

*The following is a review of the [Collected Papers](#) of the 1998 Church and Ministry 150th Anniversary Theological Convocation of the Lutheran Church -Missouri Synod . This 265 page book may be ordered from the Office of the President, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1333 South Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, Missouri 63122. A complimentary copy was sent to every LCMS pastor after the 1998 LCMS Convention. The review concludes that the LCMS is no longer following the original structure of the LCMS as established by its founder, C.F.W.Walther, in his book Church and Ministry.*

## **1998 Church and Ministry Convocation**

### **A Layman's Response**

by Clyde T. Nehrenz

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## **Intoduction**

Recently I read "Church and Ministry, The Collected Papers of The 150th Anniversary Theological Convocation of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod." The convocation was attended by "the faculties of Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, together with the district presidents and vice-presidents of our Synod and the Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations." The stated purpose of the convocation was specifically to address the "tensions among some of our pastors and congregations concerning Church and Ministry."

One thing is clear. Those who attended this convocation are of all people signally unqualified to solve the problem they met to address. It is a real problem and that's for sure. But there's a dilemma. Those who met there to solve the problem are themselves the chief cause of it. And it gets worse. They are living in denial.

Laymen - that is, just plain old run-of-the-mill laymen - are never included in these discussions other than as passive listeners. That's understandable. There are no Melanchthon's among us. Nevertheless,

there are some of us who climb the wall every time we read of yet another seminar, conference or convocation that has met to discuss the church and the ministry and each time see some of the same old suspects listed as presenters and responders.

Thanks to the Internet you now have an opportunity to hear from one of the run-of-the-mills. You also have the opportunity - perhaps a happy one - to, with a flick of your finger, send me off packing into cyberspace. To those who do so, have a nice day.

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## Part I

### A Brief History of LCMS Church and Ministry

#### Early Period

Before considering the essays presented at the convocation it will be helpful to put them in perspective by reviewing some history, beginning back at the time Dr. Walther composed his theses, *Church and Ministry*.

There were four issues in the forefront of Missouri's battle with Grabau and Loehe, over which, it should be remembered, the spirits of Stephan, Vehse and Marbach hovered. First, the definition of the term "church." Second, the essence of the thing it denotes. Third, the means by which the office of the ministry is established. Fourth, the essence of the office.

Walther had to deal with the following errors concerning the Church:

1. The Christian Church is a visible church comprised of only those who gather around Word and Sacrament.
2. Where there is no Christian Church so understood there is no salvation.
3. Members of the true church are not found in communions that teach error.
4. The keys of the kingdom of heaven were given solely and exclusively to pastors.
5. The efficacy of the sacraments depends on the Word of God and a valid ministry.

Walther answered in Theses 1-3, 5 and 9 that the "Church in the proper sense of the word...is the totality of all those who have been called by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel...,truly believe in Christ and are....incorporated into Christ through faith"; that in this sense there are no unbelievers in the church; that since no man can see into another's heart and perceive if he truly believes "the church in the proper sense of the word is invisible"; that "absolutely necessary for the obtaining of salvation is fellowship in this invisible church."

He then pointed out that although the church in this sense is invisible, nevertheless, "its presence can be

definitely recognized, its marks (being) the pure teaching of God's Word and the administration of the sacraments according to Christ's institution."

Accordingly, Scripture also applies the name "church" to the universal church; that is, to the totality of all those everywhere "who profess allegiance to the Word of God that is preached and make use of the sacraments," even though "this church is made up of good and evil persons."

And, most importantly, "Scripture also applies the name "church" to the several divisions of the universal church, that is, the congregations found here and there in which the Word of God is preached and the holy sacraments are administered. These are called 'churches' (particular churches)...because in these visible assemblies the invisible, true, and properly so-called church of believers, saints, and children of God lies hidden."

For that reason they "also possess the authority which Christ has given to His whole church," the communion of saints; namely, the authority to forgive sins and to withhold the forgiveness of sins, the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

It was also claimed by the opposition that the rights and privileges of the office of the keys do not belong to each and every Christian but exclusively to pastors and that the efficacy of the sacraments depend on the Word of God and a valid ministry.

Walther answered in Thesis 4 that the keys were given to the "true church of believers and saints...And it is therefore the proper and only possessor and bearer of the spiritual, divine, and heavenly goods, rights, powers, offices, etc. which Christ has procured and which are found in His church."

