

MINISTERS: WHAT IS THEIR JOB?

WHO IS THEIR BOSS? WHY DO WE NEED THEM?

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I was ordained on July 1, 1979 about 15 miles southeast of here at Trinity Lutheran Church in Clear Lake. During the course of my ministry, the doctrine of the office of the ministry has received a tremendous amount of attention among Lutherans in America. This topic has become a matter of hot theological controversy among those accustomed to theological controversies. Since it is a theological controversy, we need to approach it theologically. Most of the confusion and debate surrounding this topic has been caused by the failure to do precisely that.

Two questions that Christians often have about ministers are: What is their job? And, Who is their boss? A third question may not always be verbalized, but it does rise in one's mind: Why do we need them? I hope that by raising and addressing these questions we might better appreciate the gracious gift our Lord has given us in the office of the holy ministry.

WHAT IS THE MINISTER'S JOB?

When we ask this question as a theological question, we see that we are dealing with the divine institution of the office of the ministry. The One who created this office is the One who has written out its job description. If God had not instituted the office and if God had not laid down the duties of this office, then we would not be dealing with a theological topic. In that case, we would certainly be at liberty to decide for ourselves what the job of the minister is. But we are not at liberty to do this because this office is an institution of God.

It is a divine institution because it has both divine mandate (that is, the divine command) and divine promises attached to it. The church has no more authority to create a divine institution than she has to invent a new word from God because a divine institution is established solely by God's word. The bride of

Christ may not claim to act in God's place when God has not authorized her to do so. When she presumes to act as if for God without God's command and promise, she is no longer the church. This was clearly the position of Luther and the Lutheran Reformation. They simply refused to acknowledge as divine the authority of the Roman hierarchy because it claimed to carry out God's work without God's command to do so. The various offices, which were created by man, were used to tyrannize the divinely established office of the ministry of the gospel. The claim that one is acting on orders from God when one is not doing so is an essential feature of the Antichrist. This is why we must be certain that God

has instituted the office of the ministry and that our ministers are doing what God has told them to do. The failure to distinguish between what is of divine institution and what is man-made is a very serious failure, one that confuses the Spirit and the flesh. Such confusion leads to spiritual death.

The office of the ministry was originally held by the apostles who were chosen by Christ. The duties of this office were stated clearly by the risen Lord of the church when he gave his Great Commission to the apostles that they should make disciples of all nations by means of baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and by means of teaching them to hold on to everything which he, Christ, had taught. Christ chose specific men, placed them into the office for which he chose them, and he sent them, (which is why they were called apostles). He ordained them, that is, placed them into office. Jesus did not lay his hands on them as is done today. He breathed on them and they received from him the Holy Spirit with the authority to act in his stead and by his command as they forgave the sins of the penitent and retained the sins of the impenitent. The ministry to which Christ called them was aptly described by St. Paul as the "ministry of reconciliation." The apostles were indeed ministers of Christ. A minister, by definition, administers something. As ministers, they were not called to serve in some kind of generic fashion as if it would be up to them to choose what type of service to render, but they were called by Christ to be ministers by administering to those under their care the means of salvation: the gospel and the sacraments of Christ. As St. Paul said, "Let a man so consider us, as ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." This office has the sole purpose or function of administering Christ's word and sacraments to Christ's people.

The divine office and the divine duties or function of the office cannot be separated. There is no office apart from the duties of the office. Those who have not been called into the office may not legitimately perform the duties of the office. Our Confessions refer to the office of the ministry as "the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments." Our church simply knows of no other divinely instituted ministry, for Christ has not established any

other ministry than the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments.

If we are, as Paul tells Timothy (2 Timothy 1:13), to "Hold fast the pattern of sound words," we should use the words "ministry" and "minister" as these words are used in the Bible, in the Lutheran Confessions, and in the writings of the fathers. The ministry is the ministry of preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments. The minister is the one who is called to administer the gospel and the sacraments. Unfortunately, we have not held fast the pattern of sound words.

