

Mandate & Institution: Letting the Lord Have His Say

Introduction

While staying in my home a number of years ago, Dr. Kenneth F. Korby (1924-2006) told me about a woman in his congregation that publicly adulterated her marriage and remained impenitent. She had better words than the Lord regarding marriage. Her life was nothing but the justification of the self.¹ Her big sin was not the adultery but her deafness and deadness to God's Word. He explained to me that the highest of pastoral care was to use the keys according to the Lord's mandate and institution. So, in her unrepentant condition, Dr. Korby no longer welcomed her to receive the Lord's body and blood in the Sacrament of the Altar. Her response was typical. She would go to the nearest Lutheran congregation and receive the Sacrament there. More of Dr. Korby's pastoral care came with these words: "It will be like glass in your belly!" She left.

Years later Dr. Korby's phone rang late one Saturday evening. It was the same woman. She greeted him. She begged him to meet her at the church, to put on his vestments, to sit in front of the altar, to hear her confession and to give her the Lord's forgiveness. He did. He used the loosing key. After the absolution the woman asked Dr. Korby if she could receive the Sacrament in the Sunday morning divine service. The answer was yes. However, she insisted that Dr. Korby tell the congregation that she had repented, had been absolved by him and that she would eat and drink to her benefit. He did. There was great joy. For this woman who was lost was found. She was dead but now she was alive. The Lord was having a church according to his promise. Where Christ is there the church is. "Dispute resolution" according to the Lord.

Here we learn once again what theology is really all about and the Lord's way of pastoral care in the church: REPENTANCE AND FAITH done by the Lord in the law and the gospel. Dr. Luther, put it this way: "The proper subject of theology is man guilty of sin and condemned, and God the Justifier and Savior of man the sinner." (AE 12:311; *Nam Theologiae proprium subiectum est homo peccati reus ac perditus et Deus iustificans ac salvator hominis peccatoris*] (1538 *Enarratio* Psalm 51:2-3, WA 40²:328,17-18) That simple statement is a gargantuan critique of all ancient, medieval or modern theology that would partially or completely absent Jesus from the church as the only Justifier and Savior of sinners by insisting on using the law of love as the means for salvation in which like attracts like via the infusion of grace as the performance enhancing drug in one's 24-7-365 *ambitatio divinitatis* to perfect one's nature.² Love is the fulfillment of the law (Rom 13) but it doesn't save anyone. Only the gospel does!

Consequently, there must be the proper distinction between the law and the gospel so that once can properly hear and receive the central biblical message which is the forgiveness of sins for Jesus' sake only (1538 *Enarratio* Psalm 51:7-8, WA 40²:385,9-10: *in hoc psalmo et est principalis locus nostrae Theologiae, sine quo impossibile est, Sacram scripturam intelligere*). "This promise [the gospel] is the sole cause, the first, middle and last cause; that is, it is everything in justification."³ (AE 12:333) Dr. Luther, therefore, adds that:

with your whole heart pay attention to the voice of the brother absolving you. And do not doubt that this voice of the brother in the Sacrament or in absolution is divinely spoken by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit Himself, so that you completely depend on what you hear, not on what you do or think ... Our whole certainty is place in Thy Word ... After hearing comes confidence, so that we say: 'I am baptized. I have taken the body given for me on the cross. I have heard the voice of God from the minister of brother, by which the forgiveness of sins has been announced to me.' (AE 12:370-371)

¹Oswald Bayer astutely observes: "Our whole life histories are placed before a permanent tribunal in which we act as accused, prosecutor, and judge. Throughout our lives we continually seek to find excuses for the fact that we live as we do, that we are existent rather than nonexistent, and that we are as we are and not something different ... I constantly vacillate even to the very end of life, between the judgment others make about me and my own judgment of myself. I am constantly trying to ascertain others' judgment about me and my own judgment of myself; I arrive at some point of calm, and then become unsure of myself again. My identity is a floating one. Who am I? asked Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Am I what others say about me? Am I what I know about myself? Am I balanced between these different evaluations? Questions such as these relate to my inner being, not just to something external. They effect the core, not the shell. It is not true that judgment is an addition to being. What I am, I am in my judgment about myself, intertwined with the judgment made of me by others. Person is a 'forensic' term." *Living By Faith: Justification and Sanctification*, 3-4.

²Based on Plato's primary philosophical principle: God is good and that God never changes.

³Bayer rightly asserts: "The theme of justification is not one theme among many. It has principal significance. It touches on every theme. Justification concerns not merely one's own history, not only world history, but also natural history. It has to do with everything ... It embraces the totality. All reality is involved in the justification debate," (*Justification and Sanctification*, xii, 9).

What scandal! What outrage! After all, one of the biggest evils experienced in the world for an enthusiast (whether ancient, medieval or modern) is when the Lord sends a preacher that does not speak to the old Adam's desires, preferences, hopes, dreams, etc. but rather deathly attacks it all so that the new man (faith) may arise and live from the divine promise of the gospel, (denying the supposed morality of reason that "ought" implies "can," -- Is 42:18 "Hear, you deaf; and look, you blind, that you may see"). Everything goes devilishly south when you believe your words are better than the Lord's and therefore live as a God-within-er, an enthusiast, a pretend unicornian or sasquatchian pretend divinity.⁴ Like father Adam. Like the pope, an Anabaptist or a Muslim. The Lutheran Confessions unmask this theological toxin – this old Adamic contaminant with the words of Dr. Luther.

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. (SA III, 8)

You would do well to trust the Lord's salvific promises given in the *externum verbum* by which the Lord has his say. He intends His words to have their full sway in order to kill and make alive --to repent and to faith -- to restore you to be creatures that live by faith.

Confessions

Consequently, for the sake of the Holy Spirit's creating a *sola fide* that justifies the sinner *coram Deo propter Christum* when and where it pleases him, AC V confesses the divine institution of the preaching office (*Predigtamt*) that is given to preach the gospel, baptize, absolve and lord's supper according to Christ's mandate and institution.⁵ When the Lord's words are going on, the Lord has a church. In addition, he has good use of his hangers-on-believers as humans

⁴ "You will be like God, knowing good and evil," (Gen 3:5). Ralph Waldo Emerson said as much in his July 15, 1838 "Divinity School Address" at Harvard. He warned his hearers of the "formalists" that defraud and discomfort worshippers. Emerson opined that the "true preacher" is the one that "deals out to people his life." Yes, that's right, the preacher's life. Why? Because the goal of preaching is to use Jesus as a cipher to do what you OUGHT, namely, reach your potential – YOU ARE DIVINE! "He [Jesus] saw with open eye the mystery of the soul ... Alone in all history, he estimated the greatness of man. One man was true to what is in you and me. He saw that God incarnates himself in man." So, just as Jesus said, "I am divine" so all proper pastoral care and preaching should be to assist or midwife the worth of man – man's divinity. True faith that is to be inspired by an Emersonian preacher is "a faith like Christ's in the infinitude of man." His admonition for the Harvard men going out to preach was this: "Yourself a newborn bard of the Holy Ghost, -- cast behind you all conformity [like that of the formalists AC V], and acquaint men at first hand with Deity [in themselves]. ... Let me admonish you, first of all, to go alone; to refuse the good models, even those which are sacred in the imagination of men, and dare to love God without mediator or veil." (<http://www.emersoncentral.com/divaddr.htm>) Old Adam enthusiasts / God-within-ers, hell-bent on justifying themselves with their own words (like a Stoic enthusiast: "obey thyself"), *intra nos* feelings and self-chosen works, are horrified and repulsed when the Triune God sends a preacher in the way of AC V. There is nothing more dangerous and wicked in this world to a God-within-er than when a preacher sent by the Lord does the work prescribed by the Lord and confessed by the church in AC V. The only thing left to do for the *intra nos* looking, navel gazing, self-justifying God-within-er is to get rid of the preacher along with the *externum verbum* he proclaims IN ORDER TO HAVE MY OWN SPIRITUAL QUEST.

