

The Fragile Nature of the Public Ministry

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Synopsis

On the Course of the Power and Office of the Keys: with emphasis on spirits, hauntings, pressures, and joys in the vessel of the pastorate's administration of the Keys, as reminiscent of 2 Corinthians 4 and as illustrated by the preambulations of the Reverend Harry D. Prediger.

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Foreword

Once upon a time a great Sea Lord christened and launched the good ship Royal Keys. A man o' war. The Sea Lord commissioned the vessel to catch the four winds and ply the high seas, and he dedicated to her crew a perpetual charter. To make peace or withhold it in his name. And so it happened. For ages long the Royal Keys circumscribed the globe and established peace or withheld it, to degrees, in the name of her Lord.

Now the strange but wonderful thing about the voyages of the Royal Keys rested not in the seamanship or savvy of her crew, but in the vessel's seaworthy powers and timeless charter. For when death removed, one by one, the members of the original crew, willing hands were always found to fill her decks through the ages, and though various sailors piped aboard sometimes navigated her poorly, manned her armaments recklessly, or misinterpreted her charter outrageously, the Royal Keys always managed to keep herself afloat and trimmed for the next company and the latest engagement. The reason that this was so was because her Lord had made her so, saying early on, "Hell itself will not overcome her."

Thus the Lord Christ has consigned to his Church the power to speak for him. Sinners granted the authority to forgive or to condemn fellow sinners. They practice this right mutually in their private worlds, as also they call some to the public office to work the keys in the name of Christ and Church.

The Ship visualizes the turning of the keys by the universal priesthood and by the public office. As a cathedral mullion has the Ship ploughing the sea, so the complement of saints rides out the waves of history with "sails fill'd and streamers waving" of forgiveness. Then too as a catacomb graffito stations the apostles at oars in the Ship or St. Peter at her helm or St. Paul in her stern, so the public office has selected mates hailing one and all, "I forgive your sins, or I withhold forgiveness." Always though, the ship sails through storms, ne'er at rest 'til she can weigh anchor "in a sea of glass, clear as crystal."

This essay, matched to themes from 2 Corinthians 4, examines the course of the keys. It traces the proclamation of forgiveness from Christ to Church to Public Office, with concerned emphasis on the pastorate where the keys are twisted fully in both directions and where its “jars of clay” Lutheran fragility is being pressured by predictable and cyclical spirits, and is written to give parochial school teachers and lay delegates an inside look at pastoral quarters.

The essay stows supportive and technical material in footnotes, leaving you to race ahead of the essayist and economize time by reading silently more material than he could cover orally.

Finally, “Test everything...Test the spirits.”

The Message

Prologue

“Harry!”

The sound of his name split the silence of Harry’s study like a gunshot reporting the opening of deer season. Harry’s eyes widened in disbelief as he looked up from his desk to discover who it was that had come calling. “How did you get in?”

“You don’t mind, do you, if I interrupt your work?” asked Harry’s visitor, not so much asking permission as he was announcing that, whatever Harry was doing, something more important had arrived. “Harry,” he added, “I mean to have a private word,” he mocked, adding a wink. Harry shivered.

“I don’t know what you mean,” protested Harry.

“You don’t? Harry,” he said in a condescending tone.

“I’m sorry, but I’m really busy,” said Harry politely, but also chewing his lower lip. “Can we talk after Sunday?” Harry’s visitor sat down instead.

“No. Now’s the time, and then I’ll go.” Alarm raced through Harry’s nervous system, and a wild urge told him to leap out of his study and keep running.

“Harry, I’ve come as I suspect you knew I would some day,” he said, raising his hand to ward off the objection that Harry’s brain was feverishly assembling. “I mean to speak bluntly and tell you what others are thinking and saying. You’re failing.”

Harry bowed his head and said nothing. Harry—all 48 years of him, slightly balding, slightly paunchy, married man, family man, owner of 4 shapeless suits, and a 5 year old minivan—the Rev. Harry D. Prediger sat fastened to his monumental swivel chair, a condemned man, waiting for sentence to fall upon his 25 years of ministry. “Harry, you don’t spend enough time with your shut-ins. You know you hate writing the church newsletter. Your church isn’t growing. And you’ve made so many enemies. What have you to show? Oh, and your sermons! Stinkers, Harry. Phew. My boy, you’ve become a bore.” The words stabbed.

“I try,” replied Harry, not too convincingly. The thought that he had curdled into a sour, stale irrelevancy especially hurt. “I’m doing what I was taught.”

“Try? People want results, Harry. You’re about as relevant as the Latin fading on your college diploma.”

With a sudden disgust Harry sized up his tormentor who too was all of 48 years, a slightly balding, paunchy family man, owner of 4 shapeless suits—Sears’ issue, with title to a 5 year old Voyager. For on this sultry, otherwise undistinguished Saturday in June, while engrossed in his late night ritual of committing to memory his Sunday sermon, a haunting was visited on the Reverend Harry D. Prediger. By his own irreverent doppelganger.

“Harry.” This was Joan, Harry’s wife. She had appeared unnoticed at the study door, where she stood amused by the effect her greeting had worked on her husband. The sound of her voice had made Harry start violently. “Harry, what’s wrong? Seen a ghost?” she asked with feigned demureness.

“I’ve just got a lot on my mind,” he explained, adding a sigh and a lie. “My sermon...it’s giving me trouble.”

“Please come to bed soon.” A soft concern had quickly replaced Joan’s comic tone. “You know how crabby you’re going to be tomorrow if you stay up too late, and then you’re just going to lay on the sofa all afternoon and sleep, and remember, we’re signed up to attend the AAL Branch picnic. Hon’, please?”

“Okay,” he agreed softly. She blew him a kiss and left, noticing that while her husband absentmindedly acknowledged her affection, he had kept his eyes fastened all the while upon the two empty chairs facing his desk. Weird. She shut the door.

“Har-rieeee.” This was the specter. “You know she’s right. You are turning into an old geezer.” And he tittered with a cruel laugh barely audible. “Why don’t you get out while you can?” His words this time were honeyed with sympathy as he pointed Harry in the direction of his bookcase.

Harry rose and stepped mechanically to the bookcase where he stored his church letterhead, selected a crisp sheet, sat down, reached for his best pen, and began to scratch out a letter of resignation. “Don’t you feel better?” clucked the apparition. “Now go through with it.” Harry stared at his work, zombie-like. Then, just as he was about to sign it, he stopped. Then took it up in his hands. Then slowly tore it in two. Then in quicker, jerkier movements shredded the halves into bits. The specter frowned. “Now, Harry, why did you have to go and do that?”

“It just came to me,” said Harry surging with the relief that comes with a sudden realization. “Man, you had me, and I was forgetting it. It’s so easy, you know, take it for granted, but I’m still preaching it, aren’t I? The gospel. I am preaching it.” Harry stretched his tensed up back, sighed, and pleurably felt and heard vertebrae snap and pop. “I am preaching it.”

The spirit stood to leave. “I’ll be back.”

I figured he’d say that, thought Harry, snapping and popping and sighing.

Part 1: The Treasure of the Gospel

The Gospel of Forgiveness is God’s Treasure to Sinners

“We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us” (2 Cor 4.7).ⁱ

What treasure? “Our gospel” (4.3). “The light of the gospel” (4.4). “The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (4.6). Treasure means gospel. Christ’s gospel. We treasure its “message of reconciliation” (5.19), for it heralds the best possible news to sinners: the forgiveness of sins.

The Gospel of Objective Justification

“They just had to bring that in, didn’t they?” she snapped. The criticism belonged to a 50ish, heavy-set grandmother, who along with her companion, observed the church’s Children’s Christmas Eve Program. What got her goat? Sin. She hated the mention of it, meaning she hadn’t come to worship her Savior but her grandchild.

“Her Savior?” Yes. A pity the woman would have objected because the description fit, at least from God’s angle. “We are convinced that *one died for all*, and therefore all died” (5.14). There the apostle says it. A simple message. All deserve God’s dooms and judgments, and God did something about it. He beheld the sins of man, and his justice demanded punishment. But he also felt his love race for humankind. So justice dovetailed with mercy to restore sinners to the holiness lost by Adam and Eve—God sent off his Son to do and die for the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve. And keeping his commandments in every way for everyone and suffering hell that no human might, Jesus Christ satisfied his Father’s demands. And God saw all his Son had done, and behold it was very good, and there was justice, and there was mercy—the Lord’s way. I forgive you, one and all, for my Son’s sake, God declares; believe it to your salvation, he invites. This is the gospel for the ages.ⁱⁱ

Am I boring you? Good but old news loses the knife-thrust of enthusiasm and novelty. So am I not? Just a little? Boring you? “Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so,” you learned to chime when you were children, as did Karl Barth.ⁱⁱⁱ And how familiar we have grown with the old news of forgiveness. At times we treat it as we do our wives. For granted. Wanting the flush of a first kiss. But that’s our doing, not the gospel’s. Do not confuse responses to the gospel with the gospel. Gospel means good news—Period—the gospel is God speaking forgiveness, which is not just the heart of the gospel—that’s the all of it. “Forgiveness is man’s deepest need and God’s highest achievement” (Horace Bushnell), which news intends to “cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God” (4.15). Forgiveness—no greater news exists, no matter how sinners greet it.

The Office of the Keys Applies Objective Justification

I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven...If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven. (Matt 16.19; John 20.23) Twice Jesus deputized his Church to personalize forgiveness to those who repent or to withhold it from the impenitent. The Church’s intermediacy cannot minimize the reality of this power,^{iv} no more than a chest can trivialize the treasure it stores.

Now as the power exists, so will the office. Office [*officium*, from *opus* “work” + *facere* “to do”]. Meaning what power Christ has given his Church, the Church will work. Meaning to spend the treasure that Christ has bequeathed. Christians then with authority will “loose” or “bind” sins. As members of a universal priesthood (1 Pet 2.9) every Christian not only has access to God immediately but also has the authority to act intermediately one with another, and as a “little Christ,” in Lutheresque terms, will establish the office in their private worlds and forgive or condemn in Christ’s stead.^v Forgiveness then is deed and title to the soil on which we live. So when life chisels and all cry fake and fraud, then tiptoeing with the delicacy of a duchess slumming we will pick through life’s hoaxes and counterfeits, treasuring the gospel, forgiving as we are forgiven, and knowing that we have what we must have most. That is Christianity.

What’s more, Christians elect men from their midst to communicate the gospel to all in the name of Christ and Church, a still narrower deputation by the deputized, derived from Christ’s command; he began the routine by calling a group of men (Mark 1.14-17) charged to latchkey law and gospel globally, “and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations” (Luke 24.47), so with Paul’s immediate call (Acts 9.15-16), and then others from among the local congregations (Acts 14.23; Titus 1.5). And our Confessions remind episcopalians of all stripes that the people first chose their pastors and bishops, as those whom

the people now elect to the public office must guard against acting as lords: the people will always hold the precious power to regulate the public office.^{vi} That is Ministry.^{vii}

Lutherans distinguish, therefore, the working of the keys by the universal priesthood and by the public office. Luther says:

For although we are all priests, this does not mean that all of us can preach, teach, and rule. Certain ones of the multitude must be selected and separated for such an office .

