

Duties of the Pastor: Expectations and Evaluations

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“How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” (Romans 10:15)

Our theology informs our understanding of the Office of Holy Ministry.

I would like, in this essay, to explore this thesis by first establishing it in contrasting the Lutheran and Romanist understanding of the office in the Reformation, and then applying it to the theological assaults brought to the Lutheran Church by various new ecclesiologies.

The Priesthood of Perpetual Sacrifice, The Pre-Reformation Office

While the Roman Catholic Church never had a monolithic doctrine, the prominent soteriology of the Middle Ages was a bank-like system of merit administered by the church, and an ontological understanding of grace that imparted strength to earn this merit. Heaven was a vault of goodness, filled with the good works of Christ, Mary, and the other saints, and the Pope held the key. This understanding stood behind the selling of indulgences, the sacrifice of the mass, the existence of purgatory, the work of the various orders, the cult of the saints, and the vocation of priest.

Through the sacrament of ordination the Roman priest received the indelible character and could, on behalf of the pope, effect the sacrifice of the mass whereby God’s grace is infused into Christians, repairing his nature. The priest offered the unbloody sacrifice of the Mass, imparting grace to the participant which empowers them towards meritorious good works. The Mass is also sacrificed for the dead who are still paying down their debt in purgatory.

The Council of Trent, which has anathemas for everyone, and especially anyone who would get close to the Gospel, has an anathema for denying that the Words of Institution institute a new priesthood.

If any one saith, that by those words, Do this for the commemoration of me (Luke xxii. 19), Christ did not institute the apostles priests; or, did not ordain that they, and other priests should offer His own body and blood; let him be anathema.¹

¹ The Council of Trent, Session 22, Canon 2. See also, for the background, the preceding chapter, “Session 22, Chapter 1, On the institution of the most holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Forasmuch as, under the former Testament, according to the testimony of the Apostle Paul, there was no perfection, because of the weakness of the Levitical priesthood; there was need, God, the Father of mercies, so ordaining, that another priest should rise, according to the order of Melchisedech, our Lord Jesus Christ, who might consummate, and lead to what is perfect, as many as were to be sanctified. He, therefore, our God and Lord, though He was about to offer Himself once on the altar of the cross unto God the Father, by means of his death, there to operate an eternal redemption; nevertheless, because that His priesthood was not to be extinguished by His death, in the last supper, on the night in which He was betrayed,--that He might leave, to His own beloved Spouse the Church, a visible sacrifice, such as the nature of man requires, whereby that bloody sacrifice, once to be accomplished on the cross, might be represented, and the memory thereof remain even unto the end of the world, and its salutary virtue be applied to the remission of those sins which we daily commit,--declaring Himself constituted a priest forever, according to the order of Melchisedech, He offered up to God the Father His own body and blood under the species of bread and wine; and, under the symbols of those same things, He delivered (His

Here's another one.

If any one saith, that there is not in the New Testament a visible and external priesthood; or that there is not any power of consecrating and offering the true body and blood of the Lord, and of forgiving and retaining sins; but only an office and bare ministry of preaching the Gospel, or, that those who do not preach are not priests at all; let him be anathema.²

The fallen nature of this world is being perfected by grace through the ministry of the church. This means the church must possess both temporal and spiritual power, “both swords.” With absurd bombast Pope Boniface lays claim to both swords in the Bull *Unam Sanctam*:

We are informed by the texts of the gospels that in this Church and in its power are two words; namely, the spiritual and the temporal. For when the Apostles say: 'Behold, here are two swords' [Lk 22:38] that is to say, in the Church, since the Apostles were speaking, the Lord did not reply that there were too many, but sufficient. Certainly the one who denies that the temporal sword is in the power of Peter has not listened well to the word of the Lord commanding: 'Put up thy sword into thy scabbard' [Mt 26:52]. Both, therefore, are in the power of the Church, that is to say, the spiritual and the material sword, but the former is to be administered for the Church but the latter by the Church; the former in the hands of the priest; the latter by the hands of kings and soldiers, but at the will and sufferance of the priest.³

The Roman priest, then, was chiefly the re-sacrificer of Christ, the distributor of grace (and sometimes salesman of the same), and the office through which the Lord was renewing this fallen world. The pope understood things in terms of power, and not authority (which is the difference between infusion and imputation). The utter confusion of Law and Gospel created an equal confusion about the office of holy ministry.

own body and blood) to be received by His apostles, whom He then constituted priests of the New Testament; and by those words, Do this in commemoration of me, He commanded them and their successors in the priesthood, to offer (them); even as the Catholic Church has always understood and taught. For, having celebrated the ancient Passover, which the multitude of the children of Israel immolated in memory of their going out of Egypt, He instituted the new Passover, (to wit) Himself to be immolated, under visible signs, by the Church through (the ministry of) priests, in memory of His own passage from this world unto the Father, when by the effusion of His own blood He redeemed us, and delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into his kingdom. And this is indeed that clean oblation, which cannot be defiled by any unworthiness, or malice of those that offer (it); which the Lord foretold by Malachias was to be offered in every place, clean to his name, which was to be great amongst the Gentiles; and which the apostle Paul, writing to the Corinthians, has not obscurely indicated, when he says, that they who are defiled by the participation of the table of devils, cannot be partakers of the table of the Lord; by the table, meaning in both places the altar. This, in fine, is that oblation which was prefigured by various types of sacrifices, during the period of nature, and of the law; in as much as it comprises all the good things signified by those sacrifices, as being the consummation and perfection of them all.” (<https://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/trentall.html>)

² The Council of Trent, Session 23, Cannon 1.

³ *Unam Sanctam*, Bull of Pope Boniface VIII promulgated November 18, 1302, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Bon08/B8unam.htm>. The bull ends with this particularly anti-Christ-like flourish, “Furthermore, we declare, we proclaim, we define that it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff.”

