

# *The Christological Nature of the Predigtamt as Espoused in the Lutheran Confessions*

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As is often the case in the ministry of the Called and ordained servant of the Word, I had the honor of closing the eyes of one of my sheep (Betty) as her soul was received by the angels in death. Hard as it is to conduct the funeral of someone to whom you have become so close, it is always an honor to proclaim the faithfulness of Christ Jesus to His promises now realized more fully in the Church Triumphant. The day after the funeral her son (then a Baptist) drove into my driveway with his pick-up. He had a twig bent rocking chair in the back end which he promptly brought to my front door. I received him with a greeting of Christ which to my surprise he answered appropriately. He placed the rocking chair in my living room and said "this is your chair." I recognized it as the one I always sat in when I made visits to Betty's home to bring her the Divine Service. I indicated to George that this rocking chair should be a part of the inheritance from Betty to you or the grandchildren. George responded "you don't understand, this was the pastor's chair. No matter how many people were over to visit Betty, no one sat in that chair. This is the place where the pastor would come and sit in front of her as he set up the Altar and conducted Divine Service. It is the place where God sat and spoke to her His Words of forgiveness, life and salvation. It is where He sang the Lutheran hymns, it is from there that Jesus gave to her His Body and Blood in Holy Communion." As that chair was the chair of the Pastor, so also, to Betty, it was the Seat of Christ. To Betty the Office of the Ministry had a Christological nature to it.

Betty was a lifelong Lutheran, emigrating to the United States from Pomerania Prussia early in the 20th century. Is the Christological nature of the Office unique to Betty or did she learn like all others catechized in the Word and the Lutheran Confessions? Does this mean that the J.A.A. Grabau's statement "The pastor is to be obeyed in all matters unless the scriptures forbid it" (*Hirtenbrief 1840*) is true and Walther was wrong? Was Martin Stephen correct when he said "The Bishop is to have authority over every facet of the members lives" (*Investiture 1838*)? Is the pastor, in his person, God? Was Rome right when they said "Unless one is blessed by the Pope or by one whom the Pope has blessed he cannot enter heaven" (*Boniface the VIII*). If one were to answer "yes" to these questions would they not be siding with the *Confutation* rather than the Lutheran Confessions? May our walk through the Lutheran Confessions in this paper bring some clarity to these discussions and confessional practices to the Office of the Holy Ministry.

## **AC V & XIV The Office of the Ministry and Church Governance**

"To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel."

"It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call." (Tappert pg. 31, 36. All references in this paper are from Tappert BOC).

Instituted the office of the ministry, the *predigtamt* or preaching office, the Confessions say. Does article V speak of an office in the abstract or in the concrete? While this is debated even to this day, and the focus of this paper is not meant to answer that question, Walther already has. Walther actually says both, abstract and concrete. He does this by quoting Ludwig Hartmann who says "The ministry of the Word may be treated in two ways: first, in an abstract way when the state or the office itself is being considered, as Article 5 of the Augsburg Confession treats it; second, in a concrete way, when the persons are considered to minister in this holy office, as Article 14 of the Augsburg Confession treats it" (Church & Ministry

178). Walther does not speak of AC V without including AC XIV. To him it is unconscionable to talk of one as though it did not involve the other. While the *amt* for Walther was abstract, the *amt* was always filled with a *prediger* or a concrete man, one who carried out the duties of the office. At the very least Walther says that the office is distinct from the *priesteramt*, the universal priesthood of all believers. Distinct *unterschiedene* means different from, not the same as, unusual, unique. The office and the man who fills it is not the same as the ones who benefit from his duties. He is so different that the man who fills the office makes the *predigtamt* concrete when AC V and XIV are understood as Walther indicates in his book. His unique relationship with the congregation is founded in the Gospel he preaches.

