

Systematic Theology 5.1.1

The Names and Nature of the Church

Louis Berkhof

*Part Five: The Doctrine of the Church and of the Means of Grace — Section 5.1.1:
The Names and Nature of the Church*

Editorial note

The text has been updated to UK English; gloss boxes have been added to explain technical terms; summaries have been included; and questions for further study have been added. We have also included a master outline with the part represented in this volume shown in bold.

Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Berkhof's Systematic Theology: Master Outline

This six-part guide is designed for use at the beginning of each volume. The part represented in this volume is shown in bold.

Part One: The Doctrine of God

- The Being of God
- The existence of God
- The knowability of God
- Being and attributes
- The names of God
- Attributes in general
- Incommunicable attributes
- Communicable attributes
- The Holy Trinity
- The Works of God**
- Divine decrees
- Predestination
- Creation in general
- The spiritual world
- The world
- Providence

Part Two: The Doctrine of Man in Relation to God

- Man in His Original State
- Origin of man
- Constitutional nature
- Image of God
- Covenant of works
- Man in the Covenant of Grace**
- Origin of sin
- Character of sin
- Transmission of sin
- Sin in the human race
- Punishment of sin
- Man in the Covenant of Grace**
- Name and concept
- Covenant of redemption

Nature of the covenant of grace
Its dual aspect
Its dispensations

Part Three: The Doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ

The Person of Christ
History of the doctrine
Names and natures
The unipersonality of Christ
The States of Christ
Humiliation
Exaltation
The Offices of Christ
Prophetic office
Priestly office
Necessity of the atonement
Nature of the atonement
Theories of the atonement
Purpose and extent of the atonement
Intercession
Kingly office

Part Four: The Doctrine of the Application of the Work of Redemption

Soteriology
Soteriology in general
The Holy Spirit's operations
Common grace
Mystical union
External calling
Regeneration and effectual calling
Conversion
Faith
Justification
Sanctification
Perseverance of the saints

Part Five: The Doctrine of the Church and of the Means of Grace

The Church

Names and history

Nature of the Church

Government

Power

The Means of Grace

Means of grace in general

The Word

Sacraments in general

Christian baptism

The Lord's Supper

Part Six: The Doctrine of the Last Things

Individual Eschatology

Physical death

Immortality of the soul

Intermediate state

General Eschatology

Second coming of Christ

Millennial views

Resurrection of the dead

Final judgement

Final state

The Names and Nature of the Church

I. Scriptural Names of the Church and the Doctrine of the Church in History

The Church is the people united to Christ by the Holy Spirit and faith.

Scripture's names for the Church reveal her gathered, holy, and Christ-centred character, while history shows differing understandings of her visible form.

Introduction

The doctrine of the application of the merits of Christ naturally leads on to the doctrine of the Church, for the Church consists of those who are partakers of Christ and of the blessings of salvation that are in Him. The Reformed conception is that Christ, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, unites men with Himself, endows them with true faith, and thus constitutes the Church as His body, the *communio fidelium* or *sanctorum*. In Roman Catholic theology, however, the discussion of the Church takes precedence over everything else, preceding even the discussion of the doctrine of God and of divine revelation. The Church, it is said, has been instrumental in producing the Bible and therefore takes precedence over it; it is moreover the dispenser of all supernatural graces. It is not Christ that leads us to the Church, but the Church that leads us to Christ. All the emphasis falls, not on the invisible Church as the *communio fidelium*, but on the visible Church as the *mater fidelium*. The Reformation broke with this Roman Catholic view of the Church and centered attention once more on the Church as a spiritual organism. It emphasized the fact that there is no Church apart from the redemptive work of Christ and from the renewing operations of the Holy Spirit; and that, therefore, the discussion of these logically precedes the consideration of the doctrine of the Church.

It seems rather peculiar that practically all the outstanding Presbyterian dogmaticians of our country, such as the two Hodges, H. B. Smith, Shedd, and Dabney, have no separate locus on the Church in their dogmatical works and, in fact, devote very little attention to it. Only the works of Thornwell and Breckenridge form an exception to the rule. This might create the impression that, in their opinion, the doctrine of the Church should not have a place in dogmatics. But this is extremely unlikely, since none of them raise a single objection to its inclusion. Moreover, Turretin and their Scottish forbears, on whose foundation they are building, devote a great deal of attention to the Church. Walker says: "There is perhaps no country in the world in which all

kinds of Church questions have been so largely discussed as in our own.”[Scottish Theology and Theologians, p. 95; cf. also McPherson, The Doctrine of the Church in Scottish Theology, pp. 1 ff.] And, finally, Dr. A. A. Hodge informs us that his father lectured to his various classes on the subjects of Ecclesiology, practically covered the entire ground, and intended to complete his Systematic Theology by the publication of a fourth volume on the Church; but was prevented by the infirmities incident to his advanced age. [Preface to Hodge’s work on Church Polity.] Dabney says that he omitted the doctrine of the Church, because this was ably treated in another department of the Seminary in which he labored.[Lect. on Theol., p. 726.] Shedd in giving his scheme asserts that the Church comes into consideration in connection with the means of grace.[Dogm. Theol. I, p. 10.] However, he devotes very little attention to the means of grace and does not discuss the doctrine of the Church. And the editor of Smith’s System of Christian Theology incorporated into this work the author’s views on the Church, as expressed in other works. [pp. 590 ff.]

A. SCRIPTURAL NAMES FOR THE CHURCH.

GLOSS Ekklesia: the Greek word commonly used for the Church: an assembly convened by God.

I. IN THE OLD TESTAMENT. The Old Testament employs two words to designate the Church, namely qahal (or kahal), derived from an obsolete root qal (or kal), meaning “to call”; and ’edhah, from ya’adh, “to appoint” or “to meet or come together at an appointed place.” These two words are sometimes used indiscriminately, but were not, at first, strictly synonymous. ’Edhah is properly a gathering by appointment, and when applied to Israel, denotes the society itself formed by the children of Israel or their representative heads, whether assembled or not assembled. Qahal, on the other hand, properly denotes the actual meeting together of the people. Consequently we find

occasionally the expression qahal 'edhah, that is, “the assembly of the congregation” Ex. 12:6; Num. 14:5; Jer. 26:17. It seems that the actual meeting was sometimes a meeting of the representatives of the people, Deut. 4:10; 18:16, comp. 5:22,23; I Kings 8:1,2,3,5; II Chron. 5:2-6. 'Edhah is by far the more common word in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Joshua, but is wholly absent from Deuteronomy, and is found but rarely in the later books. Qahal, abounds in Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Sunagoge is the usual, almost universal, rendering of the former in the Septuagint, and is also the usual rendering of the latter in the Pentateuch. In the later books of the Bible, however, qahal is generally rendered by ekklesia. Schuerer claims that later Judaism already pointed to the distinction between sunagoge as a designation of the congregation of Israel as an empirical reality, and ekklesia as the name of that same congregation ideally considered. He is followed in this by Dr. Bavinck. Cremer-Koegel, however, takes exception to this. Hort says that after the exile the word qahal seems to have combined the shades of meaning belonging to both it and 'edhah; and that consequently “ekklesia, as the primary Greek representative of qahal, would naturally, for Greek-speaking Jews, mean the congregation of Israel quite as much as an assembly of the congregation.”[The Christian Ekklesia, p. 7.]

