

## The Church

**Matthew 16:13-20** When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” 14So they said, “Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” 15He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” 16Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” 17Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock **I will build My church** ( ἐκκλησία ekklesia ), and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. 19“And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” 20Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ.

**Matthew 18:15-20** “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. 16“But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ 17“And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to **the church**. But if he refuses even to hear **the church**, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. 18“Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19“Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. 20“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

**Matthew 28:18-20** And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20“teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

**John 10:14-16** “I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. 15“As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. 16“And other sheep I have which are not of **this fold**; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be **one flock** and one shepherd.

**John 20:21-23** So Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” 22And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

**Acts 2:46-47** So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to **the church** daily those who were being saved.

**Ephesians 2:19-22** Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into **a holy temple** in the

Lord, 2in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

**Ephesians 4:1-6** I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

**Ephesians 5:25-27** Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved **the church** and gave Himself for her, 26that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

**2 Corinthians 6:14-18** Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? 15And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? 16And what agreement has **the temple of God** with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people." 17Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you." 18 "I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the Lord Almighty."

**1 Peter 1:22-2:10** Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, 23having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, 24because "All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away, 25But the word of the Lord endures forever." Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you. 2:1Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, 2as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, 3if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

4Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, 5you also, as living stones, are being built up **a spiritual house, a holy priesthood**, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame." 7Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone," 8and "A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense."

They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. 9But you are **a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people**, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10who once were not a people but are now **the people of God**, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

**1 Peter 3:15** But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;

## THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION

### VII. [THE CHURCH]

<sup>1</sup> It is also taught among us that one holy Christian church will be and remain forever. This is the assembly of all believers among who the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. <sup>2</sup> For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. <sup>3</sup> It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places. <sup>4</sup> It is as Paul says in Eph. 4:4, 5, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism.”

### VIII. [WHAT THE CHURCH IS]

<sup>1</sup> Again, although the Christian church, properly speaking, is nothing else than the assembly of all believers and saints, yet because in this life many false Christians, hypocrites, and even open sinners remain among the godly, the sacraments are efficacious even if the priests who administer them are wicked men, for as Christ himself indicated, “The Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat” (Matt. 23:2).

<sup>3</sup> Accordingly the Donatists<sup>8</sup> and all others who hold contrary views are condemned.

## THE APOLOGY OF THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION

### ARTICLES VII AND VIII. THE CHURCH

<sup>1</sup> The authors of the Confutation have condemned the seventh article of our Confession in which we said the church is **the assembly of saints**.<sup>1</sup> And they have added a lengthy dissertation, that the wicked are not to be separated from the church since John compared the church to **a threshing floor on which chaff and wheat are heaped together** (Matt. 3:12) and Christ compared it to **a net in which there are both good and bad fish** (Matt. 13:47).

<sup>2</sup> The saying is certainly true that there is no defense against the attacks of slanderers. Nothing can be said so carefully that it can avoid misrepresentation. <sup>3</sup> That is why we added the eighth article, to avoid the impression that we separate evil men and hypocrites from the outward fellowship of the church or deny efficacy to the sacraments which evil men or hypocrites administer. Thus we do not need to defend ourselves at any length against this slander. The eighth article exonerates us enough. We concede that in this life the hypocrites and evil men are mingled with the church and are members of the church according to the outward associations of the church’s marks — that is, Word, confession, and sacraments — especially if they have not been excommunicated. The sacraments do not lose their efficacy when they are administered by evil men; indeed, we may legitimately use sacraments that are administered by evil men. <sup>4</sup> Paul also predicts that Antichrist will “take his seat in **the temple of God**” (2 Thess. 2:4), that is, that he will rule and hold office in the church.

<sup>5</sup> The church is not merely an association of outward ties and rites like other civic governments, however, but it is mainly **an association of faith and of the Holy Spirit in men’s hearts**. To make it recognizable, this association has **outward marks, the pure teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments** in harmony with the Gospel of Christ. This church alone is called **the body of Christ**, which Christ renews, consecrates, and governs by his Spirit, as Paul testifies when he says (Eph. 1:22, 23), “**And he has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness,**” that is, **the whole congregation “of him who fills all in all.”** Thus those in whom Christ is not active are not members of Christ. This

much our opponents also admit, that the wicked are dead members of the church. <sup>6</sup> We wonder why they criticize our description, which speaks of living members.

