

# **THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH AND MINISTRY AND ITS IMPORTANCE TO THE CHRISTIAN PASTOR AND HIS CONGREGATION**

## **PART I**

**By Pastor Gavin L Winter**

**Fellowship Day  
2 November 1980**

**Good Shepherd  
Evangelical Lutheran Church  
ELCR Kingaroy Queensland**



# THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH AND MINISTRY AND ITS IMPORTANCE TO THE CHRISTIAN PASTOR AND HIS CONGREGATION

## HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

In the years 1902-3 a congregation of the then orthodox Missouri Synod wrongly excommunicated one of its members. The Missouri Synod, performing its Scriptural duty, pointed out to this congregation the false doctrine it was putting into practice. However the congregation refused to repent of its error. The Missouri Synod had no other choice than in 1903 to suspend this congregation from membership in said Synod.

At this time the Missouri Synod, together with the Wisconsin Synod (WELS) and several other Synods, belonged to the SYNODICAL CONFERENCE (organised in 1872 chiefly through the work of Dr. Walther). The Congregation mentioned previously, having been suspended from fellowship in Missouri, now applied for membership in the Wisconsin Synod. Honouring the suspension from fellowship of a sister Synod, action on this application was deferred. However some of the WELS pastors now wrongfully practised church fellowship with the suspended congregation. Some of these pastors maintained that since Synod was merely a human arrangement, it had to respect the action of this divinely instituted local congregation whether it was in accordance with Scripture or not.

Out of this conflict a wrong doctrinal position emerged which has plagued WELS ever since. This position was first propounded by Johann Hoefling of the University of Erlangen, Germany, in 1850. He taught that the office of the public ministry was not instituted by God, but simply developed over the years because of "inner necessity", or the inner need which over the years the church found existed for the ministerial office. Professor Lehringer (a professor in the Seminary of WELS defines this new false interpretation of WELS as follows:

"The plea is not sound that only the local congregation has the power of excommunicating an unrepentant sinner, because it is divinely instituted and has the express command to do this, while a synod, or under whichever name beyond the limits of a local congregation may be comprehended, is not even mentioned in Scripture...."

"There is no word of institution of the local congregation in the sense we speak of it today...."

"Similarly we look in vain in Holy Writ for a word of institution of the pastorate in a local congregation.... It came as a shock to some members of our Synod and in Missouri, when, e.g. Professor J. Schaller spoke of the historical development of the pastorate through the centuries into what is in our congregations today. And yet it is true...." (Quartalschrift, Vol. 47, No. 2, p.103f).

After the death of the faithful and orthodox theologian of WELS, Dr. Adolf Hoenecke, in 1908, some of the following amazing antiscritptural statements were made by WELS men in public church papers:

"Therefore it (the Synod, GLW) has all ecclesiastical authority, the power of the Word, the power of the Keys."

"The Local congregation has no monopoly on the exercise of the Means of Grace, the Gospel, the Sacraments, the power of the Keys" (Quartalschrift, July 1911, pp.140, 146).

"From this it follows that it (the Synod) possesses all power which Christ has given to His Church on earth." (Quartalschrift, 1913, p.99).

“The public office in the Church is, as soon as it is concretely established, an external institution. But in the whole New Testament there is nowhere a clear word of formal institution for any specific form of it, if one looks away from the apostolate.” (Quartalschrift, January, 1913, p.40).

In 1916 and again in 1929 apparent agreement in the doctrine of the Church and Ministry was reached between Missouri and WELS, but both times it was not long before theologians of WELS relapsed into their errors. Since then this false doctrine has become the official doctrinal position of the Wisconsin Synod. Since, in the 1940s, Missouri had its hands full with its own doctrinal troubles (“Statement of the 44”), the false doctrine of WELS on the Church and Ministry was left unresolved.

Fortunately, the orthodox Lutheran Church in Australia has never had to combat publicly the error espoused by WELS up till now. The Lord has graciously granted its preservation from this anti-Scriptural error in the past. The writer has chosen the topic for this Essay, not only so that our members will be well-informed on this vital doctrine of the Word of God, but also that none of Satan’s poisonous leaven be introduced into our midst. Only in recent years a church body has been formed in Australia which is in doctrinal fellowship with WELS. Since, as Dr. A.L. Graebner states (Theological Quarterly, January 1902, Vol. VI. No. 1):

“Membership in or fellowship with a church is prima facie ((arising) at first sight, (based) on the first impression, GLW), evidence of agreement with and approval of its doctrine and practice”,

this group is also co-responsible for the error of Wisconsin. May the members of the ELCR dread to deviate one i-dot from Scripture, lest they, through false doctrine, be lead astray by Satan’s hordes.