2. IN THE NEW TESTAMENT. The New Testament also has two words, derived from the Septuagint, namely, ekklesia, from ek and kaleo, “to call out,” and sunagoge, from sun and ago, meaning “to come or to bring together.” The latter is used exclusively to denote either the religious gatherings of the Jews or the buildings in which they assembled for public worship, Matt. 4:23; Acts 13:43; Rev. 2:9; 3:9. The term ekklesia, however, generally designates the Church of the New Testament, though in a few places it denotes common civil assemblies. Acts 19:32,39,41. The preposition ek in ekklesia (ekkaleo) is often interpreted to mean “out from among the common mass of the people,” and to indicate in connection with the Scriptural use of ekklesia, that the Church consists of the elect, called out of the world of humanity. This interpretation is rather doubtful, however, for the preposition originally simply denoted that

the Greek citizens were called out of their houses. Now it would not have been unnatural if that entirely Scriptural idea had been put into the word in God's revelation. But, as a matter of fact, we have no proof that this was actually done. The compound verb *ekkaleo* is never so used, and the word *ekklesia* never occurs in a context which suggests the presence of that particular thought in the mind of the writer. Deissmann would simply render *ekklesia* as "the (convened) assembly," regarding God as the convener. Because the idea of the Church is a many-sided concept, it is quite natural that the word *ekklesia*, as applied to it, does not always have exactly the same connotation. Jesus was the first one to use the word in the New Testament, and He applied it to the company that gathered about Him, Matt. 16:18, recognized Him publicly as their Lord, and accepted the principles of the Kingdom of God. It was the *ekklesia* of the Messiah, the true Israel. Later on, as a result of the extension of the Church, the word acquired various significations. Local churches were established everywhere, and were also called *ekklesiai*, since they were manifestations of the one universal Church of Christ. The following are the most important uses of the word:

a. Most frequently the word *ekklesia* designates a circle of believers in some definite locality, a local church, irrespective of the question whether these believers are or are not assembled for worship. Some passages contain the added idea that they are assembled, Acts 5:11; 11:26; I Cor. 11:18; 14:19,28,35, while others do not, Rom. 16:4; I Cor. 16:1; Gal. 1:2; I Thess. 2:14, etc.

b. In some cases the word denotes what may be called a domestic *ekklesia*, the church in the house of some individual. It seems that in apostolic times wealthy or otherwise important persons often set aside a large room in their homes for divine worship. Instances of this use of the word are found in Rom. 16:23; I Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philemon 2.

c. If the reading of Tisschendorf is correct (as is now generally taken for granted), then the word is found at least once in the singular to denote a group of churches, namely, the churches of Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. The passage

in which it is so used is Acts 9:31. Naturally, this does not yet mean that they together constituted an organization such as we now call a denomination. It is not impossible that the church of Jerusalem and the church of Antioch in Syria also comprised several groups that were accustomed to meet in different places.

d. In a more general sense the word serves to denote the whole body, throughout the world, of those who outwardly profess Christ and organize for purposes of worship, under the guidance of appointed officers. This meaning of the word is somewhat in the foreground in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, 10:32; 11:22; 12:28, but was, it would seem, present also in the mind of Paul, when he wrote the letter to the Ephesians, though in that letter the emphasis is on the Church as a spiritual organism, cf. especially Eph. 4:11-16.

e. Finally, the word in its most comprehensive meaning signifies the whole body of the faithful, whether in heaven or on earth, who have been or shall be spiritually united to Christ as their Saviour. This use of the word is found primarily in the Epistles of Paul to the Ephesians and the Colossians, most frequently in the former, Eph. 1:22; 3:10,21; 5:23-25, 27, 32; Col. 1:18,24.

We should bear in mind that the names “Church,” “Kerk” and “Kirche” are not derived from the word *ekklesia*, but from the word *kuriake*, which means “belonging to the Lord.” They stress the fact that the Church is the property of God. The name *kuriakon* or *he kuriake* first of all designated the place where the Church assembled. This place was conceived of as belonging to the Lord, and was therefore called *kuriakon*. But the place itself was empty and did not really become manifest as *kuriakon* until the Church gathered for worship. Consequently, the word was transferred to the Church itself, the spiritual building of God.

3. OTHER BIBLICAL DESIGNATIONS OF THE CHURCH. The New Testament contains several figurative designations of the Church, each one of which stresses some particular aspect of the Church. It is called:

a. The body of Christ. Some in our day seem to regard this appellation as a complete definition of the New Testament Church, but it is not so intended. The name is applied not only to the Church universal, as in Eph. 1:23; Col. 1:18, but also to a single congregation, I Cor. 12:27. It stresses the unity of the Church, whether local or universal, and particularly the fact that this unity is organic, and that the organism of the Church stands in vital relationship to Jesus Christ as her glorious head.

b. The temple of the Holy Spirit or of God. The church of Corinth is called “a temple of God,” in which the Holy Spirit dwelleth, I Cor. 3:16. In Ephesians 2:21,22 Paul speaks of believers as growing into “a holy temple in the Lord,” and as being built together for “a habitation of God in the Spirit.” There the name is applied to the ideal Church of the future, which is the church universal. And Peter says that believers as living stones are built up “a spiritual house,” I Pet. 2:5. The connection clearly shows that he is thinking of a temple. This figure emphasizes the fact that the Church is holy and inviolable. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit imparts to her an exalted character.

c. The Jerusalem that is above, or the new Jerusalem, or the heavenly Jerusalem. All three of these forms are found in the Bible, Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22; Rev. 21:2, cf. the verses 9 and 10. In the Old Testament Jerusalem is represented as the place where God dwelt between the cherubim and where He symbolically established contact with His people. The New Testament evidently regards the Church as the spiritual counterpart of the Old Testament Jerusalem, and therefore applies to it the same name. According to this representation the Church is the dwelling place of God, in which the people of God are brought into communion with Him; and this dwelling place, while still in part on earth, belongs to the heavenly sphere.

d. Pillar and ground of the truth. There is just one place in which that name is applied to the Church, namely, I Tim. 3:15. It clearly refers to the Church in general, and therefore also applies to every part of it. The figure is expressive of the fact that the Church is the guardian of the truth, the citadel of the truth, and the defender of the truth over against all the enemies of the Kingdom of God.

B. THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH IN HISTORY.

GLOSS **Communio sanctorum:** communion of saints: the fellowship of those united to Christ by true faith and the Holy Spirit.

1. THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH BEFORE THE REFORMATION.

a. In the patristic period. By the Apostolic Fathers and by the Apologetes the Church is generally represented as the *communio sanctorum*, the people of God which He has chosen for a possession. The necessity for making distinctions was not at once apparent. But as early as the latter part of the second century there was a perceptible change. The rise of heresies made it imperative to name some characteristics by which the true catholic Church could be known. This tended to fix the attention on the outward manifestation of the Church. The Church began to be conceived as an external institution, ruled by a bishop as a direct successor of the apostles, and in possession of the true tradition. The catholicity of the Church was rather strongly emphasized. Local churches were not regarded as so many separate units, but simply as parts of the one universal Church. The increasing worldliness and corruption of the Church gradually led to reaction and gave rise to the tendency of various sects, such as Montanism in the middle of the second, Novatianism in the middle of the third, and Donatism at the beginning of the fourth century, to make the holiness of its members the mark of the true Church. The early Church Fathers, in combating these sectaries, emphasized ever increasingly

the episcopal institution of the Church. Cyprian has the distinction of being the first to develop fully the doctrine of the episcopal Church. He regarded the bishops as the real successors of the apostles and ascribed to them a priestly character in virtue of their sacrificial work. They together formed a college, called the episcopate, which as such constituted the unity of the Church. The unity of the Church was thus based on the unity of the bishops. They who do not subject themselves to the bishop forfeit the fellowship of the Church and also their salvation, since there is no salvation outside of the Church.