<sup>7</sup> We have not said anything new. Paul defined the church in the same way in [Eph. 5:25-27](#), saying that it should **be purified in order to be holy**. He also added the **outward marks, the Word and the sacraments**. He says, “**Christ loved the church and gave himself up for it, that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that the church might be presented before him in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that it might be holy and without blemish.**” We have repeated this statement almost verbatim in our Confession. 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! <sup>8</sup> The following phrase, “**the communion of saints,**” seems to have been added to explain what “church” means, namely, the assembly of saints who share the association of the same Gospel or teaching and of the same Holy spirit, who renews, consecrates, and governs their hearts.

<sup>9</sup> We set forth this doctrine for a very necessary reason. We see the infinite dangers that threaten the church with ruin. There is an infinite number of ungodly within the church who oppress it. The church **will abide** nevertheless; it exists despite the great multitude of the wicked, and Christ supplies it with **the gifts he has promised** — the forgiveness of sins, answer to prayer, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Creed offers us these consolations that we may not despair but may know all this. <sup>10</sup> It says “the church catholic” lest we take it to mean an outward government of certain nations. It is, rather, made up of **men scattered throughout the world who agree on the Gospel and have the same Christ, the same Holy Spirit, and the same sacraments**, whether they have the same human traditions or not. The gloss in the *Decrees* says that “the church in the larger sense includes both the godly and the wicked,” and that the wicked are part of the church only in name and not in fact, while the godly are part of the church in fact as well as in name.<sup>2</sup> <sup>11</sup> The Fathers say the same thing in many places. For example, Jerome says, “Therefore the sinner who has been defiled by any spot cannot be called part of the church of Christ, nor can he be said to be subject to Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Hypocrites and evil men are indeed associated with the true church as far as outward ceremonies are concerned. But when we come to define the church, we must define that which is **the living body of Christ** and is the church in fact as well as in name. <sup>13</sup> We must understand what it is that chiefly makes us members, and living members, of the church. 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. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> 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. It is evident, moreover, that the wicked are in the power of the devil and are members of the devil's kingdom, as Paul teaches in **Eph. 2:2 when he says that the devil "is now at work in the sons of disobedience."** Certainly the Pharisees had an outward affiliation with the church (that is, with the saints among the Old Testament people), for they held high positions and they sacrificed and taught. To them Christ says (**John 8:44**), **"You are of your father the devil."** Thus the church, which is truly the kingdom of Christ, is, precisely speaking, **the congregation of the saints**. The wicked are ruled by the devil and are his captives; they are not **ruled by the Spirit of Christ**.

<sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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. Thus John speaks (**Matt. 3:12**) **about the whole Jewish nation and says that the true church will be separated from it**. Therefore this passage is more against our opponents than for them since it shows that the true and spiritual people will be separated from the physical people. 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. Meanwhile he teaches that though these wicked men participate in the outward marks, still they are not the true kingdom of Christ and members of Christ, for they are members of the kingdom of the devil.

<sup>20</sup> We are **not dreaming about some Platonic republic**, as has been slanderously alleged, but we teach that this church actually exists, made up of true believers and righteous men scattered throughout the world. And we add its marks, the pure teaching of the Gospel and the sacraments. This church is properly called **"the pillar of truth" (1 Tim. 3:15)**, for it retains the pure Gospel and what Paul calls the **"foundation" (1 Cor. 3:12)**, that is, the true knowledge of Christ and faith. Of course, there are also many weak people in it who build on this foundation perishing structures of stubble, that is, unprofitable opinions. But because they do not overthrow the foundation, these are forgiven them or even corrected. <sup>21</sup> The writings of the holy Fathers show that even they sometimes built stubble on the foundation but that this did not overthrow their faith. Most of what our opponents maintain, on the other hand, does overthrow faith, as when they condemn our doctrine that the forgiveness of sins is received by faith. It is also an open and wicked error when our opponents teach that men merit the forgiveness of sins by their love for God before entering a state of grace. This, too, means to remove Christ as the foundation. Similarly, why will faith be necessary if sacraments justify *ex opere operato*,<sup>4</sup> without a good attitude in the one using them?