⁵Schwabach Article VII, the precursor to AC V speaks of God instituting "the preaching office or spoken Word (that is, the Gospel)," (*Sources and Contexts of The Book of Concord*, 85). See also *The Babylonian Captivity*, "For God does not deal, nor has he ever dealt, with man otherwise than through a word of promise ... We in turn cannot deal with God otherwise than through faith in the Word of his promise." (AE 37:42) This runs with Dr. Luther's proper distinction between salvation's achievement and salvation's delivery. "Christ has once for all merited and won for us the forgiveness of sins on the cross; but his forgiveness he distributes wherever he is, at all times and in all places, as Luke writes, chapter 24 [:26f], "Thus it is written, that Christ had to suffer and on the third day rise (in this consists his merit), and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name (here the distribution of his merit comes in).' This is why we say there is forgiveness of sins in the Supper, not on account of the eating, nor because Christ merits or achieves forgiveness of sins there, but on account of the word through which he distributes among us this acquired forgiveness, saying, 'This is my body which is given for you.' Here you perceive that we eat the body as it was given for us; we hear this and believe it as we eat. Hence there is distributed here the forgiveness of sins, which however was obtained on the cross." (AE 37:192) Seminal are these remarks that echo what he wrote three years earlier in his *Against the Heavenly Prophets*, namely: "that the fact [*geschichte*] of Christ's suffering and the use [*brauch*] of it are not the same thing; *factum et applicatio facti, seu factum et usus facti*. The passion of Christ occurred but once on the cross. But whom would it benefit if it were not distributed [*ausgeteilet*], applied [*angelegt*], and put to use [*vnd ynn brauch bracht wurde*]? And how could it be put to use and distributed except through the Word and sacrament? ... they consider [*halten*] the fact [*factum*] and the application [*vsus*] to be one and the same ... They fail to see that in the Supper the application of the passion [*vsus passionis*], and not the fact of it [*factum passionis*], is concerned [*gehandelt wird*]." (AE 37:193) See also LC II, 38-39. Consequently, Hermann Sasse teaches that the office and the gospel belong together in that the office exists to give the gospel. "It is important that his connection be noted," he writes. "The doctrine of the office of the ministry is very closely connected with the doctrine of justification, the 'article by which the church stands or falls'.... It [the office] is not, as has been commonly thought in modern Protestantism, a Catholic remnant in the confession of the Evangelical Church, a foreign body in the teaching of the Reformation. It is rather a completely essential part of this doctrine. For justifying, saving faith would not exist in the world if the *ministerium ecclesiasticum* did not exist," ("The Lutheran Doctrine of the Office of the Ministry," in *The Lonely Way: Selected Essays and Letters*, 2:124).

in the world to care for his creation and other creatures in their God pleasing vocations (AC VI-VII, XV-XVI, XX, XXIII, XXVI-XXVII).

The *Mittel* that the *Predigtamt* is given to properly steward via *rite vocatus* (AC XIV) and what the holy Trinity accomplishes through them are confessed in AC IX (Baptism), AC X (Lord's Supper), AC XI, XXV (Confession), AC XII (Repentance), XIII (Use of Sacraments), XXII (Both Kinds of the Sacrament), XXIV (Mass), and XXVIII (Power of Bishops). Fanatics or God-within-ers (*Anabaptists et alios*) are damned because they vehemently assert that the Holy Spirit works apart from the external Word (*sine verbo externo* / German: *ohn das leiblich Wort des Evangelii*). (AC V, 4; cf. Ap IV, 66)

The mandate and institution Words for both the *Predigtamt* and what it has been given to do are for the high pastoral care of creating and sustaining faith through the external Word (Rom 10:17) so that the sinner is justified by grace through faith in Christ apart from works of the law.⁶ After all, the justified lives by faith (Rom 1:17) in the Lord's promissory words of the gospel.⁷ Dr. Norman Nagel would always offer the following from Dr. Luther regarding baptism to let the Lord have his say first via his mandate and institution words: "Do not ponder that the water is wet, but that it has the words of the Lord." All that of course was said in contrast to the Dominicans and the Franciscans who contended that the water did the great things or that God's will washes away sin in baptism apart from the Word. If you know your Small Catechism you can immediately diagnosis what is problematic with Aquinas and Scotus. Dr. Luther last willed and testament it this way: "Baptism is nothing other than God's Word in the water, commanded by God's institution, or, as Paul says, 'washing by the Word.'" (SA III, V, 1; cf. the Small Catechism's answers to: What is Baptism? Which is that Word of God?)

Again, please note the careful distinction the Confessions make when they speak of the *Predigtamt* and what the Lord has given it to do. Melancthon pushes the *mandatum* / *Befehl* of God: "If we define the sacraments as rites, which have the command of God and to which the promise of grace has been added, it is easy to determine what the sacraments are, properly speaking. For humanly instituted rites are not sacraments, properly speaking, because human beings do not have the authority to promise grace. Therefore signs instituted without the command of God are not sure signs of grace. (Ap XIII, 3). The German puts it this way: "For men without [divine] mandate [*ohne Befehl*] do not have [authority] to promise grace." This is just one example of how the Confessions faithfully confess the Scriptural teaching: God's mandate and institution and then man's authority to do what the Lord has given.

This is precisely the pattern in the New Testament. Jesus institutes and then the apostles do what he mandates (Mt 16:19; 18:18; 26:28-28; 28:19-20; Mk 16:15; Lk 24:47; Jn 20:21-23). Authority to do and to speak comes from the author (Mt 28:18). Consequently, the Confessions push the divine mandates and institutions to show that what the pastors and congregations in Saxony are doing is done by the Lord's will, is pleasing to him and is gospel-ly certain and sure for folks. Giving communion in both kinds is a clear example. "Both kinds are given to the laity in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper because this usage has the command [*mandatum* / German: *Befehl und Gebot*] of the Lord (Matt. 26[:27]), 'Drink from it, all of you.' Christ here clearly instructs concerning the cup that all should drink." The German states: "Concerning the cup Christ here commands with clear words that they all should drink from it (*Da gebeut Christus mit klaren Worten von dem Kelch, dass sie alle daraus trinken sollen*)." Then 1 Corinthians 11:21 is pulled in to show that everyone in the congregation should drink from the cup, not only the clergy (AC XXII, 1-4). In addition, please note that Corpus Christi festivals are rejected "because dividing the sacrament does not agree with the institution of Christ [*institutione Christi / Einsetzung Christi*]." (AC XXII 12)

Compare too the basis for allowing the clergy to marry: "Therefore, because God's Word and command cannot be changed by any human vow or law, priests and other clergy have taken wives for themselves ... Thus, that priests and clergy may marry is based on the divine Word and command ... no human law can abolish or change God's command, neither can any vow change God's command." (AC XXIII, 8, 18, 24-25, German). Even more: "It is taught among us concerning those who are inclined to marry, that all those not suited for celibacy have the power, authority and right to marry. For vows cannot annul God's order and command." Then comes 1 Corinthians 7:2 and that is based on "God's creation and order" in which the estate of marriage is given from the beginning. "Although God's command concerning marriage frees and releases many from monastic vows, our people offer still more reasons why monastic vows are null and void. For all service of God instituted and chosen by human beings without God's command [*Gebot*]

⁶The Small Catechism's hermeneutic is mandate and institution for baptism (Mt 28:19), absolution (Jn 20:22-23) and Lord's Supper (Mt. 26:26-28; Mk 14:22-24; Lk 22:19-20; 1 Cor 11:23-25).

