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CONTENTS

THE GOSPEL IS – DEVOTIONS FOR A PASTORAL CONFERENCE	Wayne Eichstadt
THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT AS IT APPLIES TO THE PASTOR AND HIS LIFESTYLE	Bruce Naumann
THE RELATIONSHIP OF AND/OR DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE UNIVERSAL PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS AND THE PUBLIC MINISTRY	Thomas R. Schuetze
EDITORIAL: CORRECTION AND APOLOGY	John Lau
BOOK REVIEWS	
<i>Our Great Heritage</i>	by Lyle W. Lange
<i>Essays on Church Fellowship</i>	ed. Curtis Jahn
<i>The Wauwatosa Theology</i>	ed. Curtis Jahn
<i>Studies in the Augsburg Confession</i> (cited)	by John P. Meyer

(Reviewer: David Lau)

The Gospel Is . . . Devotions for a Pastoral Conference*

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We thank our God for bringing us here safely and for the opportunity to study together, worship, praise our Lord together, and grow together in this our precious fellowship.

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

I. The Gospel is LIFE.

It is no secret that during the two years since we last gathered for a pastoral conference we have faced challenges. The challenges begin individually. Each of us has certainly faced personal challenges of various degrees directly or indirectly related to the gospel ministry: Challenges of all sorts in one's present calling, and for some the challenge of considering and then perhaps serving in a new field of labor. Challenges in the study -- wrestling with a text to mine the treasure of the Word and then wrestling some more to put that truth into sermon, Bible Class, or classroom form. Challenges to comfort those who seem to have so many reasons to remain *comfortless*. The challenge to admonish and correct those in whose lives Satan has begun dangerous inroads.

There are challenges that pastors and congregations face together: Congregational challenges as shepherd and flock work together in their efforts to take the gospel to those yet outside the fold as well as to serve one another. Likewise, there are challenges for a church body to stand firmly in the truth against every temptation to do otherwise; to conduct ourselves as brethren in Christ; to continue undertaking the ambitious work we have begun; and to seek the Lord's will in all things. There are challenges on every hand in the gospel ministry. Some are exciting challenges of prosperity. Others are trying challenges of sorrow and disappointment.

When a mountain climber is asked why he climbs the mountain, the old stand-by response (whether it is ever really used or not) is: "I climb this mountain **because it is there!**" Why undertake the challenges of the gospel ministry? What will be our answer when others ask us "Why must you insist on making things difficult for yourselves by doing what you are doing?" What will our answer be when in times of frustration we ourselves ask, "Why go on this way?" Why climb the mountain of gospel challenges? Not just because it is there, that wouldn't be enough, but because it is LIFE.

There is a passage in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians that is a hallmark of comfort and revitalization as we face challenges in the work of the Lord both as pastors and as laymen. **1 Corinthians 15:58**: "*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*"

These words standing all alone are enough for great encouragement, for it is the Lord Himself who through the apostle Paul assures each of His servants, "your labor is not in vain." However, when we pay attention to the first little word of this verse, the depth of the encouragement is even greater. The first little word, *ὥστε* (therefore), connects the rest of the verse to all that has gone before in this "resurrection chapter" of Paul's letter.

The encouragement that Paul gave to the Corinthian Christians and to all Christians in every calling is one that is connected to and based upon LIFE. When Paul first came to the Corinthians, his starting point was with the gospel of LIFE. "*I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day*" (15:3-4). Paul continued to testify to the Corinthians that Christ's resurrection and life gives life to lost and condemned sinners. Jesus has risen to life and gives life to all just as Adam brought death to all. For sinners who are born in the condemnation of death and who have no hope of escape, it is indeed good news to hear that there is life.

The message of forgiveness and life through Jesus' death and resurrection is what Jesus Himself proclaimed while He was on the earth. The message of the apostles was always built around life. Resurrection to life was the message of Paul's words in Athens, his words before King Agrippa, and in his epistles such as this one to the Corinthians. Likewise, resurrection and life was the substance of Peter's sermon on Pentecost, his words to the household of Cornelius, and in his epistles such as the opening words of his first letter, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ...*" (1 Pet. 1:3).

To the Corinthians, Paul wrote, "*If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins*" (1 Cor. 15:17). Take away the life of our substitute Christ, and there is no life for us, we are still condemned sinners. Take the life out of the gospel; take away our confidence in the forgiveness of sins and the certain hope of an eternal life in the presence of our Savior, and we are, as Paul says, among all men "the most pitiable" (15:19).

Far from leaving us as pitiable, condemned creatures, the gospel gives us LIFE through Christ. As the 15th chapter of First Corinthians begins to ascend to its climax, Paul describes the glorious transformation that will take place in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet on the day Christ returns. Then from the Holy Spirit's inspiration come the resounding words which are a beautiful symphony of joyful hope in the ears of every sinner: "*...then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, 'death is swallowed up in victory.' O death where is your sting? Oh grave where is your victory? The sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law, BUT THANKS BE TO GOD WHO GIVES US THE VICTORY THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST*" (v.54-57), and then ... THEREFORE, for that reason, keep on being steadfast, immovable, abounding in the work of the Lord.

The gospel is LIFE and that makes all the difference. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul gave a list of some of the challenges he faced in his gospel ministry: From the Jews five times he received scourging stripes just one short of 40, the legal limit; three times he was beaten with rods; stoned once; and shipwrecked three times. Paul described what he faced as "perils of water, perils of robbers, perils from his own people, perils from the Gentiles, perils in the city, perils in the wilderness, perils in the sea, perils among false brethren, in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness -- besides many other things" (cf. 2 Cor.

11:25ff.). How could this man possibly keep going in the midst of such things? His motivation, purpose, ability, and perseverance came from the knowledge of the LIFE his Savior and our Savior, Jesus, gives.

God has given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ ... THEREFORE, beloved, brothers let us continue to remain steadfast, firmly seated on the truth of God's Good News which has brought that life to us.

God has given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ ... FOR THAT REASON keep on being immovable in the confidence you have in the forgiveness of sins and the life Jesus brings. Let nothing shake you from that life nor let the world with its sinful allure and scoffing ridicule pull you away from your life-source.

BECAUSE God has given victory over sin and death to us who deserve nothing but sin and death, let each of us be moved to keep on producing fruits of thanksgiving in thought, word, and deed. BECAUSE God has given us the victory through Christ we know that when we live and work for Him it is not thankless work nor a dead-end job. Because of victory and life we know that when our labors are guided by Him nothing of what we do is ever empty or worthless even if to human eyes it may seem to be so. God has given us the victory of life through our Savior and THEREFORE, even all the challenges, even the difficult labors have purpose and through them God will bless us.

The life we have in Christ Jesus is the object and foundation of our faith. The life we have in our Savior is the sum and substance of our message. The life we have in Jesus is our reason to ever go forward, to always climb whatever mountain of challenge may come as a result of faithfulness to God's Word. We are able to do all things through our life-giving Christ who strengthens us (cf. Phil. 4:13). The life we have been given as a gift from God's grace is what will enable us to persevere and keep on going -- not only muddling along through this life but charging forward with energy, joy, and purpose; with songs of thanksgiving and praise to the God of our salvation who has given LIFE to us sinners. Amen.

This week we face the challenges of difficult and intense study in God's Word. When this week's work is done in connection with the Lord and His Word, we have the assurance that these efforts will not be in vain. For the Lord's blessing in this regard, let us pray ...

Lord God, Heavenly Father, we praise and thank You with deep gratitude for Your life-giving gospel and Christ's redemptive work which the gospel proclaims.

We are weak sinners in need of life. Out of Your boundless mercy and for the sake of the holy innocent sufferings and death of Your beloved Son, forgive us all our sins and be gracious and merciful to us. Cleanse us through Your Spirit by the blood of Jesus Christ.

During this week's conference and in all following days, refresh us with Your gospel of peace. Renew our appreciation for the gospel, invigorate our souls, and fill us with godly zeal so that we both rejoice in our salvation and proclaim that salvation in word, life, and ministry.

As we sit at our Savior's feet to hear and study Your holy Word, send Your Spirit in rich measure. Open our hearts to hear. Close our minds to our own thoughts and fleshly concerns and grant us understanding that comes from Your wisdom as we humbly submit to Your Word. Bless all who present Your Word to us and grant them wisdom to speak what Your Word declares.

Through our study and devotion in Your Word, preserve us all in the liberty of the gospel and in the unity of truth wrought by the Spirit with which You have so richly blessed us.

Father in Heaven, we bring these our petitions before Your almighty throne as Your adopted and beloved children through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Ghost, one God forever and ever. Amen.

II. The Gospel is FOCUS.

O Lord, our heavenly Father, almighty and everlasting God, who has safely brought us to the beginning of this day, defend us in the same with Thy mighty power and grant that this day we fall into no sin, neither run into any kind of danger, but that all our doings, being ordered by Thy governance, may be righteous in Thy sight; through Jesus Christ Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one God forever and ever, Amen.

Anyone who has ever had a part in raising sheep knows just how apt a description it is when God portrays us as the sheep who have gone astray and have turned every one to his own way. Apart from blatant disobedient straying, sheep are also easily distracted. A sheep can become so occupied with eating the grass in front of its nose that it keeps its head down and is oblivious to all else while it follows wherever the greenest grass leads. A playful lamb filled with curiosity will chase after a butterfly or anything else that grabs its attention. Needless to say, if these distractions are followed long enough and far enough, they too result in straying from the fold.

We who are sheep of the Good Shepherd, have a good many distractions of our own. When Devil, world, and self come calling with distractions, it is the gospel alone that will turn our heads away from the distraction and back to our Savior, for the gospel is FOCUS. We hear these words in the letter to the Hebrews: **Hebrews 12:1-2:** *“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

The catalog of faithful heroes which the writer to the Hebrews presents just before these words is an impressive list of Old Testament believers who maintained their focus as they waited for the promised Messiah. Abraham’s eyes looked at his dying body and the dead womb of his wife and could not see how they would ever have a son, but hoping against hope he kept his heart focused on God’s promise. Moses had every advantage as an adopted Egyptian, but he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter and instead suffered with his own people because he kept his focus *“esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasure in Egypt”* (Heb. 11:26). And so the list continues with many other such heroes of faith.

As impressive as the focus and faith of these believers are, Scripture teaches us that these great heroes of faith also became distracted sheep at times. Abraham followed the “unfocused” advice of Sarah and had a son with her handmaid, Hagar, as an apparent solution to provide Sarah with children if only by proxy. Moses grew impatient with the Lord’s time-table, took matters into his own hands, and killed an Egyptian; but then when the Lord **did** call him to lead Israel out of Egypt, Moses objected saying that he was unqualified having lost the focus that when the Lord calls to service He also provides what is needed.

