed of the Word that has been cast down. But we have this promise that the seed of the Word will sprout; not all seed, just as not every single grain of wheat germinates and bears fruit, but wherever the Word is preached in a place, not all will be lost, some fruit will certainly come. God does not allow fine seed to be scattered on cursed land. In a place where there is finally no one who accepts [100/2] His Word, he also takes away the preaching of the Word. But as long as the preaching of the Word is still there, we can still believe with certainty that the

Church is still there, i.e. the children of God through faith, no matter how horrible things may be in life.

Now individual cases were given which seem to contradict this, namely:

It seems as if God still leaves the Word in such places where it is no longer accepted, for example, reference was first made to the often long time futile and apparently useless preaching of the gospel among the Gentiles, since the preaching of the Word is indeed there, but not yet a church.

However, it was replied:

A distinction had to be made between the offering and the spreading of the divine Word. The Word of God is only now offered to the Gentiles. The promise in the prophet Isaiah 55:10-11, however, goes where the Word of God is going in the air; so where people have at least declared that they want to hear it, that it should be preached to them, the church is still there, [<page 66>](#page66) according to the divine promise, no matter how sad it looks outwardly in a place, yes, even if it looks as if not God but the devil is ruling there.

When it was pointed out how the Lord Himself commands us to shake the dust from our feet if they do not receive us, and that it thus appears as if God's word could go forth for a time in a place and yet not a single believer be there; such a case could be imagined; the answer was given:

Such cases should not be thought of, but that one should simply keep to the word: where God's word is preached, it should not return empty.

Then it was reminded that upright preachers are often driven out: should one then assume that there are no more Christians? Answer: Not at all; for there are certainly still baptized children there, or old, simple-minded people who do not hold with the wicked, but who cannot stand up against the violence of the wicked. For example, one should only go to Rome and preach there; there one would certainly be cast out with one's evangelical preaching; nevertheless, there are still children of God among the crowd of the wicked there; they are only under the power of the tyrants. I must believe what the Lord says in Isaiah 55:10-11, even if it seems that God's Word is often preached in a place where there is no longer a church, even if it seems that there is not a single believer.

Here the explanation was attempted:

According to Scripture, the Word of God should have a double effect, namely that God wants the Word, because it can no longer serve as the fragrance of life unto life, to remain in one place as the fragrance of death unto death.

But this was denied, for one should consider that God had not given His Word to the world for [101/1] death and judgment, but for life. The latter was God's intention; the former something accidental, occurring through the fault of man. We therefore have to look here at the power of the Word to produce life according to God's intention, not at the hardening effect of the Word due to man's guilt and God's judgment. God gives his Word where it can produce fruit for righteousness, and takes it away from where it can no longer produce such fruit. If people declare from the outset that we don't want to hear anything from you,

then no actual scattering of the seed is possible, and consequently it is also not possible for the church to be there. The church is not there where I see people who say: I don't want to know anything about the word of God; but it is there where there are people who receive the word of God among themselves, no matter how evil many of them are, because then there will certainly be some chosen ones who also accept it from the heart. God does not send his word so that people may go to hell, but so that they may go to heaven. That is where the church is, where the word has its dwelling place. The passage in the prophet Isaiah shows how the Word and the Sacrament are the unmistakable marks of the Church. That the Lord gives his word for blessing is also evident from the parallel passage belonging to Isaiah 55, Heb. 6:7-8.

It was then recalled how the papists often catch people by giving false or not unmistakable marks of the church. The papists usually cite as characteristics of the Church unity, holiness, the name Catholic, age, duration, miracles performed by holy men <page 67> in the Roman Church, and other things. As to the three attributes first mentioned, they refer to the Nicene Symbolum, where it is confessed of the Church that she is One, Holy, Catholic Church. They assume that attributes are characteristics. But this is not true, for some properties are not unmistakable characteristics because they are not found in the things to be characterized alone, but are common to other things. For example, in the case of a sting etc. Feeling pain is a characteristic of humans, but animals also have the same characteristic. It would therefore be foolish to describe this property as a distinguishing characteristic, because it is not distinguishing. Furthermore, we humans have love in common with God, which is why love cannot be cited as a distinguishing characteristic of God.

This is also the case with the attribute of unity claimed by the Church. This is certainly a characteristic of the Church, but not an infallible characteristic of it, for unity is found in many other things. In the devil's kingdom there is also a certain unity. A band of robbers is also united.