Priesthood to Pastor

Martin Luther had this theology, but he hated it, hated the God who was demanding such perfection. He tells the story of his discovery of the Gospel in the introduction to his Latin Works.⁴ Luther was pressing on the words “the righteousness of God” in Romans 1:16-17. He was taught that this righteousness was his own doing, but there was a word that didn’t fit, “faith.” Faith believes a promise. If the righteousness is by faith, it must be a promised righteousness, not a commanded righteousness. Like a flash Luther sees it, the Gospel is the gift of the Lord’s righteousness through the promise of the forgiveness of sins. This is why our salvation is apart from our works, the saving righteousness is not ours at all.

This is the Biblical doctrine of justification, that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to our account.

Also they teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who, by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight. Rom. 3 and 4.⁵

This is a completely and radically different understanding of the Lord’s work of saving man. Salvation is by grace through faith apart from works. The distinction between Law and Gospel flips the light on in the Scriptures, and with the clarity of the Scriptures restored, the sufficiency is also restored. *Sola gratia, sola fide, sola Scriptura*, but when the Lutheran confessions speak of the uniqueness of the Scriptures they mean more than the source of truth, the Scriptures are the unique tool that the Holy Spirit uses to create and sustain faith.

In perhaps the most brilliant and insightful theological statement made outside the Scriptures, Luther writes, “And in those things which concern the spoken, outward Word, we must firmly hold that God grants His Spirit or grace to no one, except through or with the preceding outward Word.”⁶ He explains:

In a word, enthusiasm inheres in Adam and his children from the beginning [from the first fall] to the end of the world, [its poison] having been implanted and infused into them by the old dragon, and is the origin, power [life], and strength of all heresy, especially of that of the Papacy and Mahomet. Therefore we ought and must constantly maintain this point, that

⁴ Here are Luther’s own words, “Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, “As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the Decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!” Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience. Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted. At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, “In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’” There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, “He who through faith is righteous shall live.” Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me. Thereupon I ran through the Scriptures from memory. I also found in other terms an analogy, as, the work of God, that is, what God does in us, the power of God, with which he makes us strong, the wisdom of God, with which he makes us wise, the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God. And I extolled my sweetest word with a love as great as the hatred with which I had before hated the word “righteousness of God.” Thus that place in Paul was for me truly the gate to paradise” (AE 34.336-337).

⁵ The Augsburg Confession, IV. All quotations of the Lutheran Confessions are taken from the Concordia Triglotta [1917], available at www.bookofconcord.org.

⁶ Martin Luther, Smalcald Articles, III.VIII.3

God does not wish to deal with us otherwise than through the spoken Word and the Sacraments.⁷

The “only” of Sola Scriptura involves the gracious working of God. This explains the “that we may” of Augsburg Confession article V. After speaking of justification by faith, the princes confess:

That we may obtain this faith, the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith; where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake. They condemn the Anabaptists and others who think that the Holy Ghost comes to men without the external Word, through their own preparations and works.

This is a profound theological insight, and unique to the Lutheran Confessions. The Lord’s Word, and the Lord’s Word alone, is efficacious. The Word of God is the mean and instrument of the Holy Spirit to save mankind.

This was right under Luther’s nose when he was hating that word “the righteousness of God.” “I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation for those who believe” (Romans 1:16).

The efficacy of the Word, that is, the power of the Gospel, is definitive for the confessors. The Sacraments are water with God’s word of promise, the body and blood of Jesus with the word of promise. The church is where the Gospel is preached and the sacraments are administered. Worship is the preaching and hearing of the Gospel, and the distribution and reception of the sacraments. Conversion (what we sometimes call “evangelism”) is the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. And, at last, the office of the Holy Ministry is the office of the Word, the “Preaching Office,” and the two unique marks of the church are also the two unique marks of the office.⁸

This lets the Lutheran Confessors restore the office of the Holy Ministry to its proper place, as St. Paul does in Romans 10(5-17).

For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them.

The righteousness of the law requires doing, obedience. Not so the righteousness of the Gospel.

But the righteousness based on faith says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) “or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ...

The righteousness of the Gospel is not about our ascent to heaven (by some mystical experience), or about our decent to hell (by atoning for our own sins by works), it is a righteousness that is brought right to us in the preached word!

...because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is

⁷ Ibid. 9-10

⁸ It is incredible that all the things we fight about in the LCMS are derivative of the doctrine of the efficacy of the word: worship, evangelism, the office of the ministry, communion practice, etc.

justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.”

This Word of promise is kept not by works, but by believing and confessing. But, Paul asks, how can we believe a promise that we have not heard? (Skipping verses 12-13):

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?

The righteousness of faith is delivered in preaching, and this is seen to by preachers. So the saving work of God in the world is bound up to the preaching office. So Paul will quote Isaiah regarding the preaching office, one of the strangest and most wonderful texts:

As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

Paul talks rarely of beauty. But here it is, something brought to us as beautiful, wonderful, and praiseworthy: feet. The feet of runners are notoriously nasty, but these are the feet of the preacher, the feet that carry to us the mouth that proclaims the good news. Paul praises the beauty of the preacher’s feet in order to praise the surpassing beauty of the preacher’s office, it is the office of good news, the office of the Gospel, the office of the forgiveness of sins, of faith in Christ, of bringing to us, to our ears and our hearts the righteousness of Christ.

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Our theology informs our understanding of the office, and the Luther understanding of the office grows out of the distinction between Law and Gospel, the understanding of the efficacy of the Word.

From Sacrifice to Sacrament, and the Ordination of a Lot More Priests

From the distinction of Law and Gospel grew the distinction between sacrament and sacrifice. A sacrifice is something offered to God, and sacrament is His gift to us.