God places these heroes of faith before us as examples, but one by one we see how they too faced distractions stemming from their own weaknesses. They remain heroes of faith and examples to us because by God’s grace they also turned away from their distractions and regained their focus. It is our own similar distractions concerning which God says, *“Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”*

A runner who carries extra weight is slowed and the added burden becomes an impediment to his victory. Should that runner get tangled up in a net he will trip and fall and is sure never to finish the race. At times, we who run the race to our eternal goal add burdens, weights, and cares of our own that God never asks us to bear. Rather we should cast them all on Christ and leave them behind. We, the distracted and straying sheep, get all tangled up in the things of the flesh and our own pursuits -- things that either have no importance to heavenbound children of God or else are completely opposed to God. These are to be laid aside in order to maintain focus.

The Devil seeks to bring any kind of distraction that may work to destroy Christ’s church and the individual Christian. The Devil, the world, and our flesh all encourage us to set our eyes on what we can see or on the lack of what we think we should see. They want us to focus on our individual difficulties and cry out, “Woe is me.” They would like us to become worried at a lack of material wealth. In mission congregations, the foes of Christ would love to see us lose our focus so that we become consumed with numbers instead of purpose. In larger thriving congregations, the foes will delight if we become satisfied with what we have and cease to reach out with the gospel, or become so involved with a project that the true focus of our efforts is lost.

In order to endure patiently whatever our spiritual enemies put into our path and to run the race

with perseverance we need follow the example of the Old Testament heroes *“looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

When Jesus faced the temptations of the Devil in the wilderness He used the truth of God’s Word to keep His focus and resist the temptation so that although He was tempted in all points even as we are, He would yet remain without sin and be our Savior. When Peter rebuked Jesus for saying that He must suffer and die, Jesus maintained His focus and said, “Get behind me, Satan” (Matt. 16:23). When the people came to Jesus after the feeding of the 5,000 and wanted to make Him a king, Jesus resisted the distraction of earthly rule and power and quietly slipped away from them. When Jesus faced the agony of His suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, He fervently prayed that the cup of suffering might be removed, nevertheless, not His will but the Father’s be done. When Jesus was taunted to come down from the cross, He stayed on the cross and died there for our sins because that was the purpose for which He had come.

When distractions came to Jesus, He did not follow. The Son of Man had come to seek and to save that which was lost. He had left the Father’s throne and became man in order to save sinners. Jesus despised the shame of the cross and remained focused on the purpose for that shame, the need for it, and the joy in heaven and on earth that the completion of His work would bring.

The importance and value of Christ’s work together with His love for sinners led Him to run with endurance the race that was set before Him. The news of Christ’s work is our gospel and that will enable us to set aside distraction and run with endurance the race that is set before us. We will maintain focus in what we say and what we do when we keep Jesus and God’s gracious salvation in front of our eyes.

When we recall the great love with which God loved us, we will be moved to love Him who first loved us and to keep Him above all else in our lives. When we keep the gospel focus and daily see our sins’ punishment as it was carried out upon Christ, we will be moved to daily repentance. When we see all that Jesus has done for our salvation and bear in mind all the promises of God that are ours through Him, we will be glad to bear the cross of Christ in His name.

The gospel focus is of utmost importance in what we teach and proclaim. One of the greatest distraction potentials for any Christian church is to compromise the gospel. To uphold the focus of the gospel in our preaching and teaching is to proclaim the entire Word of God in all of its truth and purity. Luther noted, “If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the Devil are at the moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be confessing Him.” The gospel is of necessity the focus of our proclamation and the basis for all that we do. It is, therefore, of never-ending urgency that we continue to learn, and study, and grow in the Word.

A camera is focused only on one place. Too much of a turn in one direction or the other results in a blurry picture. We are a confessional church deeply committed to the entire truth of God’s Word. We, according to God’s Word, take a firm position on the truth and opposed to all error for anything less would be a sin. All of this is good and pleasing to God and is part of the gospel focus, but the danger lurks that Christ-like love which motivates our zeal may become unfocused and be replaced by sin. As a confessional church we face a unique challenge to our focus as did the Ephesian congregation to whom Christ spoke saying, *“I have this against you, that you have left your first love”* (Rev. 2:4).

Christ did not suggest to the Ephesians that they should stop vigorously defending the truth. Quite the opposite, the Lord **commends** them for *“your labor, your patience, that you cannot bear those who are evil and you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not and have found them liars..and have not become weary ...”* (Rev. 2:3)

The gospel’s focus is all of these things that the Ephesians did, but Christ’s own rebuke to the Ephesians and the warning to all is: “don’t blur your focus by losing your first love.” The Ephesians were correcting sin for the sake of correction rather than out of love for straying sinners. The Ephesians were exposing false prophets for the sake of the battle rather than a love for the truth and concern for the souls who might be misled by lies. There is a danger that as we fight for the faith and contend for the truth we end up in the battle for the battle’s sake and lose sight of our true purpose. The Ephesians got so caught up in correcting sin, exposing false teachers, and defending the truth that

they lost their focus and forgot why they were doing it in the first place. They lost the focus of the gospel.

Each of us who clings to the truth does well to remember our first love and keep the gospel as our focus. Do we share the truth and expose false-teaching because we are itching to find something wrong and then drive the truth home with force and authority; or do we yearn to share the news of sin and grace out of an interest in the welfare of souls? Do we thrive on discussions of controversy and go looking for a battle so that we can pull out our weapons of truth and emerge the victors; or do we pray that hearts and minds will be opened to an explanation of the truth? Are we thrilled with intellectual arguments and forget our objective? Do we pick up a cause and defend it only because it is “our cause” or do we humbly submit to the Word and work for God’s cause? In all that we say and do, whose glory are we seeking?...our own? our congregation’s? or God’s? The objective in defending the truth is the preservation of the truth for the benefit of lost sinners. Anything else is a loss of first love and a loss of focus.

The gospel focus teaches us that purity of the Word **and** love can **co-exist**. Such an evangelical focus is what, by God’s grace, sets us apart. It is what makes IMMANUEL LUTHERAN COLLEGE different from public schools and other private schools. It is the difference between the CLC and political groups both inside and outside the visible church. The evangelical focus makes the difference between a caretaker of souls and a worship facilitator. It is the difference between a social club and a family united in Christ with one aim and one hope.

Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith who has set before us the race which we now run. The gospel is our focus to run this race well and to obtain the crown of life which Jesus won for us when He ran His race of redemption. With the Good News of all that Christ Jesus has done for us as our focus, we join with Paul “*being confident of this very thing that He who has begun a good work in [us] will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ*” (Phil. 1:6). Amen.

III. The Gospel Is OPPORTUNITY.

Holy Spirit, God of Love, who our night dost brighten, poured on us from heaven above, now our faith enlighten. In Thy light we gather here; show us that Christ’s promise clear is Amen forever. Jesus, our ascended Lord, Oh, fulfill Thy gracious Word: Bless us with Thy favor! Amen. [TLH #230]

We are a small church body with small congregations (we know that even our largest congregations are small by most standards). Sometimes people call and inquire about a congregation and they begin to list different things for which they are looking and then ask, “Now, what do you have in these areas? How do you approach these things?” To which we who are small have to respond, “We don’t have those things. It just isn’t practical or possible because of our size.”

When this kind of situation arises, the experience of Peter and John at the temple gate comes to mind. The man who was lame from his birth looked expectantly to receive something from the apostles. Peter told the man, “*Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you*” (Acts 3:6).

At times, people see a church name in the yellow pages or on some outreach material and look expectantly to the church for certain things. We might have to say “this or that we do not have, but what we do have we give to you.” What we have is what we ourselves have been given, namely, the “Word of Reconciliation, the Gospel of Peace.”

When we remember that the whole world and every person in it is corrupted by sin then we realize that what we have is what the world needs. A pharmaceutical company with a medication that everyone needs would have a wide range of opportunity for profit. As ambassadors of Christ in a sinful world we have a wide range of opportunity for the gospel.

On this last day of our *pastoral* conference it seems appropriate to spend a final devotion in a *pastoral* epistle. In his instruction to Timothy and with similar words to Titus, Paul covers the whole spectrum of the ministry and by so doing leads us to see the wonderful opportunities we have with the gospel. We turn to the words of the apostle in his first letter to Timothy chapter 4. It is worthwhile to note that all of Paul’s imperatives direct the activity to be ongoing.

1 Timothy 4:12-16: “*Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word,*

in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourselves and those who hear you."

The apostle Paul took every kind of opportunity to apply the gospel wherever there was a need. On his missionary journeys he took the gospel to those who hadn't heard of Christ. Paul returned to established congregations and used the gospel to strengthen the Christians. Paul used letters as an opportunity to rebuke error such as that in Corinth, to give joyful thanksgiving for the gospel's fruit like that in Philippi, and to give instructive training to his younger co-workers, Timothy and Titus.

More than once, Paul told the people to whom he ministered, "follow our example." The value in the example set by Paul and the others was not in themselves, but rather that they were following Christ's example. Part of the opportunity in the gospel ministry is to provide an example, "... keep on being an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity."

We have the opportunity to be an example to the believers with the words we use in and out of the pulpit. We have a continuing opportunity with the way in which we live, the love we show, and the spirit in which we deal with one another. This is true in all of our dealings with everyone but especially so as we minister to the members of our congregations. We have the opportunity to keep providing an example of faith and to show forth how trust in our Savior plays an important role in our lives.

A pastor's good example is the same opportunity that belongs to every child of God. As Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). However, there is a unique opportunity and importance in the example of those who serve in the public ministry because of the high office to which they have been called.

When Paul wrote to Titus about being an example, he especially urged Titus to be an example for the young men because Titus was himself a young man. An example carries tremendous weight when it comes from among one's peers. However, this does not eliminate the opportunity for a shepherd of any age to keep on reflecting the gospel through his example to the believers of all ages.

There is also a less obvious but yet special opportunity in being an example to the believers. We know the need for laborers to go out into the Lord's harvest. We know that God gives gifts to His children enabling them to be these laborers. The continuing example that pastors or other called servants give is an opportunity to encourage a new generation of Christ's ambassadors to serve in the public ministry. To borrow a phrase, we have the opportunity to show "what is **good** about the public ministry."

I believe it is safe to say that more than a few of us here were led by the Lord to serve in the ministry, at least in part, through a pastor or professor who gave us an example in word, conduct, love, spirit, faith, and purity. Now we have the same opportunity of the gospel.

Paul instructed Timothy, "Till I come, keep on giving attention to reading, to exhortation and to doctrine." Timothy was to keep turning his mind and giving his attention to these three areas that cover every facet of the public ministry and every aspect of what we have been called to do. As we keep giving attention to these areas we, like Timothy, will find opportunity.

There is a wealth of opportunity in the public reading of the Word and preaching of the gospel in our worship services. The opportunity for public proclamation extends into outreach materials and mission endeavors as we seek to take the gospel to souls who are still walking in darkness.

There is opportunity to use the Word for exhortation and private counseling. It is the opportunity for the ready ear of a shepherd to listen and then apply the wisdom of God. It is the application of law and gospel according to individual needs.

There is boundless opportunity to serve our Lord and the souls in our care through the teaching and instruction in Sunday schools, day schools, confirmation class, youth groups, Bible class, adult instruction, and didactic sermons.

