

Did Jesus Institute the Pastoral Office?

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I would like to thank Pastor Cascione for inviting me to speak to you today. This is a “free” conference. This means that the speakers speak for themselves, not as representatives of any particular Lutheran synod. I am not here as a representative of the ELS. The president of the ELS has asked me to tell you that the ELS cherishes her fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod. I am happy to pass on to you that official message from the president of the ELS. I also hope that my remarks this afternoon will serve to build bridges of understanding between brothers on a topic that has vexed confessional Lutherans in America for many decades.

While I do not presume to represent the ELS I do claim to represent confessional Lutheran theology. I belong to that school that is well represented among the so called “confessionals” in Missouri today that insists that loyalty to the Lutheran Confessions supercedes loyalty to any synod. Some folks have a hard time with this devotion to the Lutheran Confessions. I understand their reluctance to stand so firmly on documents produced by fallible men in the heat of doctrinal disputes in another place at another time. After all, isn't it the Scriptures alone that must serve as the standard by which all teaching in the church should be judged? Why, then, this constant appeal to man-made documents? Because these documents speak from the Holy Scriptures and receive their authority from the written word of God. I was persuaded long ago that the Lutheran Confessions are fully in agreement with the Holy Scriptures. I have been especially confirmed in this belief during the past two years as I have seen how the Lutheran Confessions so clearly set forth the biblical teaching on the pastoral office.

As you may know, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod has recently been discussing and debating the doctrine of the ministry. The Doctrine Committee of the ELS (somewhat comparable to the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Missouri Synod and the Committee on Inter-Church Relations of the Wisconsin Synod) prepared several theses on the “Office of the Public Ministry” commonly known among us as the DC Theses. The Doctrine Committee memorialized the 2001 convention of the ELS to adopt these theses as the

official position of the ELS. One of my objections to the DC Theses was that they defined the office in such a way as to include within it the office of parochial school teacher. While the DC Theses did distinguish between the pastoral office and the parochial school teacher's office, they did not say that the pastoral office is divinely instituted and the parochial school teacher's office is not. Rather, the DC Theses promoted the view that the pastoral office is the most comprehensive form of the public ministry and that the Christian Day School teacher holds a more limited form of this office. When I spoke at the convention against adopting the DC Theses, I appealed to Articles V, XIV, and XXVIII of the Augsburg Confession. I urged the delegates to read these articles. I argued that it was not possible that the original signatories of the Augsburg Confession could have conceived of putting women who teach children in a parochial school into the office defined in these articles. My argument, of course, was not that anyone in my synod favored women pastors. Nobody in the ELS does. Rather, it was that the DC Theses were proposing a definition of the office that disagreed with the definition of the office in the Lutheran Confessions.

Some people came up to me afterwards and chided me for basing my argument on the Lutheran Confessions instead of on the Bible. I believe that when we are among Lutherans we ought to be able to appeal to the Lutheran Confessions to settle an argument. Still, I did take to heart their criticism and decided that I would try to continue the debate within our synod by making my argument solely from the Scriptures as much as I could. While that debate has yet to take place in public forums within the ELS, it did take place electronically for several months after the 2001 convention and before the 2002 convention of the ELS on an email list called elsministry. Thousands of pages of emails were posted. The debate was not limited to pastors of the ELS. Professor Brug of the Wisconsin Synod seminary in Mequon was invited to join the debate and he did so. John Brug is a very capable scholar and one of the leading theologians in the Wisconsin Synod today. His contributions were very helpful to me as I have tried better to understand the underlying theological concerns of the Wisconsin Synod view of the ministry and I am grateful to him for his efforts in helping me to understand that view.

During this debate I began to discern a paradigm^[1] or model of the ministry with which I first became familiar years ago in the Missouri Synod. The popular paradigm of the ministry that developed in the tradition of the Synodical Conference in the 20th century sees the ministry as coming from Jesus to us in this way:

1. Christ

2. Private ministry (means of grace given to all individual Christians)
3. Church (Christians gather into groups for mutual edification; to fulfill God's command to establish the public ministry; for decency and good order, etc.)
4. Public ministry (those who, on behalf of the church, preach the gospel and administer the sacraments)

This way of approaching the topic of the ministry emphasizes that the ministry belongs to every single Christian. This affirmation is made in conscious opposition to any kind of clerical attempts to hijack this office and steal it away from God's people to whom it belongs. That, of course, is a noble goal. The ministry of Christ is indeed the personal possession of every individual Christian even as Christ is the personal Savior of every individual Christian. It may be in vogue in certain circles to denigrate the personal and individual use of God's word in favor of emphasizing the corporate nature of the church and the public nature of the office, but that is wrong. It is wrong-headed and self-defeating to defend the public office God has instituted by denying that the office is immediately the possession of every single Christian. Simple logic proves that it is. If God is going to justify us by means of what He gives to us in the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments, the office to which these duties are entrusted must belong to all those who are justified. We can hardly be justified by faith alone if God hasn't given to us those means by which justifying faith is obtained. It is right and proper to emphasize that the ministry belongs to every individual Christian. Luther certainly did so.^[2] He did so in defense of the doctrine of justification.

