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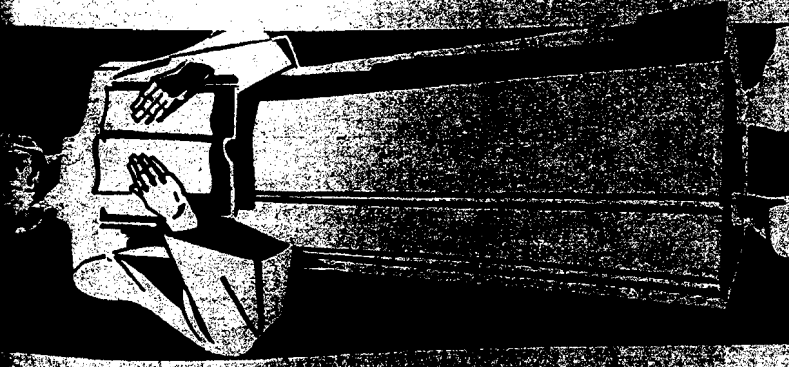
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This Issue

AFTER THE VARIOUS articles began to come in for publication in a somewhat indiscriminate way, a very clear pattern nevertheless developed. Professor Regin Prenter, a former chairman of the LWF's theological commission, has contributed an article clarifying the Lutheran doctrine of the church especially for the present day. Pastor Hans-Lutz Poetsch, the regular speaker on the German Lutheran Hour, describes the struggles of confessional Lutheranism on the continent. Only the future will tell whether these are the last sparks of a dying church or the seeds of a new birth. Dr. Ralph Moellering lays down several principles for the church in a time of revolution. Two articles on the practice of liturgies in the church take differing slants. Pastor Reinhart Trautmann questions the sanctity of the forms most frequently used. Pastor Reinhard Mumm, also a German pastor, gives a very favorable review of the *Worship Supplement*. Father Harvey J. McSorley, a Luther scholar in the Church of Rome, interprets Luther's concept of the church in such a way as to make it compatible to current Roman Catholic theology. William Meyer of our faculty has some pertinent remarks on whether original languages are really guarantees in understanding the Bible. Most contemporary articles on the church are negative. Fortunately all of these contributions are positive and are therefore also eminently practical.

What Does It Mean Today To Be The Church?

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THE PURELY DOGMATIC QUESTION, what the church is, appears to be answered with comparative ease within the Reformation framework. The Reformers gave a thoroughly researched answer to this question in their dialog with the papal church. One is reminded for instance of Luther's "Von den Konziliis und Kirchen." Also the confessional writings, especially the Augsburg Confession, have their specific articles on the church, which clearly describe the essence and the functions of the church according to evangelical doctrine.

But is the question, what the church is, at all to be posed as a purely dogmatic question? The doctrine of the church distinguishes itself in its content from other dogmatic articles in that the teaching church has itself as the object in ecclesiology.

When the evangelical church defines a pure doctrine of the church, it puts itself to the test. It must ask itself, as soon as the pure doctrine of the church is put into practice, "To what extent does she as the evangelical church correspond in fact to its own teaching regarding the church?" It is indeed entirely possible that a church which calls itself evangelical openly contradicts in practice its evangelical doctrine regarding the church. Therefore the true doctrine concerning the church, which is simply a part of the essence of ecclesiology, can never be a so-called "pure dogmatics". The doctrine of the church always involves at the same time church ethics and church law. When we develop our evangelical doctrine concerning the church we are asked whether we are today ethically and legally "church" in that sense, or whether we can and want to be that.

We must remember that the world in which the evangelical church is and must be church today is a different world from that late medieval Christendom in which the reformers established their confession regarding the church. The modern world is not "a Christian world". This does not mean that it has now already become a "pagan" world. On the contrary! It is—here I am actually thinking of our West European world—a world, which in its cultural heritage, in its institutions, and in its moral and legal principles is still deeply influenced by Christianity. But now the decisive issue is that Christianity remains only as a cultural heritage, and the church no longer sets the tone in the public life of the people. It has become one "private society of religion" among other private societies of religion. The church's former high position is now only

historical, and no longer remains grounded in the earlier principle. Society as such has become religionless, filled only with multi-private societies of religion. Now the state stands above all religious and confessional differences. Its constitution is democratic. The government in the old sense of the word has passed and can no longer exist.

