

## **The Lord, The Keys, The Church**

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## **The Synod and Her Officers**

- or -

## **The Department of Redundancy Department**

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*(Abstract: This paper is written in the context of present considerations of restructuring the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. It starts with the doctrine of the bestowal of the Office of the Keys immediately, or directly to the church, and builds upon that doctrine the reason for the existence of a synod and its proper relationship to the local congregation. Many quotes of C.F.W. Walther are offered from German sources only recently available. A diagnostic of the Synod's problematic condition is offered with its doctrinal cause and remedy.)*

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## I. Introduction

Some congregations belonging to the LCMS are deemed too small, too poor, and or too unstable to warrant granting them a called pastor. They are served under interim arrangements by people who serve at the discretion of their District President. The congregations are thankful someone is taking responsibility for their being served under such 'emergency' situations.

Many congregations are in turmoil over internal disagreements over worship style, dissatisfaction with pastors for a myriad of reasons, tensions between operating units within the church. Whom you going to call? District office, thank you.

The 2004 dispute resolution system places all the control of the process of strife, rostering, and beef settlement into the hands of, who else, the District Presidents. We should be thankful someone is in control.

Yet, according to both our polity and our doctrine, the Synod, as such, is not biblically mandated nor are the offices of District or Synodical President (DP or SP) commanded in Scripture. Consistent with Scriptures and our Confessions only one office has been instituted by God in his church, that is, the Office of the Holy Ministry (OHM).

Those who acknowledge this fact, I believe, are the ones most hopeful that it would be a good change to require the Synod to have our DP's serve in the one mandated office (OHM) as a pre-requisite for their service to many congregations through their office as DP. While there may be legitimate and good reasons rallied to that position, there are some limitations to the public administration of the Office of the Keys. There are also unique jurisdictional and accountability issues stemming from the congregational context of the OHM which may lead to the conclusion that for a supervisory system, such as Synod to work, EACH pastor and EACH congregation needs to be in the same relation to that supervision; supervision here not being a term to connote authoritative or coercive power, but the power of external observation and involvement, from 'over and above.'

## II. Congregational Autonomy: Theological Fact, not Political Pass

Essential to the Lutheran Church Reformation and the founding documents of the Lutheran Church, and a theological distinction and clarity that belongs to the Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church alone, is the ordering of churchly authority in the context of the local congregation. The so-called 'Great Commission,' the Words of our crucified and risen LORD

JESUS, prior to his session at the right hand of God, centers all authority in Christ. "All authority is given me," says Christ. And under that authority his chosen servants are to baptize and teach wherever those apostles were sent under Christ's authority. There local churches were established through baptism, teaching and preaching, and they were united spiritually, through Christ who was present in each of them, but they were independent of each other. United in apostolic doctrine and practice (as St. Paul says he teaches and practices in "all the churches"), they were independent in the sense that they did not depend on the other churches, but on Christ and his gracious Word.

So why is a congregation, indeed, independent of other congregations? Because Christ is there; giving himself immediately, with no middle man to each congregation, each gathering of two or three around his Name. The treasures of heaven in Word and Sacraments are there and theirs. This independence is based doctrinally on the sufficiency and efficacy of Christ, which is the sufficiency and efficacy of Scripture, the foundation of the apostolic and prophetic Word, where JESUS is the chief cornerstone, the sole rule and norm of both doctrine and life. Everything that a congregation needs, the things that deliver the Triune God and grace, that create and sustain faith through grace, are there with Christ. The apostolic office, apostles in the first generation, and their successors, the pastors in subsequent generations, have been given stewardship, in and by Christ, of everything Christ needs to create and sustain the church, so the believers are the body of Christ in that place. Its independence is not a political freedom from all authority, but freedom bound to and found only in Christ and His Word. Becoming free from Christ is to become bound again in sin. Being bound to Christ by faith is being freed from sin.

This is extremely important to our identity as true Christians, as Lutherans. We gather around Christ and receive him and all his blessings publicly and only through his mandated OHM. The condition of faith around that Christ is '*satis est*'. When the Lutheran believer says in the *Nunc* following communion, "LORD now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace," he means it, if he is a believer. That means, "I've got it all because I have Christ." This autonomy is satisfaction!