...This is the way to distinguish between the office of preaching (*Predigtamt*) or the ministry (*Dienstamt*), and the general priesthood of all baptized Christians.^{viii}

Dienstamt means speaking for God to all by a chosen few. Some “God appointed” (1 Cor 12.28) offices were: apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles workers, healers, helpers, administrators, and tongues speakers; pastors and deacons (1 Tim 3.1,8); and elders (Titus 1.5). So Paul’s “we-have-this ministry” (4.1) maxim sets into context a developing system of partnership and cooperation between what would be known as the clergy and the laity. The clergy enlisted from the laity to serve the laity publicly as “Christ’s ambassadors” (5.20). That is Diplomacy.

And the conclusion? There is some confusion. The cauldron of church and ministry is being stirred by spirits, troubled and toiling over the roles of clergy and laity in working the keys. Is everyone a minister? No, say some. Yes, say others. Garnish this stew with “lay ministry” and “staff ministry” and feel dyspepsia bubble. To the indigestible bits of rubbery terms floating in this kettle I trace some cramping, for when “ministry” is simmered and stretched to mean more than officially loosing or binding sins, how does this improve the arrangement of forgiveness as the entree? Did the clock strike midnight, spelling the end of the exclusive salvific sense of “public ministry” and reducing it to a common variety vegetable which intends to please all tastes? (see p. 9, footnote 14) Professor Brenner writes of the “ministry of the keys.”^{ix} That’s a tonic. Add “public” to it, say “public ministry or office of the keys,” and feel relief. What is at stake? The people’s precious right to maintain the public office, so that forgiveness of sins is proclaimed within and without and never arranged as a sidedish in the menu of parish concerns. This is not about bistro chefs pigheadedly guarding their pots and pans from amateur gastronomes but about keeping the public ministry of the keys from sinking into a buffet steaming of everything but forgiveness. Christians, the King says loose or bind sins and appoint officials to do this for all. Treasure your privileges. Paul’s “we-have-this-ministry” (4.1) formula makes you the “we” as in the ones who support the *Predigtamt* and are served by it. Grant the public office your assents and goodwills. That is Responsibility.

The Public Office of the Keys in the Pastoral Ministry

“This ministry” (4.1) of selected “ambassadors” (5.20) developed into various forms in apostolic days (cf. p. 6). So today. Lutherans have a hydra-headed public office to work the keys: pastor, teacher, missionary, professor, official. Other heads may be forming. But the Small Catechism gives itself exclusively to the pastorate (Luther’s Catechism, Q. 311) when it asks, “How does a Christian congregation use the Keys?” Now why?

Professor Brug speaks of the pastoral ministry as the “most comprehensive form of the public ministry,”^x and Professor Brenner writes that the “call of the parish pastor is broadest in scope.”^{xi} How? The parish assigns to its pastor sole authority to loose and bind sins over against all parishioners, privately or en masse. By working sacraments, rites, sermons, services, calls, classes, etc. Or by rebuking erring parishioners, banning them from communion, or asking of the parish confirmation of his excommunications.^{xii}

No other office is empowered to turn the keys so completely, directly, personally, or frequently, because a flock needs a shepherd.^{xiii} His pastoral role is to loose or bind the sins of sinners in the stead of Christ via gospel and law, parceling the scriptures and sacraments. So, do training and tradition produce the pastoral scope and role? Ach! Sinners needing forgiveness have made the parish priest/pastor since Roman days what he is.

Consequently the essay, dear teachers and delegates, focuses largely on the course of the keys in the pastorate, because 1) the style, scope and spirit of the traditional Lutheran pastorate is again taking shots, and 2) while it does not continue the apostles' office by apostolic succession, in style, scope and spirit it does match up with Paul's ministry to the ancients. Paul built churches by the proclamation of the gospel (4.2-3). He preached (Acts 20.7). He baptized (1 Cor 1.14). He celebrated communion (1 Cor 10.16,17). He excommunicated (1 Tim 1.20). He claimed jurisdictional ties to converts (1 Cor 9.1). He was a *Seelsorger* (1 Thess 1.11,12). He directed parish assemblies in *absentia* (1 Cor 5.4) as he regulated worship protocol in person (1 Cor 11.34). He managed stewardship (1 Cor 16.1-3). He reconciled personalities (Phi 8-9). He absolved penitents (2.10). Paul the apostle pastored a flock of parishes.

I focus largely on the pastorate since the Catechism says, "A Christian congregation with its called pastor uses the keys..."^{xiv} As shepherds go, so their flocks. And where pastors lead is compassed by the degree they centralize pardon to people's fortunes and God's glory. Since this treasure is stowed in fragile vessels, view the pastorate then as a faux always waiting to pass by its use of the gospel. Or as a kindred spirit says, "The pastorate is the gimbals of the HMS WELS, for Satan is not going to attack us on the means of grace, but on the vessel that holds the means, namely the ministry" (John Berg). I think so, and in that spirit I wish to stand laymen and teachers topside to the pilothouse to eye the focus of pastoral labors, for both parties qualify as shipmates who figure to lose the most if pastors go xenophilous, change their gospel bearings, and beach the fleet on tempting but uncharted fads du jour.

The Problematic Wish for Joyous and Growing Responses to the Gospel

St. Paul worked the gospel hard at great personal expense (4.8-11); he did so that the Corinthians might profit thereby (4.12),

All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God (4.15).

Joyous responses to God, by growing numbers of people—the dream and goal of every pastor. Yes, but worked by gospel alone.

Bob was my parishioner. Married, with 3 grown sons, he worshiped and communed with the precision of a Swiss watch. But secretly he was two-timing his wife. I discovered his sin, I latchkeyed God's dooms, but before the church could lock them in place he quit.

Then there was Joe, my dad's couch potato No-show. My pastor dad was set to run the 3rd Commandment mizzenward, pipe this delinquent to attention, and make him walk the plank, when Joe meekly owned up, offering that he did pray and read his Bible daily. Oh.

Delegates, teachers, feel here the rolling deck on which we pastors stand. We work forgiveness by word and sacrament. And when we spend hours on a sermon and preach it we wish to see the earth also move beneath people, see lives changed, see offerings pile up, see faith moving and splashing. But what do we see too often?

We see old man Schmidt staring at the East window vacantly. Worse, we believe ourselves to be failures, because hoped for or programmed results are missing. We see what seemed a likely target drift off, while another that looked beyond range bobs bottle-like

somehow within reach. Meaning like St. Paul we labor for positive responses to the gospel, hoping all we pastor to will fit into this compartment, when some we see so promising sink with a gurgle and others we see so unlikely surface as the faithful ones.

Feel then what pastors frequently suffer. See-sickness.

We wish to fathom the deep waters of the soul, see what headway the gospel makes, see joyous and growing responses to its pronouncement, when so much is hidden beneath the see. What we see too often and clearly are the difficulties. I polled midwestern and west coast pastors, "Identify your greatest difficulty in the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins."^{xv} Seven answers emerged:

- 1) Freeing people from work-righteousness,
- 2) Getting people excited about their forgiveness,
- 3) Leading people to repentance when they don't want to
- 4) Wanting people to appreciate liturgical absolutions
- 5) Wishing people would act like they are forgiven,
- 6) Drawing people into the church to hear the gospel,
- 7) Showing people the evil nature of sin.

Dreams, missions, goals. Then to trust the power of word and sacrament alone to work wonders! Hear one pastor's see-sickness as,

"The constant question as to whether that proclamation, which is my responsibility and privilege, is being personally appropriated by the hearers, which, of course, is up to the Holy Spirit" (F. M. Krieger).

This is tension: to proclaim the message, ponder its efficacy, and feel the tug to want to make things happen when results disappoint.

Memorial 87-1 "Spiritual Renewal" said our ship has struck a plateau, that it is leaking membership, and that it is taking on frustration.^{xvi} Outwardly, yes, our parishes have grown little since 1980. And when we fail to see more joy and growth to the gospel's pronouncement, second-guessing and doubt come naturally. Are we content to wrap ourselves up in the old cliché, "I preach the gospel"? Do we have our message wrong, or have we erected sociological, cultural barriers around it? I sense concern and panic in our circles reacting to the status quo. It's as if the Department of Numbers has laid down a defeatist attitude, christened and launched it.

Brothers, Paul saw difficulties. But I do not see him making waves as one who, ever so remotely, questioned the design of his gospel ministry and put to port in order to drydock and rebuild her because he had grown tired with its attendant disappointments like inadequate staffing (Acts 15.30-41; 2 Tim 4.9-11), misunderstandings of mission and ministry (Gal 2.11-14), impacts of the unbelieving world (Eph 4.17-19; Gal 4.9-11; Acts 19.23-41), not receiving the support needed to carry on (Phil 4.14-16), other pressures (2 Cor 5.3-10, 11.23-27), or especially dead ends (Acts 16.6-8, 17.32-18.1).

"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed" (4.8-9).

He had faith in the efficacy of the message, however he saw things.

"It is written, 'I believed, therefore I have spoken.' With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak" (4.13).

And that spirit buoyed him: "Therefore we do not lose heart" (4.16). Do you follow? Paul's spirit dwelt not on what he saw but on the reality he did not see,

“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (4.17-18)

Now, consider me. Who am I? I am not a heartless spirit believing I have found in Paul an equally self-centered penitent, happy for God’s pardon but aloof to those who turn a cold or lukewarm face to the gospel. Sweet Jesus, I wish for your good news joyous, growing responses, and yes, I often wonder if I should be doing more than merely heralding it? But strange, my wonderment gives me a *deja vu*, for soirees of familiar spirits haunt me and taunt me to believe I must do more than proclaim. Do you recognize me?

I am a ministerium, very much in love with the gospel, which also explains my fascination for an old flame whose spell I was under long ago and who enters my life ever so often to rekindle the romance. She tempts me to think I need her to fire people up for the gospel. So picture me...a Richard Blaine of sorts.

You remember Rick. Of *Rick’s Cafe Americain*? Into my life one day, like Rick’s, swept my temptress, Elsa the breaker of hearts. “Of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world she walks into mine,” I almost caught myself mumbling into my chalice, because of course it was into my sacristy she had stepped. “Play it again, Sam,” I mused as the minister of music on the organ bench finessed the footpedals, flashbacked to my fling with Elsa, and determined not to get involved with her again. “Here’s to you kid,” I toasted, raising my now worn copy of Luther’s *Hauptschriften* and mopping my sweating brow with it, I escorted her to the airport to her awaiting John and put them on the plane to Zurich, wondering all the while when and where she would find me again. Elsa...

...Pietism, alias Fraulein Enthusiasm-Subjectivism.^{xvii} Always hot to flirt with Lutherans—when things look dull—when people act apathetic—when churches feel cold. Then Elsa purrs, Emphasize the Christ, not for you, but in you. If people don’t act forgiven, categorize them. Concentrate more on how they respond to gospel than on setting forth the truth plainly (4.2). Charming. But Elsa’s curves have a way of bumping means of grace off center, obscuring their objectivity, demoting forgiveness, and those who succumb may find they’ve sold not only the bridal bed by night but the wife in it to boot. It’s because our parishes have settled into a no-growth pattern that makes our ministerium vulnerable to the swish of her skirts, and the set is ready for players to take their cues.

Farfetched? Remember how *Casablanca* starts,

“To all officers. 2 German couriers carrying important official documents murdered on train from Aran. Murderer and possible accomplices headed for Casablanca. Round up all suspicious characters and search them for stolen documents.”

I feel something’s afoot in our circles. A manhunt is on. It’s as if 2 Germans sharing in common the name “Martin” have been mugged, their influence stolen, and the alert sounded. Something’s happening. First it was lights, camera, action. And now, reaction.