Various popular authors such as Oscar Feucht and Don Abdon and the entire Church Growth industry have caused deep confusion in the church by redefining theological terms. The confusion has become almost universal so that nobody knows what one is talking about today when one speaks of ministers and the ministry. They have popularized the notion that all Christians are ministers. The "ministry" of these "ministers" then includes anything and everything even remotely connected in some tangential way to the word and sacraments. But not every Christian is a minister in the biblical or confessional sense of the term. Don Abdon is wrong when he says that all Christians are ministers. He misreads both the Scriptures, as in Ephesians 4:12 and the Confessions, as in Article V of the Augsburg Confession. Abdon states that it is an error to identify the office of the ministry with the pastoral office. He even appeals to AC V to support his contention. But the German version of the Augsburg Confession, in Article V, when speaking of the ministry, uses the word, "Predigtamt," which literally means, preaching office. Abdon further says, "The pastoral office is the training function so that the rest of the ministers of Christ can function effectively in ministry." (Training and Equipping the Saints, p 25). This error distorts both the duties of the minister and the duties of those he has been called to serve. The minister's duty is to preach the word. The duty of Christ's sheep is to "hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it." This error has led to pathetic and tragic confusion on the part of pastors and people concerning the divinely established office of the ministry.

Abdon argues that, since the ministry belongs to the church, every Christian is a minister. But this does not follow at all. The ministry belongs to the church because the word of God belongs to the church, because the sacraments and the keys belong to the church, because Christ belongs to the church, as St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:21-23, "All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future -- all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God." It is because the ministry belongs to the church that God **through** the church -- as we shall see -- calls men into the ministry.

All Christians are priests. Priests, by definition, offer sacrifices to God and intercede for one another as we do when we pray the Lord's Prayer. The work of Christian priests is holy because the priests are holy. The work of the priests is a sacrificial work that is offered up to God in praise and thanksgiving. But God does not feed and nourish his church by means of the sacrifices offered by the royal priesthood. He does so by means of the ministry of the word, which is the bestowal of the merits and benefits of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, which alone renders us holy and pleasing to God.

The office of the ministry is not a priestly office. It is a ministerial office. It does not benefit the church because of sacrifices it has to offer. This is the error of the Roman sacrificial system, and why Luther and the Reformers called it an abomination. The office of the ministry benefits the church because through it Christ saves sinners by his holy word. As Luther says, **"This office [the office of the ministry] is a service or ministry proceeding from Christ to us, and not from us to Christ."** Many in the church today, especially those promoting various "Church Growth" strategies borrowed from our Baptist friends in California, have turned this order completely around. They would suggest that the various alleged "spiritual gifts" which we offer in sacrificial service can be the means by which the church grows. This is false doctrine. The church grows by means of the treasures of Christ which are given us from God, not by our sacrifices, whether it be the Roman priest offering up the sacrifice of the Mass or the "spiritually gifted" Church Growth enthusiast offering up the sacrifice of his alleged spiritual gifts. Christ commits the treasures of Christ through his church to his ministers to administer.

The "everyone a minister" teaching is extremely harmful to the spiritual health of the church for a number of reasons:

First, it has reversed the proper evangelical order. The ministry has become, not what God offers to us, but what we offer to him. The ministry is then centered in us, not in the gospel and the sacraments, that is in Christ.

Second, it has placed Christians under a new yoke of legalism. Christians must now obey certain "Church Growth" rules that require of them that they expend their efforts at "being equipped" for whatever new "ministry" might be invented. Luther's Table of Duties are scriptural. The "Church Growth" Table of Duties are not. They are the imposition of sociologically derived requirements. Not having a divine mandate, no pastor has any business requiring them.

Third, it promotes a false view of spiritual gifts, which is theologically Arminian and therefore sub-Lutheran and unworthy of true evangelicals.

We cannot afford to let the world decide for us what a minister is and what his duties are. Our Lord has already done so. We cannot change or alter a divine institution.

WHO IS THE MINISTER'S BOSS?

I will never forget a conversation I had several years ago with a member of my congregation who insisted that I commune her stepdaughter while she also regularly communed at an ALC congregation. After failing to convince her from Scripture that closed communion was indeed the will of God, I finally told her directly that I was under obligation not to do what she insisted I do. I said, "No, I won't do it." She replied, "We're the ones who pay your salary." I couldn't argue with that, so I said nothing. She had also been at the call meeting of the congregation at which the call was extended to me. She reminded me of that and said, "We hired you." Now to that I did reply. "No. You did not hire me. God did." Who is the minister's boss? It is the one who hired him. It is the one who has the authority to fire him. It's the same in this regard as in every other kind of employment. This is why we must be certain of the fact that it is God who calls men into the ministry of the word and sacraments.

Martin Chemnitz, in his Enchiridion on Ministry, Word, and Sacraments, asks this question: "Who, then, properly has the right or power to send and call ministers of the Word and of the Sacraments?" This is his answer: "At all times there have been great, often also bloody, controversies regarding the right to call; but, speaking properly and on the basis of Scripture, the right to call and to send laborers into the harvest belongs to Him who is the Lord of the harvest." There can be no doubt that the one who sends the laborers into the harvest is their boss.