⁷Referencing the *Verba* of the Lord's Supper Dr. Luther categorically maintains: "Everything depends on these words ... for they are the sum and substance of the whole gospel." (AE 36:277; cf. 36:36, 183) So too baptism, absolution and the sermon since they have to do with the bestowal of Christ's Good Friday forgiveness.

and authority [*Befehl*] to obtain righteousness and God's grace is contrary to God, the holy gospel, and God's decree [*Befehl*], as Christ himself says (Matt. 15[:9]: 'In vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.'... Now the life supported by God's command [*Gotts Gebot*] is certainly a good and perfect state, [Latin: The good and perfect life is one that has God's command – *mandatum Dei*], but the life not supported by God's command [*Gotts Gebot*] is a dangerous state." (AC XXVII, 18-20, 36, 58 German)

When the proper distinction is made between the two kingdoms so also each one's duties. In the church and according to the gospel, "the power of the keys or the power of the bishops is the power of God's mandate [*mandatum Dei* / German: *Befehl Gottes*] to preach the gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer the sacraments." (AC XXVIII, 5 Latin) John 20:21-23 and Mark 16:15⁸ are given as examples of such *mandatum Dei* / *Befehl Gottes*. (AC XXVIII, 6 Latin) In order to contrast the unique vocation of the *Predigtamt* from that of temporal / political authorities, "this power is exercised only by teaching or preaching the gospel and by administering the sacraments ... for not bodily things but eternal things, eternal righteousness, the Holy Spirit, eternal life, are being given. These things cannot come about except through the ministry of Word [German: *das Amt der Predig*] and sacraments." Proof of that comes from Romans 1:16 and Psalm 119:50. (AC XXVIII, 8-10 Latin)

Again, so that the *potestas ecclesiastica et civilis* / *die Regiments, das geistlich und weltlich* do not get mixed, "the power of the church possesses its own command to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments... according to the gospel, or, as they say, by divine right [*de iure divino*], this jurisdiction belongs to the bishops as bishops (that is, to those to whom the ministry of the Word and sacraments has been committed): to forgive sins, to reject teaching that opposes the gospel, and to exclude from the communion of the church the ungodly whose ungodliness is known – doing all this not with human power but by the Word. (AC XXVIII, 12, 20-21) Luke 10:16 is then quoted to indicate that the churches are to be obedient to the bishops who do their work according to the Lord's mandate and institution or according to the gospel (by divine right). As they faithfully do that, Christ himself is speaking – doing what he says or promises through that particular Word spoken by the "office of the bishop [*das bischoflich Amt*]." (AC XXVIII, 21 German) Or to put it another way the *Predigtamt* carries a divine authority only when it speaks what Jesus has given it to speak. However, when the bishops "teach or establish anything contrary to the gospel, churches have a command from God that prohibits obedience." For that Matthew 7:15; Galatians 1:8 and 2 Corinthians 13:8, 10 are cited. (AC XXVIII, 23-24)

Whereas the papists use Matthew 16:18-19 to push the bishop of Rome's exclusive authority, the Treatise runs it differently, namely, according to the Lord's mandate and institution.

But certain verses are cited in objection to our position, namely: 'You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church' [Matt. 16:18]. Also: 'I will give you the keys' [Matt. 16:19]; 'Feed my sheep' [John 21:17]; and certain others. ... In all these sayings Peter represents the whole company of apostles, as is apparent from the text itself. For Christ did not question Peter only but asked, 'Who do you (plural) say that I am?' [Matt. 16:15]. What is said here in the singular – 'I will give you the keys' and 'Whatever you bind ...' is said elsewhere in the plural: 'Whatever you (plural) bind [Matt. 18:18] and, in John [20:23], 'if you (plural) forgive the sins of any...' These words show that the keys were entrusted equally to all the apostles and that all the apostles were commissioned in like manner [German: *zu predigen*, "to preach"]. Moreover, it must be acknowledged that the keys do not belong to one particular person but to the church, as many clear and irrefutable arguments show. For having spoken of the keys in Matthew 18[:18], Christ goes on to say: 'Wherever two or three agree on earth ...' [Matt. 18:19-20]. Thus, he grants the power of the keys principally and without mediation to the church. (Tr 22-24)⁹

⁸An early draft of the AC also includes Matthew 16:19 with John 20! "For Christ speaks with clear words, that he wills to give Peter the key to the heavenly kingdom [*Dann Christus spricht mit klaren Worten, er wolle Petro geben Schlüssel des himmelreichs*]," (BSLK 120, 30-34). The Confessions cite John 20:21-23 three more times regarding the authority of the *Predigtamt* (Tr 9, 23-24, 31).

⁹So too the Small Catechism: "The Office of the Keys is that special authority which Christ has given to His church on earth to forgive the sins of repentant sinners, but to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant as long as they do not repent." Then John 20:22-23 is provided as the mandate and institution text so that you believe that "when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command ... this is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself." This, of course, does not deny that Jesus uses the holy and royal priesthood to speak his forgiveness among each other and to the world (Mt 5:24; 6:12, 14; 18:15-35; Mk 11:25; Lk 6:31; 11:4; 17:1-4; 2 Cor 2:7, 10; Gal 6:1-5; Eph 4:32; Col 3:13), repay evil with good, bless and pray for those who hurt (Rom 12:14-21; 1 Pet 2:21-25; 3:9-12; Mt 18:18-20; 6:12; Lk 11:4) and love the enemy (Mt 5:43-48). Regarding the extension of the Lord's forgiveness (Mt. 18) by the royal priesthood in Luther and Chemnitz see AE 35:22; 67:408-409, 414-415; 69:414-417, 430-433; *Examination* 2:595, 621. See also C.F.W. Walther's Thesis IV Concerning the Church in

The church cannot be without the keys and their benefits. So what is spoken to Peter is also spoken to the eleven and to all who are put into the apostolic office. After all, “we have the certain teaching that the office of preaching comes from the general call of the apostles¹⁰ [e.g. John 20:21 that is referenced / *haben wir ein gewisse Lehre, dass da Predigtamt vom gemeinen Beruf der Apostel herkommt*].” (Tr, BSLK 474, 9-11)

Contrary to the pope’s claim that he, by divine right, has the power of both swords the Treatise asserts:

Christ gave to his apostles only spiritual authority, that is, the command to preach the gospel, to proclaim forgiveness of sins, to administer the sacraments, and to excommunicate the ungodly without the use of physical force [German: “through the Word”]. He did not give them the power of the sword or the right to establish, take possession, or dispose of the kingdoms of the world. Indeed, Christ said, ‘Go, ... teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you’ [Matt. 29:19-20]. Again, ‘As the Father has sent me, so I send you’ [John 20:21].