It has been said by some that Scripture does not speak to us clearly on these two vital doctrines and that we may therefore please ourselves what we teach concerning them. In this vein they are declared to be “Open Questions.” However, as we proceed we will see that Scripture does speak, and indeed speaks quite definitely, concerning the Divine Institution of the Church and the Ministry. WHERE SCRIPTURE SPEAKS, it is the DUTY OF CHRISTIANS to BELIEVE AND OBEY.

Let us now examine

### **THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH AND MINISTRY AND ITS IMPORTANCE TO THE CHRISTIAN PASTOR AND HIS CONGREGATION**

WE SHALL SEE

- I. WHAT SCRIPTURE HAS TO SAY ABOUT THIS VITAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH;
- II. THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS DOCTRINE TO THE CHRISTIAN PASTOR AND HIS CONGREGATION;
- III. A NUMBER OF THE ERRORS WHICH HAVE ARISEN CONCERNING THIS DOCTRINE AND THE DREADFUL CONSEQUENCES WHICH MAY RESULT IF THIS DOCTRINE IS CORRUPTED.

(Note: The doctrine of the Ministry will be dealt with in a future Essay.)

## I. WHAT SCRIPTURE HAS TO SAY ABOUT THIS VITAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

### SCRIPTURAL USAGE OF THE WORD "CHURCH"

It is of vital importance that there be no confusion as to what Scripture means when it uses the word "church" in the New Testament. It is not left to man to interpret Scripture as it suits himself. Whoever refuses to accept the CLEAR WORD OF HOLY WRIT commits an offense against the supreme majesty of God (Rom. 16:17) and is guilty of rebellion against the Lord.

The word used for "church" in the New Testament is the Greek word ἐκκλησία. It comes from two words ἐκ (which means "out of") and καλέω (which means "to call"). Its original meaning is "to call out" or "to call forth", properly referring to "a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place; an assembly." (Thayer, Greek-English Lexikon, p.196) In secular Greek the word ἐκκλησία was used to refer to "an assembly of people convened at the public place of council for the purpose of deliberating" (ibid. p.196). In this sense we hear in Acts 19:39, 41 of the town clerk or secretary of the city of Ephesus referring to an assembly of citizens who had gathered together under Demetrius against Paul because Paul through his preaching had been ruining the craft of idol-making these men had to honour Diana, the goddess of the Ephesians.

The word ἐκκλησία is used in the Christian sense in the New Testament to refer in the first place to the whole body of Christians scattered throughout the earth; collectively, all who worship and honour God and Christ in whatever place they may be: (ibid. p.196), and in the second place to "an assembly of Christians gathered for worship" (ibid. p.196), that is, the local congregation.

### DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE THREE USAGES OF THE WORD "CHURCH" IN THE CHRISTIAN SENSE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the New Testament the word "church" (ἐκκλησία) is not always used to denote one and the same sense. Rather it is used in the Christian sense in three different ways.

#### (I). INVISIBLE CHURCH

The word church (ἐκκλησία) is used in its widest sense to refer to the INVISIBLE CHURCH, the TOTAL NUMBER OF TRUE CHRISTIANS SCATTERED RIGHT THROUGHOUT THE EARTH. It is the sum total of all those who, having through the Law been convicted of their sin and punishment, place their full trust and confidence in the Work of Redemption which Christ has completed for them through His suffering and death on the Cross.

On the basis of God's Word, Dr. A.L. Graebner describes this meaning of the word "church" (ἐκκλησία) in Scripture as follows:

"The CHURCH in the WIDEST SENSE of the term is the WHOLE NUMBER OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD. These are, collectively considered, the 'household of God' (Eph. 2:10), united under the 'one God and Father of all' (Eph. 4:6), 'the whole family in heaven and earth' (Eph. 3:15), comprising all 'the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven; (Heb. 12:23), the multitude gathered from out of 'every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation' (Rev. 5:9), whom Christ has 'made unto God kings and priests' (Rev. 5:10), the aggregate of the 'heirs of salvation' (Heb. 1:14). In this sense the CHURCH has also been defined as THE WHOLE NUMBER OF GOD'S ELECT.... This is the CHURCH UNIVERSAL in heaven and earth, in time and eternity.

