

The Office of the Holy Ministry

What are the Consequences of Getting It Wrong?

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¹ This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. ² Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. ³ But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. ⁴ For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. ⁵ Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God. 1 Corinthians 4:1-5 (ESV)

V. Concerning the Office of Preaching

To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel. It teaches that we have a gracious God, not through our merit but through Christ's merit, when we so believe.

Condemned are the Anabaptists and others who teach that we obtain the Holy Spirit without the external word of the gospel through our own preparation, thoughts, and works.¹

As a youngster, all I ever really wanted to do was be a pastor. I attended a small parochial school in Northeast Nebraska and I loved chapel, I loved religion class, I even loved memory work. I was always at work building a bigger and better family altar and reminding everyone in the family of the importance of daily devotions. Growing up on a farm there was little that I was allowed to do early on, so I would find every scrap of wood or metal I could lay my hands on and construct and paint makeshift crosses; some thought I was obsessed, others thought it cute, my older brothers considered me simply a pest.

My dad died when I was eight, a devastating blow to the entire family. So many of the events of September 7, 1966, as well as the days and weeks that followed, are forever etched in my long term memory. One of the things that I remember especially well from that time was the care of our pastor. His visits, his prayers, his funeral sermon, his encouragement, his support, his ongoing concern for me and my little sister at school, were all great examples of truly high pastoral care. Through it all I never wavered in my desire to be a pastor.

Priorities often change during high school and college years and the same is true for me. Sports, girls, cars, girls... all took turns clamoring for the top spot in my life. I quickly discovered that telling a girl you were going to be a pastor was not the best way to land a date. Determined now to be a professional athlete (I loved baseball but was better at foot-

¹ Augsburg Confession. Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arandt, C. P. (2000). The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 40.

ball) I went off to college with a scholarship and a plan to be a State Patrolman if a pro sports contract didn't come through. When a knee injury ended the professional athlete dream it also ended the scholarship. I came back home and married my high school sweetheart. We had dated for 5 years and not once had I ever told her of my desire to be a pastor. I had suppressed it forever, or so I thought.

Several years later I was happily married with a beautiful wife and three young sons and a job that provided very well. I was managing our local semi-pro baseball team and was the youngest person ever elected to our local City Council, but something was missing. I thought it was more money. I changed jobs and started working for AAL. I now worked half the hours and made considerably more money, but I was even more unsettled. With my insurance job I was now in the homes of many people, all of them Lutheran and many of them inactive. I found myself spending more and more time with the local pastors, not selling them financial products but talking theology. My in-home conversations were more and more "pastoral" and less and less financial. Little did I know that my world was about to be rocked.

Our congregation's youth group had been planning for many months to attend the National Youth Gathering in Washington, D. C. At the last minute one of our adult sponsors was hospitalized and unable to attend. Since I didn't have a "real job" and had a very flexible schedule, I was pressured into going. I balked and protested, but in the end I went. Somewhere along the 11 day trip, it once again became clear to me that God was calling me to be a pastor. My wife, surprisingly, didn't protest. A new pastor had been installed during our trip, and when I shared my desire with him, he was not only supportive, but told me to report for work under him the very next Sunday. I immediately started classes at Concordia, Mequon, and was on the fast track to becoming a Lay Minister in the LCMS.

While still working for AAL, I was now serving unofficially as "an assistant to the pastor" and completing my Lay Ministry studies. In December of 1988 I received a "call" to serve full time as Lay Minister in my home congregation and promptly quit my insurance gig and began working full time in the church. I was serving much like a vicar or full time elder, doing whatever work the pastor assigned me to do. I was preaching once a month, making hospital and shut-in calls, and teaching Bible study. All the time I was pouring over everything I could get my hands on in the way of theological materials, even studying Greek on my own. As they say in Nebraska, I was in "hog heaven."

This lasted for a little over two years. Our pastor received and accepted a call to a congregation far away. I was left by myself in a congregation of roughly 1000 souls and a large parochial school. Our vacancy pastor was retired, lived 45 miles away, and was on site for a few meetings and only one Sunday a month. I met with the District President and was given authority by him to administer the Sacraments "in the absence of an ordained minister" for "as long as the vacancy lasted;" the only thing I was not allowed to do was officiate at weddings. In essence, I was the acting pastor.

To be honest, I didn't see any issue with what I was doing. Perhaps it was zeal for "doing the work of the Lord," or just sheer ignorance, but I went about my tasks as faithfully as I

knew how. I had always intended to go to seminary and become a “real pastor” when the timing was right, but in the mean time I was serving as best I could. I was not prepared for what happened next.