When the Lord wanted Paul to serve the need in Macedonia he sent the vision of the man who pleaded, "Come and help us!" (cf. Acts 16:9). We may not have such a direct plea for help but there are silent cries of need that beg us to take the opportunities of reading, exhortation, and doctrine in

order to fulfill the need.

It seems that more and more we are watching young people drift away from their Savior and His Word, but it is not just the young. There is a need and an unspoken cry for help when young and old alike begin to conclude that the Word of God is old, out-of-date, and just isn't relevant anymore. We have the opportunity to show otherwise! We have the opportunity to show that the Word of God is as relevant today as when it was written because we still face the same problem of sin and thanks be to God we still have the same Savior who died for our sins! We have the opportunity to show that the words of Scripture are not just church jargon that have no application and mean nothing to the average human being, but rather that they are words of truth from God Himself that mean everything to every human being.

There are opportunities in the ministry to which we have been called. *“Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.”* Keep on giving attention to every aspect of your ministry. Make use of the opportunities.

“Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine.” It has been said many times but it cannot be overstated that a pastor's gospel opportunity begins with himself. It is a matter of personal growth in the Word. Paul calls upon Timothy and every minister of the Word to keep on meditating in the things of the gospel and to personally become wrapped up in them.

The purpose, Paul said, for meditation was so that progress would be evident to all. As you know, Timothy was a young man. There were naturally those who were skeptical that such a young man could possibly serve as a capable pastor and be an effective leader, teacher, and faithful shepherd in a congregation. Paul told Timothy, *“Let no one despise your youth.”*

Does a young pastor have complete knowledge with nothing left to learn? Oh, no! Not even close! So, Paul says, let no one despise your youth, but for your part wrap yourself up in these things so that by the Spirit's working you will grow in your knowledge and understanding and application of the Word. Take the opportunity to serve yourself with the gospel, then your spiritual growth is going to be clearly evident to everyone and will silence any skeptics.

Remember, all of Paul's imperatives describe an action of an ongoing nature. The meditation and study in these things is not to stop when we reach a theologically mature age of 45 or the milestone of 25 years in the ministry. They are to keep on going so that the progress and growth never stops and is continually evident to all.

The resultant blessing of continued personal growth in the Word of God also serves the greater purpose of blessing those who hear you. *“Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.”* When we immerse ourselves in the Scriptures it serves a dual purpose -- personal and public. When a pastor grows the congregation he serves also grows. The gospel is opportunity for your own thirsting soul and for those whom you serve.

Today, we will break camp, as it were, and leave this conference to return to our respective corners of the world. There may be things of which we may yet be uncertain as we leave but there is one thing of which we can be certain. We leave with the certainty that we are ambassadors for Christ and that having been said we leave with OPPORTUNITY.

From the farmlands and back roads of the Dakotas and Minnesota to the scant pathways through the underbrush of far-away lands; from the urban sprawl of places like Seattle-Tacoma, San Francisco, Phoenix, Dallas, Chicago, and the coasts of Florida to the villages and huts in Nigeria and India; from the Sunday schools, day schools, and youth groups of our congregations to the classrooms of our high schools, college and seminary at ILC; from the deathbed of the aged to the instruction of the young child on a mother's knee; THE GOSPEL IS OPPORTUNITY.

Lord God, grant us a rich measure of Your grace so that we cannot help but speak the things that we have seen and heard (Acts 4:20) and believing therefore speak (2 Cor. 4:13) to the glory of God and the salvation of souls. God be with us all! Amen.

The Eighth Commandment As It Applies To the Pastor and His Lifestyle*

Bruce Naumann

* Presented to the CLC Great Lakes Pastoral Conference, September 23-25, 1997.

“I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others I myself should become disqualified” 1 Corinthians 9:27.

With these words St. Paul emphasizes the importance of making application of Scriptural principles to oneself. He knew that there is a definite danger of preaching and teaching correctly, while letting one’s own attention to the Word and personal sanctification slide. As public servants of the Word, pastors will want to follow Paul’s example by being not only teachers, but “doers of the Word.” The subject of this essay has to do with bridling the tongue, which the Scriptures identify as the member of the body which is both the most destructive and the most difficult to control. “If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless” (Jas. 1:26). “The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell” (3:6). “No man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison” (3:8).

The eighth commandment, as all the others, have application to the pastor, first of all, insofar as he is a Christian like any other. We do well, then, to review briefly the meaning of this commandment as it applies to all. Luther himself found great profit in such study.

I dare not say in my heart: The Lord’s Prayer is old; you know the Ten Commandments; you are well acquainted with the Creed, etc. -- But I study these things daily and remain a pupil of the Catechism. Moreover, I feel that it helps me remarkably, and I find that God’s Word cannot be exhausted by study.¹

I. The Eighth Commandment as it applies . . . to the pastor’s personal life.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, or say anything that might ruin his good name and reputation; but we should defend him, speak well of him, and explain all his words and actions in the best possible way.²

With this commandment the Lord set out to protect what is one of the most valuable temporal possessions that a man has - his good name and reputation. While the commandment itself speaks specifically about the sin of telling a lie about one’s fellowman, the analogy of Scripture shows that we sin against God by any talk about our neighbor which comes from an unloving heart. This can take the form of lying, gossiping, slandering, or betraying our neighbor, regardless of whether what is said is factual or not. “Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds” (Col. 3:9). “A talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter” (Prov. 11:13). “Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law” (Jas. 4:11). “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people’s matters” (1 Pet. 4:15).

It is interesting to note, in the James passage, that when we indulge in critical speech against a brother, we become, by the very act, the “pot calling the kettle black.” In other words, we apply the law to another while excusing our own breaking of the eighth commandment. In doing so we deny the law with regard to ourselves with the same breath that we apply it to another. Thus we show that we are those who undermine the law, thereby “judging” it. Note also that Peter classifies those who cannot refrain from minding other people’s business with murderers and thieves.

So, in our daily dealings with those in our family and community, our goal is to abstain from one of the world’s most popular pastimes, namely, confessing other men’s sins. Instead, we want to treat the good name and reputation of our neighbor as a valuable commodity -- as valuable as our own! Several handy questions should quickly come to mind in order to determine what to say when the

subject of our neighbor's behavior comes up in daily conversation:

- 1) In what way is this discussion benefiting the person who is the subject?
- 2) If I were the subject in these circumstances, how would I want the conversation to go?
- 3) What would Jesus say or do in this situation?

Luther gives us this helpful elaboration in His Large Catechism:

To avoid this vice, therefore, we should note that nobody has the right to judge and reprove his neighbor publicly, even when he has seen a sin committed, unless he has been authorized to judge and reprove. There is a great difference between judging sin and having knowledge of sin. Knowledge of sin does not entail the right to judge it. I may see and hear that my neighbor sins, but to make him the talk of the town is not my business. If I interfere and pass sentence on him, I fall into a greater sin than his. When you become aware of a sin, simply make your ears a tomb and bury it until you are appointed a judge and authorized to administer punishment by virtue of your office. Those are called backbiters who are not content just to know but rush ahead and judge. Learning a bit of gossip about someone else, they spread it into every corner, relishing and delighting in it like pigs that roll in the mud and root around in it with their snouts. This is nothing else than usurping the judgment and office of God . . . Therefore God forbids you to speak evil about another even though, to your certain knowledge, he is guilty. All the more urgent is the prohibition if you are not sure but have it only from hearsay. But you say: "Why shouldn't I speak if it is the truth?" I reply: "Why don't you bring it before the regular judge?" "Oh, I cannot prove it publicly; I might be called a liar and sent away in disgrace." Ah, now do you smell the roast? If you do not trust yourself to make your charges before the proper authorities, then hold your tongue. Keep your knowledge to yourself and do not give it out to others. For when you repeat a story that you cannot prove, even if it is true, you appear as a liar. Besides, you act like a knave, for no man should be deprived of his honor and good name unless these have first been taken away from him publicly. Every report, then, that cannot be adequately proved is false witness. No one should publicly assert as truth what is not publicly substantiated. In short, what is secret should be allowed to remain secret, or at any rate be reproved in secret, as we shall hear. ³

II. The Eighth Commandment as it applies . . . to the pastor's calling as *Seelsorger*.

It has been rightly said that information is power. The pastor is often privy to sensitive information about his parishioners, and is therefore in a position of great responsibility when it comes to preserving -- without going to the point of dishonesty -- the good name and reputation of those under his spiritual care. He is also under greater responsibility than others with regard to this commandment, since he is to be an example of godly living to his flock. He is, furthermore, a special ambassador of Jesus Christ to his community. It is with this sense of weighty responsibility that Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed" (2 Cor. 6:3).

It is the pastor's role to act as leader and shepherd with regard to admonishing his flock about sins against the eighth commandment, and "putting the best construction" on the behavior of others. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that a pastor refrains from disclosing private information about his members, unless it is done according to proper order for Scriptural admonition (Matt. 18), and for the greater good of the person involved. How easy it is to speculate with a member about why another may be negligent in his use of the means of grace, for instance! With his elders, whose business it is to look after the straying sheep, these and similar matters may be properly discussed, in order to find a solution which will benefit the straying. Beyond this venue, however, the pastor is obliged to "put the best construction" on the situation when anyone asks him about it -- even his wife (perhaps especially so).

The pastor should be like a stone wall when it comes to some bit of second-hand information that he hears from one member about another. The question to be asked of the tale-bearer should be this: "Have you spoken with this person about this matter yourself?" If the answer is no, then the pastor

must hear no more, put it out of his mind, and urge the tale-bearer to take it up with the person in question. If the hearsay turns out to be factual, then it will likely come up later anyway, from a proper channel which will allow the pastor to deal with it properly. If the report is inaccurate in the first place, then the pastor has just been saved from the huge embarrassment that comes from acting on false information, which carries with it the potential for great harm to his members. (Of course, if the person reporting the case has indeed taken the first step of individual admonition, the pastor may then be part of the second step, according to Matt. 18.)

If the constraints of the eighth commandment are carefully followed, the pastor will not only avoid becoming guilty of sin himself on these occasions, but he will also preserve a solid basis on which to deal with the erring. For if he should confront a member about a matter of sin with only second-hand knowledge in hand, that person can rightly rise up in indignation about the pastor's actions. Such a pastor would then be left with zero credibility as a shepherd. If he relies on his members who do have first-hand knowledge of a problem to go to the person individually, he may have to wait a long time. But the maintenance of a person's reputation according to the eighth commandment, as well as the principle of decency and order in the church, are paramount in such cases.

III. The Eighth Commandment as it applies . . . to the pastor's synodical dealings.

Our church body is now seeking a final resolution to a recent doctrinal controversy, namely, the "self-esteem" or "love of self" issue. This has, at times, been a hotly contested debate, and has resulted in the departure of several pastors and congregations from our fellowship. Given these circumstances, our discussion of the eighth commandment with regard to synodical dealings holds with it the danger of "sitting in judgment" over against the actions of others on both "sides" of the controversy. Instead, let each of us examine the matter in relation to his own self and conduct, with a look to the future.