Have you noticed, for example, the growing list of essays and books appearing in the past 5 years, reacting to the dangers of pietism, subjectivism, and enthusiasm?^{xviii} Have men caught the fleeting glimpse of a familiar spirit and are trying to run it to earth?

Perhaps they were hot on my trail; I started cell groups in 1989. I enrolled 300 parishioners into 25 cells under trained lay leaders, hoping for adult spiritual growth, despite the warnings.^{xix} A paranoid-schizophrenic mesmerized one cell with his visions. A delinquent heated up a second by continually roasting various personalities. A third cell plotted the demolition of the AAL Branch. A fourth planned for suffrage. A fifth...you get the idea.

A sobering episode. I had arbitrarily divided the parish but scarier, some thrived on the detachment from the body and looked to carve it further. The moral? I refrain from saying that all who use a method devised by the divisive against “dead orthodoxy” will automatically wreak havoc, as all who borrow the neighbor’s tools must also recognize it a dicey practice. Spirits design tools, and how does one exorcise and sanitize alien ways and means? Dr. Becker taught, “No methodology is neutral.” I had to test it; I found it true. Meaning, you can try to spoil the Egyptians if you wish, but remember what it was that Israel used to craft their golden calf.

So, yes, I believe something’s going on. I sense it, because I was a part of it. The allure that people hear enough about justification, that means of grace aren’t sexy, that subjective thrills are needed, haunts confessionalism: Methodism, Rivalism, Pentecostalism. Amazing how this femme fatale fleshes herself out into new and shapely forms—just how many sisters does Elsa have? Church Growth is one—read Pastor Koester’s masterful expose of it, *Law and Gospel*. Then meet Meta. As in *Meta-Church* by Carl F. George. Its themes of caring, sharing warm fuzzies downgrade forgiveness, and its disdain for traditional clergy, I fear, wants to transfer reconverted men like me south to sell Chiclets to beachcombers.^{xx}

Meta-Church is Elsa Pietism with a moustache. The methods of this variant of church growth, according to George’s publishers, promise an “evangelistic harvest of beyond-huge proportions.” But felt needs determine ministry, not the need of forgiveness. The home cell is designed as the parish’s spiritual, emotional center, not pulpit and altar railing. And anti-clergyism is institutionalized.

O tempora. O mores. Delegates, teachers, in these days of decline your pastors long to win converts and see the converted lead joyous lives. But when they hear the echo, “We’re not growing; our parishes are lifeless,” men may hear a Siren call of unconfessional solutions that can casually gum up the trumpeting of absolutions.

Preach forgiveness. Have faith in the message. Trust the efficacy of gospel in word, water, wine and wafer. But that’s too simple, and when results dissatisfy, they seem insufficient. Hear the understandable lament of a pastor who wrote in a recent essay,

“Too often Sunday enthusiasm and compliments over a well delivered and ‘powerful’ sermon are interpreted in the minister’s mind as having achieved ends, but the Gospel is the *means*. If the Gospel information is not leading to transformation of lives and motivated faith is not enabled to express itself can we be satisfied that all is accomplished?”

No. Lives and faith that lack transformation and motivation cut to the heart. But the Lutheran spirit agrees with the Wittenberg *Minnesaenger* who believed his end achieved after he sang his *Lied*,

“My preaching is useless and similar to the person who sings in a forest, for he sings to the trees and only an echo bounces back. So we preach to the glory of God, whether no fruits follow. And though many blaspheme, it’s still good to preach Christ for the sake of a few” (*SL*, XXII, 303-304). [Author’s translation]

Luther believed in the efficacy of the gospel message as the means to faith and as *the end of pastoral service*. He took great comfort in this, pointing out that this was the boast of the apostles,

“Thusly we must preach and speak and let the Word (as heard) work. For the same must first take captive and illuminate hearts. We are nothing, as if we should or could do it; it belongs to another power and might. Therefore the apostles prided themselves in their writings only about their service (*Ministerii*) and not of their results (*executionis*).

Accordingly we want to let it stand and implore God for *mercy*”(SL, XX, 28). [Author’s translation]

Means of grace are “mercy”-ful *ends*. Pastor Koester writes,

“A scriptural understanding of the gospel and related teachings will lead to the goal of preaching the Word of God taking our eyes off of growth per se. This is not a no-growth excuse...it is a paradigm by which our mind is centered exclusively on how to preach the gospel. In the paradigm the means do not justify the end. In our sphere of responsibility, *means are the end.*”^{xxi}

Or as I heard a TV detective put it lately, it’s the truth that counts, not the results. I like that. Our task is to be “setting forth the truth plainly” (4.2); our God will program the results.^{xxii}

And one more look at the gospel’s message and efficacy. NPH in 1963 printed Professor Meyer’s *Ministers of Christ*, a commentary on 2 Corinthians. Meyer looks at St. Paul’s no-frills delivery,

Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God (4.2),

and then he gives his Beetles-era application to the ancient words,

Some ministers, in their eagerness to bring the Gospel to the people, resort to entertainment to attract the crowds, in order to get an opportunity to preach to them. If you would tell such ministers that they are ashamed of the Gospel and that by their methods they disgrace it, because they manifest *a lack of trust in its efficacy*, they would resent the charge. The disgrace their methods bring upon it, does not appear on the surface; that is why Paul speaks of secret things of shame...The Gospel is the word of Truth. To resort to ruses in proclaiming it, even though with the best of intentions, is heaping shame on the Truth. Not only are truth and lies incompatible in their nature, but to use lures in connection with the Gospel ministry treats the Truth, the eternal Truth of God, as though it were inefficient, not attractive enough in itself.^{xxiii}

Thirty one years ago Meyer was slamming lodges and not seeker services with clowns, omitting “Lutheran” on the marquee, bait and switch worship tactics, or dropping communion on Easter to avoid offending guests, as he was also typecasting human nature. And Meyer put the arrow in the black when he zeroed in on the problem of “lack of trust” in the gospel’s efficacy. That’s my problem, as it was and will remain; it’s human nature to doubt the power of the treasure when we poor, miserable vessels pop open our lids and pour it out—assay it, and is it not but the simplest of statements as the turnkey of Philippi heard?...Jesus Christ has won your forgiveness; believe it.

Keeping the focus on the pronouncement of absolution I see as the greatest of pressures which contributes to the fragile nature of all public ministry. So many things can go wrong. I take the centrality of forgiveness for granted. Or I cheapen it by justifying any means that observably serves to attract people to it. Or I sidetrack its centrality by pouring my energies into semi-related needs. Or I demote it by trivializing the role of its called dispensers by a misapplication of the universal priesthood.^{xxiv} Or I quail at results and doubt the message’s efficacy and borrow the methods of the heterodox. Or I pick up the idea from the Reformed that things other than Satan hinder or hide the gospel (4.3-4). And in the sad and final reckoning I may awake to thrill to the shock that I too, inadvertently, achieved to degrees what others have plotted, namely, the suppression of the gospel of objective justification. And how? By turning the gospel not into a social but sociological gospel.

When French Huguenots squatted on Spanish Florida, Philip II's admiral, Pero Menendez de Aviles, captured the colony, flayed its leader alive, and hanged the rest. He posted a sign saying he'd taken such measures not because they were Frenchmen but because they were Lutherans. And yes, slaying Lutherans is one way to suppress the gospel but so can, more subtly, shifting the focus of Lutheranism—proving again there is more than one way to skin a cat (echism). Pastors, teachers, delegates, we live so long and learn so little and forget what little we learn so quickly.

Delegates, to you are given the keys to the kingdom of God. In turn you have commissioned public stewards to wear and work them. And who better to use the passkeys than those trained at Mequon to shepherd the flock and those trained at New Ulm to teach its young? And pastors and teachers, parishioners by and large trust you to wear these keys, for if I found one belief from all sectors that rang loud and clear in my polling of pastors, it was to this question: "Do you feel 'trusted' to do the work for which the seminary trained you?" "Yes," the overwhelming majority of pastors wrote, and I believe by extension that goes for parochial teachers too.

We have the gospel in a vessel, and though she be small and human yet she is a fit one, for our pastors and teachers know the gospel, and she must needs be under sail. And Someone is calling, "Aloft there. Clear your leech lines. Heave taut your halyard. Put out to sea." Let's every man, Jack, take ship, unfurl and hail the royal ensign, *Preach The Gospel* (Mark 16.15). And when doubts storm our cruise with lip-labored arguments, to reduce us to reluctant but out-argued lubbers for standing forgiveness central and working sacraments and scriptures fore and aft, may we run with the wind with the figurehead of Luther leading^{xxv}, knowing he who rules the waves has commissioned us so to do and seeks but faithfulness.

German Quotations

Page 5, footnote 8:

"Denn ob wir wohl Alle Priester sind, so koennen und sollen wit dock darum nicht alle predigen oder lehren, und regieren; doch muss man aus dem ganzen Haufen etliche aussondern und waehlen, denen solches Amt befohlen werede. Und wer solches fuehrt, oder ist nun nicht des Amts halfen ein Priester (wie die andern alle sind), sondern ein Diener der andern aller. Und wenn er nicht mehr predigen und dienen kann oder will, so tritt er wieder in den gemeinen Haufen, befiehlt das Amt einem andern, und ist nichts Anderes, denn ein jeglicher gemeiner Christ. Siehe, also muss das Predigtamt oder Dienstamt scheiden von dem gemeinen Priesterstande aller getauften Christen. Denn solch Amt ist nicht meter denn ein oeffentlicher Dienst, so etwan einem befohlen wird ovn der ganzen Gemeinde, welche all zugleich Priester sind." (SL, V, 1037-38)

Page 17:

"Meine Predigt ist vergeblich und aehnlich dem, der in einem Walde singt, denn er singt den Baeumen und es schallt nur das Echo wieder. So predigen wit zur Ehre Gottes, obgleich keine Fruechte folgen. Und obgleich viele laestern, so ist es doch gut, um weniger willen Christum zu predigen." (SL, XXII, 303-04)

Page 17:

"Solches muessen wir predigen und sagen und das Wort (wie gehoert) wirken lassen. Denn dasselbige muss zuvor die Herzen gefangen nehmen und erleuchten. Wir sind es nicht, die

es thun sollen oder koennen; es gehoert eine andere Kraft und Macht dazu darum ruehmen sich auch die Apostel in ihren Schriften nur des Dienstes (Ministerii), und nicht der Folge (executionis). Dabei wollen wir's jetzt lassen bleiben und Gott um Gnade anrufen.” (SL, XX, 28)

Page 21:

“Weil man denn den Glauben ins Herz nicht giessen kann, so kann noch soll auch niemand dazu gezwungen noch gedrunge werden, denn Gott thut solches allein und macht das Wort lebendig in der Menschen Herzen, wann und wo er will, nach seinem goettlichen Erkenntnis und Wohlgefallen. Darum soll man das Wort frei gehen lassen und nich unsere Werke dazu thun. Wir haben jus verbi, und nicht executionem, das ist, das Wort sollen wir predigen, aber die Folge Gott heimgestellt sein” (SL, XX, 18) [Emphasis added].