So Christ's presence and his authority is as sure as the presence and authority of his Word and his Sacraments and is constitutive of the church. Thus the church is not abstract, but objectively present, for where "two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." This is why they meet. They have Christ and he is their life, forgiveness and salvation. But he is an unseen Christ in all his churches. So he has filled that void of sight with a human office and has commanded his people to appoint men to this office. The 'two or three' or more possess all that is Christ's, but Christ has commanded that one be selected to administer, or be the

steward of his mysteries, to give them their meat (meet, mete) in due season.

This is God's essential work of saving his creation through the church. Gathering together in Christ's Name, the child of God, Jesus, is not alone in his Sonship with God. The wheat seed that died and was buried did not remain alone, but brought forth much fruit. That is the church and God's way of salvation, in Christ alone.

#### A. The Mandated, Biblical Ordering of Churchly Authority

But where there are people gathered, and gifts to be distributed, it is done in an orderly way, for God is a God of order. So what are the orderly lines of authority in the church? Walther explains that all authority of the Keys is given by Christ, who has all authority, directly, immediately, to the church. The delineation of the lines and order of this authority from Christ is included in Walther's *Brosamen*, as a comment affixed by Walther to his Seventh Sermon at the opening of Synod:<sup>1</sup>

Comment. – In our days this doctrine is completely missing, even among most Lutherans, who think it is no longer a doctrine of our church, but rather only a private opinion of Luther, that is, as this relates to his commentary on John 20.22 – 23. In this regard we share, out of many witnesses, only the following witness of our Johann Gerhard. This is what he writes, among other things, in his commentary on the Gospel for Quasimodogeniti Sunday: “To whom are the Keys of the heavenly kingdom entrusted? – What injustice the **Roman papacy** has perpetrated against the church is already obvious to everyone, when **he has ruthlessly stolen this inherent dignity (the authority of the Keys) for himself and his bishops alone**, for the sake of a supposedly indelible character given them in ordination, **while all the rest who are called ‘laymen’, as if they were sows (Matthew 7.6), have been excluded from it with the most extreme contempt, who, therefore, are not allowed to interfere with the spiritual estate in this matter, to say nothing of their being allowed to make a judgement about them.** As such, we set our judgement against their arrogance. We, with Dr.

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<sup>1</sup>C.F.W. Walther, “How True and Important is the Doctrine of our Church, that the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven Are Originally Given Neither to Peter nor Any Other Official, But Rather to the Church of Believers”, *Lutherische Brosamen*. CPH. 1876. pp. 473f.

Luther, the blessed Chemnitz, and the other orthodox theologians, consider this prerogative as having been guaranteed by Christ to his whole church, his most beloved bride, who is the one who portions out the heavenly wealth, as the one to whom already before this, in Matthew 18.18, is given such a glorious promise to share in this. Yes, from this passage itself, John 20. 22 – 23, it can be clearly concluded, whatever the critics might babble against it (*obblaterent*), that this authority belongs to all who are anointed with the Holy Ghost. But now as all true Christians have the Holy Ghost, it follows that all are also robed in this authority. So Dr. Brenz concludes in his commentary on John 20. But yet the wild demeanor of the Anabaptists can in no way be defended, who most egregiously mix together the stations which God makes known as being distinct, introducing a most horrid confusion. Indeed, J.B. Fickler in his Reply to the Attack on the Fountains of Salvation, wants to assign blame for this heresy to us, as he writes: “There (that is, in the Lutheran Church) nothing is needed but that, without distinction, it is said to one: Go, Hans, you be the preacher; you, Michael, take the bread and wine and distribute the holy LORD's Supper to your neighbor; you, Barthel, go and absolve the farmers.” But the right explanation of our thoughts on this, and the observation of the distinctions which our theologians make in this question, will free us from this pretense. For these distinctions immediately establish and teach a three-fold authority, the highest and, in itself, **the most glorious authority of the Word and the Sacraments is alone by God's authority; secondly**, the office is by the **church's authority, as the servants are called, chosen and sent by God by means of the church, as by his instrument**; and finally, **third, the execution is by the authority of those who are legitimately called and elected by God through the church, that is, by the authority of the servants of the church, to whom is commanded the use and the administration of the office of the Word and Sacraments.** Therefore, **the authority itself is, indeed, common to the whole church, but the use and the carrying out** (by which, specifically in the church, in which, according to the apostolic direction in 1 Corinthians 14.40, everything should be done decently and in good order, thus confusion will be eliminated) **is only allowed by those who have been set apart for this office by the church through a legitimate call and who possess it in their name, that is, the legitimate servants of the church,** who, in the name of the church, distribute