Chemnitz then goes on to distinguish between immediate and mediate calls. An immediate call is simply a call without means. Christ chose his first ministers, the apostles, directly, that is, without means. He personally called them. Christ has also chosen those who have followed the apostles in this office, but he has not called them immediately -- without means -- but mediately, that is, through means. The means by which God calls men into the ministry is the church.

In his sixth thesis concerning the holy ministry, C. F. W. Walther shows conclusively, both from Scriptures and the fathers, that God confers the office of the keys, that is, the office of the ministry, through the church. Even the apostles did not presume to appoint pastors without the consent of the churches to which they were called (Acts 14:23; 2 Corinthians 8:19). It is God who calls, and, since we have no scriptural warrant to suggest that God calls men directly or

immediately into this divine office, we must regard those who are called mediately, that is, through the church, as men called by God.

Gerhard makes a compelling argument for the fact that the church must have the right and the duty to call ministers, and that our Lord requires the participation of the sheep in the calling of shepherds. He writes:

Whoever has the duty to discern between teachers and seducers, to examine sound

doctrine, to distinguish between the voice of Christ, the Chief Shepherd, and that

of false shepherds, not to follow a stranger, but to flee from him, to anathematize

those who preach another gospel than that proclaimed by the apostles, to him also

belongs the duty to call ministers according to his status and order.

Now the church includes both the preachers and the hearers. The model for the calling of ministers that we find both in the New Testament and in the history of the Lutheran Church includes both pastors and people, or, to use the less biblical terms, the clergy and the laity.

As Robert Preus points out in his recent study on the divine call, the Lutheran Church never excluded either the pastors or the people from the process of the divine call. To exclude the pastors would be to fall into the error of the Anabaptists. To exclude the people would be to fall into the error of the Papists. The whole church includes both preachers and hearers.

A candidate for the office of the ministry must be examined and found to be fit. Those best qualified to do so are clearly pastors who themselves are known to be orthodox and faithful. But those whose duty it is to run away from false teachers surely must know that a candidate for this holy office is genuinely committed to the apostolic word. How can they know? Does our present synodical procedure fully take into account the responsibilities of Christ's sheep as God, through them, calls ministers? Perhaps at one time it did, but today I am not so sure. Should a congregation in Minnesota call a man about whose fitness they know little or nothing? Are the sheep of the Good Shepherd to assume that simply because a man is on the clergy roster of the Missouri Synod he will faithfully preach God's word to them? Yet many of our synodical officials strongly discourage congregations from sending questionnaires to candidates for a call.

If the questionnaires are designed solely to ascertain the orthodoxy of the candidate, and not to enter into a business-like process of negotiation, how can anyone rightly object to this? A Christian congregation acts in a wholly irresponsible manner if it assumes the fitness of a minister merely on the say so of a church beauracrat who himself has no call, but merely a three year term in a man-made office. Furthermore, this official seldom knows much more about the orthodoxy of the candidate than does the congregation which calls him.

If the church is really acting for God in calling a man to be her pastor, how can she to any degree abdicate her responsibility to ascertain without any doubt the thorough faithfulness of that man to God's word? The suggestion that the congregation that entrusts itself to our present synodical procedure is thereby entrusting itself to the direction of the Holy Spirit is, in my judgment, a pernicious and presumptuous suggestion. Nowhere does God's word say anything about call lists or district presidents. It says plenty about testing the spirits and running away from hirelings. The call from the church is a divine call because to the church belongs the office of the keys, the saving word and sacraments, and God has mandated that these means of salvation be administered and administered faithfully by men called to do so.

The Lutheran Church has always taught (Augsburg Confession, Article XIV) that "nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call." This is not because the word and sacraments of Christ cannot save sinners unless preached and administered by a called minister. The baptism of a sick baby by a nurse in the hospital is surely the administration of a sacrament by which the baby is saved. The gospel of Christ confessed by a child to his next door neighbor is indeed the power of God unto salvation. The means of grace have the inherent power to regenerate sinners, regardless of who administers them. The reason our church has always insisted that the public, that is, the official preaching, teaching and administration of the sacraments be done only by those who are rightly called is because our Lord has instituted the office through which these duties are performed, and he is the one who calls men into this office. Through Jeremiah, God warned his people about listening to preachers he had not called. "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied." It is the Lord who asks the question, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for **us**?" To which Isaiah responds, "Here am I, send me." Isaiah had no right to preach without a call from God to preach. So it remains today.