Walther had to deal with the following errors concerning the holy ministry or pastoral office:

1. Vehse's low view of the office.
2. There is no priesthood of all believers.
3. The ministry is a separate rank or class within the church.
4. The keys were not given to every true believer but solely to pastors.
5. The Lord calls and ordains men for the ministry through the clergy.
6. Ordination is a divine institution and essential to the validity of the ministry.
7. Pastors alone have the authority to excommunicate.

In theses 1-3 Walther points out that Scripture clearly teaches that all Christians are priests before God but also that there "is an office distinct from the priestly office," namely, "the holy ministry of the Word or pastoral office," an office not of "human institution, but (one) which God has established."

He goes on in 6 and 7: "The ministry of the word [pastoral office] is conferred by God through the congregation as the possessor of all ecclesiastical power, or the power of the keys, by means of its call which God Himself has prescribed." This power, "conferred by God through the congregation, as

possessor of the priesthood and all church authority," is the authority "to exercise the rights of the spiritual priesthood in public office on behalf of the congregation."

Since, then, the "keys embrace the whole power of the church...and the incumbents have been entrusted with the keys," therefore "the ministry of the Word is the highest office in the church, and from it all other offices flow."

Finally, Dr. Walther showed that, unlike a congregation's call, "ordination is not of divine institution but is an apostolic ecclesiastical arrangement and only a solemn public confirmation of the call. "

(All quotations are from *Walther on the Church*, Tr. J.M.Drickamer.) Given the atmosphere of the current debate, it must be stressed that Dr. Walther supported all his theses by copious testimony from Scripture, the Confessions and the later church fathers. In doing so he showed that it was not he and the Missourians who shaped the doctrine of the Church and the Ministry; rather, it was the doctrine of the Church and the Ministry of Scripture and the Confessions that shaped them.

It is this true, scriptural doctrine, formalized by Walther at Synod's request, that, more than any other, set the Missourians apart from all other Lutherans. It is the doctrine that served for over 100 years as a guide in determining polity and practice, and the doctrine whose underlying principles prepared generations of Missourians to stand fast during the theological upheavals that seemed constantly to assail them.

There are three principles here that are especially germane to the subject at hand:

1. The office of the Word, or pastoral office, is the only office in the church that God Himself instituted. All other offices are auxiliary to it.
2. Only a local congregation can establish the ministry of the Word: (office of the ministry: pastoral office).
3. Ordination is nothing more than the public confirmation of a local congregation's conferral of the office of the ministry.

As one reads over the wealth of doctrinal and practical material produced by Synod during its early and middle years it becomes irrefutably clear that from the beginning it insisted that only a local congregation has the authority to establish the office of the ministry since it is the local congregation alone that is organized for the express purpose of administering the Word and sacraments, the marks of the one, true, invisible church of believers. ( e.g. *Walther on the Church*. Drickamer, pp. 86,98,103; Pieper. Vol III, pp. 442, 462 (Luther))

Actual practice confirmed these convictions. No Synodical official, whether elected or appointed, including even the president of Synod and professors at our seminaries and colleges, was considered an incumbent of the office of the ministry , or pastoral office, by virtue of his Synodical position. If one held the office while serving in one of these positions he held it only by virtue of its being conferred on him by a local congregation.

Furthermore, no one thought of Synod as a church in the scriptural sense of the word; that is, as an assembly of believers "in which the word of God is preached and the holy sacraments are administered." They knew that a synod does not have the marks of the one true church and therefore has no authority - indeed, no reason - to establish the office of the ministry. Nor does a synod have the "authority of a spiritual court," the authority to excommunicate.

They had organized Synod for the express purpose of assisting members in carrying out those auxiliary functions of the office of the ministry established by a congregation that could be better performed in concert with sister congregations.

Training future church workers, including pastors, establishing mission stations, protecting pure doctrine, etc., are all duties, they insisted, incumbent upon a congregation to perform as it discharges its responsibility of administering the Office of the Keys. Member congregations authorize Synod to perform these duties for them. Never, however, did they suppose that a congregation or a group of congregations could empower Synod to administer the Office of the Keys or authorize it to establish the Office of the Ministry.

Ordination was the responsibility and prerogative of the calling congregation. Synod was involved only as the authorized agent of the congregation in verifying the qualifications of the man the congregation had called. It was emphasized repeatedly that ordination is a ceremony instituted by men and, solemn though the ceremony might be, had nothing to do with the validity of the office's public administration of the forgiveness of sin.