that wealth that was won through Christ's bloody war. Therefore, they are called by the apostle Christ's servants, and stewards of the mysteries of God, 1 Corinthians 4.1. By observing these distinctions we go the middle way between the two extremes, and we are, thus, not agreeing with either the pride of the papistic spiritual estate, nor putting up with any of the confusions of the Anabaptists, but rather we give the church the honor due her. See: Luther's book on the abuse of the mass. Dr. Chemnitz' Examination, part 2, of the Sacraments in general (p. 48) and on Absolution (p. 360.) and Brenz in the indicated places" (*Explicatio* ελεγχτική *Evangelior.Domin. Ed. II. Jenae 1663. P. 732. sq.*)

Walther is, thus, following the Scriptural regard for both the dignity and power of the church (all believers) as well as that of their pastors, who are the servants called by the Lord to distribute the heavenly treasures to the believers, for whom Christ has won them and who can receive them (only through faith). But with dignity and rights, come also responsibility to use the gifts and the wealth according to (not the church's innovations or the pastor's innovations, but) Christ's institution and command in his New Testament.

#### **B. The Congregation's Authoritative Stewardship of Christ and His Grace to Sinners.**

The significance of the responsibility of the Keys is not that one person, holding the OHM, is responsible for carrying out the Office of the Keys, but that he is responsible to carry it out PUBLICLY in the name, for the benefit and on the behalf of the church, while each individual Christian is responsible to carry them out privately, that is, in the situations in their lives which diverge from the good order of public worship and are facilitated in their lives through their various callings in the offices that they hold, which callings are common to the world, but transformed by their being Christians. Thus, the offices of son, daughter, husband, wife, worker, boss, become venues for expressing and putting into practice Christ's doctrine, the work and service of Christ and his Keys by them as Christians. They themselves, by Christ's grace and doctrine, are turning from their sins to Christ and his promises. They, then, also confront and turn sinners from their sins to the Savior, thus, bearing each others burdens, in their various callings.

The body of Christ is composed of a myriad of converted believers with a myriad of gifts and talents. But they share and have in common being served God's grace by the OHM, and they share and have in common living lives of sacrificial service to God in their callings, giving witness

to Christ as the only answer to the sins of their neighbors, whom they serve in their callings. Thus husbands and wives have a spiritual care for each other, a concern for sin and that their spouse receive grace, lest he/she perish. Parents are concerned for their children, to raise them in the fear and discipline of the LORD; and children for their parents, lest they perish, if they are severed from Christ and his grace (the church). And so forth in all callings of life.

Thus the OHM and the priesthood of all believers are united in the goal and purpose of the Gospel under Christ; that is, that sinners be turned in repentance from sin to the Savior. They share a fear for themselves and for others that without Christ, without penitent faith, that takes serious the consequence of sin and rejoices in salvation by Christ, a person will be lost forever. Thus church discipline and the Office of the Keys MUST be the concern of all believers. And all believers, according to their callings, carry out the Office of the Keys privately, and publicly as dictated by the nature of sins confronted.

In this, water (Baptism) must be thicker than blood (family relationships). Being baptized into Christ is more important than family relations (Matthew 10.37). The fact that a family member is sinning wantonly may make dealing with that sin most uncomfortable, devastating or dangerous in terms of our closest family relations. But there is something more important. Discipline, and even excommunication, addresses a problem that does not go away without repentance and forgiveness, let alone ignoring it. Thus our human, even our familial, love must give way to proper doctrine, mandated discipline, lest we lose our loved ones and God himself by our silencing his Word by our 'love'. You can observe this in a prayer of Walther used at the opening of a voter's assembly<sup>2</sup>:

LORD God, heavenly Father! Through your holy apostle in your precious Word you cry out to us fathers: "You fathers, bring up your children in the discipline and admonition to the LORD."

