

Doctrine of the Church: Historical Theology

We are studying the doctrine of the Church. We have looked at the biblical pictures pertaining to the nature of the Church—what the Church is—and now we are working our way through some samples of the historical theology of the Church. We have looked at Cyprian's statements. We looked at the Constantinopolitan Creed, which described the Church with adjectives like holy, catholic, and apostolic. We also looked at some of Augustine's teachings, and now we will discuss Pope Bonifas and the famous Roman statement from 1302: "*unum sanctum*," which means one holy Church. (This expanded the powers of the Roman Catholic Church.) We are obliged by the faith to believe and hold, and we do firmly believe and sincerely confess, that there is one holy catholic and apostolic Church, and that outside this Church there is neither salvation nor remission of sins. Of this one-and-only Church, there is one body and one head, namely Christ. Christ's vicar is Peter and Peter's successor. (This is a knock on the Greek Church, of course.) Therefore, if the Greeks or others say that they were not committed to Peter and his successors, they confess that they are not of Christ's sheep. For the Lord says in John, "There is one fold and one shepherd."

We learn from the words of the Gospel that in this Church and in her power are two swords, the spiritual and the temporal. For when the apostles said, "Behold here"—that is, in the Church, since it was the apostles who spoke—"are two swords. The Lord did not reply, 'It is too much,' but he said, 'It is enough.'" Here is an important statement around the year 1300 that consolidates the powers of the Roman Catholic Church. Notice "Catholic" is capitalized in that third line. There is a slam against the Greeks who rejected the Roman Pope. They are not a Church according to Bonifas and the Roman Catholic tradition. The quotation from John is certainly not talking about the Roman Catholic Church at that time, but the true believers of Christ, the people of God. The other biblical reference is a wild allegorization of the Gospels when Peter talked about the two swords. When the apostles talked about the two swords, we are not talking about the Church's spiritual powers and temporal powers. By the way, you know what is meant by "spiritual powers." "Temporal powers" means the Church has authority over the civil government and civil rulers, which certainly is not the Bible's teaching either. But the Roman Catholic Church continued to expand its powers even in that realm. That is an important document in the history of the doctrine of the Church. John Wicliffe and John Huss are what we call "performers." Do you remember that Martin Luther did his church door thing in 1517? We are talking about almost 200 years before that. Wicliffe was studying his Bible in Great Britain. He is famous, of course, for his translation of the Bible into English. The Church, he said, is the assembly of all those predestined to salvation. Here a break with Rome is implied because he is talking about the true people of God. He is not defining the Church institutionally as do those who acknowledge the Roman Church as their mother. He is defining the Church theologically as the number of the predestined.

John Huss does a similar thing: "Two righteous persons congregated together in Christ's name constitute, with Christ as the head, a particular holy Church. But the holy catholic, that is, universal Church, is a totality of all the predestinate [those who are predestined] present, past, and future." Words such as these are potentially what got Huss burned at the stake by the Roman Catholic Church at the counsel of Constance. He was lied to. He was guaranteed safe conduct, and then that was revoked and he was burned because he would not recant. When asked how it is right for the true Church to lie, the answer was given that "a word given to heretics is not binding." So, Luther later feared for his life when he was given safe conduct for the diet of worms.

A Lutheran standard, this time, was the Augsburg Confession. In 1530, the Reformation was in full swing and the Lutherans saw a need to codify, to put into writing, some of their gains. They wanted to put down in writing some of their points of agreement, that there might be agreement and a basis for

teaching. When the Reformation came, when Luther, Calvin, and others who followed broke with Rome, they did so in the name of the Bible's teaching. And some good came about, but also a great weakness was immediately exposed. That is, once they broke with the antiquity and the unanimity of Rome, they had a problem of subjectivism. In fact, Rome said, "If you break with the holy mother Church, you will open up Pandora's box of sects and isms and heresies." You know what, Rome was right. I am a protestant, and I am thankful for Luther. They needed to do what they did, but there is a problem of subjectivism inherent in Protestantism. The way to overcome it is by forming articles of belief, confessions of faith, and creeds. We need to say what we believe in order to distinguish our church from the cult down the street. We need to at least have a statement of faith.