Theologians are rightly accustomed to distinguish between a Sacrament and a sacrifice. Therefore let the genus comprehending both of these be either a ceremony or a sacred work. A Sacrament is a ceremony or work in which God presents to us that which the promise annexed to the ceremony offers; as, Baptism is a work, not which we offer to God, but in which God baptizes us, i.e., a minister in the place of God; and God here offers and presents the remission of sins, etc., according to the promise, Mark 16:16: He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. A sacrifice, on the contrary, is a ceremony or work which we render God in order to afford Him honor.⁹

Sacrifices are further distinguished between atoning (propitiatory) sacrifices and sacrifices of thanksgiving. The singular atoning and propitiatory sacrifice was the death of Jesus on the cross. There the Lamb of God took away the sin of the world. There God’s wrath was completely and eternally propitiated. Forgiveness was won when Jesus claimed, “It is finished!” (John 19:30).

Far from being a propitiatory sacrifice, the Lord’s Supper is a Sacrament, the delivery of the promise.¹⁰ Here’s Luther with the distinction which has profound theological implications.

⁹ Apology of the Augsburg Confession, XXIV.17-18

¹⁰ This gets an anathema too. In fact, I think I could find an anathema for everything we’ve asserted so far. “If any one saith, that the sacrifice of the mass is only a sacrifice of praise and of thanksgiving; or, that it is a bare commemoration

We treat of the forgiveness of sins in two ways. First, how it is achieved and won. Second, how it is distributed and given to us. Christ has achieved it on the cross, it is true. But he has not distributed or given it on the cross. He has not won it in the supper or sacrament. There he has distributed and given it through the Word, as also in the gospel, where it is preached. He has won it once for all on the cross. But the distribution takes place continuously, before and after, from the beginning to the end of the world. For inasmuch as he had determined once to achieve it, it made no difference to him whether he distributed it before or after, through his Word, as can easily be proved from Scripture.¹¹

With this distinction the entire church is ordained into a holy priesthood to offer the sacrifice of praise and love in their life (1 Peter 2, Romans 12:1-2). The false distinction between priest and Christian is torn down. The false distinction between holy work and secular work is torn down. And with the tearing down of these distinctions many of the institutions of the Roman church also fell, including the monasteries. (In fact, the false doctrine of purgatory falls with the false distinction between “saint” and “Christian.”)

This is important, for while the Reformation tore down a number of false distinctions, monks and secular families, priests and bishops, holy and half-holy (seen in the destruction of purgatory itself), it also re-established distinctions that had been lost, especially take from the pope both swords, and re-establishing the secular rule from the spiritual rule (two kingdoms), the distinction between nature and grace (also, by extension, the two kingdoms, and this becomes the distinction between Law and Gospel). The distinction between pastor and hearer was established and blessed. “Of Ecclesiastical Order they teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called.”¹²

Every Christian is a priest, but not every Christian is a pastor. The Lutherans maintained the uniqueness of the Pastoral office in the distribution of the Sacraments. The work and authority of pastors is outlined along these lines.

But this is their opinion, that the power of the Keys, or the power of the bishops, according to the Gospel, is a power or commandment of God, to preach the Gospel, to remit and retain sins, and to administer Sacraments. For with this commandment Christ sends forth His Apostles, John 20:21 sqq.: As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you. Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained. Mark 16:15: Go preach the Gospel to every creature.

This power is exercised only by teaching or preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments, according to their calling either to many or to individuals. For thereby are granted, not bodily, but eternal things, as eternal righteousness, the Holy Ghost, eternal life. These things cannot come but by the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments, as Paul says, Rom. 1:16: The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. Therefore, since the power of the Church grants eternal things, and is exercised only by the ministry of the Word, it does not interfere with civil government; no more than the art of singing interferes with civil government. For civil government deals with other things than does the Gospel. The civil rulers defend not minds, but bodies and bodily things against

of the sacrifice consummated on the cross, but not a propitiatory sacrifice; or, that it profits him only who receives; and that it ought not to be offered for the living and the dead for sins, pains, satisfactions, and other necessities; let him be anathema.” Session 22, Chapter 3.

¹¹ Martin Luther, “Against the Heavenly Prophets” (AE 40.213-214)

¹² AC XIV

manifest injuries, and restrain men with the sword and bodily punishments in order to preserve civil justice and peace.¹³

Here again our theology informs our understanding of the office, and the Lutheran understanding of the distinction between sacrifice and sacrament sets the pastor in place not to offer sacrifices but to administer the sacraments. The ministry is a ministrations, a service, of specific holy things.

The Reformation of Pastoral Care

There is one more piece to put in place to give the full picture of the Lutheran understanding of the Pastoral Office.

Luther had, from his study of the Scriptures, a profound understanding of vocation, of God's instituting and ordering the world. I think you could argue that the distinction between Law and Gospel is a sub-set of Luther's understanding of vocation, and simply his answer to the question, "What is the vocation of the Law?" and "What is the vocation of the Gospel?"¹⁴ Luther was a theologian hunting for words of institution, not only for the sacraments, but for everything in the world. This is, in fact, why he spends so much time on the Ten Commandments in the Large Catechism. Luther is reordering the world according to the institutions.¹⁵ The Roman church had brought dis-order to the world through their false doctrine (forbidding priests to marry, distinguishing between the holy and secular estates, giving both swords to the church, establishing the monasteries and various orders). None of these estates had God's command or institution.

It is a great irony of our time that the only people we can find to talk reasonably about God's ordering of the world are the same people we started out to correct, the Romanists.