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## **Middle Period**

Experience has shown that whenever a doctrine of Scripture comes under attack and controversy develops, the antagonists follow a tried-and-true pattern of attack, two features of which stand out:

1. The meaning of words, phrases and terms is thrown into hopeless confusion.
2. Sophistry abounds.

Experience has also shown that when the doctrine being attacked is the doctrine of the Church and the Ministry the bottom line is always the removal of the power of the keys, the power to forgive sins and to withhold the forgiveness of sins, from the priesthood to be placed into the hands of a special group or hierarchy.

The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has not escaped the attackers. Already in the 1930s controversy erupted within the Synodical Conference when several professors of the Wisconsin Synod began to push for a change. By the '40s the Missouri Synod was deep into the controversy and the antagonists were making headway.

In 1946 the Synodical Conference appointed a committee to look into things and report back. The whole matter was reported in the February 1951 *Concordia Theological Monthly* (CTM), pp. 81-83. Wisconsin's position appeared in print in 1970 when its "Theses On the Church and the Ministry" was published in the Wisconsin *Lutheran Quarterly*.

In sum, concerning the church, the theses state that "the specific forms in which believers group themselves together has not been prescribed by the Lord (but) the local congregation will usually be the primary grouping of Christians....The Holy Spirit...draws Christian congregations together in larger groupings, such as a synod. In essence the various groupings...lie on the same plane. They are all church in one and the same sense, namely in this sense that on the basis of the marks of the church the Lord lets us apprehend the presence of the Holy Christian Church."

An antithesis states: "We hold it to be untenable to say that the local congregation is specifically instituted by God in contrast to other groupings of believers in Jesus' name; that the public ministry of the keys has been given exclusively to the local congregations."

In sum, concerning the ministry, the theses state that "Christ instituted [when He gave the keys] one office in the church, the ministry of the Gospel...This office or service, the ministry of the keys, has been given to the church, i.e., to the believers individually and collectively." However, "Christians are not all qualified to perform publicly the functions of (this) ministry...The Lord has set forth the needed qualifications," and "there are men especially appointed to discharge publicly (this ministry's) duties."

The antithesis states: "We hold it untenable to say that the pastorate of a local congregation as a specific form of the public ministry is specifically instituted by the Lord in contrast to other forms of the public ministry."

Following the Interim Committee report there is a lengthy article entitled "The Public Ministry In the Apostolic Age" in which the following is stated: "It is a mistake to identify the pastorate with the ministry or to speak of other church offices as auxiliary to the pastorate. To assume that the pastorate is one divinely instituted office and that all other offices flow from it is a misapprehension. The ministry of the Word is one divinely instituted office and the pastorate is a branch of the same ministry."

"....Those who have been called to serve the church in a representative capacity, and who have been given supervisory responsibility, and those who have been charged with the care of souls for the purpose of edifying the saints and building the Body of Christ, are all members of the public ministry, be they pastors, parish teachers, college professors, chaplains, superintendents, Synodical officials, or institutional missionaries."

The word game had begun and the goal became immediately clear: Wrench from the one office instituted by Christ Himself - the office of the Word, or pastoral office - its intrinsic power, relegating it to an office of auxiliary functions, one among many. The pastoral office was not to be the highest office because of its essence, its power to forgive sins, but, rather, because of the relative importance of its

functions - preaching, administering the sacraments, overseeing the whole flock as opposed to teaching children, directing the choir, teaching Sunday School, etc.

It was for the express purpose of preventing this destructive view of the pastoral office that our Missouri fathers had always insisted on using the term "confer" when speaking of the office of the ministry. A man is not placed into the office; rather, the office is conferred on the man. The office of the ministry is an office of power - to forgive and to withhold the forgiveness of sins in the name of the assembly. Until that power is given - conferred on someone - the office does not exist. That is what had always been taught in Missouri.

But in the Wisconsin view the office exists at all times like a box of gospel tools. If anyone in the course of their functioning uses one of the tools, they are in the public ministry. If the person happens to be a man and has been ordained then he is in the office of the public pastoral ministry. This not only undermines the God-given authority of the pastoral office, it relegates the pastor who holds the one office established by God Himself and who is especially chosen by Christ for the office, to the position of common workman- at best, foreman.