Anyway, the reformers, both Luther and Calvin, saw a need to do that in the Augsburg Confession. The Lutherans said, among other things, "It is also taught among us that one holy Christian Church will be and remain forever. This is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity, and the holy sacraments [the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper] are administered according to the Gospel."—Notice the place of the Word of God here. It sits in judgment. It even defines what the ordinances are.—"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. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian Church that ceremonies instituted by men should be observed uniformly in all places." It is as Paul says in Ephesians 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." This is outstanding for more than one reason. It is noteworthy. The Church is now defined as the assembly of believers. The Gospel is given a prominent place. It is given a place in defining the Church. Indeed, as we shall see, the most important mark of the Church is the pure preaching of the Word. If that mark is not present, there is no Church at all—not the true Christian Church.

Notice also that they are not calling for complete uniformity as far as every church service goes. Though they acknowledge that human beings have to devise certain ceremonies, the Lord has not given us an inspired church service in the Bible. This group of believers in this one country may do it differently than a group of believers in another country or even in the same country or the same city. It depends on various factors. The Word, the Gospel, and the ordinances are not negotiable. But those things God has left free, it says, "It is not necessary for the true unity of the Church that ceremonies instituted by men should be observed uniformly in all places." I think that is rather honest. I have been with different groups of believers over my pilgrimage and sometimes the Christians have thought that their church service was divinely commanded. I found that to be somewhat presumptuous and naïve, especially when different groups contradicted each other. I think we are called on to have a more humble attitude than that.

Article 8 of the Augsburg Confession says, "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. Accordingly, the Donatists, and all others who hold contrary views, are condemned." The reference to the Donatists is to those who separate from the believing Church.

I have been asked a very good question in regard to Augustine's statement about mixed company. Here it comes up again, and it admits that the Church is not pure. They are claiming that no local Lutheran church is 100 percent believers, at least the average one is not. How is that different from the words I

read in 2 Corinthians 6? “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.” How is that different from union between believers and unbelievers? There is a big difference. The 2 Corinthians 6 passage is talking against idolatry. It is talking about willfully entering into an ecclesiastical union with a group of people or institution that stands against God’s Word and principles in terms of its teachings and so forth. It is not saying to only associate with true, perfect Christians. You are not going to find perfect Christians. Even if you start out with a core group of only dedicated believers, if you grow and reach out, you are going to end up with people you are not certain about and even some people who are not believers at all. So, there is a difference in a church that stands for the Gospel. According to Article 7, that is obviously what they are doing. They have the true Gospel. They are not mixing belief and unbelief. It is not a church that is so liberal in its teachings that the Gospel is hidden. No, it is a Gospel Church. It is a Bible believing church. But within that framework, they are acknowledging they are not going to achieve 100 percent membership of spotless Christians. In fact, there are hypocrites. Judas fooled the other disciples. Do you think he would not have fooled you? Every pastor is fooled by false Christians, even open sinners. Now church discipline comes into effect here, and we will talk about that as we move along, but the Lutheran statement seems to me to be very honest.

Here is a definition for Donatism and Donitists. These were followers of a man named Donatus in early church history who ended up seceding or pulling away from other Christians. It had to do with persecutions in North Africa. Certain Christians, under pressure, gave up their Bibles and even denied Christ in order to not go under the sword or be offered in flames. When the persecution was over, there were always problems. Let us say, for example, that your uncle stood for Christ and he lost his life. Your friend’s uncle had to say he was not sure if he was a Christian in order to live. How do you sort all of this out? Do you let them repent and bring them back in? The church divided over things like that.