The Lutherans' strong understanding of God's ordered world allowed them to revisit the ancient three estates: family, church, and state, and put them in proper relation to each other. The state is derived from the family, and is instituted in the Fourth Commandment.¹⁶ The church is an estate of the Second and Third

¹³ AC XXVIII.5-11

¹⁴ Luther explains his rule in the 1532 sermon on the distinction between Law and Gospel, "It is like the word of God in Exodus 20:12, 'You shall honor your father and your mother,' and the one found in Ephesians 6:4, 'You fathers, bring up your children in the training and instruction of the Lord.' Since the two words do not address the same office or the same persons, what chaos would follow if they were thrown together on the grounds that 'it is all God's Word! The son would then want to be father and the father would want to be the son. ... But that lacks rhyme or reason and is intolerable. The father should do what God has assigned and commanded him to do. Likewise let the son attend to his calling. In this way duties and functions are properly distinguished and distributed. ... When someone begins to interfere in the office assigned to another, or tries to take it over and annex it to his own, what kind of chaos and turmoil does that not soon produce? The word must be rightly distinguished, so that each person looks after what he has been called and assigned to do, stays with it, and goes no farther." (Martin Luther, "The Distinction Between the Law and the Gospel: A Sermon by Martin Luther, January 1, 1532," trans. Willard L. Bruce, *Concordia Journal* 18, no. 2 (April 1992): 153-163. For the German original of this sermon see WA 38:8-42 or StL 9:799-811.) For more on this see the author's essay "The Highest Art in Christendom: Recovering the Difficulty of Distinguishing Law and Gospel" in *Theology is Eminently Practical, Essays in Honor of Prof. John T. Pless* (Lutheran Legacy, 2011, ed. Jacob Corzine and Bryan Wolfmuehler).

¹⁵ Luther understands the Ten Commandments as the instituting of God. This is not to say that there was no order before Moses received the tablets on Sinai. All three estates, family, church, and state, were instituted already in the Garden of Eden. The Ten Commandments are our access to this orderly creating of God. Chemnitz would see the Ten Commandments as the first written Scripture, and therefore the tablets would pre-date the writing of the book of Genesis.

¹⁶ "In this [fourth] commandment belongs a further statement regarding all kinds of obedience to persons in authority who have to command and to govern. For all authority flows and is propagated from the authority of parents." (LC I.141)

Commandments, and is instituted there. This takes the sword away from the church, leaving it only with the authority of God's Word.

The doctrine of vocation and the three estates establish the church as an institution (like marriage, family, human government, etc.). The office of Holy Ministry, then, is attending to this institution. This profound understanding of institution is vital for the Lutheran Church today. More on this soon.

The Simplicity of Office

There is a fantastic vocational clarity in the Lutheran Church. The Church is where there is Word and Sacrament. The Gospel is found in Word and Sacrament. Conversion is worked by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament. Worship is the Lord's gifts of Word and Sacrament. The Office of Holy Ministry is the Office of Word and Sacrament.

Preaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments are the duties, the only essential duties of the pastor, and this is because the Gospel and the Sacraments are the two essential marks of the church, because the Word is the instrument of the Holy Spirit, and because the Church is instituted by the Lord Jesus precisely for the purpose of distributing these gifts.

“Everything, therefore, in the Christian Church is ordered to the end that we shall daily obtain there nothing but the forgiveness of sin through the Word and signs, to comfort and encourage our consciences as long as we live here. Thus, although we have sins, the [grace of the] Holy Ghost does not allow them to injure us, because we are in the Christian Church, where there is nothing but [continuous, uninterrupted] forgiveness of sin, both in that God forgives us, and in that we forgive, bear with, and help each other.”¹⁷

The aim of this work is comfort. The two marks of the church in AC VII are the two duties of the pastor in AC XXVIII, and all of this is driving towards a singular goal: the comfort of terrified consciences.

When I have this righteousness within me, I descend from heaven like the rain that makes the earth fertile. That is, I come forth into another kingdom, and I perform good works whenever the opportunity arises. If I am a minister of the Word, I preach, I comfort the saddened, I administer the sacraments.(AE 26.11-12)

One of the uniquenesses of our Luther Confessions is its insistence that the right use of doctrine ends with comforted consciences, and this is no different when it comes to the office of the pastor and his duties.

This short list of duties, though, can be expanded. Luther, for example, unfolds the two marks of the church into seven in his “On Councils and the Church.”¹⁸ Johann Gerhard does the same thing with his “On the Duties of Ministers of the Church.”¹⁹ These seven duties are here listed with all Gerhard's supporting Scripture texts.

1. “The most important duty of ministers of the church is to preach the Word.” (Isaiah 9:2, Luke 1:79, John 1:5, Acts 26:17-18, Ephesians 5:8, Ephesians 4:18, Psalms 19:8, Psalms 119:105, 2 Peter 1:19, Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:15, 1 Corinthians 12:28, Ephesians 4:11, Acts 20:28, Isaiah 63:11, Malachi 2:7, Revelation 1:20, 2 Corinthians 5:20, Matthew 9:38, 2 Timothy 2:15, 1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:9, Ephesians 6:17, Romans 13:4, 2 Corinthians 10:4, Matthew 4:7, Acts 6:2)

¹⁷ LC III.55

¹⁸ AE 41.148-165

¹⁹ Johann Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces*, Locus 23, Chapter 6, Section 2, translated by Richard Dinda and published as a pamphlet by LCMS World Relief and Human Care, 2005, and available from LCMS International Center.

2. “The second duty of ministers is to administer the Sacraments.” (1 Corinthians 4:1, Matthew 28:19, 1 Corinthians 3:6-7, Matthew 7:6)
3. “The third duty of ministers is diligently praying for the flock entrusted to them.” (1 Samuel 12:23, James 5:6, John 17:20, Exodus 32:11, Deuteronomy 9:18, Leviticus 5:6, Isaiah 63:16-17, Jeremiah 23:3, 27:3, Daniel 9:17, 2 Corinthians 13:7, 9, Ephesians 1:15-17, 3:14, Philippians 1:4, 9, Colossians 1:3, 2 Thessalonians 1:11, Acts 12:5, Colossians 4:3, 1 Thessalonians 5:25, 2 Thessalonians 3:1, Hebrews 3:18, 1 Corinthians 3:6, 1 Peter 5:8-9, 2 Corinthians 2:16, 3:5, Numbers 6:23)
4. “Their fourth duty, then, is the honest control of their life and behavior.” (Titus 2:7, 1 Timothy 1:18-19, 1 Timothy 3:2, 4, 6, 8-9, 15, 4:7, 12, 6:11, 2 Timothy 2:15, 22, Titus 1:7-8, 2:7, Romans 2:21, 24, Psalm 50:16, 21, Matthew 5:19, Acts 24:19, Acts 1:1, 1 Corinthians 9:27)
5. “The fifth duty of ministers is to administer church discipline.” (Matthew 18:17, Galatians 5:1, 1 Corinthians 5:4-5, 2 Corinthians 2:6)
6. “The sixth duty of ministers is to preserve the rituals of the church.” (Romans 14:15, 1 Corinthians 8:9, 14:12, Galatians 5:1, 1 Corinthians 7:23, Galatians 2:4, 5, 2 Corinthians 6:14, 1 Thessalonians 5:22, 1 Corinthians 9:22)
7. “The seventh duty of the ministry is the care of the poor and the visitation of the sick.” (1 Corinthians 16:2, 2 Corinthians 9:1, John 13:29, Galatians 2:9-10, Acts 6:5)