Page 21:

“Ich bin dem Pabst, dem Ablass und allen Papisten entgegengestanden, aber mit keiner Gewalt, mit keinem Frevel, mit keinem Stuermen, sondern Gottes Word habe ich allein getrieben, gepredigt und geschrieben; sonst habe ich gar nichts dazu gethan. Dasselbige Wort, wenn ich geschlafen habe, oder bin guter Dingegewesen hat so viel zuwege gebracht, dass das Papstthum so schwach und ohnmaechtig worden ist, dass ihm noch nie kein Fuerst noch Kaiser so viel hat koennen abbrechen. Ich habe es nicht gethan; das einige Word, von mir gepredigt und geschrieben, hat solches alles ausgerichtet und gehandelt. Wenn ich auch haette mit Gewalt und Ungemach hierinne gefahren, ich sollte wohl ein solch Spiel angefangen haben, dass Deutschland waere dadurch in gross Blutvergiessen kommen. Aber was waere es? Ein Narrenspiel waere es gewesen, und ein Verderbniss an Leib und Seele. Ich bin stille gessen und habe das Wort lassen handeln” (SL, XX, 20-21) [Emphasis added].

Appendix of Definitions of the Gospel

Osiander was the first to fulfill Luther's prediction that people would arise to obscure the gospel. Osiander did this by including the new life of faith in the gospel's pronouncements.

“That Osiander practically identified justification with regeneration, renewal, and gradual sanctification appears from the following quotations...Osiander was fanatical in denouncing those who identified justification with the forgiveness of sins” (Triglotta, 157).

The whole gospel, however, is God's pronouncement of forgiveness of sins, exclusive of human responses to it; the gospel would be good news if no one believed it.

“Moreover, the power of the keys administers and presents the Gospel through absolution, which [proclaims peace to me and] is the true voice of the Gospel” (Apol, Art. XII, 39).

“The Law issues only commands and demands. The Gospel, on the other hand, only makes offers. It means, not to take anything, but only to give” (Walther, Law and Gospel, 9).

But does not the Gospel as a “message” have a wider meaning? Yes, Walther says,

“There is a similar usage as regards the term Gospel; sometimes it is used in a wide, then again in a narrow meaning. The narrow meaning is its proper sense; in its wide meaning it is used merely by way of synecdoche, signifying anything that Jesus preached, including even His very poignant preaching of the Law, as, for instance, the Sermon on the Mount

and His reproving of wicked men. Besides the term Gospel is used in contradistinction to the Old Testament, which often signifies only the teaching of the Law” (Walther, Law and Gospel, 278).

The Confessions likewise teach a narrow and wide sense of the term gospel, but only in the sense of messages of God humanward. When controversy broke-out between parties about what the message of the gospel did and did not include, the Thorough Declaration said,

“Now, when we consider this dissent aright, it has been caused chiefly by this, that the term Gospel is not always employed and understood in one and the same sense, but in two ways, in the Holy Scriptures, as also by ancient and modern church-teachers. For sometimes it is employed so that there is understood by it the entire doctrine of Christ, our Lord, which He proclaimed in His ministry upon earth, and commanded to be proclaimed in the New Testament...Furthermore the term Gospel is employed in another, namely, in its proper sense, by which it comprises not the preaching of repentance, but only the preaching of the grace of God, as follows directly afterwards, Mark 1,15, where Christ says: Repent, and believe the Gospel” (Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration. 3,4, 6).

The gospel, in its proper or wider sense, is a proclamation; sanctification is the proper response to the gospel but is not gospel.

Catalogue of Gospel Definitions

Many thanks to Pastor John Berg of Bethany, Kenosha for compiling the catalogue of quotes on the gospel’s definition, the gem being Chemnitz’s condemnation of any attempt to include the new life of Christians in a broad definition of the gospel.

Statements by Martin Chemnitz:

It is worthwhile to consider what pernicious hallucinations regarding the article of justification have occurred at all periods because it was not correctly established, on the basis of true foundations, and what the proper doctrine of the Gospel is, in which faith must seek righteousness before God...

But even Augustine himself, who in other respects sheds light beyond all others in defining the Gospel, was in error on this point ...he says in his *De Vera Innocentia* “The Gospel is a lovely fragrance and the preaching of the truth, and by this fragrance he lays hold on life who keeps the Gospel with his good works and lives according to it.

Eusebius in his *De Preparatione Evangelica* has a description which is summarized thus: The doctrine of the Gospel brings to us the religion by which our souls are converted to God and to live a life in keeping with His Commandments...

These men and others could not correctly teach the doctrine of justification...Therefore if the correct doctrine of the Gospel is as they defined it, then it follows that the righteousness of faith consists not only in the application of the remission of sins for the sake of the Mediator, *but that also an essential part of the Gospel, is the new obedience or good works.*

The adversaries, the papists, have seen this clearly. Consequently they are seeking various destructive tactics whereby they may confuse, obscure, and remove this necessary distinction, which makes the Gospel in the proper sense the doctrine that reveals the righteousness of faith availing before God. They see that his way is very easy: if it established that the proper teaching of the Gospel is not only a matter of faith in the gracious promise for the sake of Christ, but also deals with renewal or good works, *then it immediately follows that good works have entered into the matter of justification as a partial cause*. Because “the righteousness of God has been revealed in the Gospel” (Rom 1:17), therefore the Cologne theologians contend that in the definition of the Gospel we must add the statement of Matt. 28:20, “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you,” that is, the commandment of love...

Gropper (Johann Gropper, 1503-59, Roman Catholic adherent of Erasmus. Later became a vicious opponent of Luther and the Reformation) is really playing a sneaky game. He says that the benefit of Christ is not only reconciliation but also sanctification or renewal. And the Gospel, because it reveals the righteousness of faith, consists of and is completed in these two parts, remission of sins and the inner renewal of the will, from whence come good works as the fruit of the Spirit. *This was plainly the delusion of Osiander*.

Here it is absolutely necessary that the benefits of Christ on account of which we receive remission of sins and are received unto eternal life be distinguished from the benefits of renewal which follow justification.” (“Loci Theologici,” Concordia 1989, Vol. II, page 448 passim)

Statements by Martin Luther

“For what is the whole gospel but the good tidings of the forgiveness of sins?” (“The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,” *Luther’s Works* [AE] 35:56, Concordia/Fortress)

“Thus the gospel is and should be nothing else than a chronicle, a story, a narrative about Christ, telling who he is, what he did, said, and suffered ...There you have it. The gospel is a story about Christ, God’s and David’s Son, who died and was raised and is established as Lord. This is the gospel in a nutshell ...For the preaching of the gospel is nothing else than Christ come to us, or we being brought to him.” (“Brief Instruction,” AE 35:117 passim)

“The gospel, however, does not preach what we are to do or to avoid.” (“How Christians Should Regard Moses,” 35:162)

“What is the whole gospel in a short summary with the words of this testament or sacrament. For the gospel is nothing but a proclamation of God’s grace and of the forgiveness of sins, granted us through the sufferings of Christ, as St. Paul proves in Romans 10 and as Christ says in Luke 24.” (“Treatise on the New Testament,” AE 35:106)

“Now as you have often heard, the Gospel teaches nothing, but that one must learn to know Christ alone, and so the Holy Spirit teaches nothing more.” (*Sermons of Martin Luther*. (Grand Rapids: Baker 1988), 3:341.

“*Lex est Deus accusans et damnans; evangelium est Deus absolvens et justificans.*” (Quote attributed to Luther in Pieper’s *Christian Dogmatics* Vol 3, p. 250, Concordia, 1953)

Another Statement from the Confessions:

“In like manner also renewal and sanctification, although it is also a benefit of the Mediator, Christ, and a work of the Holy Ghost, does not belong in the article or affair of justification before God, but follows the same, since, on account of our corrupt flesh, it is not entirely perfect and complete in this life, as Dr. Luther writes well concerning this in his beautiful and large exposition to the Galatians, in which he says as follows: ‘We concede indeed that instruction should be given also concerning love and good works, yet in such a way that this be done when and where it is necessary, namely, *when otherwise and outside of this matter of justification we have to do with works.*’” (FC V:20, *Triglotta* p. 959)

Statement by Herman Sasse:

“As soon as the gospel is no longer understood exclusively as the gracious promise of the forgiveness of sins for Christ’s sake, the concept of faith is altered.” (Herman Sasse.” *Here We Stand*. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1938), 122.

These plain and simple statements tell us that the pronouncement of the forgiveness of sins is the gospel, the whole gospel, and nothing but the gospel. The proper response to the gospel is sanctification (a.k.a. renewal, the new life of the Christian, faith, etc.), but to make sanctification in any sense a part of the gospel is heresy. What Lutheran pastor, who knows what the confessions and fathers say on this matter, as well as Christ himself (Luke 24.45) would say...“The gospel that we are preaching is not working—if all our people know is that Jesus takes their sins away, we need a new gospel,” or “I think the whole gospel is not only what Christ did for me, but what the Spirit worked in me, a whole new life.” Do confessionals talk like this? Or do pietists?

The Message in the Administration

Prologue

When next it happened, Harry had entered his pulpit.

He bowed his head and prayed success upon his sermon, and then, while the people were singing he used the surplus seconds to give the worshipers the once over. Always good to know who’s here and who’s not, he reminded himself. Ah, good, old man Schmidt is here, beamed Harry inwardly. This one’s for you! And when you want to squirm, you’ll know that I had you in mind and not old Felbob there under the East window.

“Grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord Jesus...” intoned Harry, the practiced words rolling off his lips like melting butter. “Today I’m going to talk to you about your money,” he announced, “...about God’s will and what your spirit should be.” At these targeted words old man Schmidt quickly crossed his arms and stared at old man Felbob.

“And what I have to say,” Harry adlibbed, “applies to everyone, not just for someone sitting in front of you...”

Schmidt looked up, as did the doppelganger who had materialized, taking a seat beside the elderly man. “Oh please, be quick about it,” he heckled. “Everyone, and especially Schmidt, wants to hear Amen.” And the specter made an obscene gesture.

Harry grabbed the sides of his pulpit in a spasm of rage, and with eyes that protruded like hat pegs he bore down on the empty seat beside Schmidt, the parish’s most notorious miser. “Money can become an evil which rots the core out of *anyone!*” he bellowed in uncommon fierceness, suddenly karate chopping the air with a crosswise sweep of his right hand that came to rest dramatically pointing at his ghostly counterpart, but what old man Schmidt took to be himself, promptly raising him off the pew one inch. “And I mean to take the gloves off about this subject this morning,” Harry added with a flourish, jabbing at the specter with the sword of his right index finger, which promptly made Schmidt unwind his folded arms, fasten his trembling hands to his knees, and train his eyes on the bald head in front of him in a panicked effort to ignore Harry’s spirited outburst. Never had a practicing phrenologist studied such a globe as did Schmidt, as if its very moles, liver spots, peaks and valleys might unlock the secret to the meaning of life.

It was Harry’s greatest sermon.

“Powerful sermon, Reverend, mighty powerful words. I don’t know what got into you, but boy, we sure needed to hear that. Man, oh, man, that would have cooked the cherries on grandma’s hat,” gushed old man Felbob, one of the first ushered out. He stood pumping Harry’s hand like he was working to raise water from the bowels of a rusty well, while old man Schmidt a few bodies away, the church’s current expert on bald heads, waited in line, numb and still levitating, and wondering where the minister had found the nerve to preach practically an entire sermon in his direction. When it came his turn, Schmidt extended to Harry the limp, dead fish of his right hand, muttered a “good” something, and shuffled off on wooden feet.

Followed by the specter who gave Harry a blank look.