One Sunday after church, one of our faithful members approached our vacancy pastor as he and I were discussing an upcoming funeral. He had a question, a question that had been troubling him for quite some time and he finally worked up enough courage to ask it. He asked, “When the Lay Minister consecrates the elements, is it really the Lord’s Supper?” We were both stunned. I must admit, it was a question I had never considered. This man was not looking for a theological dissertation or debate, he was not thinking theology in the abstract², he simply wanted to be sure. The vacancy pastor replied that the power was in the Word and not in the person so of course it was the Lord’s Supper. To this the man asked, “Then why do we need pastors?” This man was not being flippant and he was certainly no “alligator” or trouble maker, he simply wanted to be sure. The vacancy pastor had no real answer and the best he could do was try to make some joke about pastors needing a paycheck too. The man walked away and we continued our funeral preparations, but those questions remained, ringing in my ears and biting at my soul.

In my mind I had done everything “by the book.” I had an inner calling from the Lord to serve. I was certified by the LCMS as a Lay Minister. I had received a “call” from the congregation to serve. I had received authorization from the District President for this “emergency” situation. I could even justify myself by pointing to the financial sacrifice I was making by working full time for the Lord. But deep down I knew I wasn’t really in the Office.³ Deep down I knew that this wasn’t really an emergency situation.⁴ Deep down I knew that the District President had no authority to make exceptions where the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions had spoken so clearly. But what really troubled my conscience was that the very thing I had dedicated my life to do, to proclaim God’s Word in its truth and purity, had led someone not into certainty but into doubt.

² “Nor indeed are we dreaming about some platonic republic, as some have slanderously alleged. Instead, we teach that this church truly exists, consisting of true believing and righteous people scattered through the entire world. And we add its marks: the pure teaching of the gospel and the sacraments. This church is properly called “the pillar . . . of the truth” [1 Tim. 3:15*] for it retains the pure gospel, and, as Paul says [1 Cor. 3:12*], “the foundation,” that is, the true knowledge of Christ and faith.” Apology VII & VIII, 20, Kolb/Wengert, 177. See also Herman Sasse, *We Confess the Church*, CPH, 1986, 49.

³ “Clearly, ‘Word and sacrament ministry’ by ‘lay-ministers’ is ruled out. ‘Lay-ministers’ by definition have no regular call. If they did, they would not be ‘lay-ministers.’” Kurt Marquart, *The Gospel Ministry: Distinctions Within & Without*, Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2000, 23.

⁴ “In emergencies (that means danger or death or insuperable isolation, not mere inconvenience or whim), of course every Christian should do what he can.” Ibid. Sasse defines an emergency this way, “this is a state of emergency. In order to remain a Christian, I need the means of grace. For what will become of my faith without the Holy Ghost who is given to me by the means of grace?” Herman Sasse, *The Problem of Lutheran Evangelism*, 4, unpublished manuscript, quoted in Herman Sasse, *Witness*, translated by Bror Erickson, Magdeburg Press, 2013, 20. The question of emergency situations is nothing new, and was addressed in the 17th century (urgent necessity). See John Andreas Quenstedt, *The Holy Ministry*, Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1991, 7.

I share this very personal account not to bring any undue attention to myself or the people involved, and certainly not for personal catharsis, but to demonstrate how easy it is to lead the people of God into doubt. My intentions and motives were pure, or about as pure as the intentions and motives of any poor, miserable sinner can ever be. I had followed the letter of the law and LCMS church polity precisely. But because of my actions, at least one person that I had been called to serve with the Gospel was now in doubt regarding the Gospel. I could not escape the inevitable conclusion that in spite of all my actions to the contrary, I had created that doubt.

What is at stake if we get our doctrine and practice of the Office of the Holy Ministry (OHM)⁵ wrong? Luther would say “*gewiss*” or certainty⁶. Instead of consciences being brought to the peace that only the Gospel can bring, they are left in turmoil and doubt. Anything that leaves a troubled conscience in doubt is not the way of the Lord; our God is not a God of doubt but a God of certainty. When the doctrine and practice of the OHM is in error, the doctrine of justification itself is at stake! The OHM exists for the sake of the Gospel.⁷ The two belong inseparably together:

There are two fundamental truths which the beginning of Article V brings to our awareness and which we must always have in view if we are to understand the Lutheran doctrine of the office of the ministry: The doctrine of the office of the ministry is inseparably connected with the doctrine of justification. And God willed that justifying faith be awakened by the oral preaching of the Gospel.⁸

Luther teaches us that justification is at the heart of every doctrine, so a problem with any doctrine is really a problem with the chief doctrine, justification.