<sup>22</sup> Just as the church has the promise that it will always have the Holy Spirit, so it also has the warning that there will be ungodly teachers and wolves. **But the church, properly speaking, is that which has the Holy Spirit**. Though wolves and ungodly teachers may run rampant in the church, they are not, properly speaking, the kingdom of Christ. So Lyra testifies when he says: "The church is not made up of men by reason of their power or position, whether ecclesiastical or secular, because princes and supreme

pontiffs as well as those in lesser stations have apostasized from the faith. Therefore the church is made up of those persons in whom there is **true knowledge and the confession of faith and truth.**<sup>25</sup> What have we said in our Confession that is different from what Lyra says here?

<sup>23</sup> Perhaps our opponents demand some such definition of the church as the following. It is the supreme outward monarchy of the whole world in which the Roman pontiff must have unlimited power beyond question or censure. He may establish articles of faith, abolish the Scriptures by his leave, institute devotions and sacrifices, enact whatever laws he pleases, excuse and exempt men from any laws, divine, canonical, or civil, as he wishes. From him the emperor and all kings have received their power and right to rule, and this at Christ's command; for as the Father subjected everything to him, so now this right has been transferred to the pope. Therefore the pope must be lord of the whole world, of all the kingdoms of the world, and of all public and private affairs. He must have plenary power in both the temporal and the spiritual realm, both swords, the temporal and the spiritual. <sup>24</sup> Now, this definition of the papal kingdom rather than of the church of Christ has as its authors not only the canonists but also **Dan. 11:36-39....**

<sup>28</sup> In accordance with the Scriptures, therefore, we maintain that **the church in the proper sense is the assembly of saints who truly believe the Gospel of Christ and who have the Holy Spirit.** Nevertheless, we grant that the many hypocrites and evil men who are mingled with them in this life share an association in the outward marks, are members of the church according to this association in the outward marks, and therefore hold office in the church. When the sacraments are administered by unworthy men, this does not rob them of their efficacy. For they do not represent their own persons but the person of Christ, because of the church's call, as Christ testifies (**Luke 10:16**), "**He who hears you hears me.**" When they offer the Word of Christ or the sacraments, they do so in Christ's place and stead. Christ's statement teaches us this in order that we may not be offended by the unworthiness of ministers....

<sup>30</sup> Our opponents also condemn the part of the seventh article in which we said, "For the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions or rites and ceremonies, instituted by men, should be alike everywhere." If we mean "particular rites" they approve our article, but if we mean "universal rites" they disapprove it.<sup>8</sup> <sup>31</sup> We do not quite understand what our opponents mean. We are talking about **true spiritual unity**, without which there can be no **faith in the heart** nor **righteousness in the heart before God**. For this unity, we say, a similarity of human rites, whether universal or particular, is not necessary. The righteousness of faith is not a righteousness tied to certain traditions, as the righteousness of the law was tied to the Mosaic ceremonies, because this righteousness of the heart is something that quickens the heart. To this quickening human traditions, whether universal or particular, contribute nothing; nor are they wrought by the Holy Spirit, as are chastity, patience, the fear of God, the love of our neighbor, and the works of love....

<sup>47</sup> They have approved the entire eighth article.<sup>8</sup> There we confess that hypocrites and evil men have been mingled with the church and that the sacraments are efficacious even when evil men administer them, for ministers act in Christ's stead and do not represent their own persons, according to the word (**Luke 10:16**), "**He who hears you hears me.**" <sup>48</sup> We should forsake wicked teachers because they no longer function in the place of Christ, but are antichrists. Christ says (**Matt. 7:15**), "**Beware of false prophets**"; Paul says (**Gal 1:9**), "**If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed.**"

<sup>49</sup> Christ has also warned us in his parables on the church<sup>9</sup> that when we are offended by the personal conduct of priests or people, we should not incite schisms, as the Donatists wickedly did. <sup>50</sup> We regard as utterly seditious those who have incited schisms because they denied to priests the right to hold property or other possessions. The right to hold property is a civil ordinance. It is legitimate for Christians to use civil ordinances just as it is legitimate for them to use the air, light, food, and drink. For as this universe and the fixed movements of the stars are truly ordinances of God and are preserved by God, so lawful governments are ordinances of God and are preserved and defended by God against the devil.

## The Church

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