We know that false teaching and practice is bound to rear its ugly head from time to time in the Church Militant (Acts 20:29-30), and that our Lord has commanded us to constantly be on the lookout for such error (Rom. 16:17). To do this faithfully, while at the same time practicing Christian love and "putting the best construction on everything" when it comes to dealing with our peers, is an art of sanctification which requires the Spirit's power and prompting. Luther felt keenly that the preservation of good relations between Christian pastors and teachers, based on a right confession of Scripture, was of tremendous value and importance:

Oh, dear God, how hostile the devil is to us! He causes disunity even among the servants of the Word so that one hates the other! Accept it that we are not the same in life and walk, and one who has a different way and is amazing to the other: one must let that go and happen (for it has its limit). For one cannot make everything as straight as an arrow and all along the same lines when it comes to morals and life. As long as we are united in the correct, pure doctrine -- there not even the least bit may be impure and false; rather everything must be pure and choice, as from a dove. There no tolerance nor overlooking nor love avails; for a little leaven leavens the whole lump, as St. Paul says in 1 Cor. 5:6 (XXII, 820f.) . . . I know of no greater gift that we have than *concordiam docentium* (the harmony of the teachers), that here and there in the principalities and imperial cities the teaching is uniform with ours. I would not take the Turkish empire in exchange for this consensus. . . As dear as a preacher holds the glory of Christ, the furthering of His Gospel, and his own salvation, so ready he should be to bear the burdens of his colleagues in the office (Gal. 6:2) and rather suffer everything than to let a bitter root grow up between them and him, which would destroy peace.⁴

The same principles for preserving a person's good name and reputation that apply in our own homes and congregations also apply to our fellow pastors, teachers, and synodical officials. Here are some general principles to keep in mind toward that end: (1) In general, mind your own business. The Lord has given each of us enough to do in our own callings without hankering to review and criticize another's ministry. (2) Take advantage of every opportunity for fellowship and mutual strengthening in faith. There is no substitute for personal familiarity when it comes to helping each other in matters of doctrine and practice, when necessary. (3) Second-hand information is to be disregarded, and the tale-bearer rebuked.

If you personally become aware of a brother's lapse in doctrine, practice, or personal sanctification, be scrupulous about following Matthew 18. Approach him personally. If a face-to-face meeting is impossible, a telephone call may have to suffice. If at all possible, avoid discussing this kind of issue through written letters or e-mail. This type of communication is fraught with difficulties that tend to work against a God-pleasing resolution. The sterile page or computer monitor have a way of taking all "brotherliness" out of an admonition. Simple inquiries are immediately perceived to be accusatory on the written page, and attempts at light-hearted humor are often read as sarcasm. It is all too easy to write things to a brother that you would not have the courage or the gall to say when looking him in the eye, and once the postman comes or the "send" button is clicked, you can't correct your overreaction or wrong assumption.

When this personal contact is made, you may find that you were simply mistaken. If not, your humble and brotherly admonition may be all that is necessary to make the matter right. Barring that, another witness must be brought in to admonish as well. If the offender will not heed even this, then it is time for the wider church, that is, the synod, to get involved. Here, the issue of decency and order is of utmost importance. The only way that a matter of concern about a fellow pastor should become public knowledge is when it is made so by the man himself, or when the matter is properly taken up by those who are called to deal with these synodical issues and adjudicate them. In our synod this means an appeal first to the Conference Visitor, then (if necessary) to the synod President, and finally to the Convention. If there is a perceived failure on the part of such officials to act, then this becomes a separate issue which should, again, be dealt with according to Matthew 18 and our agreed-upon *modus operandi*.

Our flesh may try to justify a "shortcut" in this process, protesting in this way: "Plenty of people know about all this already, so I am repeating nothing new." Here Jesus' words apply: "Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!" (Matt. 18:7). Even when there is a genuine problem of doctrine or practice to address, the Lord's purposes are not served when we add our own sins against Christian love and good order to the problem.

One may ask, "But what happens when I am falsely accused? Is it not incumbent on me, for the sake of truth and justice, to retaliate and expose my enemy as a liar?" To this the Scriptures reply: "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness; by whose stripes you were healed"(1 Pet. 2:21-24).

Walther remarks on this point: ". . . A true Christian receives reproof meekly, even if the reproof is uncalled for. He is not greatly surprised that people should charge him with wrong-doing, knowing that no person who is still in his natural state can be expected to do good. If he knows himself to be innocent of the charge, he says, God be praised! I am not guilty."⁵

Of course, there comes a time when a line is crossed. It can happen that a person may use the constraints of the eighth commandment as an excuse to shut his eyes to the fact that false teaching or practice is, in fact, going on. A person who is actually a false teacher will probably deny it, and may well use any means possible to avoid censure and continue in his ways. It is contemptible to hide false teaching or practice, using the eighth commandment as a cloak behind which to conceal such errors. However, it is no less contemptible to combat such things outside of the parameter of established "decency and order," while painting one's own slander, gossip, and meddling in other men's matters as though it were nothing other than a pure and ardent quest for orthodoxy. May God preserve us from both abuses.

In summary, we see that there are two Biblical directives to which we aspire in these matters. "Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple" (Rom. 16:17-18). "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ

forgave you” (Eph. 4:31-32).

Because of our human flesh, we can be sure that we will fall short, in both of these areas, in carrying out God’s commands as He would have us do. As with all of God’s commands, we take comfort in the fact that our Lord Jesus fulfilled God’s will perfectly in our stead, and died as our substitute to pay for our failures. Equipped with this knowledge of saving grace and the Lord’s inerrant Word, we can now strive to deal with each other in Christian charity, while at the same time practicing vigilance for the true doctrine.

Notes

¹ E. Plass, ed. *What Luther Says* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959) 1241.

² M. Sydow, *Martin Luther’s Small Catechism* (c. 1988).

³ Theodore G. Tappert, ed. and trans., *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959) 400f.

⁴ C.F.W. Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, J.M. Drickamer, trans., 271f.

⁵ C.F.W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel*, W.H.T. Dau, trans., (St. Louis: Concordia, 1928) 121.

The Relationship Of And/Or Distinction Between the Universal Priesthood of Believers and the Public Ministry*

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Before accepting the call to St. Matthew Lutheran Church of Dallas, I had the opportunity to serve Redeemer Lutheran in Bowdle, South Dakota. During my tenure there I had frequent occasion to drive to Aberdeen where I would make calls on a number of parishioners we had residing there. My customary travel route would take me by one of several Lutheran churches in the city. Prominently displayed on its exterior wall, facing the road, was the name of the church (it was ELCA Lutheran), and under the name, the message: “Where Every Member is a Minister.” The first time I saw it I can remember nodding my head in approval as I called to mind Bible passages through which the Lord shows that it is His will that we do this. He wants all who confess Him as Savior and Lord -- indeed, every church member! -- to minister to their fellow man, and in particular, to their fellow-Christians, as needs arise and they have opportunity.¹ Especially are they to involve themselves in the important task committed to them by Jesus of sharing the Good News of the Gospel. No one would question that.

I hadn’t driven too many blocks past that Aberdeen church, however, when the thought struck me that the message I had just read was not one that I could recommend that CLC congregations put up on their church wall. For this reason: The naked assertion that “every member is a minister” can serve the altogether wholesome purpose of reminding Christians of the responsibility God has given them to minister to each other and their fellow man in love. But it can also serve the detrimental purpose of blurring and confusing in the minds of people the distinction which God draws in Scripture between the universal priesthood of believers (into which *all* Christians are called) and the public ministry (to which only *some* Christians are called).

What is the distinction that Scripture draws between the universal priesthood and the public ministry and what is their relationship? This is the question we are seeking to address in this paper. May the Lord bless our study.²

I. On the Universal Priesthood of Believers

A. Everyone who believes in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (whether man, woman, or child) is a member of the universal priesthood.

- 1 Peter 2:9 - But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people.
- Revelation 1:5 - (Jesus Christ) has made us kings and priests to His God and Father. Compare also Rev. 5:10 and 20:6.
- “Indeed, all Christians are priests, and all priests are Christians. Worthy of anathema is any assertion that a priest is anything else than a Christian” (Martin Luther, *Church and Ministry II*, LW, Vol.40, p. 19).
- “The Ministry of the Keys, which is the ministry of the Word, has been committed to the Holy Christian Church -- therefore to each Christian man, woman and child ...” (Thesis I, *Concerning Church and Ministry*, p. 25).
- “If a little group of pious Christian laymen were taken captive and set down in a wilderness, and had among them no priest consecrated by a bishop, and if there in the wilderness they were to agree in choosing one of themselves, married or unmarried, and were to charge him with the office of baptising, saying mass, absolving and preaching, such a man would be as truly a priest as though all bishops and popes had consecrated him. That is why in cases of necessity any one can baptise and give absolution, which would be impossible unless we were all priests” (Martin Luther, “An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility,” *Works of Martin Luther*, Philadelphia Edition, 7 Vols., II, p. 67).

B. When we say that everyone who believes in Jesus Christ is a member of the universal priesthood we mean that all have been granted the privilege and right, through the merits of Christ, to approach the throne of the Father directly in prayer and to receive all the blessings Christ won for them through His substitutionary death on the cross. They need no *human* go-between or mediator to intercede for them before the throne of God in order to receive His blessings.

- Romans 5:1-2 - Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand. (Cf. also Ephesians 2:18 and 3:12.)
- 1 Timothy 2:5 - For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all.
- “All Christians are God’s royal priests (1 Peter 2:9), and therefore have no need of a priesthood from among men to mediate between them and God. They themselves have free access unto the Father (Eph. 2:18), to present their petitions to Him, and to receive from Him the fulness of His blessings, without the mediation of priest or saint. No hierarchy stands between Christ and His people” (Edward Koehler, *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*, p. 253).
- “Not only are we the freest of kings, we are also priests forever, which is far more excellent than being kings, because as priests we are worthy to appear before God to pray for others and to teach one another the things of God. For these are the functions of priests, and cannot be granted to any unbeliever. Thus Christ has obtained for us, if we believe on Him, that we are not only His brethren, co-heirs and fellow-kings with Him, but also fellow priests with Him, who may boldly come into the presence of God in the spirit of faith and cry, Abba, Father!, pray for one another and do all things which we see done and prefigured in the outward and visible works of priests. But he who does not believe is not served by anything, nor does anything work for good to him, but he himself is a servant of all, and all things become evils to him, because God does not hear sinners. Who then can comprehend the lofty dignity of the Christian?” (Martin Luther, “Treatise on Christian Liberty,” op. cit., p. 325).

C. The primary responsibility God has committed to His priests (that is, to all Christians) is to preach the Word, and specifically, to spread the Good News of the gospel, the message of the

forgiveness of sins and eternal life in Christ.