Here is the first and chief article:

That Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, “was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification” (Rom. 4[:25*]); and he alone is “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1[:29*]); and “the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53[:6*]); furthermore, “All have sinned,” and “they are now justified without merit by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus . . . by his blood” (Rom. 3[:23–25*]).

⁵ Many consider Luther’s *Concerning the Institution of the Ministry of the Church*, LW 40:3-44, to be his most fundamental treatment of the doctrine of the OHM.

⁶ ‘You say again: “Do you teach that a Christian should not doubt that he is acceptable before God, and whoever doubts is not a Christian, for faith makes us certain that God is our father, and as we believe, so it is?” I answer: Cling firmly to the fact that faith in God’s grace is certain, for faith is nothing other than a constant, unquestioning, unwavering confidence in divine grace.’ Martin Luther, *Sermon on the Epistle for the Third Sunday in Advent*, Luther’s Works (LW) Volume 75:129.

⁷ “There is one divinely instituted Gospel ministry or office (AC V) simply because there is one indivisible Gospel (which always includes the sacraments). Kurt Marquart, *The Gospel Ministry: Distinctions Within & Without*, Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2000, 9.

⁸ Herman Sasse, “The Lutheran Doctrine of the Office of the Ministry,” *The Lonely Way*, Volume II, CPH, 2002, 124-5. Sasse also addresses emergency situations in this essay, 134-5.

Now because this must be believed and may not be obtained or grasped otherwise with any work, law, or merit, it is clear and certain that this faith alone justifies us, as St. Paul says in Romans 3[:28*, 26*]: “For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law”; and also, “that God alone is righteous and justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.”

Nothing in this article can be conceded or given up, even if heaven and earth or whatever is transitory passed away. As St. Peter says in Acts 4[:12*]: “There is no other name . . . given among mortals by which we must be saved.” “And by his bruises we are healed” (Isa. 53[:5*]).

On this article stands all that we teach and practice against the pope, the devil, and the world. Therefore we must be quite certain and have no doubt about it. Otherwise everything is lost, and the pope and the devil and whatever opposes us will gain victory and be proved right.⁹

As I often warn, therefore, the doctrine of justification must be learned diligently. For in it are included all the other doctrines of our faith; and if it is sound, all the others are sound as well. Therefore when we teach that men are justified through Christ and that Christ is the Victor over sin, death, and the eternal curse, we are testifying at the same time that He is God by nature.¹⁰

This is the chief article of our faith; and if you either do away with it, as the Jews do, or corrupt it, as the papists do, the church cannot exist. Nor can God keep His glory, which consists in this, that He is compassionate and wants to forgive sins and to save for the sake of His Son.¹¹

Therefore all depends on this article about Christ, and he who has this article has everything. In order to be able to abide by it, the Christians must be engaged in the most strenuous warfare and must fight constantly.¹²

The now sainted Dr. Kurt Marquart stresses that the entire mission of the church depends on this

right relationship between justification and the OHM.

If there is to be such a thing as a Lutheran “paradigm” for the church’s mission, its all-decisive, determining elements will have to be the pure preaching of the Gospel (orthodoxy!) And the right administration of the sacraments (infant baptism, bodily presence!)- and therefore also properly qualified incumbents of the divinely ordained Gospel ministry to do this. All stress is on God’s gracious channels of salvation, on His own provisions for the delivery of the deliverance in His Son- to the exclusion of all man-made substitutes,

⁹ Smalcald Articles, II, II, 1-5. Kolb/Wengert 301.

¹⁰ Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, LW 26:283.

¹¹ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 21-25*, LW 4:60.

¹² Luther, *Sermons on the gospel of John, Chapters 14-16*, LW 24:319.

like synergism, moralism, unionism, antinomianism, revivalism, anti-sacramentalism, subjectivism, millennialism, pentecostalism, and the like. Administrative, ceremonial, and other such details are significant only as they either implement and express, or else hinder and obstruct, the divine arrangements for the life and growth of the church (Augsburg Confession VII, compare Formula of Concord X).¹³

If the entire mission of the church depends on this relationship between justification and the OHM, then it would seem to be churchly wisdom that pastors in the church would receive the best possible education and training; after all, precious souls are at stake! Often in the church today the cry goes up, “emergency and the urgency of the Gospel demands that we get pastors to their field as quickly as possible.” Is an emergency situation cause and reason to shorten our theological training? Are we compelled to do so for the sake of the mission of the church? Wouldn’t it be better for a layman to serve as pastor in certain circumstances than for people to go without? Perhaps a quick history lesson would help us answer these questions.