"Viewed in the horizon of time, as the Church of Christ on earth, the CHURCH is the WHOLE NUMBER OF THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN CHRIST, who are justified by faith and

sanctified in faith through the Means of Grace.” (Theological Quarterly, VI, No. 1. Emphasis added).

Similarly Dr. Pieper, the faithful and orthodox teacher of the Missouri Synod, writes:

“The CHRISTIAN CHURCH consists of ALL THOSE, and only those, WHO BELIEVE IN CHRIST.”

“Nothing else makes one a member of the Church: neither holding membership in a church body, nor outward use of the means of grace, nor profession of the Christian faith, nor holding an office in the Church, nor zeal for a moral life in imitation of Christ, nor any immediate (without means, GLW) regeneration or submergence in God of which the ‘enthusiasts’ of all shades talk. Only personal faith in the forgiveness of sins which was purchased by Christ’s vicarious satisfaction and is proclaimed and dispensed in the Gospel makes one a member of the Christian Church.” (Christian Dogmatics, Vol. III p.397).

Since true Christian faith is invisible and exists in a person’s heart, it is impossible for one human being to say whether another for certain belongs to this INVISIBLE CHURCH. This is something known alone by that person and the Lord Himself (2 Tim. 2:19).

Hypocrites or sham-Christians do not belong to this Invisible Church.

Dr. Pieper writes:

“Scripture teaches: They (hypocrites, GLW) DO NOT BELONG TO THE CHURCH, are not a part of the Church, but have only outward fellowship with the Church.” (ibid. p.398)

To this INVISIBLE CHURCH and to every Christian belonging to it Christ has given the KEYS OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN (Matt. 16:19, “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven”).

Although this Church is Invisible, yet we know beyond doubt where it must exist. Wherever the distinguishing MARKS of the orthodox Church exist, the preaching of the Word of God in its truth and purity and the right administration of the Sacraments, according to Christ’s institution, there must be true Christians present. Also in Heterodox Churches (those which do not teach and practise the Word of God in its truth and purity), because the Word of God (Law and Gospel) is still taught to a certain extent, true Christians are present. The Word of God and the Sacraments are the means of grace whereby true Christian faith is worked in the heart of a person.

It is this usage of the word “CHURCH” (e)jkklḗsía) in its widest sense that we read of in the following Scripture passages:

Matt. 16:18, “Upon this Rock I will build My Church.”

Eph. 1:22, “Gave Him (Christ) to be the Head over all things to the Church which is His Body.”

Eph. 5:27, “A glorious Church not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing.”

Eph. 5:23, “Christ is the Head of the Church.”

## (II.) DIVINELY INSTITUTED LOCAL CONGREGATION

Holy Scripture also applies the name “Church” (e)jkklḗsía) to a group of true believers in a definite locality. It refers to that group or assembly of Christians of the same faith in one locality, who have gathered together to have the Word of God preached and the Holy Sacraments administered in their midst, that is, to administer the Office of the Keys. (Acts 20:28, Matt. 18:17).

Dr. A.L. Graebner describes this divinely instituted LOCAL CONGREGATION, composed only of true Christians, as follows:

“In a more restricted sense the word εἰκκλησία, CHURCH, is used to denote the LOCAL CONGREGATION. In this sense also the CHURCH is the WHOLE NUMBER OF BELIEVERS, BUT RESTRICTED TO A CERTAIN PLACE. Thus we read of the CHURCH (εἰκκλησία) at Jerusalem as of ‘all that believed’ (Acts 4:32). St. Paul writes to ‘the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse’ (Col. 1:2), ‘to the saints which are at Ephesus and to the faithful in Christ Jesus’ (Eph. 1:1), and to ‘all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi’ (Phil. 1:1). In this sense the word may be used in the plural, as when Paul mentions ‘the care of all the churches’ (Greek: εἰκκλησίῳν - local congregations, GLW) (2 Cor. 11:28) and writes ‘to the churches’ (local congregations, GLW) (Gal. 1:12). Each of these local congregations of saints is a PART OF THE CHURCH UNIVERSAL....” (op. cit.; Emphasis added).

According to this, then, the local congregation (εἰκκλησία) in its strict sense consists only of true believers. Hypocrites and unbelievers do not belong to this local congregation in its strict sense.

On this point Caloy writes:

“Even though hypocrites are in that assembly in which the Church is, still they are not really in the assembly which is the Church.” (Syst. VIII, 253 ff.)