Then one might be led to ask if it is more difficult to be the church in our secularized world than it was in the medieval world with a Christian veneer. This question should not be answered too hastily as self-evident. It would no doubt be tempting to affirm unanimously the secularization of the church from the Lutheran viewpoint. The Lutheran emphasis on the doctrine of the two kingdoms and the sharp distinction between Law and Gospel seem to provide the basis to legitimize the desecularization and sanctification (*Verkirchlichung*) of evangelical Christendom. The separation of the two kingdoms naturally brings in its train the autonomy of both the secular and the ecclesiastical life. Secularization appears to be the logical consequence of that well known teaching of the two kingdoms. Furthermore, after this secularization has been carried out and the church has consequently been unburdened of an entire series of mundane and semi-mundane tasks, it is thereby simultaneously freed for the pure proclamation of the Gospel as its sole and proper task. After all, the accomplishment of this was hindered especially through the very legality of all those mundane tasks. It seems only logical that this should occur.

But let there be caution! Especially today we must earnestly consider whether these traditional Lutheran dogmas at our disposal do not represent also an almost irresistible temptation for the Evangelical Lutheran Church at present, to contradict in practice its own genuine doctrine of the church instead of actively corresponding to it in its existence.

We must likewise caution against the too easy evangelical legitimization of the *status quo* of the evangelical churches in the modern world. To distinguish between the external "empirical" church as a sociological entity on the one hand from the "true" church as an object of faith on the other hand must likewise be cautioned against. The church as an established institution is indeed a sociological entity and its external constitution is in no wise an object of faith in the same sense as in its inner spiritual essence. But once more: caution is imperative! The church, which we believe and confess as the holy church, as the people of God, is none other than the so-called empirical church. She is a sociological entity. She it is which has and must have an external constitution. Therefore, one can and must distinguish between the external constitution as such from the inner fellowship of the believers. But one cannot and may not separate the external, constituted church from the inner, purely spiritual church. For through this latter improper

distinction, the evangelical church withdraws itself from the testing of its actually being the church it professes doctrinally to be. It takes flight then from its own empirical character into a supposed superempirical church, whose reality is dependent on faith.

Thus, the question: What does it mean today to be church? must be rephrased in the following manner to be adequate: To what extent does the actual character of the church, whose responsible members, clergy and laity, we ourselves are, correspond to the doctrine which it is obliged to teach concerning itself as church? The question is hereby of double thrust. It is on the one hand a dogmatic question: How are we as an evangelical church to teach concerning the church we profess to be? On the other hand it is also an ethical and legal one: Are we, can we, and do we actually wish to be precisely that church which our dogmatics designates as the true church?

The matter under consideration then is of concretizing and actualizing the traditional dogmatic teaching regarding the "marks of the church" in ethics and church law.

According to evangelical doctrine the church is the people of God. The gracious God has chosen and called the church by the Gospel out of the world into His fellowship under the royal and priestly Lordship of Jesus Christ. Because this gracious call of God occurs through the promise of His Gospel, it is a holy church. Its holiness is gained through the faith as she gratefully accepts God's predestinating call. This church, this believing people of God under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, now exists in the world through the public confession of its faith. This Christian faith, the faith of the Christian people of God in its acceptance of the predestinating gracious call of God is a confessing faith which declares itself publicly before the world.

Although the Christian faith is indeed hidden in its acceptance of the predestinating call of God—God alone knows them that are His!—yet it cannot be silent in its hiddenness. It must speak, and while it speaks the praise of the Lord of the church with its mouth, it must also accompany and confirm the words of its mouth with the deed of its hands. Through the confession by the people of God which is made by all members of this people together, the church is recognizable in the world as the holy people of God. As a holy people it is indeed hidden before the world, for its holiness is not of its own doing but by the holiness of Jesus Christ which she receives through faith in the Gospel as her own. Thus the church's holiness by faith remains deeply hidden under the remaining sin of all the individual members of the people of God. Precisely as the holy church of sinners is this people of God constantly exposed to the mockery of the world. But the holy church is nevertheless recognizable by the confession of its faith before the world. It should be so recognizable that the world can persecute it where and when it wishes. For the confession