Part 2: Treasure in the Clay Jar of the Pastorate

Institutionalizing the Keys Creates Inherent Pressures

His exploits read like a Sabatini novel.^{xxvi} He walked with God (Acts 18.9) and an angel (Acts 27.24), as he dodged highwaymen (11.26), fenced with scholars (Acts 17.18-31), outwitted bunglers, (Acts 16.37-39), turned foe against foe (Acts 23.6-10), managed harrowing escapes (11.32-33), foiled intrigues (Acts 14.5), and penetrated the innermost courts of power (Phil 1.13;4.22)—while braving the occasional stoning, flogging, sinking, and starving. Saul, St. Paul, freebooter in the Lord (10.3-6), hotgospeller of grace (Eph 3.7-13), ventured much because of the work charted for him: itinerant outreach to Jews (Acts 9.15) and Gentiles (Gal 2.2, 7-8), and overseeing a farflung fellowship (11.28) by a system of local ordinations (Titus 1.5), visitations, and communications. The nature of this design made for distinct pressures (4.8-9).

Ordinary Pressures on the Pastor to Remain an Absolver/Overseer

A parish pastor is specialist and generalist.

A pastor specializes in working the keys within the vessel of Christians who have called him. So he carries out Christ’s commission, “Feed my lambs, take care of my sheep, feed my sheep” (John 21.15-17), as also a second commission has him clap eyes on the horizon to spy

outside opportunities to preach “repentance and forgiveness of sins” (Luke 24.45). Both commissions pressure him to parcel out expertise and energy in the care and cure of souls.

Next a pastor generalizes the art and part of his specialty as *episkopos*, “bishop, overseer” (1 Tim 3.2) of a parish.^{xxvii} His *episkope*, “superintendence” (1 Tim 3.1) extends over the public working of the keys by all and for all within his charge,^{xxviii} as he ranges over many fields. Uppermost he preaches, administers the sacraments, and conducts worship and rites. He teaches young and old, counsels, and calls upon the sick, shut-in, dying, bereaved, prospects, and delinquents. He records his acts with or without secretarial help. He maps out parish policy, strategy, and ideas, guiding officers. He studies, meditates, and prays. He takes part in denominational activities. He publishes, recruits leaders, and raises funds. He keeps peace among people. And more. And twice a year he smiles (and groans)—when he hears someone say, “I wouldn’t mind having a job like that—only one day a week!”

Being an overseer means balancing jobs to avoid majoring in likes and minoring in dislikes. This basic tension first finds the pastor when after much training for ministry and professing love for aspects of it—a Jacob pining after his Rachel—he enters his call and awakens early to find himself wedded to an unforeseen task, to a proverbial Leah winking at him through weak eyes.

You will see in this generalist agenda the pressure of the schedule. Most often a pastor is his own boss doing certain musts: sermons, sacraments, rites, services, classes, meetings, etc. But the musts are teamed with discretionary maybes. How often do I call on shut-ins or prospects? Do I spend 3 days on a stewardship program or send away for it? How often do I council with engaged couples? Do I keep office hours? You get the point. A pastor is a sculptor. You’re handed the skeleton of a basic design, and then you get to flesh it out according to your image. Trouble is, some parts receive more enthusiastic attention than others, and then you hear the critics say that you’ve shaped bits out of proportion.

Then you say, “There so much to do, and I don’t have enough time, and I’m having a hard time trying to gauge my effectiveness. “How pastors wish they could issue report cards! So yes, St. Paul put it nicely, did he not? There are days you feel like a jug, a clay vessel, into which so much is being poured, you fear the sides are going to burst and no one hears you saying “Whennnnn.”

What’s a pastor to do?—*those things most directly linked to the proclamation of forgiveness. Then* make the nagging guilt of so-much-more-could-be-done! a hairshirt; wear it, get used to the itch, and if needs be, ask Christ and others to scratch. Or must the pastor exhaust himself on every homespun or imported interest that courts a monopolizing of his absolving/overseering role?

Two Current Concerns which Pressure the Parish GP

I could write and preach sermons exclusively. Another man loves nothing better than communing old people. But unless the parishioners approved, a pastor would pay dear who assigned the lion’s share of his attention to a special interest; he would find himself a lion in a den of Daniels growling their disapproval.

Consider then the cases made for outreach and adult spiritual growth. Both merit pastoral attention, but how much?

First, *outreach*. When Christians call a man to shepherd them, it means just that. The shepherd will feel for his sheep a primary responsibility, as he also seeks to add to their number.

This makes him not a missionary but a part-time missionary, as he is a part-time everything as he absolves and oversees.

But then tying opinion to scolding like knots on a scourge this accusation was laid on pastors, teachers, and parishes, that,

“inadequate staffing, misunderstandings of mission and ministry, impacts of the unbelieving world and other pressures have contributed to many congregations conducting a ‘maintenance ministry’ rather than an aggressive, growth oriented ministry”^{xxxix}

Why must this be an *either/or*? Here was a sad antithesis of *episkope*, pitting one specific of the ministry (evangelism-outreach) against its *Aufsehen* (overseeing). Maintenance ministry^{xxx} vs. aggressive, growth oriented ministry?^{xxxi} No. Must the competency (“mission and ministry”) of a generation of pastors and parishes be questioned because national growth or levels of sanctification fell short of expectations? Your district growth has slowed dramatically, gaining only 35 communicants in 1993.^{xxxii} But having been one of you once I think I would know your reaction if a rustic back east in America’s Dairyland were to publish a soft impeachment that AZ-CA caught up with the rest in adopting a maintenance ministry.

Please understand that I desire to see my parish grow and yours too. How do we do it? We preach forgiveness of sins plainly (4.2) and continually, trusting its efficacy, while fixing our eyes not on what is seen but unseen (4.18). And we encourage people to let their light (4.4) shine, through the privacy of their worlds or by formal organization along the lines of evangelism committees.

And we might want to try something which our circuit riders, the monks, and St. Paul did. Itinerant mission work. Send out evangelists, seminary-trained men called by circuits or conferences to work as their missionaries, to tour and preach and teach, gathering and identifying prospects and directing them to awaiting shepherds and flocks. If the expense of such a call were spread among 5, 10, 15 parishes, it could be attractive and affordable. I’m not saying it will work, but it might be worth a look.

The *discipleship movement* has emerged to pressure pastors. “Adult spiritual growth is job one,” said the Spiritual Renewal Project. It ran from August 1987 through December 1991, cost \$214,161,^{xxxiii} and was intended to address problems in the status quo of 1987, such as

“...within the congregations of the synod there are numerous evidences of spiritual weakness, such as, attendance at worship services, participation in Holy Communion, enrollment in Bible classes, and involvement in lay ministry... the ‘backdoor’ losses are so great that the membership of our synod is basically not growing...congregations are struggling to administer God’s grace to those many members in need...”^{xxxiv}

This effort was not lacking in funds and was ably administrated; it produced. Besides 4 “white” papers, 3-5 day consultations with 70 parishes, and 8 regional workshops, it created *Training Christians for Ministry*, a curriculum designed for spiritual maturity and equipping members for ministry. Then the project ended and passed into the Adult Discipleship Office. Now 7 years after the effort began, the status quo has worsened. Nationwide membership, worship attendance, and percentage of mission offerings are down.

Was the effort needed? Successful? Perhaps. Maybe not. The same goes for any or all of the \$2.4 million my parish spent on efforts since 1987. Yet what’s done with faithful motives to focus people on word and sacrament glorifies God, even if this or that amounts to faithful failure. But adult discipleship as a *wider American movement* spooks me—is this groundswell affecting us?

The American discipleship movement wears at its elbow a familiar and loud bowwow: reconstructionism. When things go wrong, suspect the institution; the discipling movement sees weakness in American parishes and responds by seeking a radical reconstruction of the shepherding office. And Prof. Schuetze's 1977 teaser, "*A Shepherd or a Coach*," is no more a graveyard phantom whistled off.

My study into this was directed to *Foresight*, a 1986 book. It identified currents *soon* to affect churches, one being a trend to renew parishes by equipping/discipling. It touted reconstructing pastoral leadership using this antithesis: the institutional parish vs. the equipping parish. What is an equipping parish?

"It is a pattern where pastoral authority is shared and where authority is linked primarily with giftedness rather than with office or position, and where the leaders freely share authority with the whole faith community—disciplining and enabling everyone to exercise ministry and leadership within areas of gift and calling."^{xxxv}

Foresight, a Reformed work, links the equipping/discipling movement favorably to Pietism's aim of institutionalizing a greater practice of the priesthood of believers in congregational life,

"This spiritual priesthood was stressed by Luther at the Reformation. Philip Jacob Spener's *Pia Desideria*, 'Spiritual Hopes,' published in 1675, is credited in large measure with launching the *Pietist renewal movement within German Lutheranism*. Spener's program for church renewal called for 'the establishment and diligent exercise of the spiritual priesthood.' According to Spener, "Not only ministers but all Christians are made priests by their Savior, are anointed by the Holy Spirit, and are dedicated to perform spiritual-priestly acts," Citing Luther, Spener argued, 'All spiritual functions are open to all Christians *without exception*.' This concept proved powerful as a lever to renew the church three hundred years ago. This may happen again."^{xxxvi}

And what might happen after 1986?

"Emerging alternative forms of pastoral training will accompany this trend. *Dynamic, growing churches become impatient with the costly [sic] and heavily academic pastoral education [sic] provided by seminaries*. Sometimes they need functional shortcuts. Pastors who see their role as equipping and discipline understand that they *actually are in the work of pastoral training* as they see some of their disciples demonstrate gifts for pastoral ministries."^{xxxvii}

And one man's amalgam of dreams can loom over the horizon as another's nightmare, wouldn't you agree?

And I'll tell you what I see. Human nature never changes, and the forgiveness of sins has always been *the* job, but many have received its good news with half a yawn, no matter the age, parish, or fellowship, and one reaction to this reality has always been to overreact to it. Oh, you wish to test this assertion? Consider:

"Christianity has become to *most church members* driving a sharp bargain with the Lord; a barter. Getting by with as little as possible...Giving as little of ourselves, our life as possible. As cheaply as possible...*Our Christianity becomes a drudgery, not a joy. A galling law not a glad Gospel...We must have emptied the Gospel of its Life giving power or our appeal would bring more response*. We preach it as a cold formal empty ceremony, not so very far removed from the cold empty formal Mass of the Roman Church"^{xxxviii}

This 1926 blast on the status quo comes as a singularly chilly “how d’ya do?” And while not all such overreaction is set to the light touch of a German jazz band, lapsed lovers of Christ have always populated parishes (Rev 2-3), and someone is ever quizzing that if we have the gospel, how come all our people aren’t more sanctified or why aren’t we growing? Maybe the pastors or parishes are too parochial, or maybe we have to start preaching the *whole* gospel. And this reaction easily paints a picture with colors running over the lines, making the 1977 question more insightful than ever,

“Is the pastor to shepherd or to equip (a.k.a. disciple)? It is not an either/or. The shepherding does, however, receive first emphasis in Scripture. In fact, as this is done, the other too will be served.”^{xxxix}

Trusting the Rank and File

Teachers, delegates, will your pastoral GP take an elephant walk someday to wherever old species go to collapse when they feel the end coming? Well, if your pastor were to open his study door and tumbled backwards into the 16th century he would, yes, know where to find work—as I suspect the same holds true if that door spilled him headlong into the 22nd century. Because he would find a group needing shepherding as God commands (Acts 20.28). I mean the local parish, the basic unit of Christendom. Trust its design.

St. Paul, for instance, planted parishes and then turned control over to local overseers (Titus 1.5-7).^{xi} “He welcomed their liberty...He withheld no gift from them which might enable them to dispense with his presence...He could trust them”.^{xli} Apostolic trust of hometown bishops? In Corinth? If Paul, how about you?