Dannhauer makes a striking comparison:

“The hypocrites are by no means members of the Invisible Church.... even as the weeds are not part of the wheat field as such, but only of the entire field made up of wheat and tares.” (Hodos, p.61)

Following on from this Dr. J.T. Mueller writes:

“With respect to the relation between the Church Universal and the local Churches (congregations, GLW), Scripture teaches clearly that THESE ARE NOT TWO DIFFERENT KINDS OF CHURCHES, but THE CHURCH UNIVERSAL CONSISTS OF ALL TRUE BELIEVERS WHO ARE FOUND IN THE LOCAL CHURCHES. Since it is God’s will that all believers should be joined to local churches, all cases where an individual believer on account of special circumstances temporarily does not hold membership in a local church must be regarded as exceptional and hence require no consideration in this connection. Local Churches therefore are TRUE BELIEVERS, or true members of the Church Universal, who are JOINED TOGETHER IN A VISIBLE COMMUNION FOR THE PURPOSE OF EXECUTING THE OFFICE OF THE KEYS, or the peculiar Church-power which Christ has given to His Church on earth. This point must be clearly understood; for LOCAL CHURCHES, in the PROPER SENSE of the term, CONSIST ONLY OF TRUE BELIEVERS.” (Christian Dogmatics, p.554).

This is the local Christian congregation as God sees it (consisting only of true believers). It is this local congregation of true believers which alone publicly exercises the Office of the Keys on behalf of the true believers in its midst.

In this second sense, the word church (εἰκκλησία) is used in the following passages of Scripture:

1 Cor. 1:2, “The Church of God which is at Corinth, to them which are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called (to be) saints.”

1 Thess. 1:1, “The Church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Acts 2:47, “The Lord added to the Church (at Jerusalem, GLW) daily such as should be saved.”

Phil. 1:1, “To all the saints which are in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi.”

These passages show us that also the local groups called Churches in Scripture consist only of the truly regenerate, that only true believers are the real members of the local church.

Finally, we let Dr. Walther sum up what a truly EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN LOCAL CONGREGATION is:

“An Evangelical Lutheran local congregation is an assembly of believing Christians at a certain place among whom God’s Word is preached purely according to the Confession of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the holy Sacraments are administered according to Christ’s institution as stated in the Gospel, in the midst of whom, however, there is always also an admixture of spurious (false, GLW) Christians and hypocrites, and at times even public sinners.” (Form of a Christian Congregation, p.1).

### (III.) LOCAL VISIBLE CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION

No man is able to see through the eyes of God. It is impossible for him to see who really belongs to this local Christian Congregation (in its strict sense). Man is able only to see the outward visible assembly gathered together in one place, which contains both true believers and hypocrites or unbelievers. The Lord therefore accommodates Himself to the speech and limitations of man, and on occasions uses the word church (e]kklēsia) to designate the local congregation as it is seen by men containing both true believers and hypocrites.

Dr. A.L. Graebner again writes concerning this third usage in the New Testament of the word “church”:

“But e]kklēsia (CHURCH) is said also in a tropical sense.” (op. cit. Emphasis added).

NOTE: This is a figure of speech used on quite a number of occasions throughout the New Testament. It is also called a Synecdoche, where the whole of something is named according to what is its principal part. Here the visible local congregation (wider sense) is called CHURCH (e]kklēsia) on account of the true Christians present, even though there is an admixture of hypocrites and hypocrites are not members of the INVISIBLE CHURCH.

Pastor Neil Hilton excellently illustrates this point with the following words:

“When therefore the entire visible group of those who profess to be Christians and members of the church is called ‘church’, this is by synecdoche, a figure of speech in which the whole is named after its principal part... As a prospector, finding gold in a piece of quartz, cries out, ‘Gold! Gold!’ not ‘Quartz’. He does not mean to say that quartz is gold, but for him the gold is the main thing. So in calling the visible group a church, we do not mean to say that hypocrites are the Church, but that the believers are the main thing, are what makes this group a church, are in fact the Church, the hypocrites being mixed with the Church but not really belonging to it.” (T.F.W. 1969, Vol. I. pp.4-5).