- I Peter 2:9 - ...that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness and into His marvelous light.
- Luke 24:47 - ...and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.
- Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 16:15, John 20:21-23.
- “Mostly the functions of a priest are these: to teach, to preach and proclaim the Word of God, to baptize, to consecrate or administer the Eucharist, to bind and loose sins, to pray for others, to sacrifice, and to judge of all doctrine and spirits. Certainly these are splendid and royal duties. But *the first and foremost of all on which everything else depends, is the teaching of the Word of God.*” (Martin Luther, *Church and Ministry II*, op. cit., p. 21).
- “...priests are not called to make sacrifices that merit forgiveness of sins for the people, as in the Old Testament, but they are called to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments to the people” (*Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, para.7, p. 212, Tappert).
- “It is our single purpose to be a Christian church which strives to proclaim the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible, by which alone man can know the true God and the way to eternal life” (*CLC Statement of Faith and Purpose*, p. 3).

D. Christians may, in Christian liberty, carry out the duties of their priestly office in a variety of ways. They are free to use whatever opportunities God sets before them for preaching the Word, whenever and wherever these opportunities occur.

- 1 Peter 3:15 - But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.
- “...Christians are to be personally active in this ministry in every possible way which is not in violation of God’s will and ordinance. Mark 16:15; Matt. 28:18-20; John 20:21-23; 1 Cor. 3:21-23; 1 Pet. 2:9” (Thesis I, *Concerning Church and Ministry*, p. 25).

Examples of the different ways Christians may carry out the duties of their priestly office:³

In a private setting:

- ◇ At a social gathering Christians privately discuss with one another the great deeds God has done to accomplish the salvation of sinners.
- ◇ A member of the family or a Christian neighbor offers a sick person the comfort of the forgiveness of sins or in some other way strengthens his patience by pointing to the goodness of God our Savior.
- ◇ A Christian laborer in the course of his work day counters with a clear witness to Jesus a scoffer who blasphemes in his presence.
- ◇ The father of a family conducts a devotion in the presence of his wife and children.

In a public setting:

- ◇ The members of a Christian congregation -- assembled on a Sunday morning for worship -- join in confessing their sins, in speaking the Creed, in praying, and in singing the liturgy and hymns.
- ◇ During a Christmas Eve service children of the congregation publicly proclaim the praises of the Savior.
- ◇ On Examination Sunday and on Confirmation Day Catechumens make public confession of their faith in the Triune God.

E. As Christians carry out their priestly ministry they may do so with complete confidence that the Holy Spirit will use the gospel they preach to convert unbelievers and to comfort and edify

believers.

- Romans 1:16 - I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.
- Romans 10:17 - Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.
- Isaiah 40:9 - O Zion, you who bring good tidings, get up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, you who bring good tidings, lift up your voice with strength, lift it up, be not afraid; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!"
- Colossians 3:16 - Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.
- "To obtain such faith (in Christ) God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, He gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where He pleases, in those who hear the Gospel" (*Augsburg Confession*, Art. V).
- "Without these means, Word and Sacrament, we obtain none of these (spiritual blessings). For since the beginning of the world God has dealt with all the saints through His Word and, in addition, has given them external signs of grace. This I say that no one may venture to deal with God without these means or build for himself a special way to heaven, lest he fall and break his neck as the pope has done to his followers and still does, and as today the Anabaptists and other schismatic spirits do" (*What Luther Says*, 3 Vols., II, p. 915).
- "We must hear the Word that comes to us from without (das äusserliche Wort) and not despise it, as some think. For God will not come to you in your private room (Kämmerlein) and talk with you. It is decreed that the external Word (das äusserliche Wort) must be preached and come first. Thereupon, after one has heard the Word and taken it to heart, the Holy Spirit comes, the proper Schoolmaster, and gives power to the Word, so that it strikes root. . . . Therefore we must grant the Gospel this honor and concede to it this glory that it is a means and a way and, as it were, a pipe, through which the Holy Spirit flows and comes into our hearts. This is why St. Paul tells the Galatians that they have received the Holy Spirit, not through the works of the Law but through the preaching of faith (3:2). And, writing to the Romans, he draws this conclusion (10:17): "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." From this it follows that they act foolishly, yea, against God's order and institution, who despise and reject the external Word, thinking that the Holy Spirit and faith should come to them without means. It will indeed be a long time before that will happen" (*Ibid.*, p. 914f.).

F. The ministry of the gospel was established by God in Old Testament times when He gave the first gospel promise (the so-called "Protevangeli") to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Thus, when Jesus gave the great commission (Matt.28:18-20) He was not giving His believers a new assignment. Rather "He formally ratified the Vocation into which the Holy Spirit has placed every true believer since the beginning of time, gave it a New Testament definition, and by way of encouragement and exhortation placed Himself with His gifts and blessing at the head of His witnessing Body."⁴

- "It should at once be mentioned here that this New Testament ministry, the preaching of reconciliation in Christ, did not first begin with the coming of the Son of God into the flesh. We call the proclamation about the woman's seed the Protevangel because God through that one brief word offered mankind for their acceptance complete salvation in Christ. He there at once placed beside the old covenant of the law the new covenant of reconciliation and thereby without doing anything further established the ministry of reconciliation among men" (Professor John Schaller, "The Origin and Development of the New Testament Ministry," published in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol.78, January, 1981, pp. 30-51).
- "The Gospel in its very nature is a proclamation. It is a Word, a Message. St. Paul calls it the 'word of reconciliation,' (II Cor. 5:19) and cries: 'Woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel!' (I

Cor. 9:16). An ‘unpreached’ Gospel would be a contradiction in terms. Scripture itself is speech; for it is a speaking of God to him who reads it. Thus we may rightfully say that God through the very act of revelation of the Gospel instituted preaching” (*Concerning Church and Ministry*, p. 25).

G. A Christian’s “installation into office” as a priest of God happens for him or her personally the moment the Holy Spirit brings him/her to faith in Christ. With your *regeneration* comes your *authorization* to function as a priest of God.

- “For a priest, especially in the New Testament, was not made but was born. He was created, not ordained. He was born not indeed of flesh, but through a birth of the Spirit, by water and Spirit in the washing of regeneration [John 3:6f.; Titus 3:5f.]” (Martin Luther, *Church and Ministry II*, op. cit., p. 19).
- “For since the church owes its birth to the Word, is nourished, aided and strengthened by it, it is obvious that it cannot be without the Word. If it is without the Word it ceases to be a church. A Christian, thus, is born to the ministry of the Word in baptism” (Ibid., p. 37).
- “Through baptism all of us are consecrated to the priesthood, as St. Peter says in I Peter ii, ‘Ye are a royal priesthood, a priestly kingdom’ and the book of Revelation says, ‘Thou hast made us by Thy blood to be priests and kings’” (Martin Luther, “An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility,” op. cit., p. 66).

H. “The only restrictions laid upon God’s spiritual priests in the exercise of the Gospel ministry arise from the provisions for mutual love and good order as stipulated by the Scriptures. Since the Church is a Body, its members defer to one another and conform their activities to that which best serves the common good. The orderly processes of life in the Christian community, or congregation, are not to be disrupted by loveless individualism.”⁵

- Ephesians 4:3 - (Endeavor) to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
- Philippians 2:4 - Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Cf. also Philippians 1:27.
- 1 Corinthians 14:33,40 - For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints...Let all things be done decently and in order.

II. On the Public Ministry

A. Out of the body of believers comprising “the Universal Priesthood” God sees fit to select *some* believers to serve Him in an additional capacity, as *public ministers* of the gospel.

- Acts 13:2 - (The Holy Spirit sets apart Barnabas and Saul for their work as missionaries.)
- Ephesians 4:11 - (Paul lists apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers as special gifts which the ascended Christ gives to His Church.)
- Acts 20:28 - (Paul indicates that the “overseers” of the church at Ephesus were placed into their position by God the Holy Spirit.)

B. Today, individuals become “public ministers of the gospel” when they are set apart for this ministry by God through a divine call issued to them in His name by their fellow Christians. Without a divine call no one has the authority or right to function in the public ministry.

- Romans 10:15 - How shall they preach unless they are sent?
- Acts 1:23-26 - (Matthias is elected by the early Christians to fill the spot in the apostolic circle that was vacated by Judas.)
- Acts 6: 1-6 - (Seven men are chosen by the Jerusalem congregation to serve as deacons.)
- “True it is that all Christians have a common call and command to proclaim the Word of God, Rom.

10; to speak of it among themselves, Eph. 5; to admonish one another on the basis of God's Word, Heb. 5; and especially in the governing of one's house to exhort and admonish, Eph. 6. But the public ministry of Word and Sacrament is not entrusted to all Christians in general, 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4; since for that office there is need for a special call, Rom.10." (Martin Chemnitz, *Enchiridion*, 14, quoted in *Church and Ministry*, by Eugene Klug, p. 141).

- "For whoever comes out of the water of baptism can boast that he is already consecrated priest, bishop and pope, though it is not seemly that every one should exercise the office. Nay, just because we are all in like manner priests, no one must put himself forward and undertake, without our consent and election, to do what is in the power of all of us. For what is common to all, no one dare take upon himself without the will and the command of community; and should it happen that one chosen for such an office were deposed for malfeasance, he would then be just what he was before he held office" (M. Luther, "An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility," op. cit., p. 68).
- "Let every one, therefore, who knows himself to be a Christian be assured of this, and apply it to himself,-- that we are all priests, and there is no difference between us; that is to say, we have the same power in respect to the Word and all the sacraments. However, no one may make use of this power except by the consent of the community or by the call of a superior. For what is the common property of all, no individual may arrogate to himself, unless he be called" (Martin Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity," Ordination, *Works of Martin Luther*, op. cit., p. 282f.).
- "It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call" (*Augsburg Confession*, Art. XIV).

C. The function of the public ministry is identical in content to that of the universal priesthood. That function is to preach and teach the Word, especially, to share the Good News of the gospel, the message of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life in Jesus Christ. (Cf. I. C. above).

- 2 Timothy 4:1-2 - I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.
- 1 Timothy 4:11,13,15-16 - These things command and teach...Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine...Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. 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.
- 1 Corinthians 2:1-2 - And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.
- 1 Corinthians 9:16 - Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!

D. What distinguishes the public ministry from the general ministry of the gospel into which all Christians are called is the fact that those who serve in the public ministry do so in the name of other Christians.

- "The Public Ministry is not a function different in content than the Ministry of the Keys which, as we have seen, is the inalienable possession of every child of God. We call it 'public,' but not in the sense that it is either restricted to, or characterized by, an administration of the Keys that is public rather than private or hidden ... If the Public Ministry is distinct in character, it is because those who serve therein function, not only in their own right as disciples of Christ, but in behalf of, in the name of, and by request of, their fellow-Christians. It is the Gospel service performed, not by right of an individual priesthood alone, but vicariously for many spiritual priests" (*Concerning Church and Ministry*, p. 29).
- "Out of the multitude of Christians some must be selected who shall lead the others by virtue of the special gifts and aptitude which God gives them for the office. Thus St. Paul writes (Eph. 4:11,12): 'And His gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors

and teachers, for the equipment of the saints' (this means those who are already Christians and baptized priests), 'for the work of the ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ' (that is, the Christian congregation or church) ...This is the way to distinguish between the office of preaching, or the ministry, and the general priesthood of all baptized Christians. The preaching office is no more than a public service which happens to be conferred upon someone by the entire congregation, all the members of which are priests" (M. Luther, *Selected Psalms II*, LW, Vol.13, p. 332).