Augustine was not altogether consistent in his conception of the Church. It was his struggle with the Donatists that compelled him to reflect more deeply on the nature of the Church. On the one hand he shows himself to be the predestinarian, who conceives of the Church as the company of the elect, the *communio sanctorum*, who have the Spirit of God and are therefore characterized by true love. The important thing is to be a living member of the Church so conceived, and not to belong to it in a merely external sense. But on the other hand he is the Church-man, who adheres to the Cyprianic idea of the Church at least in its general aspects. The true Church is the catholic Church, in which the apostolic authority is continued by episcopal succession. It is the depositary of divine grace, which it distributes through the sacraments. For the present this Church is a mixed body, in which good and evil members have a place. In his debate with the Donatists he admitted, however, that the two were not in the Church in the same sense. He also prepared the way for the Roman Catholic identification of the Church and the Kingdom of God.

b. In the Middle Ages. The Scholastics have very little to say about the Church. The system of doctrine developed by Cyprian and Augustine was fairly complete and needed but a few finishing touches to bring it to its final development. Says Otten (Roman Catholic historian): "This system was taken over by the Scholastics of the Middle Ages, and then was handed down by them, practically in the same condition in which they had received it, to their successors who came after the Council of Trent." [Manual of the History of Dogmas, II, p. 214.] Incidentally a few points were somewhat further

developed. But if there was very little development in the doctrine of the Church, the Church itself actually developed more and more into a close-knit, compactly organized, and absolute hierarchy. The seeds of this development were already present in the Cyprianic idea of the Church and in one aspect of the Church as represented by Augustine. The other and more fundamental idea of that great Church Father, that of the Church as the *communio sanctorum*, was generally disregarded and thus remained dormant. This is not saying that the Scholastics denied the spiritual element altogether, but merely that they did not give it due prominence. The emphasis was very definitely on the Church as an external organization or institution. Hugo of St. Victor speaks of the Church and the State as the two powers instituted by God for the government of the people. Both are monarchical in constitution, but the Church is the higher power, because she ministers to the salvation of men, while the State only provides for their temporal welfare. The king or emperor is the head of the state, but the Pope is the head of the Church. There are two classes of people in the Church with well defined rights and duties: the clerics, dedicated to the service of God, who constitute a unit; and the laics consisting of people from every domain of life, who constitute a separate class altogether. Step by step the doctrine of the papacy came to development, until at last the Pope became virtually an absolute monarch. The growth of this doctrine was in no small measure aided by the development of the idea that the Catholic Church was the Kingdom of God on earth, and that therefore the Roman bishopric was an earthly kingdom. This identification of the visible and organized Church with the Kingdom of God had far-reaching consequences: (1) It required that everything be brought under the control of the Church: the home and the school, science and art, commerce and industry, and so on. (2) It involved the idea that all the blessings of salvation come to man only through the ordinances of the Church, particularly through the sacraments. (3) It led to the gradual secularization of the Church, since the Church began to pay more attention to politics than to the salvation of sinners, and the Popes finally claimed dominion also over secular rulers.

2. THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH DURING AND AFTER THE REFORMATION.

a. During the period of the Reformation. The Reformers broke with the Roman Catholic conception of the Church, but differed among themselves in some particulars. The idea of an infallible and hierarchical Church, and of a special priesthood, which dispenses salvation through the sacraments, found no favor with Luther. He regarded the Church as the spiritual communion of those who believe in Christ, and restored the Scriptural idea of the priesthood of all believers. He maintained the unity of the Church, but distinguished two aspects of it, the one visible and the other invisible. He was careful to point out that these are not two churches, but simply two aspects of the same Church. The invisible Church becomes visible, not by the rule of bishops and cardinals, nor in the headship of the Pope, but by the pure administration of the Word and of the sacraments. He admitted that the visible Church will always contain a mixture of pious and wicked members. However, in his reaction against the Roman Catholic idea of the domination of the Church over the State, he went to another extreme, and virtually made the Church subject to the State in everything except the preaching of the Word. The Anabaptists were not satisfied with his position, and insisted on a Church of believers only. They, in many instances, even scorned the visible Church and the means of grace. Moreover, they demanded the complete separation of Church and State. Calvin and Reformed theologians were at one with Luther in the confession that the Church is essentially a *communio sanctorum*, a communion of saints. However, they did not, like the Lutherans, seek the unity and the holiness of the Church primarily in the objective ordinances of the Church, such as the offices, the Word, and the sacraments, but most of all in the subjective communion of believers. They, too, distinguished between a visible and an invisible aspect of the Church, though in a slightly different way. Moreover, they found the true marks of the Church, not only in the true administration of the Word and of the sacraments, but also in the faithful administration of Church discipline. But even Calvin and the Reformed

theologians of the seventeenth century in a measure fostered the idea of the subjection of the Church to the state. However, they established a form of government in the Church which made for a greater degree of ecclesiastical independence and power than was known in the Lutheran Church. But while both Lutheran and Reformed theologians sought to maintain the proper connection between the visible and the invisible Church, others lost sight of this. The Socinians and the Arminians of the seventeenth century, though indeed speaking of an invisible Church, forgot all about it in actual life. The former conceived of the Christian religion simply as an acceptable doctrine, and the latter made the Church primarily a visible society and followed the Lutheran Church by yielding the right of discipline to the State and retaining for the Church only the right to preach the gospel and to admonish the members of the Church. The Labadists and Pietists, on the other hand, manifested a tendency to disregard the visible Church, seeking a Church of believers only, showing themselves indifferent to the institutional Church with its mixture of good and evil, and seeking edification in conventicles.

b. During and after the eighteenth century. During the eighteenth century Rationalism made its influence felt also in the doctrine of the Church. It was indifferent in matters of faith and lacked enthusiasm for the Church, which it placed on a par with other human societies. It even denied that Christ intended to found a church in the received sense of the word. There was a pietistic reaction to Rationalism in Methodism, but Methodism did not contribute anything to the development of the doctrine of the Church. In some cases it sought strength in casting reflection on the existing Churches, and in others it adapted itself to the life of these Churches. For Schleiermacher the Church was essentially the Christian community, the body of believers who are animated by the same spirit. He had little use for the distinction between the visible and the invisible Church, and found the essence of the Church in the spirit of Christian fellowship. The more the Spirit of God penetrates the mass of Christian believers, the fewer divisions there will be, and the more they will lose their importance. Ritschl substituted for the distinction between

the invisible and the visible Church that between the Kingdom and the Church. He regarded the Kingdom as the community of God's people acting from the motive of love, and the Church as that same community met for worship. The name "Church" is therefore restricted to an external organization in the one function of worship; and this function merely enables believers to become better acquainted with one another. This is certainly far from the teaching of the New Testament. It leads right on to the modern liberal conception of the Church as a mere social center, a human institution rather than a planting of God.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY: Does the history of the Church begin at or before the day of Pentecost? If it existed before, how did the Church preceding that day differ from the Church following it? To what Church does Jesus refer in Matt. 18:17? Did Augustine identify the Church as a spiritual organism, or the Church as an external institution, with the Kingdom of God? How do you account for the Roman Catholic emphasis on the Church as an external organization? Why did not the Reformers insist on entire freedom of the Church from the State? How did Luther and Calvin differ in this respect? What controversies respecting the Church arose in Scotland? What accounts for the different conceptions of the Church in England and in Scotland? How did Rationalism affect the doctrine of the Church? What great dangers are threatening the Church at the present time?

II. Nature of the Church

The Church is both a spiritual organism united to Christ and a visible institution in the world. It is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic in its true character, and is recognised by the faithful ministry of Word, sacraments, and discipline.

A. THE ESSENCE OF THE CHURCH.

GLOSS Spiritual organism: the Church as Christ's living body, joined to Him and animated by His Spirit.

1. THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CONCEPTION. The early Christians spoke of the Church as the *communio sanctorum*, and thus already, though without having thought the matter through, gave expression to the essence of the Church. But even as early as the end of the second century, as the result of the rise of heresies, the question as to the true Church forced itself upon them and caused them to fix their attention upon certain characteristics of the Church as an external institution. From the days of Cyprian down to the Reformation the essence of the Church was sought ever increasingly in its external visible organization. The Church Fathers conceived of the catholic Church as comprehending all true branches of the Church of Christ, and as bound together in an external and visible unity, which had its unifying bond in the college of bishops. The conception of the Church as an external organization became more prominent as time went on. There was an ever growing emphasis on the hierarchical organization of it, and the capstone was added with the institution of the Papacy. Roman Catholics now define the Church as: "The congregation of all the Faithful, who, being baptized, profess the same faith, partake of the same sacraments, and are governed by their lawful pastors, under one visible head on earth." They make a distinction between the *ecclesia docens* and the *ecclesia audiens*, that is, between "the Church consisting of those who rule, teach, and edify" and "the Church which is taught, governed, and receives the sacraments." In the strictest sense of the word it is not the *ecclesia audiens* but the *ecclesia docens* that constitutes the Church. The latter shares directly in the glorious attributes of the Church, but the former is adorned with them only indirectly. Catholics are willing to admit that there is an invisible side to the Church, but prefer to reserve the name

“Church” for the visible communion of believers. They frequently speak of the “soul of the Church,” but do not seem to be altogether agreed as to the exact connotation of the term. Devine defines the soul of the Church as “the society of those who are called to faith in Christ, and who are united to Christ by supernatural gifts and graces.”[*The Creed Explained*, p. 259.] Wilmers, however, finds it in “all those spiritual, supernatural graces which constitute the Church of Christ, and enable its members to attain their last end.” Says he: “What we call soul in general is that pervading principle which gives life to a body and enables its members to perform their peculiar functions. To the soul of the Church belong faith, the common aspiration of all to the same end, the invisible authority of superiors, the inward grace of sanctification, the supernatural virtues, and other gifts of grace.”[*Handbook of the Christian Religion*, p. 103.] The former writer finds the soul of the Church in certain qualified persons, while the latter regards it as an all-pervading principle, something like the soul in man. But whatever Roman Catholics may be ready to grant, they will not admit that what may be called “the invisible Church” logically precedes the visible. Moehler says: “The Catholics teach: the visible Church is first,—then comes the invisible: the former gives birth to the latter.” This means that the Church is a *mater fidelium* (mother of believers) before she is a *communio fidelium* (community of believers). Moehler grants, however, that there is one sense in which “the internal Church” is prior to “the exterior one,” namely in the sense that we are not living members of the latter until we belong to the former. He discusses the whole subject of the relation of those two to each other in his *Symbolism or Doctrinal Differences*. [Chap. V, especially in the paragraphs XLVI-XLVIII.] He stresses the identity of the visible Church with Christ: “Thus, the visible Church, from the point of view here taken, is the Son of God, everlastingly manifesting himself among men in a human form, perpetually renovated, and eternally young — the permanent incarnation of the same, as in Holy Writ, even the faithful are called ‘the body of Christ.’”[p. 59.]

2. THE GREEK ORTHODOX CONCEPTION. The Greek Orthodox conception of the Church is closely related to that of the Roman Catholics, and yet differs from it in some important points. That Church does not recognize the Roman Catholic Church as the true Church, but claims that honor for itself. There is but one true Church, and that Church is the Greek Orthodox. While it acknowledges with greater frankness than the Roman Catholics the two different aspects of the Church, the visible and the invisible, it nevertheless places the emphasis on the Church as an external organization. It does not find the essence of the Church in her as the community of the saints, but in the Episcopal hierarchy, which it has retained, while rejecting the Papacy. The infallibility of the Church is maintained, but this infallibility resides in the bishops, and therefore in the ecclesiastical councils and synods. “As invisible,” says Gavin, “she (the Church) is the bearer of divine gifts and powers, and is engaged in transforming mankind into the Kingdom of God. As visible, she is constituted of men professing a common faith, observing common customs, and using visible means of grace.” At the same time the idea is rejected of “an invisible and ideal Church, of which the various bodies of Christians formed into distinct organizations and calling themselves ‘Churches,’ are partial and incomplete embodiments.” The Church is “an actual, tangible, visible entity, not an unrealized and unrealizable ideal.” [Greek Orthodox Thought, pp. 241-242.]

3. THE PROTESTANT CONCEPTION. The Reformation was a reaction against the externalism of Rome in general, and in particular, also against its external conception of the Church. It brought the truth to the foreground once more that the essence of the Church is not found in the external organization of the Church, but in the Church as the *communio sanctorum*. For both Luther and Calvin the Church was simply the community of the saints, that is, the community of those who believe and are sanctified in Christ, and who are joined to Him as their Head. This is also the position taken in the Reformed confessional standards. Thus the Belgic Confession says: “We believe and profess one catholic or universal Church, which is a holy congregation of true

Christian believers, all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by His blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit.”[Art. XXVII.] The Second Helvetic Confession expresses the same truth by saying that the Church is “a company of the faithful, called and gathered out of the world; a communion of all saints, that is, of them who truly know and rightly worship and serve the true God, in Jesus Christ the Saviour, by the word of the Holy Spirit, and who by faith are partakers of all those good graces which are freely offered through Christ.”[Chap. XVII.] And the Westminster Confession, defining the Church from the point of view of election, 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 fulness of Him that filleth all in all.”[Chap. XXV.] The Church universal, that is, the Church as it exists in the plan of God, and as it is realized only in the course of the ages, was conceived as consisting of the whole body of the elect, who are in course of time called unto life eternal. But the Church as it actually exists on earth was regarded as the community of the saints. And it was not only the invisible Church that was so regarded, but the visible Church as well. These are not two Churches but one, and therefore have but a single essence. The one as well as the other is essentially the *communio sanctorum*, but the invisible Church is the Church as God sees it, a Church which contains only believers, while the visible Church is the Church as man sees it, consisting of those who profess Jesus Christ with their children and therefore adjudged to be the community of the saints. This may and always does contain some who are not yet regenerated — there may be chaff among the wheat —, but may not tolerate public unbelievers and wicked persons. Paul addresses his Epistles to empirical churches, and does not hesitate to address them as “saints,” but also insists on the necessity of putting away the wicked and those who give offense from among them, I Cor. 5; II Thess. 3:6,14; Tit. 3:10. The Church forms a spiritual unity of which Christ is the divine Head. It is animated by one Spirit, the Spirit of Christ; it professes one faith, shares one hope, and serves one King. It is the citadel of the truth

and God's agency in communicating to believers all spiritual blessings. As the body of Christ it is destined to reflect the glory of God as manifested in the work of redemption. The Church in its ideal sense, the Church as God intends it to be and as it will once become, is an object of faith rather than of knowledge. Hence the confession: "I believe one holy catholic Church."

B. THE MANY-SIDED CHARACTER OF THE CHURCH.

GLOSS Visible and invisible: the Church as it appears in the world, and the full company of true believers known perfectly to God.

In speaking of the Church several distinctions come into consideration.

1. THAT OF A MILITANT AND A TRIUMPHANT CHURCH. The Church in the present dispensation is a militant Church, that is, she is called unto, and is actually engaged in, a holy warfare. This, of course, does not mean that she must spend her strength in self-destroying internecine struggles, but that she is duty bound to carry on an incessant warfare against the hostile world in every form in which it reveals itself, whether in the Church or outside of it, and against all the spiritual forces of darkness. The Church may not spend all her time in prayer and meditation, however necessary and important these may be, nor may she rest on her oars in the peaceful enjoyment of her spiritual heritage. She must be engaged with all her might in the battles of her Lord, fighting in a war that is both offensive and defensive. If the Church on earth is the militant Church, the Church in heaven is the triumphant Church. There the sword is exchanged for the palm of victory, the battle-cries are turned into songs of triumph, and the cross is replaced by the crown. The strife is over, the battle is won, and the saints reign with Christ forever and ever. In these two stages of her existence the Church reflects the humiliation and exaltation of her heavenly Lord. Roman Catholics speak, not only of a militant and triumphant, but also of a suffering Church. This Church, according to

them, includes all those believers who are no more on earth, but have not yet entered the joys of heaven, and are now being purified in purgatory of their remaining sins.