Quoting some examples from Scripture where the word CHURCH (e]kklēsia) is used in this sense, Dr. A.L. Graebner writes:

“Of the ‘CHURCH (e]kklēsia, GLW) of Pergamos’ we read that it had among its members those who held the doctrine of Baalam and them that held the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes (Rev. 2:14f.) These profligate (immoral, GLW) errorists were **CERTAINLY NOT MEMBERS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST** (Invisible Church, GLW), of the holy Church of the children of God. Again we read of Diotrephes, who was prating (foolishly talking, GLW) against the apostles with malicious words, that he ‘cast out of the church’ (3 John

10) those who would receive the brethren against his will, and this was called the 'CHURCH' to which St. John had written (3 John 9). Yet what is here called 'the church' cannot be called the invisible Church, the family of God, from which no man Diotrefes could cast these brethren for doing the Will of God. CHURCH here designates a society gathered about the Means of Grace and professing the Christian faith. Such society may count among its members men as Diotrefes and Baalamites and Nicolaitanes and few or many hypocrites. But because of the CHILDREN OF GOD, WHO CANNOT FAIL TO BE WHERE THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST IS PREACHED AND THE SACRAMENTS ARE ADMINISTERED, such society is SYNECDOCHICALLY called what a part only properly is, a CHRISTIAN CHURCH." (Theological Quarterly, VI, I).

To all true Christians, that is, to every member of the Invisible Church, God has given the power of the Office of the Keys. However it is His Will that this power be exercised conjointly by the entire local Christian Congregation. In its strict sense only the whole number of the true Christians in such a visible congregation have this power. But since the number of true Christians in such a local congregation is invisible to men, God has ordained that the local visible congregation holds and exercises the power of the Office of the Keys among its members. Unbelievers have no part in the power of the Keys. God knows who those hypocrites are in the visible local congregation. Though their vote may stand up before men; yet before God in heaven it is nothing but a blasphemy and mockery against the Most High. In accordance with God's will and for the sake of good order the congregation calls pastors to administer the Office of the Keys publicly on its behalf so that what the pastor does on behalf of the congregation the church does through him. Aside from cases of emergency no one is permitted to exercise the Office of the Keys on the congregation's behalf unless he is rightly called and appointed.

Of this Dr. A. L. Graebner writes:

"Only by the true disciples of Christ within a Visible Church or in their name is the Office of the Keys administered. Not knowing, however, who they are, we can deal with them only where they are, in the visible church, where we find the marks of the church, the Word and the Sacraments. The brother who would tell unto the CHURCH his grievance against a brother, will tell it unto the visible congregation of which both are members, - or in which the offender is a member, if they be of different congregations, - knowing that thus he will have it before those whom the brother should hear and who have the power to bind and to loose on earth what shall (have been, GLW) bound and loosed in heaven. From this tribunal there is no appeal to a superior court on earth as of higher authority." (Theological Quarterly, VI, I Emphasis added).

#### SUMMARY

To summarise, Scripture has three usages in a Christian sense of the word "CHURCH" (e]kklēsia). They are:

- (i) the Invisible Church or the Communion of saints;
- (ii) the local Congregation (strict sense), composed only of true believers;
- (iii) the local visible Christian Congregation (wider sense) composed of both believers and unbelievers (hypocrites).

#### DIVINE INSTITUTION OF THE LOCAL CONGREGATION

God has not left it as arbitrary or as a matter of Christian liberty for a Christian to join a local Christian Congregation. Rather HE HIMSELF HAS INSTITUTED OR ORDAINED the LOCAL CONGREGATION, commanding the Christian to join such a local congregation where it exists, provided it is orthodox, or to form them where they do not exist.

- a. It is God's will, institution and appointment that Christians not only read and study the Word of God at home, but that they also assemble together in the form of the local congregation and appoint for themselves a pastor or pastors to preach the Word publicly and administer the Sacraments on their behalf.

In Titus 1:5 we read, "For this cause left I (Paul) thee (Titus) in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders (pastors, GLW) in every city, as I had appointed thee." It is important to note that St. Paul is here not giving advice to Titus, but is passing on the divine order and command of God. Titus had already seen that local congregations were established and Paul, under inspiration, commands him to see that these congregations do what is wanting, that they call for themselves pastors and establish the Office of the Public Ministry.

Dr. Fritz writes:

"Also the DIVINE arrangement that A CONGREGATION SHALL HAVE ITS OWN PASTOR OR PASTORS (at Ephesus: "Over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers" Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5) goes to prove that the local church is a divine institution and that therefore membership in a local church is not optional, but is divinely commanded." (Pastoral Theology, p.25f. Emphasis added).