There is much to commend this paradigm made popular throughout the synods of the old Synodical Conference. It begins with Jesus who is the Savior of sinners. It then goes from Jesus to His Christians. Those who are justified by faith alone and who by virtue of their status as children of God are the true members of the Holy Christian Church. From this confession of the so called "invisible church" it proceeds to the gathering together of Christians for the purpose of doing churchly things, chief among which is the establishment among them of the public ministry. As Christ's church these Christians establish the office of the public ministry that carries out the ministry on their behalf. They do this at God's command and according to His word. While adherents of this paradigm teach that God has instituted this public ministry, they also emphasize the representative nature of the ministry as the minister acts "on behalf of" the church. The word "public" in "public ministry" is to be understood primarily as the minister acting "on behalf of" the "public" or the church. The minister acts publicly by delegation from those who have the ministry by virtue of their status

as the priesthood of believers. Consider once more the order: Christ, private ministry, church, public ministry.

The Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod both followed this paradigm in their church and ministry debates during the first half of the 20th Century. They both agreed that the office is given to every believer and that believers gather together to form churches and as churches to establish the public ministry. Where they differed with each other was on the question of what kind of gathering of Christians constituted a church in the scriptural sense of the term. Only that gathering which could rightly be called church would have the right to exercise the churchly authority to call someone to carry out the duties of the public office.

For the moment we can set aside the differences between the Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod on the question of what form the church and the ministry may or must take and take note instead of the common approach. Read the writings of the theologians of both synods during most of the twentieth century and you will see that they follow essentially the same paradigm. The strength of this paradigm is that it seeks to uphold Walther's scriptural insistence (as given, for example, in his seventh thesis on the ministry)[\[3\]](#) that the ministry belongs immediately to the church and every individual Christian and then mediately by God's call through the church to her public ministers. It is important to safeguard this public office from being tyrannized by the public office holders to the detriment of those for whose benefit Christ instituted the office in the first place.

Having said that, there is much that argues against this paradigm. The first objection I would like to raise is that it does not follow the pattern of thought set down plainly in the Holy Scriptures. It is not based on the Bible. It is rather based on a theological system. The biblical paradigm goes like this:

1. Christ
2. Public ministry (that is, this is the ministry of Christ by which He serves the church by giving to them the treasures He won for them)
3. Church (as the creation of the Holy Spirit through the public administration of the means of grace)
4. Private ministry (means of grace given to all individual Christians)

Adherents of the first paradigm may initially oppose a model that appears to put the public ministry between Christ and the church. Surely, they will argue,

nothing can come between Christ and His church. Is this not a kind of sacerdotalism from which the Reformation delivered us? Far from this being the case, the model I propose does the very opposite. It brings Christ to the church as Christ Himself has promised to come. Furthermore, it keeps Christ in possession of the office of which His ministers are only stewards. I believe and I hope to show to you this afternoon that this paradigm, rather than the other, is biblical and confessional. I also believe that if we take it seriously it may help us to overcome certain divisions on the doctrine of the ministry that have arisen within and between those synods that once made up the Synodical Conference. It would be nice if folks from the Missouri Synod, the Wisconsin Synod, the ELS, and other synods that hail from the old Synodical Conference would learn to speak to one another in mutually understandable language. Right now the theological debates on the ministry are so cluttered by contradictory definitions as well as a multitude of undefined terms that carry huge emotional baggage (what is a "divine call"?) that productive conversation is nearly impossible. I believe that part of this is due to the paradigm we have inherited. The paradigm I am proposing adheres more closely to the literal sense of the Scriptures. This is the literal sense of the Augsburg Confession as well.

So let us turn to the institution of the office by the One who purchased the treasures it dispenses.

Jesus instituted the office after he died on the cross to take away our sins and rose from the dead. He appeared personally to the men whom he had taught for the previous three years. Everything that he had taught them was to direct their attention to the events that had just taken place. What had just taken place was the redemption of the world, though the world did not know it. The world cannot understand it. It sees Christ's death as a shameful failure. To the extent that it understands the preaching of the cross it is scandalized by it. The world knows nothing of true righteousness. It can be found only in the suffering and death of the Son of Man. And it was necessary that He suffer for us. It was the Son of Man who laid claim to authority on this earth to forgive sins. Surely he was not claiming authority to abrogate the divine law by his bare word. Christ's word is never bare. It is always joined to His vicarious obedience and His blood shed for us. The reason the gospel is God's power to save everyone who believes it is because the righteousness of God is revealed in it. Talk is cheap. Christ's talk is not. It is as dear as His enduring the curse of the law and fully drinking down to the bitter dregs the wrath of God against every sinner who ever lived. When He cried out as the forsaken sinner He remained the beloved Son of the Father full of grace and truth. In that apparently shameful death God glorified His Son by reconciling the world to Himself through Him and for His sake not imputing men's sins against them. After Jesus rose from the dead and before He ascended into heaven to fill all things and be with his church everywhere and all the time He gave to His church a precious gift. What we call this gift is not so important as

that we acknowledge it for what it is and that we confess that it is from Jesus Christ Himself.

He gave this gift to the eleven apostles whom he had chosen. What is this gift? A number of answers could be given. We could say Jesus gave the gospel or the gospel and the sacraments. We could say he gave the authority to forgive and retain sins or the office of the keys or the ministry of reconciliation. We might not ordinarily say that Jesus gave us the gift of the pastoral office. But I would suggest to you that we should. If we cannot find the institution of the pastoral office in the words that Jesus spoke to the apostles after he rose from the dead and before he ascended into heaven we will not be able to find a divine institution for this office anywhere else in the Scriptures.

Let us then consider the words that Jesus spoke.

Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw Him, they worshipped Him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth, Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have command you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:16-20)

Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after he had risen. And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:14-16)

Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high." (Luke 24:46-49)

Then Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive

the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” (John 20:21-23)

In each of these accounts except for Luke’s, Jesus was speaking only to the men whom He had instructed in the mysteries of the kingdom for three years. There had been twelve of them. Now there were eleven, and one of them was missing in St. John’s account. Jesus was telling the men whom He had taught to preach the gospel, to forgive and retain sins, to baptize, and to teach the church to hold on to everything that He commanded. To put it into the church’s familiar language, He was telling them to preach the gospel and to administer the sacraments. In St. Luke’s Gospel, Jesus’ audience included men who were not apostles. Since there were men present whom He was not putting into the office of preaching, this account does not record Christ’s command to preach. Instead, Jesus spoke in the passive voice telling them that preaching would be done. Strictly speaking, St. Luke’s Gospel does not therefore record the divine institution of the office since no divine command is given. However, it assumes the divine institution of the office and more than that, it teaches that the office will be transmitted beyond the apostles themselves. “Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations.” St. Luke records the actual divine institution of the office in Acts 1:8.

In these post-resurrection accounts where Jesus commands men to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments He is talking specifically and exclusively to men whom He prepared to do just that. Jesus joins the preaching of the gospel to the administration of the sacraments. St. Mark’s account makes it clear that there is no preaching without baptism and there is no baptism without preaching. The teaching that Jesus commanded in St. Matthew’s Gospel is the instruction of the baptized. The command to teach or make disciples that is given in the main verb is to take place by means of the two participles or “ing” words that follow, that is, by baptizing and teaching. This teaching is that the baptized keep in their hearts the treasures Jesus bestows. The New International Version translates the Greek word teereoo as obey, as in “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” That’s unfortunate. This implies a list of rules to obey. That is clearly not the intent. This word is better translated “to hold on to” or “to guard” or to “keep.” It’s the same word used by Jesus in John 8:51 where He says, “If anyone keeps my word he shall never see death.” The “all things” of Matthew 28:20 are better understood to be the “mysteries of God” that we are to embrace in simple faith, not religious principles for doing this or that. Included among these holy mysteries is the Lord’s Supper. St. John’s Gospel tells us of the essence of the preaching and teaching. It is the forgiving of the sins of the penitent and the retaining of the sins of the impenitent. In addition to this, Christ’s words here recorded clearly establish the dogmatic foundation for Holy Absolution. While St. John nowhere records Christ’s institution of the Lord’s Supper, this sacrament is implicit in his words to St. Peter recorded in John 21,

“feed my lambs . . . feed my sheep.” It is inconceivable that this pastoral activity could occur apart from the feeding of God’s children with the same body and blood of Jesus by which they were purchased to become the children of God.

Nothing recorded in the Acts of the Apostles or in the Epistles adds anything of substance about the nature and the duties of this holy office. Jesus institutes, establishes, forms, and authorizes His holy ministry in the words He spoke to His apostles after He rose from the dead and before He ascended into heaven. These clear words of institution set the foundation upon which the rest of the New Testament builds.

What is the plain sense of these familiar words? Jesus is instituting an office whose incumbents are to preach the gospel and to administer the sacraments by His divine authority. He is promising that through the words they speak and the sacraments they administer sinners will be forgiven of their sins and saved eternally. He is joining His almighty power to save sinners to the word that He commands His ministers to say and to the sacraments He commands His ministers to administer. He is promising to be with them until the end of the age. Of course, His promise is that He will be with both His ministers and with His church to which His ministers will be preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments until the end of time. The church and her ministry belong together. The church and her Lord belong together. The ministry that Jesus gives to His church remains His ministry. It is what He says it is. It does what He says it does. The church may no more dismember this office than she may disjoin the water from the word in Holy Baptism or the consecration from the elements in the Lord’s Supper.

These texts from Matthew and Mark contain the divine institution of Holy Baptism. The text from St. John’s Gospel contains the divine institution of the keys. Why then should we question that these texts also contain the divine institution of the office to which the administration of baptism and the preaching of the law and gospel are entrusted?

Let us consider five objections that are raised against the assertion that these clear texts constitute the institution of the pastoral office by Jesus Christ.

The first objection is that if by these words Jesus instituted the pastoral office then these words cannot refer to Christ giving the means of grace to all Christians. If these words aren’t addressed in the first instance to all Christians, the means of grace will become the sole possession of the pastors. The pastoral office will also belong solely to the pastors. Therefore Romanizing Lutherans like Loehe and Grabau who taught that the pastoral office is transmitted only by the

pastors will be right and Walther who taught that the office belongs immediately to the whole church and only mediately to the pastors will be wrong.

This argument is not based on the biblical text, but on the Synodical Conference paradigm. In service to this paradigm the biblical text is subjected to some very questionable exegesis. For example, it is commonly asserted that St. Luke's account and St. John's account refer to the same event. Therefore, since in St. Luke's account others than the apostles were present, we must not interpret St. John's account in such a way that Christ's words were spoken only to the apostles. If that were not enough, we are told that Christ's appearance to over 500 brothers at once as recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:6 is the same event as that described in Matthew 28.^[4] Thus we have St. Luke's account changing the clear sense of St. John's account and St. Paul's account changing the plain sense of St. Matthew's account all in service to a Synodical Conference paradigm constructed in opposition to Romanizing Lutherans of the 19th century! It makes much more sense to accept the accounts as they stand, namely, as Christ calling the first pastors into the office. The fact that He gave this concrete office to the whole church is sufficient proof that in this giving He also gave to all Christians individually the same gospel, baptism, absolution, and Supper that He entrusted to the public office.^[5] After all, the pastor cannot give to the Christian anything to which his baptism does not entitle him. (Galatians 3:26-29) But how does the Christian receive these treasures if not through the public preaching and administration of the sacraments by the called and ordained pastors?^[6]

