

CHAPTER I

**Of the Rights of an Evangelical Lutheran Local Church
Independent of the State**

§ 4. *All the rights which an Evangelical Lutheran local congregation possesses are included in the keys of the kingdom of heaven, which the Lord has originally and immediately given to His entire Church, and in such manner that they belong to each congregation, the smallest as well as the largest, in like measure, Matt. 18:17-20 ("Tell it unto the church. . . . Whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven"); 16:19; John 20:22, 23.*

"Scripture clearly identifies the ecclesiastical power and the keys." (Melanchthon, *Corp. Ref.*, 12:494.) And these "keys belong not to the person of one particular man but to the Church. Christ grants the keys principally and immediately to the Church and not merely to certain persons. Matt. 18:20: 'Where two or three are gathered together in My name,' etc." (Smalcald Art., Tract, §§ 24, 69.) Luther: "The Christian Church alone has the keys; let there be no doubt about this. And whoever, in spite of this, arrogates the keys to himself, be he Pope or anybody else, is an arrant *sacrilegus*, a church-robber." (19:846.) "Here [Matt. 18:19, 20] we learn that also two or three gathered together in the name of Christ have exactly the same power as St. Peter and all the apostles. Even though all of them were but stable-boys, what does Christ care about high and mighty lords?" (17:1074.) The congregation does not get its power from the ministry but the ministry from the congregation. "The minister is a servant of the whole congregation, to which the keys are given, though he himself be a scoundrel. For what he does in the name and stead of the congregation the Church does." (11:2304.) Nor does the local church derive its authority and rights from the Church at large. It is not dependent on any superchurch, any larger church-body, any other congregation. "We know that in Christendom all churches are equal. And the bishops, or pastors, are equal, no one the lord or servant of the other." (17:1115.) "The congregation of God of every place and every time" is a sovereign body. (Form. of Conc., Th. Decl., X, § 9.)

§ 5. *Additional Scripture-proof for the teaching that with the keys of the kingdom of heaven every Evangelical Lutheran local congregation has the entire church power which it needs, that is, the power and authority to perform everything that is requisite for its government: the true members of such congregation, viz., the believing Christians therein contained, are called "priests and kings before God," or "the royal priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6), "anointed" (1 John 2:20, 27), Christ's affianced bride (2 Cor. 11:2), "the body of Christ," in and among whom Christ dwells (1 Cor. 12:27; Matt. 18:20); they are described as equal brethren (Matt. 23:8-11), as the possessors of all things (1 Cor. 3:21-23: "All things are yours"). Furthermore, the ministers are called their "stewards" and "servants" (1 Cor. 4:1; 2 Cor. 4:5). Finally, the congregation itself is represented as the supreme tribunal (Matt. 18:15-18: "Tell it unto the church").*

Luther: "The keys are given neither to Peter nor to his successor but to the Church alone, from which he receives them as a servant." (18:737.) "The Holy Ghost was careful not to use the name *sacerdos*, priest, for the apostles or any other offices. It is the name reserved for the baptized, the Christians. For none of us is born in Holy Baptism an apostle, preacher, teacher, pastor, but we are all born priests. Out of the number of these born priests some are then chosen and elected to these offices, which they administer in the name of all of us." (19:1260.) Smalc. Art.: "Christ gives supreme and final jurisdiction to the Church when He says: 'Tell it unto the church.'" (Tract, § 24.)

CHAPTER II

Of the Duties of an Evangelical Lutheran Local Church Independent of the State

§ 6. *It is the duty of the congregation carefully to see to it that the Word of God may richly dwell and have full and free scope in its midst. Col. 3:16: "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly," etc.*

Smalc. A.: "Wherever the Church is, there is the authority [command] to administer the Gospel." (Tract, § 67.) Apology: "The true adornment of the churches is

godly, useful, and clear doctrine, the devout use of the Sacraments, ardent prayer, and the like." (XXIV, § 51.) Luther: "God's Word cannot be without God's people. On the other hand, God's people cannot be without God's Word." (16:2276.)

§ 7. *It is the duty of the congregation to care for the purity of doctrine and life in its midst and to exercise church discipline in these matters.* Matt. 18:15-18: "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, . . . let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." Rom. 16:17: "Mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them." 1 Cor. 5:1-13: "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? . . . Put away from among yourselves that wicked person." 1 Cor. 6:1-8; 2 Cor. 2:6-11. Gal. 6:1: "restore such an one in the spirit of meekness." 1 Thess. 5:14; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14, 15. 2 John 10, 11: "If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed," etc.