Following the Civil War, the population of new and once sparse territories increased dramatically. The Midwest filled up quickly with people and many immigrants secured land for the first time in their lives. The role of the railroad was very important as they enticed people farther and farther onto the frontier. Many hurried frantically lest they miss out on the opportunity of a lifetime. The majority of these immigrants originated in Europe,¹⁴ particularly Germany and the Scandinavian countries.¹⁵ As a result of the lack of Lutheran pastors many German and Scandinavian Lutherans joined other denominations. The need was so great for pastors that William Loehe stated, “do not forget that many North American Christians are actually lapsing into paganism unless they receive aid from the fatherland.”¹⁶

One would think that there would be great temptation, in light of this emergency situation, to simply have laymen substitute as pastors, or at least a quick way to get men trained and ordained. Such was not the case. So great was the concern for God’s Word, pure doctrine, and people’s souls that the response was an increased call for properly trained men to serve as pastors and increased educational opportunities. Much has been said recently re-

¹³ Kurt Marquart, “*Church Growth*” As Mission Paradigm; A Lutheran Assessment, A Luther Academy Monograph, Houston: Our Savior Lutheran Church, 1994, p. 13.

¹⁴ By the late 19th century, there was mission work being done with Letts, Poles, Slovaks, Estonians, Lithuanians, Italians, Finns, Norwegians, Chinese, Jews, in “Old Mexico” and even a new attempt at Indian mission work in Wisconsin.

¹⁵ For the pioneer missionary efforts among both Germans and Scandinavians see G. H. Gerberding, *The Life and Letters of W. A. Passavant* (Greenville, PA: The Young Lutheran Co., 1906). This book is a great resource for a number of subjects, including the Lutheran struggle with “American Christianity” and the “New Measures,” Confessional integrity in the English language, the difficulties of life and work before, during and after the Civil War, and especially Passavant’s tireless efforts in human care and social ministry causes.

¹⁶ Rev. William Loehe, quoted in Walter A. Baepler, *A Century of Grace* (St. Louis: CPH, 1947), 68. Contrary to the notion that once a Christian had made true decision for God, he could not fall from faith, Loehe clearly understood that Scripture teaches that a fall from faith/grace is possible.

garding the example of the Loehe¹⁷ “sendlings” and the need for flexibility regarding the training of pastors in emergency situations.¹⁸ Who were these “sendlings” and is this historical evidence of an emergency short cut into the pastoral office?¹⁹

Loehe’s constant and consistent appeal for missionary help to Germans in America bore immediate fruit. Donations came pouring in, and the most unlikely of all people, Adam Ernst, volunteered for service. A cobbler’s apprentice from Asch, Bohemia, Ernst had already been turned down by another mission society.²⁰ Loehe saw his dedication and enthusiasm, but also his lack of education and training, and set in motion his plan for *nothelfer*, or emergency men. Ernst quickly recruited a friend, George Burger. Loehe noted,

Now we had two students, and we had to consider ways and means to meet our objective. We must admit that our experience was like that of everyone who undertakes a new task without any training. We did not know what to do. So much did we realize that we could not make anything great out of our two students. Two schoolteachers who would work at their trade and support themselves—that was our objective.²¹

A year of intense study followed, with Loehe assuming the vast majority of the training of the workers himself. The students studied in the morning. Courses included selected readings of Scripture, the Book of Concord, church history, geography, English grammar, composition, penmanship, singing, piano, methods in reading and writing, Christian doctrine, pastoral theology, catechetics, liturgics, homiletics, participation in the divine services and in congregational life.²² In the afternoons, Loehe lectured the students. They met every evening for evening prayers at his parsonage. They accompanied him on sick

¹⁷ For a classic example of Loehe’s Missionary appeal see James L. Schaaf, “Father From Afar: Wilhelm Loehe and Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* (60:12 January-April 1996) 50.

¹⁸ For one such example see 1998 LCMS Convention Resolution 5-01, Resolution 5-09, and especially Appendix R5-01A.