But the real gut issue of the growing controversy was principles, not practices. Wisconsin simply rejected the teaching of Scripture that God has ordained that Christians living in one place gather themselves into local congregations in order to administer the Word and the sacraments publicly. From that rejection followed all its false notions about the "church."

And it rejected the teaching of Scripture that Christ instituted a special office when He called the apostles and that He maintains that office today through the agency of local congregations. From that rejection follow all its false notions about the "ministry."

Wisconsin's position was a repudiation of fundamental principles taught in Scripture. Her's and Missouri's positions were irreconcilable. But that did not keep some people in Missouri from asking questions about the viability of the Missouri position. Already in the 1940s some at the seminaries were asking why it was that they were Christians residing in one place but could not use the Sacrament; they could teach men how to baptize but could not baptize; they could keep men from or authorize them for the ministry but could not defrock or excommunicate, etc. They were, in short, beginning to rebel against Missouri Synod practices that were based on the principles of Walther's doctrine of the Church and the Ministry. .

People began roaming about Synod confusing everybody by asking whether the essence of the office of the ministry was function or power. In reality they were pushing and laying the groundwork for rejection of Missouri's position. Soon new categories of "ministry" began piling up one on top of the other in the Annual. Things were about to change

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**Late Period**

A dramatic shift of historic proportions took place in 1962 when the delegates to that year's Synodical Convention adopted a resolution submitted by the Council of Presidents. By doing so the delegates effectively set aside the scriptural principles that had been formulated by Dr. Walther, adopted by the 1852 Synodical convention, published in the book *Church and Ministry* and used as the guide for Missouri Synod polity. In their place were set principles derived from the Wisconsin Synod's doctrine of the church and the ministry. From that day on the Missouri Synod prior to that time has had to be referred to as Old Missouri. It would never be the same.

The system that has developed as a result of this folly has emasculated the one office in the church established by Christ Himself, namely, the ministry of the Word or pastoral office conferred through a local congregation. The incumbents of the office, chosen by Jesus as surely as He personally chose the apostles, have become, as one writer lamented already several years ago, "low in rank, frequently frustrated, competing with gorgeous vestments (of district officials), infested with the ambition to enlarge their turf."

Prior to 1962, Synod's Handbook (*Constitution and Bylaws*) read: "B. ORDINATION AND INSTALLATION... 4.15. Ordination of Candidates: A candidate for the ministry may be ordained only when he has received a legitimate call from and to a certain congregation and after previous examination has been found to be sound in doctrine, apt to teach, blameless in life, has made application for membership in Synod, and has submitted a request for ordination to the respective District President."

The resolution (6-35) adopted at the convention amended 4.15 to read, in part, as follows: "B. ORDINATION AND INSTALLATIONS: 4.15. Prerequisites for Ordination. 1a. A candidate for the office of the pastoral ministry ....may be ordained when the following prerequisites have been met... 5. He shall have received and accepted a call extended through the proper channels to assume full-time work in the church...6a. He shall have...submitted a request for ordination to the proper official of the board through which the call was extended...b1. A call shall have been extended by a congregation or a proper board expressing preference for a particular candidate to be assigned to the function of pastor or other syndic approved office."

Synod from now on was to be considered a "church" with authority to administer - and authorize others to administer even though they had no connection with a congregation - the power to forgive and to withhold the forgiveness of sins. Ordination would be the means of entering this ministry. Being pastor of a congregation, in other words, was now to be considered simply one function of the ministry of the Word; working for some board or other was to be another function of the same ministry. All would be ordained.

The effects extended far beyond those graduating from seminary. Everyone could now be in the office of the ministry. No longer would professors and Synodical officials and bureaucrats inside or outside of Synod have to suffer the insult of having to rely on the voter's assembly of some local (yokel?) congregation to enjoy the prestige of being in the office of the ministry. They, like the seminary graduates, were "in" the office of the ministry by virtue of their ordinations.

Synod, by this action, had taken on itself a divine power not given to it by God and to which it has no claim. It had usurped the power to forgive sins, the office of the keys. And the usurpation was accomplished, as it always is, by means of the human rite of ordination.

Three things were necessary to attain the goals of the leaders of the revolution:

1. They had to find a way to incorporate into the polity of Synod the newly established principle that a synod is a "church" in the biblical sense.
2. They had to establish the principle that ordination is the means by which the office of the ministry is empowered.
3. They had to make clear that ordination is the exclusive prerogative of Synod.