of the church in word and deed puts it, so to say, within the reach of the enemies. It cannot flee from the grasp of the persecutors into the safe unseizability of the so-called *ecclesia invisibilis*. The audible word and the visible word of the confession of its faith makes it unfailingly recognizable in and before the world. The existence of the church, which believes and teaches that it is the hidden, holy church, is one of such an unmistakable character by virtue of its obligation to confess its faith. Through this obligation its catholicity comes into evidence. It is this obligation of the church to its own nature through the unmistakable character of its confession in word and deed which is expressed in the doctrine of the marks of the church, the *notae ecclesiae*.

This did not appear with sufficient clarity in the early ecclesiological expressions of Luther in, for instance, "Von dem Papsttum zu Rom." In this book Luther says: "The signs, by which one can externally observe, where the church itself is in the world, are baptism, holy communion, and the Gospel, and not Rome, or this or that place." To this corresponds Article VII of the Augsburg Confession: ". . . one holy Christian church . . ., which is the gathering of all believers, among whom the Gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered in accordance with the Gospel." Here the marks of the church can be interpreted purely institutionally. Wherever a pastor actually functions in the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments, there a believing congregation must also be found. This means that one can ascribe invisibility to the believing people of God and visibility to the institution of the office. Such an institutionalized interpretation of the doctrine of the *notae ecclesiae* is in conformity with a national church and its corresponding national-church ideology. The state which is eminently visible provides for the institution of the church to which also the office of the ministry belongs. Then the truth or result of the function of the institution of the spiritual office, the real, true church of the believers, disappears into spiritual invisibility behind the imposing visibility of the institutionalized state church. The fellowship of the believers does not come into view. It has no share in the external recognizability of the church, which emerges through the *notae ecclesiae*.

Later expressions of Luther are different regarding the marks of the church. In his "Von den Konziliis und Kirchen" the marks of the church are not ascribed to the office as such but to the entire congregation and are interpreted as its confession. This is true also of those marks which are most intimately bound with the function of the office: the Gospel, baptism, holy communion, the absolution, and the calling of the servants of the Word. This becomes especially clear and dutifully evident in his work, "Von den Konziliis und Kirchen". "Where you hear such Word or see it preached, believed, confessed, and acted according to, there have no doubt, that a true

ecclesia sancta catholica, a Christian, holy people must surely be there, even if their number is very small." Here one sees how the institutionalized interpretation of the *nota* of the Gospel begins to expand. The verb *predigen*—which designates the function of the office is explained by the three verbs: *glauben*, *bekeimen*, and *danach tun*. This places the entire people of God under the Gospel. This is also well expressed in the following sentence of Luther: "For God's Word cannot be without God's people, again God's people cannot be without God's Word; who would want to preach or hear it preached, if none of the people of God were present? and what could or would God's people believe, if God's Word were not there?" (*Münchener Ausgabe*, pp. 114). Again on baptism: "Secondly, one recognizes God's people or the Christian, holy people by the holy sacrament of baptism, where it is rightly taught according to Christ's command, believed, and used" (p. 115). By use of the verbs, *geglaubt* und *gebraucht*, to explain the function of the Gospel, the people are included in the action of baptism as *notae ecclesiae*. For, as we read further, ". . . baptism does not belong to the baptizer, nor is given to him, but to the one who is baptized, for whom God has instituted and given it, just as the Word of God is not the preacher's (except that he also wants to hear and believe), but to the disciple, who hears it and believes, to him it is given." The same shift of emphasis from the institution of the office ("in which the holy sacraments are administered in accordance with the Gospel", *function of the office!*) to the fellowship of the people again becomes clear when holy communion is discussed: "Thirdly, one recognizes the people of God for a Christian, holy people by the holy sacrament of the altar, where it is rightly administered according to Christ's institution, believed, and received; for it is also a public sign and a precious means of salvation, given by Christ as a bequest, by which His people are hallowed that they should practice and publicly confess, that they are Christians, as they do in the case of the Word and baptism" (p.p. 115f). Here it becomes exceedingly clear that Word and Sacrament are not exclusively functions of the office as a mere preached word or a mere administered sacrament but are the marks of the church as the Word that is preached and believed and witnessed in the confession and in deed, and the sacrament as a sacrament administered, believed, practiced, and thereby witnessed. The Word and Sacrament are thus not primarily bound up with the office which administers them, but primarily with the people who receive and give testimony to them. "The Word of God is not the preacher's (except that he himself wishes to hear and believe), but it belongs to the disciple, who hears and believes."