2. THAT BETWEEN A VISIBLE AND AN INVISIBLE CHURCH. This means that the Church of God is on the one hand visible, and on the other invisible. It is said that Luther was the first to make this distinction, but the other Reformers recognized and also applied it to the Church. This distinction has not always been properly understood. The opponents of the Reformers often accused them of teaching that there are two separate Churches. Luther perhaps gave some occasion for this charge by speaking of an invisible ecclesiola within the visible ecclesia. But both he and Calvin stress the fact that, when they speak of a visible and an invisible Church, they do not refer to two different Churches, but to two aspects of the one Church of Jesus Christ. The term “invisible” has been variously interpreted as applying (a) to the triumphant Church; (b) to the ideal and completed Church as it will be at the end of the ages; (c) to the Church of all lands and all places, which man cannot possibly see; and (d) to the Church as it goes in hiding in the days of persecution, and is deprived of the Word and the sacraments. Now it is undoubtedly true that the triumphant Church is invisible to those who are on earth, and that Calvin in his Institutes also conceives of this as included in the invisible Church, but the distinction was undoubtedly primarily intended to apply to the militant Church. As a rule it is so applied in Reformed theology. It stresses the fact that the Church as it exists on earth is both visible and invisible. This Church is said to be invisible, because she is essentially spiritual and in her spiritual essence cannot be discerned by the physical eye; and because it is impossible to determine infallibly who do and who do not belong to her. The union of believers with Christ is a mystical union; the Spirit that unites them constitutes an invisible tie; and the blessings of salvation, such as regeneration, genuine conversion, true faith, and spiritual communion with Christ, are all invisible to the natural eye; — and yet these things constitute the real forma (ideal character) of the Church. That the term “invisible” should be

understood in this sense, is evident from the historical origin of the distinction between the visible and the invisible Church in the days of the Reformation. The Bible ascribes certain glorious attributes to the Church and represents her as a medium of saving and eternal blessings. Rome applied this to the Church as an external institution, more particularly to the *ecclesia representativa* or the hierarchy as the distributor of the blessings of salvation, and thus ignored and virtually denied the immediate and direct communion of God with His children, by placing a human mediatorial priesthood between them. This is the error which the Reformers sought to eradicate by stressing the fact that the Church of which the Bible says such glorious things is not the Church as an external institution, but the Church as the spiritual body of Jesus Christ, which is essentially invisible at present, though it has a relative and imperfect embodiment in the visible Church and is destined to have a perfect visible embodiment at the end of the ages.

The invisible Church naturally assumes a visible form. Just as the human soul is adapted to a body and expresses itself through the body, so the invisible Church, consisting, not of mere souls but of human beings having souls and bodies, necessarily assumes a visible form in an external organization through which it expresses itself. The Church becomes visible in Christian profession and conduct, in the ministry of the Word and of the sacraments, and in external organization and government. By making this distinction between the invisible and the visible Church, McPherson says, “Protestantism sought to find the proper mean between the magical and supernatural externalism of the Romish idea and the extravagant depreciation of all outward rites, characteristic of fanatical and sectarian spiritualism.” [Chr. Dogmatics, p. 417.] It is very important to bear in mind that, though both the invisible and the visible Church can be considered as universal, the two are not in every respect commensurate. It is possible that some who belong to the invisible Church never become members of the visible organization, as missionary subjects who are converted on their deathbeds, and that others are temporarily excluded from it, as erring believers who are for a time shut out from the communion of

the visible Church. On the other hand there may be unregenerated children and adults who, while professing Christ, have no true faith in Him, in the Church as an external institution; and these, as long as they are in that condition, do not belong to the invisible Church. Good definitions of the visible and invisible Church may be found in the Westminster Confession.

3. THAT BETWEEN THE CHURCH AS AN ORGANISM AND THE CHURCH AS AN INSTITUTION. This distinction should not be identified with the preceding one, as is sometimes done. It is a distinction that applies to the visible Church and that directs attention to two different aspects of the Church considered as a visible body.[Cf. Kuyper, *Enc. III*, p. 204; Bavinck, *Geref. Dogm. IV.*, p. 331; Ten Hoor, *Afscheiding of Doleantie*, pp. 88 f.; Doekes, *De Moeder der Geloovigen*, pp. 10 f.; Steen, *De Kerk*, pp. 51 ff.] It is a mistake to think that the Church becomes visible only in the offices, in the administration of the Word and the sacraments, and in a certain form of Church government. Even if all these things were absent, the Church would still be visible in the communal life and profession of the believers, and in their joint opposition to the world. But while emphasizing the fact that the distinction under consideration is a distinction within the visible Church, we should not forget that both the Church as an organism and the Church as an institution (also called *apparitio* and *institutio*) have their spiritual background in the invisible Church. However, though it is true that these are two different aspects of the one visible Church, they do represent important differences. The Church as an organism is the *coetus fidelium*, the communion of believers, who are united in the bond of the Spirit, while the Church as an institution is the *mater fidelium*, the mother of believers, a *Heilsanstalt*, a means of salvation, an agency for the conversion of sinners and the perfecting of the saints. The Church as an organism exists charismatic: in it all kinds of gifts and talents become manifest and are utilized in the work of the Lord. The Church as an institution, on the other hand, exists in an institutional form and functions through the offices and means which God has instituted. The two are co-ordinate in a sense, and yet there is also a certain subordination of the one

to the other. The Church as an institution or organization (*mater fidelium*) is a means to an end, and this is found in the Church as an organism, the community of believers (*coetus fidelium*).

C. VARIOUS DEFINITIONS OF THE CHURCH.

GLOSS Institution: the Church considered in her public ministry, offices, worship, sacraments, and discipline.

The Church being a many-sided entity has naturally also been defined from more than one point of view.

1. FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF ELECTION. According to some theologians the Church is the community of the elect, the *coetus electorum*. This definition is apt to be somewhat misleading, however. It applies only to the Church ideally considered, the Church as it exists in the idea of God and as it will be completed at the end of the ages, and not to the Church as a present empirical reality. Election includes all those who belong to the body of Christ, irrespective of their present actual relation to it. But the elect who are yet unborn, or who are still strangers to Christ and outside of the pale of the Church, cannot be said to belong to the Church realiter.

2. FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF EFFECTUAL CALLING. To escape the objection raised to the preceding definition, it gradually became customary to define the Church from the point of view of some subjective spiritual characteristic of those who belong to it, especially effectual calling or faith, either by naming such a characteristic in addition to election, or by substituting it for election. Thus the Church was defined as the company of the elect who are called by the Spirit of God (*coetus electorum vocatorum*), as the body of those who are effectually called (*coetus vocatorum*), or, even more commonly, as the community of the faithful or believers (*coetus fidelium*). The

first two of these definitions serve the purpose of designating the Church as to its invisible essence, but give no indication whatsoever of the fact that it also has a visible side. This is done, however, in the last named definition, for faith reveals itself in confession and conduct.

3. FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF BAPTISM AND PROFESSION. From the point of view of baptism and profession the Church has been defined as the community of those who are baptized and profess the true faith; or as the community of those who profess the true religion together with their children. It will readily be seen that this is a definition of the Church according to its external manifestation. Calvin defines the visible Church as “the multitude of men diffused through the world, who profess to worship one God in Christ; are initiated into this faith by baptism; testify their unity in doctrine and charity by participating in the Supper; have consent in the Word of God, and for the preaching of that Word maintain the ministry ordained of Christ.”[Institutes IV., 1,7.]

D. THE CHURCH AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

GLOSS Kingdom of God: God’s saving rule in Christ, presently revealed in His people and finally displayed in fullness.

1. THE IDEA OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD. The Kingdom of God is primarily an eschatological concept. The fundamental idea of the Kingdom in Scripture is not that of a restored theocratic kingdom of God in Christ — which is essentially a kingdom of Israel—, as the Premillenarians claim; neither is it a new social condition, pervaded by the Spirit of Christ, and realized by man through such external means as good laws, civilization, education, social reforms, and so on, as the Modernists would have us believe. The primary idea of the Kingdom of God in Scripture is that of the rule of God established and acknowledged in the hearts of sinners by the powerful regenerating influence

of the Holy Spirit, insuring them of the inestimable blessings of salvation, — a rule that is realized in principle on earth, but will not reach its culmination until the visible and glorious return of Jesus Christ. The present realization of it is spiritual and invisible. Jesus took hold of this eschatological concept and made it prominent in His teachings. He clearly taught the present spiritual realization and the universal character of the Kingdom. Moreover, He Himself effected that realization in a measure formerly unknown and greatly increased the present blessings of the Kingdom. At the same time He held out the blessed hope of the future appearance of that Kingdom in external glory and with the perfect blessings of salvation.