### **AC XXVIII The Power of the Bishops**

"Our teachers assert that according to the Gospel the power of keys or the power of bishops is a power and command of God to preach the Gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer and distribute the sacraments. For Christ sent out the apostles with this command, 'As the Father has sent me, even so I send you. Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained' ( John 20:21-23). This power of keys or of bishops is used and exercised only by teaching and preaching the Word of God and by administering the sacraments. In this way are imparted not bodily but eternal things and gifts, namely, eternal righteousness, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life. These gifts cannot be obtained except through the office of preaching and administering the holy sacraments, for St. Paul says, 'The Gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith.' Inasmuch as the power of the church or of bishops bestows eternal gifts and is used and exercised only in the office of preaching, it does not interfere at all with government or temporal authority." (Tappert 81-82)

"According to divine right, therefore, it is the office of the Bishop to preach the Gospel, forgive sins, judge doctrine and condemn doctrine that is contrary to the Gospel, and exclude from the Christian community the ungodly whose wicked conduct is manifest. All this is to be done not by human power but by God's Word alone. On this account, parish ministers (*pfarluete*, *people of the parish*) and churches are bound to be obedient to the bishops according to the saying of Christ in Luke 10:16, 'He who hears you hears me.'" (Tappert 84)

The Confessions make this perfectly clear, as I believe Walther did as well, that the Gospel has an office through which it comes to the church. God works through means and gives an office to the church that the means may be exercised. The Gospel is the forgiveness of sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for man. According to Smalcald part III article IV (Tappert 310) the Gospel is to be preached and administered. The office through which God does this is the office through which God brings the merits of His Son to the undeserving. The pastor is the mouth of Christ when he preaches the Gospel of Christ. In effect, the office is no office at all apart from Christ who comes to the sinner through what the office preaches and administers. Therefore, the Word and the Sacrament connection to the office make the office the office of Christ Himself.

### **AP VII & VIII The Church**

"When the sacraments are administered by unworthy men, this does not rob them of their efficacy. For they do not represent their own persons but the person of Christ, because of the churches call, as Christ testifies (Luke 10:16), "He who hears you hears me." When they offer the Word of Christ or the sacraments, they do so in Christ's place and stead." (Tappert 173)

To do so in Christ's place and stead is not as though He is absent from the act. In fact, He is truly present in the Word and sacrament as the pastor preaches and officiates. The distinct nature of the office means that the office of Christ is acting and in that action Christ is there acting for the sake of repentance and faith. When the pastor preaches and administers, the focus is not on him but on the presence of Christ through the office that belongs to Him. When His Word is preached He is preaching, when His sacrament is officiated He is officiating. When the people of the parish hear the Word they are hearing Christ's Word. When they eat and drink they are eating and drinking what Christ gives, His Body and Blood. Not

even the sin, ignorance, and unbelief of the pastor can take away from the office what Christ gives through the office. Therefore the office is Christological and not anthropocentric. Walther says as much in Thesis IX "Therefore, when a pastor uses God's Word in his congregation, whether by teaching, admonishing, reproving, or comforting, either publicly or privately, then the congregation hears Jesus Christ Himself out of his mouth. In that case it owes him unconditional obedience as the one by whom God desires to make known to it His will and lead it to eternal life, and the more faithfully a pastor administers his office, the more highly it should esteem him." (C&M 303-304)

For that reason preachers need to be clear, eloquent (in a non-showy way), creative and practical in their application of the Gospel and Christian doctrine. Just because a sermon is orthodox doesn't mean it's any good, or that any reasonable person can get something out of it. If it's badly organized and uses theological catch-phrases, it's hard to say that it's really "preaching the Gospel."