Gerhard pays special attention to the life of pastors with an extended discussion of each of the Greek words used by Paul to describe the minister’s life. The pastoral epistles especially highlight the responsibilities, the aptitudes, and the habits of the pastor. Gerhard works to distinguish the common virtues that ought to belong to all Christians, and the special virtues that are required of the pastor. Luther reminds us that the pastor has to give special attention to both his life and his doctrine, life for the sake of enemies and doctrine for the sake of friends.²⁰

Gerhard concludes his masterful treatment, “These are the seven most important duties of ministers of the church to which we can relate the rest conveniently. The apostle embraces them all with one word: ‘This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful’ (1 Cor. 4:1-2).”

I suppose the duties of the pastor could be expanded further. I attempt such a visual expansion in the appendix, but any extra enumeration is simply an expansion of these seven duties, and, indeed, these seven duties are simply an unfolding of the two chief duties: preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments according to their institution.

If one wanted a checklist, Gerhard’s Seven Duties would be it. And the standard of evaluation is also established: faithfulness.

²⁰ On Titus 1:16 Luther writes, “Through faith we are justified; through good works God is glorified. Let this, he says, be seen among you, for you are set in the midst of the wicked (cf. Phil. 2:15). And God wants to use your life to convert other nations, that the kingdom of Christ may be expanded. That the Word of God may not be discredited: Our good life is necessary to remove offense and to edify others, ‘that your light may shine’ (Matt. 5:16). God Himself gives everything freely. But He demands that we not give offense to others who are to be converted and that we not alienate them from our doctrine. For if we have lived a wicked life, we alienate many; because the heathen cannot see our faith, they ought to see our works, then hear our doctrine, and then be converted. So he speaks elsewhere of ‘adorning the doctrine’ (v. 10), so that the enemies do not have [a reason for complaint]. That is: ‘Live good lives, so that men are not frightened away from your doctrine.’ We should be a good example to others, ‘so that no fault may be found with our ministry,’ as 2 Cor. 6:3 says.” (AE 29.57-58)

Pride of Office and Humility of Person

The vocation of pastor, then, is simple, but this does not mean that it is easy. The Scriptures warn us of the difficulty.

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. (1 Timothy 3:1)

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. (James 3:1)

Obeys your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. (Hebrews 13:7)

I've wondered if the Lord has arranged the work of the pastor to ensure nobody is actually good at it. Simply considering the way personalities work faces us up to this. The guy who likes to spend hours concentrating on study of ancient texts normally does not like to stand in front of people and talk. The guy who likes to sit in meetings and make sure everything is arranged just right normally does not like his evenings interrupted with emergencies. A pastor is required to be an introvert and an extrovert, creative and disciplined, a good listener and a good speaker and a good writer, a logical thinker with great emotional empathy, holy and relatable. In other words, no one is good at it.

Wrestling with this difficulty works itself out in a handful of different directions. There is a pride of office and a humility of person that is often confused. The pastor who understands rightly the great authority of his office becomes proud of his person, and subsequently receives any compliment or criticism into his person. On the other hand, there is the pastor that knows his shortcomings and his inability to bear the office with the dignity it requires, and reacts by reducing the office to something more manageable. Both are wrong. The Scriptures would call us to a pride of office and humility of person, taking the teaching and work seriously, but not ourselves.

This is why St. Paul's discussion of sufficiency comes up so often in the discussion of the work of the pastor:

Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Corinthians 3:4-6)

Minister vs Leader, The Transformation of the Church Growth Movement

It would be nice to stop there, but the thinking of the church continues to change, and as the doctrine changes so does the church's understanding of the Office of Holy Ministry. This means that the normal expectations of the duties of the pastor in the ecclesiastical air are skew from our confessional and Biblical understanding.

Modern theology is obsessed with ecclesiology, with studying and understanding what the church is. This narcissism extends to every corner of the church, liberal and conservative. The article on which the church stands or falls, it seems, is the doctrine of the church itself. This bluster, though, shows that there is something missing; it is the roar of the lion with no heart.

What drives the modern church? What is her material principal? The key ingredient is success, and mostly a success in terms of size and growth.

The Church Growth Movement decided one day that growth is a mark of the church, and the social sciences were helpful at achieving that growth. In fact, cultural anthropology is brought to the church as a science to help understand conversion. “We who would understand the ways in which the Holy Spirit, through establishing thousands of new communities of the redeemed, is spreading abroad the sweet savor of Christ, must ask why evangelistic crusades issue in conversions in some populations and not in others. Why do conversions in some cases set off a chain reaction resulting in a multitude of new congregations, while in others the few scattered converts scarcely strengthen existing ones? Why does a given church grow rigorously during one period and stagnate in another? What environmental and missionary factors condition church growth?”²¹

An Aside on the Doctrine of Conversion

Martin Luther rightly taught that conversion from darkness to light, from unbelief to faith, from unbeliever to Christian, is accomplished by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God, and particularly the Gospel preached. Melancthon came along and added the human will to the equation. What role Melancthon gave to the will is, to me, a bit of a question, but there is no question that there were now three things involved in conversion. John Calvin came in and broke the work of the Spirit from the external word.²² The radical reformers were then free to make conversion a matter of the Holy Spirit and the human will. Charles Finney of Second Great Awakening fame doubles-down on this theology and introduces “new measures” for persuading the unbeliever to believe.²³ This is the theological underpinning of the Revivalism that helps define American Christianity, and certainly underpins the theology of the Church Growth Movement.²⁴

²¹ Donald A McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth, 3rd Edition* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1990), 107.