Dr. Luther

Christ’s mandate and institution of the *Predigtamt* goes together with the mandate and institution of the preaching of the gospel, baptizing, absolving, binding, and lord’s suppering – and vice versa. For the sake of having a church that lives by faith the Lord Jesus has instituted both. Neither are to be divorced from one another. This is precisely the meaning of AC V. In addition, all of the foregoing flows from Dr. Luther’s insights that he learned from the Scriptures:

For we must believe and be sure of this, that baptism does not belong to us but to Christ, that the gospel does not belong to us but to Christ, that the office of preaching does not belong to us but to Christ, that the sacrament [of the Lord’s Supper] does not belong to us but to Christ, that the keys, or forgiveness and retention of sins, do not belong to us but to Christ. In summary, the offices and sacraments do not belong to us but to Christ, for he has ordained all this and left it behind as a legacy in the church to be exercised and used to the end of the world; and he does not lie or deceive us. Therefore, we cannot make anything else out of it, but must act according to his command and hold to it. (AE 38:200).

Consequently, what is done according to Jesus’ mandate and institution he does instrumentally by the men put into the *Predigtamt*. Luke 10:16 “He who hears you hears me.” Matthew 28:20 “Surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.” Mark 16:20 “And the Lord worked with them.” Acts 1:1 “all that Jesus began to do and teach.” 2 Corinthians 5:20 “We are Christ’s ambassadors, as though God making his appeal through us.” “To be baptized in God’s name is to be baptized not by human beings but by God himself. Although it is performed by human hands, it is nevertheless truly God’s own act.” (LC IV, 10). “For this reason [his mandate and institution] he [Jesus] is and remains the one, true, eternal baptizer who administers his baptism daily through our action or service until the day of judgment. So our baptizing should properly be called a presenting or bestowing of the baptism of Christ, just as our sermon is a presenting of the word of God. (AE 38:199)

Again, Dr. Luther:

So it is not our work or speaking but the command and ordinance of Christ which make the bread the body and the wine the blood, beginning with the first Lord’s Supper and continuing to the end of the world, and it is administered daily through our ministry or office. We hear these words, ‘This is my body,’ not as spoken concerning the person of the pastor or the minister but as coming from Christ’s own mouth who is present and says to us: ‘Take, eat, this is my body.’ ... we hear Christ himself through the pastor’s mouth speaking to us and commanding that we should take bread and wine at his word, ‘This is my body,’ etc., and in them according to his command eat his body and drink his blood. (AE 38:199-200)¹¹

Church and Ministry, 49-66; and his 1870 Sermon on Matthew 16:13-19, “The Keys Are Given to the Church of Believers,” in *At Home in the House of My Fathers*, 183-192.

¹⁰The crucified and risen Lord Jesus is judge of both the living and the dead (Acts 10:42; 2 Cor 5:10; 2 Tim 4:1). The Father has given all judgment to him (Jn 5:22, 25). He delivers the Father’s word of judgment to sinners in, with and under his church, his forgiven and forgiving people (Mt 16:18-19; 18:15-35). He calls and sends the apostles as well as those men he puts into apostolic ministry via the church to speak his words of judgment to sinners (repentant and unrepentant). For this task he gives the Holy Spirit so that he works through them in his words of loosing and binding (Jn 20:19-23; 2 Cor 5:20-6:1). They are authorized to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations in his name (Lk 24:47).

¹¹“It does not reside in our speaking but in God’s command, who connects [*verbindet*] his command with our speaking. When we follow his institution and command in the Supper and say, ‘This is my body,’ then it is his body, not because of our speaking or our declarative word, but because of his command in which he has told us to speak and do and has attached his own command and deed to our speaking.” The *Verba*, spoken from the Lord’s *befehl und geheisse*, are spoken “in his person and name [*ynn seiner person vnd namen*].” (1528 *Great Confession*, AE 37:184, 187)

Again, to repeat for emphasis, when Jesus institutes the *Predigtamt* He also institutes each means of grace by which He is at work to justify sinners *coram Deo* only through faith in him (AC V). Through the office Jesus himself speaks (Lk 10:16) and preaches repentance and forgiveness (Lk 24:47). Through the office Jesus himself absolves and binds (Mt 16:19-20; 18:18; Jn 20:22-23 / SC “that we receive absolution from the pastor as from God Himself”; LC “through a human being God looses and absolves from sin”). Through the office Jesus himself baptizes and teaches (Mt. 28:16-20; cf. Mk 16:15-16). “When we hear the Gospel, we hear Christ Himself, and it is His own voice and His Word that is spoken ... the mouth of every pastor is the mouth of Christ.” (AE 69:343, 405) The mandate and institution passages are the Lord’s words from his mouth. That is the *coram Deo* point (“because we know that God wills to preach and work through men and those chosen by men,” Ap XIII, 12-13, German).

Martin Chemnitz

Through the call of the church Jesus appoints pastors as ministers of the gospel to work with him in the bestowing of his Good Friday forgiveness. He authorizes them to use the keys of the kingdom with him in the congregations they serve (Mt 16:18-19; 18:18; Jn 20:19-23). We have observed that the Augsburg Confession teaches that pastors use the keys to bestow Christ’s Calvary won forgiveness by baptism, the preaching of the gospel, absolution, teaching true doctrine and welcoming people to the Lord’s Supper (AC XXVIII, 5-10, 21-22; cf. Latin of AC XXIV, 6; XXV, 1; Ap XXIV 49; Dr. Luther’s *Formula Missae* and *Unterricht der Visitatoren*). Most especially pastors use the keys by categorically pronouncing absolution to many people in the congregation or just to one and by such absolution they admit the absolved to receive the body and blood of Jesus in the Sacrament of the Altar. The use of the binding key would do just the opposite.

For such high pastoral care Martin Chemnitz extols and echoes the same dominical mandate passages (Mt 28:19; 16:19; Jn 20:23; Mt 28:20) that are used by the Confessions for the institution of the *Predigtamt* (*Ministry, Word, and Sacraments*, 26; hereafter MWS). He does the same as well in the *Examination of the Council of Trent* with additional biblical passages: “Christ says, ‘Go, teach, preach, baptize’ (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15). Paul says: ‘A bishop must hold firm to the sure Word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it’ (Titus 1:9). He must be an apt teacher (1 Tim. 3:2), must attend to reading and teaching (1 Tim 4:13), must rebuke those who sin, in the presence of all (1 Tim. 5:20), etc.” (*Examination* 2:680) He warns against those that would define the ministry and its tasks as imitations of the ceremonial from the Old Testament. Instead, if you want to know what the ministry and its duties are you learn from “the description of Christ and the apostles in the New Testament.” (*Examination* 2:681) “We must judge and decide about the duties of the ministers of the New Testament on the basis of the Word, prescription, and command which has been handed down about the ministry in the New Testament Scriptures.” Then note the Scriptures Chemnitz cites: “These passages are found in Matt. 10:1-5; 26:13; 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8, 22; 6:2; 1 Cor. 4:1; 12:27-31; 14:6, 26-33; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Eph. 4:11-16; Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 3:1ff; Titus 1:5ff.” (*Examination* 2:468)¹²

In addition, Chemnitz teaches that God is at work in what he mandates and institutes: “Because God Himself deals with us in the church through the ministry as through the ordinary means and instrument. For it is He Himself that speaks, exhorts, absolves, baptizes, etc. in the ministry and through the ministry. Lk 1:70; Heb 1:1; Jn 1:23 (God crying through the Baptist); 2 Co 2:10, 17; 5:20; 13:3.” (*MWS*, 29) In the way of AC V Chemnitz also states: “The chief thing of the ministry is that God wants to be present in it with His Spirit, grace, and gifts and to work effectively through it. ... that God, present through this means [Word], wants to deal with us in the church and work effectively among us.” (*MWS*, 29-30) Here is another quote from Chemnitz to show once again how he upholds and demonstrates the biblical teaching of the Confessions.