It is no wonder that the fourth and fifth signs, the keys and the election of church officers, are interpreted in the same manner. ". . . for where God's people are not, there the keys are not, and where the keys are not, there God's people are not; for Christ has

left them as a bequest, that there should be a public mark and means of salvation, by which the Holy Spirit (through the merit of Christ's death) again hallows the fallen sinners, and that the Christians should thereby confess, that they are a holy people under Christ in this world . . ." (p. 117). "Wherever you see therefore such offices or office holders, there you may know, that surely a holy, Christian people must be present, for the church cannot be without such bishops, pastors, preachers, priests, and again, it cannot be without the church, they must be side by side" (p. 125).

The last two *notae* prayer and the Holy Cross, are very particularly signs of the confession of the people who receive the Gospel in faith. "Seventhly, one recognizes the holy Christian people outwardly by this means of healing, the Holy Cross, under which it must suffer every misfortune and persecution, all manner of tribulation and evil (as the Lord's Prayer prays) at the hands of the devil, the world, and the flesh, must mourn inwardly, be embarrassed, be frightened, be outwardly poor, despised, sick, and weak, in order that it might be like unto its Head Christ, and the cause of all must be this alone, that it holds fast to Christ and God's Word and thus suffers for the sake of Christ, Matthew 5: 'Blessed are they who are persecuted for my sake'" (p. 125).

Thus all seven *notae ecclesiae* in "Von den Konziliis und Kirchen" are interpreted as necessary outward forms of the confession of the faith in the Gospel which are offered in Word and Sacrament. The one-sided, institutionalized emphasis upon the Word without faith, the office without the congregation, the 'being-preached-at' without the confession of the faith in the Word, in deed, and in suffering, is excluded here from the start. It is in this spirit that we must attempt today to make the doctrine of the marks of the church concrete and actual in ethics and church law.

But how is it possible today to be the church of the Gospel in this sense? Here our concern is not exclusively regarding the pure doctrine of the pastors in the pulpits but also regards the confession of the faith of the entire congregation in word and deed.

What does this imply? This means that the purity of doctrine, the Gospel to be preached to the people in the service can never be assured by legislation over doctrine. Self-evidently I am not maintaining that no order, thus no law, can be brought to bear in the area of proclamation. There is in the church truly a "law of grace". The pastor must make a vow at his ordination. There must be some kind of ecclesiastical board before which he makes this vow. The board on its part through the acceptance of the vow likewise takes upon itself the co-responsibility for its fulfillment. Let us call this board or authority by the traditional name "bishop." The co-responsibility of the bishop for the conduct in office of those ordained under him does not mean, certainly not in the first instance, that he is to be interested as a spiritual police chief only in the eventual transgressions of the

vow and to correct and punish them in some manner. Doctrinal discipline is then not the primary method by which the bishop actively assumes the above named co-responsibility. His co-responsibility is primarily a positive one. He is the helper, teacher, counsellor, pastor, and brother in relation to those ordained under him. And only in the measure that he has been able to exercise this positive co-responsibility actively will he be able to apply the right discipline in the case of a doctrinal conflict. Where order and law are valid, it must also be possible to exercise discipline. But since the Gospel is not a law, and the pure proclamation of the Gospel accordingly not an obedience under the law but a gift of grace—as it must become evident in the ordination prayer—this discipline cannot be carried out in a legalistic manner.