²² John Calvin: “The expression of our Savior, ‘Many are called, but few are chosen,’ (Mt. 22:14), is also very improperly interpreted (see 3.2.11, 12). There will be no ambiguity in it, if we attend to what our former remarks ought to have made clear—viz. that there are two species of calling: for there is an universal call, by which God, through the external preaching of the word, invites all men alike, even those for whom he designs the call to be a savor of death, and the ground of a severer condemnation. Besides this there is a special call which, for the most part, God bestows on believers only, when by the internal illumination of the Spirit he causes the word preached to take deep root in their hearts.” (Calvin’s Institutes, 3.24.8, emphasis added. www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.v.xxv.html)

²³ Want some Finney? From *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (found here <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/finney/revivals.pdf>) “Do not say now, “I cannot convert sinners; how can I convert sinners? God alone can convert sinners.” Look at the text, “He that winneth souls is wise,” and do not think you can escape the sentence. It is true that God converts sinners. But there is a sense, too, in which ministers convert them. And you have something to do; something that requires wisdom; something which, if you do it wisely, will insure the conversion of sinners in proportion to the wisdom employed. If you never have done this, it is high time to think about yourselves, and see whether you have wisdom enough to save even your own souls.” (157)

“The Scriptures ascribe the conversion of a sinner to four different agencies—to men, to God, to the truth, and to the sinner himself. The passages which ascribe it to the truth are the largest class. That men should ever have overlooked this distinction, and should have regarded conversion as a work performed exclusively by God, is surprising. So it is that any difficulty should ever have been felt on the subject, or that people should ever have professed themselves unable to reconcile these several classes of passages.” (158-9)

Are you ready for this one? “The church has always felt it necessary to have something of the kind to answer this very purpose. In the days of the apostles baptism answered this purpose. The Gospel was preached to the people, and then all those who were willing to be on the side of Christ were called on to be baptized. It held the precise place that the anxious seat does now, as a public manifestation of their determination to be Christians. And in modern times, those who have been violently opposed to the anxious seat have been obliged to adopt some substitute, or they could not get along in promoting a revival.” (217)

²⁴ “From the beginning the Church Growth Movement has been rooted in biblical, evangelical, conversionist theology.” (McGavran., 8.) “Individual church growth leaders have and live by their own personal theological convictions, but they do not seek to superimpose them on the universal church. However, on one thing there is total agreement: men and women without a personal relationship with Jesus Christ are doomed to a Christless eternity. The decisions they make for or against Jesus Christ in this life will make the difference. Therefore, faithfulness to God implies doing our part,

It is amazing to see how theological considerations like “infant or believers’ baptism” and “Jesus’ true or symbolic presence in the Supper” are dismissed as secondary considerations, while the free-will revivalistic semi-Pelagian theology of the decision for Christ, the unbiblical and dangerous language of “personal relationship”, and the ungodly use of “persuasion evangelism” is assumed to be Biblical. It seems like Jesus thought doctrine and baptism were fairly important parts of making disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19).

I find this chart helpful.

Martin Luther	Philip Melanchthon	Everyone else you ever meet
Holy Spirit	Holy Spirit	Holy Spirit
God’s Word	God’s Word	
	Man’s Will	Man’s Will

Instead of seeing the will of man as the object of conversion, the Revivalist sees man’s will as the instrument of conversion, and it understands this will to be both free and weak, and so open to manipulation. It will be vital for the Lutheran Church to be very clear on our doctrine of conversion, which is basically the doctrine of the efficacy of the Word, which, as mentioned above, only the Lutherans believe. We must remove man’s will (the doctrine of original sin) and assert the means of the Word (efficacy of the Scriptures and the doctrine of the Sacraments).

Anyhow, back to the Church Growthers...

The Church Growth Movement embraces a biological understanding of the church as a body. It can then look at stuff in nature that grows, and ask, “How can we do that kind of thing?” “Why call our approach *Natural Church Development*? Natural means learning from nature. Learning from nature means learning from God’s creation. And learning from God’s creation means learning from God the Creator.”²⁵ This analogy of the church as a body is, first, wrong, and, second, dangerous. With the assumption of the church/body ecclesiology the Church Growth Consultants arrive like doctors to diagnose the problems. “A healthy body is growing, reproducing, multiplying, expelling waste, having a ‘life-cycle’, getting married and going on vacation” and whatever, which gives the consultant an almost completely subjective template for evaluating the health of an individual congregation (and charging guru costs to that same unhealthy congregation), and opens up the possibility of endless streams of church grown books and conferences, which is the joy of today’s pastor.

The Church is not *a body*, but the body of Christ, and the body of Christ does not grow, multiply, have babies, go through life cycles, and all of the other things our bodies do. In fact, the body of Christ is bound up in personal union to the divine nature, just as the church enjoys the mystical with Christ. The body of Jesus was crucified, raised, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father, which is exactly how St. Paul speaks of her (and us!) in Romans 6:1-4 and Ephesians 2:4-6, “seated with Christ in the heavenly places!” How beautiful! To understand the Church as Christ’s body we don’t need a microscope, we need a Bible, not biology but theology.

empowered by the Holy Spirit, to persuade all men and women to become disciples of Jesus Christ and responsible members of his church.” (Ibid., 9)

²⁵ Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development, A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Health Churches* (ChurchSmart Resources, St. Charles, IL, 1996), 10.

The Church Growth Movement redefines also the office of the pastor, and this is chiefly done by removing the comma from Ephesians 4:12. This text has been a battleground, which is too bad, because it is such a beautiful passage.