Donatus led a party that thought itself to be pure, and it formed a division in the body of Christ. Also, there was a notion that persons who were contaminated should not perform spiritual ministries. If the bishop or pastor handed over his Bible, some people said, “He is not going to be my pastor anymore. Any baptisms he performed are invalid.” You see, that is how it went. So, the pure group thought they could trace their ministries to those who never gave in. However, there were different and mixed motives during the persecution of the Church. Some of the church leaders said, “I am going to stand and fight even if it means my blood.” Others said, and I do not know the wisdom on this, “I think it is the Lord dealing differently with different people.” Still others said, “Look, if we all go down here, there will be no leaders left. The Lord is leading me to take a group of people into exile.” I am not saying they were cowards either. They could have been right in saying, “These people are going to need a pastor over here. I am going to go with them.” Regarding the glory-hunters, as the man who taught me church history said, “If you think about it, it is kind of easier to go out in the flame of glory and die than it is to put up with all the problems in the world.” In that way, it is easy to be a martyr. You know you get rid of all your problems in a hurry and immediately enter glory.

So Donatism had to do especially with that latter idea that they had a pure ministry, and they rejected those who had a so-called contaminated ministry. If the man who led you to the Lord, the person who gave the Gospel to you, turned out to be a hypocrite, they thought, “Uh oh, I am not saved.” No, that is not true. You are saved by Christ. You are saved by the Gospel. You would have to keep track of the person who led you to Christ all your life. Well, in fact, you do not have to do this. Sometimes our spiritual giants fall, but that does not put our salvation in jeopardy because our salvation does not depend on them. It has been known in Church history, even in our own country in this century, that some preachers who were unsaved men preached the true Gospel of Jesus Christ and people were saved. There is no question about it. We know it happens because that preacher is saved sometime later. It is

the Gospel that saves. Of course we are happy to have saved preachers, but that other thing has been known to happen. Furthermore, you can think you are a Christian and not be. Sometimes God is merciful and saves those people.

The Scots Confession is a Reformed document from Scotland, of course, in 1560. The Scottish word for church is “Kirk.” That is the word that recurs in this document. Article 16 says, “As we believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost...” By the way, compare the language here about Rome to what Bonifas said in “*unum sanctum*” years before. Now the tables are turned and the Reformers can be pretty nasty. You will see as we go along. “As we believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so do we most constantly believe that from the beginning there has been, now is, and to the end of the world shall be, one Kirk”—that is to say, one company and multitude of people chosen of God, and there is election again—“who rightly worship and embrace him, by true faith in Christ Jesus”—there is the believing Church again—“who is the only Head of the same Kirk, which also is the body and spouse of Christ Jesus which Kirk is catholic, that is, universal, because it contains the elect of all ages, of all realms, nations, and tongues, be they of the Jews or be they of the Gentiles; who have communion and society with God the Father and with his Son, Christ Jesus, through the sanctification of His Holy Spirit.” Maybe it is just me—my doctorate is in historical theology—but this kind of stuff edifies me. I tell you, it is good stuff. It is not something that somebody whipped up in his office in a couple of minutes. We are talking about believers praying and working for long periods of time and obviously using the Bible. None of them are perfect, but they are solid. I am better off knowing about them. Therefore, it is called a communion, not of profane persons, but a communion of saints, who, as citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, have the fruition of the most inestimable benefits—namely, one God, one Lord Jesus, one faith, and one baptism (They are quoting from Ephesians 4.), out of which Kirk there is neither life nor eternal felicity. That sounds like Cyprian. So the reformers can say that there is no salvation outside the Church, but by that they mean the true Gospel-preaching company of believers.

Again, Article 16 says, “Therefore, we utterly abhor the blasphemy of them that affirm that men who live according to equity and justice shall be saved, what religion that ever they have professed.” Do you understand what they are saying? They are opposing a notion of universalism, the idea that you could be saved by being a good Buddhist or something. To them, that is blasphemy. It is interesting; in our day that belief is becoming quite fashionable. Some evangelical leaders and writers are even entertaining the thought. I fear for the cause of the Christian mission around the world when I read some of that stuff.