The second objection is that a pastor is not an apostle. There are two significant differences between the original apostolic office and the present pastoral office. First, the apostles were called immediately by Christ while God calls pastors mediately through the church. Second, it was to the apostles specifically that Jesus said:

However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.”
(John 16:13-14)

Whether God calls immediately or mediates the call through the church doesn't change the nature of the office into which God calls men. Since the apostles were called immediately by Christ their ministry was not bound to any particular church as is the case with pastors who have received the called mediately. Again, this in no way effects the nature of the office.

The fact that it was only to the original apostles that Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth does not imply that today's pastors hold an

office essentially different than the office held by the apostles. It means rather that today's pastors are bound to teach and preach in full accordance with the written apostolic Scriptures. The pastoral office is not a different office than the apostolic office. It is the same office. Within Christ's High Priestly prayer are these words, "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word." (John 17:20) Surely, Jesus is not here praying only for those who would believe in Him through the personal preaching of the eleven apostles. Rather, he is praying for everyone who will come to faith by means of the preached word.

The third objection is that the texts under discussion nowhere use the word "pastor" and indeed the word is seldom used in the New Testament to talk about the incumbents of the public ministry Jesus instituted. Those who raise this objection point out that the title pastor didn't assume common use until it was popularized by the Pietists. In response to this objection, we concede the argument and respectfully reply: "So what?" We are not arguing for the title "pastor" to the exclusion of other titles given in the New Testament. It would be perfectly acceptable to call incumbents of the office Jesus instituted by any number of biblical titles, including elders (presbyters), bishops, teachers, ambassadors, preachers, ministers, or even angels. There is no point in quibbling over titles. The reason I prefer the title pastor is that it is most descriptive of what constitutes the essence of the office. Incumbents of this office are to feed Christ's sheep. Jesus is the Good Pastor (John 10), and calling preachers pastors reminds both the preachers and hearers of the christological foundation of the office. We need to know who provides the food that the sheep are receiving and by whose authority the sheep are being fed. When Jesus told Peter to feed His sheep (John 21:15-17) and when St. Paul told the presbyters of Ephesus to do the same thing (Acts 20:28) they were identifying the office as Christ's. If the office is Christ's, then that which is given out by the office holders must be that which Jesus entrusted to the office. When we contend that Jesus instituted the pastoral office when He called the apostles, we are arguing that Jesus instituted an office whose incumbents are to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments. What they do is far more important than what they are called.

The fourth objection to the assertion that Jesus instituted the pastoral office when he called the apostles as recorded in Matthew 28, Mark 16, and John 20 is that we cannot find in the New Testament a transmission of the apostolic office to others. Therefore we must conclude that the apostolic office ended with the death of the apostles. We have already said that the original apostles were unique in that they alone were called personally here on earth by Jesus Christ Himself and to them alone Jesus gave the promise of infallibility in their official, that is, apostolic preachments. Since these features of the apostolic office were to be discontinued, the office as apostolic office could hardly have been passed

on. However, the office as pastoral office most certainly was passed on. The apostles were bishops (Acts 1:20) and elders (1 Peter 5:1; 2 John 1; 3 John 1), titles used interchangeably in the New Testament (compare 1 Timothy 3:1-7 with Titus 1:5-9.) and synonymous with what we today call the pastoral office. The only office Jesus instituted here on earth was the apostolic office. If that office does not exist today as the pastorate, it doesn't exist. Yet it is quite clear in the New Testament that this office was passed on. St. Paul says as much in 2 Timothy 2:2 where he writes, "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." Adolf Hoenecke said it well in his Dogmatics, "The ordinary preaching office is the continuation of the extraordinary apostolic office, a continuation God himself wants. It is of divine institution in and with the apostolic office. The divine institution of the concrete apostolic office is proved in Thesis 1."^[7] Lest we assume that Hoenecke is here distinguishing between the preaching office and the pastoral office, we note that his Thesis 1 reads, "The teaching office (Lehramt), by which we here mean the pastors, the estate compose of the servants of the Word, is divinely instituted."^[8]

The fifth argument against our proposition that Jesus instituted the pastoral office is the argument that when Jesus called the apostles He was not instituting any particular form of an office. Instead, he was giving the gospel and the sacraments to the church. These means of grace were to be administered publicly, but there were no legal regulations given to the New Testament church. The Holy Spirit would guide the church into establishing wholesome forms of the office as needed. This was the argument of the Wisconsin Synod seminary faculty in Wauwatosa against the Missouri Synod seminary faculty in St. Louis that began about ninety years ago and continues to this day. It was one of the biggest controversies of the old Synodical Conference and it constitutes one of the biggest obstacles to a God-pleasing realignment of confessional Lutheranism in America. Obviously we don't have the time today to do more than give the briefest of overviews of this debate, but it is necessary to know just a little bit about what drove each side.