¹⁹ There is great need for further study on this topic. Some, with apparently little knowledge of the history or situation, use the Loehe “sendlings” as an excuse for any and every type of “lay ministry” possible, without regard for Augsburg Confession XIV. As a starting point for this study I would strongly encourage the primary source, Wilhelm Loehe, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Klaus Ganzert (7 volumes to date; Neuendettelsau: Freimund-Verlag, 1951ff.). Resources in English are much more difficult to come by as Loehe has not been widely translated. See Thomas Winger, “The Relationship of Wilhelm Loehe to C. F. W. Walther and the Missouri Synod in the Debate Concerning Church and Office,” *Lutheran Theological Journal* (Fall/Winter 1994); Herman Sasse, “Walther and Loehe: On The Church,” *Springfielder* (December 1971), 176-182; Todd Nichol, “William Loehe, the Iowa Synod and the Ordained Ministry,” *Lutheran Quarterly* (Spring 1990); Kenneth F. Korby, “Loehe’s Seelsorge for His Fellow Lutherans in America,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* (November 1972), 227-246; Kenneth F. Korby, *Theology of Pastoral Care in William Loehe with Special Attention to the Function of the Liturgy and the Laity* (Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Print shop, n.d.) 236-272.

²⁰ Schaaf, 50.

²¹ Loehe, quoted in Baepler, 67.

²² Baepler, 67-70.

calls and taught the Catechism to children, under his strict observation and supervision. On Saturdays they would practice the musical sections of the Lutheran Liturgy (chanting) with Friedrich Hommel, a renowned liturgiologist. At the evening prayer services the students would take turns leading the devotion and Loehe would critique them. After more than twelve months of this intense study, Loehe, reluctantly and only after Wyneken's urging, sent them to America. Ernst and Burger were the first *Sendlinge*, that is emissaries of Loehe. They were sent with this ringing endorsement, "It is better that the poor sheep be led to the green pastures and the still waters by you than by no one at all."²³

Loehe sent them with strict instructions. They carried with them a statement that they were leaving Germany under their own free will. They also carried a pledge of allegiance to the Confessional Writings of the Lutheran Church²⁴ and very detailed instructions regarding their missionary activities. He also advised them to join a truly Lutheran Synod, like the Ohio Synod. They journeyed to Columbus, Ohio, with Burger immediately enrolling in the seminary and Ernst teaching in a German School by day and working as a cobbler by night, supporting them both. Loehe had considered these two men unfit and ill prepared for the task before them; the Ohio Synod wrote back to Loehe and begged him to send more such well trained men as these.²⁵

His "sendlings" had indeed received only a little more than a year of training and schooling, but Loehe had condensed nearly an entire seminary course and curriculum into that year. By 1853, 82 candidates of theology, including 23 similarly trained *Nothelfer* (emergency men), had come to America through his efforts. Even after Loehe and the Missouri Synod parted ways in 1853, most of these men joined Missouri. In 1847 there were 22 pastors in the fledgling synod, 50 in 1848, 61 in 1849, 75 in 1850, and by 1872 there were 415;²⁶ thanks be to God! If there was ever a truly "emergency" situation for the LCMS in America, this was it. Rather than create a "fast track" into the OHM or have laymen perform pastoral duties, they devised ways to condense a full curriculum into a shorter time span. Why no short cuts? Because the ministry of the Gospel was too important to be left to ill equipped men; precious souls were at stake.

In 1973, Oscar E. Feucht wrote a book hoping to help people rediscover the role of the laity in the Missouri Synod.²⁷ St. Louis seminary Professor Roland Hoppmann, now in the kingdom of glory, once told me that the book, when it was written and published, was considered theologically weak and lightly regarded. It has been required reading at some of

²³ Loehe, quoted in Schaaf, 51. Note the concern for the souls of the "poor sheep."

²⁴ C. F. W. Walther would later criticize this practice as a less than unconditional subscription to the Lutheran Confessions, *Essays for the Church-Volume I (1857-1879)*, ed. August Suelflow (St. Louis: CPH, 1992) 23.

²⁵ Schaaf, 52.

²⁶ Baepler, 113.

²⁷ Oscar E. Feucht, *Everyone a Minister* (St. Louis: CPH, 1974). See also *Issues In Christian Education*, Concordia University, Seward, Nebraska, Volume 36, Number 1 (Spring 2002), titled "The Ministry of Every Christian: Recovering a Neglected Doctrine."

our Concordias and the topic of hundreds of Bible studies in our synod. The way people today quote its title and contents, you might think it has been added to the canon of Scripture. In his quest to help people unpack the biblical teaching of “the priesthood of all believers,”²⁸ Feucht committed the cardinal sin of Lutheran theology; he failed to remember the paradox. In his book, not one word is spoken regarding the divinely instituted office of the holy ministry. I contend that he did not intend to deny this clear Scriptural teaching, but many since then have taken his work to be the final, and only word on the subject.