This promise is also added, that God is present with the ministry, that by His blessing He gives the increase to its planting and watering, and that He is truly efficacious through the ministry to call, enlighten, convert, give repentance, faith, regeneration, renewal, and, in short, to dispense through the ministry everything that pertains to our salvation. Matt. 28:20: ‘Lo, I am with you always.’ John 20:22-23: ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any,’ etc. Matt. 16:19: ‘I will give you the

See also Chemnitz, “Concerning the Sacrament of the Eucharist,” in his *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 2:228-229 and Dr. Luther’s 1540 “Sermon at the Baptism of Bernhard von Anhalt” AE 51:315-329.

¹²Please note that in the Latin of Chemnitz’s *Examination* the verse numbers are not included in the quote above. They were most likely added by the translator. This begs the question: what part of Matthew 26 is Chemnitz referencing? Verses 28-28? Why not? After all, Chemnitz usually hooks the ministry with what the ministry is given to do (like AC V) and that would include giving the body and blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. There are other explicit connections to this by Chemnitz: “the dispensation of Baptism and the distribution of the Eucharist” belong to the duties of the ministry (*Examination* 2:680) and the command to “Do this” is the Lord authorizing the apostles to administer the Lord’s Supper (*Examination* 2:695).

keys of the kingdom of heaven ... and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.'
(Examination 2:692; see also MWS, 132-133)

Chemnitz: The Keys

Let's push further with an assist from Chemnitz regarding the keys. In catechetical style he asks diagnostic questions and then provides the biblical answers. Such Q & A might be helpful for us as we fraternally discuss the conference's theme. One question he asks is this: *How then, are sins bound and loosed? Only in general? Or only privately or in particular?* Confessional Lutherans these days are tempted to assert that sins can only be bound and loosed *coram Deo* privately and in particular and not in general. Chemnitz says yes to both! He contends that sins are bound and loosed both in general and in particular according to Scripture.

A general binding happens in "public address, when, on the basis of the Word and according to the Word of God, sins are rebuked in general and the wrath of God and eternal damnation threatened to them who continue in sins without repentance." (MWS, 133) I know. I know. You're troubled. Why? Well, because isn't the pastor supposed to know who is guilty of what? Not according to Chemnitz! "For though a minister of the Word does not know who is guilty of which sins, and does not rebuke them in particular and by name, yet they are bound and retained in the sight of God by that general address to the impenitent and unbelieving." (MWS, 133) He cites Luke 10:10-12; 13:3, 5; Acts 13:46, 51; Ephesians 5:5-6 and 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9.

A general loosing takes place after the proceeding call to repentance when "the promise of the Gospel is set forth in general and to all," and then is believed by a sinner. "Let him surely believe the more firmly that God forgives and remits sins to him in this way." (MWS, 133-134) Chemnitz offers the use of the loosing key in general from Acts 3:19; 4:12; 10:43; Luke 10:6.

Chemnitz acknowledges that not all sinners are moved to repentance by the general use of the binding key and that the general preaching of the gospel does not "satisfy a troubled and disturbed conscience, nor does it give that comfort that suffices to strengthen weak and feeble faith," etc. (MWS, 134) Consequently, "God ordered and ordained that the binding key be used also in particular and applied to individuals who clearly are impenitent or obstinate" in the name of the whole church according to Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Corinthians 5:1-5. (MWS, 134) This is for the sake of repenting the sinner and so that others "fear to commit such great sins (1 Co 5:5; 2 Th 3:14; 1 Ti 5:20). Chemnitz then cites examples from Scripture of the use of the binding key in this way: Cain (Gen 10:4-12), Canaan (Gen 9:25), Simon Magus (Acts 8:20-21, 23), Elymas (Acts 13:10-11), the incestuous man (1 Co 5:1-5) and others (2 Th 3:14; 1 Tim 1:20). (MWS, 134)

So too the loosing key. "Christ not only taught the Gospel in general but also proclaimed forgiveness of sins privately to individual penitents (Mt 9:2; Lk 7:48, 50; 19:9; 23:43). (MWS, 134) Such use of the loosing key the Lord Jesus has given to the *Predigtamt* "or, in case of necessity, any Christian" with his divine promise. Chemnitz cites Matthew 16:19; 18:18; 10:22-23. (MWS, 134) "And this use of the unlocking key is commonly called private absolution ... [and] Christ has promised to be present with His Spirit in this act (Mt 18:20; 28:20; Jn 20:22-23). He Himself [i.e. Christ] also through this means truly offers, gives, applies and seals forgiveness of sins to a troubled conscience, with the added promise that whatever is forgiven and loosed on earth in this way is forgiven and loosed also in heaven (2 Co 2:10; Mt 16:19)." (MWS, 134-135)

Chemnitz extols private absolution in the way of the Confessions and the Reformation. The emphasis is on God's giving in the absolution. The absolution provides great comfort for the troubled conscience just as it did with the paralytic in Matthew 9:2 and the woman in Luke 7:50. "Private absolution also effects this, that I have no need to dispute anxiously and with concern within myself what God thinks or decides about me in heaven, inasmuch as I can become the more sure about that matter through private absolution here on earth, so that I ought not doubt at all that it is valid in heaven also. And the Holy Spirit wants to be present in that very act (Jn 20:22-23) and strengthen and preserve faith through the Word. (MWS, 135)

Another question he asks is: *"Are, then, all to be equally absolved regardless, be they penitent or impenitent? Or is it in the discretion and power of the minister to bind and loose howsoever and whomever he will?"* Great question! The answer: "By no means!" After all, according to John 20:21 the keys are not to be used according to the pastor's will or whatever the world determines to be right (Jn 6:38; 7:16) but according "to the command and will of God (Jn 8:28; 12:49). (MWS, 135) God does not absolve the unrepentant and unbelieving. Instead, he binds them (Jer 5:6-7; Lk 13:3; Jn 3:36) "Therefore, whom God binds in His Word, him the minister of the Word also should bind." (MWS, 135) God looses the sinner that "heartily repents and in true confidence seeks the grace of God in Christ (Eze 33:14-16; Lk

15:10; cf. the story of the prodigal son, etc.). The minister of the Word should therefore do the same, not binding, but remitting sins to him (Mt 18:21-22; Lk 17:3-4)." (MWS, 135)

"But how will a minister of the Word become clear regarding the true repentance and faith of a sinner?" Chemnitz answers: "For that reason and for that purpose examination and exploration in private confession is observed in our churches with those who seek absolution and are about to approach the Table of the Lord." (MWS, 135) He, of course, rejects the papal way of doing it with its three main errors: enumeration of all sin to the priest, confession merits forgiveness, and the priest as spiritual judge imposes satisfactions to "atone and expiate" for the sins confessed.