But what does it mean to carry out an evangelical discipline? This means that the bishop—or the ecclesiastical court eventually called together by him—will not seek to decide the matter exclusively with the aid of some church law, i.e. the confessional writings interpreted legalistically. Indeed, the confession of the church is the norm according to which churchly proclamation must be evaluated. But in the word confession one must not understand primarily a law of doctrine put into writing but the evangelical confession orally delivered by the congregation in its act of worship. In its content this living confession is self-evidently identical with the confessional writing because both express the truth of the one Gospel as it is expressed in Holy Scripture. But in their form they are different. The living confession is the confession of the church *in actu* while the confessional writings are the record and the explication of the content of the living confession. To apply doctrinal discipline evangelically then would mean, to let the matter be decided in the local congregation through the mutual worshipful confession of the bishop and the local church. This is then in contrast to all legalistic procedure in which the matter is left to a standing court outside the local congregation which judges according to a valid law of doctrine. The heretic, should he truly be a heretic and not merely an opponent or critic of some traditional theology, must be so convinced that he himself understands that he no longer shares, nor can share the confession of the church, and therefore must take leave from the pulpit of his own accord.

Of course many will cry out, "That is a Utopia! We do not have such bishops and such congregations. The bishops are not theologically trustworthy, and the congregations are not at all mature enough for such responsibility." So be it! If we are not sufficiently mature to carry out such evangelical doctrinal discipline neither are the bishops nor the laymen in the congregation. Is it then evident that we must necessarily apply such discipline legalistically? Dare we actually ever do this? And if we assert this, are we then actually willing to be the church in accord with our own doctrine of the

church? Perhaps we desire it, but unfortunately we cannot attain it. Let us say that we are members of a *Volkskirche* supported by the state. Will the state give further support to a church which in this manner manifests its character as church? Will it be able to tolerate an evangelically applied doctrinal discipline? The pastors in such a church are officers of the state, who cannot or may not be deposed in this "private" matter. As an officer of the state an evangelical pastor practically cannot be deposed for false doctrine. Neither does it occur any longer in practice, although the solemn ordination vow is still maintained—as a beautiful, traditional fiction. Is it possible to be an evangelical church in such a church-state relationship, if the important matter is to spread the Gospel, the first mark of the church, in the world in a truly unmistakable manner? What shall we say to this? Are we then an evangelical church in accord with our doctrine of the church, or have we become something entirely different from what our doctrine demands of us?

Can this become different? As I see it, the renewal of the evangelical church never begins with legalistic measures applied by a higher authority. It will not suffice to call for stricter discipline. If so, who shall exercise it? Will it be done under the conditions actually existing in our church today? Certainly one cannot expect everything from the theologians. I am here thinking of the professors of theology. They are teachers of the church. Certainly! But they will not become better theologians. The congregations will sooner improve in whose midst they receive the means of grace and with whom they unite in person to confess their faith. It must begin in the congregations—I mean in the worshipping congregations. Here pastors and lay people must together knock at the door, pray, and seek. And this they can do with great confidence and in joyful hope, because the God of the Gospel is gracious and the Holy Spirit is stronger and wiser than all men. One can, therefore, not begin anywhere but in the local worshipping congregation. There the renewal must begin. Of course, this can bring conflicts with it. But then we should perhaps for a moment think of the seventh mark of the church in "Von den Konziliis und Kirchen".

How does the second mark, baptism relate to this? If baptism is also to be a confession, can we then maintain our present practice of infant baptism? Is not infant baptism the most institutionalized part of our entire church life? I am thinking of the circumstances in my own church where we have received such a beautiful and rich tradition in the doctrine of baptism from the Grundtvig movement. But the practice appears somewhat different. One "makes reservation" for baptism with the church warden as one would order other merchandise. One is entitled to it because one is a "paying member" of the *Volkskirche*. What happens then if a naive pastor wants to instruct the parents more diligently regarding their obligation? What happens if he, as Pastor Husum, requires that the parents must

attend the services regularly and bring their child to the same in order to baptize the child? The pastor must then be prepared to be compelled to perform the baptism in spite of his condition. For the members of the *Volkskirche* are entitled unconditionally to the so-called "services" by the "functionaries" of the church. Under such circumstances how can baptism be a mark of the church? There is, of course, a popular infant baptism theology, which sees an especially impressive proclamation of the unconditional grace of God precisely in the indiscriminate administration of baptism to all, good and evil, believers and unbelievers, churched and unchurchd. Is it the precious grace of God or the cheap grace of the state which is proclaimed in this manner? Does not the precious grace in baptism intend to assure the baptized of eternal salvation? Can this genuine blessing of baptism be preserved and strengthened without the Gospel, without faith, without holy communion, without the fellowship of the saints? Can the gift of baptism be given to those, who in their freedom say "no thanks!" precisely to the Gospel, to faith, to holy communion, to the fellowship of the saints, insofar as it can be known by men?