You do not cry out to us: Love your children, for this love you yourself have already planted into our hearts, and no fall, no sin has been able to diminish this love from our hearts.

But you know, by our nature, just how blind our love is, so that we, alas!, when we want to make our children comfortable and happy, often cast them into misfortune and spoil them. That is why you cry out to us: "Bring up your children

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<sup>2</sup>C.F.W. Walther, Prayer 128. *Ansprachen und Gebete gesprochen in den Versammlungen der ev. - luth. Gesamtgemeinde und ihres Vorstandes.* CPH. 1888. P. 193

in the discipline and admonition of the LORD!" For this discipline and admonition is the single means by which our dear children, whom you have already received in holy Baptism, will also remain with you and, ultimately, be strong enough to withstand all the temptations of their flesh, the world and the evil foe, until they receive the crown that you have reserved for them.

Oh then, grant us the wisdom from above, that holy zeal and that faithfulness and steadfastness that never become tired or weary, without which we could never be your blessed instruments to raise our dear children. Protect us from being one of those who care nothing about you, but take the people of this world as their patterns of behavior. Rather, make your precious Word our guiding star, even in raising our children.

Strengthen this in us also throughout our present corporate discussion and may this meeting result in temporal and eternal blessings for us and for our children.

O God, you are eternal love, the just Father over all who are called children in heaven and earth, hear us for the sake of your dear Son, JESUS Christ, our LORD and Savior. Amen.

This is the venue and responsibility of every spiritual priest and the public responsibility of the OHM. They are united in their spiritual responsibilities and concerns and differ only in the scope and application of their callings as Christians.

So under these lines of authority, what are Christ's mandates to his people?

### **1. Baptizing and Teaching: Conversion of Sinners.**

Christ's "all authority" in the Great Commission is the authority to create the church through Baptizing and Teaching. Modern translations often translate the verb, μαθητευσατε, with "make disciples" of all nations whereas the King James tradition simply translates it "teach" all nations. Thus the baptism is appointed as the initial teaching, which teaching brings one into the church and which brings the baptized into the teaching of the "all things" Christ has commanded.

No great excursus is needed to extol to true Lutherans the richness of the blessings of Baptism, nor to point out that Baptism embraces the whole repentant life of the believer until taken into heaven to join Christ. As Luther comments in the fourth part of Baptism in the Smaller

Catechism, commenting on Romans 6, "It signifies that the old Adam in us should be daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts, and, again, a new man come forth and arise, who will walk before God in righteousness and purity forever."

Thus Baptism into Christ's death and resurrection and the public preaching of repentance are the means by which the Holy Spirit converts sinners to be regenerate, and thus, so long as their flesh of sin lives, to turn to grace in Christ through the Word and the Sacraments.

Without conversion and subsequent sanctification (continuing in the gracious means appointed by God), no one will see God and his favor.

Thus it is the duty of the OHM to baptize children under Christ's command as parents bring them in order that they not only be baptized, but also remain in Christ, that is, in the church and the means of grace. And it is the duty of Christian parents not only to bring their children to baptism but to bring them weekly with them to the preaching and teaching of the Word, and, eventually to the communion of the church and a lifetime of learning God's Word.