“For without Christ Jesus there is neither life nor salvation so shall there none be participant thereof, but such that the Father has given unto his son, Christ Jesus”—that is a biblical election theme—“and they that in time come unto [believe in] him, avow his doctrine and believe into him.” We comprehend this as the children with the faithful parents. Here is a covenant concept where the children are considered members of the Church. Do not get nervous right away, my Baptist friends. They are not members of the Church in that they are automatically saved, but members of the Church in that they are non-communicant members. That is, they belong to the people of God by promise and oath. They need to grow up into faith, but they are viewed as members in that broader sense.

“This Kirk is invincible”—here is the mention of the invisible Church—“known only to God, who alone knows whom He has chosen and comprehends as well as the elect that are departed”—commonly called the Kirk triumphant. We distinguish between the Church militant, that means the Church down here on earth still fighting it out with the world, the flesh, and the devil, and the Church triumphant, that is those who have gone onto their reward.—“as those that yet live and fight against sin and Satan as shall live hereafter.”

Let us look at the Belgic Confession, another Reformed Confession. Article 27 reads, “We believe and confess one single catholic or universal Church—a holy congregation and gathering of true Christian believers, awaiting their entire salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by his blood and sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit. This Church has existed from the beginning of the world and will last until the end, as appears from the fact that Christ is eternal King and cannot be without subjects.” As with the Scots Confession, so the Belgic Confession affirms the unity of the people of God. We are one people of God from the Garden of Eden. The argument here is that Christ is the eternal King who has to have subjects, so it is one Church. “This holy Church is preserved by God against the rage of the whole world, even though for a time it might appear very small in the eyes of men—as though it were snuffed out.” It may look as if there is no Church left at all.

I think of the work of God in certain countries, specifically a North African country, where evangelical missionaries were ousted because of communism for 30 years. Missionaries were excluded, and for all that we know the church was completely eliminated. When the dust settled a quarter of a century later and outsiders were again welcome to come and teach, the Church had multiplied more than tenfold. The people of God had shared the Gospel and the Gospel had spread like wild fire. The people were lacking teaching, so there was a problem in that area. Seminaries were not allowed. Pastors could not be trained very well. They gossiped the Gospel, and it spread. People suffered for the faith, but the Gospel spread. It was remarkable. No western missionaries were needed to spread the Gospel. The people were the best spreaders of the Gospel themselves. Then they invited missionaries in. They were allowed to come in and do more training again. Maybe I will remember the name of this country. It was a wonderful thing to see the Church just explode and the Gospel grow more than tenfold. I forget the exact numbers, but it was a tremendous growth of the Church.

So this holy Church is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or certain persons, but it is spread and dispersed throughout the entire world, although it is still joined and united in heart and will, in one and the same Spirit, by the power of faith.

Last, we will look at the Westminster Confession of Faith, which is the official doctrinal standard of Covenant Theological Seminary. Let us see what it says about the Church. Article 15 says, “The catholic or universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of Him that fills all in all. The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.” So the visible Church includes those who do not really know the Lord, but if they profess the true faith, they are part of the visible Church. The phrase, “and of their children,” is a covenantal view of the Church. And the statement, “the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation,” is Cyprian’s statement adapted into a reformed context. They leave open the extraordinary working of God, as on the mission field. “Unto this catholic visible Church, Christ has given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God,” ordinances include the sacraments and prayer, “for the gathering and perfecting of the saints in this life and to the end of the world and does, by His own presence and Spirit according to His promise, make them effectual there unto.” It speaks of Christ working through the ministry, through the Word, and through the ordinances and prayer. “This catholic Church has been sometimes more, sometimes less visible. And particular churches, which are members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the Gospel is taught and embraced,

ordinances administered and public worship performed more or less purely in them.” This is a very honest statement acknowledging problems and weakness, more purity and less purity. Again, I find that to be correct. “The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error and some have so degenerated as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless, there shall be always a church on earth to worship God according to His will. There is no head of the Church, but the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor can the pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof.”