The work began immediately. A two-pronged attack was launched. One front occupied itself with confusing the term "office of the ministry"; the other front worked at "puffing" ordination.

All through the period of the '60s and '70s , while we were preoccupied with the Battle for the Bible, these episcopal planners were scurrying around unnoticed (this was one issue that both the liberals and conservatives in that battle could unite on) gathering together all their offices of churchly functions and labeling them "office of the ministry." It was no more difficult to do than with each new addition of The Lutheran Annual handing the printer a list of names to be included under the heading, "Pastors." Soon there were 18 species of pastors and no one knew exactly what it was that being in the office of the ministry signified.

While all of this was going on ordination was being "puffed" with a fury. Candidates were permitted to be ordained in their home congregations and the ceremony became a solemn and sentimental affair comparable to baptism. Pomp and circumstance became the order of the day with the clergy resplendent in glowing attire and all of it captured on film for the local newspaper.

The recognition that ordination is nothing more than a public confirmation of a congregation's conferral of the office the ministry was all but lost. A candidate's request to be ordained in his home congregation was directed to the district president; no one even thought about getting permission from the calling congregation.

In time, the result the episcopal planners sought was achieved: Most of the laymen in Synod - and a good percentage of pastors- came to see ordination as an exclusive prerogative of Synod. And the planners got a bonus. Not only had many people come to see ordination as a prerogative of Synod, they had at the same time come to the conclusion that a pastor is a pastor by virtue of his ordination.

Every revolutionary movement has its theorists, its apologists , and its intellectual diva's (as it were). This one was no exception. All the while the Wisconsin principles were being threaded into the polity of Synod, the printing presses were kept busy turning out claptrap justifying the unjustifiable.

Three examples stand out. *The Ministry*, published in 1981 by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) mercilessly ripped and tore Walther's doctrine to shreds, without scruples defended and adopted the Wisconsin principles, then shamelessly printed Walther's theses in full at the end of their screed and with their thumbs to their noses, laughed, see, we agree with Walther.

Dr. Kurt Marquart's *Ministry and Ordination Confessional Perspectives* layed the groundwork for declaring that any old polity will do. Picking and choosing from the Confessions, he attempted to support the claim that Luther and the reformers were indifferent towards church polity.

And, of course, there was Dr. Scaer's *Ordination: Human Rite or Divine Ordinance* in which, after listing a plethora of reasons why he concluded as he did, wrote, "I personally find it very difficult to designate as a human rite or adiaphoron any ceremony in which [all of the above take place]."

To the credit of all those involved in this paper campaign it must be said that they were eminently successful in bringing the Missouri Synod around to their way of thinking. As far as I can determine everything they promoted has been adopted either in principle or practice. The results have been devastating.

The most damnable thing about all of this is what it has done to the office of the ministry established by Christ when He called the apostles. The highest office in the church because of its essence, the power to forgive sins, it has now become the lowest due to the usurpation of the office by Synod's bogus, powerless, man-instituted office of function.

Our pastors, men fulfilling the highest calling on earth - administering the forgiveness of sins to sin-sick souls - have been relegated to not much more than common workmen hired out of Synod's pool of pastors-by-ordination to administer busy-work functions.

And what of the congregations, groups of individuals each charged by God to tell the world "of the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light," entrusted by Him with the power to forgive sins through the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments and with the authority to appoint men to do this miraculous work for them publicly?

As planned, they have been relegated to groups of spiritual no-nothings to whom Synod deigns to send men chosen from its pool of pastors-by-ordination to work on with Word and sacrament. Having no part in their pastors' authority to administer the forgiveness of sins they have become thorns in their pastors' sides, to be tolerated when necessary, ignored mostly. It was not meant to be.

The Wisconsin doctrine of the church and the ministry, now firmly entrenched in the Missouri Synod, promotes hierarchism. It invents a "church" that is not sanctioned in Scripture and an "office of the ministry" that has no connection with the office established by Christ.

Yet in practice this "ministry" becomes a powerful, autonomous class of "clergymen" separated from and out from under the control of the priesthood; this "church" becomes the clergy class' protector. Thus an environment is created that history has shown serves as an incubator for the development of all kinds of false notions concerning God's Word.

Inevitably, given time, the doctrine of justification is attacked, subverted and finally lost. And when it is lost to the hierarchy it is lost to the priesthood, which looks to the hierarchy for training and guidance.