The Wauwatosa faculty, specifically three theologians – August Pieper, John Schaller, and J. P. Koehler – argued for gospel freedom.^[9] While traditional forms of church and ministry were not to be despised, they couldn't be imposed as doctrine on the church without clear scriptural proof. The St. Louis faculty argued that the scriptural form of the visible church is the local congregation. Wauwatosa argued that any gathering of Christians around the means of grace was as divine as any other gathering of Christians around the means of grace. St. Louis argued for the divine institution of the pastoral office, and by pastoral office they meant specifically and exclusively the parish pastorate. Wauwatosa replied by saying that to affirm the divine institution of this particular form of the office in contradistinction to any other form of office that used the means of grace

on behalf of the church was to impose an extra-scriptural and legalistic requirement on a gospel institution. Where did the New Testament actually teach that only the local congregation was church and that only the parish pastor was in the divinely instituted office?

It is obvious that church and ministry go together and cannot be understood apart from the other. Our topic today, however, is the pastoral office so let's focus specifically on the ministry. Where does the New Testament teach that only the parish pastorate is divinely instituted? The St. Louis faculty did not argue for the divine institution of the pastoral office by citing the texts that record Christ's calling of the apostles into the office. Both the Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod followed the same paradigm that went from Christ to the private ministry of every individual Christian to the church to the public ministry of the church. Both sides conceived of the pastoral office as coming from the church. The Wauwatosa theologians argued that the pastoral office was the most comprehensive form of an office that can assume many forms. The St. Louis theologians argued that it was the only divinely instituted form of the public office and that any other offices in the church were auxiliary to the parish pastorate. Neither side in the dispute appealed to the words of Jesus in calling the apostles as the divine institution of the pastoral office. The St. Louis theologians, beginning with Francis Pieper and continuing with Theodore Engelder, John Theodore Mueller, and others^[10] appealed to these instituting words of Jesus not in support of the divine institution of the pastoral office, but as Christ giving the means of grace to all Christians. Then, in a separate locus or topic of theology, they dealt with the public ministry, which they identified as the parish pastorate. Sometimes they would refer to the means of grace given to all Christians as the ministry in the abstract or broader sense and then the pastoral office as the ministry in the concrete or narrow sense.

I am not sure that such distinctions between broad and narrow and abstract and concrete are always that helpful. They may often serve to obfuscate what God has stated with crystal clarity. At any rate, in the debate between Wauwatosa and St. Louis the St. Louis theologians couldn't prove the divine institution of the pastoral office by appealing to those texts that prove it. They were required by their paradigm to prove the divine institution of the pastoral office in another way. They appealed to passages that commanded the appointment of elders or bishops (Acts 14:23; 20:17-18; Titus 1:5). They cited texts that listed the work of such elders or bishops (Acts 20:28, 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-11; etc.) While I agree with the St. Louis theologians that they did prove that what we call the pastoral office was commanded by the apostles, I question whether an apostolic command necessarily implies a specific divine institution. Furthermore, how can these apostolic instructions, given in certain times and places, be binding on all times and places unless these commands are dominical in nature? The dominical nature of these commands comes from the fact that the apostles are

giving instructions concerning the office Jesus instituted in the calling of the apostles. The apostles institute nothing! The apostolic commands concerning the pastoral office derive their authority from Christ's institution of that very office.

As long as Missouri argued from the divine institution of the local congregation to the divine institution of the pastoral office, the debate about the ministry was of necessity a subtopic of the debate about the church. This debate forced Missouri into a rigidity of definition unwarranted by the biblical text or the history of the church. Were she to have argued the divine institution of the pastoral office from Christ's instituting words, she could have maintained that this office is held not only by parish pastors, but also by missionaries, chaplains, theological professors and other preachers who are not the servants of only the local congregation.^[11] Unfortunately, we don't get to choose the terms of the debate and the debate on the ministry between Missouri and Wisconsin never did come out from under the shadow of the debate about what is and is not church in the visible sense.

If we conceive of the public office exclusively as it comes to us from the activity of the church, why must the church be restricted in what she does by being permitted to establish only the parish pastorate as a divine institution? If the public office is nothing other than the private office with the divine command that what every Christian has privately must also be administered publicly why should one specific way of doing so – the pastoral office – be any more divine than any other way? Why must we regard all other positions in the church as auxiliary to that office? Didn't Jesus give the means of grace to all His Christians?

As Wisconsin carried on the argument in this vein, Missouri's "auxiliary offices" became Wisconsin's "limited" or "focused" forms of the office. Why insist that the office of parochial schoolteacher derives from the parish pastorate? Doesn't the teacher teach God's word on behalf of the church and not only on behalf of the pastor?^[12] Isn't the insistence that only the parish pastor holds the divinely instituted office a legalistic confining of the office to only one form? Doesn't the church have the freedom to assign suitable persons to use of the means of grace on her behalf and to establish whatever forms of the office to which the Holy Spirit may lead her?

What Wisconsin did, essentially, was to take the agreed upon paradigm to its logical conclusion. Since the public office derives from the private office, by what logic does one form supercede all other forms? As Missouri searched the Scriptures to prove that the parish pastorate was the one divinely fixed form, Wisconsin countered Missouri's arguments by claiming that it was legalistic to impose one fixed form on the church. This is a gospel office, not a law office. The very nature of the gospel is that it creates its own forms.

