

## *Church and Ministry*

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The Collected Papers of  
The 150th Anniversary Theological Convocation  
of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Edited by Jerald C. Joerz and Paul T. McCain

Cover painting:

*Jesus Washing Peter's Feet* by Ford Madox Brown.  
Tate Gallery, London/Art Resource, NY.

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**SOLI DEO GLORIA**

IN COMMEMORATION OF  
THE 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF  
THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

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## FOREWORD

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IN COMMEMORATION OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—Missouri Synod's 150th Anniversary, the faculties of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, together with the district presidents and vice-presidents of our Synod and the Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations, attended a theological convocation devoted to the topic of the doctrines of Church and Ministry, specifically the doctrine of the Office of the Holy Ministry and the doctrine of the royal Priesthood of all Believers.

What made this event unique was the fact that it was scheduled shortly after the International Lutheran Council (ILC) met here in the United States. Thus, we were privileged to have as participants in our convocation the leaders of all of our partner churches around the world, as well as leaders from a number of other Lutheran churches who had gathered for the ILC meeting. Our partner churches were invited to send one theologian from their church body. Hence, the convocation took on a most welcome international flavor, as we were able to listen to the reaction of many of our friends from around the world to issues of concern to our church. Their participation in this conference was extremely beneficial to us and very much appreciated.

One of the most important goals of this convocation was that it not simply be an end in itself, that is, a convocation for the sake of having a convocation. Instead, the publication of the papers as a book, along with a study guide, was considered an essential aspect of this effort. I would like to encourage the pastors of our church to study these essays carefully and then to lead their congregations in a study and discussion of these important issues.

— Dr. A.L. Barry



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*Keynote Address*

**CHALLENGES IN CHURCH AND MINISTRY  
IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD**

Dr. A.L. Barry, President  
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

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GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE BE MULTIPLIED to each of you from Him who is, who was, and who is to come, even Jesus Christ our Righteousness.

This convocation is a key part of the 150th anniversary celebration of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The members of our Commission on Theology and Church Relations, as well as our seminary faculties and district presidents, are here for theological thought and conversation. What a fitting thing for Lutheran churchmen to do—celebrate by talking theology! We are also most pleased that representatives from member bodies of the International Lutheran Council, our partner churches and guests, can join us for this event. We come together in the hope and prayer that God would richly bless these days, to the benefit of all the church bodies involved in this convocation.

**Introduction**

Recently, we in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod have become more and more aware of tensions among some of our pastors and congregations concerning Church and Ministry, especially

when it comes to the relationship between the Priesthood of all Believers and the Office of the Public, Pastoral Ministry. I have a suspicion that, to some degree, these tensions have been around for a long time. Yet, for whatever reason, they have come to the forefront more pointedly of late.

We find an ever-increasing number of conflict situations our district presidents are called upon to address. Every one of these, and probably more besides, makes for very difficult days in the lives of pastors and other professional church workers, as well as congregations and their members. These conflicts often leave lasting scars on God's people. Fallout from them can easily turn into an unhealthy disruption in Gospel proclamation. It can even raise questions in the minds of people concerning their basic understanding of the Gospel. When these things happen, our theologians become understandably concerned, as the whole Synod should be. There is no doubt in my mind that our convocation is devoted to a timely and important topic.

### **The Missouri Synod in Days Past**

This is by no means the first time in its history that the Missouri Synod has had occasion to ponder the doctrines of Church and Ministry. You might recall the extreme, almost crippling, difficulties our forefathers experienced in this connection even before our church body began and also in its early years of existence. By way of the theological leadership of Dr. C.F.W. Walther, the Lord brought us through those times of crisis.

Already at its 1851 convention, our Synod approved a set of theses on Church and Ministry prepared by Walther, together with his elaboration of them, and it instructed that his presentation be published as the Synod's statement and unanimous confession. The theses say that Christ gave the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven to the church.<sup>1</sup> They also state that the Pastoral Office is distinct from

the Priesthood of all Believers and that it is an Office established by God Himself.<sup>2</sup> Church and Ministry are related to one another in these various theses as follows: “The Holy Ministry is the power, conferred by God through the congregation as the possessor of the priesthood and all church power, to exercise the rights of the spiritual priesthood in public office on behalf of those who possess them together [*vom Gemeinschaftswegen*].”<sup>3</sup>

Walther and the Missouri Synod said that the Office of the Ministry has its origin in its divine institution by Jesus Christ with the call of the apostles. The keys that pastors administer as bearers of the Office are the same keys Christ first gave to His church, and to all members of the church. Pastors employ these keys, by God’s command, as a matter of public responsibility.<sup>4</sup> This remains the position of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and I submit that all of us within our Synod would do well to take this position to heart even after almost 150 years of history.