The phrase “everyone a minister,” in trying to elevate the role of the laity in the church, really does just the opposite. It minimizes the theology of vocation, blurs the distinction and paradox of royal priesthood and office of the ministry, and robs people of true joy and freedom in the Gospel. The 2001 Report of the Church Growth Study Committee offers a strong warning and urges great caution in this area. In reality, the idea behind “everyone a minister” is the most blatant form of clericalism in the church.²⁹ It implies that your work is only pleasing to God if it resembles the work of a pastor, making your God-given vocations meaningless. This too is an error of Pietism.³⁰ A new twist on this same error, being seen more and more in our synod today, is the teaching that everyone is a missionary.³¹ This type of teaching, while well intended, is an innovation in the church and often leads people to despair. Luther strongly cautions against the use of the royal priesthood to blur the distinction between office and priesthood, and the so-called logic that because all are priests, all are ministers:

If Münzer and Carlstadt and their comrades had not been allowed to sneak and creep into other men’s houses and parishes, whither they had neither call nor command to go, this whole great calamity would not have happened. To be sure, the apostles did, at first, go into other men’s houses and preach there. But they had a command and were ordained and called and sent to preach the Gospel in all places; as Christ said (Mark 16:15): “Go into all the world and preach to all creatures.” Since then, however, no one has had this general apostolic command; but every bishop or pastor has had his definite diocese or parish. For this reason St. Peter (1 Peter 5:3) calls them *klhvrou*, that is, “parts,” indicating that to each of them a part of the people has been committed, as Paul writes to Titus also (Titus 1:5). No one else, no stranger shall undertake to instruct his parishioners, either publicly or privately, without his knowledge and consent. On peril of body and soul no one should listen to such a man but should report him to his pastor or his ruler.

This rule should be so rigidly enforced that no preacher, however pious or upright, shall take it upon himself either to preach to the people of a papistic or heretical pastor, or to

²⁸ In light of current misunderstandings, perhaps the Biblical term “Royal Priesthood” should be used (1 Peter 2:9, Exodus 19:6, Isaiah 61:6, Revelation 1:6 and 5:10).

²⁹ John T. Pless, *Reflections on the Life of the Royal Priesthood: Vocation and Evangelism*, does an excellent job on this topic.

³⁰ Brent Kuhlman. “Oscar Feucht’s Everyone a Minister: Pietismus Ridivivus” *Logia* (Reformation 1999) 31-36.

³¹ http://www.missioncentral.us/missioncentral/mission_central_staff

teach them privately, without the knowledge and consent of that pastor. For he has no command to do this, and what is not commanded should be left undone. If we want to perform the duties that are commanded, we have enough to do. It does not help their case to say that all Christians are priests. It is true that all Christians are priests, but not all are pastors. For to be a pastor one must be not only a Christian and a priest but must have an office and a field of work committed to him. This call and command make pastors and preachers. A burgher or layman may be a learned man; but this does not make him a lecturer and entitle him to teach publicly in the schools or to assume the teaching office, unless he is called to it.³²

Luther fought against the fanatics, these “Schwärmer,” because they drew a completely false conclusion from the general priesthood; they sought the abolition of the OHM altogether.³³ Now is the time for a renewed study of the Confessions, Luther³⁴, Gerhard³⁵, Walther’s *Kirche und Amt*,³⁶ and a rededication to the Scriptural gifts and paradox of royal priesthood and holy office.

The real problem of “priesthood” and “ministry” is that both languish under the terrible profanation of everything sacred in our time. The one cannot be built up at the expense of the other. The trouble is not too much Royal Priesthood, but rather that its secularized counterfeit is not nearly Royal and Priestly enough! The Gospel Office does not degrade the People of God, but with its sacred ministrations adorns them ever anew with the Epiphany gold and myrrh of heavenly Royalty and Priestliness.³⁷

A related concern in the last generation or so has been an attempt to see the OHM merely in a functional way.³⁸ While this has been touted by some as a new discovery and a way to elevate both the Royal Priesthood and OHM, it has in fact done just the opposite. This

³² Luther, *Selected Psalms II*, LW 13:64-65.

³³ Sasse, *The Lutheran Doctrine of the Office of the Ministry*, 131. See also Luther, *Infiltrating and Clandestine Preachers*, LW 40:379-94.

³⁴ To understand Luther correctly, we need to remember that was fighting a two-sided battle. “His doctrine of the office of the ministry is directed against the Roman doctrine of the priesthood and against the undermining of the office of the ministry among the fanatics.” Sasse, *The Lutheran Doctrine of the Office of the Ministry*, 130. See also Kurt Marquart, *The Gospel Ministry: Distinctions Within & Without*, Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2000, 7-8.

³⁵ Johann Gerhard, *On the Ecclesiastical Ministry*, Part One, CPH, 2011; Part Two, CPH, 2012.

³⁶ C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, translated by J.T. Mueller (St. Louis: CPH, 1875, 1987). I was once chastised, while teaching a class at one of our Concordias, for quoting from this book too much and using Walther’s terminology of “auxiliary” offices in the church.

³⁷ Kurt Marquart, *The Gospel Ministry: Distinctions Within & Without*, Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2000, 6. See also page 18, note 15, “The notion that the office is a general activity, which can be delegated from the general priesthood and carried out ‘by whomever will,’ lacks all foundation in the Symbolical books.”

³⁸ One example would be James H. Pragman, *Traditions of Ministry: A History of the Doctrine of the Ministry in Lutheran Theology*, CPH, 1983.

splitting of the OHM into functions began with a misunderstanding of AC V.³⁹ Marquart cautions⁴⁰ that this is a grave error that lead to all kinds of problems in the church, “The one Gospel office must not, however, be thought of as a bundle of ‘functions,’ to be gathered or scattered according to whim.”⁴¹ To understand the term “ministry” in a wide and narrow sense has further muddled the waters.

Pieper (1953:III, 439) makes this distinction, asserting that “in the wider sense it embraces every form of preaching the Gospel or administering the means of grace,” whether by Christians in general or by public ministers. Pieper offers no proof or illustration of his attribution of this usage to Scripture and “the Church,” but moves at once to the “special, or narrower” -really the proper- sense of the public ministry. This distinction, so far as I know, is not found in Luther, the Confessions, Chemnitz, Gerhard, Quenstedt, or ever Walther’s much enlarged edition of Baier. The intent, no doubt, was to safeguard the dignity of the church’s royal priesthood, but in present circumstances any equivocation between “priesthood” and “ministry” is less than helpful.⁴²

In Gerhard it is perfectly simple: “ministry” is an “abstractive,” and “ministers” a “concrete” description. The distinction, quite logically, is between the office and its incumbents. We have here not two offices, or two kinds of offices, but two ways of looking at the one and same office. In this sense, AC V, “Of Ecclesiastical Ministry,” treats the one office “abstractively,” while AC XIV speaks of the same office “concretively.”⁴³

What are the consequences of a functional view of the OHM run amuck? Aside from the already demonstrated denigrating of the laity that it was intended to exalt, aside from the confusion regarding the existence of and God-given authority in the OHM, a rampant “hire and fire” mentality seems to have replaced the doctrine of the call. Pastors are now, in many cases, considered mere hirelings.⁴⁴

Temporary “calls are wrong because they treat a divine gift as a human plaything, with the built-in provision of termination without biblical grounds. To dismiss a servant of God without cause and due process (1 Tim. 5:19) has always been regarded as sacrilege (Ps. 105:15) in the church. Walther (1987): “A congregation can depose an incumbent of the holy ministry only if it is clear from the divine Word that God Himself has deposed him as a wolf or hireling” (p. 304). Ungodly life, ungodly doctrine, or incompetence—not unpopu-

³⁹ Tappert’s footnote, page 31, in his translation of *The Book of Concord*, Fortress Press, 1959, does more harm than good.

⁴⁰ “The important *Lehre und Wehre* theses of 1874 capture and safeguard the organic unity of the office.” Kurt Marquart, *The Gospel Ministry: Distinctions Within & Without*, Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2000, 10. I have attached them as an Appendix to this paper.

⁴¹ Kurt Marquart, *The Gospel Ministry: Distinctions Within & Without*, Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2000, 10. Sasse also warns of the dangers in splitting the office into functions, *The Lutheran Doctrine of the Office of the Ministry*, 127.

⁴² Ibid., 14.

⁴³ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁴ Seeing the pastor as “CEO” has actually made this problem worse! Ibid., 22.

larity—are the only proper grounds. God’s call and commission do not depend, like parliamentary governments, on periodic “votes of confidence.”