Pastors and teachers, most parishioners trust you to do your work. But is big brotherism casting a small shadow of distrust on the ability of parishioners and their called workers to work the keys locally or associatively with sister parishes? You judge,

“There is little evidence to suggest that the large majority of our WELS laymen and a good number of our WELS pastors understand or even know the mission, objectives, and vision we have defined for our WELS ministry through our leaders” (Res. 5, Subject: *Mission/Vision 2000*).^{xlii}

Oh really? When were parishes and pastors reduced to executants, to conform themselves to the arbitrary goals and dreams of those they supposedly commissioned to superintend their will? You will sense here a pressure between the spirit of home-rule and the all too human spirit of wanting everyone to think the same.^{xliii}

How may I frame this most charitably, for I mean to offend no one and therefore ask forgiveness if I do, when I ask, is faithfulness to the ministry of the keys in my flock identical to agreement and conformity with those who detail for everyone God’s great, broad strokes of will, “Feed” (John 21.15) and “Go” (Mark 16.15)?

I feel for my brother pastors, teachers and their parishes, because a conventional criticism sees our local parish, and its pastor especially, almost as hidden reefs making easy passages difficult. And that kind of negative can quickly institutionalize itself like a constant, throbbing low-grade toothache, if it has not already done so. And how it is affecting our mouthpieces? Are there not enough pressures on already overworked, underpaid called workers who are trying to do their best in their local, unique situations without having their understanding and loyalty to the ministry of the keys challenged or suspected? Do you know *150 pastors* and *232 male teachers* have quit since 1985?^{xliv} The trust seesaw needs balancing—“Trust down begets trust up.” Trust the ones who man the ships of the line to do their jobs on the front lines.^{xlv}

The Man

Prologue

“Wow, dad, you were excited,” commented Harry’s 16-year old son, Chad, on the sermon later during the Sunday dinner. “You were hollering at us like the principal at school shouts at the freshmen for messin’ up the locker-rooms. It was great.”

Harry didn’t know if he liked the way his son had put it, but a compliment is a compliment. “You must have spent all week on that sermon, Dad,” quizzed Betsy, Harry’s you-can-never-put-one-over-on-me thirteen year old.

“Well, no.” The genius at the table confessed that he had spent only 5 hours on it. “I had a hectic week, so I used an old sermon from about 15 years ago. But I reworked it.”

“Is that legal, Dad?” asked Betsy, quick to spot injustice.

“Hey, what could I do?” asked Harry defensively. “I don’t make it a practice, but it happens. I had a funeral Friday—people don’t call me up to ask me when they can die,” said Harry in a silly, relaxed tone. “I had a bunch of other things. I finished the hymns for the next 6 months for the organists. I had...oh, yeah, and another thing about that funeral, Joan. The daughter of the dead man, she shows up unannounced and ties me up for two hours.” Harry’s silly mood had vanished.

“She’s a member?”

“Naw, used to be. Belongs to some ELCA church. She comes to the study and starts in on how she wants everything to go. On and on she goes. She’s a music teacher, see. She’s got all the music picked out. Okay. But get this, she’s already lined up the musicians and singers! I said no to that, and keep saying no.”

“What happened?” asked Betsy, clearly impressed.

“She got mad, and when I was finished at the grave, two of her friends played Bach. On a tinny portable electric organ,” said Harry, relishing the memory. “Oh, but the best part. I’m riding back with the undertaker, and he says to me, ‘Wow, talk about a difficult person. The man’s daughter. And she doesn’t much like you, Reverend.’ And he hands me a check and says, ‘She wanted you to have \$35 but her friends got \$50 each.’” Joan smiled, Betsy could not find the words to express her outrage at this injustice, while Chad listened and chewed.

“So, that was my week. Busy. But not boring. Plenty of interruptions. And man, am I tired.”

“You can sleep, Harry,” reminded Joan, “after we get back from the AAL picnic.” Harry groaned.

“I said you were going to pay if you stayed up too late.”

“Yea, yea, I know.”

“And I heard you talking to yourself too.”

Harry looked at his wife searchingly. “Huh?”

“You weren’t practicing your sermon. You’ve been doing that a lot lately. Talking to yourself. Harry, maybe you need to talk to someone.”

Harry sighed and looked at his half-eaten mashed potatoes. Then he smiled. “I guess you’re right. And the apparition, which was in the first stages of materializing outside the kitchen window, disappeared in wisps.

Part 3: The Clay Jar of The Pastor

The Men Who Man the Pastorate Are Only Men

“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all surpassing power is from God and not from us”(4.7). And this from a man whose enemies conceded his message was turning the world upside down (Acts 17.6)—the superhuman power of the gospel contrasted to the very human weaknesses of its messengers! This redounds to God’s glory, as it also takes a toll on his servants who are outwardly “wasting away” (4.16) and who need at all times the understanding and support of the ones they serve.

Tensions of Professional Life and Scheduling

Delegates and teachers, have you ever wondered what it’s like to keep a pastor’s schedule? You’re the pastor now.

You’re on call 24 hours a day, so your phone will ring at all hours. About business. And you will accept it as part of the calling. A tired male voice may call you at 1:10 a.m. to tell you that the wife he’s been nursing at home for two years has died. He just wants you to listen. Or someone has you pick up the phone at 7:00 a.m. on Monday, your day off, and the cheery female voice says, “Say, Pastor, I was just wondering...” (Grrrr!)

Okay, so people don’t leave you alone. And your privacy and time are always easy marks, but such is the field in which you range. You love the sheep, and you reside among them to tend them, so you place yourself at their disposal. That has its blessings as it also creates tensions. Sometimes your parishioners don’t always remember that you are first and foremost someone’s husband and father, as you periodically need reminding that the female you married is the lovely creature who shares your bed, not the one who came “down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband” (Rev 21.2).

Now add to this your normal schedule; it is never normal. You do not have an 8 to 5 job. Typically you work a 6-day week, but half the time this turns into a 7-day work week. Some days you work less than 8 hours and other days more hours, but total them all up and you will be amazed to find that you are working 50, 60, or more hours a week.^{xlvi} And even if you establish a day off, you will have the day off only if you drive off where no one can find you. You work many an evening. You work the weekends. You work the holidays. And chances are you also live on the job site. (HMMMM)

So, you are working, even when most of your flock only sees you in action one hour on Sunday.

Delegates, your pastor cannot punch in and out and then hang a “Do Not Disturb” sign on his residence, and church does let out for summer like school. Remember the pastor is but a man like you, and if he’s like me he would probably appreciate extra time off more than a raise, although if he got both his smile would last longer. Delegates, quiz your shepherd to find out if he’s taking care of his physical and emotional health. If he’s not taking a regular day off, or if your parish is not giving him *at least* three weeks off, then you man the oars and row him to a quiet port of call, as Jesus once led his men to do (Mark 6.31-32). And concerning your teacher, if I were a schoolmaster or principal, I think I’d need 3 months off to recuperate! I don’t advocate working teachers hard in the summer just to justify a 12 month salary. The teachers I see pack 12 months of work into 9.

And finally this. Fatigue with the rigors of the public office can build up to the point of explosion, and the rocketing resignations of pastors and teachers is both telling and alarming.

Are not temporary sabbaticals for careworn pastors and teachers preferable to permanent resignations?

For pastors in particular, how about institutionalizing a 2-3 month leave of absence for a strategic, recurring period of rest. Let it happen, say, every 5th year or so in his call to a parish, his salary continuing and another pastor substituting, freeing the pastor and his family to do as they please. Nerves may heal.

This is not my original idea but a variation of something which Teacher Karen Manthe (of Trinity Lutheran School, Caledonia, Wisconsin) did to rejuvenate her career. Here is her experience:

“After teaching in two different WELS schools for five years I took a year off. I had always wanted to be a teacher and had never questioned the direction I was going all the way through school. But teaching was very demanding and time consuming and after five years I was no longer sure if it was what the Lord wanted for me or if it was what I should be doing with my life. I was exhausted. I needed time to step back and see my life, from a different perspective. I needed a change. So I quit teaching and held another job for one year. During that year I became convinced that I was a teacher and that the Lord wanted to use me in this all-consuming profession. I came back after one year refreshed and more enthusiastic about teaching, and I continue to be enthusiastic after thirty two years in the teaching ministry.”

Sabbaticals and leaves of absence have a legitimate place.

The Pressure Point of the Calling Process

God directly pointed Paul to his calls (Acts 13.4), closing (Acts 16.7), then again opening fields to him (Acts 16.9-10). Paul enjoyed direct revelation; our calling bodies, however, elect candidates not infallibly but providentially (Pro. 16.9; Rom. 8.28), and sometimes the wrong man is selected. Who can deny this?

The Lord has instituted the public gospel ministry; that much we know. But how do we peg candidates into the holes? We train, grade, and then match men to calls, praying for the best and leaving claims of infallibility with the Sacred College to blow smoke on their choices. In this context the newly issued Official Record Input represents a breakthrough, as for the first time pastors are asked to make known their interests and experiences in the hope that more accurate calling lists can be created.^{xlvi} But why not take this one step further? Ask men how and where they would like to serve and live. Let's say a west coast mission, with no school, needs a pastor. The district president opens his databank and reads, “There are 7 young couples nationwide with no children, who want adventure and mission challenges, and hate snow.” Hmmm.

A called worker can feel himself a pawn; he can move, but only when others invite him. Then again, others may see him only as a pawn and never the knight or castle he is, because he was cast as a certain type early on and feels checked. Assigned to a rural church, for example, he took the next call he received—to another rural church—and suddenly he's rumored for his farmer ministry, when all along he's wanted to minister to factory workers. “When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed” (Acts 18.27). Was Apollos presumptuous for desiring a public office in a specific locale? Why should not the called worker have a bit more input and influence over the calls he receives? After all it is his life and his family which are involved. Then again the district president's task could become lighter. He could compile names of men for calls who have already expressed preferences discreetly through

official channels, which you might suspect would please parishes because they receive a man who desired such a call, which in turn speeds up the process of moving men around more quickly who feel trapped. Which takes us back to where we began this subject.

“Here am I, send me” (1 Tim 3.1) to Pewaukee.

Supporting Called Worker with the Word

How would you feel if someone said you were incompetent even to christen a newborn sausage or grant decent burial to a pigeon, or words to that effect? Ouch. Such things are said. I have seen the eyes of a principal after a seasoned union steward ripped him for his “interrogation methods” of her beloved rapsallion.

I asked pastors if angry people had ever threatened to end their ministry or harm them; better than half the men answered, “Yes; yes.” A baseball bat wielding delinquent and a live-in boyfriend with a .357 magnum went after one pastor. Drunks threatened to kill another man. Another pastor said his uncle had taken a shotgun after a parson in western South Dakota. And I know a pastor who received death threats because he condemned lodges.

On the heels of such threats other forms of resistance pale. Unhappy parishioners may promise legal or church actions to get rid of pastors, or send over the former pastor’s wife to tell them how bad they are (as men reported to me). As a circuit pastor I have been involved in disciplinary cases and know that criticisms of called workers, yes, are sometimes justified. But dealing with young and old in their most sensitive area, the soul, proves that pastors and teachers most often find that doing their duties can be as offensive or more so as not doing them! And men can be hit only so often before hairline cracks fissure their vessel.

We are not defenseless, however. We can and must bring the Word to bear mutually to support our minds, emotions, and spirits.