Today’s challenges in Church and Ministry are certainly not limited to any one synod. In visiting with several of our partner church and ILC presidents, I am told that similar tensions exist in their church bodies. The precise nature of the challenges may vary, but on the whole, these leaders tell me, tensions over Church and Ministry are as real elsewhere as they are in our Missouri Synod.

It is for this reason also that we look forward to the opportunity that this theological convocation presents. Let me say especially to our guests from other church bodies: we eagerly anticipate your involvement here, for I genuinely believe we can help each other.

### **Cultural Context**

I would like to comment briefly on two basic trends that impact Church and Ministry, especially in the United States. These trends have helped shape the challenges presently faced by the Missouri Synod, and perhaps other church bodies too. The two trends

are radical equality—the desire to put everyone on the same level—and individualism.

After I had initially resolved to say a word to you about radical equality and individualism, someone advised me to pick up Robert Bork's book *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*.<sup>5</sup> This whole volume is about these two forces. Bork calls them "the defining characteristics of modern liberalism."<sup>6</sup> They are very important when it comes to a consideration of the challenges that presently confront us in Church and Ministry.

### Radical Equality

For our purposes, perhaps it would be best to characterize radical equality as a movement to eliminate all distinctions between people, even between ideas and teachings.<sup>7</sup>

Here are some examples of radical equality afoot in our U. S. society:

- a major chemical company goes out of its way to portray its scientists to the public as "a bunch of average Americans";<sup>8</sup>
- college students arrive at the university convinced that any claim to absolute truth threatens openness and equality;<sup>9</sup>
- commentators observe, with good reason, that about the only thing people will not tolerate is intolerance; and
- radical equality has made a deep impression on the United States; as Bork says in his book, "The idea that democracy and equality are not suited to the virtues of all institutions is a hard sell today."<sup>10</sup>

Yet, a passionate drive for a levelling kind of equality is not new in this country. Already in the generation or so after the Revolutionary War, many voices were crying for equality in terms every bit as radical as today's.<sup>11</sup> Among church bodies, the theology of the Baptists and Methodists positioned them to make great membership gains in a situation where "ordinary, often untrained peo-

ple found the freedom to act on their own impulses, unhampered by the doctrines of the past. . . .”<sup>12</sup> Consequently, the very idea of a well-educated and formally-called ministerium sworn to uphold established doctrinal norms came under attack in the United States already in the early 1800s. This trend has not decreased in intensity in our present day and age. If anything, it has only increased.

### Individualism

We should also say just a few words here about the second trend, individualism. In some ways, individualism goes hand-in-hand with the idea of equality. By individualism, we mean the promotion of an individual to the point where a person becomes totally absorbed with his own thoughts, ideas, and wisdom.

Individualism, too, can boast of a lengthy pedigree in the United States. More than 150 years ago, a distinguished European visitor to this country made this observation: If all are on an equal footing, not only is “confidence in this or that man . . . destroyed, but [also] the disposition to trust the authority of any man whatsoever,” that is, anyone outside oneself. Therefore, “every one shuts himself up tightly within himself and insists upon judging the world from there.”<sup>13</sup> The visitor added that “in democratic societies, each citizen is habitually busy with the contemplation of a very petty object, which is himself.”<sup>14</sup>

This mind-set has resulted in a kind of horrible fruition recently. Reflecting on the last 30 years, William Bennett says that our society places less value on sacrifice, restraint, or moral obligation, “and correlatively greater value on things like self-expression, individualism, self-realization, and personal choice.”<sup>15</sup>

Under these circumstances, no doubt many church-going Americans regard their own local church to be only a free association of individuals who delight in the joy of belonging. But again, this is not particularly new. An 1844 book identified voluntarism—

that is, individuals freely choosing to do things—as the “central motif marking religion in America.”<sup>16</sup> Whenever church life is seen largely to consist of persuading loosely-associated individuals to pull together in the same direction, the Office of the Ministry cannot help but be affected. As one writer put it already in 1850, “The minister is often expected to be, for the most part, a manager of social utilities, a wire-puller of beneficent agencies.”<sup>17</sup>

### The Continuing Challenges

In various combinations, these two trends of radical equality and individualism continue to present great challenges for us today when it comes to Church and Ministry. For instance, Christians who are unprepared, uncertified, and uncalled can all too easily begin to assume the public role and responsibilities of the pastor. If they are not satisfied with his “performance,” or if he has frustrated them by telling them something they do not wish to hear, they may start thinking about “firing” him and “hiring” another. Or, interestingly, they may begin to conceive of the church according to the model of a business in which they own stock but in which they have little or no active involvement unless they want to.