2. HISTORICAL CONCEPTIONS OF THE KINGDOM. In the early Church Fathers the Kingdom of God, the greatest good, is primarily regarded as a future entity, the goal of the present development of the Church. Some of them regarded it as the coming millennial rule of the Messiah, though history does not bear out the exaggerated claims of some Premillenarian writers as to their number. Augustine viewed the kingdom as a present reality and identified it with the Church. For him it was primarily identical with the pious and holy, that is, with the Church as a community of believers; but he used some expressions which seem to indicate that he also saw it embodied in the episcopally organized Church. The Roman Catholic Church frankly identified the Kingdom of God with their hierarchical institution, but the Reformers returned to the view that it is in this dispensation identical with the invisible Church. Under the influence of Kant and especially of Ritschl it was robbed of its religious character and came to be regarded as an ethical kingdom of ends. It is often defined at present as a new principle introduced into society and destined to transform it in all its relations, or as the moral organization of mankind through action from the motive of love, the final end of creation.

3. THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE INVISIBLE CHURCH. While the Kingdom of God and the invisible Church are in a measure identical, they should nevertheless be carefully distinguished. Citizenship in the one and

membership in the other are equally determined by regeneration. It is impossible to be in the Kingdom of God without being in the Church as the mystical body of Jesus Christ. At the same time it is possible to make a distinction between the point of view from which believers are called the Kingdom and that from which they are called the Church. They constitute a Kingdom in their relation to God in Christ as their Ruler, and a Church in their separateness from the world in devotion to God, and in their organic union with one another. As a Church they are called to be God's instrument in preparing the way for, and in introducing, the ideal order of things; and as a Kingdom they represent the initial realization of the ideal order among themselves.

4. THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE VISIBLE CHURCH. Since the Roman Catholics insist indiscriminately on the identification of the Kingdom of God and the Church, their Church claims power and jurisdiction over every domain of life, such as science and art, commerce and industry, as well as social and political organizations. This is an altogether mistaken conception. It is also a mistake to maintain, as some Reformed Christians do, in virtue of an erroneous conception of the Church as an organism, that Christian school societies, voluntary organizations of younger or older people for the study of Christian principles and their application in life, Christian labor unions, and Christian political organizations, are manifestations of the Church as an organism, for this again brings them under the domain of the visible Church and under the direct control of its officers. Naturally, this does not mean that the Church has no responsibility with respect to such organizations. It does mean, however, that they are manifestations of the Kingdom of God, in which groups of Christians seek to apply the principles of the Kingdom to every domain of life. The visible Church and the Kingdom, too, may be identified to a certain extent. The visible Church may certainly be said to belong to the Kingdom, to be a part of the Kingdom, and even to be the most important visible embodiment of the forces of the Kingdom. It partakes of the character of the invisible Church (the two being one) as a means for the realization of

the Kingdom of God. Like the visible Church, the Kingdom also shares in the imperfections to which a sinful world exposes it. This is quite evident from the parable of the wheat and the tares, and that of the fishnet. In so far as the visible Church is instrumental in the establishment and extension of the Kingdom, it is, of course, subordinate to this as a means to an end. The Kingdom may be said to be a broader concept than the Church, because it aims at nothing less than the complete control of all the manifestations of life. It represents the dominion of God in every sphere of human endeavor.

E. THE CHURCH IN THE DIFFERENT DISPENSATIONS.

GLOSS Dispensation: a distinct period in God's unfolding administration of His covenant purposes.

1. IN THE PATRIARCHAL PERIOD. In the patriarchal period the families of believers constituted the religious congregations; the Church was best represented in the pious households, where the fathers served as priests. There was no regular cultus, though Gen. 4:26 seems to imply a public calling upon the name of the Lord. There was a distinction between the children of God and the children of men, the latter gradually gaining the upper hand. At the time of the flood the Church was saved in the family of Noah, and continued particularly in the line of Shem. And when true religion was again on the point of dying out, God made a covenant with Abraham, gave unto him the sign of circumcision, and separated him and his descendants from the world, to be His own peculiar people. Up to the time of Moses the families of the patriarchs were the real repositories of the true faith, in which the fear of Jehovah and the service of the Lord was kept alive.

2. IN THE MOSAIC PERIOD. After the exodus the people of Israel were not only organized into a nation, but were also constituted the Church of God. They were enriched with institutions in which not only family devotion or

tribal faith but the religion of the nation could find expression. The Church did not yet obtain an independent organization, but had its institutional existence in the national life of Israel. The particular form which it assumed was that of a Church-State. We cannot say that the two coalesced altogether. There were separate civil and religious functionaries and institutions within the bounds of the nation. But at the same time the whole nation constituted the Church; and the Church was limited to the one nation of Israel, though foreigners could enter it by being incorporated into the nation. In this period there was a marked development of doctrine, an increase in the quantity of the religious truth known, and greater clearness in the apprehension of the truth. The worship of God was regulated down to the minutest details, was largely ritual and ceremonial, and was centered in one central sanctuary.

3. IN THE NEW TESTAMENT. The New Testament Church is essentially one with the Church of the old dispensation. As far as their essential nature is concerned, they both consist of true believers, and of true believers only. And in their external organization both represent a mixture of good and evil. Yet several important changes resulted from the accomplished work of Jesus Christ. The Church was divorced from the national life of Israel and obtained an independent organization. In connection with this the national boundaries of the Church were swept away. What had up to this time been a national Church now assumed a universal character. And in order to realize the ideal of world-wide extension, it had to become a missionary Church, carrying the gospel of salvation to all the nations of the world. Moreover, the ritual worship of the past made place for a more spiritual worship in harmony with the greater privileges of the New Testament.

The representation given in the preceding proceeds on the assumption that the Church existed in the old dispensation as well as in the new, and was essentially the same in both, in spite of acknowledged institutional and administrative differences. This is in harmony with the teachings of our confessional standards. The Belgic Confession says in Art. XXVII: "This

Church has been from the beginning of the world, and will be to the end thereof; which is evident from the fact that Christ is an eternal King, which without subjects He cannot be.” In full agreement with this the Heidelberg Catechism says in Lord’s Day XXI: “That the Son of God, out of the whole human race, from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves for Himself, by His Spirit and Word, in the unity of the true faith, a Church chosen to everlasting life.” The Church is essentially, as was pointed out in the preceding, the community of believers, and this community existed from the beginning of the old dispensation right down to the present time and will continue to exist on earth until the end of the world. On this point we cannot agree with those Premillenarians who, under the influence of a divisive dispensationalism, claim that the Church is exclusively a New Testament institution, which did not come into existence until the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost and will be removed from the earth before the beginning of the millennium. They like to define the Church as “the body of Christ,” which is a characteristically New Testament name, and seem to forget that it is also called “the temple of God” and “Jerusalem,” which are very decidedly names with an Old Testament flavor, cf. I Cor. 3:16,17; II Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21; Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22. We should not close our eyes to the patent fact that the name “Church” (Heb. qahal, rendered ekklesia in the Septuagint) is applied to Israel in the Old Testament repeatedly, Josh. 8:35; Ezra 2:65; Joel 2:16. The fact that in our translations of the Bible the Old Testament rendering of the original is “gathering,” “assembly,” or “congregation,” while the New Testament rendering of it is “Church,” may have given rise to misunderstanding on this point; but the fact remains that in the Old Testament as well as in the New the original word denotes a congregation or an assembly of the people of God, and as such serves to designate the essence of the Church. Jesus on the one hand said that He would found the Church in the future, Matt. 16:18, but also recognized it as an already existing institution, Matt. 18:17. Stephen speaks of “the Church in the wilderness,” Acts 7:38. And Paul clearly testifies to the spiritual unity of Israel and the Church in Rom.

11:17-21, and in Eph. 2:11-16. In essence Israel constituted the Church of God in the Old Testament, though its external institution differed vastly from that of the Church in the New Testament.

F. THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE CHURCH.

GLOSS Catholic: universal: the Church includes Christ's people from every nation, place, and age.

According to Protestants the attributes of the Church are ascribed primarily to the Church as an invisible organism, and only secondarily to the Church as an external institution. Roman Catholics, however, ascribe them to their hierarchical organization. The former speak of three attributes, but to these three the latter add a fourth.

1. THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH.

a. The Roman Catholic conception. Roman Catholics ordinarily recognize only the hierarchically organized ecclesia as the Church. The unity of this Church manifests itself in its imposing world-wide organization, which aims at including the Church of all nations. Its real center is not found in the believers, but in the hierarchy with its concentric circles. There is first of all the broad circle of the lower clergy, the priests and other inferior functionaries; then the smaller circle of the bishops; next the still narrower one of the archbishops; and, finally, the most restricted circle of the cardinals; — the entire pyramid being capped by the Pope, the visible head of the whole organization, who has absolute control of all those that are under him. Thus the Roman Catholic Church presents to the eye a very imposing structure.

b. The Protestant conception. Protestants assert that the unity of the Church is not primarily of an external, but of an internal and spiritual character. It is the unity of the mystical body of Jesus Christ, of which all believers are

members. This body is controlled by one Head, Jesus Christ, who is also the King of the Church, and is animated by one Spirit, the Spirit of Christ. This unity implies that all those who belong to the Church share in the same faith, are cemented together by the common bond of love, and have the same glorious outlook upon the future. This inner unity seeks and also acquires, relatively speaking, outward expression in the profession and Christian conduct of believers, in their public worship of the same God in Christ, and in their participation in the same sacraments. There can be no doubt about the fact that the Bible asserts the unity, not only of the invisible, but also of the visible Church. The figure of the body, as it is found in I Cor. 12:12-31, implies this unity. Moreover, in Eph. 4:4-16, where Paul stresses the unity of the Church, he evidently also has the visible Church in mind, for he speaks of the appointment of office-bearers in the Church and of their labors in behalf of the ideal unity of the Church. Because of the unity of the Church one local church was admonished to supply the needs of another, and the council of Jerusalem undertook to settle a question that arose in Antioch. The Church of Rome strongly emphasized the unity of the visible Church and expressed it in its hierarchical organization. And when the Reformers broke with Rome, they did not deny the unity of the visible Church but maintained it. However, they did not find the bond of union in the ecclesiastical organization of the Church, but in the true preaching of the Word and the right administration of the sacraments. This is also the case in the Belgic Confession. [Articles XXVII - XXIX.] We quote only the following statements from it: "We believe and profess one catholic or universal Church, which is a holy congregation of true believers, all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by His blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit." [Art. XXVII.] The marks by which the true Church is known are these: "If the pure doctrine of the Gospel is preached therein; if it maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if Church discipline is exercised in punishing sin; in short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God; all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of

the Church. Hereby the true Church may certainly be known, from which no man has a right to separate himself.”[Art. XXIX.] The unity of the visible Church was also taught by Reformed theologians of the post-Reformation period, and was always very strongly emphasized in Scottish theology. Walker even says: “True Churches of Christ, side by side with one another, forming separate organizations, with separate governments, seemed to them (Scottish theologians) utterly inadmissible, unless it might be in a very limited way, and for some reason of temporary expediency.”[Scottish Theology and Theologians, pp. 97 f.] In the Netherlands this doctrine was eclipsed in recent years in the measure in which the multi- or pluriformity of the Churches was emphasized in deference to the facts of history and the existing condition. At present it is again stressed in some of the current discussions. In view of the present divisions of the Church, it is quite natural that the question should arise, whether these do not militate against the doctrine of the unity of the visible Church. In answer to this it may be said that some divisions, such as those caused by differences of locality or of language, are perfectly compatible with the unity of the Church; but that others, such as those which originate in doctrinal perversions or sacramental abuses, do really impair that unity. The former result from the providential guidance of God, but the latter are due to the influence of sin: to the darkening of the understanding, the power of error, or the stubbornness of man; and therefore the Church will have to strive for the ideal of overcoming these. The question may still arise, whether the one invisible Church ought not to find expression in a single organization. It can hardly be said that the Word of God explicitly requires this, and history has shown this to be infeasible and also of questionable worth. The only attempt that was made so far to unite the whole Church in one great external organization, did not prove productive of good results, but led to externalism, ritualism, and legalism. Moreover, the multifariousness of Churches, so characteristic of Protestantism, in so far as it resulted from the providential guidance of God and in a legitimate way, arose in the most natural manner, and is quite in harmony with the law of differentiation, according to which an

organism in its development evolves from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous. It is quite possible that the inherent riches of the organism of the Church find better and fuller expression in the present variety of Churches than they would in a single external organization. This does not mean, of course, that the Church should not strive for a greater measure of external unity. The ideal should always be to give the most adequate expression to the unity of the Church. At the present time there is a rather strong Church union movement, but this movement, as it has developed up to this time, though undoubtedly springing from laudable motives on the part of some, is still of rather doubtful value. Whatever external union is effected must be the natural expression of an existing inner unity, but the present movement partly seeks to fabricate an external union where no inner unity is found, forgetting that “no artificial aggregation that seeks to unify natural disparities can afford a guarantee against the strife of parties within the aggregation.” It is un-Scriptural in so far as it has been seeking unity at the expense of the truth and has been riding the wave of subjectivism in religion. Unless it changes colour and strives for greater unity in the truth, it will not be productive of real unity but only of uniformity, and while it may make the Church more efficient from a business point of view, it will not add to the true spiritual efficiency of the Church. Barth sounds the right note when he says: “The quest for the unity of the Church must in fact be identical with the quest for Jesus Christ as the concrete Head and Lord of the Church. The blessing of unity cannot be separated from Him who blesses, in Him it has its source and reality, through His Word and Spirit it is revealed to us, and only in faith can it become a reality among us.”[The Church and the Churches, p. 28.]

2. THE HOLINESS OF THE CHURCH.

a. The Roman Catholic conception. The Roman Catholic conception of the holiness of the Church is also primarily of an external character. It is not the inner holiness of the members of the Church through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, but the outer ceremonial holiness that is placed in the

foreground. According to Father Devine the Church is holy first of all “in her dogmas, in her moral precepts, in her worship, in her discipline,” in which “all is pure and irreproachable, all is of such a nature as is calculated to remove evil and wickedness, and to promote the most exalted virtue.”[The Creed Explained, p. 285.] Only secondarily is the holiness of the Church conceived of as moral. Father Deharbe says that the Church is also holy, “because there were in her at all times saints whose holiness God has also confirmed by miracles and extraordinary graces.”[Catechism of the Catholic Religion, p. 140.]

b. Protestant conception. Protestants, however, have quite a different conception of the holiness of the Church. They maintain that the Church is absolutely holy in an objective sense, that is, as she is considered in Jesus Christ. In virtue of the mediatorial righteousness of Christ, the Church is accounted holy before God. In a relative sense they also regard the Church as being subjectively holy, that is, as actually holy in the inner principle of her life and destined for perfect holiness. Hence she can truly be called a community of saints. This holiness is first of all a holiness of the inner man, but a holiness which also finds expression in the outer life. Consequently, holiness is also attributed, secondarily, to the visible Church. That Church is holy in the sense that it is separated from the world in consecration to God, and also in the ethical sense of aiming at, and achieving in principle, a holy conversation in Christ. Since visible local churches consist of believers and their seed, they are supposed to exclude all open unbelievers and wicked persons. Paul does not hesitate to address them as churches of the saints.