The alternative to a divinely called pastor is a hired pastor. But then he is no pastor, but a hireling. The numerous instances of pastors being fired, as if they were first hired, is one of the most frightening developments in the Missouri Synod today. It is a practice which simply rejects the divinity of the call, and victimizes the very people who are permitted to get away with it. There simply is

no divine call if a pastor may be fired at will. When a lawyer representing the Missouri Synod in a North Dakota court describes the called pastor of a congregation as an "at will employee" of the congregation, the divine call has been denied. Just as it is God who calls, it is God alone who removes an unfaithful pastor from his office.

Listen to the words of Martin Chemnitz.

Just as God properly claims for himself the right to call, also mediately, and it is

accordingly necessary for it to be done according to divine instruction, so also has

God properly reserved to himself alone this power of removing someone from the

ministry. 1 Sm 2:30, 32; Hos 4:6. But since that dismissal takes places

mediately, it is therefore necessary that it not take place except by instruction and

divine direction. Therefore as long as God lets in the ministry his minister who

teaches rightly and lives blamelessly, the church does not have the power, without

divine command to remove an unwanted man, namely a servant of God. But then

he does not build up the church by doctrine or life, but rather destroys, God

himself removes him, 1 Sm 2:30; Hos 4:6. And then the church not only

properly can but by all means should remove such a one from the ministry. For

just as God calls ministers of the church, so he also removes them through legitimate

means. But as the procedure of a call is to follow the instruction of the Lord of the harvest,

so also if one is to be removed from the ministry, the church must show that that also is

done by the command and will of the Lord.

I have heard many arguments defending the popular practice of removing called ministers of the gospel for less than biblical reasons. The study document promoted among the LCMS Council of Presidents by Rev. Wil Sohns suggests that a pastor may be dismissed when he has "lost the confidence of people." By that standard, the Apostle Paul would not have survived for one year! I don't doubt that Rev. Sohns and others who advocate applying extra-biblical standards by which pastors may be removed are concerned about the welfare of congregations which seem to be saddled with pastors who are deemed ineffective or not suitable for one reason or another. But true Christian concern must be informed by the word of God, not by shallow sentiment that applies sociological or psychological, that is carnal and worldly, criteria in an area where the word of God alone must reign supreme. A pastor must be removed if he sins against the word of God by false teaching or scandalous life. To remove him for less than a divinely mandated reason is, per se, an act of denial of the divine call and an act of rebellion against Christ, whose servant the minister is.

Luther urges Christians, for the sake of saving their souls, to depose those who teach contrary to God's word. When this is done, as Chemnitz points out, it is God who does it. When a faithful pastor is deposed, it is not God who does it, but the devil, even if this action is defended by the most respected officials in the church. The call from God is permanent. Only God can remove a minister whom he has called. And this fact applies both to ministers and congregations. Kurt Marquart has this to say on the subject:

A divine call, be it noted, binds both ministers and congregations. The former

may no more "resign" arbitrarily from their charges, than the latter may arbitrarily

dismiss them. To presume, without valid cause, to drive called ministers out of

their divinely assigned tasks and responsibilities, is to interfere sacrilegiously with

God's government of his church. It is to mistreat God's servants is if they were

the servants and hirelings of men (Ps. 105:15; Is. 55:8-11; Mt. 9:38; Lk. 10:16;

I Cor. 4:1; Eph. 4:11; Heb. 13:17). Such lawless (II Thess. 2:3-4!) usurpation of

divine prerogatives amounts to "temple-robbery" (see Acts 19:37 and Rom. 2:22).

It should not surprise us that pastors are removed unbiblically when prominent synodical spokesmen are willing to assert that one can indeed be a pastor when the call itself is clearly unbiblical.

In a December 17, 1986 letter from Dr. Samuel Nafzger to the Alexandria Circuit of the Minnesota North District, he answered this question which the circuit pastors had asked: "Are we in any way to regard women ordained into these churches as pastors?" Nafzger's reply was, "In my opinion, therefore, we do not question that 'women ordained into these churches as pastors' are pastors in their churches. We rather hold that it is contrary to Holy Scripture that these churches have decided to place these women into the office of the public ministry." Nafzger is clearly saying that individuals who are indeed pastors were not called by God to be pastors. He can hardly say that God would call someone to do something he has told her not to do! What has he done? He has taken the call from the church and the call from God and has driven a wedge between them so that they are now two different things. No longer is the call from God that which makes one a pastor. The call is clearly no longer divine. It is no wonder, in this theological climate, that pastors can be hired and fired at will.