If there is any consolation for us in all this, it is that none of the elements of the radical equality and individualism confronting us today are new. We have seen it all before. For that reason, we can appreciate all the more the efforts of our forefathers to assert their biblical and Lutheran theology of Church and Ministry even amidst, and in spite of, these forces.<sup>18</sup>

But there is bad news. The fight with these two cultural trends, grows more fierce as time passes. We should keep this in mind as we hear from our presenters the biblical and confessional teaching on Church and Ministry, and strive to apply it today.

### **Engaging the Challenges at this Convocation**

Much of our planning for this convocation was guided by two overarching concerns. We asked, first, how can we best address the topic of Church and Ministry in a constructive manner that will be a blessing for all of our church bodies and a relationship-builder between our pastors and people at the congregational level? And, equally important, how can we carry what we have done here back to the pastors and people of our Synod?

At this convocation, we do not merely want to recall how this topic was treated in any one church body's past. Although none of us can divorce himself from what we have learned in days gone by, we need once again to ask the hallmark question that has made Lutheranism a light shining brightly down through the years: What do the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions have to say? There is no question more important than this. I am certain that this is the same basic question our partner church representatives and guests will find themselves pondering. Then, how can we, in our respective church bodies, best apply these truths in a meaningful and God-pleasing manner to the present day?

At this convocation there will be four major presentations. The first two presentations will focus on Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. The other two presentations will be devoted to the subject of the Pastoral Office and the Royal Priesthood. Following each major presentation, we will hear responses by two or three reactors. We will have the opportunity to discuss these presentations as we break into discussion groups and then reconvene for two panel discussions. Finally, we have asked four individuals to offer comments at the end of the entire convocation by way of general summary and reaction. They will tell us what they heard, and give us their assessment of what they heard. Here I would like simply to offer a few thoughts by way of introduction to our major presentations.

### Major Presentations I and II

First, and of primary importance, we need to go back and once again ask what the Scriptures say about the royal Priesthood of Believers and the Office of the Public, Pastoral Ministry. In taking us into the Scriptures, our first two main speakers will have the opportunity to underscore the Gospel blessings that our Lord has given us in the Priesthood of All Believers and the Office of the Public Ministry. For, both Priesthood and Ministry emerge from the saving work of our Lord Jesus Christ. They are both His gifts to His church.

Christ Himself created the Priesthood of all Believers. We see this truth taught in passages that use the language of priesthood. The Bible says that Christ has made His people priests (Rev. 1:6; 5:10). He, of course, was the Victim and the High Priest in the sacrifice that paid for the sins of the world. The activities of priests boil down to these three: offering sacrifices to the Lord, praying to Him, and proclaiming His message.<sup>19</sup> On account of Christ, we Christians offer our bodies as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1-2). We pray for ourselves and our neighbors. And we declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9).

But truths about the Priesthood of All Believers are expressed also in biblical texts where the language of priesthood is not used. Christ gives the Keys to the church, that is, to those who believe in Him and confess Him, who are gathered together around His Word, who have the Holy Spirit (Matt. 16:17-19; 18:18-20; John 20:19-23). Christ bought and paid for His bride, the church, with His own blood, and He Himself has placed the Keys into her hands at this staggering cost. What a privilege it is for Christians to be able to speak the Word of God, with all of its saving power (Eph. 5:18-20; Col. 3:12-17). As we do, the Master is with us until the end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20).



In addition to the Priesthood of all Believers, we are told that the Office of the Public, Pastoral Ministry is also God's gift. That is what Scripture calls it. The ascended Lord "gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers" (Eph. 4:11).

In a number of ways, Scripture attests that God Himself instituted this office. For instance, we note this fact already in Old Testament prophecies such as, "I will give you shepherds" (Jer. 3:15). Or we think of how the New Testament narrates the call of the apostles (Matthew 10; 28:18-20; Luke 9:1-10; Mark 16:15; John 20:21-23; 21:15-17). It says that pastors of the New Testament era subsequent to the apostles were called by God Himself: "Watch out for yourselves and the whole flock among whom the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He acquired through His own blood" (Acts 20:28; translation mine). And it shows that the apostles also recognized these "next generation" pastors as their co-workers and fellow ministers (1 Pet. 5:1; Phil. 2:25; Col. 4:7; 1 Cor. 1:1; 4:1). Thus, the Pastoral Office is not simply a pragmatic human response to a need for leadership on the part of a group of Christians who gather themselves together and then, merely for the sake of good order, appoint one from among them to "do the Ministry." While it is true that the Office of the Ministry is necessary for practical reasons, it is also true that the Office has its origin not in the will of men, but in God's will for His church. It is His gift.

