

For the

# LIFE of the WORLD

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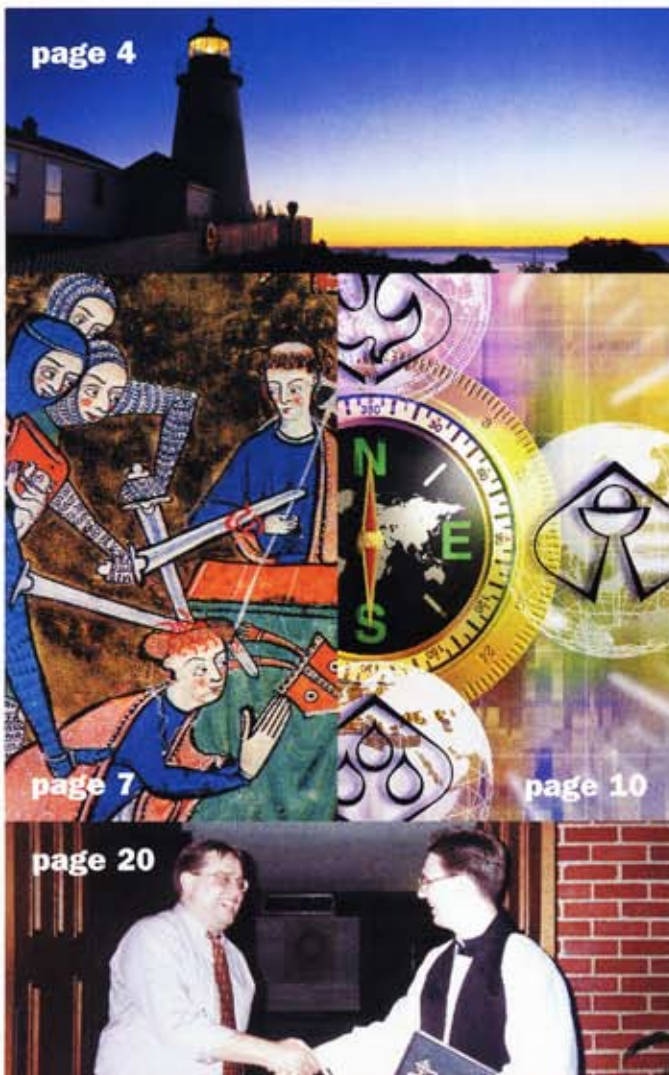
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## FEATURES

### 4 **Confessions in a Non-Confessional World**

By Dr. Max Kiesling, Member of Crown of Life Lutheran Church, San Antonio, Tex.

We are living in an increasingly "non-confessional" world. It is a reality that has a strong hold on society at large, and is increasingly afflicting the Christian church. As Christians, our foundational beliefs should be defined and understood first, followed by the proclamation of those beliefs in the world around us. To reverse this process by letting our daily contact with the world influence our foundational beliefs would be dangerous, if not fatal.

### 7 **On the Councils and the Church: Luther on Reform, Government, and Institutions of the Church**

By the Rev. Prof. Roland F. Ziegler, Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.

There was never an age where the church was unanimous, where there was no strife and struggle, where everybody lived in peace and harmony. Reading the New Testament shows us congregations loaded with problems. Any study of church history gives us a picture of a church in distress. And how else could it be in this world, in this age, where sin is still here, where the devil still tries to destroy God's holy Church through false doctrine and temptation to a sinful life?

### 10 **The "Marks" of the Church**

By the Rev. Dr. Kurt E. Marquart, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.

The marks of the Church mean that we are to be guided by faith, not by sight, in dealing with the church. In the church, it is above all truth and truth alone that counts—not numbers or prestige or pleasant relations. Where the Gospel is purely preached and the sacraments are rightly administered, there Christ's Church is rightly and properly represented.