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## Part II

### The Convocation

Old Missouri passed away almost 40 years ago. This means that most of those who were present at the convocation have spent their entire careers under the new, Wisconsin, regime. It is therefore likely that most if not all are under the impression that Synod has the authority to publicly administer the Office of the Keys and that they are therefore incumbants of the office of the ministry by virtue of Synodical ordination.

This is why I said at the very beginning that those attending are, sadly, just not the ones to solve the problem of pastor-parishioner mutual discontent. Even more regrettable, it is a problem that under prevailing conditions is unresolvable.

There may have been a few present who by virtue of having it conferred on them by a local congregation hold the office of the ministry instituted by Christ when He called the apostles and thus have the authority to publicly forgive sins through the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments.

But the only office of the ministry that most of them can claim to be in is the pretending Synodical "office of the ministry" instituted by the delegates to the 1962 convention. That office does not have the power of the keys to forgive sins in the name of anybody. It does not have the power to absolve. It does not have the power to excommunicate. In short, it does not have the "peculiar church power which Christ has given to His church on earth to forgive sins."

The only authority it has is to perform some function or other that is auxiliary to the divinely established congregational office of the ministry - and as everyone knows, those functions, in practice, are often far removed from any connection with the divinely established office. All of this needs to be kept in mind as one reads the essays. It will help to explain much.

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## Two Distinct Perspectives

In order to facilitate responding to the published essays I will consider them from what appears to me to be the Presenters' and Responders' two rather distinct perspectives, cultural and sociological.

**The Cultural** - The participants allow Judge Robert Bork's book *Slouching Towards Gomorrah* to set the tone here. The central theme of his book is the effect that the "characteristics of modern liberalism," namely, "radical egalitarianism" and "radical individualism," have, and are having, on today's culture. "These may seem an odd pair," he writes, "for individualism means liberty and liberty produces inequality, while equality of outcomes means coercion and coercion destroys liberty." (Pg. 5)

The problem he highlights throughout the book is that while individualism and the pursuit of equality are both commendable, desirable and to be encouraged and practiced within the confines of social institutions - family, church, neighborhood, etc. - when the protective wall of an institution is breached and its norms discarded these constructive traits soon become destructive.

Time and again the essayists refer to those facets of individualism and egalitarianism in society that when turned radical result in what can be broadly defined as disrespect for authority. They conclude that this has affected pastors and parishioners alike and has now been brought by them into their congregations where it adversely affects their relationships with each other.

The essayists delude themselves by talking as if the Old Missouri institution, congregationalism (in the finest sense of the word), is still intact and that the solution to the problem is to simply overcome the invasive cultural deviation brought in from the outside by appealing to the combatants' sense of guilt by applying scriptural imperatives to their problems.

They are hopelessly off the track.

The cause of the problem is not something that has been brought in from the outside. The cause, as Judge Bork demonstrates, is an institution that no longer provides a barrier of set limits to the honorable pursuit of individualism and equality. Until this is recognized there will never be a solution to the pastor-parishioner problem the convocation met to address.

When those professors and others back prior to 1962 were laying the groundwork for the overthrow of Waltherianism their object was to break loose from the confines of the institution of congregationalism, the Missouri Synod system of church government. When this was finally accomplished in 1962 the result was the radical individualism and radical egalitarianism that Judge Bork decries.

Hierarchy, the natural result of individualism, broke loose from its congregational restraints when Synod allowed men other than pastors of congregations to be considered incumbents of the office of the ministry. As a result a hierarchical pecking order-of-function developed with pastors of congregations at the far end of the line, some of them fighting to move ahead.

The reaction came when the levelers, the radical egalitarians, finding a threat to their own independence in an increasingly overbearing hierarchy, broke loose from the restraints imposed by institutional forms and traditions, setting off in all directions on their own.

The result is what in the first instance some are now referring to as smells and bells; in the second instance, hoe-downs. In the first instance there is haughtiness on the part of the clergy, resentment on the part of the laity; in the second, condescension on the clergy side, disdain on the lay.

Look no further for the source of pastor-parishioner problems.

**The Sociological** - The breaking away from institutional restraints that has caused two systems to develop side by side, has fostered confusion and disruptive attitudes to abound, and poses a threat to the dissemination of pure doctrine is praised by one of the essayists as "a demonstration of (Lutheranism's) genius." (Pg.78 ff.)