In order for a congregation to establish the Office of the Holy Ministry in its midst and call pastors, it of necessity is required that a divinely-instituted local congregation be established. (Acts 14:23, 1 Cor. 12:28)

- b. Holy Scripture requires that in the divinely instituted local congregation Holy Communion be celebrated (1 Cor. 11:17, 33; 10:17), the duties of Christian fellowship and love be exercised (1 Cor. 11:33; 1:10; Acts 6:1-6; Col. 3:15-16), Christians attend for public worship (Heb. 10:24-25), works of Christian love be performed (Gal. 6:9-10) and mission work be done (Matt. 28:19-20).

It is God's will that these things be done publicly under the auspices of the divinely instituted local congregation.

- c. The Word of God tells us that the FIRST CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION AT JERUSALEM was ESTABLISHED BY GOD. Acts 1:4 records the command of the Lord that the disciples should remain in Jerusalem for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2 records the fulfilling of the promise given to them when the Holy Spirit came upon them and instituted the first congregation, Acts 2:41-47. Finally we read in verse 47, "And THE LORD ADDED to the church (e|jkklēsia - local congregation at Jerusalem) daily such as should be saved." This makes it quite clear that it was the Lord Himself who instituted this first local congregation at Jerusalem. His Will being that the Apostles and the whole New Testament Church follow His divine example and command wherever true Christians were brought to the faith. When God formed Eve and brought her to Adam, this first marriage and the Words of the Lord (Gen. 2:21-24) established marriage as a Divine institution. So the founding of this first congregation by the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, according to the Will of God, establishes the local church as a divine institution.
- d. Following on from (c.) it was the PRACTICE OF THE APOSTLES AND THEIR FOLLOWERS, according to Divine Command, on all occasions where believers in a certain locality were brought to the faith, to GATHER THEM TOGETHER INTO LOCAL CONGREGATIONS. We hear of no other body in Scripture than the divinely instituted local congregation which had the power publicly to administer the Office of the Keys. It is to the local churches in particular places that the Apostles give common instruction, admonition and comfort in their Epistles (1 Cor. 1:2; Rom. 1:7; Gal. 1:2; Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Acts 20:28; 14:23; 1 Cor. 5:13).

- e. God has especially given the power to exercise publicly the Office of the Keys, and in particular the third stage of Church Discipline to the local congregation. In order for this to take place, it must be the Lord's Will and Command that local congregations exist.

In Matt. 18:17 we read: "And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the Church (Greek: e|kklēsia - local congregation, GLW): but if he neglect to hear the church (Greek: e|kklēsia - local congregation, GLW) let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." The context clearly shows that it is not the whole Invisible Church to which this must be told, but the CHURCH (divinely instituted local congregation). Other than these three ways there is no usage of the word e|kklēsia in a Christian sense in the New Testament. God has not given the power to excommunicate to any other group of Christians (Synod, Federation, family group), but alone to the local congregation.

In 1 Cor. 5:1-13 and 2 Cor. 2:5-11 Paul does not take it upon himself, nor do any other smaller or larger group of Christians, to excommunicate and later to restore the incestuous man in Corinth, but alone the local Corinthian congregation.

Dr. J.T. Mueller concluded:

"From all this it follows that it is indeed GOD'S WILL AND ORDINANCE THAT CHRISTIANS SHOULD ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN LOCAL CHURCHES; for without them these Christian obligations, enjoined so definitely, cannot be performed." (Christian Dogmatics, Mueller, p.555).

#### IMPORTANT POINTS TO NOTE RESULTING FROM THE DIVINE INSTITUTION OF THE LOCAL CONGREGATION

- I. Because the local congregation is divinely instituted, it is God's Will that the Christian join such a congregation where it exists (provided it is not a heterodox congregation), and where it does not exist to see to it that one is established. Cases may exist in which the individual Christian finds no orthodox local congregation to join. This is something which the Lord Himself has permitted to occur and they thereby are not going contrary to His Will. In such cases it is His Will that they regularly read and study His Word privately, for example, using devotion books, sermon books or taped sermons. Even if the congregation be very small (only two or three members), it is still a divinely instituted local congregation which the Lord has commanded the Christian to join. (Matt. 18:20)

It is for these reasons that it is the practice of the congregations of the ELCR, when one of its members wishes to join another congregation in its midst, to grant him a peaceful dismissal to that congregation. This is to ensure that there is not an undue delay in joining the other congregation and that the person does not remain outside of a local congregation for any length of time, thus going against the Lord's Will.

- II. Because the local congregation alone is the divinely ordained body which exercises the Office of the Keys, other groups of Christians or groups of Christian Congregations (Synods, Federations) are not instituted by God but are by human arrangement only.