## **AP XII Penitence**

"The power of the keys administers and offers the Gospel through absolution, which is the true voice of the Gospel. In speaking of faith, therefore, we also include absolution since "faith comes from what is heard," as Paul says (Romans 10:17). Hearing the Gospel and hearing absolution strengthens and consoles the conscience. Because God truly quickens through the Word, the keys truly forgive sin before him, according to the statement (Luke 10:16), "He who hears you hears me." Therefore we must believe the voice of the one absolving no less than we would believe a voice coming from heaven. Absolution may properly be called a sacrament of penitence, as even the more learned of the scholastics say." (Tappert 187)

Here the same applies as above. When the absolution comes through the office created by Christ and filled by the Call of Christ, using the congregation to extend the Call, it is Christ Himself absolving the sins of the sinner. What sweet certainty this gives the repentant soul. The keys of the kingdom are given to the church for the sake of forgiveness and comfort. When we say they are given to the church we do not mean to the congregation only but to the entire church which includes the office and the duties it is given to exercise the keys. When addressing the doctrine of the Call Walther defines the congregation (*Gemeinde*) "consists of both preachers and hearers." (C&M 220). The office is the vocation where Christ has chosen to exercise the keys He has given to the Church in a public manner.

## **AP XIII The Sacraments**

"If ordination is interpreted this way, we shall not object either to calling the laying on of hands a sacrament. The church has the command to appoint ministers; to this we must subscribe wholeheartedly, for we know that God approves this ministry and is present in it." (Tappert 212)

Without making this a discussion concerning ordination and the laying on of hands, we can conclude from this excerpt that God is *present* in the ministry. His presence is a sacramental presence when His Word is preached and the sacraments administered according to His Word. This was why Betty said that the chair I sat in was the place where God came to her to give her His gifts. The gifts were the gifts whether it was me or another pastor bringing them. The corporeal reality of the presence of Christ was in the Word and sacraments that came to her as I preached and administered. In and through the Gospel as exercised by the Called and ordained pastor God is present in the ministry. This clearly defines the Christological nature of the office.

## **AP XXIV The Mass**

"Thus it squares with our position that a minister who consecrates shows forth (*exhibit populo*) the body and blood of the Lord to the people, just as a minister who preaches shows forth (*exhibit populo*) the gospel to the people, as Paul says (I Cor. 4:1) "this is how one should regard us, as ministers of Christ and dispensers of the sacraments of God," that is, of the word and sacrament; and II Cor. 5:20 "we are am-

bassadors of Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." (Tappert 264)

In this discussion on the term liturgy the Lutheran Fathers argue against *ex opera operato*. The power and efficacious nature of preaching and the sacraments is not in the act but in the Gospel. The point of this excerpt is while the act is not the power, the power isn't enacted without the act. The office is given to the church (Eph. 4:11-12) for the sake of the enactment of the power of the Gospel (Tractate 67). As the pastor preaches and administers he "shows forth" the reality of Christ. He doesn't show a picture and ask members to remember, he doesn't tell a story with some moral platitude as its goal. He shows forth, presents, gives a corporeal reality that is in fact Christ Himself.

### **AP XXVIII Ecclesiastical Power**

"It is a testimony given to the apostles so that we may believe them on the basis of another's Word rather than on the basis of their own. For Christ wants to assure us, as was necessary, that the Word is efficacious when it is delivered by men and that we should not look for another word from heaven. "He who hears you hears me" cannot be applied to traditions. For Christ requires them to teach in such a way that he might be heard, because he says "hears me." Therefore he wants his voice, his Word to be heard, not human traditions." (Tappert 284)

Walther quotes this passage with the intent of guarding against the Old Adam of each pastor. The pastor is not Christ that he must be obeyed on all matters. He is in the office of Christ that he may preach the Gospel which is the only authority the church has. Walther holds the congregation to the Word preached by the pastor as long as it is God's Word and not simply the word of man. He says "if they teach anything unchristian and unscriptural, we should not obey them. Hence, this passage does not establish any rule outside the gospel. Therefore, they cannot prove their authority, which they have established outside the gospel, from the gospel; for the gospel does not speak of traditions but of teaching God's word." (C&M 314). The Christological nature of the office is not located in the man filling the office but in the Christ who speaks through the office. And at the same time the concrete necessity of a man in the office makes the Christological nature of the office a place where Christ comes to His people.