First of all, spiritual and emotional refreshment begins and ends with a man’s private encounter with God in meditation. Professor Pieper touted the importance of personal edification, saying,

“Unless we turn back from our merely official study of the Gospel and study the Scripture for our own edification and spiritual strengthening, and that in the spirit of the 119th Psalm, the Church will die in our hands...That is what I said before: true faithfulness in office consists in this that we care more for our own soul than for the office. We must study the Scriptures for our own soul’s salvation...Only thus can we receive a new spirit and renew our flagging strength, pour new life and new power into our teaching and preaching, and create new spiritual life in our hearers.”^{xlvi}

This ritual of meditation must also include private study, 2, 3, 4 hours or more a week, to buck up our Luther(an) sensibilities. Too many of our men, I fear, have too many books on their shelves from Grand Rapids and Wheaton, and too few are imbibing Luther. Is it too much to suggest that henceforth all block grants of insurance money be used exclusively for purchasing a complete set of Luther’s Works (English) for all seminary graduates and male graduates of New Ulm? I am not kidding. Give the gift that lasts; a shot of Luther a day keeps the heretics at bay.

Secondly, when Martin Luther stabbed medieval theology with a fork and discovered it half baked, he did not throw out private confession with indulgences but installed it in his reforms, and long after growing his tonsure out he made regular trips to his father confessor (*Beichtvater*). This once used office could be resurrected as a practical way for called workers to find peace and release by venting their hurts and sins to one of their own. As a circuit pastor I have been cloistering with pastors once a year in my version of the confessional, at McDonalds

or Burger King. We meet in a relaxed atmosphere, talk about parish problems, family matters—whatever may be bothersome. I ask questions and let them talk. The men are not judged by what they say, the 8th commandment is not invoked, but they are encouraged to think aloud; I keep their fears and sins a secret, sharing my thoughts when asked. Granting men opportunity to speak their hearts without being put on the defensive seems a great strength of the confessional.

I have yet to try this approach with teachers. Would a teacher feel more comfortable with a fellow teacher as his or her *Beichtvater*? Do female teachers need a *Beichtmutter* to confide and confess their private thoughts? Perhaps answers rest in a closer liaison between circuit pastor and school visitor to hear and monitor the private concerns of teachers.

And finally, a third way to bring the word to bear to help support called workers is by way of preaching. I claim no originality here but credit Martin Luther. Remember Luther's 8 famous sermons which he preached to correct the abuses of Carlstadt? Remember his tour of parishes to scout out problems among the clergy and strengthen their hand? He had a good idea.

Borrowing a page from the reformer's *Pastorale* I've been making a preaching visitation of the churches in my circuit. "How to Think of and Treat Your Pastor" (a topical sermon, I admit it) is the title of my sermon. In it 3 areas are reviewed:

- 1) Q. What have you called your pastor to do?
A. You have called him to forgive you your sins.

- 2) Q. What is your pastor up against?
A. People love to have their sins forgiven but rarely love to have them condemned.

- 3) Q. What can you do to help him?
A. Love him, remember he is a family man, deal with him honestly, and pray for him.

Reaction has been favorable, and comments usually came in 2 forms: "I really needed to hear that," or "They really needed to hear that." And one criticism was collected. "He really laid it on thick," commented a Kenosha worshiper. (I did)

My negative about the sermon is that it was very difficult to do justice to the office of teaching. Applications were made where possible, but had I to do it over, a better plan would have presented separate sermons for the pastoral and teaching offices.

To this I will add that my feelings about supporting called workers were substantiated when I polled pastors what parishioners, fellow pastors, teachers, or officials could do to encourage them in proclaiming the gospel. Here are the top 7 responses:

- 1) Give a simple word of thanks,
- 2) Ask how things are going,
- 3) Treat each other with respect,
- 4) Affirm that our major duty is to preach objective truth
- 5) End the "big brother" proliferation of programs, bureaucracies, seminars, etc. which inundate and guilt trip pastors,
- 6) Give constructive criticism in love,
- 7) Become more involved in word and sacrament.

And now the end of the matter? Delegates, effect your called workers not to be licensed enthusiasts but a rugged bunch. They need a thick hide to keep them from being buffaloes by bad ideas or practices as they work with people in their most sensitive area, the soul. At the same

time affirm them and love them in the Word that they also remain sensitive, loving, and dedicated.

And called workers, we can be tough on each other. To rephrase George B. Shaw, “Put a pastor on a spit, and you can find another pastor to turn him.” Yes, collect the fagots and build the bonfire when foreign doctrine and practice infiltrate. But let us also pray for grace to tolerate differences of opinions among us regarding human traditions and forsake the ever present legalistic spirits that want to turn everyone into toady lickspittles. Do we not confess that the true unity of the Church consists not in agreement with opinions but in the doctrine of gospel and sacraments?^{xlix} Let us use the Word personally and publicly to affirm true unity.

Rejoice in the Privilege of Adventuring as the King’s Herald

When the fleet of Sir Francis Drake captured and occupied Cartagena in 1586, his occupying musketeers and pikemen busied themselves digging for hidden treasure, insulting papistic images, and most horrifying of all to the Spanish clergy—listening to “the tenets of Luther” being preached on the terrace of the Governor’s residence. Ah, those were the days when honest seamen took their religion seriously.

And of our days? As bad as Luther’s day reads, people were at least willing to buy the forgiveness of sins. We are frustrated in our attempts to give it away. So few appear interested. What shall we do? We will proclaim the forgiveness of sins in the grand manner for its own sweet sake, for the honor of God is at stake beside the salvation of men’s souls. We will make proclamation, remembering how precious is the faith which seizes the treasure of God’s forgiveness in Christ to spend it on itself—faith in someone never seen, and faith in something which by nature we think we can do! This is totally unhuman. From start to finish the thought must electrify and humble us that it is a miracle that anyone should believe the gospel. It is a miracle likewise that anyone should return a second time to hear us proclaim it.

We have then his orders (“Preach the gospel”), we are his captains, and we have our commissions. And for all we must suffer in our adventures God will more than make worth our while: “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (4.17). Anchors aweigh. Amen.

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ⁱ Future references to 2 Corinthians will cite only chapter and verse. All Scripture quoted from the New International Version.

ⁱⁱ See the Appendix for confessional definitions of the gospel.

ⁱⁱⁱ The great theologian Barth also said, “Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” But his neo-orthodoxy brings into question what he meant by “Jesus, love, Bible.” The sainted Dr. S. Becker said, “What neo-orthodoxy really says, is ‘Go, and preach the Bible in all its glorious falsehood’ ...neo-orthodoxy tells us we cannot be sure what really did happen, but they insist they are sure what did not happen” (Anonymous, *An Anthology of Wis. Synod Humor*, 130, 131). Neo-orthodoxy wants to direct people back to God, while denying the historicity and inerrancy of his Word. The point of this obliquity meaning, the gospel is gospel only when the assurance of salvation is based on the salvific historical events of the Gospels. If the cross on which the Son of God was crucified was not so real that you could run your hand up and down its length and go away with a palm stickered with souvenir slivers, then gospel based on anything less real is no gospel. God justifies sinners on the basis of what his feelings accomplished via the history of Jesus.

^{iv} “The power of the keys administers and presents the Gospel through absolution, which [proclaims peace to me and] is the true voice of the Gospel...For when the Gospel is heard, and the absolution [i.e. the promise of divine grace] is heard, the conscience is encouraged and receives consolation. And because God truly quickens through the Word, the keys truly remit sins before God according to Luke 10,16: He that heareth you heareth Me” Apology of the Augsburg Confession, *Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 261.

^v The reaffirmation of the egalitarian nature of the power of the keys formed the bedrock of Brother Martin’s insurgency against the pontifical hierarchy. Concomitantly the Symbols dealing with the primacy of the pope or on the power and jurisdiction of bishops contain some of the choicest passages confessing that the right to absolve sins belongs to all Christians. “For just as the promise of the Gospel belongs certainly and immediately to the entire Church, so the keys belong immediately to the entire Church, because the keys are nothing else than the office whereby this promise is communicated to everyone who desires it,” The Smalcald Articles, *Concordia Triglotta*, 511 and “Here belong the statements of Christ which testify that the keys have been given to the Church, and not merely to certain persons,” *Ibid*, 523.

^{vi} “For wherever the Church is, there is the authority [command] to administer the Gospel. Therefore it is necessary for the Church to retain the authority to call, elect, and ordain ministers [‘Kirchendiener’]. And this authority is a gift which in reality is given to the Church, which no human power can wrest from the Church...Hence wherever there is a true church, the right to elect and ordain ministers necessarily exists,” The Smalcald Articles *Concordia Triglotta*, 523.

^{vii} Lutherans once meant the public office, when they said “ministry,” distinguishing it from *vocatio caritatis*, the loving works of faith whereby Christians serve God, be it ushering or splitting the atom. See “Ministry in the Minds and Lives of the Confessors,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol 90, 254pp, and “Concerning the Doctrine of the Ministry,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol 91, 30pp.

^{viii} Ewald Plass, *What Luther Says*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), Vol 3, 1139-40. Lutheran Leadership Series (WELS Parish Services) in “C. The Church raised up and trained leaders from the laity” (p. 47) cites p. 1139 of *What Luther Says* and argues, “Luther said every Christian has a ministry from the time he is baptized. What did Luther mean?” (p. 48). Luther meant all Christians have direct access to God, and turning the page to p. 1140; one reads that Luther distinguished between this private priesthood of believers and “the ministry.” Luther may have been guilty of excesses, but one should not credit him with cobbling the universal priesthood to a universal lay/member ministry, as if the monk that broke with the hierarchy of Rome was keen to found the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.

^{ix} “Although the gospel ministry (ministry of the keys) belongs to every Christian, not every Christian is qualified to serve in the public ministry,” John M. Brenner, *The Doctrine of the Divine Call and Current Practice*, 1994 Conference paper, 11.

^x Brug, *Current Debate Concerning the Doctrine of the Ministry*, 32 [Emphasis added].

^{xi} Brenner, *The Doctrine of the Divine Call and Current Practice*, 14 [Emphasis added].

^{xii} Impenitents are excommunicated by our council or voters’ assembly. The Confessions, however, appear to give pastors broader powers. “It is certain that common jurisdiction of excommunicating [*excommunicandi, zu bannen*] those guilty of manifest crimes belongs to all pastors...it is right also to restore this jurisdiction to godly pastors [*piis pastoribus, Pfarrherren*] to whom by Christ’s command, it belongs... (*Concordia Triglotta*, 525, 527.)

^{xiii} The parish’s teacher is called to teach its children, as its principal is called to run its school, as its fellow parishes jointly call administrators to superintend churchwide policies, but none save its pastor can call its parishioners “his.”

^{xiv} The *Report of the Committee for the Rewording of the Catechism Enchiridion* wants this to read: “A Christian congregation with its called minister of the Word,” explaining “the public use of the keys is not restricted to the pastoral office.” True, “minister of the Word,” reflects a generic apothegm of the public office, but how does this bland rephrasing serve reality in parish life? Turning the keys left and right, *publicly, privately, and frequently* for all members, rests with pastors. Loosing and binding sins by other parish offices, comparatively, are less frequent, limited or occasional, if even a part of the *Predigtamt*—whose sins do so-called ministers of music or administration loose or bind? Luther was parsimonious in defining who worked the office of the keys and how, “*Ein Pfarrer pflegt des Amts der Schluessel, tauft, predigt, reicht das Sacrament und thut andere Aemter...denn er ist ein Diener der ganzen Gemeinde, welchem der Schluessel gegeben ist...*” (*SL* 11, 2304). Besides, using the term “pastor” keeps in place one more irksome barrier before suffragettes looking to star in the future corycat thriller, “Honey, I Shrunk the Rev.” *Obsta principiis*.