We are studying what the Church is before we begin thinking about what it should do. To think about what it is, we have a couple of subsets: the nature of the Church—we have now looked at biblical pictures and historical theologies concerning the nature of the Church—and the marks of the Church. On page 41 is where we are going. We are going to look at these marks. We are going to take a little time to get there because I have reversed the order. First we go to the historical theology and then to the Bible. Eventually, I am going to argue that we have 3 marks to the Church: the Word, the sacraments or ordinances of the Church, and discipline.

First of all, let us get some information in our heads about what has been taught. Now we are concerned not with the earlier history but with the Reformation. It was the Reformers trying to sort out the true from the false. That leads to the discussion of the marks of the Church. The discussion is still relevant because we have to sort out the true from the false. Luther, in one place, talked about seven marks. Discussion went on until a virtual, basic agreement on the three marks came about, but it was not always the same way. According to Luther, the seven marks of the Church are preaching, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, the keys (by which in this context he meant church discipline), the calling of ministers, prayer and public worship, and possession of the holy cross. (By that he meant taking up your cross and following Christ even unto persecution or death if necessary.)

So Luther spoke of seven marks in one place. In the apology, in the explanation and defense of the Augsburg Confession, we have these words: “We can see that in this life, hypocrites and evil persons are mingled with the Church and are members of the church.” Now, we should get this straight. Later we are going to say that it is the job of the leaders or elders of the church to interview people for church membership. We will talk about the concept of a credible profession of faith. People who deny Christ, who do not profess the Gospel, should not be admitted to church membership. We are not talking about that in these documents. These people are not stupid. They are assuming that things like that go on. What do you do if you are an elder interviewing people for church membership and someone says he knows Jesus, he can explain the Gospel, and there is nothing flagrant in his life? You have to accept him. You cannot see the heart. You cannot see what is going to happen five years from now. What I am saying is that elders make mistakes—even those who try to do it right and who would never take somebody in who did not know the Gospel. These elders would never take somebody in who was known in the town for profligacy of something or another. However, we can be fooled. I will say it again. If the 11 disciples can be fooled, even to the point of Judas going out and selling his Master for money, then anybody can be fooled except for God Himself.

So that is what we are talking about here—an honest admission that the Church is often mixed. In this life we can see that hypocrites and evil men are intermingled with the Church. They are members of the church, according to the outward association of the church’s marks: the Word, confession, and sacraments, especially if they have not been excommunicated. Excommunication is a sign that in the estimation of the leadership of the Church a particular person is so much in error in either belief or life that it is their understanding that the person is no Christian at all. It is the ultimate step. It is wrong to excommunicate persons on a whim. There is a whole process of things that ought to happen, but the

ultimate discipline is excommunication. I thank the Lord that I have seen it work in the lives of true believers. It was difficult to tell that they were true believers until their excommunication led to their brokenness and repentance. This discipline has brought individuals back to the spouses that they had deserted, brought them back to their responsibility, or caused them to repudiate some terrible heresies about Jesus. So, it could be done wrong, but it also can be done correctly. Show me a church with no church discipline, and I will show you a church that tolerates immorality, heresy, and that in time will probably not be a church of Christ, but a synagogue of Satan.

The church is not merely an association of outward ties and rights like other civic governments. Certain modern, liberal churches are just like social clubs. However, most churches are mainly an association of faith and of the Holy Spirit in men's hearts. To make it recognizable, this association has outward marks. You see, the whole discussion of the marks says, "How can I recognize a Christian church? Are there any identifying features?" Oh yes, there are marks. The marks of a Christian church include the pure teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the ordinances or 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. Thus, those in whom Christ is not active are not members of Christ. The church is not just a civic club, a group of nice people who like to get together and do nice things. No, it is a group of people who know the Lord. 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 as well as the name. 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. They would think of it as only the outward observance of certain devotions and rituals.

The Geneva Confession came from John Calvin's city of ministry, Geneva, Switzerland. It says, "The proper mark by which rightly to discern the Church of Jesus Christ"—notice that "mark" is singular—"is that His holy Gospel be purely and faithfully preached, proclaimed, heard, and kept and that His sacraments be properly administered, even if there be some imperfections and faults as there always will be among people." I love the honesty of some of these things. There the word and the ordinances are joined under the name "mark." How could it be? The ordinances are viewed as ceremonies that depict the Gospel. So in that sense, there is only one mark. As a matter of fact, the three marks are only one, because it is the Word that constitutes the Gospel, it is the Word that constitutes the ordinances, and it is the Word that teaches us to discipline. So really, you have one mark: the Word of God. Nevertheless, to get the full richness of the Word of God we have those three confessions.