All right. So what kind of confession is retained in the Church of the Augsburg Confession? Well, Chemnitz elaborates the three kinds of confession that the Scriptures teach. The first is confession that is made to God, "namely, when the whole church and everyone in it, confesses his sins individually to God with a humble and contrite heart and asks forgiveness (Ps 32:5; 1 Jn 1:9; Ps 106:6; Dn 9:4-7; Ez 9:6, 15; 10:1-3, 10-12)." (MWS, 136)

The second kind of confession is the one that is done "in brotherly reconciliation with [one's] neighbor." The sinner confesses his sin to his brother and begs for forgiveness and reconciliation (Mt 5:22-23; 18:15; Lk 17:4; Ja 5:16). (MWS, 136)

Then Chemnitz recounts the following. "Third, Scripture also testifies that, in the early church, before they that were to be baptized were admitted to Baptism they made a confession publicly or privately; one can gather from this that they were moved by serious repentance and sought Baptism in true faith (Mt 3:5-6; Lk 3:12; Acts 2:37-38; 8:36-38; 19:18). Thus David confessed his sins before absolution (2 Sm 12:13). So also the woman who was a sinner (Lk 7:38, 48). And Zacchaeus (Lk 19:8-9)." (MWS, 136) From these examples he argues that both public and private "exploration" were practiced in the ancient church. Consequently, "our churches also retain that kind of confession. For none are received to the Lord's Supper, unless they first, by general confession, attest their repentance and faith to the pastor of the church, who on that occasion also enters into private discussion with individuals." (MWS, 136)

Chemnitz then offers five reasons why this is done:

1. "That from this kind of confession and private discussion pastors might note whether the hearers rightly hold and sufficiently understand the necessary parts of doctrine, and if they perceive that they still lack something in this matter, they they might thus have occasion to inform them more earnestly and better from the Word of God."
2. "That is this way they might explore whether they that desire to be admitted to the Lord's Supper are moved by true repentance and at the same time teach them more precisely what sin is and what its reward [is]; likewise what things are required for true repentance and how they are to be rightly engaged in."
3. "That in this way they might inquire and learn who believes what, [and] how, how seriously [and] with and through whom they seek remission of sins; where there is opportunity at the same time, to instruct and teach the unlearned more precisely what the nature and character of faith is, and likewise to remind them to learn to examine themselves whether they be in the faith (2 Co 13:5)."
4. "That by private exploration they might be able to determine what kind of intent to improve they have individually, and on that occasion diligently impress on them for what reasons new obedience is necessary and in what it consists."
5. "That by that service they might, with salutary counsel and comfort from the Word of God, help pious consciences that are either pressed by temptation or troubled by some scruple; and that can be done best in that kind of private conversation." (MWS, 136-137)

Chemnitz then clinches it the way the Confessions do. "Finally, the rite of private confession is retained and used in our churches chiefly for the sake of absolution, namely so that it might be rightly and salutarly sought, received, and used in earnest repentance and true faith." (MWS, 137) In addition he states: "Since these individual benefits, now enumerated, are of greatest importance and lack neither divine Word nor command, it is therefore clear and plain that this rite, namely as it is observed in our churches, rests on their foundations and [that] they are firm and drawn from Scripture." (MWS, 137) Consequently, when properly taught the "pious" will be attracted to use it because of their need and because of the divine benefits offered there. "Indeed the pastors themselves will also be reminded thereby how and why that private discussion is to be undertaken." (MWS, 137) Finally, Chemnitz declares:

As for the rest, the time of private confession is in our churches mostly connected with the Lord's Supper, so that no one might knowingly be admitted to it unworthily without true self-examination and bring judgment and damnation on himself. People are individually exhorted by pastors in private confession to examine and search themselves diligently and at the same time instructed why that should be done. All who are pious will understand that this is very important. (MWS, 137)

Conclusion

Let's put a twist on the opening story. This time, however, the pastor is a recent seminary graduate with a small family. The woman steadfastly remains an openly unrepentant adulteress even after numerous attempts over the course of two years to win the sister according to Matthew 18. Things go south in the congregation over that time. Who is the young pastor to judge? Who is he to cast the first stone? Who does he think he is? Calling her to repentance and then refusing to give her the Sacrament? Who has ever heard of such a thing? Where is the love? Our congregation's reputation in the community is ruined. No one will want to join this most unwelcoming place. No doubt he is one of those Fort Wayne hyper-European sacerdotalists! He wears a clerical! Enough said. She feels in her heart that she has done nothing wrong. She offers all kinds of pious reasons to justify her sinful behavior. She claims that the pastor has been a bully.

Most of the congregation agrees. People have stopped coming to church. In fact, many are planning to leave. Giving is way down. The treasurer can't pay the bills any more let alone the pastor's salary. The congregation plans to hold a meeting. Its purpose is to demand the pastor's immediate resignation and provide him with a two-week severance package. He's not a good fit. They'll get a better fitting pastor and all will be better.

In an attempt to somewhat salvage the situation the officials in charge of the circuit and district advise everyone to use the dispute resolution process, informal first, and if needed then the formal. To make a long story short the woman remains impenitent and the pastor resigns. Hypothetically, the pastor could have used the office of the keys in the dispute resolution process not only with the woman but also with the members of the congregation that supported and promoted her sin. However, he was reluctant. If he did that, his life as a pastor humanly speaking would be over forever. None of the officials who are in charge of the process encourage the pastor to use the binding key. The tremendous economic, career, emotional, and psychological pressures during this entire process were too much for the pastor. He hopes against hope for another call. In the meantime the binding key was loosed and the loosing key was bound.

The odd man out, however, in this entire process was Jesus. He and his Good Friday forgiveness were absented from sinners. He was not allowed to have his say. And I'm here to tell you that you cannot be the church without Christ!

AC V confesses the biblical truth that the *Predigtamt* or the *ministerium ecclesiasticum* has been tasked by the Lord to preach the gospel -- *ministerium docendi evangelii* (ministry of teaching the gospel) and to administer the sacraments *ministerium porrigendi sacramenta* (ministry of administering the sacraments). Both go together. The preaching of the gospel and bestowing of the sacraments are never to be divorced from each other.

Hermann Sasse states that for Dr. Luther and the Confession this is precisely the *Kirchenregiment* (church government) of AC XIV and XXVIII. It is the:

Exercise of the functions peculiar to the office of the ministry: 'an authority and command of God to preach the Gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to dispense and administer the Sacraments' [AC XXVIII, 5]. That is ecclesiastical power (*potestas ecclesiastica*), really church government. For in the exercise of these functions through his servant, through the administration of these means of grace, Christ the Lord himself rules his church. 'For this is always the kingdom of Christ' (*Semper enim hoc est regnum Christi*), says the Apology to AC VII and AC VIII, 'that he makes alive by his Spirit, whether it be revealed or hidden under the cross' (*sive sit revelatum, sive sit cruce tectum*) [Ap VII and VIII, 18]. ("The Lutheran Doctrine of the Office of the Ministry," 129)

Again, Sasse's point is this: the functions of the *ministerium ecclesiasticum* – preaching the gospel and handing out the sacraments -- are church government (*Kirchenregiment*) properly speaking. There Jesus exercises his lordship as Savior. There he gives the Holy Spirit through the Word to create faith and to deliver his Good Friday forgiveness that also gives life and salvation. There he is having a church. Where Jesus is giving and doing / doing and giving what he promises according to his mandate and institution, he is there. *Ubi Christ ibi ecclesia!* (Ignatius, Epistle to the Smyrnaeans 8:2; see Sasse's "The Presence of Christ and the Future of the Church, in *The Lonely Way*, 1:462)

All this is in total opposition to the *iure humano* arrangement of the church propagated as *iure divino*. Dr. Luther put it this way: "Christ's merit is not acquired through our work or pennies, but through faith by grace, without any money and merit – not by the authority of the pope, but rather **by preaching a sermon**, that is, God's Word." (SA II, 2, 24, emphasis added) No greater authority in the church than the preacher that preaches! The highest office in the church is that of the preacher who in service as a slave to Christ proclaims the gospel.