^{xv} I polled 100 pastors from self-supporting and mission parishes in 6 districts, and half responded. Consider the results representative, but to what degree of the entire ministerium? I do not know. You are invited to match up the responses to your own views to determine the degree of personal realism and relevancy.

^{xvi} Book of Reports and Memorials, 1987, 270.

^{xvii} When I asked pastors their understanding of pietism in my poll, four major definitions emerged, which I list in order of prominence: overemphasis on sanctification to the neglect of justification, overemphasis on the subjective, lack of emphasis and confidence in the means of grace, and turning adiaphora into law. Pastor Lance Hoff’s remark’s struck me: “I understand pietism as legalistic sanctification. And yes, it is a relevant threat to confessional Lutheranism. At present we are recognizing that there is a deadness...a lethargy in many of our established congregations. And there is a danger that we resort to legalistic means to force people to do what is good for them.”

^{xviii} *Essays*: John Brenner, 1989 “Pietism: Past and Present”; Paul Prange, 1991 “The Effects of the Age of Pietism on the Lutheran Church”; Harold Sauer, 1991 “I Will Build My Church”; Curt Holub, 1992 “The Pietism of the New Evangelicals: A Confusion of Justification and Sanctification”; Dan Lindquist, 1992 “The Simplicity of the Baptizing and Teaching Ministry”; Daniel Drews, 1993 “The Dangers of Subjectivism”. *Books*: Harold Senkbeil, “Sanctification”; Smith-Klein, “What’s Going On Among the Lutherans?”; Bob Koester, “Law and Gospel.” *Newsletter*: Steven Spencer, “The Orthodox Lutheran Forum.”

^{xix} Saying that cells appear to be an “unbridled blessing to the church,” Professor Mark Braun of WLC, cites 3 dangers: “dishonor toward the public call, danger of false doctrine, and a drift toward pietism.” *Lutheran Educator*, Vol XX, Feb 1980, No 3, 5.

^{xx} Carl F. George, *Prepare Your Church for the Future* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Fleming H. Revell, 1992). Speaking of the cell-group in the parish and the purposeful activity of its members, George gives it a “sometimes only line of pastoral care” status, adding the belief, “Vision casting places the locus of ministry where it belongs: in the hands of lay pastors [sic]” 139. LC-MS Mission Boards are listening.

^{xxi} Robert Koester, *Law and Gospel* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993), 132-133, [Emphasis added]

^{xxii} When the Gentiles heard this [the gospel], they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed” Acts 13.48.

^{xxiii} Joh. P. Meyer, *Ministers of Christ* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1963), 61-62. [Emphasis added]

^{xxiv} Professor Armin Schuetze’s now famous Quarterly article, “*A Shepherd Or A Coach*,” WLQ, Vol. 74, No. 1, touches on a number of these concerns. He writes, “If ideally every universal priest should function directly through some role in the congregation, then the pastoral function may soon be seen as primarily one of training others to serve. The laymen are seen as the ministers and the pastoral office may be one that trains and organizes the laymen for the church’s many services, including such spiritual service as sick calls, reading the Scriptures in divine worship, and preaching. *Where this kind of thinking is carried to its conclusion the pastor’s role as shepherd suffers and may be lost.*” 10-11.

^{xxv} Picture Luther’s face when he emerged from the Wartburg disguised as a knight, mounted his pulpit, and preached his Eight Sermons against the fanatical spirits who were discontented to trust the efficacy of the word because events and results disappointed. Luther said, “Because you cannot pour faith into the heart, neither can you or should you force or urge anyone thereto, for God alone works such a thing and makes the word alive in human hearts, when and where he wills, according to his divine knowledge and pleasure. *Therefore you should let the word fly free and not add your works to it. We have the right of words (jus verbi), but not of results (executionem), which is to say, we should preach the word, but entrust the results to God.*” (SL, XX, 18) [Author’s translation]. The Lutheran spirit works the *jus verbi* (the right to preach), trusting God for *executionem*, (the results). Luther cites himself as example: “I stood against the pope, indulgences, and all the papists, but with no force, no outrage, no storm, but I have only put into motion, preached, and wrote God’s word; otherwise I have done nothing to it. This same word, whether I am sleeping or doing some other good thing, has brought about so much, that the papacy has become so weak and helpless, to the point that no prince or emperor has ever been able to pull down as much. I have not done it; one little word, preached and written by me, has accomplished and done it all. For if I had been driven in this business by force and trouble, I could truly have started such a game so as to engulf Germany in a bloodbath. But what would that have accomplished? It would have become a fool’s game, destroying body and soul. *I am relaxing, however, and letting the word do its thing.*” (SL, XX, 20-21) [Author’s translation]. Compare this Luther(an) spirit to that of the pietist’s whose overreaction to lack of results promotes legalistic excesses. Pietism is no friend of confessionalism, no matter how tempting the bait. [Did you hear the one about the pietist who went fishing? Nothing was taking his bait, so to while away the time he decided to practice his Sunday sermon. “My friends,” he began, and all the suckers rose to the surface.]

^{xxvi} The best loved fiction of Rafael Sabatini (1875-1950) includes *The Sea Hawk* (1915), *Scaramoache* (1921), *Captain Blood* (1922), *Bellarion* (1926), and *The Hounds of God* (1928).

^{xxvii} Luther called pastors by various names, *Kirchendiener*, *Prediger*, *Pfarrer*, *Pfarrherren*, *Capellane*, and was just as likely to employ the term *Bischoefe* on scriptural and historical grounds, saying, “*Denn en Bischof und Pfarrherr ist Ein Ding bei St. Paulo, wie das auch St. Hieronymus bewaehret*” (SL, X, 314).

^{xxviii} What makes a bishop and what is the area of his *episkope*? Luther says, “*dass St. Paulus alle die Bischoefe nennt, die dem Volk das Wort und Sacrament reichen, als jetzt sind die Pfarrherren and Capellane. Darum ich achte, so sie auf die Doerfer gehen zu predigen, oder die Doerfer eigene Pfarrherren haben, allzumal Bischofsstand besitzen... Das weist auch der Name Episcopus ab Epi et scopin [von epi and skopein], attendere, superintendere, warten und wachen aufs Volk, wie ein Waechter oder Hueter auf eine Stadt; dass Episcopus oder Bischof auf Griechisch eigentlich heisst auf Deutsch ein Waechter, ein Hueter, Zuseher*” (SL, XIX, 707, 708).

^{xxix} Memorial 87-1, *Spiritual Renewal*, Book of Reports and Memorials, 1987, 270.

^{xxx} It happened the other day. The meterman slipped into the church to read the dials and chanced to spy the resident pastor, who was out of uniform and dressed in jeans. Mistaking him for the janitor, the gas company man asked, “Are you the maintenance man?” “Yes,” drawled the pastor with a wry smile, “in a manner of speaking you could say I am.” (Gregory Gibbons, Kenosha).

^{xxxi} This antithesis appeared earlier at an April 24, 25, 1987 Yahara Center “Symposium on the Lutheran Elementary School and Evangelism” in materials distributed on “Mission or Maintenance.”

^{xxxii} In the decade of the 1960’s 3,864 souls and 2,808 communicants were added. In the 1970’s the numbers climbed to 5,891 souls and 5,271 communicants. In the 1980’s the totals were 2,507 souls and 2,113 communicants. (Statistical Reports of the WELS).

^{xxxiii} The \$214,161 came from operating funds. Also \$57,812 financed 8 “Revitalizing Parish Ministry” workshops (of which \$50,000 was a LB grant), and not counting an undisclosed amount expended by the participants. Additionally the costs of the 3-5 day consultations with 70 parishes cannot be verified, but if the average cost to each parish was \$1000 to \$2000, this would add \$70,000 to \$140,000 to the price tag for this total effort.

^{xxxiv} Memorial 87-1, *Spiritual Renewal*, 270.

^{xxxv} Howard Snyder, *Foresight* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986), 87. [Special thanks to Gregory Gibbons for locating this book].

^{xxxvi} Snyder, *Foresight*, 93.

^{xxxvii} *Ibid.*, 93.

^{xxxviii} W.F. Beitz, *God’s Message to Us in Galatians: The Just Shall Live By Faith* (Unpublished, copy in Wis. Lutheran Sem), 3,4. August Pieper said milder things in 1919: ‘...the spiritual life among us is in the process of diminishing... Even the table prayers have been discontinued in some families. The Bible is seldom or never opened. Only the grandmother still prays perhaps with her hymnal; all the rest either leave the hymnal at the church, or they put it away immediately after the church service until the following Sunday; it only serves in the regular church service.—Is this not true? (*Wis. Lutheran Quarterly*, April 1965, 90-91).

^{xxxix} Schuetze, “A Shepherd or a Coach,” 7.

^{xl} *Presbyterios* (elder) and *episkopos* (overseer) are used interchangeably, as also with *poimaino* (shepherd) in 1 Pet 5.1-2.

^{xli} Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods - St Paul's or Ours* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1968), 149.

^{xlii} Proceedings of the 51st Biennial Convention (1991), 185.

^{xliii} Article II from our original constitution shows the intent and spirit of our founding fathers: "In respect to the self-rule of each congregation, the synod stands only as an advisory body. Consequently no resolution by the synod has a binding effect upon the individual congregation, if the resolution, as a synodical resolution, places a demand upon the congregation. Such a synodical resolution can be binding only if the individual congregation by means of a congregational resolution accepts the synodical resolution of its own free will and also ratifies it. If a congregation finds the resolution to be contrary to God's Word or not applicable in its own midst, it has the right to disregard the resolution and reject it."

^{xliiv} Special thanks to Estelle Vaichinger, secretary to Rev. Karl Gurgel, and to Verona Krueger, secretary to the Commission on parish Schools, for their help in assembling these records.

^{xliv} When I asked pastors in my poll "is there pastor bashing?" all but two pastors answered affirmatively. I did not define what I meant by "bashing" but let the men express themselves. Pastor Bradley Pearson gives this definition which in theme appeared time and again and is representative of what I received from pastors: "Too often pastors today are judged on their ability to persuade, entertain, etc. instead of where it really counts: faithfulness to the word, their people and the ministry." And who is doing the bashing? I found three categories of bashers: 1) parishioners, as you might have guessed, but tied virtually between themselves in frequency of citation 2) other pastors and 3) officials and administrators. Men are being pressured to perform and their success determined by observable results. See Chapter 8 "Unfinished Business and Failed Objectives" in *Motivation for Ministry*, NPH, 1993.

^{xlvi} Keep track of your schedule for one month. I had to do this once for a course requirement, keeping a log of how I spent the hours of each day. The exercise permanently cured me of my earlier nagging guilt that I wasn't spending enough time on pastoral duties; I was spending plenty of time, and I have since deliberately cut back.

^{xlvii} The Official Record Input also asks Circuit Pastors to evaluate the traits of pastors, a highly subjective exercise which might be balanced if pastors were also asked to evaluate their own characteristics. The two composites of traits might then be assembled for a more objective picture. Such dual evaluations are often done of fiancées in premarriage counseling.

^{xlviii} August Pieper, "The True Reconstruction of the Church," (*WLQ*, Vol. 62, No. 2) 113-114.

^{xlix} "And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says: One faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, etc. Eph 4,5.6." *Augsburg Confession*, Art. VIII, 2-4.