

FOREWORD

At some point in the search for a church home the simplest of questions may occur to the Christian: How do I know when I have found it? How can I be sure I am really in a Christian church? Sure, weekly gatherings of Christians nowadays are embraced or abandoned for all sorts of reasons: Building location, worship times, musician quality, youth programs, educational opportunities, preaching skill-level, mission outreach and even congregational indebtedness. None of these reasons for accepting or rejecting a given community of believers, however, really touch on what constitutes the true Christian church on earth.

So what does? That is subject of the short work which follows. There Martin Luther poses this question and on the basis of Scripture, comes up with seven distinctive marks which identify the Christian church! He then goes on to explore the extent and the limit of the power of the church on earth, especially when representatives of individual Christian communities gather together to decide matters touching on the church at large. What role might Christian homes and schools play in that bigger picture? What about the government? Luther touches on these matters as well!

In short, what the following work contains is a brief primer on the essence of the Christian church in the world in these end times. As the extensive *Afterword* explains, it is

taken from a section of one of Luther's more famous works, his *On the Councils and the Church*, which first appeared in 1539. It is a brand new translation by Holger Sonntag, divided into chapters with study questions for ease of use.

Any Christian who takes a few moments to work through this text will most certainly benefit from the effort, as most assuredly have I as I prepared this edition.

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