### **SA part III, Article IV The Papacy**

"Consequently the church cannot be better governed and maintained than by having all of us live under one head, Christ, and by having all the bishops equal in office and diligently joined together in unity of doctrine, faith, sacraments, prayer, works of love, etc."

The notable word in this passage is "doctrine" along with its companions. The doctrine must be the doctrine of Christ. When the doctrine is not sound it is no longer Christ who speaks and the office loses its Christological nature. That is why every sermon deserves to have the best exegetical preparation possible. The sermon must speak the Word of Christ. Outside examples and analogies are often helpful but cannot overtake the doctrine of the text. Application is necessary as long as the application of the text is of the text rather than a pet peeve of the preacher. Bible classes and catechesis must have sound doctrine. If not, it is no longer Christ teaching but man and his tainted wisdom. The Divine Service is to maintain the words of Christ, the prophets and the apostles, in order for their words to be heard. It is not limited to that only but the words of man are no replacement for the words of the aforementioned three.

### **SA part III, Article XII The Church**

"We do not concede to the papists that they are the church, for they are not. Nor shall we pay any attention to what they command or forbid in the name of the church, for, thank God, a seven-year-old child knows what the church is, namely, holy believers and sheep who hear the voice of their shepherd." (Tappert 315)

The interesting facet of this text is the footnote (probably inserted by Tappert) referencing John 10:3. John 10 is the great "I am the Good Shepherd" chapter. In this text Jesus is making reference to Himself and the means by which His voice is going to be heard by those who follow Him. His voice, the voice of the Good Shepherd, is to be heard by the sheep when their shepherd (the pastor) preaches His Word. By theological sequence Jesus is identifying the office of ministry with Himself in John 10 (confer Acts 28:20). As the apostles would be sent out to preach, they would be preaching what they have been given, namely Jesus Word. The effect is that Jesus is speaking to His sheep using the office He established and filled with a divine Call. The church gathers around the preached Word that they may hear Him.

### **Power and Primacy of the Pope (Tractate)**

"According to John 20:21 Christ sends forth his disciples as equals, without distinction, so that no one of them was to have more or less power than the other... Since Paul, then, clearly testifies that he did not even wish to ask Peter to let him preach, even when he came to him for the last time, we have here a clear teaching that the ministry stems from the common call of the apostles." (German Text, Triglot 504-505)

The point made in this passage is that the Call of the pastor stems from or flows from the common Call of the apostles. Walther quotes this text in Thesis II where he says "The ministry of the Word or the pastoral office is not a human institution but an office that God Himself has established." (C&M 177-178) When the pastor carries out the duties of the office he is only doing what was done before him through the apostles. The office of the ministry is the office of Christ, is the office of the apostolic ministry. As the apostles were sent to preach and administer for the sake of the keys being exercised, so do pastor's preach and administer for the sake of the keys being exercised. The pastoral office is apostolic only in that the message is the apostolic Gospel and teaching.

### **Tractate**

"In addition, it is necessary to acknowledge that the keys do not belong to the person of one particular individual for the whole church, as is shown by many clear and powerful arguments, for after speaking of the keys in Matthew 18:19, Christ said, 'If two or three of you agree on earth,' etc. Therefore he bestows the keys especially and immediately on the church, and for the same reason the church especially possesses the right of vocation." (Tappert 324)

The Tractate addressed three problems with the Papacy.

1. A human office was declared of divine origin i.e. the Papacy.
2. The Pope declared authority over church and state.
3. Salvation depended on believing in the position and power of the Pope.