It is interesting to hear arguments from Missouri Synod theologians that our opposition to women's ordination should be in the way of the gospel rather than by appealing to the law. Missourians these days are concerned about not depending on law commands to protect a gospel institution. This is precisely the spirit of Wauwatosa. Missourians will not understand the Wisconsin Synod refusal to regard the pastoral office as the only divinely instituted form of the ministry until they understand the spirit behind Wisconsin's argument. It is the spirit of evangelical freedom. Does the gospel obtain its efficacy from the fact that an ordained pastor is preaching it? Is not the gospel taught in the classroom by the Christian Day School teacher as efficacious as is the gospel preached by the pastor from the pulpit? If so, isn't the CDS teacher also using the means of grace on behalf of the church even as the pastor is? Why then do you insist that only the pastor is a minister in the real sense of the word while the CDS teacher derives his office from the pastoral office and so isn't really in the office except by extension? Why not rather apply simple logic and teach that the CDS teacher's office is a more limited form of the same office of which the pastoral office is only a more comprehensive form? Why do you put so much emphasis on the form the ministry takes rather than on the substance of what is preached and taught?

This is a persuasive argument. There is much to commend it, especially if the public ministry of the church derives from the private ministry of every individual Christian. CDS teachers are servants of the church. They teach God's word on behalf of the church. There can be no doctrinal objection to saying that these servants are in the public ministry of the church if by public we mean "on behalf of the church" and if by ministry we mean "service that uses God's word." Parochial schoolteachers in both the Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod have long been taught that they were entering into the "teaching ministry."

But what Jesus gave to the church was not merely the means of grace given to all believers along with instructions to establish an office. That's not what happened. Jesus gave to the church an office all of whose incumbents are called to do what Jesus gave to the office. This is the plain sense of the biblical text. Jesus didn't just toss out the duties of this office to the priesthood of believers and tell them to assemble them into wholesome forms by the guiding of the Holy Spirit. Jesus spoke to specific men and told them and their successors to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments until the end of time. The notion that Jesus was telling every Christian to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments cannot be shown from the Scriptures. It is taken as scriptural by adherents to the Synodical Conference paradigm, but only after the plain sense of the Scriptures is forced through the paradigm. The simple fact is that Jesus didn't tell all Christians to preach. If he did, you should be preaching and if you're not, you're disobeying Jesus. Can we not agree with the plain meaning of

the Bible when it says that what Jesus told the original apostles to do He also tells his pastors to do until the end of the age?

The Wauwatosa theologians argued against legalism of every description and every evangelical Lutheran should commend them for that. It is therefore in full agreement with this most fundamental concern of the Wauwatosa theology that I offer the following evangelical arguments for finding the divine institution of the pastoral office in Christ's calling of the apostles.

First, this puts Jesus in charge of the office He instituted. The Savior, who by his blood has purchased the office, is the One who defines and forms the office by which He will save sinners to the end of time. The church does not make this decision for herself. When Christians get together to do holy things they generally make a royal mess of things even when they have the best intentions. They mean well. They're awfully clever. That's their problem. They think of all sort of things that work well in the abstract, that is, in their own minds, but not necessarily in practice. Anybody who knows anything about teaching children knows that the office of the CDS teacher is not defined by the gospel, but by the law. So are the offices of administrators and church executives of every description who must, by virtue of their offices, be evaluated by criteria other than the faithful stewardship of the mysteries of God. Are such servants of the church also incumbents of the office Jesus gave us? Not on the say so of the church, even if she claims inspiration from the Holy Spirit!

This leads us to a second argument for finding the divine institution of the pastoral office in Christ's calling of the apostles. It understands the office and therefore the call into the office according to the clear biblical text that cannot change rather than according to a nebulous and indefinable leading of the Holy Spirit to where no one knows. How can we know that the call into the office is divine? We can know, first of all, because it is a call into the office that God has instituted! We don't learn that a call is divine because the folks who issued it prayed before they issued it and the person who received it prayed before he accepted it. By this kind of logic, the Holy Spirit is to blame for every whim of every "calling body" or every desire of every candidate for office. The office is not defined by the call. The office defines the call. It is true enough that no man has the office except by a legitimate call from the church. But the church doesn't create the office. God does. The church certainly may call men and women into offices of her own making. She most certainly may not assert as a divine institution what is not clearly taught in the Bible as a divine institution.

While the parochial schoolteacher does teach God's word on behalf of the church this does not mean that she or he holds an office instituted by God. Jesus called only men to preach. That is the immediate call. Nowhere in the New Testament where a mediate call is taught (for example, Acts 20:28; Romans

10:15; 2 Timothy 2:2; Titus 1:15) is a woman the recipient of such a call. I have searched the Scriptures in vain to find a single instance of the church telling a woman to teach God's word to anybody. The argument that a woman who teaches children in a parochial school has a call into the same office (albeit a more limited form of it) as the pastor is not an argument from the Bible. It is an argument from a theological system that has evolved beyond anything known in the Bible. May the church ask women to teach God's word and the useful arts to children in a Christian Day School? Certainly! May such a servant of Christ regard herself as called by God to such an office? Certainly! Is the word of God this teacher teaches wholly as efficacious as the word of God the pastor preaches? Certainly! Did God institute the office this woman holds? Certainly not! Why not? The Bible does not teach this. I don't care what the Holy Ghost told anybody to do. I don't care how anybody feels. I care what the Bible says and the Bible knows nothing at all about the church telling women to teach the word of God to other people's children. Therefore the church has no right to set down binding doctrine concerning such an office except to say that it isn't of divine origin and is therefore an adiaphoron. An adiaphoron cannot be a divine institution.