But no Christian can trust a pastor who was hired and can be fired at will. Such a man is not a minister of Christ at all. Such a man will not preach what God has commanded him to preach, he will preach what will "sell" at any given moment within the congregation. He will become a man-pleaser. He will avoid the theology of the cross and turn to a theology of glory. He will fulfill the warning of the Apostle concerning those who will heap up for themselves teachers to teach what their itching ears want to hear. The divine call to the office of the ministry is the call from God to preach what God wants preached. And that is not so far above us that we cannot know it. It is written in the Holy Scriptures and faithfully confessed in the Book of Concord. It is the doctrine of Luther's Small Catechism. It is the doctrine that is the duty of every Christian to learn so that he may know how to judge the teaching of his pastor to ensure that he is faithful. God does not require pastors to be popular. He requires them to be faithful.

WHY DO WE NEED MINISTERS?

We need ministers because it is impossible for the royal priesthood, the church, to exist without God's word. The word by which we are made members of the church logically precedes the church. It is not as if a group of religious people gathers together and come to some kind of consensus on what they want to promote. The word creates the church; the church does not create the word. This marks the difference between the true church and the false church. Every individual member of the church has been born again by the seed that cannot perish; the everliving word of God, and this is the word that is preached. As St. Peter writes (1 Peter 1:23ff), "Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever . . . now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you."

Luther, after showing from Scripture that the word and the ministry belong to the church, writes:

. . . since a Christian congregation neither should nor could exist without God's

word, it clearly follows . . . that it . . . must have teachers and preachers who

administer the word.

We need to pay very close attention to Luther's reasoning here, for he follows a pattern of thought that is rooted in Scriptures and is the unanimous testimony of the church. Luther makes an assumption that is fundamental to a true understanding of the office of the ministry and the divine call into this office. The assumption is that the word by which we are saved is the word that is preached and the preached word requires a preacher.

This is St. Paul's assumption also. Listen to the familiar words of Romans 10.

For whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.
How then shall they

call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him

of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And

how shall they preach unless they are sent? . . . So then faith comes by hearing,

and hearing by the word of God.

The church needs ministers because the church needs the word of God. But surely we have the Bible and books in which the word of God is faithfully taught. Do we really need pastors? Listen to Luther's Preface to the Large Catechism:

Indeed, even among the nobility there are some louts and skinflints who declare

that we can do without pastors and preachers from now on because we have

everything in books and can learn it all by ourselves. So they blithely let

parishes fall into decay and brazenly allow both pastors and preachers to suffer

distress and hunger. This is what one can expect of crazy Germans.

The purpose of the ministry is the salvation of souls. Our Lutheran Confessions state this quite clearly. Articles IV and V of the Augsburg Confession deal with justification by faith and the office of the ministry. These two topics are joined.

Our churches also teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own

strength, merits, or works but are freely justified for Christ's sake through faith

then they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are

forgiven on account of Christ, who by his death made satisfaction for our sins.

This faith God imputes for righteousness in his sight. AC IV

This is the only justifying, the only saving, the only evangelical faith. That we may obtain this faith, that we may live and die in it is surely no academic

question, but the issue upon which our eternal destiny depends. And this is why our Lord in his wisdom instituted the office of the ministry.

In order that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the gospel and

administering the sacraments was instituted. For through the word and the

sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, and the Holy

Spirit produces faith, where and when it pleases God in those who hear the

gospel. AC V

The teaching of the gospel, which the minister is called by God to do, is the very means by which the Holy Spirit is given and the Holy Spirit produces justifying faith. We cannot understand the meaning or necessity of this office and the call to this office if we ignore this crucial point. St. Paul wrote to Timothy (1 Timothy 1:15), "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners." How does Jesus save?

He saves us by what he did. He made satisfaction for our sins. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He has rendered to the bar of God's justice his obedience to God's law, and he has received in his body the punishment for the disobedience of the world. This is how he has saved us, past tense.