For this reason the Tractate denied that the keys were given to only one man. They were given to the entire church immediately or directly. The notable word in this passage is "vocation" (*vocatus or Beruf*). AC XIV translates it "Call." The church possesses the honor to Call their pastor. In reality it is God who Calls through the church for their sake. When the church Calls it is acting by the command or order of God to fill His office that He may speak to and feed them. Vocation is critical in our understanding of the office. It is what defines the place and position that the keys are exercised. The father or mother exercise the keys in the parental realm. The boss or employee exercise them in the business world. The neighbor exercises them in the social world. The pastor exercises them in the ecclesiastical world. As each does so it is Christ acting in and through them. The vocation of pastor in the church is filled by no one other than the pastor. What he does is not more powerful than the father and mother or neighbor. The power lie in the Gospel itself (confer Rom. 1:16). The distinction here is not one of power but one of vocation and in the case of the pastor "regularly called." The point is that the office, by vocation of preaching the Word, is Christological in nature.

## Tractate

"The gospel requires of those who preside over the churches that they preach the gospel, remit sins, administer the sacraments, and, in addition, exercise jurisdiction, that is, excommunicate those who are guilty of notorious crimes and absolve all those who repent. But the confession of all, even of our adversaries, it is evident that this power belongs by divine right to all who preside over the churches, whether they are called pastors, presbyters, or bishops" (Tappert 330).

The Lutheran Fathers are outlining the authority of those who preside over the churches. They identify who they are by listing "pastors, presbyters, or bishops." The equality of the authority cannot be missed yet there is an authority attached to the office. In particular the authority to *exercise jurisdiction that is excommunicate*. Ultimately this authority belongs to God alone. When man is in error it does not determine the objective work of God. At the same time it does give to the office an authority that belongs to Christ. Further entrenching the understanding that the office is Christological in nature.

In C&M (214) it is interesting that either Walther or Mueller added an edit to this passage by bracketing "believers" in along with "all who preside over the churches." Neither the Latin nor the German have "believers" in the text. It may be a sign of what the editor thought the Father's were saying but clearly by the text did not say. I think it was probably an edit by Mueller.

## SD Rule & Norm

"In order to preserve the pure doctrine and to maintain a thorough, lasting, and God pleasing concord within the church, it is essential not only to present the true and wholesome doctrine correctly, but also to accuse the adversaries who teach otherwise (I Timothy 3:9; Titus 1:9; II Timothy 2:24; 3:16). 'Faithful shepherds,' as Luther states, 'must both pastor or feed the lambs and guard against wolves so that they will flee from strange voices and separate the precious from the vile'" (John 10:12-16, 27; Jeremiah 15:19). (Tappert 506)

The Solid Declaration again references John 10. The Faithful Shepherd is Christ Jesus. He fought the enemy wolf as he battled to rescue us by His sacrifice on the cross. He earned the authority to rule the church via His resurrection from the dead. The continuum of shepherding, the preaching of Christ and Him crucified as well as the resurrection from the dead is given to the office. The faithful shepherd defends his sheep with "pure doctrine" and by accusing the accuser. The theology of the cross calls for the preacher to call sin what it is, sin. To call it to repentance and drown the Old Adam. Then it is his most wonderful privilege to preach the Gospel. To apply the healing balm of Jesus to the hurting soul. There is nothing more central to the office than to preach, proclaim, bestow and apply Christ to the hearer.

This is particularly noticeable in the Divine Service with the Salutation and the verba around the Gospel reading. "The Lord be with you" invites the congregations to recognize the office of the pastor as the office of Christ, at the moment when heaven comes to earth to dwell in their midst. The congregation responds "And with thy Spirit" to recognize what is happening in their presence. Christ is in their midst-incarnate<sup>i</sup> in the Holy Office of the Word. When the Pastor introduces the Gospel, the congregation says, "Glory be to You O Lord." This statement follows the Salutation in such a manner that the Pastor standing in the Holy Office is the vessel in whom and by which the congregation recognizes Christ's presence. Christ is incarnate in the Pastoral Office as He speaks His Word to the Baptized. When the pastor says at the conclusion: "This is the Gospel of the Lord", the congregation responds with the Christological recognition, "Praise be to You O Christ." Again the incarnation of Christ is recognized. The people have stood because they recognize that this incarnate Lord, who has made Himself present in the Office of the Word will soon be present in the Holy Sacrament of His body and blood. It is Christ who speaks the Holy Verba (the Words of Institution) through the mouth of the pastor. The Sacrament is presented and distributed. The people of God say, "Amen!"