E. All who serve under a divine call -- not only pastors, but others too -- are exercising the functions of the public ministry⁶ and are to be esteemed very highly in love by their fellow-Christians for their work's sake.

- 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 - Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 - And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake.
- "The office of the Public Ministry is not limited to any one divinely fixed form as such, for example, the outward form of the 'Pfarramt' or pastoral office. In Christian liberty, as circumstances require and as the Lord supplies diversity of gifts, operations and ministries (1 Cor. 12:4-6 ...; 12:28 ...) the Church may separate the various functions of the Public Ministry of the Word and apportion them to whatever number of qualified persons it may choose to call..." (Thesis III, *Concerning Church and Ministry*, p. 32f.).
- "The government of a church embraces many functions, all of which, when the number of the believers is very large, cannot well be taken care of by one person or even a few. Therefore Christians (in order that all things might be done decently, in order, and for edification, when the number of people in the church greatly increased) began to divide the functions of the ministry of the Word among certain grades of church workers in order that everyone might have his definite post where, by performing certain functions of the ministry of the Word, he could serve the congregation. Thus at first the apostles [at Jerusalem] took care of both the ministry of the Word and the sacraments and at the same time also of the distribution and administration of the alms. Later, however, when the number of the disciples increased, they transferred to others that part of the ministry of the Word which concerned the alms. These men were called deacons, that is, servants. The reason why they did this was, as they themselves stated, that they might give themselves 'continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4). This first institution of the grades and orders of the ministry of the Word in the apostolic church shows what should be the cause, nature, manner, purpose, and use of such grades or orders, namely, that according to the needs of the congregation the individual functions of the ministry of the Word might be performed for edification more easily, more correctly, more assiduously, more orderly, and with a certain dignity...But all these grades the apostles include under the names of elders and overseers....In 1 Tim.5:17 Paul mentions two kinds of elders, of whom some labored in the Word and doctrine, while others took care of the management of the church...But here we must add by way of a reminder: (1) That there is no divine command prescribing which grades or orders and how many of them there must be. (2) That at the time of the apostles there were not in all congregations, or not always the same, or just so many grades or orders, as may be inferred from the letters of Paul addressed to various congregations. (3) That at the time of the apostles these grades were not divided in such a way that frequently one and the same person did not take over and administer all the functions belonging to the ministry of the Word, as we know from apostolic history. At the time of the apostles these grades therefore were free and the chief interest was in order, propriety, and edification; but at that time special gifts, such as tongues, prophecy, the apostolate, and miracles, were given to certain persons by God. However, the grades of which we treated so far were not an arrangement beyond and outside the ministry of the Word and the sacraments, but the

very functions of the ministry of the Word were divided among these grades” (Martin Chemnitz, *Examen concil. Trid.*, pp. 475f., quoted by C.F.W. Walther in *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, published in *Concordia Heritage Series*, p. 51ff.).

- “The office of a [Christian] schoolteacher, insofar as he deals with the Word of God, is a church ministry too ...” (ibid., p. 90)

F. Functions within the public ministry that involve Christians in the preaching and teaching of God’s Word (such as pastors and teachers) are especially noble in character. Those called to serve in this capacity (the care and feeding of souls) are to be accorded a special measure of honor and love, for the Lord’s sake.

- 1 Timothy 5:17 - Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.
- Hebrews 13:17 - Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.
- Hebrews 13:7 - Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.
- “But (the office of preaching) is in truth the highest office of all, on which all other offices depend and from which they follow; on the other hand, where this office does not exist none of the others can follow...Therefore, the man to whom has been committed the office of preaching has committed to him the highest office in the Christian Church” (M. Luther, “The Right and Power of a Christian Congregation To Judge All Teaching And to Call Teachers,” *Works of Martin Luther*, op. cit., IV, p. 84)
- “But the estate of which I am thinking is that which has the office of preaching and the service of Word and Sacraments, which gives the Spirit and all blessedness such as one cannot attain by any chanting or pomp. It includes the work of pastors, teachers, preachers, lectors, priests (whom men call chaplains), sacristans, school-teachers, and whatever other work belongs to these offices and persons. This the Scriptures highly exalt and praise” (M. Luther, “A Sermon on Keeping Children in School,” ibid., p. 143).
- “Who can tell all the glory and the virtue that a real and faithful pastor has in the eyes of God? There is no dearer treasure, nor any more precious thing on earth or in this life than a real and faithful pastor or preacher ...” (ibid., p. 146).
- “A true pastor, then, serves men in body and soul, in property and honor. See now how he serves God and what a glorious sacrifice, or service, he renders; for by his word and his work the kingdom of God is maintained in the world; so, too are kept the Name and the honor and the glory of God, the true knowledge of God, the right faith and understanding of Christ, the gifts and works and power of the Holy Spirit, the true and saving use of baptism and the Sacrament, the right and pure doctrine of the Gospel, the right way of disciplining and crucifying the body. Who could ever give high enough praise to any one of these things?” (ibid., p. 149f.).
- “Not, says Paul (2 Cor.4:5), that we lord it over you; but we serve you for Christ’s sake. I am not installed to rule any Christian as lord, but to be his minister. One is the Lord. But although ministers are servants, yet we must obey them and humble ourselves before them for the sake of the Lord. On the other hand, they are to serve us and also bear our infirmities also for the sake of the Lord” (*What Luther Says*, op. cit., p. 926).

G. God blesses the Church with pastors and teachers in order that -- through their gospel-centered ministry (their laboring “in word and doctrine”) -- the body of Christ may be strengthened in true faith, protected from soul-destroying error, and prepared for lives of fruitful service in the Lord’s kingdom.

- Ephesians 4:11-12 - And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists

- and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. (KJV)⁷
- 2 Timothy 2:2 - 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.
 - 2 Timothy 4:2 - Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.
 - Titus 1:7,9 - A bishop must...(hold) fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.
 - 2 Timothy 3:16 - All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.
 - John 15:5 - I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him bears much fruit. (Cf. also Psalm 1:3).
- “Out of the multitude of Christians some must be selected who shall lead the others by virtue of the special gifts and aptitude which God gives them for the office. Thus St. Paul writes (Eph. 4:11,12): ‘And His gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipment of the saints’ (this means those who are already Christians and baptized priests), ‘for the work of the ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ’ (that is, the Christian congregation or church).” (M. Luther, *Selected Psalms II*, op. cit.).
 - “Christendom must have men who are able to floor their adversaries and take armor and equipment from the devil, putting him to shame. But this calls for strong warriors who have complete control of Scripture, can refute a false interpretation, know how to wrest the sword they wield, that is, their Bible passages, from the hands of the adversaries and beat them back with them. Not all people can be so adept at defending doctrine and the articles of faith. Therefore we must have preachers and teachers who daily study and search Scriptures and can fight on behalf of others. Yet every Christian should certainly be so well armed that for himself he is sure of his faith and doctrine, and he should be so firmly grounded on passages from God’s Word that he is able to hold his own against the devil and to defend himself when people want to convert him to some other view. In this way he helps to uphold and defend the doctrine” (*What Luther Says*, Vol. I, p. 419).
 - “There is a great difference ... between a simple preacher of the faith and an expositor of Scripture, or as St. Paul puts it, a prophet. A simple preacher, to be sure, is in possession of so many clear passages and texts from translations that he can know and teach Christ, lead a holy life and preach to others. But to interpret Scripture, to treat it independently, and to dispute with those who cite it incorrectly, to that he is unequal; that cannot be done without languages. Yet there must always be such prophets in the Church, who are able to treat and expound the Scriptures and also to dispute; a saintly life and correct doctrine are not enough. Hence languages are absolutely necessary in the Church, just as prophets or expositors are necessary, although not every Christian or preacher need be such a prophet, as St. Paul says, I Corinthians xii and Ephesians iv” (M. Luther, “To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish Christian Schools,” *Works of Martin Luther*, op. cit., p. 117).

Conclusion

We began this paper by asking: “What is the distinction that Scripture draws between the universal priesthood and the public ministry and what is their relationship to each other?” It is hoped that the Scriptures we’ve considered and the citations we’ve read from Luther and other sources have brought the answer to this question into clearer focus.

In summary: Each Christian man, woman, and child, as a member of the universal priesthood, has been granted the glorious privilege of preaching and proclaiming to the world the Good News of Christ the Savior of sinners. They are to actively proclaim the praises of Him who called them out of darkness into His marvelous light, using every opportunity God sets before them to do this. From among this innumerable company of holy, blood-bought priests the Lord sees fit to set some apart

(through a divine call), thereby placing them in charge of the public administration of the Means of Grace. “The Public Ministry is not a function different in content than the Ministry of the Keys which, as we have seen, is the inalienable possession of every child of God.”⁸ It is distinct and different only in the sense that it is carried out in behalf of and in the name of other Christians. Finally: Among those whom God calls into the public ministry are some whose particular task it is to “labor in word and doctrine.” These have the responsibility and privilege of strengthening and building up their fellow-Christians in their faith in Christ, and preparing them for lives of fruitful service in His kingdom -- through faithful preaching and teaching of God’s Word.

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Listing of writings from which excerpts have been taken in the preparation of this paper:

- ◇ *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*, Edward W.A. Koehler, CPH, 1939.
- ◇ *Church and Ministry, The Role of Church, Pastor and People from Luther to Walther*, Eugene F.A. Klug, CPH, 1993.
- ◇ *Concerning Church and Ministry* (CLC confessional document).
- ◇ *Concerning the Ministry*, Martin Luther, LW, Vol. 40.
- ◇ “The Form of a Christian Congregation” (essay by C.F.W. Walther), *Concordia Heritage Series*, CPH, 1961.
- ◇ “Ephesians 4:11-12 Reconsidered,” Philip J. Secker, *Logia*, Vol. V, No. 2, Eastertide 1996, p. 60f.
- ◇ *Statement of Faith and Purpose of the CLC*, 1969.
- ◇ *The Book of Concord* (Tappert), Fortress Press, 1959.
- ◇ “The Origin and Development of the New Testament Ministry” (essay by Prof. John Schaller), *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 78, Jan. 1981.
- ◇ *What Luther Says, An Anthology*, Ewald M. Plass, 3 Volumes, CPH, 1959.
- ◇ *Works of Martin Luther*, Philadelphia Edition, 7 Volumes, Fortress Press, 1982.

Notes

<sup>1</sup> For example: Psalm 100:2a, Isaiah 61:6, Romans 12:1, Galatians 5:13b, Matthew 20:26.