Smalc. A.: "When the true judgment of the Church is removed, godless dogmas and godless services cannot be removed. . . . The Christians must censure all other errors of the Pope." (Tract, §§ 51, 56.) Luther: "The right to judge, and pronounce on, matters of doctrine belongs to each and every Christian, so much so that he is doing an accursed thing who impairs this right by a hair's breadth. . . . Christ gives them this right. Moreover, He commands them to judge the doctrine." (19:341.)

"What is the reason that the ban [church discipline, excommunication] has in these days fallen into disuse? This, that no one is willing to do his Christian duty in this matter. . . . The neighbor might have been won back if you had only performed your duty and obligation by admonishing him." (Luther, 6:1633.)

§ 8. *It is the duty of the congregation to concern itself also with the temporal welfare of all its members that they may not suffer want of the necessaries of life nor be forsaken in any need.* Gal. 6:10: "Let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household

of faith." Deut. 15:4. Rom. 12:13: "Distributing to the necessity of saints." Gal. 2:9, 10; Jas. 1:27; 1 Thess. 4:11, 12.

Luther: "In this story you see what form a Christian congregation should have. . . . The apostles take care of the souls, occupy themselves with preaching and praying, and yet they also provide for the needs of the body, appoint men to distribute the goods, so that no one suffers want. . . . We should form our congregations after this model, provide for preaching, but also for the distribution of goods, the visiting of the sick, so that no one suffers want. . . . But we have not as yet the people for that." (11:2065.) "After the preaching of the Gospel the office and charge of a true and faithful pastor is to be mindful of the poor. . . . There is none that will now care for the maintenance of the ministers and the erecting of schools. . . . To be brief, true religion is ever in need. Therefore a true and faithful bishop must have a care of the poor also so that they suffer no need." (On Gal. 2:10.)

§ 9. *It is the duty of the congregation to see that in its midst "all things be done decently and in order," 1 Cor. 14:33, 40, and to "provide for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord but also in the sight of men," 2 Cor. 8:21. Col. 2:5.*

"It is lawful for bishops, or pastors, to make ordinances that things be done orderly in the Church" (A. C., XXVIII:53), the pastors acting "as servants and stewards, not as masters, of the Church" (Luther, 16:1014), the power to make such ordinances "as may be most useful and edifying" lying with "the congregation of God of every place" (F. C., Ep. X, § 4).

§ 10. *It is the duty of the congregation to be diligent "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" also with all parts of the orthodox Church, Eph. 4:3; 1 Thess. 4:9, 10; Rom. 15:26, 27; 2 Cor. 8:19.*

Luther: "It is a fine thing that the churches be in accord also regarding external matters as they agree in the Spirit, faith, Word, and Sacrament. St. Paul earnestly admonishes us to strive after, and maintain, concord and harmony in doctrine and life and keep from dissension and inconformity, Rom. 12:16; 1 Cor. 1:10." (20:1790 f.)

§ 11. *It is also incumbent upon the congregation to do its part in building up and promoting the welfare of the Church at large. Amos 6:6; Acts 11:21-23 ("Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem; and they sent forth Barnabas that he should go as far as Antioch," etc.); 15:1 ff.*

Luther: "Mark 16:16: 'He that believeth and is baptized' shows that faith must not remain concealed and hidden; it will not do for each one hearing the Gospel to go his own way, to believe for himself, and not to confess his faith before others. No, it should be known and seen where the Gospel is not only preached but also believed and received, that is, where the Church and Christ's kingdom is to be found in the world; for that purpose Christ brings us together and holds us together through this divine sign of Baptism. Otherwise, if we remained apart and separate without such an external bond and sign, Christendom could not be extended and preserved. Therefore Christ binds us together in this divine community in order that the Gospel be spread farther and farther and others be brought into the fold through our confession." (11:982 f.) — D. Arcularius: "It belongs to the solidarity of the congregations that one come to the aid of the other, as often as need arises, through mutual instruction, admonition, consolation, and whatever other assistance our Christian duty calls for, after the example of the churches at Jerusalem and Antioch, Acts 11:21-23."