But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Ephesians 4:7-16)

We will make only a few cursory observations. First, the Greek word *poimain* can be translated as "shepherd" or "pastor", and while the ESV translates it as "shepherd" here, it is understood as pastor. Also, "pastor" and "teacher" are put together into the same office.

Second, how stunning, almost breath-taking, it is for pastors to find themselves listed alongside the apostles, evangelists, and prophets as gifts that the ascended Jesus gives to His Body.

Third, the duties of the pastor/teacher are listed in verse 12, and here is the controversy. Does St. Paul list two or three duties of the pastor? Should it be:

...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...

or

...to equip the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...

This might seem like a small thing, but, in fact, the results are profound for our understanding of the Office of Holy Ministry. Is the pastor equipping the saints and doing the work of the ministry or is the pastor equipping the saints to do the work of the ministry? Who does the work of the ministry?

Lucky for us all the pastors and congregations of the LCMS have subscribed to a common understanding of the text!

For wherever the Church is, there is the authority [command] to administer the Gospel. Therefore it is necessary for the Church to retain the authority to call, elect, and ordain ministers. And this authority is a gift which in reality is given to the Church, which no human power can wrest from the Church, as Paul also testifies to the Ephesians when he says, Eph 4:8: He ascended, He gave gifts to men. And he enumerates among the gifts specially belonging to the Church pastors and teachers, *and adds that such are given for the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.* Hence, wherever there is a true church, the right to elect and ordain ministers necessarily exists. (Power and Primacy of the Church, 67, emphasis added)

This passage should settle it for us, but I would be willing to concede the comma to the Church Growth Movementers if they would understand the “ministry” given to the laity of the church like Paul expounds it in the verses following:

“...until we all attain to the *unity of the faith* and of *the knowledge of the Son of God*, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and *carried about by every wind of doctrine*, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.”

The normal church growth pastor is equipping the saints of some sort of evangelism, getting more people in, and growing the church. Paul understands the ministry distinctly in terms of teaching, of doctrine, of the unity of the faith, of maturity in wisdom. How wonderful, in fact, for the laity of the church to be built up on the rock-solid foundation of the pure doctrine. This, in fact, is how they are equipped and how they are ministered to.

The Church Growth Movement makes “growth” a (probably “the”) mark of the church, and transforms the pastor from a steward of God’s mysteries into an equipper of the saints for growth.

Throwing the Mega-Church into the Mix

The Mega-church Movement decided, one day, that the church should be huge. “If we’re gonna grow, we’ll end up huge. Go big or go home.”

The almost immediate reaction of the church should have warned us of the dangers of this theological shift. Immediately there is the small-group movement, the house church movement, the micro-church movement, the discipleship movement, the emergent church movement, the simple church movement, the missionalist movement, and every other kind of church movement you could imagine, all of them testifying to the fact that churches should not be huge. But the assumption behind all the nonsense remains unquestioned: the church should be big.

With the bigness of the church came the transformation of the pastor into a manager, or better, a leader. The pastor, like a CEO, cast the vision of the congregation. The sermon was transformed into a time for setting the course and implementing the vision. Mission, Vision, and Values statements started appearing on the walls of congregations, and the pastor was disconnected from any sort of conversation with the congregation. Everything having to do with the office of pastor is now found under the rubric of “leadership”, leadership books, leadership conferences, leadership degrees, leadership magazines, pastoral leadership institutes, and constant babble anytime pastors are together about being a leader.

Perhaps we are somewhat nervous about the term, so we soften it by inventing a new and completely nonsensical phrase: “servant-leadership”. Why not just say “servant”? That’s what the word *minister* actually means. The answer is that the Mega-Church Movement has marked a radical shift in ecclesiology, and the theological void it has created has been filled with Harvard Business Review theory and practice.

The theological void of the Mega-Church Movement is seen in the use of the word “church” itself. It used to be a noun. Then we were supposed to “do church”, then “be church.” Soon “church” will be a verb. “Let’s church today,” and in a few months we’ll be able to use “church” in every part of speech. “Let’s church the de-churched with a churchy churching of the anti-church culture. Are you church enough?” (It’s good we got the word “culture” in there. It makes it authentic.) This is possible because there is no theology behind it, and the Mega-Church Movement is spinning out of Biblical orbit and anything like orthodox theology faster than anyone would have predicted.

The take-away from the assumption that the church should be big is that the pastor is a leader, even if there are only a few people in the congregation.

“Start the church as a rancher, not as a shepherd . . . It is hard for some to picture how they can start a brand new church and not shepherd all the people, but they can, as long as there is mutual agreement that this is the way it is done in our church. This mutual agreement requires three basic ingredients: (1) the pastor does not visit the hospital, (2) the pastor does not call on members in their homes, and (3) the pastor does no personal counseling.”²⁶

Evaluating the New Marks of “Growth” and “Size”

Looking for success, the Church Growth Movement has made “growth” a mark of the church and made the pastor into an equipper for growth. The Mega-Church Movement has told us that the church should be huge and that the pastor is a leader. These are the duties of the new-pastor, and try as we might to resist it, we absorb them.

What pastor does not drive past the full parking lot of the big-box mega and look with longing eyes? What parishioner doesn’t look around at the empty pews, and then up at their pastor, with sadness? Or, on the flip side, there is a pride when the church is growing and people are coming to be baptized. “What are you guys doing over there? What’s your secret?” Like picking up the stink when walking through the dump, we absorb the assumptions of growth and size by being part of the church in America.

So it is helpful for us to question these assumptions, and to consider a few Biblical texts to help exercise the stink.

First, do our efforts grow the church? Answer: no.

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. (1 Corinthians 3:6)

God grows the church. It is His work, His glory. Conversion is the work of the Spirit through the preached Word. This is sure. Now, this does not excuse sin, especially the sin of laziness. Paul planted. Apollos watered. We do the work appointed to our vocation; we preach, we teach, we visit, we pray, and we trust the Lord to do the work that belongs to Him. The solution to our laziness is not programs but repentance, and a trust in the Lord’s Word that He is merciful.