Third, this office is formed and given here on earth, which is where redemption was won and where sinners live. The office doesn't descend to us from on high as we ask guidance from the Holy Spirit on what form we should fashion. The Holy Spirit doesn't institute this office in the present. Jesus instituted it in the past and thereby determined until the end of time what this office was to be. Even as the righteousness that avails before God was established here on earth by Christ's vicarious obedience and suffering, the gospel that revealed this righteousness was entrusted to an office instituted here on earth. Here on earth the incarnate Word, revealed in the written word, is proclaimed by the oral word of His preachers.

Fourth, this joins together the gospel and the sacraments into one office. The very same men were told "do this in remembrance of me" and were also told to preach, teach, baptize, and absolve. The sermon is not a religious lecture. It is God's word to his own children, baptized into His holy name. It cannot be rightly understood apart from the body and blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of sins. Ripping the gospel away from the sacraments or the sacraments away from the office of preaching is to distort the essence of both word and sacrament. Preaching and the sacraments belong to the same office and this is by divine right. What right does the church have to dismember what Jesus has permanently joined together?[13]

Fifth, this is the plain teaching of the Augsburg Confession and the Lutheran fathers.[14] I have saved this until last because it is true that the Confessions are normative only because they agree with the clear Scriptures. Nevertheless

they are normative because they agree with the clear Scriptures. The Augsburg Confession develops the doctrine of the ministry by teaching of the need for a Savior in Article II, the saving work of Christ in Article III, justification by faith in Article IV, and the means by which we obtain justifying faith in Article V. This article refers to ministry of preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments. The focus is on the means of grace and not on the ministers or preachers. Nevertheless, the gospel and the sacraments mentioned here are not the means of grace as used by individual Christians in their daily lives, but the gospel that preachers preach and the sacraments that these same preachers administer. Of course this doesn't deny the inherent efficacy of the gospel when spoken privately by every individual Christian. But AC V isn't talking about the private activity of the individual Christian.

It is a misunderstanding of the Augsburg Confession to assume that AC V is talking only about the means of grace (without preachers to preach and administer the sacraments)^[15] and the office to which the gospel and the sacraments are entrusted doesn't come into play until AC XIV. Who is preaching the gospel purely and administering the sacraments rightly in AC VII? Who is doing the baptizing of AC IX? Who is administering the Supper of AC X? Is it not the preachers of AC V? Aren't preachers at least a necessary implication of AC V? Isn't the pattern of thought of the Augsburg Confession that God wants us to go to church to have our babies baptized and to hear the gospel and to receive the Lord's Supper? So when we come to AC XIV, we are dealing with the external call into the office that has already been established in AC V and implied throughout the intervening articles.

AC XIV is not talking about the church "forming" the office by distributing according to her pleasure any portion of the duties there listed. AC XIV is talking about putting a man into the office to which all of these duties has been entrusted. In support of this argument is the fact that the Roman Confutation did not argue with AC XIV except to insist that the ordinations be done according to canon law.^[16] Clearly, AC XIV refers to called and ordained men who may publicly preach the gospel and administer the sacraments.

When AC V is interpreted as the means of grace in the abstract without preachers who are preaching and administering the sacraments, it is left up to the church to "form" the office in AC XIV. When the Lutheran fathers first began to refer to AC V as the ministry in the "abstract," they did not thereby mean to

imply that the ministry actually existed in the abstract, but rather intended to distinguish the duties of the office from the persons holding the office. That is, the ministry should be distinguished from the ministers. This proper distinction has recently evolved into the notion that the ministry in the abstract is the ministry as it belongs to every individual Christian. This incorrect understanding of AC V has led to an incorrect understanding of AC XIV. Instead of AC XIV referring to putting men into the office formed by Christ, it now refers to the forming of the office by the church. So now AC XIV is used in support of the new definition of the ministry as any service using the means of grace on behalf of the church and in the name and stead of Christ. This is not what AC XIV meant when it was written.

The Augsburg Confession clearly teaches that Jesus instituted the pastoral office when he called the apostles. We read in AC XXVIII,

Our teachers hold that according to the Gospel the power of keys or the power of bishops is a power or command of God to preach the Gospel, to remit and retain sins, and to administer the sacraments. For Christ sent out the apostles with this command, "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you. Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." According to Mark 16:15 he also said, "Go and preach the gospel to the whole creation." (Tappert, Latin, pages 81-82)

It is my prayer that the confessional Lutheran who belong to those synods formerly comprising the Synodical Conference will be able to overcome their differences by means of a common and faithful appeal to the clear meaning of the Sacred Scriptures on those issues under dispute. We share a common tradition that is in most respects very sound and scriptural. Every once in a while, however, we need to challenge paradigms that become normative among us and keep us from grounding our teaching in the Scriptures alone. It is proper to put all church traditions to the biblical test and to do so regularly. As the great Wauwatosa theologian, J.P. Koehler put it:

Traditionalism is the way of thinking in which tradition, the forms of teaching handed down by the fathers, becomes decisive. This way of thinking exists not only among the Romanists where a tradition is put forward that often stands in opposition to Holy Scripture, but also among Lutherans. The term denotes not the falsity of the tradition, but the tendency to rely on human teachers and their interpretation instead of directly on Scripture itself.[\[17\]](#)

If all of us follow Koehler's advice and apply it to our teaching concerning the office given us by the Lord Jesus, the Pastor and Bishop of our souls, we can surely expect the blessing of the Holy Spirit on our labors.

[1] Lutheran dogmatic theology has always treated the doctrine of the church before the doctrine of the ministry. The order in which the various topics of theology are presented is not our concern here, but rather how the various topics relate to each other.