The temporary election of “full-time” officials, the imitation of secular universities in offering temporary teaching assignments, and Social Security driven retirement pose as yet unresolved theological problems for modern Lutheran church-life. Even more disastrous is the rampant “hiring and firing” mindset, in which people imagine that they can create and abolish calls and “ministries” according to their own fancies—rather than simply transmitting the one divinely instituted call and office (Walther, 1915:I, 117). It is a tragic—and wicked!—thing when “multitudes,” perhaps under the spell of some bureaucratic enthusiasm of the day, press, oppose, torment, and perhaps even presume to remove their pastors for not measuring up to popular expectations.⁴⁵

Since God is the Author of the office, only He governs entry into and exit from it!⁴⁶

So what can we conclude? The highest worship of God is to preach God’s Word and the office of preaching is the highest office in the church.⁴⁷ The heart of the Gospel is the forgiveness of sins.⁴⁸ The OHM is one of the marks of the church.⁴⁹ This ministry is primarily a ministry of service and brings with it much loneliness and suffering.⁵⁰ Not all Christians are in the office.⁵¹ The man in the OHM is not to be concerned with popularity but with faithfulness.⁵² The OHM is God’s institution and will last until the end of time.⁵³ The consequences of getting the OHM wrong are many and bring doubt and confusion where God desires certainty and order.⁵⁴ Sasse sums things up well:

As Luther once went the lonely way between Rome and Spiritualism, so the Lutheran Church today stands alone between the world powers of Roman Catholicism on the one hand and modern Protestantism on the other. Her doctrine which teaches that the Spirit is bound to the means of grace is as inconceivable to modern people in the twentieth century as it was to their predecessors in the sixteenth. But we are convinced that behind this doc-

⁴⁵ Ibid., 26-7. The Transforming Churches Network (TCN) and the Council of Presidents’ document, *The Divine Deposal/Dismissal of Ministers of the Word and Sacraments* come to mind.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 25. See also Sasse, *The Lutheran Doctrine of the Office of the Ministry*, 126, 128.

⁴⁷ Apology XV, 42. See also Kurt Marquart, *The Gospel Ministry: Distinctions Within & Without*, Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2000, 12; 17.

⁴⁸ Sasse, *We Confess the Church*, 51.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 54-5. Sasse here is referencing Luther’s treatment of the marks of the church in his *On the Councils and the Church*, LW:41:148f.

⁵⁰ LW:75:114-5; 120; 146.

⁵¹ Ibid., 114. “All Christians serve God, but they are not all in the office.”

⁵² Ibid., 121-2.

⁵³ Sasse, *The Lutheran Doctrine of the Office of the Ministry*, 128; 126.

⁵⁴ Kurt Marquart, *The Gospel Ministry: Distinctions Within & Without*, Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2000, 10. Note especially his comments regarding the doctrine and practice of “Old Missouri” compared to “New Missouri.”

trine stands one of the most profound truths which has ever been expressed in Christian theology. Luther once formulated it in the Smalcald Articles in the following way:

*In these matters, which concern the spoken, external Word, it must be firmly maintained that God gives no one his Spirit or grace apart from the external Word which goes before. We say this to protect ourselves from the enthusiasts, that is, the “spirits,” who boast that they have the Spirit apart from and before contact with the Word... In short: enthusiasm clings to Adam and his children from the beginning to the end of the world—fed and spread among them as poison by the old dragon. It is the source, power, and might of all the heresies, even that of the papacy and Mohammed. Therefore we should and must insist that God does not want to deal with us human beings, except by means of his external Word and sacrament. Everything that boasts of being from the Spirit apart from such a Word and sacrament is of the devil.*⁵⁵

That is Luther’s theology. Moreover, it is the doctrine of the Lutheran Church. Just as God is revealed only as the Incarnate One, just as he always remains hidden outside of Jesus Christ, just as we can never conceive of the naked God (*Deus nudus*) in his undiluted majesty, so the Spirit of God also works only through the external means of grace.

But if that is correct, then we understand the enormous significance of the office of the ministry which is never understood by the world, but rather despised and ridiculed by it. Then the humble preaching of the Gospel and the administration of these simple Sacraments are the greatest things that can happen in the world. For in these things the hidden reign of Christ is consummated. He himself is present in these means of grace, and the bearer of the *ministerium ecclesiasticum* actually stands in the stead of Christ. That certainly puts an end to any clerical conceit. We are nothing. He is everything. And that means that the terrible sin of pessimism, which is the pastor’s greatest temptation, is finished with as well. It is nothing but doubt and unbelief, for Christ the Lord is just as present in his means of grace today as he was in the sixteenth or the first century. And “all authority in heaven and on earth” [Matt 28:18] is just as much his today as it was when he first spoke that promise to the apostles. And it remains so into all eternity.

Do we still believe this?⁵⁶

⁵⁵ SA III VIII 3, 9-19. Kolb/Wengert, 322-3.

⁵⁶ Sasse, *The Lutheran Doctrine of the Office of the Ministry*, 138-9.