It is the same with the quality of holiness which the Church claims. Hypocrites often seem much holier in the eyes of men than Christians, than the members of the Church. Since we cannot recognize true holiness in the heart, which is valid before God, since [101/2] hypocrites can also assume an appearance of holiness, holiness cannot possibly be an infallible characteristic, but is rather a very deceptive one.

It is the same with the name catholic. This name is not an infallible mark, for a thief can also call himself an honest man.

Only the marks of the Word and the holy sacraments are infallible.

Some think that mutual brotherly love is obviously a characteristic of Christians and therefore of the Church, since our Lord expressly says: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." But this mutual love is indeed a necessary characteristic of Christians, so that one would not be a Christian if he did not have this love; but it is not an infallible



characteristic, since someone can also feign love.

On the other hand, the Word is an infallible mark. Where the word is preached, there must be children of God, by virtue of the divine promise: the word shall not come to me empty, i.e. not without fruit.

It is the same with the Methodists as with the Papists. They also give all kinds of marks to prove that their church is the true church, e.g. purity of life, missionary zeal, prayerful zeal, etc., but these too, as I have said, if they are understood to mean the right thing, are indeed marks, but likewise not infallible ones, for all this can be nothing but a sham.

Concerning Matthew 28:18-20, it was noted:

Word and Sacrament are not characteristics of the Church because a religious institution is established where Word and Sacrament are in harmony, i.e. where the ministry of preaching is established. In this sense, the opponents of the pure doctrine also admit that Word and Sacrament are characteristics of the church, in that they consider Word and sacrament to be necessary to describe the nature of the church. This is a completely non-Lutheran idea. We therefore say that Word and Sacrament are the [page 68](#) unmistakable marks of the Church, because through the Word the holy people of God, or the Church, is begotten and born, because therefore where God's Word is preached, there is certainly a multitude of born-again believers hidden among the multitude that is called the Church.

The following comment was made on 1 Cor. 12, 13:

Not only the Word, but also the sacraments are characteristics of the Church, because the sacraments are nothing other than the visible Word. The Church is the multitude that hears and believes the Word, baptized into One Body by One Spirit and imbued with One Spirit. That from which a thing certainly arises is the surest sign of the thing that has arisen from it. The seed sown in the field is the surest sign of the field in which the seed is sown; if wheat is sown in it, everyone knows that it is a wheat field. If I have put money in a bag, the money is the surest sign that the bag is a purse. If I [102/1] have sown the seed by which Christians become Christians, then there is a Christian field, i.e. the church. As soon as I preach God's word, I sow Christians. We do not carry the seed of Christianity in our hearts; oh no, everything by which we are Christians, the whole new man, the whole building of the church lies in the word; oh a delicious word, since it says: the good seed are the children of the kingdom! —

The first passage from the confessional writings on the second thesis was read from the Augsburg Confession:

"It is also taught that there must always be and remain one, holy, Christian church, which is the assembly of all believers, in which the gospel is preached purely and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel." (Art. 7.)- Recently it was remarked that this is thus a part of our Lutheran confession, that Word and Sacrament are marks and indeed unmistakable marks of the Church.

Apology:

"The Christian church is not only in the company of outward signs, but is primarily in communion with the eternal goods in the heart, such as the Holy Spirit, faith, fear and love of God. Spirit, faith, fear and love of God. And yet this church also has outward signs by which it is known; namely, where God's word is pure and the sacraments are administered according to it, there is certainly the church, there are Christians, and this church alone is called Christ's body in Scripture." (Art. 7.) - In this passage two things are taught: 1. whoever does not have the communion of eternal goods in his heart does not belong to the church; then 2. the outward signs are given, Word and Sacrament, and added: "There is certainly the church"; but so that no one gets a wrong idea of the church, for example, thinks of it as an institution or the preaching office, it is added as something equivalent to the church: "There are Christians."

The same:

"St. Paul to the Ephesians in chapter 5 also says immediately what the church is, and also sets forth the outward signs, namely the gospel and the sacraments; for thus he says: "Christ loved [<page 69>](#page69) the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify it, and purify it by the washing of water in the Word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, but that it might be holy and without blemish, etc."

Here the gospel and the sacraments are simply described as marks of the church, not with the more specific definition "pure and pure", so that we would know that the church is also there where the marks do not show themselves in their perfection. [102/2]

The same:

"We do not speak of a fictitious church, which is nowhere to be found, but we say and know for certain that this church, wherein live saints, is truly on earth and abides, namely, that there are some children of God now and then in all the world, in all kingdoms, islands, countries and cities, from the rising of the sun to its setting, who have rightly recognized Christ and the gospel, and say that this church has these outward signs, the preaching office or gospel, and the sacraments."