[2] See, for example Sermons of Martin Luther, Edited by John Nicholas Lenker, Volume 2, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1988, pages 359, 375-376.

[3] Church and Ministry, C.F.W. Walther, translated by J.T. Mueller, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1987, pages 268-29.

[4] See, for example, "Children's Bible History," Board for Parish Education of the WELS, 1973, pages 356-357.

[5] Consider Luther's argument in his letter to the Christians in Prague: "Here we take our stand: There is no other Word of God than that which is given all Christians to proclaim. There is no other baptism than the one which any Christian can bestow. There is no other remembrance of the Lord's Supper than that which any Christian can observe and which Christ has instituted. There is no other kind of sin than that which any Christian can bind or loose." Luther's Works, American Edition. General Editors, Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann. Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1958, Volume 40, pages 34-35.

[6] Luther's assumption is that the Church is born, not by the individual use of the means of grace, but by the means of grace as given by God through His called and ordained ministers. Consider these words from his letter to the Christians in Prague: "Ordination indeed was first instituted on the authority of Scripture, and according to the example and decrees of the Apostle, in order to provide the people with ministers of the Word. The public ministry of the Word, I hold, by which the mysteries of God are made known, ought to be established by holy ordination as the highest and greatest of the functions of the church, on which the whole power of the church depends, since the church is nothing without the Word and everything in it exists by virtue of the Word alone." AE, Volume 40, page 11.

[7] Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics, Volume IV, Adolf Hoenecke, Translated by Joel Friedrich, Paul Prange, and Bill Tachmier, Northwestern Publishing House, 1999, page 192.

[8] Hoenecke, page 187.

[9] See “Legalism Among Us” by J. P. Koehler, The Wauwatosia Theology, Curtis Jahn, Editor, Northwestern Publishing House, 1997, Volume II, pages 229-282 and “The Origin and Development of the New Testament Ministry” by John Schaller, The Wauwatosia Theology, Volume III, pages 73-94. Koehler’s essay provides the clearest expression of the spirit of Wauwatosia theology. Schaller’s essay remains the foundational work on the ministry for the Wisconsin Synod. These essays, especially the latter, are indispensable reading for everyone who wishes to understand the Wauwatosia theology which has strongly influenced the official teaching of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

[10] Consider, for example, the “Brief Statement,” the 1943 Catechism, and the 1987 Catechism, none of which appeal to any of the texts in which Jesus instituted the pastoral office as constituting such a divine institution.

[11] Consider Thesis Seven of “The Ministry of the Word: Evangelical Lutheran Theses for the Twenty First Century”: “Our Lord Jesus Christ has given to His church on earth this one office of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments as His gracious gift. Defining this office as the pastoral office is therefore an evangelical, not a legal, definition. Incumbents of this office need not serve a specific local congregation or carry out all the duties of the office as a matter of divine law. St. Paul, for example, did not regularly carry out all the duties entrusted to the office. The one and indivisible office of Christ therefore is held also by men such as theological professors, missionaries, chaplains, etc. who do not regularly carry out all of the duties of the office. However, all those who hold the office may rightly perform all the duties of the office when it is warranted.” at www.christforus.org.

[12] Sad to say, neither side in the controversy paid sufficient attention to the obvious fact that the teacher in the school does nothing more than what God has always commanded parents to do and for this reason derives his or her office from the office of father and mother. See Deuteronomy 6:7; Ephesians 6:4; LC, Ten Commandments, paragraph 141. See also, “The Teaching of the Synodical Conference on the Office of the Public Ministry,” by Rolf Preus at www.christforus.org.

[13] This does not mean that the pastor must always do everything the office gives him to do. He may confine himself largely to preaching. The issue here is not what a man may or may not do within the office, but what the office by its

very nature gives him to do. Luther writes, “Therefore, whoever has the office of preaching imposed on him has the highest office in Christendom imposed on him. Afterward he may also baptize, celebrate mass, and exercise all pastoral care; or, if he does not wish to do so, he may confide himself to preaching and leave baptizing and other lower offices to others – as Christ and all the apostles did, Acts 4. “That a Christian Assembly or Congregation has the Right and Power to Judge all Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers, Established and Proven by Scripture” AE, volume 39, page 314 Luther makes the same argument in his letter to the Christians in Prague, “Thus Paul writes in II Tim. 2[:2]: ‘These things entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others.’ Here Paul rejects all the show of tonsure and anointing and ordaining and only requires that they be able to teach, and to them alone he wants to entrust the Word. If the office of teaching be entrusted to anyone, then everything accomplished by the Word in the church is entrusted, that is, the office of baptizing, consecrating, binding, loosing, praying, and judging doctrine.” AE, volume 40, page 36.

[14] See, for example, Ministry, Word, and Sacraments: An Enchiridion, by Martin Chemnitz, Translated by Luther Poellot, Concordia Publishing House, 1981, page 26.

[15] The Office of the Ministry in N. Hunnius’ Epitome Credendorum: A Voice from the Age of Lutheran Orthodoxy, James D. Heiser, The Johann Gerhard Institute, 1995, pages 16-20.

[16] Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord, Edited by Robert Kolb and James Nestingen, Augsburg Fortress, 2001, page 115. For a thorough treatment of AC XIV see “The Doctrine of the Call in the Confessions and Lutheran Orthodoxy” by Robert Preus, Church and Ministry Today, John A. Maxfield, Editor, Luther Academy, 2001.

[17] “Legalism Among Us” page 250.