3. THE CATHOLICITY OF THE CHURCH.

a. Roman Catholic conception. The attribute of catholicity is appropriated by the Roman Catholic Church, as if it only has the right to be called catholic. Like the other attributes of the Church, it is applied by her to the visible organization. She claims the right to be considered as the one really catholic Church, because she is spread over the whole earth and adapts herself to all

countries and to all forms of government; because she has existed from the beginning and has always had subjects and faithful children, while sects come and go; because she is in possession of the fulness of truth and grace, destined to be distributed among men; and because she surpasses in number of members all dissenting sects taken together.

b. Protestant conception. Protestants, again, apply this attribute primarily to the invisible Church, which can be called catholic in a far truer sense than any one of the existing organizations, not even the Church of Rome excepted. They justly resent the arrogance of the Roman Catholics in appropriating this attribute for their hierarchical organization, to the exclusion of all other Churches. Protestants insist that the invisible Church is primarily the real catholic Church, because she includes all believers on earth at any particular time, no one excepted; because, consequently, she also has her members among all the nations of the world that were evangelized; and because she exercises a controlling influence on the entire life of man in all its phases. Secondly, they also ascribe the attribute of catholicity to the visible Church. In our discussion of the unity of the visible Church, it already became apparent that the Reformers and the Reformed Confessions expressed their belief in a catholic visible Church, and this opinion has been reiterated by Dutch, Scottish, and American Reformed theologians right up to the present time, though in recent years some in the Netherlands expressed doubt about this doctrine. It must be admitted that this doctrine presents many difficult problems, which still call for solution. It is not easy to point out with precision just where this one catholic visible Church is. Furthermore, such questions as these arise: (1) Does this doctrine carry with it a wholesale condemnation of denominationalism, as Dr. Henry Van Dyke seems to think? (2) Does it mean that some one denomination is the true Church, while all others are false, or is it better to distinguish between Churches of more or less pure formation? (3) At what point does a local church or a denomination cease to be an integral part of the one visible Church? (4) Is a single external institution or

organization essential to the unity of the visible Church, or not? These are some of the problems that still call for further study.

G. THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH.

GLOSS **Marks of the Church:** the chief signs by which a true Church is recognised: faithful Word, sacraments, and discipline.

1. THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH IN GENERAL.

a. The need of such marks. Little need was felt for such marks as long as the Church was clearly one. But when heresies arose, it became necessary to point to certain marks by which the true Church could be recognized. The consciousness of this need was already present in the early Church, was naturally less apparent in the Middle Ages, but became very strong at the time of the Reformation. At that time the one existing Church was not only divided into two great sections, but Protestantism itself was divided into several Churches and sects. As a result it was felt ever increasingly that it was necessary to point out some marks by which the true Church could be distinguished from the false. The very fact of the Reformation proves that the Reformers, without denying that God maintains His Church, were yet deeply conscious of the fact that an empirical embodiment of the Church may become subject to error, may depart from the truth, and may totally degenerate. They assumed the existence of a standard of truth to which the Church must correspond, and recognized as such the Word of God.

b. The marks of the Church in Reformed theology. Reformed theologians differed as to the number of the marks of the Church. Some spoke of but one, the preaching of the pure doctrine of the Gospel (Beza, Alsted, Amesius, Heidanus, Maresius); others, of two, the pure preaching of the word and the right administration of the sacraments (Calvin, Bullinger, Zanchius, Junius,

Gomarus, Mastricht, à Marck) and still others added to these a third, the faithful exercise of discipline (Hyperius, Martyr, Ursinus, Trelcatius, Heidegger, Wendelinus). These three are also named in our Confession;[Art. XXIX.] but after making mention of them, the Confession combines them all into one by saying: “in short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God.” In course of time a distinction was made, especially in Scotland, between those features which are absolutely necessary to the being of a Church, and those which are only necessary to its well-being. Some began to feel that, however necessary discipline might be to the health of the Church, it would be wrong to say that a church without discipline was no Church at all. Some even felt the same way about the right administration of the sacraments, since they did not feel free to unchurch either the Baptists or the Quakers. The effect of this is seen in the Westminster Confession, which mentions as the only thing that is indispensable to the being of the Church “the profession of the true religion,” and speaks of other things, such as purity of doctrine or worship, and of discipline as excellent qualities of particular churches, by which the degree of their purity may be measured.[Chap. XXV, paragraphs 2, 4. 5.] Dr. Kuyper recognizes only the *praedicatio verbi* and the *administratio sacramenti* as real marks of the Church, since they only: (1) are specific, that is, are characteristics of the Church and of no other body; (2) are instruments through which Christ works with His grace and Spirit in the Church; and (3) are formative elements that go into the constitution of the Church. Discipline is also found elsewhere and cannot be co-ordinated with these two. Bearing this in mind, he has no objection, however, to regard the faithful exercise of discipline as one of the marks of the Church. Now it is undoubtedly true that the three marks usually named are not really co-ordinate. Strictly speaking, it may be said that the true preaching of the Word and its recognition as the standard of doctrine and life, is the one mark of the Church. Without it there is no Church, and it determines the right administration of the sacraments and the faithful exercise of Church discipline. Nevertheless, the right administration of the sacraments is also a real mark of the Church. And

though the exercise of discipline may not be peculiar to the Church, that is, is not found in it exclusively, yet it is absolutely essential to the purity of the Church.

2. THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH IN PARTICULAR.

a. The true preaching of the Word. This is the most important mark of the Church. While it is independent of the sacraments, these are not independent of it. The true preaching of the Word is the great means for maintaining the Church and for enabling her to be the mother of the faithful. That this is one of the characteristics of the true Church, is evident from such passages as John 8:31,32,47; 14:23; I John 4:1-3; II John 9. Ascribing this mark to the Church does not mean that the preaching of the Word in a Church must be perfect before it can be regarded as a true Church. Such an ideal is unattainable on earth; only relative purity of doctrine can be ascribed to any Church. A church may be comparatively impure in its presentation of the truth without ceasing to be a true church. But there is a limit beyond which a Church cannot go in the misrepresentation or denial of the truth, without losing her true character and becoming a false Church. This is what happens when fundamental articles of faith are publicly denied, and doctrine and life are no more under the control of the Word of God.

b. The right administration of the sacraments. The sacraments should never be divorced from the Word, for they have no content of their own, but derive their content from the Word of God; they are in fact a visible preaching of the Word. As such they must also be administered by lawful ministers of the Word, in accordance with the divine institution, and only to properly qualified subjects, the believers and their seed. A denial of the central truths of the gospel will naturally affect the proper administration of the sacraments; and the Church of Rome certainly departs from the right mode, when it divorces the sacraments from the Word, ascribing to them a sort of magical efficacy; and when it allows midwives to administer baptism in time of need. That the right administration of the sacraments is a characteristic of the true Church,

follows from its inseparable connection with the preaching of the Word and from such passages as Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:42; I Cor. 11:23-30.

c. The faithful exercise of discipline. This is quite essential for maintaining the purity of doctrine and for guarding the holiness of the sacraments. Churches that are lax in discipline are bound to discover sooner or later within their circle an eclipse of the light of the truth and an abuse of that which is holy. Hence a Church that would remain true to her ideal in the measure in which this is possible on earth, must be diligent and conscientious in the exercise of Christian discipline. The Word of God insists on proper discipline in the Church of Christ, Matt. 18:18; I Cor. 5:1-5,13; 14:33,40; Rev. 2:14,15,20.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY: What is the meaning of the word *ekklesia* in Matt. 16:18; 18:17? When and how did the term *kuriake* come into use for the Church? How do the Dutch words ‘kerk’ and ‘gemeente’ differ, and how are they related to the Greek term? Are there passages in Scripture in which the word *ekklesia* is undoubtedly used to denote as a unity the whole body of those throughout the world who outwardly profess Christ? Is the word ever used as the designation of a group of churches under a common government, such as we call a denomination? Does the visibility of the Church consist merely in the visibility of its members? If not, in what does it become visible? Does the visible Church stand in any other than a mere outward relation to Christ, and does it enjoy any other than mere outward promises and privileges? Does the essence of the visible Church differ from that of the invisible Church? What objections have been raised to the distinction between the Church as an institution and the Church as an organism? What is the fundamental difference between the Roman Catholic and the Reformed conception of the Church?