The word "Synod" comes from two Greek words: "sún" which means "with, together with" and "hódos" which means "way, path". It means "together with in the same path, to go on the same way." It refers to a group of congregations, having joined together on the same path, or of the same doctrinal faith and with the same aims and purposes.

Dr. A.L. Graebner correctly explains:

"A number of LOCAL CONGREGATIONS may join hands and jointly carry on the work of the Master (e.g. joint extension of the Kingdom of God and proclamation of the Word, training of pastors, printing of books and periodicals, GLW). By so doing they

meet on an EQUAL FOOTING. Synods are consociations (congregations which join together to form a Federation, GLW) of sister churches, not judicatories (law making bodies, GLW) whose enactments (resolutions, GLW) must be respected as binding upon the several churches (congregations, GLW) thus united in a common cause. In their relation to the several congregations Synods ARE ADVISORY BODIES ONLY, as far as the internal affairs of the congregations are concerned.” (Theological Quarterly, VI, I. Emphasis added).

In spiritual matters GOD’S WORD, being King, RULES SUPREME, and all people are obliged to believe and obey whatever it says. But in earthly matters the LOCAL CONGREGATION is supreme because it is divinely instituted and possesses the Office of the Keys. All other bodies of Christians or groups of local congregations (for example, Synods, Federations, Ladies’ and men’s groups, Pastoral Conferences, Councils, Conventions) are by human arrangement only and dare not dictate to the local congregation. They are ADVISORY BODIES only and may make recommendations, suggestions and give advice, but in the last instance the congregations themselves must decide.

Dr. C.F.W. Walther states:

“An association of a number of congregations to form a larger church body with governing officers, for example, by means of a Synod with the authority of supervision, a so-called superior board, a consistory, a bishop, etc., is not of DIVINE RIGHT, but only a HUMAN ARRANGEMENT, and therefore it is not ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY; of this there can be no doubt because there is no DIVINE COMMAND for it.” (Pastorale. p.393. Emphasis added).

## II. THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS DOCTRINE TO THE CHRISTIAN PASTOR AND HIS CONGREGATION

Why is it so important that the Scriptural doctrine of the CHURCH be maintained in its truth and purity?

- a. As with other doctrines of Holy Scripture, and the Word of God itself there are many who follow the voice of Satan claiming that Christians need not accept the doctrine of the Church (and the Ministry) as it is clearly revealed to us in Scripture. The following blasphemous statement is often heard: “God has not laid down any clear guidelines concerning the structure of the church, therefore we may teach and practise as we please in this point. The local congregation is simply a human arrangement, having developed in the Christian Church over the years.”

But as we have seen in the previous section, the Word of God does speak and speaks quite clearly concerning the divine institution of the local congregation. In the first place, this doctrine is of vital importance BECAUSE IT IS CLEARLY TAUGHT IN HOLY SCRIPTURE. WHEREVER SCRIPTURE SPEAKS TO US, whether it be in Primary Fundamental, Secondary Fundamental or non-fundamental doctrines, BECAUSE IT IS THE WORD OF GOD IT MUST BE BELIEVED AND OBEYED. Christ said in Matt. 28:20, “Teaching them to observe (Greek: keep strictly) all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” And again in John 8:47, “He that is of God heareth God’s words: ye therefore hear them not because ye are not of God.” The word “hear” refers not only to hearing with the ears, but especially to heeding, believing and obeying what has been heard. Just as a slave obediently and without question follows his master’s voice, so it is the Christian’s duty not to argue and rebel against Christ’s clear Word, but obediently to follow what His Master says.

Those who do not accept the Scriptural doctrine of the Church must be placed in one of two categories.

Either 1) They are IN IGNORANCE concerning what the Word of God has to say about this doctrine. Those who ignorantly or in weakness hold to false doctrine are called errorists. It is the duty of such, having learnt of their error, trustingly to put their faith in the forgiveness of Christ and to cling steadfastly to the Word of God. Said Jesus to the Sadducees who had come questioning Him: “Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.” (Matt. 22:29).

Or 2) Knowing what the Word of God teaches they stubbornly and WILFULLY REBEL AGAINST THE CLEAR TEACHING OF GOD’S WORD. May such heed the words of Heb. 10:26-27, “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgement and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries.” Refusal to heed what the Word of God says in this doctrine cannot but spread and lead to further error and false doctrine (Gal. 5:9), and if a person stubbornly and wilfully persists in error in spite of instruction eventually he will lose the faith.