But let me go even one step further. I believe we can enhance our appreciation of these gifts—namely, the Priesthood of all Believers and the Pastoral Office—even more by asking: Are there other portions of Scripture that can be added appropriately to the basic groups of passages to which we have commonly referred?

Permit me to illustrate. As I examine the book of Acts, I cannot help but think about certain incidents that further enhance

my understanding of the Priesthood of all Believers and the Office of the Ministry. For example, with regard to the Priesthood of all Believers: in the days and weeks immediately following Pentecost, Christians constituted a minority in Jerusalem. They were surrounded by many people who did not believe in Jesus as Savior. They would have had many opportunities to speak of their faith with unbelievers, one-on-one or even in groups. So it was with Stephen and Philip, who were among the seven deacons appointed to serve tables. But Acts says that Stephen did more than take care of food distribution. He also “wrought signs and wonders among the people, disputed with members of the synagogue and refuted the council of the Jews with the Word of the Spirit.” By what right and authority did Stephen do such things? In his case and also Philip’s, as members of the Priesthood of all Believers, “they did it on their own initiative . . . since the door was open to them, and they saw the need of a people who were ignorant and deprived of the Word.” This is the conclusion Luther drew about the history of Stephen; but of much greater importance, it is a conclusion rooted in God’s Word. By the way, Luther continued: “In the same way any Christian should feel obligated to act.”<sup>20</sup>

But there is still another point that can be made from the early chapters of Acts, this one about the Office of the Ministry. While some think the church in its earliest days did not have a distinct Office of the Ministry, Scripture tells us otherwise. Even those taught by Jesus before and after the Resurrection did not attempt to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth until they received His authorization (Acts 1:8). When an apostle was needed to replace Judas, the pool of candidates for this position consisted only of males (Acts 1:20–22). The seven deacons were appointed because it was not right that the apostles neglect preaching and teaching. In all this we get glimpses of an Office of the Ministry that dated back to the earliest days of the church. It was originally exercised by the

apostles. This office had its own authorization and qualifications. It was limited as to who could and could not serve in it, and it had an overarching responsibility that shaped the day-to-day decisions of those who held it. Of course, there are no apostles, as such, today. Yet the same commission the apostles had received—to preach the Gospel and forgive sins—continues to this day. It is the commission to shepherd the sheep, if you will, and now it is carried out by pastors. The German translation of the *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope* correctly notes that the Office of the Ministry “proceeds from the common call of the apostles” (*Treatise*, 10).

Especially in contemplating our first two major presentations: What other applicable Scripture passages or themes might also help us in setting forth the biblical teaching about Church and Ministry? I see the possibility of doing this as both needed and challenging.

By being in the Word, and only by being in the Word, will we properly address the concerns that bring us here. Over the years, in working with pastors and people alike, I have found that if you want to change a situation that exists or if you want to address a need in the church, the best way of doing it is through the Word. That is why I have continued to say to our Missouri Synod, both to pastors and to laypeople alike: Be in the Word, in the Word, in the Word.

So we pray, “Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word.” That is a most fitting prayer for each of us as we begin this theological convocation.

However, when I emphasize being in the Word, I am not suggesting that we ignore our Lutheran Confessions. Unfortunately, we live in a day and age where certain Lutheran entities no longer treat the Confessions as a clear and accurate exposition of Scripture, as writings suitable to serve as standards for proclamation in

the church of all times and ages including our own. Rather, they relegate the Symbols to the position of summarizing what the church believed to be true at some point in history. To me, this is no longer a *quia* subscription to the Confessions. Even as all of our speakers look to Scripture for what God Himself says, I am also certain that they will clearly direct our attention to the Confessions as *norma normata*.<sup>21</sup>

### Major Presentations III and IV

But now let us turn to major presentations three and four, both of which are scheduled for tomorrow. In tomorrow's phase of our program, we will emphasize taking biblical truths from the first two presentations and putting them to use in the present.

The third major presentation will begin where the second presentation ends: with the Pastoral Office. It will direct our attention to an application of biblical and confessional teaching about the calling and office of a pastor to our present day and age.