The AC XIV and XXVIII *Kirchenregiment* is to be properly distinguished from what we are accustomed to call church government. You hear "church government" and you automatically think handbook, by-laws, CCM rulings, etc. That is

not bad in itself. On balance, Sasse reminds us what the Confessions teach, in particular, that “the church is not only ‘an association of faith and of the Holy Spirit in hearts’ (*societas fidei et Spiritus Sancti cordibus*), it is always at the same time ‘an association of external things and rites’ (*societas externarum rerum ac rituum*) [Ap VII and VIII, 5].” (The Lutheran Doctrine of the Office of the Ministry, 129) Such an association of external things and rites goes together with the proper *Kirchenregiment* of Word and sacrament. Sasse argues that, “both [of] these sides of the church are inextricably joined.” However, anything external to the preaching of the gospel and the giving out of the sacraments (e.g. human administration or governance by ecclesiastical laws, rules, bylaws) ARE NOT the manifestation of Christ’s rule – even if it is called a dispute resolution process. Sasse reminds us of a very important point that can get lost in the hustle and bustle of life in the church. It is this: the external government of the church “must be so ordered that it grants to the real church government the fullest opportunity to work.” (The Lutheran Doctrine of the Office of the Ministry, 129) In other words, whatever the external human order it must exist only so that the divinely instituted means of grace get done. The rite of private confession in the hymnal is a good example of that.

The danger, of course, is that the association of external things and rites of the church can hinder or prevent the *ministerium ecclesiasticum* from doing the divinely instituted AC V and AC XXVIII tasks. In fact, the *iure humano* can replace the *iure divino* so that the *iure humano* is *iure divino*! As if man’s arrangements and words are better than the Lord’s.

In most of Protestantism and no doubt even in your own congregations to a certain extent, the gospel is nothing but an accusatory law and the ever-changing and contingent law is now the progressive Spirit-filled gospel of love. The forgiveness of sins given in sermon and sacrament by a preacher is seen to be the most heavy-handed absolute tyrannical authority that no self-respectful global citizen can tolerate. After all, the absolution also means that the absolved is a sinner.¹³ Consequently, the application of the gospel is legally determined (both inside and outside the church) to be a vicious attack on created goodness, the individual’s sense of worth, privacy, diversity, human rights, etc. The application of the forgiveness of sins is said to do violence to global and cultural variety, diminish plurality, stifle flexibility, inhibit fruitfulness and kill society.

Worse yet is that these very things are substituted for Christ alone as our righteousness. After all, the bumper stickers advertise the *sine qua non* of the old Adamic utopian dream: celebrate diversity / . In the post-Genesis 3 world, you sermon and sacrament AC V-ers are demonized as bigots, racists, hegemoniacs, control freaks, imperialists or autocrats because you relentlessly try to control the individual’s quest for his *intra nos* spiritual mission.

“Lording it over the congregation!” is a typical slur. In the end, you AC V sermonizers and sacramenters stand outside an individual or group of people with supposed divine “force” as an absolute authority with an objective, external word that has absolutely nothing to do with the individual’s inner spirituality from the bathroom to the bedroom. Accordingly, you AC V-ers are labeled by fanatics as unmodern, anti-Zeitgeisters! Therefore, preacher must be eliminated, by force if necessary, so that he cannot do his AC V tasks. In such a time of the “spirit” (Zeitgeist), the binding key is loosed and the loosing key is bound via the euphemistic language of inclusivity, tolerance, acceptance, not throwing the first stone, and being non-judgmental. Progressive spiritualists (enthusiasts), individual or institutional, think according the old Adamic self in resistance to the means of grace work of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, Jesus is expelled as the only Savior; made extrinsic to salvation. He is partly or entirely absented so that there is lots of legroom for the progressive law of charity or external *iure humano* policies to do the salvific work!

Here is the bottom line. The very worst thing that you can do to someone in this life is this. Christ himself hands you the office of the keys but then you prevent them from being used. Or you refuse to use them for fear that you will cause too much harm in a congregation. Or you resist using them lest you insult a sinner, or because a majority vote in a church assembly told you that it was no longer necessary or so loving to do. Again, when you do that you are not using Jesus in the way that Jesus wants to be used, namely, as the Savior of sinners. Divorce Jesus from sin and sinners and you divorce Jesus from his church. It’s like burying the treasure in the ground because you fear a harsh master.

The loosing key is to loose. The binding key is to bind. The church nor the ministry are given to bind the loosing key or loose the binding key. Do that and you have your say but you partially or totally absent Christ from the church. Can you have church without Christ? No. You cannot be the church without Christ. You don’t want that do you? Of course you don’t. So repent. And trust the Lord’s promise is that he will build his church on the confession that he is the

¹³ “If God promises life, it follows that we are under death. If He promises forgiveness of sins, it follows that sins dominate and possess us,” (AE 12:340). Similarly, “If we believe that Christ has redeemed men by his blood, we are bound to confess that the whole man was lost,” (AE 33:293).

Christ – the Savior Christ. He suffered. He died. He rose. He reigns. For sinners. For you. In the way AC V faithfully confesses it.

Let us pray. Most merciful Father, we beg you to cast the bright beams of your light upon your church that we, being instructed by the doctrine of the blessed apostles, may walk in the light of your truth and finally attain to the light of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Rev. Brent W. Kuhlman

27 April 2016 (Wednesday of Easter 5)

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What if the pastor is a Judas or a Tillian Tchividjian? What if he is a hypocrite? What if he's a raging alcoholic? Are my children and grandchildren baptized? Am I baptized? Did we ever receive the Lord's Supper from this rogue? Well, we are not Donatists. "A person may use the sacraments even when they are administered by evil people. This accords with the saying of Christ [Matt. 23:2]: 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat....' Both the sacraments and the Word are efficacious because of the ordinance and command of Christ [*propter ordinationem et mandatum Christi*], even when offered by evil people." (AC VIII, 1-2)

Nevertheless, we admit that in this life many hypocrites and wicked people, who are mixed in with these [assembly of saints who believe the gospel and have the Holy Spirit], participate in the outward signs. They are members of the church according to their participation in the outward signs and even hold office in the church. Nor does this detract from the efficacy of the sacraments when they are distributed by the unworthy, because they represent the person of Christ on account of the call of the church and do not represent their own persons [*quia repraesentant Christi personam propter vocationem ecclesiae, non repraesentant proprias personas*], as Christ himself testifies [Luke 10:16], 'Whoever listens to you listens to me.' When they offer the Word of Christ or the sacraments, they offer them in the stead and place of Christ [*Cum verbum Christi, cum sacramenta porrigunt, Christi vice et loco porrigunt.*]¹⁴ The words of Christ teach us this so that we are not offended by the unworthiness of ministers. (Ap VII-VIII, "The Church," 178:28)

We are not Donatists! Therefore, Melancthon stresses again as he speaks specifically of holy Baptism that, "the sacraments are efficacious [*et quod sacramenta sint efficacia*] even though they may be dispensed by evil ministers, because the ministers act in the place of Christ and so do not represent their own person [*quia ministrie funguntur vice Christi, non repraesentant suam personam*]. This accords with that passage [Luke 10:16], 'Whoever listens to you listens to me.'" However, if the pastors are false prophets/teachers, then they "must be avoided because they no longer act in the person of Christ but are Antichrists." Matthew 7:15 and Galatians 1:9 come ringing in. (Ap IX, "Baptism" 183:47-48)