CHAPTER III

Of the Performance of the Rights and Duties of an Evangelical Lutheran Local Church Independent of the State

A. Of the Meetings of the Congregation

§ 12. *In order that a free local congregation may execute its rights and privileges in a conscientious, profitable, and God-pleasing manner, it is necessary to have public meetings, properly arranged and conducted, for the purpose of transacting its business as a self-governing body. Matt. 18:17: "Tell it unto the church." 1 Cor. 5:4: "When ye are gathered together." Acts 21:17-22: "The multitude must needs come together." Chap. 6:2; 15:30; 1 Tim. 5:20.*

Luther calls such meetings "useful councils" (16:2261). It would be "a truly evangelical church order for those who mean to be real Christians to record their names on a list and meet at an appointed place" for the purpose of exercising discipline, caring for the poor, and performing other Christian work. "If one had the people and persons, the rules and regulations could easily be supplied. But as yet I neither can nor would make rules and regulations for such a congregation or assembly. For I do not yet have the persons needed for this." (*The German Mass and Order of Service*, 10:226.)

§ 13. *All the adult male members of the congregation are entitled to active participation in the transactions of such meetings by way of speaking, deliberating, voting, and resolving. Matt. 18:17, 18; Acts 1:15, 23-26; 15:5, 12, 13, 22, 23: "It so pleased the apostles and elders with THE WHOLE CHURCH. . . . The apostles and elders and BRETHREN." 1 Cor. 5:2; 6:2; 10:15; 12:7; 2 Thess. 3:15. But women and the young are excluded from such participation. 1 Cor. 14:34, 35: "Let your women keep silence in the churches." 1 Pet. 5:5.*

§ 14. *The external management of the meetings rests with those who in general supervise the congregation or to whom the external government of the congregation has been entrusted as a special office. Acts 15:6 ("The apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter"); 1 Tim. 5:17; Rom. 12:8; 1 Cor. 12:28.*

The various church offices stem from the one office instituted by God, the ministry. For instance, "the deacons (almoners) and elders, caring for the discipline, perform work with which the ministry is charged. . . . God has left it to the congregations to establish such separate offices and define their particular work as the need arises and the circumstances require." (M. Chemnitz, *Examen*, II, 13.)

§ 15. *Subjects of deliberation and action in such meetings are matters of doctrine (Acts 15), election or appointment of church officers (Acts 1:15-26; 6:1-6; 2 Cor. 8:19); church discipline (Matt. 18:17-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-5; 2 Cor. 2:*

6-11; 1 Tim. 5:20), public offenses (Acts 21:20-22), quarrels among members (1 Cor. 6:1-8), matters of good order and ceremonial (1 Cor. 14:26-40; 16:1, 2), and the like.

§ 16. *In matters of doctrine and conscience there must be unanimity, all giving assent to the teaching of God's Word (Is. 8:20: "To the Law and to the Testimony") and to the Confessions of the Church. Adiaphora (MITTEL-DINGE), matters neither commanded nor prohibited by God's Word, are ordered according to the principles of love and equity; after the matter has been fully and orderly discussed, it is decided by a majority vote (1 Cor. 16:14: "Let all your things be done with charity"; 14:40: "Let all things be done decently and in order"; Col. 2:5). — In case anything should have been decided and determined by the congregation contrary to the Word of God, such decision is null and void, must be so declared, and revoked.*

Holy Scripture "is the only true standard by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged." In the Confessions of the Church "we have a unanimously accepted, definite, common form of doctrine." (F. C., Thor. Decl.; cp. Summary, §§ 3, 9, 10.) — Christians come to an agreement on the adiaphora "in Christian liberty and guided by love, having the best interests of the community in mind. To do such things out of love and in Christian liberty does no harm." Luther adds: "But to enforce them as though obedience were due [to human authority] is damnable." (12:87.)

§ 17. *Good order and a due regard for the rights of all require that the meeting, having been previously announced, be held at a suitable time. Those who fail to appear thereby waive their right of vote. For the sake of love and peace and needful prudence it is advisable that important resolutions concerning matters which admit of postponement should be considered valid only when they have been confirmed in a subsequent meeting.*

The "Ordinance of a Common Chest" for the Church at Leissnig (1523), which was approved in principle by Luther, provided that "a parish-meeting shall be held three times a year, from 11 A. M. to 2 P. M., to hear the report and examine the books of the ten elders (*Vorsteher*) and