<sup>2</sup> A number of essays have been written over the years on the topic of the universal priesthood and the public ministry. Here is a partial listing of them:

- “The Relation of the Public Ministry and the Priesthood of All Believers in Regard to Current Lutheran Debates,” David Lau (1995 CLC Great Lakes Pastoral Conference Essay); reprinted in the *Journal of Theology*, Vol.35, #4, pp. 2-26).
- “Using Lay Ministry More Effectively,” by Douglas Libby (1993 CLC General Pastoral Conference Essay).
- “Furthering Lay Member Involvement in Church Work (Locally and Synodically),” by Jonathan Wiechmann (1993 West Central Delegate Conference Essay).
- “There is a Need to Give Greater Emphasis to the Doctrine of the Priesthood of Believers,” by James Burkhardt (1992 Southeastern Delegate Conference Essay); reprinted in the *Journal of Theology*, Vol.32, #2, pp. 23-30.
- “Equipping the Saints for the Work of Ministry,” by Norbert Reim (1985 CLC General Pastoral Conference Essay).
- “Understanding, Appreciating, and Exercising the Priesthood of Believers,” by Robert List (1982 Minnesota Delegate Conference Essay).
- “The Lutheran Ministry As Set Forth in the Book of Concord, As To Its Doctrinal Aspects,” by H.C. Duehlmeier (1980 Convention Essay #1).
- “The Lutheran Ministry As Set Forth in the Book of Concord...,” by Robert Reim (1980 Convention Essay #2).
- “The Lutheran Ministry As Set Forth in the Book of Concord, Its Significance for Our Day,” by

- L.W. Schierenbeck (1980 Convention Essay #3).
- “The Book of Concord and the Doctrine of Church and Ministry,” *Journal of Theology*, Vol. 20, #1 (pp. 2-22) and #3 (pp. 2-9), by R.E. Wehrwein
  - “Clergy and Laity -- Class Conflict?,” by Roland A. Gurgel (1962 CLC Convention Essay).
    - <sup>3</sup> Examples taken (with some variation in wording) from Professor John Schaller’s essay “The Origin and Development of the New Testament Ministry,” reprinted in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol.78, January, 1981, pp. 30-51.
    - <sup>4</sup> *Concerning Church and Ministry*, p. 26.
    - <sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 27.
    - <sup>6</sup> Examples of offices in our midst (in addition to parish pastors) that fall under the public ministry “umbrella”: Christian Day School teachers, Sunday School teachers, church elders and deacons, congregational officers, members of the Praesidium of the CLC, elected/appointed members of our synodical boards and committees, professors at ILC.
    - <sup>7</sup> I’m inclined to agree with the interpretation set forth by Philip J. Secker on this passage: “The sense of the full phrase [“for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry”] ... is: for the carrying out or fulfilling of the functions or responsibilities of one’s office. The meaning of the sentence is that Christ gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, so that they might carry out the offices bestowed upon them. This is how the Lutheran Symbols understand the passage in the only reference they make to it: ‘Paul [in Ephesians 4:11-12] enumerates pastors and teachers among the gifts belonging exclusively to the church and he adds that they are given for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ. (“Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope,” para .67, p. 331 in Tappert) ... The practical implications of verses 11-16 for the church are these: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers are the gift of the exalted Christ to the church. Christ gave these gifts to the church not merely to equip the people of God to do practical service, but to equip them in every appropriate sense. They are to do this by carrying out the functions appropriate to the offices that Christ has bestowed upon them. Prophets, for example, are to prophesy, evangelists are to evangelize, pastor-teachers are to pastor and teach. When these offices are carried out, the body of Christ will be built up ‘through the due activity of each part’ (4:16 NEB).” (Philip J. Secker, “Ephesians 4:11-12 Reconsidered,” *Logia*, Vol. V, No.2, Eastertide 1996, p. 60f.)
    - <sup>8</sup> *Concerning Church and Ministry*, p. 29.
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### EDITORIAL: CORRECTION AND APOLOGY

In the March 1997 issue of the JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY an article entitled “Thunderbolts from Heaven: Luther’s *Bondage of the Will*” was published. For various reasons, for which the editor is ultimately responsible (one being the recognized scholarship of the author), the article did not receive the editing it should have, but was basically published as it was. This was a serious mistake, for which the editor apologizes. In an attempt to make amends, and to clarify for all a doctrinal position of the CLC which the article in question makes unclear, the following is now presented. References not otherwise identified are to the March 1997 issue. Readers are asked to make the necessary corrections.

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In the introductory material (10-11), there is a factual error in dating. Erasmus’ attack on Luther, *De Libero Arbitrio*, came in 1524; Luther’s response, *De Servo Arbitrio*, in 1525. Later on, in the notes (25-26), a citation from F. Bente’s *Historical Introductions* (Trig. 203) is made of sections of two successive paragraphs. Under Bente’s heading, “230. Agreement of Articles XI and II,” the first cited paragraph ends: “But the truth is, the Second fully confirms and corroborates the Eleventh, and *vice versa*; for both maintain the *sola gratia* as well as the *universalis gratia*.” The next paragraph begins: “Both articles teach that in every respect grace alone is not confined to some men only, but is

a grace for all.” The JOURNAL article mistakenly states, in referring to this, “Both articles (I, Of Original Sin, and II, Of Free-will and Conversion...”

In 1880 the Synodical Conference was greatly disturbed when Prof. Schmidt attacked the scriptural doctrine of election as it was taught by C.F.W. Walther. Schmidt’s use of the truncated expression “elected in view of faith,” as taught in the Pontoppidan (misspelled in the JOURNAL article) catechism, became the bone of contention. The context of the forthcoming struggle was the doctrine of election, primarily, and then also of conversion, not the doctrine of justification, as suggested by the JOURNAL article. In addition, the JOURNAL article stated: “The Ohio Synod ... broke with Missouri. The Norwegian Synod broke with Missouri ...” (26), as though these were identical actions. The Ohio Synod supported Prof. Schmidt’s unfortunate attempt to explain the unexplainable in the doctrine of election and withdrew from membership in and fellowship with the Synodical Conference, not merely from the Missouri Synod, in 1881. The Norwegian Synod, on the other hand, because it wanted to settle the controversy within its own midst, withdrew from the Synodical Conference in 1883, but did not withdraw from fellowship. Prof. Koehler reports: “The Norwegian Synod, threatened with a split, withdrew in 1883 but maintained cordial relations with the Conference until 1912, when ... it adopted the Madison Theses ...; the so-called ‘minority’ opponents of this unionistic move formed a small body of their own and in 1920 rejoined the Synodical Conference” (J.P. Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 160). Aaberg writes of “the (Norwegian) Synod’s decision, made at its district conventions in 1883, to withdraw from the Synodical Conference in the hope that this might avoid a split in the Synod. The hand of fellowship, however, was not withdrawn from the Synodical Conference” (T.A. Aaberg, *A City Set on a Hill*, 31-32). Also, the Madison Settlement, referred to by Prof. Koehler, was an attempt to make a compromise between contradictory teachings within the Norwegian Synod: a true and a false doctrine of election and a true and a false doctrine of conversion, not justification, as stated in the JOURNAL article (28). Although the article cites Aaberg as the source for its statement, an examination of pages 49-51 in Aaberg’s book, a section titled “An Analysis of ‘The Settlement,’” makes it clear that the issues were election and conversion.

There are quotations on page 19 of the JOURNAL article which seem to be quotations from Luther: “universal dominion of sin” and “the doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ disproves ‘freewill,’ as shown in Romans 3:21-26.” These are captions or section headings provided by the translators, Packer-Johnston (P-J, 278, 288). There are also quotations from Luther which should have been cited; e.g., “Luther noted, ‘you have broken our agreement,’” (27). This may be an approximation, but not exact. Also, “Luther said that if we use the gospel without the law, the individual will look at us the way a cow looks at a newly painted fence” is not footnoted. Luther wrote: “But what sort of wisdom is it that knows nothing about the final cause and the efficient cause? So far as our having a knowledge of the form is concerned, a cow likewise knows her abode and (as the German proverb has it) looks at and recognizes her door” (Lectures on Genesis, LW 1:24). Luther appears to use the proverb as an example of failure to comprehend because one looks only at the outward appearance. Did he also say it of using the gospel without the law? Better editing should have demanded a footnote.

The statement in the article that “... Luther is dealing with public false doctrine, so neither the 8th Commandment nor Matthew 18 apply” (12) cannot be supported, nor is it the position of the CLC. It is indeed true that public false doctrine may and should be publicly corrected and that doing so is in and of itself not a transgression of the 8th Commandment, nor of Matthew 18. All too often false teachers hide behind the 8th Commandment when their false doctrinal statements are publicly corrected from Scripture. But to say that the 8th Commandment and Matthew 18 do not apply is saying too much, for we are not to transgress these words of God in any of our dealing, public or private.

The JOURNAL article also states: “Faith is sustained and good works prompted by the Holy



Spirit continuing to work in law and gospel” (20). This statement demonstrates a failure in this instance to distinguish properly between law and gospel. Only the gospel is the means of grace by which the Holy Spirit creates and sustains faith and prompts good works in the believer. The law only accuses and condemns; it does not sustain faith or prompt good works.

The JOURNAL article sums up its discussion of the content of Luther’s *The Bondage of the Will* by commenting: “Therefore the doctrine of the un-free will is the greatest possible comfort,” with a reference to the book. The section involved does not speak of comfort in the doctrine of the un-free will, as such; rather it speaks of the comfort in the grace and mercy of God:

For my own part, I frankly confess that even if it were possible, I should not wish to have free choice given to me, or to have anything left in my own hands by which I might strive toward salvation. For, on the one hand, I should be unable to stand firm and keep hold of it amid so many adversities and perils and so many assaults of demons, seeing that even one demon is mightier than all men, and no man at all could be saved; and on the other hand, even if there were no perils or adversities or demons, I should nevertheless have to labor under perpetual uncertainty and to fight as one beating the air, since even if I lived and worked to eternity, my conscience would never be assured and certain how much it ought to do to satisfy God. For whatever work might be accomplished, there would always remain an anxious doubt whether it pleased God or whether he required something more, as the experience of all self-justifiers proves, and as I myself learned to my bitter cost through so many years. But now, since God has taken my salvation out of my hands into his, making it depend on his choice and not mine, and has promised to save me, not by my own work or exertion but by his grace and mercy, I am assured and certain both that he is faithful and will not lie to me, and also that he is too great and powerful for any demons or adversities to be able to break him or to snatch me from him. “No one,” he says, “shall snatch them out of my hand, because my Father who has given them to me is greater than all” (John 10:28f.). So it comes about that, if not all, some and indeed many are saved, whereas by the power of free choice none at all would be saved, but all would perish together. Moreover, we are also certain and sure that we please God, not by the merit of our own working, but by the favor of his mercy promised to us, and that if we do less than we should or do it badly, he does not hold this against us, but in a fatherly way pardons and corrects us. Hence the glorying of all the saints in their God. (LW, 33:288-289)

Thus we rightly conclude, with Luther, that the greatest possible comfort is in the doctrine of salvation by grace alone. Luther’s book, therefore, is a very great source of strength when we are confronted with the many and varied types of synergism presented to us in the world. Instead of turning to the “Kokomo Controversy” in the WELS, the article would have served better to apply Luther’s words toward the ongoing struggle against synergism.