## SD XI Election

"This is revealed to us, however, as Paul says, "Those whom God has foreknown, elected, and decreed, he has also called" (Rom. 8:29,30). Now, God does not call without means but through the Word, as indeed he has commanded the preaching of repentance and forgiveness of sin. St. Paul testified to the same effect when he wrote 'We are ambassadors in Christ's stead, and God is admonishing you through us, be reconciled to God' (II Cor. 5:20). And the guests and the King invites to his son's wedding those he called through the messengers whom he sent out, some of the first, some of the second, at the third, at the sixth, at the ninth, and even at the 11th hour (Matt. 20:1-16; 22:2-14)..... And we should not regard this call of God which takes place through the preaching of the Word as a deception, but should know certainly that God reveals his will in this way, and that in those whom he thus calls he will be efficaciously active through the Word so that they may be illuminated, converted, and saved. For the Word through which we are called is a ministry of the Spirit –'which gives the spirit' and a 'power of God' to save (Rom. 1:16). Because the Holy Spirit wills to be efficacious through the Word, to strengthen us, and to give us power and ability, it is God's will that we should accept the Word, believe and obey it. The elect are therefore described as follows: 'my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life' (John 10:27-28).... For this reason Christ has the promises of the gospel offered not only in general but also through the sacraments, which is attached as a seal of the promise and by which he confirms it to every believer individually. For that reason also, as the Augsburg Confession states in article XI, we retain individual absolution and teach that it is God's command that we 'believe this absolution and firmly hold that when we believe the Word of absolution we are as is truly reconciled with God as if we had heard a voice from heaven.'" (Tappert 620, 621, 623)

I don't think I can wrap it up with any more clarity than we just heard from the authors of the Solid Declaration. The office and Christ are connected by the Call He extends. The office is the office of the Word of Christ whereby He speaks and administers His mercy and grace. The Confessions do not, and would counsel us not to separate the office from Christ and His Word. To do so would violate the Confessions we all vowed to uphold. It would also create a false security in the hearts of the hearers. To fail to recognize that the office of the ministry, by its nature is Christological, is to turn the ministry into a personality cult with followers that are as blind as their leader.

Nowhere in this paper is there permission given to any pastor to act in any manner outside of the Gospel. The Christological nature of the office does not make him king for a day or ruler over all things. He is not the "owner of God's sheep" but he has been given the "authority of care" concerning the sheep (I Peter 5:2-4). The shepherd knows the wool of his sheep! The pastor has been Called by God to fill Jesus office and to speak Jesus Words and to administer Jesus sacraments. In the Word and sacraments the office finds it's Christological nature. The office is filled by a concrete man for the sake of the sheep who belong to Christ. The Pastor knows His sheep and they know Him. To know them by name is to recognize them by the touch of their wool-- He know the wool of His sheep.

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<sup>i</sup> The word "incarnate" is used in the sense of its second entrance in Webster's New World Dictionary. The second entrance says "to make real". The most common understanding of incarnate is when God took on human flesh in the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem. That is not the usage in this paper. God does not take on human flesh in the person of the pastor, nor does it mean that a parishioner may touch God when they shake the hand of the pastor. The usage in this passage refers to the Office of the Word where Christ speaks in and through His Gospel. The reading of the Gospel in Divine Service of the Liturgy is read by the pastor who fills the Office of the Word. When the Word is read Christ is "made real" in the Word given to the Office for the sake of the sheep hearing His voice.