When it comes to the use of the office of the keys in the church there is the dominical mandate that the pastor forgive sinners (Mt 16; 18; Jn 20). Again, Melancthon quotes Luke 10:16 with regard to the speaking of holy absolution by the pastor. He writes:

¹⁴The German addresses the Iscariot kind of pastor: "*Also ist auch Judas zu predigen gesendet. Wenn nu gleich Gottlose predigen und die Sakrament reichen, so reichen sie dieselbigen an Christus statt.*"

The power of the keys administers and offers [*exhibet / verkündiget*] the gospel through absolution, which is the true voice of the gospel [*ist das Evangelium selbst*]. Thus, we also include absolution when we talk about faith, because ‘faith comes from what is heard,’ as Paul says [Rom.10:17]. For when the gospel is heard, when absolution is heard, the conscience is uplifted and receives consolation. Because God truly makes alive through the Word, the keys truly forgive sins before God according to [Luke 10:16], ‘Whoever listens to you listens to me.’ Therefore we must believe the voice of the one absolving no less than we would believe a voice from heaven [*denn wenn wir Gottes klare Stimme von Himmel hörten, und die Absolution, das selige, tröstlich Wort*]. (Ap XII “Repentance,” 193:39-40)

Again, when the pastor speaks the word of absolution according to Christ’s mandate and institution “it is not the voice or word of the person speaking it, but it is the Word of God, who forgives sin. For it is spoken in God’s stead and by God’s command [*Dann es sei nicht des gegenwärtigen Menschen Stimme oder Wort, sondern Gottes Wort, der die Sünde vergibt. Dann sie wird an Gottes Statt und aus Gottes Befehl gesprochen*]... It is also taught how God requires us to believe this absolution as much as if it were God’s voice resounding from heaven [*denn so Gottes Stimme vom Himmel erschulle*].” (AC XXV “Confession,” 72:3-4).

And that’s how you have it in the Small Catechism. Confession has two parts. First, confess your sin. Before God confess them all even the ones you don’t even know about like you do when you pray the Fifth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer. Before the pastor confess the ones you know and that bother you (perhaps you could confess the ones that don’t bother you – the ones you love to do – the ones you’re not worried about). Second, receive the absolution, that is, forgiveness from the pastor as from God himself, not doubting but firmly believing that by the absolution your sins are forgiven before God in heaven [*für Gott im Himmel / coram Deo in coelis*]!

Consequently, you have been given holy absolution’s liturgy:

Pastor: “Do you also believe that my forgiveness is God’s forgiveness [*Gläubst Du auch, dass meine Vergebung Gottes Vergebung sie*]?”

Penitent: “Yes, dear sir.”

Pastor: “Let it be done for you according to your faith. And by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you your sin in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Go in peace.”¹⁵ (SC, “How Simple People Are To Be Taught To Confess,” 361:26-28; cf. LSB, 185, 291, 293)

This language (“let it be done for you according to your faith”¹⁶) of holy absolution’s liturgy is from the very words of Jesus in the New Testament, in particular, the miracle accounts (Mt 8:13; 9:22; 29; Mk 5:34; 10:52; Lk 7:50; 8:48; 13:12; 17:19; 18:42; Jn 4:50). As the preacher in the holy office speaks all these words in holy absolution’s liturgy to the penitent, it is the Lord himself who is speaking.¹⁷ Here, the preacher’s word is God’s word! Identical! *Viva vox Christi!*¹⁸

¹⁵With Dr. Luther we rejoice in the Christian’s speaking the word of forgiveness. Let the following example from a sermon preached from Matthew 9:1-8 (October 19, 1533) suffice: “It truly is a mighty power when one Christian can say to another, Dear brother, be unafraid, God is gracious to you; only believe what he promises, as I declare it to you in Jesus’ name, for it is as valid as if God himself were saying to you, Your sins are forgiven. Such power began, as we hear in this account, with Christ himself, and it continues for mankind, especially with those who occupy the pastoral office and are duty bound to preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins in Jesus’ name. Nevertheless, **every Christian** has the command, not only that he can, but should, say to you when you are troubled by your sin: Why are you troubled? As your fellow Christian, I say to you, you are not fair to yourself, for God is not ungracious toward you; you ought to trust these words just as surely as though God were speaking to you personally from heaven, never questioning them because of the person of the one from whom you hear them,” *Luther’s House Postils*, Klug, vol. 3, pp. 79-80, (emphasis added).

¹⁶“We must assert that as you believe, so it will happen to you, because this faith is not taken from your judgment but drawn from the Word of God. Therefore if you can grasp this and believe that God is well pleased with those who fear Him (Ps. 147:11), then it will happen this way to you. If you do not grasp it, you are not under His pleasure but under His wrath, according to Christ’s saying (Matt. 8:13), ‘As you have believed, so be it done for you.’ ... be assured that a thing which is sure and true of itself becomes more sure and true when you believe it ... This is true theology about the true God and the true worship of God,” LW 12:322.

¹⁷“But He is certainly present in these, Himself working miracles, preaching, administering the sacraments, consoling, strengthening and helping,” 1538 “Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, Chapters 14-16,” LW 24:67.

¹⁸In a 1523 Maundy Thursday sermon Dr. Luther proclaims: “you must hear in the absolution with true faith and not doubt that the words spoken by your confessor are indeed spoken by God himself. For God has so humbled himself and condescended that he places his holy, divine word in human mouths so that we have no reason to doubt that it is God himself that speaks it,” WA 12:493, 3-7. “We call men back to the Word so that the chief part of the whole action might be the voice of God itself and the hearing itself ... with your whole heart pay attention to the voice of the brother absolving you. And do not doubt that this voice of the brother in the Sacrament or in absolution is divinely spoken by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit Himself, so that you completely depend on what you hear, not on what you do or think ... After hearing comes confidence so that we say:

'I am baptized. I have taken the body given for me on the cross. I have heard the voice of God from the minister or brother, by which the forgiveness of sins has been announced to me.' This confidence conquers death and all other evils," LW 12:370-371. In a Table Talk someone asked, "Doctor, is the Word that Christ spoke when he was on earth the same in fact and in effect as the Word preached by a minister?" The doctor replied, "Yes, because he said, *He who hears you hears me* (Luke 10:16). And Paul calls the Word *the power of God* (Rom. 1:16)'. Then the inquirer asked, 'Doctor, isn't there a difference between the Word that became flesh (John 1:14) and the Word that is proclaimed by Christ or by a minister?' 'By all means!' he replied. "The former is the incarnate Word, who was true God from the beginning, and the latter is the Word that's proclaimed. The former Word is in substance God; the latter Word is in its effect the power of God, but isn't God in substance, for it has a man's nature, whether it's spoken by Christ or by a minister," LW 54, 394, no. 5177 = WA 4:695-96. See also LW 22:502-509. Hermann Sasse put it this way: "Compared with the impressive rites performed in the pagan temples [in the Roman empire] the sacraments of the church were inconspicuous, simple actions, a simple washing with water, the breaking of bread, the prayer of the Eucharist, the distribution of bread and wine. And yet there was a great difference. This simple rendering of the apostolic message was more than human talk and more than human wisdom. Christ Himself was speaking the Word of His Gospel through the mouth of the minister: 'Thy sins are forgiven unto thee.' This washing with water was not only a sign, a picture, but really the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, bring us forgiveness of sins, and with it life and salvation. For the hands of the minister and the words he spoke were the hands of Christ, the words of Christ. And the bread and the wine which we receive from the minister, we receive really from the hands of Christ," in "The Crisis," 45.