The JOURNAL article discussed an unfortunate event in the history of Faith Lutheran Congregation of Kokomo, Indiana, about 15 years ago. The present writer confesses that he paid little or no attention to the event at the time it was reported in *Christian News* or elsewhere. There is no intention at this date to seek to unravel the entire story. However, a great deal of material has been provided to this writer, material that convinces that much of what was reported in the JOURNAL article under present consideration cannot be supported or upheld, but, rather, disavowed.

The three statements unfortunately and inaccurately attributed to Prof. Meyer’s *Ministers of Christ* (20) are in reality inaccurate paraphrases. They were written by a lay member of the Kokomo congregation, who was questioning the WELS doctrine of objective justification as it was presented by the local pastor. The fourth statement was also a paraphrase not from any WELS source. The statements were called “a caricature of objective justification” by WELS president Carl H. Mischke. The Panel of Review of the Southeastern District of the WELS reported: “Here the panel feels itself compelled to distinguish between form and content. While the form of the Four Statements is

inadequate, the doctrine of objective justification that it grapples with is scriptural.” Prof. Siegbert Becker, in a paper on objective justification delivered in Chicago on November 9, 1982, wrote: “Every one of the statements can be understood correctly, even though one must swallow a little hard to accede to the fourth. However, because the statements were used to discredit the truth of universal justification and to cause other laymen to doubt this teaching it is especially necessary to point out that the statements do not contain false doctrine” (Becker, 15). The WELS wrestled with a difficult case and upheld the doctrine of justification correctly. There we shall let the matter rest.

The author of the JOURNAL article is concerned that the term “objective justification,” as used in the WELS and also in the CLC, can be understood to teach “universalism,” namely that eventually and finally every living human being will experience salvation. However, we understand “objective justification” to mean simply that God declared the whole world to be righteous through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and for no other cause than His own grace, mercy, and love. By the term “subjective justification” we mean the wondrous work of the Holy Spirit by which He creates faith in the hearts of believers, and that this faith is the “arm” by which justification is brought to the individual.

Though we are saddened by the errors in doctrine we have observed in the WELS over the past 30 years, we rejoice that as far as can be determined that church body has remained true in its understanding and doctrine regarding justification. (Cf. “This We Believe: A Statement of Belief of the WELS,” 1967, 1975, 11.)

Our first editor, Prof. E. Reim, wrote on the use of the term “objective justification”:

What are our findings? We have seen that the terminology of an objective and a subjective justification is common property within our Synodical Conference. There is no reason why we should not use it in our discussions with each other. Nevertheless we still have a preference for the simpler terminology of a general or universal, and of a personal justification. To use these simpler terms will show that we are concerned about the substance of the doctrine rather than one single mode of expressing it. ...

But no apologies need be offered for the use that has been made of the term. It is certainly not a local idiom, indicating a self-willed separatistic trend. It is a term that serves well for the uncovering and rejection of the trends of subjectivism, against which our age is by no means immune. Therefore neither the term nor the fact of an objective justification of all mankind should be permitted to fall into oblivion. (E. Reim, “A History of the Term ‘Objective Justification,’” WLQ, 52:81-82)

With this we heartily agree. May the Lord mercifully guide us and guard us that we may not lose this most precious doctrine, for Jesus’ sake.

- John Lau

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## **BOOK REVIEWS**

### Showers of Blessing

“I will cause showers to come down in their season; there shall be showers of blessing” (Ezekiel 34:26).

In recent years God has been using Northwestern Publishing House in Milwaukee to shower down on us blessings in the form of precious theological treasures from the past. I am referring

especially to seven full-sized volumes of doctrinal essays, most of which had once appeared in the *Quartalschrift* or its successor, the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*.

***Our Great Heritage*** is a three-volume set edited by Lyle W. Lange and priced at \$95.99 in the latest Northwestern catalog. What you get in these volumes is theology: doctrinal, exegetical, historical, and practical theology, written by such past and present scholars as John Schaller, August Pieper, John Meyer, Paul Peters, Siegbert Becker, Carl Lawrenz, Wilbert Gawrisch, Armin Schuetze, and many others. Most of these essays have appeared in print before, but some have not been previously available.

Of special interest to the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) are the essays of two men instrumental in the forming of the CLC: Edmund Reim and Otto Eckert, Sr. Essays of theirs that are included:

What Constitutes False Doctrine? - Edmund Reim;  
The Historical Background of the Ecumenical Creeds - Edmund Reim;  
Crooked Sticks at Augsburg A.D. 1530 - Otto Eckert, Sr.;  
Ancient Heresies in Modern Garb - Edmund Reim;  
In an Instant and in a Moment - Otto Eckert, Sr.;  
Justification -- Ethical or Judicial? - Edmund Reim;  
The Relation of Time to Eternity in God's Dealing with Man as Concerning the Doctrine of Election - Otto Eckert, Sr.;  
Our Christian Liberty and Its Proper Use - Edmund Reim.

No doubt anyone who has been a regular reader of the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* or *Quartalschrift* will find in these volumes some of his favorite or most useful essays. Among such I would have to include August Pieper's "The Book of Job in Its Significance for Preaching and the Care of Souls," "Luther on the Form and Scope of the Mosaic Law" by Paul Peters, "The Christological Flesh-Spirit Antithesis" by Siegbert Becker, "The Doctrine of Election as Taught by the Seventeenth Century Lutheran Dogmaticians" by Robert Preus, and "Teaching Law and Gospel" by William Fischer.

***Essays on Church Fellowship*** is a 1996 volume edited by Curtis Jahn (\$31.99 in the Northwestern catalog).

Besides essays that had been published in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, this book reprints several popular pamphlets on the subject of church fellowship, plus two previously unpublished essays, "History of Fellowship Practice in the Wisconsin Synod" by Wayne Mueller and "Joining Together in Prayer and the Lord's Supper" by Armin Schuetze.

Two essays written by persons who later joined the CLC are included: "The Strength of Christian Unity" by Edmund Reim and "Concerning Christian Brotherhood and Christian Fellowship: Their Relation and Certain Practical Questions Involved" by Egbert Schaller.

No doubt a careful study of these essays would reveal the specific doctrinal difference between the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) and the CLC on the matter of terminating church fellowship. Certainly the consistent use of the term "persistent" on the part of WELS essayists to describe "errorist" allows for the view approved by the WELS in 1959, namely, that "termination of fellowship is called for when you have reached the conviction that admonition is of no further avail." The term "impasse" is also found repeatedly in the WELS literature of that time to describe what happens when according to human judgment admonition is of no further avail.

In contrast, the CLC stated in its confession *Concerning Church Fellowship*: "Suspension of an established fellowship is to take place when it has been ascertained that a person or group is causing divisions and offenses through a false position in doctrine or practice." Also: "We reject the opinion that separation from errorists is dependent upon the course of admonition."

It is good to have in one handy volume the many different essays that were written on this topic.

On many aspects of the doctrine of fellowship the WELS and the CLC are in agreement, over against the wide-open syncretism of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the escalating unionism of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod (LC-MS) with its approval of prayer fellowship with errorists and its theory about "levels of fellowship." Such errors are clearly shown to be errors in this volume.

The most recent collection of doctrinal essays from the past is found in a three-volume set entitled *The Wauwatosa Theology*, edited by Curtis Jahn. Except for an interesting and helpful essay by Martin Westerhaus introducing the three Wauwatosa theologians, John P. Koehler, August Pieper, and John Schaller, the contents of these three volumes is pure Wauwatosa theology, that is, writings of the talented triumvirate who taught together from 1908 to 1920 at the Wauwatosa Seminary of the Wisconsin Synod. The particular strong point of these three men was their method of careful Scripture study and the derivation of doctrine directly from Scripture instead of the then-prevailing method of citing Bible passages to prove doctrines already established by the dogmaticians.

Section One of Volume One is entitled "Survey and Samples." Most of the material in this section has not been available in English before now. In this section all three seminary professors are allowed to present to us their method of deriving and proving doctrine from Scripture and from Scripture alone. Psalm 119:105: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Martin Luther himself followed this method, as he confessed in the Smalcald Articles: "The Word of God shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel."

Lutherans after Luther, however, often found themselves trying to derive and prove doctrine by citing human authorities, such as Martin Luther, the Lutheran confessions, and the Lutheran dogmaticians. The great Election or Predestination Controversy among American Lutherans at the close of the nineteenth century exposed the dangers of basing doctrine on the opinions of the fathers. Each side in the controversy was able to cite human authorities for its position, for many of the Lutheran teachers of the past had misread or misapplied Scripture in their zeal to oppose the Calvinistic double predestination theory. How could the controversy be resolved? Only by going back to Scripture and studying thoroughly and exegetically the Scripture passages that dealt with this doctrine, specifically Ephesians 1: 3-12 and Romans 8: 28-39. Only through such Scripture study can one become firmly grounded on God's truth.

August Pieper said it this way, and his associates happily agreed with him wholeheartedly: "Whoever stands on Scripture no longer needs any man as interpreter; he has enough in the Holy Spirit, even if he is a simple child. If that is not established as fact, then the witness of Scripture about its own clarity and efficacy falls down. If we necessarily use the fathers to acquire the correct understanding of Scripture, then it is no longer true that God's Word is a lamp to our feet, that it makes wise the simple, and makes us more learned than all our teachers; then consistency demands that we become Catholic and take the pope as our sole infallible interpreter of Scripture" (Vol. I, 117).

For some reason three articles already printed in *Our Great Heritage* are repeated in *The Wauwatosa Theology*. This is unfortunate, for when a person shells out \$100 for a set of books, he does not want to buy something he already has. The three repeated articles are "The Hidden God" and "The Origin and Development of the New Testament Ministry" by John Schaller and "Concerning the Doctrine of the Church and Its Ministry" by August Pieper. No doubt it was felt that a collection of Wauwatosa theology simply had to include these three fine essays, even though they were printed in a previous collection.

As mentioned above, some of the essays in this collection have never appeared in English translation before. Other translations have been printed in the *Quartalschrift (Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly)*, *Faith-Life* of the Protestant Conference, and our own *Journal of Theology*.

Those of us who have been around for a while will delight in rediscovering and rereading old favorites like August Pieper's "Anniversary Reflections" and his 1919 convention essay, "The True Reconstruction of the Church." J. P. Koehler's ground-breaking "The Analogy of Faith" is included as well as John Schaller's "The Kingdom of God." As we might expect, special emphasis is given to the proper relationship between law and gospel, the church and ministry controversy, and thorough exegesis of such themes as the glory of the Lord, the veil of Moses, the hardening of the heart,

predictive prophecy, and universal justification.

What treasures we have here! Treasures that are becoming increasingly rare in a world where confessional Lutheranism seems to be losing its influence and zeal. I wish I could afford to give this set to every young pastor and seminary student in our church body. But perhaps they will appreciate it more if they have to work and pay for it themselves.

And here is a bonus, still one more treasure from the past unearthed by Northwestern Publishing House: *Studies in the Augsburg Confession* by John P. Meyer, originally a series of articles that appeared in the *Northwestern Lutheran*. The price: \$25.99.

- David Lau