We should all recognize the tremendous urgency of giving encouragement to the many, often unsung, parish pastors who serve our congregations. We really need to uphold and strengthen them through the Word. I suppose I do not have to tell you that we have a bundle of disheartened, downtrodden pastors out there who genuinely desire and need this type of encouragement. I hope and pray that they are able to sense in us as churchmen a genuine sensitivity to them and their challenges and problems. They should see us as more than church administrators, professors, or members of a commission, but rather as co-workers in Christ committed to holding up the prophets' hands.

Of equal importance, this same kind of "shot in the arm" will be just as meaningful to these pastors when it likewise comes from the members of the congregations they serve. As noted earlier, radical equality and individualism tend to produce a kind of levelling

mentality in which everyone thinks he knows better than the pastor, or even that he could do a better job than the pastor—and that perhaps he should. Yet a pastor can rejoice in his own personal salvation in Christ and in the call the Lord has given him to serve in a particular place among a particular group of people. His is, indeed, a noble task. It is a marvelous thing when both pastor and congregation come to appreciate this.

Of course, a congregation or a church body at large will not necessarily say “yes” to everything pastors might propose or every idea they might have. Lately in the Missouri Synod, we have heard certain expressions that do not harmonize with the Word when it comes to the Office of the Public Pastoral Ministry. For example, we hear rumors of pastors who say that if a lay Christian should for some reason administer a Sacrament, it would not truly be a Sacrament, nor would it be a Means of Grace. Another assertion is that when Christian parents or Lutheran school teachers teach God’s Word to children, they simply convey information, but not forgiveness and life, which can only come through the ministrations of a pastor. Or there is the idea that a pastor does not represent Christ to the congregation like an ambassador—that is, by proclaiming the Word of the One who sent him—but rather that the pastor is Christ to His people. One can massage what a brother pastor says in these and similar cases to make it sound somewhat palatable, but often the application of such erroneous statements to the congregation exceeds those directives and responsibilities given to a parish pastor by God’s Word. Such application also creates great and understandable consternation within the church. We should speak to these brethren and to the congregations they serve, and do so fraternally and with absolute clarity.

But moving on, as we reflect on our last major presentation, we might try an exercise. Although most of us here are not laypeople, let us for a moment stand in laymen’s shoes and consider the

very practical relationship between congregations and pastors. We might ask: What is God's will for these churches and their members? How should members of congregations think about themselves and their responsibilities in the Priesthood of All Believers? How should they view their called pastors?

I have sometimes heard Missouri Synod laypeople say, "I'm just a layman." What an opportunity we have to set forth the great role that God has given to the laity! We need to encourage these people to recognize their high and holy calling as priests of God, and to reflect this great truth in their daily lives and as congregational members. For example, Luther's Large Catechism speaks of "the secret confession which takes place privately before a single brother . . . [that] we may at any time and as often as we wish lay our complaint before a brother, seeking his advice, comfort, and strength." It continues, "Thus by divine ordinance Christ Himself has entrusted Absolution to His church and has commanded us to absolve one another from sins" (LC V, 13-14).

Another high privilege and responsibility of laypeople is to judge the doctrine taught in their churches, taught by their pastors. The Lord urges Christians to beware of the false prophets who come in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:15ff.). Scripture says, "test the spirits" (1 John 4:1; see 2 John 10-11). This calls for both humble dedication and high biblical literacy on the part of our laypeople. It makes our pastors' teaching task still more urgent.

When we are thinking of the privileges and responsibilities of the Priesthood of all Believers, we also should not omit that laypeople both can and should speak about Jesus Christ with their families, friends, and neighbors. The open doors they have for doing so in their daily lives are countless, and we should lose no opportunity to hold this privilege high before the eyes of God's people, His Royal Priesthood. Indeed, theirs is a high calling from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who has called them into His Kingdom.

Admittedly, congregations and individual laypeople sometimes abuse their roles. This we also need to identify as contrary to God's Word and harmful to His church. Earlier, I alluded to the "hire and fire" mind-set, which in our culture is fueled by radical equality and individualism. I am genuinely troubled by this growing attitude that I find among many congregations. Often this surfaces in connection with a pastor's desire to remain faithful to the Word. When these traits come to the fore, we, as called or elected leaders of our church bodies, have the responsibility to uphold and defend these brethren, and not just let them hang out there and get massacred.

While laypeople most certainly do judge doctrine, their pastors are called publicly to reject any doctrine or practice that runs contrary to the Gospel (See AC XXVIII, 21). So long as a pastor does this in accord with Scripture and the Confessions, members of the congregation he serves should support him and not try to pull the rug out from under him. When a pastor faithfully preaches and teaches God's Word to instruct and comfort as well as to warn and condemn, there should not only be respect in the congregation for him but also faithful reception of and obedience to what he says, not because he is saying it, but because the Lord said it. Christ is the supreme authority in the church. He redeemed her to be His own.

It would seem to me that the time has come when we as church leaders need to say these and similar kinds of things within our various church bodies, and that again with absolute clarity. We need to say to our pastors: this is good, right and proper when it comes to dealing with the people of God—and that is not. So also we need to say to congregations when it comes to dealing with their pastors: this is good, right, and proper—and that is not. In both cases, speaking from the Word will be a must. And speaking with absolute clarity will also be a must. For not to do so will only

tend to bring increased tensions, undesirable trends, as well as new demands on those church leaders who have been called upon to address these situations.

### **The Significance of Our Convocation Topic**

Our goal here is much more lofty than helping each other, or the pastors and laypeople of our churches, to get better scores if someone were to give them a “true or false” test on Church and Ministry.

Instead, I submit that we are here for the sake of the Gospel. I am going to repeat that—yes, for the sake of the Gospel! Sound biblical and Lutheran teaching on Church and Ministry always strikes an evangelical note, for our doctrine of Church and Ministry is and must ever be very much Gospel-centered. This is a very important fact that I want to underscore in a variety of ways as our convocation opens.<sup>22</sup>

I might mention first—for it is of considerable importance as we are confronted by radical equality and individualism—that our teaching on Church and Ministry assures us that the Office of the Ministry was instituted by Christ Himself. He established this Office and mandated those who hold it to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments. He gives them a particular responsibility to hold firm to the biblical Gospel and to hold it high before the eyes and ears of all. Even if everyone else in the church forgets, ignores, or resists what the Lord has said, the pastor is to keep on proclaiming. He is to give people what they need even if they may not want it right at that time. It is a powerfully steadying influence on any pastor to be reminded that his gift and task is to serve as an undershepherd of the Good Shepherd. It is a marvelously evangelical thing for laypeople to ponder that Christ has not only given His church salvation and the Gospel message, but also has called proclaimers to bring it to people.



Second, our teaching on Church and Ministry likewise gives clear encouragement to Christians who find themselves being called upon to administer the Means of Grace in emergencies, like emergency Baptisms. They can act, confident that it is not a mere turn of events in this world that enables them to do this, but the authorization of the Lord Himself. A similar thing might be said, moreover, about lay Christians who speak the Gospel with family or friends. The Lord has given them the privilege and responsibility to do so. They are in no way poaching on some personal preserve of their pastors when they speak to others of the Savior.

Third, this teaching also enables Christians to appreciate better the relationship between their own status as royal priests of God and their pastors' day-to-day activity. For instance, laypeople need not perform official church acts in order to become "involved," so to say. Luther wrote of how in the evangelical celebration of the mass, "We let our pastor say what Christ has ordained, not for himself as though it were for his person, but he is the mouth for all of us and we all speak the words with him from the heart and in faith."<sup>23</sup> Laypeople do not have to baptize, preach, or administer the Lord's Supper to develop an appropriate sense of participation in these public acts. For the pastor represents the congregation as well as Christ. What the pastor "does in the stead of the congregation, so does the church. What the church does, God does."<sup>24</sup>

Further, our teaching on Church and Ministry should increase regard both for the Priesthood of all Believers and for the Office of the Ministry. Time and again, Luther told Christians that for the public administration of the Means of Grace, they should look to their pastors. He did not argue against the fact that the Keys had been given to the church or against the priestly status of the Christian. On the contrary, he took Christ's gift of the Keys to the church very seriously.<sup>25</sup> In fact, "because they pertain to all Christians equally . . . those functions may be exercised in public worship

only by those who are called to the special office.”<sup>26</sup> Consequently, our teaching on Church and Ministry proves to be very evangelical, in the fourth place, as it calls upon us to receive God’s gifts as He gives them: both His gift of the Keys to the church and His gift of the pastors who administer the Keys in and for the church.

This might be a good place to mention a misunderstanding of the relationship between Church and Ministry. It comes into view when people characterize our doctrine as teaching that a pastor’s execution of his office amounts merely to bringing order to a congregation. For in him the congregation has someone to preach and administer the Sacraments, so no contention need arise among the members concerning who will do these things. Order is established. But this is not the end of the story.

In the rest of the story, we have yet a fifth clue to the truly Gospel-centered nature of our teaching on Church and Ministry. Walther acknowledged the need for order, but he placed his emphasis on comfort for the poor sinner who needs the assurance of the Gospel. For if the Keys had been given first, not to the church but rather to the clergy or to the apostles as apostles, then every Christian faces a dilemma. One could only be sure he had been properly baptized, for example, by tracing the ministry of the pastor who baptized him back through a series of predecessors to the original apostles. Of course, this would be an impossible task. But the Keys were actually given first to the church, and so Christians do not have such a problem! Walther wanted people to know that the church has the authority to administer the Keys, and that it “cannot be lost by the church even if pastors apostatize or become tyrannical or die.”<sup>27</sup> So, our teaching on Church and Ministry proves to be eminently evangelical as it maintains “that the power and validity of the divine Means of Grace may not be made uncertain and shaky for Christians.”<sup>28</sup> Our Lord blesses with the sure and certain promises of His Holy Word.

### Vitality of the Relationship Between Pastor and People

When I was yet a parish pastor, I often used the following illustration to explain to my catechism students the relationship that exists between the calling congregation and the Office of the Public Pastoral Ministry. It would go something like this. God has given to the congregation as a gift the Office of the Keys. This would be as if He had given a new car to the congregation as a gift. But God also has instructed the congregation to call or select a man who is capable of serving the congregation on their behalf as their called pastor or spiritual leader. In so doing, the congregation hands to the pastor it selects the responsibility of publicly operating the car.

Now, in this entire process, the ownership of the Office of the Keys (“the car”) remains with the congregation. But the exercising of the Keys in a public capacity, the operating of the car, if you will, has now been entrusted by the congregation to the pastor they have called. In so doing, he must operate the car in a genuinely responsible manner. This is a must. But the congregation also must not go grabbing the steering wheel while he serves in this capacity, yanking it first one way and then the other, acting as though they are all at once the ones who are to drive the car. In this arrangement, both have a clear responsibility from God to the other.

Now to me, two things are very clear in this illustration. One is that called pastors are not to act as though the Keys or their office—or, for that matter, the congregation—is theirs to treat however they please. Nor should they suggest that their laypeople cannot tell their neighbors about Jesus, or announce forgiveness to someone who has done wrong. But the other side of the coin is also very clear. Congregations should not try to reach back on a whim and pull the Keys out of their called pastor’s hands after they have given them to him. So also, congregations should not impede the work of their pastors or make their lives miserable as they carry

out their Ministry of Word and Sacrament. Congregations also need to act in a responsible manner over against their called pastor. In several ways, I think that this illustration captures many important points about the relationship between the Priesthood of All Believers and the Public Pastoral Office.

Now, I recognize that no illustration is perfect. Every illustration breaks down somewhere. For example, the Office of the Keys is not a commodity like a car. Yet, in spite of the weaknesses in this illustration, I hope that one point comes through loud and clear. It is the importance of that vital relationship that must exist between the universal Priesthood of all Believers and the Public, Pastoral Ministry. We need to make it absolutely clear that it is always blessed “both/and” when it comes to the Office of the Ministry.

This relationship is filled with evangelical significance, as mentioned earlier. From a very practical standpoint, when these two are not getting along with one another, the progress of the Gospel in the world is obstructed. Laypeople do not invite their friends to church because they do not want guests to experience all the bickering there. Pastors do not invest themselves as much as they could in their sermons because they get sidetracked by the battles. Countless hours and who-knows-how-much energy are poured down the drain. How tragic, especially among people like us who know something about working while it is day, before the night comes when no man can work.

Consequently, what we are doing here, at this convocation, is for the sake of the Gospel. We have the opportunity to grow in appreciating and applying to ourselves the evangelical emphasis that characterizes the doctrine of Church and Ministry. We also have the opportunity to recommit ourselves to living out the proper relationship between Church and Ministry, which cannot help but be a healthy step in taking the Gospel to a world that needs it so much.

## Conclusion

I would like to repeat one point that is very important to the success of this convocation and its impact on our respective church bodies. This theological convocation will benefit our churches only if we carry back to the grass roots, to local congregations and parish pastors, what we have done here. If we assembled here, as it were, on a high and windy hill for two-and-a-half days to pull back and forth great theological truths, but then failed to take them back to our pastors and congregations, we would be seriously under-fulfilling the potential of our time together. In the Missouri Synod, we are already giving thought as to how this communication can best be accomplished. Our ILC partner churches and guests will have to do this in the way that would best serve the various church bodies. But carry the word back, I feel we must.

For the Missouri Synod, 1997 has already provided a wonderful occasion on which to praise God for all of the blessings that He has graciously bestowed upon us. This anniversary is a time for us to look back, but it is also a time for us to look forward. So we have determined to address what has been and continues to be a key theological and relational truth for our church body: the Priesthood of All Believers and the Office of the Public Pastoral Ministry. As we do this, I am confident that God will bless.

## Notes

1. See Thesis IV on the church. The theses, and Walther's discussion of them, may be found in English in C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry (Kirche und Amt)*, trans. J.T. Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia, 1987).
2. Theses I and II on the Ministry.
3. Thesis VII on the Ministry. Walther, Mueller translation, p. 22, altered.
4. An article on "The Missouri Transferral Theory," published

a quarter-century after Walther's book first appeared, spoke of "The transfer of the power to the office-bearer, to exercise the rights of the Priesthood of all Believers in the public preaching office" *Lehre und Wehre* 23 (October 1877): 295.

5. Robert H. Bork, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline* (New York: Regan Books/Harper Collins, 1996).

6. *Ibid.*, 5.

7. Bork defines what he terms "radical egalitarianism" as "equality of outcomes rather than of opportunities." *Ibid.*

8. William H. Whyte, *The Organization Man* (Garden City, NY: Anchor/Doubleday, 1957), 235.

9. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 25 ff.

10. Bork, 10.

11. See Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), and "Sola Scriptura and Novus Ordo Seclorum," *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, ed. Nathan Hatch and Mark Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 59–78; Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage Books/Random House, 1963); Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992).

12. David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 65.

13. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Henry Reeve, Francis Bowen, and Phillips Bradley (New York: Knopf, 1953), 2:4. Robert Bellah and his associates contend that it is individualism, not equality (as de Tocqueville said), that "has marched inexorably through our history." Robert Bellah, et. al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), viii. For present purposes

it will suffice to note that both radical equality and individualism are important forces.

14. Quoted in Bloom, 86.

15. William J. Bennett, "The Children," *What to Do About . . .*, ed. Neal Kozodoy (New York: Regan Books/Harper Collins, 1995), 5, quoted in Bork, 65.

16. Robert Baird, *Religion in America*, quoted in Philip J. Lee, *Against the Protestant Gnostics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 157.

17. Andrew P. Peabody, *The Work of the Ministry*, quoted in Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, 86. Hofstadter also quoted de Tocqueville: "If you converse with these missionaries of Christian civilization [Protestant clergy in America], you will be surprised to hear them speak so often of the goods of this world, and to meet a politician where you expected to find a priest." Hofstadter, 86, note 1.

18. "The democratization of Christianity . . . has less to do with the specifics of piety and governance, and more with the incarnation of the church into popular culture." Hatch, *Democratization*, 9. If anything, an understanding of the religious setting in which the early Missourians found themselves invites us to admire their adherence to Scripture as well as to the Lutheran Confessions and Luther. If they really had been importing "American" elements into their doctrine and practice of Church and Ministry, imagine what the Missouri Synod would have looked like!

19. See *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1955-1986) [hereafter AE], 13:315.

20. Martin Luther, *Concerning the Ministry* (1523), AE 40:38.

21. It is interesting that, in the preface to the first edition of his book on Church and Ministry (1852), Walther described the Missouri Synod's persuasion that "present differences among the

Lutherans concerning the doctrines of the Church and the Ministry and whatever is immediately connected with them stems from the fact that the doctrine set forth in the public confessions of our church and in the private writings of its orthodox teachers has been disregarded and abandoned.”

22. Ken Schurb, “The Meeting of Church and Ministry in the Lutheran Confessions and Some of Their Interpreters,” *The Pieper Lectures: Volume I. The Office of the Ministry*, ed. Chris Christophersen Boshoven (N. p.: Concordia Historical Institute and the Luther Academy, 1997), 60–112.

23. Martin Luther, *The Private Mass and the Consecration of Priests* (1533), AE 38:208–209.

24. *Dr. Martin Luther's Kirchen-Postille: Evangelien-Theil*, Vol. II of *Dr. Martin Luther's Sammtliche Schriften*, ed. J.G. Walch (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1882) [Hereafter St. L.], col. 2304. See AE 51:343.

25. See St. L. II:745–746; II:2304–2305. See also *On the Councils and the Church* (1539), AE 41:154.

26. Regin Prenter on Luther, quoted in Kurt E. Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance* (Ft. Wayne: The International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, 1990), 117.

27. C.F.W. Walther, *The Form of A Christian Congregation*, trans. J. T. Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 16, note 1.

28. C.F.W. Walther, *The Congregation's Right to Choose Its Pastor*, trans. Fred Kramer (n.p.: The Office of Development, Concordia Theological Seminary, 1987), 105.