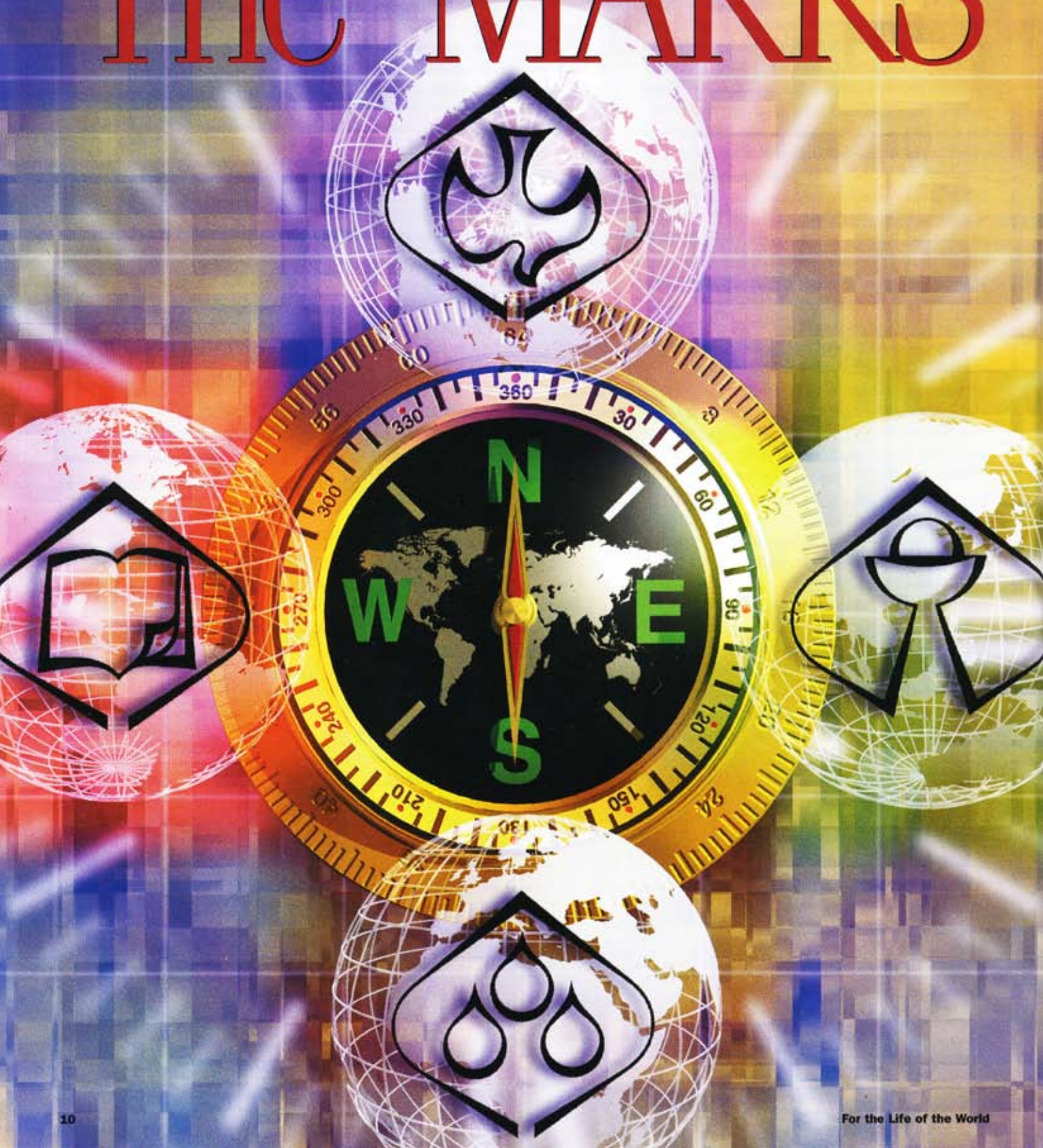
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# The "MARKS"





# of the Church

By the Rev. Dr. Kurt E. Marquart

**W**hy does the Church need “marks,” and what are they? St. Paul says “concerning Christ and the church”: “This is a great mystery” (Eph. 5:32). Comments Luther: “. . . this is a great mystery, to be apprehended by faith. It is not visible or tangible; therefore it is a sacrament, that is, something secret, a mystery, invisible, hidden” (*Luther’s Works* 41:164).

The Church is the mystical body of Christ, consisting of all who are joined to Him by God-given faith. It is the Holy Temple growing upon the foundation of

the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20, 21). Such things cannot be seen by our eyes at present. We see no one Holy Church of Christ, believers who “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:14). Instead we see various factions and everywhere sinners like us. By faith, we know that we are justified, pure, holy, spotless before God for the sake of Christ, but we certainly see no such thing anywhere on earth, in this life. The Church then is an article of faith, not of sight. As we say in the Creed: “**I believe one** holy Christian Church.” Not: “I see one holy Christian Church.” What we see is in fact a churning mass of religious organizations, bureaucracies, activities, and individuals, of very “uneven quality,” to use that favorite phrase of book reviewers. Yet within this mass, we believe the one Holy Church to be hidden—hidden so deeply that “no human reason can find her, even if it were to put on all spectacles” (Luther).