He saves us by what he does. He brings us to faith, so that by faith we might receive salvation. How does he bring us to faith and sustain us in the faith so that we remain until our dying day in the one true Christian faith? By preaching the gospel to us and by baptizing us and by giving us his body and blood to eat and to drink. You see, it is not a mere minister of Christ who preaches the saving gospel into our hearts! It is Christ doing it through his minister. It is Christ alone who baptizes. It is Christ alone who receives us at the Altar and feeds us with his body and blood, given and shed for us for the forgiveness of sins. It is Christ who absolves us when we confess the sins for which we rightly deserve God's punishment, now and forever. "Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners," so wrote the Apostle Paul to the young pastor, Timothy. Paul also wrote to the same pastor in the same letter (1 Timothy 4:16), "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you." Is Paul saying here that Timothy is the

savior of sinners? No, he is saying that the doctrine committed to Timothy to preach is the means by which Christ, the Savior saves sinners.

To Jesus was given all authority in heaven and on earth. It was by this authority that he sent out the original apostles, and it is by this authority that he today, through his church, calls and ordains pastors who are to preach the apostolic word. This is the authority won by his bitter suffering and death. It is the authority of which he spoke when he told those who questioned the authority of his ministry, "But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins -- then he said to the paralytic, Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." It is the authority to save sinners, and this is the authority entrusted to Christ's ministers.

Only the true doctrine of Christ has any authority at all. When unity in that saving doctrine is lost to the church, the church loses her authority. When the minister of Christ sets aside that doctrine, he loses his authority to preach, to teach, to baptize, to absolve, to commune, to rebuke, to comfort. And when divine authority is lost it is replaced by raw human power. As the Missouri Synod has been losing its confessional, that is, its doctrinal consensus, we have seen the evangelical authority of ministers replaced by human power. Human power that parades as God's authority is nothing but spiritual tyranny. It might be the tyranny of pastors who have lost their confidence in the authority of God's word and now depend on various manipulative techniques which they have borrowed from legalistic sects by which to get Christians to do what they should do, thus placing those whom Christ's blood has set free under a new yoke of slavery.

It might be the tyranny of the majority in voters' assembly that presumes to depose without God's authority a minister of Christ. Frequently it is the tyranny of elected church functionaries who have no call from God and yet insist on playing God. They forcibly retire a minister of the gospel who has a divine call, not because they have the authority to do so, but because they have the power, and they are willing to use it. They, who have no call, pretend that they do. Our synodical president has begun to speak of his "episkope" (which is the Greek word for the oversight that a bishop, that is a pastor, has over the church) when he has no "episkope" because he is not a bishop and he has no divine call. He has persuaded the vice presidents of Synod that they now share in this alleged "episkope." Now they have used their so-called "episkope" to try to force a minister of the Gospel to submit to their power or be thrown out of the ministry.

Nature abhors a vacuum, and this applies also to the church. Unity in doctrine -- not just any doctrine, but God's doctrine -- made it possible for us in the Missouri Synod to rely on God's authority, an authority that is at its very heart evangelical. We used to know what it meant to submit joyfully to the authority of God's word and the Lutheran Confessions. But as our unity in doctrine has slipped away, we

find that the appeal to authority no longer works. So authority has been replaced by power. Pastors and congregations cannot submit themselves to the test of God's word if they no longer know for sure what the doctrine of that word is. What can they do when they face conflict? They must then engage in power plays against each another. Who will settle the dispute? A synodical official? But how will he settle the dispute? By what standard? If we have lost the unanimous agreement in God's truth, the elected official must rely on something else. He cannot be guided by the public doctrine of the church, for there is no public doctrine anymore if there is no consensus in the word of God. So he is guided by and seeks to guide pastors and congregations by various CTCR documents which themselves were produced in the political context of theological compromise. Thus, out of the bowels of the permanent synodical beauracracy comes the appeal to agree with one another -- not on the basis of God's word -- but on the basis of what Synod has decided.

Synod has no authority, only God's word does. But when we have lost our doctrinal unity, it is inevitable that the divine evangelical authority which God has entrusted to his church and which he has called his ministers to exercise will be supplanted by legal power of human origin.

The only answer to this tragedy, which is even now occurring throughout our Synod, is a return, on the part of pastors and congregations, to our confessional moorings and the genuine, biblical doctrine of the holy ministry. Pastors must remember that they have no authority, no doctrine, and no word at all except that which Jesus Christ gave when he breathed on his apostles and commissioned them to preach his word. People must remember that the sheep have the duty to judge the doctrine that they are fed and to demand from their pastors that they be first and foremost ministers of Christ. Pastors and people must continue to confess their sin to the Lord of the Church and the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ. From Christ they will hear the words that are the heart of all Christian doctrine and the foundation for the office of the ministry: Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven.

Pastor Rolf Preus

[Slightly edited on July 1, 1999]