Second, should we assume that the church be mega? Answer: no.

It might be that at some times and places there is a need for a huge congregation, but this is the exception. The Lord’s word teaches us to assume that the church should be small. The chief text here is 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.²⁷

The Mega-Church makes this oversight and pastoral care impossible, and the only possible result is an ungodly neglect of the sheep.

²⁶ Towns, Wagner, and Rainer, *The Everychurch Guide to Growth*, 46, quoted by Lucas Woodford, *Great Commission, Great Confusion, or Great Confession* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 106.

²⁷ I had to use the New King James Version because the ESV brought in the word “leader” for “those who rule over you.”

When I was a child our family went to visit Mexico. There was a man on the bridge begging. He had a huge tumor on his leg, three feet across, and I had never seen anything like it. I was repulsed, and still remember it today. Imagine seeing that man in that condition and thinking, “Look at how huge that guy’s leg is. I wonder how much I would have to work out to get a leg that big.” This is the wrong way to look at the situation. We should think this way of the mega-church. “That poor church, it’s too big. I’ll bet the pastor doesn’t even know the people’s name. I wonder what we can do to help.” The first thing we can do is stop thinking that the church should be huge, and rejoice with our pastors who are faithful in their preaching, godly in their living, and diligent in their work.

The Problem with Movements

There is, though, a more subtle error underneath both the ecclesiology of the Church Growth Movement and the Mega-Church Movement, and it is in their shared nomenclature “movement.” I think we see it best by contrasting “movement” to “institution.”

An institution is a thing established, set in place. A movement is the opposite of this, something changing, shifting, set in motion. This distinction is seen everywhere in the Church Growth books. “This way of ‘seeing’ church that moves it past its institutional moorings and reengages its movement beginnings.”²⁸ It is a mantra, a cliché, “the church is not an institution, it’s a movement.” Even otherwise helpful voices can be found talking about the Christian Movement or the Reformation Movement or even the Confessional Movement.

And while an institution needs a minister, a movement needs a leader. Especially in times of crisis and great upheaval, leaders lead movements. Crisis, in fact, is a required part of a movement, and if you don’t have one, you find one. If you want to be a leader, the first thing on your check-list is to find a crisis. Rahm Emmanuel articulated this perfectly for us, “You never let a serious crisis go to waste. And what I mean by that it’s an opportunity to do things you think you could not do before.” The Church Growth and Mega-Church Movements live off the crisis of evangelism. “People are going to hell. Do something!” You recognize that panic-inducing cry underneath every Evangelism campaign, but it is disturbing to note that the people producing the panic are themselves not doing anything.

The fact that we have bureaucratic positions called “Mission and Ministry Facilitators” or “Transforming for Missions” and other “Mission Expert” offices is an indication that alerting people to the evangelism crisis is actually more important than doing something about it. Or, it points to what the Church Growth theology really understands as the real crisis: “The ignorance of the people about their responsibility to save the lost.” It is this unspoken, rarely articulated understanding of the problem that is so difficult to kick.

Crises and emergencies, by their very nature, call for a suspension of vocation. It might be my vocation to eat dinner with my family, but if a car crashes into the tree in the front yard that is suspended, and I am now a paramedic. “Necessity knows no law.” If I am interested in a permanent suspension to the joy and contentment of vocation, or I want out of its struggles, then I look for a crisis, or create my own.

The dynamics of crisis, and especially the impact on the conscience, should be considered more by the church. For us, it is good to consider the danger of the Confessional Lutheran pastor of inventing a crisis our own, and our favorite tactic is the crisis of error, the crisis of false teaching.

There has always been error in the church, from the Garden of Eden until the Lord returns. The writing of every book of the Bible was occasioned by theological error. There have never been times of theological peace in the Church, which is a truth Jesus promised. The Church, then, is always confessing the truth and

²⁸ Reggie McNeal, *Missional Renaissance, Changing the Scorecard for the Church* (Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA, 2009), 25.

rejecting error; it is part of the normal life of the church. False doctrine, its exposure, its correction, its rebuke, is never an emergency. We, though, are tempted to treat it as such, and we see the difference when false teachers tempt us out of our vocation.

“What is my station in life according to the Ten Commandments?” This question not only teaches us what sins to confess, it also teaches us what to pray for, and teaches us what we ought to do. If we ever find ourselves answering this question, “My station in life doesn’t matter, somebody has to do something!” then we know that we are acting like we are in an emergency, and if we say this about false doctrine, then we know that the devil has tempted us into false-belief and out of our vocation.

There is a danger that we react to the Evangelism Crisis with a Crisis of our own, and now, in the church, it is leader against leader, vision against vision, power against power, and the vocation of pastor has been lost.

An institution is based on truth, and the institution of the Church is the revelation of the Lord’s Law and Gospel in Scripture. A movement needs visions, and thus the requirement of the vision-casting leader.

Against this understanding we ask the simple question: Is the church instituted? Indeed. In instituting the preaching of the Word, baptism, and the Lord’s Supper, Jesus instituted the Church. The Church is an institution.

We know how to talk about the institutions of marriage and family, even of neighbor and neighborhoods, cities, schools, governments, etc. (and we shutter to hear people talking about marriage as a movement, or the “family movement”), so we should be able to recover the conversation about the church as an institution, and with this recovery we are able to recover the pastor as minister of the Gospel, a distributor of the Lord’s gifts of kindness and mercy.

The End

Our theology informs our understanding of the office, and the right theology is the best theology, and it is our theology. Our confidence in Christ and His promises, that He forgives our sins, that He is with us to the end, that He is coming for us, and that He has placed us in this ordered world to receive His gifts and serve our neighbor beautifully puts the pastor in the midst of the Lord’s Church to preach and teach, to baptize and give out the body and blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. And this comfort distributed is also comfort embraced by the sinner set in office by Jesus to serve His people.

Appendix: A Picture of Pastoral Duties and Habits

Vocation of Pastor Duties and Responsibilities Theological Habitus

