

Theses on The Church

Thesis I. The Church, in the proper sense of the term, is the communion of saints, that is, the sum total of all those who have been called by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel from out of the lost and condemned human race, who truly believe in Christ, and who have been sanctified by this faith and incorporated into Christ.

Thesis II. To the Church in the proper sense of the term belongs no godless person, no hypocrite, no one who has not been regenerated, no heretic.

Thesis III. The Church, in the proper sense of the term, is invisible.

Thesis IV. This true Church of believers and saints it is to which Christ has given the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Therefore this Church is **the real and sole holder and bearer of the spiritual, divine, and heavenly blessings, rights, powers, offices, etc.**, which Christ has gained and which are available in His Church.

Thesis V. Although the true Church, in the proper sense of the term, is invisible as to its essence, yet its presence is perceivable, its marks being the pure preaching of the Word of God and the administration of the holy Sacraments in accordance with their institution by Christ.

Thesis VI. In an improper sense the term “Church,” according to Holy Scripture, is applied also to the visible sum total of all who have been called, that is, to all who profess allegiance to the Word of God that is preached and make use of the holy Sacraments. This Church (the universal [catholic] Church) is made up of good and evil persons. Particular divisions of it, namely, the congregations found here and there, in which the Word of God is preached and the holy Sacraments are administered, are called churches (particular churches), for the reason, namely, that in these visible groups the invisible, true Church of the believers, saints, and children of God is concealed, and because no elect persons are to be looked for outside of the group of those who have been called.

Thesis VII. Even as the visible communions in which the Word and the Sacraments still exist in their essence bear, according to God’s Word, the name of CHURCHES because of the true invisible Church of the true believers contained in them, so likewise they, because of the true, invisible Church concealed in them, though there be but two or three, possess the POWER which Christ has given to His entire Church.

Thesis VIII. While God gathers for Himself a holy Church of the elect in places where the Word of God is not preached in entire purity and the holy Sacraments are not administered altogether in accordance with their institution by Jesus Christ,— provided the Word of God and the sacraments are not utterly denied but essentially remain in those places,—still everyone is obliged, for the sake of his salvation, to flee from all false teachers and to avoid all heterodox churches, or sects and, on the other hand, to profess allegiance, and adhere, to orthodox congregations and their orthodox preachers wherever he finds such.

A. Also in erring, heretical congregations there are children of God; also in them the true Church becomes manifest by means of the remnants of the pure Word of God and the Sacraments that still remain in them.

B. Everyone is obliged, for the sake of his salvation, to flee from all false prophets and to avoid fellowship with heterodox churches, or sects.

C. Every Christian is obliged, for the sake of his salvation, to profess allegiance, and adhere, to orthodox congregations and their orthodox preachers wherever he finds such.

Thesis IX. The only indispensable requisite for obtaining salvation is fellowship with the invisible Church, to which all those glorious promises that concern the Church were originally given.

(Walther's **Theses on the Church** of 1841 presented at the Altenburg Debate, were later combined with his **Theses on the Ministry** from an 1850 synodical convention presentation in the book *Kirche und Amt* (Church and Ministry) of 1852.

Thesis I - The holy ministry, or the pastoral office, is an office distinct from the priestly office, which belongs to all believers.

Thesis II - The ministry, or the pastoral office, is not a human ordinance, but an office established by God Himself.

Thesis III - The ministry of preaching is not an arbitrary office, but its character is such that the Church has been commanded to establish it and is ordinarily bound to it until the end of days.

Thesis IV - The ministry of preaching is not a peculiar order, set up over and against the common estate of Christians, and holier than the later, like the priesthood of the Levites, but it is an office of service.

Thesis V - The ministry of preaching is conferred by God through **the congregation, as holder of all church power, or of the keys, and by its call, as prescribed by God. The ordination of those called, with the laying on of hands, is not by divine institution but is an apostolic church ordinance and merely a public, solemn confirmation of the call.**

Thesis VII - **The holy ministry is the authority conferred by God through the congregation, as holder of the priesthood and of all church power, to administer in public office the common rights of the spiritual priesthood in behalf of all.**

Thesis VIII - The ministry is the highest office in the Church, from which, as its stem, all other offices of the Church issue.

Thesis IX - Reverence and unconditional obedience is due to the ministry of preaching when the preacher is ministering the Word of God. However, the preacher may not dominate over the Church; he has, accordingly, no right to make new laws, to arrange indifferent matters and ceremonies arbitrarily, and to impose and execute excommunication ALONE, without a previous verdict of the entire congregation.

Thesis X - According to divine right the function of passing judgment on doctrine belongs indeed to the ministry of preaching. However, also the laymen have this right, and for this reason they also have a seat and vote with the preachers in church courts and councils.