If that doesn't make you scratch your head then try this: These two systems are "expressions of irreducible tension," that is, "dialectical," and to choose one to the exclusion of the other is to "signal the demise of the creative tension that characterizes the historic Lutheran concept of ministry." It is important to "maintain them in proper dialectical tension." "These tensions need not be lamented...."

Whoa! Who invited Hegel? Interpretation? You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours, any old polity will do.

This one, I must admit, surprised me. I had no idea that the controversy had reached this level of destructiveness. The day is indeed very short. With this argument conversation has come to an end. In fact, those who insist on continuing the conversation in an effort to eliminate the systemic tensions that cause pastor-parishioner problems are the destructive ones. They haven't come to realize yet that these tensions are "creative" and the result of Lutheran "genius."

All nonsense. Pure bunk. This is what happens when God's Word is replaced by the ramblings of discredited philosophy. The tension in the Missouri Synod that is causing disruptions in our congregations, is on the verge of causing a split of the 1970's type and threatens the dissemination of doctrine in its truth and purity is not creative by any stretch of the imagination. It is wholly destructive.

Walther's theses on the Church and the Ministry were composed with this in mind, that Scripture alone should be the source of the principles that guide church polity. Taken altogether - which is never done at these church-and-ministry get-togethers - Walther's theses provide the basis for gracious and blessed harmony among our people and pastors.

There is no conflict there, no tension. Tension only comes when audacious and rebellious men attempt to stretch, pull or crumple these principles to fit their own misguided practices. The principles embedded in

Walther's theses will allow for no elitist hierarchism and no relegating of God's specially chosen, the pastors of our congregations, to some low estate of servility.

On the contrary, they foster respect and honor exactly where they are deserved both from parishioner toward pastor and pastor toward parishioner. Tensions that do crop up now and then in spite of this are due for the most part to either a lapse in the correct understanding of the principles, to conflicting personalities, or to just plain old-fashioned contentiousness.

There needs to be nothing more said about the Wisconsin principles that are now the guiding principles of Missouri Synod polity. The essayist here who is so enamored by dialectics has better than anyone else in the group demonstrated the almost hopeless state that Synod finds itself in because of 40 years of separation from God's Word regarding the church and ministry. His essay could have been aptly subtitled: Hegel: A Spirit and Word Corrective. Things appear even more hopeless when one considers the number of participants who applauded his dialectical approach.

There is no synthesizing the hierarchical and the egalitarian. So let's put Hegel back on the shelf where he belongs to collect dust. Then let's take out a copy of Walther from the library and sit at his feet to study Scriptures, the Confessions and the writings of the early church fathers as these relate to the doctrine of the Church and the Ministry. There will be found the last hope of resolving the problem of pastor-parishioner mutual discontent.

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## **What Needs to Be Done?**

To: All Incumbents Of The Office Of The Ministry That Christ Established When He Called The Apostles, A.K.A Pastors Of Local Congregations.

In my mind, three things need to be done:

1. That baptismal font needs to be removed from the chapel at the Synodical Headquarters. It has no place there and stands as a glaring tribute to rebellious men. Removing it will serve as an important symbolic gesture signifying that it is again recognized that Synod is not a "church" in the biblical sense of the word and has no authority to administer the Office of the Keys.

2. You need to develop your own bible study materials to teach the members of your congregations what Scripture says about the church and the ministry. There's no better place to start than with a comprehensive study of the Office of the Keys and Walther's theses on the Office of the Church and the Ministry.

Forget the erroneous doctrine taught in Synod for the time being. Your responsibility is to teach your congregations the scriptural doctrine. This is essential for improving relationships. But more than that it's important to prepare them spiritually for what's ahead .

3. Prepare for what's ahead. The dialectics argument should alert you. The Battle for the Bible waged in the 1960s and '70s was fought on the battlefield of Inspiration and Inerrancy. It is now becoming apparent that the next battle will be waged on the battlefield of Perspicuity.

No doctrine of Scripture is safe there. The danger is real and keeping silent will be devastating. We've already seen Ordination and Church and Ministry attacked. Twenty years ago it was Objective Justification. Professors cannot be made to keep their lights under bushels, and as far as I can determine the chief perpetrator of that scandal has evidently been allowed, under the protection of the episcopate, to continue to spread his poison among our pastors and laymen young and old. There is no catastrophe worse than this that could descend on our congregations and pastors.

Keep alert. Confront the dialectics argument at every turn where it calls into question the clearness and sufficiency of God's Holy Word .

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Huntington, Ohio

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