- b. The doctrine of the divine institution of the local congregation is vital in order that the Word of God be maintained in its truth and purity and no false doctrine be accepted or upheld by any member. If the divine institution is denied there will be confusion over who publicly exercises the power of the Office of the Keys. Confusion occurs about who is responsible for disciplining the errorist, with the result that error may be allowed to remain within a church body.
- c. It is important to the congregation so that no Pastor who falsifies God’s Word in even the slightest and refuses to repent will be tolerated. Who is going to dismiss such a false teacher if it is not known who is responsible for this task? (the Synod? the elders? one or two Christians?) God has placed the local congregation as supreme in earthly matters, the body which is to dismiss its Pastor if he keeps on preaching false doctrine.
- d. It is vital in order that the congregation realises that they are the supreme decision-making body in earthly matters and not the Pastor. The Pastor has no right to dictate to his congregation in matters neither commanded nor forbidden in God’s Word. He is to preach God’s Word, and in so far as he does this, the congregation is to obey him. He may give advice in earthly matters, but in the last instance it is the local congregation which decides.
- e. This doctrine is important in order that proper Church discipline (Matt. 18) and doctrinal discipline (Rom 16:17; Tit. 3:10-11) be carried out according to God’s command. It is to the divinely instituted local congregation that God has given the power to execute the third step of Church Discipline. What confusion would result if the congregation was not certain but doubted that it was empowered to perform this task! If Synod, Convention, or smaller groups of Christians were on the same level as the local congregation, who is to perform this task? When discipline is carried out according to Scripture, the congregation can be certain that Christ is performing His Work through them.
- f. It is important that confusion and disorder may be avoided in earthly matters (matters neither commanded nor forbidden in Scripture). The Christians belonging to the local assembly will realise that the decision of the local congregation in such matters is final providing Christian love be not violated and offense avoided.
- g. The doctrine of the divine institution of the local congregation is vital in order that proper supervision of the doctrine and life of its members will occur.
- h. Rule by Pope, Synod, board, Presbytery or Church Council will be avoided if this doctrine is stressed. Synod, Convention and Church Councils are merely advisory bodies, not divinely instituted law-making assemblies.

- i. It is important in order to avoid the danger of congregations splitting up into little family groups and worshipping outside the control of the local congregation. This inevitably must occur if Christians are not certain that it is God's will for them to join and establish local congregations.
- j. Finally, this doctrine is vital because it is of great comfort to the Christians of a congregation. Because Satan is working his hardest with sin, false doctrine and error, to cause divisions, fights and arguments in a congregation, they at times become very troubled and disheartened. However, if they know that it is by God's will that their congregation exists, that He is on the side of those fighting for the Word of God and clinging faithfully to Scripture, they are comforted, nurtured and strengthened to continue on in the battle for their faith.

(As we do not have time in this Essay, in a future Essay we will deal with point:

### III. A NUMBER OF THE ERRORS WHICH HAVE ARISEN CONCERNING THIS DOCTRINE AND THE DREADFUL CONSEQUENCES WHICH MAY RESULT IF THIS DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH IS CORRUPTED.

As well as hearing of some of the errors of WELS, the ELS (Evangelical Lutheran Synod) and CoLC (Church of the Lutheran Confessions), we shall also see some of the dreadful consequences which may result if this doctrine is corrupted.

Briefly they are:

- 1) The Principle of Sola Scriptura (Scripture alone) undermined;
- 2) Confusion in the area of Church Discipline;
- 3) Intrusion of Synod, Church Council, etc. on rights of local congregation;
- 4) Negligence in attendance at public worship of local congregation;
- 5) Contribution of women to Sunday School, etc, jeopardised;
- 6) Command concerning Head-covering confused;
- 7) Danger of teaching Antinomianism.)

### CONCLUSION

Many regard this doctrine of the divine institution of the Church and Ministry as of little importance. "After all", they say, "how can this effect our eternal salvation?" We have seen in our Essay that not only is it TAUGHT IN SCRIPTURE, but also the doctrine of the Church is of the UTMOST IMPORTANCE TO THE CHRISTIAN PASTOR AND HIS CONGREGATION.

At our Fellowship Day next year, God-willing, we will make a similar thorough study of the Scriptural Doctrine of the Ministry, reviewing it under similar headings. May you all go away from our session this afternoon not forgetting what you have heard. Above all I urge you not to put this paper away in the cupboard to gather dust without being read for years, but to read it through again, remember, and be convinced of the Scriptural nature of the vital truths we herein have covered.