The papists had replied to Melanchthon that you are a fanatic (*Schwarmgeist*) with your doctrine of the church consisting solely of saints, and therefore nowhere visible — it is nowhere to be found. To this Melanchthon replied that only the saints, the true Christians, are the Church, but that this Church has certain external signs by which it can be recognized and found, namely Word and Sacrament. —

In this passage of the Apology one can also recognize quite clearly what the ancients often understood by the office of preaching. They often took the office of preaching to be synonymous with the gospel. The Apology does not have Grabau's understanding, according to which the office of preaching is always as much as the office of pastor, so that the words of the 28th Article of the Augsburg

Confession: "These (eternal) goods cannot be obtained otherwise than through the office of preaching (*Predigeramt*)," would mean that without the office of pastor (*Pfarramt*) one could neither attain faith, nor forgiveness of sins, nor salvation! No, when our old teachers ascribe such great things to the ministry of preaching, they mean nothing other than the ministry of the Word, in whatever way it may be done to us. [including reading]

Luther:

"But you may say: If the church is entirely in the Spirit and a spiritual thing, then no one will know where there is any part of it in the whole world; that would be a strange, unheard-of thing!.... What else would it be that Christ teaches us that we should feed the sheep, John 21:16-17, and Paul that we should govern the church, Acts 20:28, and St. Peter that we should be the rulers of the church? 20:28, and 1 Peter 5:2, that we should feed the flock of Christ, — so that the believers would not be found in certain places anywhere in the world! For who will preach to the spirits? Or which spirit will preach to us? ... Some visible sign must ever be given, by which we may be gathered together to hear God's word!" — Answer: Yes, such a sign is necessary; we have that too, namely baptism, bread, and most of all the gospel. These three are the watchwords and emblems of Christians. Wherever you see these going in swing, that is, baptism, bread <page 70> and the gospel, [103/1] no matter where or with whom it may be, do not doubt that there is a church. . . Indeed, the gospel is the only, most certain and noblest sign of the church, much more certain than baptism and bread; because it is by the gospel alone that it is received, made, nourished, born, brought up, fed, clothed, adorned, strengthened, armed and preserved.... I am not speaking of the written gospel. but of that which is spoken in a bodily voice. .. These signs, and especially of the gospel, I consider to have been signified in the temple of Solomon 1 Kings 8:8, when the two handles of the staves for carrying the ark reached out before the mercy seat. So that the heil. The Holy Spirit wanted to make it clear that only by the light and public voice of the gospel can one know where the church is and where the secret of the kingdom of heaven is. For just as one would know by the protruding knobs of the poles, as by certain indications, that the ark was in the Holy of Holies, even though it was hidden, so also no one sees the church, but must believe by the sign of the Word alone, which word is impossible to be heard, but only in the church by the Holy Spirit. Spirit." (*Revelation of Antichrist*, of the year 1521. XVIII, 1792. 1795. 1796 [[StL 18, 1464](#) , [1467](#)]) —

To this passage it was remarked:

I know that here is the Church, because there is the Word, whereby Christians are born. Then the beautiful picture of the ark of the covenant covered by the veil and the protruding knobs of the carrying poles was again elaborated on, and at the same time attention was drawn to the fact that it was not merely a beautiful thought of Luther's to compare the church with this, but that this comparison was based on Scripture itself. Just as in the Old Testament only the

High Priest saw the Ark of the Covenant, and the rest of Israel could and was allowed to see nothing but the handles, so our New Testament High Priest Christ alone sees his Church, but we can only recognize it, this New Testament sanctuary of God, by the handles of the Word and the holy sacraments.

Gerhard:

"Wherever the Word is preached purely, there are always some who receive it with hearty faith, because the Word of God never returns empty, and the net of evangelical doctrine always catches some good fish; and this is sufficient for us to be able to estimate and recognize the church from the pure, publicly received preaching of the Word, although it is unknown to us who receive the Word in "true" faith and thus become true and living members of the invisible church." (*Loc. de eccles. § 142.*) —

After the foregoing passages from Luther and Gerhard had been read, they returned once more to the first passage from the Apology and asked for further explanation as to how the lowans came to cite this passage for themselves and their doctrine of the two-sided church.