Look at the Belgic Confession of 1561 on page 40, article 49. "We believe that we ought to discern diligently and very carefully by the Word of God, what is the true Church. For all sects in the world today claim for themselves the name of the Church." Is that contemporary in terms of the cults? "We are not speaking here of the company of hypocrites who are mixed among the good in the Church and who, nonetheless, are not part of it even though they are physically there, but we are speaking of distinguishing the body and the fellowship from all sects that call themselves the Church. The true Church can be recognized if it has the following marks." Do I detect a pattern here?

The Reformers and their descendants were concerned about defining what the Church is. You say, "Why are we not? We are just concerned to bring people in and get them busy." Well, we want to reach people for the Lord and get them busy, but it is worthwhile to stop and think about what the Bible says that the Church is. It is important that we, and those whom we reach, understand what the Church is.

The true Church can be recognized if it has the following marks: it engages in the pure preaching of the Gospel. It makes use of the pure administration of the sacraments or the ordinances as Christ instituted them. It practices Church discipline for correcting faults. In short, it governs itself according to the pure Word of God. Bonifas and some of those boys needed to hear these things. What I am saying is that Rome continually moved in a direction of the institutionalism of grace. Reformers moved in another direction, in a direction of defining the Church's very nature by the Word of God. They rejected all things contrary to the Word and held Jesus Christ as the only head. By these marks one can be assured of recognizing the true Church. No one ought to be separated from it. As for those who can belong to the Church, they can be recognized by the distinguishing marks of Christians. Those marks include faith and fleeing from sin to pursue righteousness once they have received the Savior, Jesus Christ. They love the true God and their neighbors without turning to the right or left and they crucify the flesh and its works. Though great weakness remains in them, they fight against that weakness by the Spirit all the days of their lives, appealing constantly to the blood, suffering, death, and obedience of the Lord Jesus in whom they have forgiveness of their sins through faith in Him. I feel like saying amen. This is good stuff. As for the false church, it assigns more authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God.

I wonder if they have a particular institution in mind. Yes, they do. It does not want to subject itself to the yoke of Christ. It does not administer the sacraments as Christ commanded in His Word. Rather, it adds to them or subtracts from them as it pleases. It bases itself on men more than on Jesus Christ. It persecutes those who live lives according to the Word of God and who rebuke it for its false greed and idolatry. These two churches are easy to recognize and thus distinguish from each other.

The Scots Confession says, "The notes, signs, and assured tokens"—these are synonyms for marks—"whereby the emaculate spouse of Christ Jesus is known from the horrible harlot, the church malignant." We believe, confess, and avow to be first, the true preaching of the Word of God into which God has revealed Himself unto us as the writings of the prophets and apostles do declare. Secondly, the right administration of the sacraments of the Lord, Jesus Christ, which must be annexed unto the Word and promise of God, to seal and confirm the same in our hearts. Last, ecclesiastical discipline uprightly administered as God's Word prescribes whereby vices repressed and virtue nourished. Wheresoever then their former notes are seen and of any time continue, be their number never so few, about two or three. There, without all doubt, is the true Kirk of Christ, who according unto His promise is in the midst of them."

Look at the Westminster Confession again. "Unto this catholic visible church, Christ has given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God for the gathering and perfecting of the Saints in this life to the end of the world: and does by His own presence and Spirit, according to His promise, make them effectual there unto." This catholic Church has been sometimes more, sometimes less visible. And particular churches, which are members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the Gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered and public worship performed more or less purely in them. The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error and some have so degenerated as to become no churches of Christ but rather synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless, there shall always be a church on earth to worship God according to His will. There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor can the Pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof.