

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

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FOREWORD

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

Presentation IV

**CONTEMPORARY ISSUES REGARDING
THE UNIVERSAL PRIESTHOOD**

Reverend Raymond Hartwig, President
The South Dakota District
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

THIS PRESENTATION, AS ASSIGNED, WILL ADDRESS the manner in which God expects His people to think about the Priesthood of all Believers and how He intends for them to relate to His set-apart servants their called pastors. It will address such contemporary issues as the “hire-and-fire” mentality, the “everyone a minister” mind-set, and the involvement of laypeople in distinctive functions of the Pastoral Office. It will also identify some of the contemporary conditions impacting the relationship of the people of the church with their pastors. As we explore these conditions, we will better appreciate this relationship.

The presentation will be divided into three parts:

1. Another look via illustration at the relationship of the Priesthood of all Believers and the Office of the Public Ministry;
2. Current conditions that are strongly impacting this relationship; and
3. A first step, especially on the part of the laity, toward resolution of the tensions that exist in this relationship.

The Relationship of the Priesthood and the Ministry

Various illustrations have already been advanced in this convocation and elsewhere to help picture and discuss the relationship between the Priesthood of all Believers and the Office of the Public Ministry. The picture which first comes to mind is that given by Martin Chemnitz in his *Enchiridion*, that "as to His spouse has Christ entrusted the Keys of the Kingdom" to His church.¹ C.F.W. Walther, among others, also advances this illustration in his *Kirche und Amt*. He depicts Christ as the Bridegroom who gives to His bride, the church, the Keys of the household, that is, authorization to administer the Gospel. She, in turn, gives these keys to the head servant of the household—the pastor. While the pastor uses these keys to carry out his duties, they remain the church's keys, hers nonetheless to use in emergency situations.²

In his opening address to this convocation, Dr. A.L. Barry introduced another illustration—that of receiving a car as a gift and then handing the Keys to another person to help use the gift. The illustration is offered, again, to promote a better understanding of both the rights and the limitations in this "vital relationship that must exist between the Priesthood of all Believers and the Public, Pastoral Ministry."

To the already existing collection of illustrations, I offer yet another—one that may not only prove helpful for appreciating this relationship, but one that hopefully will also prove helpful for viewing and addressing the tensions presently troubling the church. This illustration will be that of the loving and caring marriage relationship of husband and wife.

When C.F.W. Walther spoke the oft-quoted words of his twentieth evening lecture on Law and Gospel as he was preparing young candidates for the Pastoral Ministry, he was also describing a future beautiful marriage—that of the Office they would soon be called to fill, with the congregation they would be called to serve.

Walther said,

When a place has been assigned to a Lutheran candidate of theology where he is to discharge the Office of a Lutheran Minister, that place ought to be to him the dearest, most beautiful, and most precious spot on earth. He should be unwilling to exchange it for a kingdom. Whether it is in a metropolis or in a small town, on a bleak prairie or in a clearing in the forest, in a flourishing settlement or in a desert, to him it should be a miniature paradise.³

The kind of relationship suggested by those words can only exist when the two joined together enjoy a mutual appreciation for each other. The young bride must truly believe that her husband is the God's gift to her. The young husband must be awed by the beauty of his wife and must regard her as God's gift to him. Both together must think of themselves as the most blessed couple on earth and theirs a marriage truly made in heaven.

So it must also be in the household of God when laity and pastors are brought together by God's Word and Spirit in a unique and special marriage instituted by God. The laity have every reason to think of their pastors as gifts of God, with appreciation borne out of a right understanding of the origin of the Pastoral Office. A.H. Schwermann underscores this point in his essay to the 1955 convention of the South Dakota District titled, *The Glorious Office of the Holy Ministry*:

The Office of the Holy Ministry did not come into existence because in the flux of human events as man gradually planned and evolved it. No; it was God who planned it and gave it to the Church. . . . Counselors tell us that there are today in North America about 30,000 different professions and occupations. Some of these were planned by seamen, some by aviators, some by surgeons, some by engineers, some by farmers, and one of these 30,000 was planned by God—the Office of the Holy Ministry.⁴

When the congregation recognizes that the Office of the Public Ministry has been created by the will and ordinance of God, responses important to a happy and loving marriage relationship necessarily follow. As a bride happily gives her love, honor and support to her husband, so also does the congregation to her pastor. St. Paul writes to Timothy: "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching" (1 Tim. 5:17). And, with such honor there must also be love and respect, what E.E. Foelber in his essay in *The Abiding Word* calls "the golden band that ties both pastor and people into a social unit that reflects the love of God which brought them into being."⁵

Foelber also quotes St. Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians as a reminder and encouragement of this love and respect of the congregation for its pastor: "Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work" (1 Thess. 5:12-13). And he offers St. Paul's words to the congregation in Galatia as a love letter written by a man of the cloth marveling at the love he has received from his God-given partner: "As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the Gospel to you. Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus Himself" (Gal. 4:13-14).⁶

A happy marriage must be a mutual admiration society. The very congregation to which the pastor is joined by his call

. . . is a body of people differing from all human organizations by its unique spiritual character divinely granted to it. . . . The local congregation stands supreme, unequaled in splendor, power, and influence among the organizations of the world and surpasses in importance all other institutions.⁷

Accordingly, St. Paul calls the members of the Christian congregation at Ephesus “saints” who have been chosen before the foundation of the world, predestined to be a part of the household of Christ (Eph. 1:1–5). St. Peter tells the congregations of Asia Minor: “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light” (1 Pet. 2:9). This is one beautiful bride!

And she also is gifted. Not only does she have the usual variety of gifts, “the work of one and the same Spirit, . . . just as He determines” (1 Cor. 12:11). She also has keys, the rights, privileges, and powers granted by the Almighty God to all Christian congregations: the authority and privilege of preaching the Gospel, administering the Sacraments, and remitting and retaining sins. These rights and privileges have been bestowed upon her by Christ, extraordinary treasures accompanied by solemn responsibilities: to keep pure the doctrine committed to her care and to give this doctrine to the world. The Christian congregation is indeed one special lady!

As in any marriage, however, this mutual admiration society must also be marked by high regard for those distinguishing qualities that maintain the uniqueness and individuality of each partner, the respect for the other that is so important to a happy marriage. In his sermon on Psalm 110:4, Luther sets forth the unique rights, privileges, and powers of the spiritual priesthood, leaving no question regarding the authority of not only the congregation as a whole, but also of every member in it:

After we have become Christians through this Priest and His priestly office, incorporated in Him by Baptism through faith, then each one, according to his calling and position, obtains the right and the power of teaching and confessing before others this Word which we have obtained from Him. Even though not everybody has the public office and calling, every Christian has the right and the duty to

teach, instruct, admonish, comfort, and rebuke his neighbor with the Word of God at every opportunity and whenever necessary. For example, father and mother should do this for their children and household; a brother, neighbor, citizen, or peasant for the other. Certainly one Christian may instruct and admonish another ignorant or weak Christian concerning the Ten Commandments, the Creed, or the Lord's Prayer. And he who receives such instruction is also under obligation to accept it as God's Word and publicly to confess it.⁸

Luther goes on to make fully clear that the Means of Grace have the same nature, power, and effect whether administered by common Christians of the Priesthood of all Believers or by pastors who hold the Office of the Public Ministry:

There is no other Word of God than the one all Christians are told to preach; there is no other Baptism than the one all Christians may administer; there is no other remembrance of the Lord's Supper than the one any Christian may celebrate; also there is no other sin than the one every Christian may bind or loose; again, there is no other sacrifice than the body of every Christian; also, no one can, or may, pray but only a Christian; moreover, no one should judge of the doctrine but the Christian. These, however, certainly are the priestly and kingly functions.⁹

But even as high regard on the one hand must be accompanied by the same on the other if there is to be a happy marriage, so also the pastor's high regard for the uniqueness and gifts of the congregation must be answered with a similar high regard for his office by the congregation he serves and the church at large. This has nothing to do with superiority; it has everything to do with respect for the Office. Walther underscores this point:

The Public Ministry is not a special order, distinct from and holier than the common order of Christians, as the priesthood of the

Levites was, but it is an office of service.¹⁰ On the other hand, the [pastoral] Ministry is not to be degraded and made common. The office of Word and Sacrament not only lends dignity and authority, but also makes exacting demands. . . . [The pastor] must, therefore, stand before his people as one of them, a fellow-sinner, and yet in the full dignity and authority of his office, which he “strives to adorn with a holy life and conversation.” . . . He stands before the congregation as the bearer of the Office of Word and Sacrament upon which the congregation is dependent.¹¹

This high regard and respect for the Office of the Pastor was modeled, in my personal experience, in one of the rural parishes I was privileged to serve as pastor. My predecessor retired from the Ministry and remained in the parish to serve as master of the beautiful organ that adorned the congregation’s worship. He was neither a quiet man nor very personable. He wasn’t even a very good preacher or teacher by most standards. But he was unique, and among other less-than-agreeable things, he was a master of outrageous comments that today would prompt a call to the district president within two weeks of a pastor’s arrival in a parish. And yet the congregation loved and respected him because of the office he held among them. They loved him for 28 years and then gave him their parsonage when he retired.

As a district president, I recently came upon a similarly outstanding situation. I missed a signal from another district president as I was gathering names for a call list and as a result was not aware that this particular pastor had some problems that had called into question his ability to remain in the Pastoral Ministry. Out of the list of pastors I provided to a vacant congregation, this pastor received and then accepted their call. When the pastor and his family arrived, I immediately recognized some concerns. Since that time I had been expecting the inevitable telephone call or letter asking that something be done.

That telephone call came several weeks ago, eight months into this pastor-parish relationship. I anticipated what I would hear from the president of the congregation as I picked up the telephone. But, in fact, I was surprised—and elated. Speaking on behalf of his congregation, the layman had one question: “A number of us were talking and could it be that there has perhaps been a serious physical injury in our pastor’s past?” They had noticed that sometimes his thinking seemed to skip a beat, a difficulty that two other people in their community with past serious head injuries also experienced at times. They did not want to ask the pastor himself because they did not want to hurt his feelings. They just wanted to know so that they could be helpful to him.

I asked how the pastor was doing otherwise. The response was that he is doing just fine. He preaches good sermons, well thought out and prepared. He is faithful in visiting the sick. He is not as good at working with their young people as their previous pastor had been, but he gives them his time and attention, helps them plan their activities, and really does OK. For the first time ever their congregation had a float in the town’s Fourth of July parade. And then the royal priest spoke frankly about his servant pastor: “Oh, we know that he is not the perfect pastor, but his heart is in his ministry and we are just a small parish. We know he serves us the best he can. We have a high regard for his office and for him and want to help him as much as we can.”

The people of both these parishes modeled so strikingly and well that essential respect, which must undergird any successful marriage, and which necessarily must include a willingness to grant and lovingly accept the humanness of the other. Our Lutheran Confessions recognize this too. They speak of the strong not only enduring, but also bearing, the weak in Christian love, out of regard for the love Christ has for the person and the gifts He has given to him out of love and mercy.

. . . when the people also have patience with their pastors, [and] when the bishops and preachers in return can (when the opportunity arises) see in a good light all sorts of weaknesses and shortcomings on the part of the people. So now, Peter's statement [1 Peter 4:8] is to be understood thus: "Love covers a multitude of sins," *i.e.*, love covers the sin of our neighbor. . . . Peter means that a person in whom Christian love dwells is not obstinate, not harsh or unfriendly. On the contrary, he sees the neighbor's mistakes and faults in a good light, forgives him as a brother, appeases him, and shows himself to be willing to yield for the sake of peace. . . . If the people, then, are to be or remain united with one another—whether in the church or in secular government—they must not carefully count up every fault against one another. They must allow many things to flow by [without noticing them], always seeing them in a good light and having patience with one another in brotherly love.¹²

Walther brings this point home with a further discussion:

See to it that you don't expect too much from your people, as our quotation reminded us. You can't turn every (piece of wood) into a dowel. It simply can't be done; not all wood is suitable for dowels. "Divisions also will easily develop if the people immediately want to master and nitpick everything in the life and conduct of the bishops or pastors," says the Apology. Also our dear congregations should note this carefully. When a pastor makes an occasional mistake, they should not be too harsh in their judgment but should consider, "Did he do that out of weakness? Is it really serious enough to sound the alarm or not?" And if you determine that it was done in weakness and is [a matter] of little importance, then you should either ignore it or tell him in a friendly way, "You did not handle that correctly." Otherwise, if the congregation insists on nitpicking (*ausecken*) about every little thing, then the beautiful relationship . . . will come to an end. Then the devil laughs up his sleeve, when the people no longer heed the pastor's word; then he has torn the members from their orthodox pastor. We must support one another! The pastor should not expect the members of his congregation to be nothing but angels, and the members should not demand that their pastor be an angel either, for that he cannot be.¹³

It sounds almost simple and easy: Two partners recognizing each other to be God-given and unique, living and working together in mutual admiration, allowing each other sufficient space for individuality and error. This is the stuff that “happily ever after” and “till death us do part” is made of. On the other hand, this relationship of people and pastors would not be the critical topic of discussion that it is in our day were that always the case. Instead, we see those serious concerns Walther warned about becoming a too-frequent reality in our parishes, leading to serious concerns church-wide. Large responsibility for this lies with a number of current conditions impacting this relationship.

Current Conditions Impacting the Relationship Between the Priesthood of All Believers and the Pastoral Office

The relationship of the Priesthood of all Believers and the Pastoral Office has never been an easy marriage happily and peacefully to preserve and maintain. As we know, discussions and disputes regarding proper roles and distinctions in this relationship were a significant element of the formational moments both of Lutheranism and also The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Tendencies toward “overages” on the part of both marriage partners have kept discussions of this significant relationship current and often heated, as is the case also in our day.

We collectively cringe to hear of statements made by some pastors today, which fail to regard rightly the priesthood of the believers they serve. These pastors suggest that the efficacy of the Sacraments is emptied in the hands of a lay person, and imply or even maintain that there is no biblical or confessional foundation for the Priesthood of all Believers. They propose that it is an error to assert that in Matt. 18:19–20, Christ is commissioning all believers to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments. They contend that Lutheran school teachers can only convey information

but not confer forgiveness and life because the teacher is not a pastor. They hold that fathers and mothers can only offer their own personal forgiveness to their children since forgiveness from Christ can only come from the pastor, even proposing that Christ is bodily present in the pastor when the pastor performs the duties of his office.¹⁴

We also cringe to hear and observe the overages committed, on the other hand, by some laymen (the primary interest of this presentation) who reduce the Pastoral Office to something different from its institution by Christ. That current lay attitudes have already been some time in coming is clear from a report in a 1986 issue of *Nation* magazine:

Indeed, so far has the church caught the spirit of the age, so far has it become a business enterprise, that the chief test of ministerial success is now the ability to 'build up' a church. Executive, managerial abilities are now more in demand than those which used to be considered the highest in a clergyman.¹⁵

Conditions have not improved in the past 11 years. Os Guinness in his book, *Dining With the Devil*, demonstrates how those century-old distortions have deepened and expanded:

In a massive study in 1934, pastors were said to have five distinct roles—teacher, preacher, pastor, leader, and administrator. These roles are notable for being few in number and biblical in content. But in another huge study in 1980, involving 47 denominations, evidence showed that the pastor's profile both expanded and grew more secular. Pastors were expected to be open, affirming, able to foster relationships, experienced in facilitating discussion, and so on. The new premium was on skills in interpersonal relationships and conflict management. Biblical and spiritual criteria for ministry were notably optional. . . .

Anyone who doubts this shift has only to look at church-growth literature and check for such chapters as "portrait of the effective

pastor." In one such best-seller, theology and theological references are kept to a minimum—little more than a cursory reference to the pastor's "personal calling" and to "God's vision for the church." The bulk of the chapter is taken up with such themes as delegating, confidence, interaction, decision-making, visibility, practicality, accountability, and discernment—the profile of the thoroughly modern pastor as CEO. . . .

[These] leadership qualities could apply in a hundred other organizations—after all, they once did, and were simply borrowed. Worse still, the disadvantage of the CEO-Pastor, as increasing numbers of them are discovering, is that those who live like CEOs are fired like CEOs—and spiritual considerations have as little to do with the ending as with the beginning and the middle.¹⁶

Dr. George Wollenburg, in a presentation to the 1996 *Lay/Clergy Conference on Church Issues* of the South Dakota District, advocates that a publication out of our own circles and history has made a further contribution to this spirit of the age. Beginning with its title, *Everyone a Minister*, it helped prepare the way for the generic use of the terms "ministry" and "minister." As a result, every form of Christian service in the church became titled a "ministry" (e.g., "ministry of music," "youth ministry," or even "my own personal ministry"). According to Wollenburg,

this creates theological and doctrinal confusion. It tends to erase the distinction between that "ministry" which God has instituted in order that we might have faith, and the sanctified service of Christian people which is the fruit of, or the consequence of faith. A confusion between sanctification and justification results.¹⁷

Dr. A.L. Barry in his 1994 essay to the South Wisconsin District Pastors' Conference, *The Shepherd and His Sheep*, singles out some of that confusion on the part of the Priesthood over against the Pastoral Office and offers very helpful and practical advice on these complex issues:

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We notice an increase in what I and others refer to as a “hire and fire” mentality on the part of our congregations. . . . Because so many of our people work in situations where employees are hired and fired as a matter of routine, it is all too easy to slip into this same sort of attitude in regard to their pastor.

A second tension we encounter in the relationship of the Royal Priesthood and the Pastoral Office is keeping clear the distinction between the two . . . as when certain laypeople and even pastors take ministry in the wide sense and begin to edge it into those responsibilities that would fall within the scope of ministry in the narrow sense. . . .

There is yet a third tension in the relationship. . . . I have encountered this tension more often than the “hire and fire” mentality. With our very proper understanding of the duties and responsibilities of the Pastoral Office, I find that it may be tempting for some of the laypeople of our church to think that all they have to do is to stand on the sidelines and let the pastor do all the work—the attitude that the duty of the laity is simply to “pray, pay, and obey.”¹⁸

Excesses in any partnership, including that of the Priesthood of all Believers and the Office of the Public Ministry, result in tension and strife not so different from that which troubles struggling marriages when both parties begin to cling to personal rights and interests. In marriages we recognize the need to sit down and to put heads and hearts together to work toward regaining a proper marital balance based upon mutual love, honor and esteem. Such sitting down to put heads and hearts together ought to be most possible in the church, where heads and hearts are already joined together in Christian faith and love. But cultural and environmental factors today make such sitting down together increasingly difficult, and at the same time add to the difficulties the church is facing.

We do live at a unique time in history, amid conditions never encountered before by the church. These societal conditions that

are having a tremendous impact upon everything having to do with Christian faith and life are also impacting the relationship of the Priesthood of Believers and their pastor. However these cultural phenomena may be labeled or described, and to whomever or whatever they may be attributed, today's "modernity"¹⁹ or "post-modernism"²⁰ are certain ultimately to affect every Christian church body in every nation on earth.

Os Guinness maintains that this momentous cultural surge is the fruit of capitalism and industrialized technology. It is, therefore, strongest in North America and certain to have global consequences.²¹ James Turner in his book, *Without God, Without Creed*, places some additional responsibility elsewhere in North America:

On the contrary, religion caused unbelief. In trying to adapt their religious beliefs to socioeconomic change, to new moral challenges, to novel problems of knowledge, to the tightening standards of science, the defenders of God slowly strangled Him. If anyone is to be arraigned for deicide, it is not Charles Darwin but his adversary Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, not the godless Robert Ingersoll but the godly Beecher family.²²

Wherever credit may be given or blame placed, the result, according to Guinness, is a "crisis of cultural authority":

Modernity creates problems far deeper than drugs, crime, illiteracy, AIDS, broken families, or the plight of the inner cities. It creates a crisis of cultural authority in which America's beliefs, ideals, and traditions are losing their compelling power in society. What people believe no longer makes much difference to how they behave. Unless reversed, this hollowing out of beliefs will finally be America's undoing.²³

This new frame of mind comes with an attitude, one which Christian philosopher Elton Trueblood has called the disease of

contemporaneity and an absolutely intolerable conceit. Trueblood in his writings bemoans today's too-prevalent attitude that mankind has finally come into its own and has outgained and outlived the relevance of past wisdom, of even the Word of God.²⁴ Thomas Oden similarly shakes his head at what he calls "modern chauvinism"—tendencies to use the tools of modernity uncritically and "to exaggerate the newness, uniqueness, universality, and permanence of the present," at the expense of age-old, God-given beliefs and standards.²⁵

John Paul II joins the chorus of bemoaners by expressing his own concern over current conditions. In his encyclical letter on the value and inviolability of human life, *Evangelium Vitae*, he too looks to "the deepest roots of the struggle" and attributes today's deplorable conditions to secularism:

We have to go to the heart of the tragedy being experienced by modern man: the eclipse of the sense of God and of man, typical of a social and cultural climate dominated by secularism, which with its ubiquitous tentacles succeeds at times in putting Christian communities themselves to the test.²⁶

According to James Turner, the current social and cultural climate has indeed put the entire Christian community to the test:

Developments external to religion produced the climate in which unbelief grew. The rise of modern science challenged believers to rethink the intellectual bases of their belief. Social and economic change stripped away much of the insulation that protected belief from corrosion, and it created an environment in which old conceptions of God made less sense, even became repugnant.²⁷

A religion of humanity, (ritualized in science), a cult of art, the worship of nature. . . . No neat credal lines separated these godless denominations; unbelievers were free to worship at all three altars. Most did, distributing their piety as temperament and circumstance inclined them. They found in this way objects of reverence and

sources of consolation sufficient to permit them to let go of their Father in heaven.

Rendered intellectually incredible and morally repugnant, belief in God thus faded in favor of an entirely human morality and a religion of this world.²⁸

This fading belief in God has resulted in a corresponding denial of basic Christian concepts formerly accepted by most people, as indicated by perplexing sets of statistics regarding present-day personal beliefs. A recent poll conducted by the Barna Research Group reports that 87 percent of Americans still claim that their faith is very important in their life and 83 percent claim that their religious beliefs actually change the way they behave. But only slightly more than half believe that the Bible is accurate in all it teaches, and this accompanied by a growing acceptance of homosexuality, pornography, and dishonesty. Barna sums up his findings:

We are living amidst the dilution of traditional, Bible-based “Christian” faith. Millions of Americans are comfortable calling themselves “Christian” even though their beliefs suggest otherwise. . . . Rejection of orthodox Christian beliefs, coupled with a relativistic culture, has led millions of adults to embrace a worldview totally at odds with the faith they allegedly embrace.²⁹

This nonchalance toward, and even disdain for, correctness of doctrine must inevitably impact the church’s relationship with her clergy, beginning with a growing disdain for classic seminary education. Guinness summarizes today’s all-too-prevalent attitudes toward theology, which is viewed as

cerebral, theoretical, wordy, divisive, specialized, remote—an obviously unwelcome intruder to the Holy Family of the spiritual, the relational, and the practical. . . . [To this way of thinking] the traditional seminaries and their training can be ignored. They are on their way to joining the Dodo bird.³⁰

The result of all this is a marriage problem that has been just waiting to happen. However much people in Christian congregations may understand the call to be divine, when doctrine-conscious pastors join with congregations of late-20th-century people and attitudes, congregations are too often most interested in their pastor's skillfulness in interpersonal relationships, conflict management, and managerial abilities. This marriage is certain to have its challenging moments. And then, place all of this in a postmodern environment—one which looks with disdain on any insistence on truthful revelation to govern not only who this couple is but also how they are to live with and in relation to each other—it is no wonder that this relationship struggles as it does today.

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod cannot avoid participation in this struggle. To be sure, doctrinal concerns exist on both sides of this partnership of the Priesthood and Pastoral Office, doctrinal concerns that should not be minimized and that beg to be resolved. But these are not the only, and may not be the most compelling, concerns. In reality, they may be more symptom than malady: the unfortunate but not unexpected byproduct of a typical marital struggle in which the participants are tempted to overreact to overages on the part of the other party by resorting to overages of their own.

On the one hand, we have the classically and confessionally trained clergy of our church body, men who are well instructed regarding Bible-based doctrine and practice upon leaving our seminaries. They have at heart the very best ways of doing things in the church, and after countless hours in classrooms sitting at the feet of esteemed teachers, they also wholeheartedly believe in and are ready to staunchly defend and actively promote the proper doctrine and practice of their church. With C.F.W. Walther, they do not merely consider the Lutheran church the best among many. They consider it the orthodox over against the heterodox, the true

visible church on earth that is significantly different from other churches—a difference not just in degree but in kind. They have learned to say with the first president of their Synod,

The Lutheran Church is therefore not only a real but the true visible church of God on earth, insofar as “true” means nothing other than “as it should be according to the Word of God.” The less we can or want to boast before other churches of our pious way of life, the more we can and must nevertheless boast before others about the pure doctrine, which, thanks to the undeserved mercy of God, shines upon us poor sinners like the clear, bright light of the sun.³¹

These men now receive calls from congregations throughout the church through its placement process, from a variety of congregations likely to have already experienced a variety in pastoral practice. They receive these calls often to congregations whose pastoral expectations and interest in pure doctrine and practice have been colored to varying degrees by the culture already described. In some cases, they go to well-seasoned congregations who have seen pastors come and go and who decide early on that they will outlast this one too. In other cases they go to well-wounded congregations grown tired of the pain that comes with division after division over issue after issue. In every case, these pastors go without pastoral experience, uncertain of pastoral boundaries, and with much still to learn about working with the Priesthood of Believers. In too many cases, conscience ends up pitted against culture, neither readily giving way nor holding sway.

A current situation in my own district offers a case in point. Several years ago, a pastor who was new to the Ministry—a former dairy farmer entering the Ministry as his second career—accepted his first call to serve a well-seasoned but already somewhat wounded rural parish. Initially, this looked like the proverbial “marriage made in heaven” with very favorable early reports. The people were

so thankful that they did not have to teach their pastor what a combine was. Instead, his fame quickly spread as one who helped farmers tear down and repair their combines. The proverbial honeymoon was on.

It was also brief. This pastor had also been an excellent and eager student at the seminary, and he carried his considerable knowledge of the Scriptures and Confessions to the parish in the forefront of his pastoral awareness. He could not but believe strongly in doing things the proper way and found it difficult to settle for less. The congregation on the other hand had not been an excellent student of the Scriptures and Confessions. Church membership had been more of a Sunday morning family thing than a matter of confessional commitment. Practice, especially Communion and worship practice, had varied of late, dependent to a large extent on the practice of a variety of pastors as well as Missouri Synod's changing relationship with the American Lutheran Church. Two pastors ago they practiced open communion and participated in joint worship services with the other churches in town. One pastor ago they underwent serious tumult when that candidate pastor, bound by conscience, led the congregation into a more proper fellowship practice, but this was at the price of his early departure.

Predictably, the very short honeymoon led to very serious strife. Even though encouragements to speak and study together and to talk things out were given, divisions developed and disgruntled members began to absent themselves, some leaving the already small and struggling congregation noisily and permanently. When the remaining members were asked to identify the issues that were causing the strife, the more significant of the congregation's list of twelve items included the following: the pastor's chanting, his moving the baptismal font from the back of the chancel to the front, his determination that the Christmas tree lights not be turned on until Christmas Eve, the length of his Bible studies, his decision

that confirmands leave the worship service prior to the celebration of the Sacrament, his practice of not allowing parents of confirmands to commune with their children at the time of their first Communion, and several more issues of similar consequence. All of these were intensified by several truthful but blunt comments made by the pastor in various heated discussions and conversations since his arrival.

The paltriness of these issues, which are destroying a parish and scattering a precious flock of Christ, is particularly striking. But they are only paltry until emotions become heated. Striking also is the absence from the list of the most significant issues troubling this marriage: fellowship and worship practices, family and community ties, problems engendered by past practice and aggravated by the knowledge that sister congregations elsewhere are doing the very things that this pastor won't allow, matters held against the pastor and coloring every other aspect of his ministry. You had to be there at the meeting I requested, of course, to observe pastor and people exchanging looks and accusations across the table and to witness how woefully divided these Christians are. The pastor was well entrenched, insistent upon his rightness and his rights to receive the honor and respect due to his office. The flock was busily pointing out his every last fault, to include even the way he smiles. We have all witnessed such scenes in troubled marriages of the Gen. 2:24 kind. We have too often also witnessed these same scenes between pastors and people, neither party any longer reaching out to the other with love and esteem. The marriage that began with joy, moves toward collapse as pastors and people continue to bicker, feud and find fault with one another. What began as a joyful relationship ends in bitterness and anger.

It must be recognized and noted, of course, that this is the devil's doing, as Walther notes in an essay to the 1879 Iowa District Convention:

You see, the devil's great craftiness is that if he cannot plunge a church group into false doctrine, nor destroy their unity in confession, he then tries [to destroy it] through their lives. He creates divisions among the members. One person offends another, perhaps without wishing to do so. The second person then becomes angry and imputes malice to him. And if the offense was great enough, perhaps even intentional, then true brotherly fellowship has been destroyed, and the result is that there is no longer any real joy of standing in confessional fellowship with the offender. And that is precisely what the devil wants! ³²

Walther correctly reminds us that here too, as in other areas of Christian life, our wrestling is not altogether against flesh and blood—a critical aspect of the struggle to be borne in mind. But there certainly are contributing factors also from the human side. Significant pressures exerted by today's society undermine the leadership of pastors and challenge the convictions of the laity. And do we not also supply additional pressures from within our own church body, when the training we provide for our pastors is so often different from the practice of the church at large and the practice of the congregations they are first called to serve. Heavy strain is certain to be placed upon what should be a wonderful relationship of pastor and people.

These conditions lead to overages on the part of clergy and misunderstandings on the part of laymen, and they bring harm to the fellowship of faith locally and at large. But they also offer leads for addressing the tensions that exist in today's church between the Priesthood of all Believers and the Office of the Public Ministry—our great interest as we meet for this convocation.

Toward Resolution of Tensions in the Church: A First Step

As a parish pastor, I offered counseling to couples who came to me to be married. Our Bible study together helped to promote a proper understanding of marriage and of living together in the

name of Christ. Our time together also provided occasion to address those areas of married life most likely to cause difficulty until such time as death would do its parting. To facilitate this counsel I often used a set of cards on which were printed statements broaching significant spiritual and secular issues having to do with living together in marriage "till death us do part." With these cards couples were caused to make judgments independent of each other regarding the correctness of each of forty-four statements, their compared answers hopefully leading into meaningful discussion.

It was my practice also to ask these couples to meet with me again after six months of marriage, just to touch base with them to learn how they and their marriage were doing. At times we would end up repeating their pre-marriage counseling, often using the same set of counseling cards, this time with their greater interest and whole-hearted participation. Do we not find ourselves at a similar point in time today? The partnership between the Priesthood of all Believers and the Office of the Public Ministry, like a challenged marriage, is in dire need of a six-month visit and renewed attention among us.

Especially beneficial will be the relief and restoration that the counsel of God's Word alone can provide, to restore a proper understanding of this relationship and with that to accomplish four additional and critical goals: (1) Such study will surely help to counter the overages troubling both sides of this partnership in Christ. (2) Such study will help to spark a new or renewed appreciation of the "significant other" in this relationship. (3) Such study will help our laypeople contradict the spirit of the age in which the church must live and function today, a spirit that resists the very things pastors are called to do in Christ's name. (4) And, as an added benefit, such study will also lead our church fellowship to address other significant issues that are driving wedges between so

many of our members, and so often between pastors and the people God has placed into their care.

Already in his day, Walther saw in districts and the Synod a strong potential for the overages that have become rife in our circles in our day. He gave strong warning:

My dear brothers, let us be on our guard! Satan is sly. Right now we are brothers, living together in peace and love. But Satan will most certainly lay for us snares by which he hopes to destroy the sweet, brotherly love we now have in our hearts. We dare never think that it is enough if we just remain united in our faith and doctrine. No, once love has been destroyed, it won't be long before one person believes what the other person rejects, and the other teaches what the first considers an error. . . . For example, one person takes a stand [on the given issue], and another person takes the opposite stand. Perhaps the one person dislikes the other; he simply can't stand him, and for that reason he inflexibly maintains his position. It is frightening (*schrecklich*) what harm can result when members of a church organization do not vigilantly guard their fraternal love.³³

The Apology to the Augsburg Confession also warns against the kinds of conditions that are threatening to prevail in the church of our day for the same kinds of reasons:

In all families and communities harmony should be nurtured by mutual aid, for it is not possible to preserve tranquility unless men cover and forgive certain mistakes in their midst. In the same way Paul commands that there be love in the church to preserve harmony, to bear, if need be, with the crude behavior of the brethren, to cover up minor mistakes, lest the church disintegrate into various factions, and heresies that arise from such schisms.

For harmony will inevitably disintegrate if bishops impose heavy burdens on the people or have no regard for their weakness. Dissensions also arise when the people judge their clergy's behavior too strictly or despise them because of some minor fault and then

seek after some other kinds of doctrine and other clergy. On the other hand, perfection (that is, the integrity of the church) is preserved when the strong bear with the weak, when the people put the best construction on the faults of their clergy, when the bishops take into account the weakness of the people (Ap IV, 232–34).

Mutual study of the Scriptures, the clergy leading the way and leading their people, will go a long way toward a renewed understanding of their God-given relationship while also re-igniting the love and esteem so essential to their life and work together. Pastors and congregations carefully and caringly studying together locally and as a church body must surely result in a reduction of the animosity that lurks behind extreme positions. At the same time, such mutual study will transport the laity of the church to a mindset not entirely unlike that of hymnist Samuel Rodigast and the words he wrote for a close friend who was ill:

What God ordains is always good; His will abideth holy.
As He directs my life for me, I follow meek and lowly.
My God indeed In ev'ty need
Doth well know how to shield me;
To Him, then, I will yield me.³⁴

Pardon the play on words, but a little more of a “*whom* God ordains is always good” spirit would not be altogether bad. God’s people would recognize that those who are ordained may not always be “good” in all they say and do. However, the people would also recognize that the Office of the Public Ministry is always good. For it is by God’s will and “His will abideth holy”—also to include the ministry of the man who currently fills the Office among them.

Mutual study will also lead to a renewed lay understanding and appreciation that this Pastoral Office is one of the most significant ways in which the Lord “directs my life for me,” engendering the necessary patience and holy submission that enables one to “follow

meek and lowly.” With such a mind-set there obviously will be no room for a “hire-and-fire” mentality, nor will there be great interest in usurping the pastor’s rightful responsibilities. Indeed, when in the eyes of the laity the Pastoral Office is seen in the proper light, and its responsibilities and benefits are rightly understood, it also will be recognized that this really is a marvelous and beneficial relationship. The hymnist’s acclamation “My God indeed in every need doth well know how to shield me” evokes the God-pleasing response, in this case to the pastor’s ministry, “to Him, then, I will yield me.”

This “yielding” is pictured vividly in the book by Bo Giertz, *The Hammer of God*. Giertz writes about the young pastor, Savonius, who totally bungles a pastoral call. The situation is rescued from total failure by a godly woman who brings the Gospel to bear upon a dying man’s troubled conscience. And yet when it is time for the Sacrament, the attention of everyone in the room turns nonetheless to the pastor. He will bring the Sacrament. Later, as the pastor departs, he apologizes for his failure to do more for the dying man, declaring that he feels as though he had so bungled the call that he had failed to bring God’s comfort. The response he receives is truly accepting of his faults and “yielding” to his office: “Pastor, have you not brought him Christ’s body and blood? Have you not exercised the blessed authority of the Keys, which comes from God? Can a man do more?”³⁵

And, I love those words of Mother Lotta, the saintly Christian woman who visits another young pastor Torvik to question his carelessness regarding Holy Baptism. Pastor Torvik comments that she is “talking like a real minister” to which she responds,

God help me! Rather than let them see Mother Lotta standing in the pulpit, I would lay my old head on the railroad track. It has been more than enough that God has given me five children whom I have tried to nurture by the Word of God. And if a troubled soul

has come, I have of course tried to comfort and help with the truths of Scripture. But to be a teacher in God's church and a shepherd of the flock, that is another matter. Only an ungodly self-security would make one believe oneself capable of that, when one was not called or ordained.³⁶

That kind of "yielding" is truly a tall order in our present day, given the spirit of the age that is loose in our times and among our people: An overly expectant spirit that often highlights pastoral failures, a haughty spirit with very strong influence on Christian laity as well as pastors, a powerful spirit that so strongly encourages neither to fully accept nor even to care to hear the whole truth as revealed by God. And should the claim be made for having, maintaining, and proclaiming the only truth, and should this appear to judge others adversely who are also readily numbered in the wider Christian community—including especially family members and neighbors and friends—it not only engages today's church in what George Barna calls "the most severe struggle it has faced in centuries"³⁷ it all too often also places Christians in the pew at odds with those who have been called to serve and preach.

Walther predicts our day, not so different from his own, as he addresses the laymen of his day:

When a pastor proclaims the truth, he will often meet with opposition because the people don't consider his proclamation to be true. Then the congregation comes to the pastor with the assertion: "Pastor, you seem to have a completely different religion and we simply don't want that!" . . . Dear brothers of the laity, it cannot be any other way. We pastors must tell you the truth, whether you like it or not, and we would be despicable traitors and murderers if we did not do so.³⁸

Nathaniel Hawthorne has written a delicious parody of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* titled *The Celestial Railroad*. Although a

century old, it nonetheless captures wonderfully the spirit of our present age, a spirit not entirely different from its own. Hawthorne pictures by dream a new and improved route to the Celestial City, one quite different from the earlier pilgrim's way of repentance and sacrifice and faithfulness to the truth. His new and modern pilgrim and his companion, Mr. Smooth-it-away, ride the rails of the Celestial Railroad, in due time arriving at Vanity Fair, the final stop before their heavenly destination. This is the worldly city where many travelers end up distracted from their journey. Hawthorne's pilgrim identifies with the plight of so many church people of his day and ours when he says,

Day after day, as I walked the streets of Vanity, my manners and deportment became more and more like those of the inhabitants. The place began to seem like home; the idea of pursuing my travels to the Celestial City was almost obliterated from my mind.³⁹

How easy it is for pilgrims of every day and age to be enculturated by their surroundings, by the peculiar and yet commonplace vanities of their particular time, drawn in and captivated by it. Hawthorne's pilgrim was always brought back to his senses by a pair of simple pilgrims doing it the old way, Bunyan's pilgrim's way. One of these faithful pilgrims, Mr. Stick-to-the-right, offers him counsel:

Alas, friend, I do assure you, and beseech you to receive the truth of my words, that that whole concern [namely, the celestial railroad] is a bubble. You may travel on it all your lifetime, were you to live thousands of years, and yet never get beyond the limits of Vanity Fair! Yea; though you should deem yourself entering the gates of the Blessed City, it will be nothing but a miserable delusion.⁴⁰

So many people in our own day, including many Christians, are being similarly deluded into thinking that there is no need for

truth or sacrifice, that almost anything by way of faith and life will ultimately provide transport to the Celestial City. This cultural environment, which makes the proclamation of God's truthful Word unseemly and uncomfortable, can only be countered by leading today's pilgrims into the truth. God's truth, in turn, will bring them a long way not only toward the Celestial City but also toward addressing the significant issues driving wedges between them in their fellowship together—wedges that are being driven ever more deeply, wedges that we cannot afford to ignore.

We cannot afford to continue to train our clergy so well in doctrine and practice as we do, only to have their training be so frequently and so dramatically different from what they will encounter during the first weeks of their parish ministries. This is the case particularly in regard to the relationship of the Priesthood of all Believers and the Pastoral Office, and in regard to other significant issues troubling our church body (*e.g.*, Communion practices, worship practice, and the church growth movement). We cannot afford to send confusing messages to our laity regarding orthodox versus heterodox by appearing publicly to promote and even officially condone, doctrines and practices contrary to stated positions and that vary so often and so obviously between pastors and places. Furthermore, we cannot afford so quickly and impatiently to attribute difficulties in pastors' ministries to personal ineptnesses—which, of course, do exist—without allowing that in many cases pastors are only applying their training. They are only trying to do right things, following the lead of the first president of the Synod, of which they have just become members, who wrote words that have been by seminary training highlighted, underscored and deeply impressed on their pastoral consciousness:

The members of the Iowa Synod also accuse us of always being dogmatic. They are right to this extent, that we never give in and do not yield when it comes to the Word of God, but insist that we are

right in proclaiming that Word, and especially proclaiming it when it seems that proclaiming it would destroy the congregation. We must concede that sometimes there is terrible unrest, that factions arise, that peace ceases to exist, one opposes the next person, and it seems as if the pastor had only come to destroy, to bring a curse. But it is our Savior who says, "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34). That's the only way it can ever be in this present world. Where there is an orthodox teacher, there can be no peace. Those who don't like that kind of turmoil will have to tell Christ, "You can stay where you wish, [but don't come here]." For wherever the Lord Jesus comes, there will be fighting, wars, and an absence of peace.⁴¹

Those are fighting words, of course, and can easily be abused by pastors who wish to excuse excessiveness and belligerence. But they are also important words for any who may prefer to be accommodating when there is need to be faithful. Faithful study of God's Word by pastors and people will help all to know the difference. And faithful study and progress toward resolution of the currently divisive issues by those who lead in the church, whether from seminary classrooms or synodical offices, will go a long way toward reducing the tensions that exist in the church today. Thereby, the tensions, which too often result in what should be the beautiful marriage relationship of the Priesthood of all Believers and the Office of the Public Ministry, will also be reduced.

Conclusion

The final card in the stack of forty-four marriage counseling cards was the most interesting. The couple is asked to decide whether to answer "agree" or "disagree," in response to this statement: "Marriage is a 50-50 proposition." Equally interesting were the responses. Most went along with conventional wisdom, that marriage should indeed be a 50-50 arrangement, give and take, fair and square. Such is also the prevailing attitude regarding the rela-

tionship of the Priesthood of all Believers and the Pastoral Office: 50-50, give and take, fair and square. It is an attitude that can work fairly well, as long as both parties are happy, fair and generous. It is an attitude that no longer works, however, when one party or the other becomes overly self-interested or protective of rights and possessions. There is a better way.

Most couples who came for counseling needed a little help to see that the truly happy and successful marriage is modeled after the relationship between our Lord and His church. It is never 50-50. It is 100-0, our Lord first giving His all for His bride, one hundred percent, as St. Paul has so wonderfully described in his letter to the Philippians: "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Phil. 2:6-8)

The church responds with one hundred percent attention of her own to her Lord who has given His all, "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10-11).

A truly happy marriage is one that is modeled after the relationship between the Lord and His church, in which each party looks only to the other, to that loved one's specialness, and to that loved one's welfare. When both relate in this manner, happiness is bound to ensue. To do so, the motivation of Christ's love is essential. How insightful is that line from the hymn sung at many church anniversaries, *For Many Years, O God of Grace*. These words reflect on all that has taken place in the celebrating congregation. At the beginning of its third stanza it celebrates the marriages consecrated at this particular altar and advances this thought:

THE UNIVERSAL PRIESTHOOD

Here when the marriage vows were made,
Both bride and groom besought Thine aid,
Thy love their own transcending.⁴²

Again, if we as a fellowship of Christians hope to address the concerns that trouble our relationships and especially that between the Priesthood of all Believers and the Office of the Public Ministry, this will best happen with a 100-0 attitude. Each party will regard the specialness of the other and guard the welfare of the other. Pastors with hearts full of caring will recognize again that their congregations are beautiful and gifted brides. Congregations with hearts full of patience will look beyond the faults and shortcomings of their pastors to recognize them as their God-given shepherds. When both are thus able to see their partners in and through the love of Christ, everything else from local problems to cultural pressures can and will be transcended.

A German proverb that graces many a Lutheran wall speaks so well of the necessary progression for all to properly take place in Christian life:

Wo Glaube, Da Liebe;
Wo Liebe, Da Friede;
Wo Friede, Da Segen;
Wo Segen, Da Gott;
Wo Gott, Keine Not.⁴³

As we bear in mind the truth of these words—that out of faith flow many other blessings in our Christian lives, including also the particular blessing we desire today, the resolution of the difficulties and challenges we face regarding the Priesthood of all Believers and the Office of the Public Ministry—we also remember the words of hymnist William Bathurst who surely offers our collective prayer in the final stanza of his hymn:

Lord, give us such a faith as this;
And then, whate'er may come,
We'll taste e'en now the hallowed bliss
Of an eternal home.⁴⁴

Notes

1. Martin Chemnitz, *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments*, trans. Luther Poellot (St. Louis: Concordia, 1981), 33.
2. C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry (Kirche und Amt)*, trans. J.T. Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1987), 269.
3. C.F.W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, trans. W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), 207.
4. A. H. Schwermann, "The Call Into the Glorious Office of the Holy Ministry," Convention Essay to the 1954 South Dakota District Convention, 2.
5. E. E. Foelber, "The Office of the Public Ministry," in *The Abiding Word*, ed. Theodore Laetsch (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), 2:485.
6. *Ibid.*, 485–86.
7. George H. Perlich, "The Lutheran Congregation," *The Abiding Word*, 2:449
8. Martin Luther, "Psalm 110," 13:333.
9. Quoted by F. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1952), 3:442
10. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 221.
11. C.F.W. Walther, as quoted in "The Report of the Commission on the Doctrine of the Ministry" adopted by the 1952 convention of The United Lutheran Church in America, 553–54, referenced by Donald R. Heiges, *The Christian's Calling* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958), 97.

12. C.F.W. Walther's quotation from Ap IV, in *Essays for the Church*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), 2:56

13. Ibid.

14. Cf. George F. Wollenburg, "The Priesthood and the Office of the Holy Ministry," an essay delivered to the 1996 South Dakota District Lay/Clergy Conference on Church Issues, 1–2. See Paul T. McCain, "A Response to 'It's Jesus'," *Logia: A Journal of Lutheran Theology* 6 (Holy Trinity 1997), 47–49.

15. Quoted by Os Guinness, *Dining With the Devil* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), 52.

16. Ibid., 52–53. Guinness refers to studies reported by William Adams Brown, *The Education of American Ministers* (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, 1934), 1:21; and *Church Planning Inventory: Comparative Tabulations; 72 Congregations* (Hartford: Hartford Seminary Center for Social and Religious Research, 1986), 6.

17. Wollenburg, 1.

18. A.L. Barry, *The Shepherd and His Sheep: The Pastoral Office and the Priesthood of all Believers*, essay delivered to the South Wisconsin District Pastors' Conference in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, April 11–13, 1994, 22–25.

19. Term used repeatedly by Os Guinness in his book, *Dining With the Devil*.

20. Term used repeatedly by Gene Edward Veith in his book, *Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1994)

21. Guinness, 19.

22. James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), xiii.

23. Guinness, 18.

24. See Elton Trueblood, *The Predicament of Modern Man* (New York: Harper, 1949); *The Life We Prize* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1951); and *Declaration of Freedom* (New York: Harper, 1959)

25. Thomas C. Oden, "On Not Whoring After the Spirit of the Age," *No God But God: Breaking with the Idols of Our Age*, ed. Os Guinness and John Seel (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 193.
26. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, publication No. 316-7 (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1995), 37.
27. Turner, 260.
28. *Ibid.*, 259.
29. "Research Report Shocking; Christians Drowning in Sea of Non-Biblical Theology," *The Kansas Christian* (May 14, 1997).
30. Guinness, 84.
31. C.F.W. Walther, *Essays for the Church*, 1:204.
32. *Ibid.*, 2:55-56.
33. *Idem.*, 2:56
34. *The Lutheran Hymnal* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), Hymn 521.
35. Bo Giertz, *The Hammer of God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1960), 41.
36. *Ibid.*, 286.
37. George Barna, *The Frog in the Kettle: What Christians Need to Know About Life in the Year 2000* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990), 123.
38. C.F.W. Walther, *Essays for the Church*, 2:42-43.
39. Quoted by Os Guinness, 104.
40. *Ibid.*, 105.
41. Walther, *Essays for the Church*, 2:43.
42. *The Lutheran Hymnal*, Hymn 639.
43. Translation: "Where there is faith, there is love; where there is love, there is peace; where there is peace, there is blessing; where there is blessing, there is God; where there is God, there is no need."
44. *The Lutheran Hymnal*, Hymn 396.

RESPONSE TO PRESENTATION IV

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THANK YOU VERY MUCH, PRESIDENT HARTWIG. I enjoyed your presentation very much. Especially since I happened to celebrate my 29th wedding anniversary a couple weeks ago during my study of your paper, your final words “100-0 attitude, not 50-50” are very impressive and inspiring. Maybe it is very difficult for me to follow your proposal exactly, but it has something good. Jesus Christ is the One who has done it for us, so that we can follow Him with joy and thanks.

While I was trying to do critical readings on the essay as much as possible, my thoughts were quite often going back over my own marriage life of 29 years and also over my own pastoral career in which I have served—so far—four congregations. The essay enabled me personally to renew and appreciate the enrichment of the God-given ministry of the pastor. For that reason I am not sure to what extent I can objectively make my response to the wonderful presentation by President Hartwig.

As my response to the presentation, first of all, let me give a brief summary of the presentation with some of my own comments. As my conclusion let me present some ideas that I would like to offer as a proposal for how our church could live and work together in such a secularized culture and society as we live in today.

What the presentation by President Hartwig says seems to me to be very clear, sometimes encouraging like counseling advice, and sometimes beautiful like a sermon. I especially enjoyed the second part regarding current social conditions that impact the church today.

Let me say here a little about our own church's calling system. We in the Japan Lutheran Church are adopting a so-called combination system of both congregationalism and centralization. To put it concretely, self-supporting congregations can call their own pastors on the one hand, but on the other hand, the executive committee of the whole church body calls pastors for the purpose of assigning them to congregations that are not self-supporting. The reasons for this are the following: 1) the smallness of congregations, and 2) centralization is more congenial to Japanese mentality. So far I think that this system has been working well, easing the tensions between the people and their pastor.

Question 1: What is the relationship between the people of the church and the pastor?

The relationship can be well illustrated, President Hartwig says, by the marriage relationship of husband and wife, because it is helpful for appreciating the relationship, and for considering the tensions in the relationship. For the congregation, her pastor is the special gift of God to her, because the Pastoral Office is created by the will and ordinance of God and given by God to the church.

But the problem is that the marriage relationship is changing so much today. More people view it as a matter of give and take, or rights and duties.

Question 2: What is the congregation in this relationship?

The congregation is a people belonging to God, what the Scriptures call "saints" (*hoi hagioi*). President Hartwig quotes Luther:

“Even though not everybody has the Public Office and calling, every Christian has the right and the duty to teach, instruct, admonish, comfort, and rebuke his neighbor with the Word of God at every opportunity and whenever necessary.”

These gifts of the congregation and her uniqueness deserve the pastor’s high regard.

Question 3: What is the pastor in this relationship?

C.F.W. Walther’s explanation is quoted by President Hartwig:

[The pastor] must, therefore, stand before his people as one of them, a fellow-sinner, and yet in the full dignity and authority of his office, that he “strives to adorn with a holy life and conversation.” . . . He stands before the congregation as the bearer of the Office of Word and Sacrament, upon which the congregation is dependent (7).

For that reason, the pastor’s high regard for the gifts of the congregation must be answered with a similar high regard for the Office by the congregation he serves. The peaceful relationship between the congregation and her pastor depends not only on such mutual high respect, but also—and this is more important—on mutual love, Christian love that covers the sin of the other. Good understanding, however, is one thing, and whether people can do just as they understand is another thing. Reasons for that are many and varied. President Hartwig takes up one of the most challenging.

Question 4: What is going on in today’s society and culture? And how are the social conditions impacting our church life?

President Hartwig says, “We do live at a unique time in history, amid conditions never encountered before by the church.” Many specialists point out that it is secularism, modernity, or post-modernism that constitute a new prevailing frame of mind in

today's society and culture. People are trying to outgrow or outlive traditions, ethics and even religions, displaying their own autonomy. There are current tendencies to make too much of the newness, but to disdain the oldness.

This social and cultural change has necessarily had a great impact on Christian communities too. President Hartwig points out the shift in the pastoral profile. It seems to me to be rather extreme, but pastors are like CEOs and are better qualified as secular rather than spiritual leaders.

One of the modern tendencies in our church, and also in many churches, is that the pastor's lifestyle looks like that of salaried workers in business. This indicates, people complain, the dilution of commitment to the divine call. When pastors treat their call in a disrespectful manner we are not surprised that others do.

Another problem on the side of the congregation, that I have personally experienced recently, is the attitude of "Let the pastor do all the work." This was going on for many years before I was called by the congregation. The previous pastor himself told me that he and his wife did everything and the people were just like an audience in the theater.

Question 5: How are Christians to see themselves living in a "grown-up" world?

Elton Trueblood's interpretation of the prevalent attitude in today's society, referred to by President Hartwig, is that "mankind has finally come into its own and has outgained and outlived the relevance of past wisdom, of even the Word of God." This reminds me of the terminology used by Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "*die mündig gewordene Welt*," which means "the grown-up world." Bonhoeffer, however, does not use the term negatively, but positively. He means that, paradoxically, the "grown-up world" manifests the real presence of God.

Religious people in general see the current climate of today's society and culture as challenging to Christian communities. Indeed, "significant pressures exerted by today's society undermine the leadership of pastors and challenge the convictions of the laity" and, as President Hartwig goes on to conclude, "These conditions lead to overages on the part of clergy and misunderstandings on the part of the laymen, and harm to the fellowship of faith locally and at large."

I agree that "mutual study of the Scriptures" is the most important and indispensable activity in Christian communities for the restoration of a peaceful relationship between the congregation and her pastor. For only the Word of God can change the mind and life of people.

At the beginning of my response, I took up President Hartwig's proposal in his conclusion, namely, a "100-0 proposition" is a better way in the true relationship. This is the Christian life together in which, as St. Paul writes, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor" (2 Cor. 8:9) is to be rightly reflected.

Because of our young tradition of Christianity, we are not as familiar with such terminology as "the Ministry," in distinction from "the Priesthood." But we are familiar with Luther's explanation of "the Priesthood of all Believers," which is quoted by President Hartwig.

In order to soften the tensions between the congregation and the pastor, I would like to point out that the role of the laypeople in everyday life should be emphasized more. Do they really enjoy the relationship with Christ by the Word of God and prayer? And do they also share Christ's love with other people in their own working shops, factories, offices, etc.? It is, of course, their pastor's ministry that can prepare them to fulfill their role of Christian witness. Thus, indirectly, such a spiritual growth on the part of the

laypeople does result in a better relationship between the two partners of the church.

Finally, as Bonhoeffer predicts, we cannot reverse the changing of the world. Even if we could, it does not make sense. Let's not look at change merely as something negative. We can do something forward, not backward.

RESPONSE TO PRESENTATION IV

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS, or the priesthood of the baptized, and the Office of Public Ministry is a question fraught with tension in several senses of the term. On the one hand, there is the tension within the Office of Public Ministry itself between office and function. This can result in turning the pastor into an autocrat who focuses on maintaining power by divine right for its own sake rather than exercising the authority of the Word alone. On the other hand, the pastor may become one who sees himself merely as a CEO or “facilitator” who is little more than a motivational speaker, an “equipper” whose job is to work himself out of a job by training others to do the “real work” of ministry.

There is also the tension between the church’s possession of the Office of the Keys and the public exercise of that Office by those called into the Holy Ministry, both of which have been mandated by God, though exercised in different ways and in different spheres.

And, finally, there is the tension that sometimes exists between the pastor and his flock when conflict arises between the two, when one, the other, or both seek to assert their rights in the face of the seeming attempts by the other side to usurp them. President

Hartwig, from his experience both as a parish pastor and as a district president, has spoken well concerning each of these forms of tension, tension that both exists and finds its resolution in the Gospel.

The Office of Public Ministry was created by God for the sake of the Gospel, that is, for the creating and sustaining of the Priesthood of all Believers through the Means of Grace. It is through these means that the Body of Christ becomes living and active. The Priesthood is a priesthood of the baptized because one enters into it by Baptism, that is, by God's action. It is a Priesthood of Believers because the members of the Priesthood respond to God's activity with a living faith. It is for the sake of the Priesthood, the Body of Christ, that those who hold the Office of Public Ministry are called to be faithful. Apart from the faithful proclamation of the Gospel, there is no forgiveness of sins, no life, no salvation, and hence, no priesthood.

As the church seeks to bring the Gospel to the world, it must be sure that it is asking the right question—a question that shows the tension between the *fides quae*, the body of truth that must be faithfully proclaimed, and the *fides qua*, the faith that trusts in the Christ, who is proclaimed in accordance with the truth. We must avoid the temptation to bring people into the visible congregation by smoothing away all obstacles and eliminating all offenses (least of all the offense of the Gospel itself.) We must avoid answering the question, "How do we get our churches to grow?" in a way that eliminates the objective truth of the Gospel in favor of a faith that consists of little more than an emotional state of being, divorced from any question of theological truth. In some areas of Christendom, even though the name of Jesus is continually spoken, the Jesus proclaimed seems at times to be teacher, lawgiver and taskmaster, with the central task of the church becoming "teaching people to obey," in the sense of external obedience to various com-

mandments, or else a Jesus with whom one is encouraged to form some sort of emotional attachment for its own sake apart from the Means of Grace. In the face of these concepts of Jesus, one uncomfortably remembers Jesus' words, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. 7:21).

In reaction to this, the challenge to the orthodox faith, that is, to the church and to the teachers of the church, is the creation of a *fides qua* that has as its object the Christ who saves sinners. One falls into error when there is a proclamation of a mere word about the Gospel, a word of objective truth that people are required to accept intellectually, but that fails to create a living faith. While that is not a problem among those gathered here, it is always good to remind ourselves that our goal is not merely to create an intellectual faith in secondary discourse, forgetting that, as Gerhard Forde put it in the title of one of his books, theology is for proclamation. This means that our secondary discourse ("getting the message straight.") exists for the purpose of proclaiming the saving Gospel ("getting the message out."). Both pietism and "dead orthodoxy" (that is, orthodoxy for its own sake, that proclaims itself rather than the Gospel or that merely sets forth the claims of Christ) are to be avoided, because both fail to announce clearly to the hearer the saving Gospel: "Your sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake." Theology is always a matter of proclamation. The Lord's Word is always living and active, never static.

We can maintain the proper tension between the *fides qua* and the *fides quae* by asking the right question, which is: "How do we faithfully proclaim the Gospel in a modern (or postmodern) culture?" Or, to use the analogy that I like to use with my students, we study to get the wiring right so that the light will come on when we open our mouths to proclaim.

Thus, the creation of a living, active priesthood involves properly proclaiming Law and Gospel, neither of which our culture (or

really, any of our cultures) in and of itself understands. Attempts to reinterpret the Gospel or to attune it to the ears of the culture—whether it be proclaiming liberation to the economically oppressed, acceptance to the alienated, or empowerment to the helpless—may create a *fides qua* of sorts and may be good news to various bad situations. But such reinterpretation of the biblical message will lead to destruction rather than salvation because the object of trust, is not the Jesus who came to save sinners.

Because the culture in every age is offended by the Gospel and because the people of God live in the world, the temptation is present to accommodate the church to the culture rather than to fit the saints of God with the whole armor of God for their life within their culture. When heaven and earth meet in the Divine Service, it is the work of heaven that is being brought to earth, not the work of earth that is being held up to heaven. When the saints go marching out into the world they take heaven with them and make use of the things of heaven in their daily lives, as they offer themselves as living sacrifices to God. It goes too far to say that the pastor is Christ in the sense of being the Incarnation of His person among His people (as J.A.O. Preus III ably notes in the July 1997 *Concordia Journal*, the answer to the question, “Is the pastor Christ?” is “Yes and No”). Nevertheless, the one who holds the Office of Public Ministry is privileged to be the mouthpiece of Christ, called by Him to publicly bring His Word of forgiveness to the people of God as from the mouth of Christ Himself, and to administer the Sacraments according to Christ’s institution so that the people recognize that the acts performed are God’s acts and not those of a mere man. Through the public acts in the Divine Service and their extension in the day-to-day task of the care of souls in homes, in hospitals, and elsewhere, the ministers of Christ feed and sustain the living members of the Body of Christ and then send them out to bear Christ into the world.

It is quite clear, then, that the Office of Public Ministry is a noble task, as Paul tells Timothy. But the task of the people of God is also a noble one, not to be spoken of lightly or belittled. The quotation from Luther on Psalm 110, that President Hartwig made use of, makes it clear. And this task of bringing God's Word of forgiveness to the world is not to be seen as drudgery, but as joyful privilege. I have recently seen statements made to the effect that Luther only spoke of the Priesthood's exercise of the Office of the Keys in his early years, and that the mature Luther almost exclusively focused on the exercise of the Keys in the Preaching Office. Yet these words, which Luther spoke in 1535, show that the mature Luther recognized that individual Christians as members of the Royal Priesthood exercise the Keys in their daily life, that is, in the context of their daily vocation. As a church, we would do well to re-emphasize the importance and nature of vocation, so that the people of God more fully understand the relationship between what goes on in public worship and what goes on in their lives during the week. A recognition of the distinction and relationship between the public Divine Service and the Christian life would go far to help the understanding of the distinction and relationship between the Priesthood and the Public Ministry, so that both those who occupy the Public Ministry and those who are members of the Priesthood of all Believers carry out their tasks faithfully and joyfully.

As President Hartwig pointed out, Lutherans are not alone in seeing the challenges of maintaining the proper tension between doctrine and the Christian life. He has cited Os Guinness and his work on the subject, particularly regarding his insights on the dangers of flirting with modernity in his book *Dining with the Devil*. So also two major works by David Wells have been published in the 1990s from an Evangelical perspective that bemoan attempts to grow churches without reference to a body of doctrine: *No Place*

for the Truth or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology, published by Eerdmans in 1993, and *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams*, published by Eerdmans in 1994. One could also add Mark Noll's work, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, that has accused Evangelicals of abandoning Reformed theology's intellectual roots. We might say (and, I believe, rightly) that even though these writers come from traditions that downplay the Means of Grace and miss some implications of Gospel proclamation, they very ably show the dangers of giving in to temptation to preach a Jesus that answers all of our problems except the one that really matters—all our felt needs, but not our real need.

The fact that the members of the Priesthood at times do not seem to be doing all they could or should in carrying out the mission of the church has led some to seek ways outside of Law-Gospel proclamation to “get people moving.” Accusations of complacency abound, some saying that the problem is that we preach too much justification and not enough sanctification, and others saying that we preach too many rules and do not really preach justification at all! As the church works through these issues, it is important for us to remember that the church in mission may or may not grow, and that much of the growth of the church is hidden behind the cross, like leaven in a lump of dough. Accusations are made that people who are in church for the Divine Service and nothing else during the week are somehow “dead wood” that needs to be revitalized. The church is ill-served as well by attempts to make a distinction between being a Christian and being a disciple, as though the two were somehow different and as though disciples were created in some way other than the means by which Christians are created, namely, the Gospel. We need to be very careful about leveling ill-founded accusations against the people of God, because we may not always see how faithfully they carry out the tasks of their voca-

tion, which is the hallmark of the sanctified life. While many programs that the church offers are important in carrying out the mission of the church—education and evangelism, just to name two—it does not necessarily follow that anyone who is not “with the program” is dead wood. What we do know is that when the Gospel is preached faith is created, people are brought to life, and thereby ardently desire to serve. Thus, there most certainly is a place for programs that give the people of God opportunity to articulate their faith in a sometimes hostile environment. But in doing so we can alleviate much fear and trepidation by noting what is really going on: Christ is acting. Not us. Thus evangelism can be taught as bringing Christ to people (that is, confession of faith) rather than as bringing people to Christ (that is, salesmanship and persuasion).

We need to recognize that it is the Gospel itself, and not guilt, that impels people out into the world with the Good News. Perhaps an illustration of how this is sometimes done and how it might be done a bit better would be appropriate. You might have heard the story of the conversation in heaven between the angels and Christ, after Christ returns to heaven at the Ascension. Christ is praised and glorified for His victory over sin, death, and hell, and then is asked how the Good News of this victory will be spread throughout the world. Christ declares that He has sent His disciples into the world with the message, and that they would spread the news. But, the angels ask, what if that plan doesn't work? What other, back-up plan is there? Christ says, “There is no other plan.” Now, frankly, this illustration, I think, leaves something to be desired, since it seems to try to motivate with the Gospel, but really uses guilt. How much better to pick up where the words left off and tell “the rest of the story,” to use Paul Harvey's term. Jesus, after all, would go on to say, “There is no other plan because one is not needed, for I have armed my disciples with the Gospel and I

am with them. Wherever that message is spoken, my Spirit is at work, and through their proclamation, I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.”

Now the message may itself at times create tension between the minister and the Priesthood, because the message that calls to repentance will be by its very nature an uncomfortable message. Yet, he loves them as he does it and he does it because he loves them. The power of the Gospel itself, the message of forgiveness, is the very message that creates the love that is able to overcome the conflicts that might arise, and is the means of reconciliation. Love does indeed cover a multitude of sins, both of the Priesthood and of the minister.

Even though the focus of this paper and the response has been on the Priesthood of all Believers, much time has been spent on the Office of the Public Ministry here as well, since the two are intertwined and both are necessary to the mission of bringing the Gospel to the world. In fact, only when both are exalted as creations of God and when both faithfully exercise their tasks, are both properly honored. Thank you, President Hartwig, for giving us much food for thought about this important issue.

RESPONSE TO PRESENTATION IV

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PRESIDENT HARTWIG'S COMPARISON OF THE MINISTRY to marriage is a powerful and provocative one—a comparison that says as much about what the relationship between pastor and people should be as it does about why that relationship too often fails.

On the one hand, to describe a pastor and people as husband and wife underscores the divine origins of the relationship. So, we confess that God has established the Office of the Public Ministry and that He continues to fill that Office with men of His choosing, just as we contend that God both created and still sanctifies marriage and that He providentially brings couples together.

On the other hand, our practice can certainly obscure our theology. This is abundantly clear in contemporary America regarding marriage. Unfortunately, it is increasingly clear regarding the Ministry as well. And in both instances, some of the same forces are at work that encourage us to shape our practice at the expense of God's truth.

Perhaps the best illustration of this is the practice regarding marriage known as “no-fault” divorce, the granting of a divorce simply because one partner wants out of the marriage. There is no obligation to prove that either partner has done anything to break

his or her vows, nor can one spouse stop the divorce from taking place even if he or she wants ever so desperately to keep the marriage together. No, marriage is simply a business deal—fairly easy to enter into and even easier to get out of for any reason at all; indeed, for no reason at all.

Now, perhaps we have not quite reached this same point regarding the relationship between pastor and people in which either side can terminate the relationship for “no fault.” I fear, however, that we may be getting there. In his paper, President Hartwig gives us a couple of instances in which congregations not only tolerated but respected and loved pastors whose shortcomings and faults were manifest to all, including and especially to their own members. And there are numerous examples of faithful shepherds continuing to feed their flocks in difficult congregations.

But we also know that not only President Hartwig, but also every other church official here today could have offered many, many counter-examples of pastors and congregations, each attempting to terminate the relationship for less than biblical reasons, looking for the ecclesiastical equivalent of a no-fault divorce. Pastors demand to be put on call lists, and cry and complain until they get a call out. Or, they simply resign, go CRM, and then expect the Synod to supply another position. At the same time, congregations too look for ways to get rid of an unsatisfactory pastor. So, like marriage, our actions—if not always our words—are challenging the Ministry: Is it a divine institution or simply a business deal?

There has always been a temptation to treat the Ministry as a business deal—a contract and not a call. After all, money, property, and status are exchanged for work like preaching, teaching, and evangelism calls. So even in his day, C.F.W. Walther admonished every pastor “never [to] seek to get away [from his call] on his own, least of all to secure a higher salary or a more pleasant or easier

position.” Indeed, according to Walther, “he should never leave [even] because of the wicked in his congregation who make his life bitter.” Opportunities for service and the needs of the church should be of paramount importance when considering a call. But I suspect that Walther said these things because they needed to be said in his day. Pastors were making decisions about calls for personal and monetary reasons.¹

But if that was true in Walther’s day, how much more so today? In our money-mad age, how many pastors can escape viewing their calling as a job, and so assessing their position in terms of salary, benefits, and paid vacations? Clearly, these things are important, just as finances in a marriage are important. But neither relationship—husband and wife, pastor and people—ought to be based on money. Nor should it terminate if the financial package is inadequate.

But money is only one of the problems. There are also questions of status and authority, efficiency and competence. Like money, these questions are not at the heart of the institution, but they often have a great deal to do with problems that develop in the relationship.

And problems there will be. Of course, every couple in love and considering marriage thinks that theirs will be different and that all will be sweetness and light with them. But it is not true, and one of our common devices for disabusing such dreamers is something we call “premarital counseling”—counseling that includes straight talk on the basis of the Bible about the nature of marriage, its joys and its challenges. Our hope and expectation, of course, is that such counseling will lead to better understanding and therefore to stronger marriages.

Whether such counseling does or does not work is another question for another time. Our concern here is pastor and people; but regarding that relationship too, we have a form of premarital

counseling. We call it “the seminary.” Clearly, our analogy weakens at this point, since not only does seminary education last a lot longer than a typical premarital counseling session but also it is entirely one-sided. Only one partner is being trained for the relationship, not both, and that leads to problems.

President Hartwig recognizes this in his paper when he comments on the different expectations that pastors and their people often have about the relationship between them. “On the one hand we have . . . confessionally trained clergy who are well instructed regarding Bible-based doctrine and practice upon leaving our seminaries. They wholeheartedly believe in and are ready to staunchly defend and actively promote the proper doctrine and practice of their Synod.”

But what happens to these men? President Hartwig answers, “[They] receive calls from congregations throughout the church from a variety of congregations, often to congregations whose pastoral expectations and interest in pure doctrine and practice have been colored to varying degrees by the culture.” But this, in turn, suggests that somehow we need to bring the congregations also into the counseling process, if we want the relationship to get off to a good start.

Now, I recognize that this actually does take place in most, if not all, of our districts. When a congregation becomes vacant, the district president initiates a process to help that congregation call a new pastor. This process is more than simply soliciting names for a call list. It is one that includes a great deal of congregational self-analysis and opportunities for the Synod to remind the congregation of what the call entails and what the nature of the Office of the Ministry is.

Thus, both sides of this prospective marriage—candidate and congregation—do, after all, receive a form of counseling, but not from the same counselor. One of the clear implications of Presi-

dent Hartwig's paper about the varying expectations of pastor and people is that those responsible for preparing pastor and people, namely, seminary and Synod, must work together so closely that both candidates and congregations hear the same message about the Ministry, whether it comes from a church official or a church teacher.

But this will demand work. For one thing, we probably need to make some new institutional arrangements. For example, perhaps we need to involve synodical officials, such as a committee of district presidents, in assessing the vicarage experiences of our students. Maybe vicarage needs to be lengthened, placed after the completion of all academic work, or placed under the supervision of the church apart from the seminaries. These are possibilities.

But before we go racing off to implement what may turn out to be very bad ideas, we probably also need to assess the institutional changes already undertaken. A few years ago, the Synod began to deploy an adviser on personal growth at each seminary and in each of the districts to establish both pre-seminary screening committees and post-ordination workshops and retreats for new pastors. In some places, we now have an entirely different model of pastoral preparation, the DELTO program (Distance Education Leading To Ordination). So, how are all these changes working? Are those who have gone through these new institutional arrangements better able to meet the expectations of their congregations? Do we know the answers to these questions? If not, we need to find out. When we make changes, we need to follow up and see whether or not they are working.

However, President Hartwig has also suggested, that the problem may not simply be one of better screening and then preparation of pastors. There may also be some underlying cultural forces at work that are making it difficult for good, faithful pastors to succeed in some ministries. But if those forces are at work in our

congregations, I suggest they may also be at work among us, shaping, or rather reshaping, our expectations of pastors in ways that are different from or even contrary to the Scriptures. Furthermore, if we need to look at the culture critically, we cannot for that reason embrace the counter-culture uncritically. Though it pains me enormously as a dyed-in-the-wool conservative to say it, not every change is for the worst. In other words, if we want pastors and people to hear the same message from us about the Ministry, we need to make sure that we are speaking the same message at the seminary and in the church, and that the basis for our message is the Scriptures and the Confessions, not current cultural conventions or simply our traditions—not even our very own, very comfortable LCMS traditions.

This convocation is a great contribution because it permits a variety of voices to participate in the conversation, the presumption being that as confessional Lutherans, we will actually communicate and not just make noise. And so far, clearly, that has been the case. Perhaps also, as a consequence of this meeting, more conversation will be necessary in order to follow up on some of the issues now being brought to the table. We need to remember that the purpose of theology is always practice. We want to speak with one voice about Church and Ministry so that both people and pastors know from the Scriptures their respective responsibilities and duties. Then we need to move from conversation to commitment, from dialogue to confession.

In the 19th century, most notably regarding predestination, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod finally confessed what the Scriptures taught concerning divine election. Just about 25 years ago our church was in the process of doing the very same thing regarding an even more controverted issue among us, the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures. We talked for a long time, but finally we spoke: “We believe, teach, and confess.”

I do not mean to suggest that this issue of Church and Ministry has yet risen in our Synod to the level of those issues, either predestination or the Scriptures. But I do mean to say that if we are serious about helping pastors and congregations not only during the courtship but also after the marriage, the entire church—including professors and officials—needs to be saying essentially the same thing about that relationship. This means also how you get into it and how you get out. As professors prepare students and presidents prepare congregations, the message needs to be the same: This is what a pastor is, this is how God provides one, this is what a pastor does, this is what a pastor does not do, and so forth. Unanimity on these points in the church can go far toward helping our churches either to avoid or to overcome troubled relationships between pastor and people.

“Can this marriage be saved?” was the name of a regular column in a magazine years ago. I can remember neither the column nor the magazine very well, but the question is an appropriate one with which to conclude these reflections on President Hartwig’s presentation. “Can this marriage be saved?” Of course, it can. For when God has brought together pastor and people, when God has given His Word for pastors to preach and for people to find salvation, when God Himself is present among them all in His precious Means of Grace, we have every confidence that God both does and ever will bless both Church and Ministry, sometimes in spite of us but also through us.

Notes

1. C.F.W. Walther, *Walther’s Pastorate, that is, American Lutheran Pastoral Theology*, trans. and abridged by John M. Drickamer, from the 5th edition, 1906 (New Haven, MO: Lutheran News, 1995), 274.