[The essayist:] It was said that they would be unable to cite it because it did not contain this doctrine. It is also in itself [103/2] inconsistent to say of something invisible that it also has a visible side, or of something visible that it also has an invisible side; but if a thing is both something visible and something invisible, it must be composed of both, <page 71> from which two parts, but not two sides, would then result, one of which would be visible, the other invisible. Furthermore, a thing may be invisible in itself and yet have visible characteristics, but one cannot say that the invisible thing also has a visible side. For example, one can tell from a very well-written letter that someone has a gifted soul, but the fact that one can recognize the soul according to its powers and gifts from the written letter does not mean that the soul has a visible side, so that the written letter is the visible side of the soul! Nor do we say that the Church can be where Word and Sacrament are not; it is only a question of indicating who the Church is, namely a company of people who are in the faith. Such a group cannot be seen in this life, which is why this invisible Church has no visible side.

This was then read out:

### Thesis III

**"In an improper sense also all those visible fellowships are called churches in Scripture, which do not consist solely of believers and those sanctified by faith, but to which hypocrites and the ungodly are also added, but in which the gospel is preached purely and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel. Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 1:2; Rev. 3:7."**

To show the connection between this thesis and the two previous ones, the following was noted:

We have first seen what the Church is, then by what it is to be recognized and where it is to be sought and found.

But now the question may arise: how is it that the Bible so often speaks of

the Church, not as an assembly of pure saints, but as an assembly of people who are obviously not all saints?

You must know that it is customary in all human languages not to use a word in its nearest proper sense, but in a figurative, metaphorical, improper sense. For example, I call a certain plant a flower; this is the proper sense. But I can also use this word in a non-real or figurative sense, for example by saying to a father about his daughter: "You have a beautiful little flower in your garden. Now if the father did not understand the use of this form of speech, he might think: What is man saying? I have no flower and no garden! But anyone who heard this would laugh at his lack of understanding, for he would not realize that the words here are taken in an unreal, figurative sense. Since our Lord God speaks to us in His words in human language, he often uses this way of speaking. But the meaning of such words used in an inauthentic way [104/1] is always a divine, spiritual, heavenly one. —

The first Scripture passage cited in this thesis is: Matt. 18:17. It has been noted:

The church (*Gemeinde*) of which the Savior speaks here is not the church of the saints in the whole world. When it says: <page 72> "Tell it to the church", it obviously means a local congregation, which always includes tares. It is therefore right to call a group of people professing God's worth in one place a congregation or a church, for God Himself does so, for he gives the whole mixed group the name "church", because the church of God is underneath.

To illustrate this with other examples, it has been pointed out that a fish pond, for example, is called a fish pond because the fish are the most prominent or the main thing in the pond, despite the presence of a few frogs among them. So it is with the gold ring, whether copper is also mixed in. When spoken of in the improper sense, namely synecdochically, the thing is given the name of the nobler, more excellent part. Thus a crowd of hypocrites and Christians using the means of grace is called a congregation or church, not a bunch of hypocrites.

Only fanatics (*Schwarmgeister*) who leave a church because of the evil that may be present say that they do not want to remain in such a church, that it is only a bunch of hypocrites. But when such a fanatic leaves the church, it is not the child of God who leaves the hypocrites, but the hypocrite who leaves the children of God, because he leaves the church. Who else does such a person revile but our Lord Jesus? For if he calls the whole crowd hypocrites, he also calls the children of God in this place hypocrites, even the Lord Jesus himself, for he accepts what is done to his own as done to him.

The Lord Jesus wants His own to be honored, so do not reproach a congregation, lest you reproach the children of God in it; for in a congregation the nobler and more excellent part, for the sake of which the local congregation is called a congregation or church, are the hidden children of God; Let there be as many hypocrites and other ungodly people in it as there may be, there are also the saints and the elect, who are actually the church, provided that the voice of

the church is still heard among them. It is true that hypocrites also often speak God's word, but in doing so, although they are not themselves the church, they are the mouth of the church, the children of God.

Every fellowship where the Word of God is heard is a church. "Congregation" and "church" are completely synonymous. Dr. Luther deliberately never used the word church [*Kirche*] in the German Bible, but always "congregation" [*Gemeinde*], in order not to encourage the pope, who had made it so that "church" was understood to mean him, the pope, and his bishops. This, too, is one of the errors of the false Lutherans of our time, that they also make a distinction between church and congregation. [i.e. Pres. Matthew Harrison.] — Adjourn with the Lord's Prayer.

***This is the end of the discussion on The True Visible Church at this convention.***