That’s why the Church needs identifying signs or “marks”—otherwise we’d be at the mercy of any and every fanatical delusion calling itself “Christian.” Here is the classical “marks” language of the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*:

“However, the church is not only an association of external [things] and rites like other civic organizations, but it is principally an association of faith and the Holy Spirit in the hearts of per-

sons. It nevertheless has its external marks so that it can be recognized, namely, the pure teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments in harmony with the gospel of Christ” (Arts. VII and VIII, 5, Kolb-Wengert, p. 174). Or:

“Nor indeed are we dreaming about some platonic republic . . . Instead, we teach that this church truly exists, consisting of true believing and righteous people scattered through the entire world. And we add its marks: the pure teaching of the gospel and the sacraments” (par. 20, p. 177).

In other words, only God sees who is really in the Church, for only He can see the faith of the heart. **We can be sure where the Church** is by attending to her marks. Where the Gospel is purely preached and the sacraments are rightly, that is biblically, administered, there the Church comes to its true, proper, and legitimate expression. The more the preaching and sacraments in a given church deviate from the biblical truth, the less certain we can be of the Church’s presence there. So long as enough of the Gospel

remains for the creation and sustenance of faith, Christians, that is the Church, will exist within such a body; but a body that mixes the Gospel with contrary doctrine, that is, with error and falsehood, is a conglomerate of Zion and Babylon, and lacks the divine-

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ly-willed orthodox (right-teaching) character of the Church (see Rom. 16:17).

But why preaching and the sacraments? Because only faith makes one a member of Christ and thus of His Church, and only the Gospel can create that faith. Preaching and the sacraments are simply the various forms of the one Gospel which alone gives life and salvation. See, for instance, Rom. 1:16 and 10:17. This is the evangelical, biblical understanding of the matter. By contrast, others want to identify the Church by all sorts of human devices and traditions, such as grandiose ceremonies and rituals, or allegedly divinely-instituted church bureaucracies and chains-of-command, especially the so-called "apostolic succession," that is, the allegedly unbroken historical line of ordinations running all the way from the apostles to present-day bishops. All such pomp and circumstance are trivial by comparison with the real "apostolic succession": faithfulness to apostolic doctrine. An "episcopate" that throws biblical authority and basic Christian morality to the winds, and, contrary to the express apostolic prohibition, purports to ordain women into the office of the Gospel ministry, is unapostolic and has no meaningful claims to "apostolic succession." Mere outward, historical ties to ancient places and churches do not count (1 John 2:19). Only faithfulness to the truth counts. After all, a fossil of a fish looks remarkably like a fish, and its stone particles stand in full "anatomical succession" to the particles of the fish—but the thing hasn't been a fish for a long time!

Only the Lord's life-giving words of truth create saving faith (St. Jn. 6:63, 68; 8:31, 32). Every other teaching contradicts and attacks faith. Therefore the Lord—far from urging His followers to treat contradictory teachings with "mutual respect,"—in fact warns earnestly against false prophets (Mt. 7:15; 24:11, 24)! Only His Word gives life, and therefore only His Word has any rights in the Church. The apostles likewise allow no contradiction to the one evangelical truth (Acts 2:42; Gal. 1:6-9; Tit. 3:10; etc.).

Perhaps the recent terrorist attacks on New York and Wash-

ington can serve to illustrate the point. Everyone is, of course, (rightly) horrified at these atrocities, and churches and churchmen are publicly aghast. Yet in their own domain these churches and churchmen smile benignly—not to say inanely—at the ghastliest spiritual atrocities! Once the FBI have identified the perpetrators of the recent mass-murders, what should we then expect? Would it be a wine-and-cheese reception at which President Bush and the terrorists discuss their differences in the spirit of good-will and "mutual respect"? Surely not even the silliest sentimentalist would expect that! Yet that is the order of the day in the surreal world of "ecumenical" decorum, where every heresy is a legitimate "point of view," and every false prophet a "dear brother in Christ"!

The marks of the Church mean that we are to be guided by faith, not by sight, in dealing with the Church. In the Church, it is above all truth and truth alone that counts—not numbers or prestige or pleasant relations. Where the Gospel is purely preached and the sacraments are rightly administered, there Christ's Church is rightly and properly represented. Any contradiction of the Savior's pure Voice and teaching (St. Jn. 10, "My sheep hear My voice") misleads and **misrepresents the Church, and therefore cannot** be granted any spiritual rights or legitimacy by any church wishing to be "apostolic." Christ's truth unites and divides. Where the priority of His Gospel truth and agreement in it are not valued, it is no use prattling much about "missions," or human, bureaucratic togetherness and "love." It is all a sham. To overlook and make light of false doctrine is to compromise and flirt with the Arch-Terrorist, who seeks to deceive and destroy with his lies (Jn. 8:44; 2 Thess. 2:7ff.). But

unlike the commercial towers of New York or Washington's Pentagon, Christ's Holy Church is so firmly founded on the Divine Rock, that the very gates of hell shall not prevail against her (Mt. 16:18). Thanks be to God!

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