The two marks of the church which we have discussed so far, Gospel and baptism, unite in the mark of the office. For although, as Luther emphasized in "Von den Konziliis und Kirchen", neither the Gospel nor baptism is the property of the office bearer since they have been given to all the people, the office is nevertheless responsible for the proclamation of the Gospel and for the administration of the sacraments. Without the office the Gospel and the sacraments cannot become evident as divine institutions, as the gifts which have been offered by Christ Himself through His messengers.

We are here then concerned with the apostolic character of the ecclesiastical office. The ordination of women to the apostolic office, considered by itself, may appear as something wholly insignificant. "Why can a woman not proclaim the pure Gospel and administer the sacraments according to Christ's institution? Exegetically the question seems not wholly clear. Is there any point in raising protests against it? And can one truly find theologically sound bases for such a protest?" This matter offers questions enough which have to be considered. But one thing seems clear to me. The justification of the departure from the common church tradition is here usually bound up with a disregard of the apostolic character of the office and the Gospel and with a corresponding avoidance of public opinion and the wish of the political majority. At least this was the case in my church. Therefore this innovation places us before the question as to whether we as the church are still prepared to assert the apostolic character of the office today. For by yielding to the pressure of public opinion and the political majority in a point, be it as insignificant as possible, we reveal a new attitude regarding the authority and the responsibility of the office. The adherence to the traditions which Luther formulates in "Von den Konziliis und Kirchen" in this man-

ner: "But it is true, that in this matter the Holy Ghost has excluded women, children, and incompetent people and has chosen only competent male persons for this (except in case of need)", can perhaps be the required testimony for the apostolic character of the office in this situation.

Thus the observations which we have made as we have tried to concretize and actualize the evangelical doctrine of the marks of the church in ethics and church law all point in the same direction. They are all directed to the local worshipping congregation in which the apostolic office and the baptized, believing people are united in the proclamation and in the response of the distribution and in the receiving of the sacrament. Only in the new experience of the spiritual unity of office and congregation in every individual worshipping congregation should the source of a renewal of the church be sought, by which we might be permitted to learn in an unexpected manner how to be a church today, as an undeserved gift of God.

And here emerges the mark which we have not so far mentioned, holy communion. The unity between clergy and laity—and the original meaning must be given to the word "laity": royal and priestly member of the people of God!—is indeed manifested in holy communion as nowhere else. Martin Luther fought a hard battle in the area of doctrine for the proper understanding of the gift of the sacrament. But in worship practice his followers succeeded only in a very incomplete manner to safeguard the proper position for holy communion. Luther himself always emphasized that the preaching of the Gospel and the celebration of holy communion are inseparably related to each other. But the Lutheran churches first became preaching churches and celebration of holy communion declined. So was the case also to an even higher degree in the Reformed churches. As a consequence of this in clergy centered churches, the laity of the church were more or less condemned to silence and passivity. But the Holy Supper finds its proper place anew—precisely as communion table, not as "private mass"—there pastors and laity will also need to find their relation to each other in a new manner.

In order to sum up briefly what I have said, "to be a church" means to be a vitally worshipping congregation. There, in the service where the Gospel is purely proclaimed and the people gather every Sunday about the table of the Lord, there the people of God come into view. There the church becomes visible to the world. There it also takes the strength to live as the church in the world and for the world.

In the course of time this obviously cannot happen without all kinds of conflict. There are unavoidable powers in the world which resist the Gospel. These can even hide behind public opinion and behind political majorities. But precisely when the church receives the power to resist such world powers, it lives for the world, it serves the world. Conversely, it betrays the world if it yields to such powers

without resistance. This is the temptation of the evangelical church in the modern world in which it has entirely lost every external power and all official influence. The church today then has fallen into the fortunate and promising situation of being thrown back solely upon the promises of its Lord. This is the confident, brave, joyful "solely" in which the church today, as always, can and wants to be church. Indeed, then it always and actually continues to be the church through the grace of its Lord.