The stance of the church is also that the whole counsel of God, administered through the Keys, is the property and right of all Christians, which they are responsible to learn and carry out. Walther says in his address at the laying of the cornerstone for the college<sup>3</sup>:

From this it may seem that it only lies in the interests of the church that knowledge flourish among her scholars and champions; but the church must not be a religious despotic state, a papacy, not as a whole or in any part. Teachers must not rule over the consciences of their hearers and hearers must not follow their teachers like blind puppets. In the church there must be no spiritual masters. The knowledge of the mysteries of the religion must not be a monopoly of a special class of people, a priestly caste. Every Christian must wear the Urim and the Thrumim of truth upon his chest as a spiritual priest. **The layman must also, therefore, delve into the Scripture, himself draw out of the well and, by his own freely being convinced, believe, without building on human authority; he must not, like an inanimate machine, say, as did that coal merchant: "I believe what the church believes," without having learned, tested and proven the faith of the church. The layman must be sure of his relation to God without human, priestly mediation and be able to speak and give answer for himself**

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<sup>3</sup>Walther, *Lutherische Brosamen*. CPH. 1876. p. 327

**for the hope that is in him, without having to call upon the better insight of his teacher. Yes, the laity must be fit and always become more competent to judge the doctrine of his teacher, to distinguish the truth from heresy and, thus, to keep watch over those who watch over him.** Christians must be children with respect to evil but mature in their understanding. Only when the church is so established does she have the form which her eternal founder has given her, who said: "Therefore, only one is your Master, Christ. But you are all brothers." That is why the prophet had foretold of the church of the New Covenant: "No one will teach another, but they will all be taught by God, both small and great." (Jeremiah 31.34; John 6.45)

It inevitably is in the church's best interests to nurture scholarship and education in every way: It is required of her as her holy duty of self preservation. **Without this nurture the church would forfeit the trophy of victory she struggled to gain in the Reformation and would transform herself into a papacy all over again. She would be surrendering, thwarting her own building and defense and, thus, committing suicide.**

Children who are baptized and kept from the Word of God are as plants that are placed in a closet without benefit of sun, soil and water. To baptize a child in abstraction from the church and the church's on-going teaching is to baptize contrary to the command to baptize AND teach.

So a believer is a person who is subject to God's condemnation and Law according to his sinful flesh, but who has been embraced in the treasured grace of Christ, won for us on the cross. As such, **the Christian life is one of repentance, and learning God's Word.** Knowing his own frailty and propensity to stray and fall away from God according to his flesh, he is in a constant state of judging and rebuking himself, turning from his own thoughts. (See Romans 7; Gal. 5; and 1 Corinthians 10.31). So a Christian rebuked for sin by a brother is thankful, for he knows this is borne of love and for his good and he knows how easily and unwarily he can stray and needs to be frightened awake and back to the path of Christ. The Christian hates his sin, just as he knows God must hate sin and therefore wants to be freed from that sin to be acceptable to God through Christ's grace. Please note another of Walther's prayers for an opening of a Voter's Assembly:<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>C.F.W. Walther. "Prayer 12, Concerning the Church". *Ansprachen und Gebete gesprochen in den Versammlungen der ev. - luth. Gesamtgemeinde und ihres Vorstandes.*

LORD JESUS! You not only desire that your people stand in this world, but that they also huddle around your holy Word, that they practice inward fellowship, **that they serve those present with their gifts and not only teach, admonish, warn and comfort one another, but also rebuke one another.**

Oh, then give us all grace that we so serve one another, that none among us say with Cain in his rage: "Am I my brother's keeper?" **but that each of us care for the other's soul as if it were our own.**

But also help us, that we not only gladly be taught, admonished, warned and comforted by our brothers, but also rebuked...

## **2. Rebuking and Expelling Manifest Sinners.**

Both the priesthood of all believers and the OHM, therefore, see restoration of manifest sinners as their responsibility. They don't leave it for someone else to handle because each believer has the Office of the Keys and the responsibility that goes with it. This is in keeping also with the Lord's Words in Matthew 18, "If your brother sins" (meaning fellow believer); and with St. Paul's admonition in 1 Corinthians 5 to the congregation (not the pastors) to expel the incestuous man and with the apostolic admonition to "you who are spirit" (believers) to humbly restore one who is caught up in a sin (Galatians 6).

Walther starts his sermon at the eleventh opening of Synod, concerning "What Must Move An Evangelical Lutheran Congregation to Desire to also Practice Church Discipline Towards Those Who Want to be Her Members (*Lutherische Brosamen*, pp. 508ff) with the following apology for the necessity of practicing Church Discipline:

Among the various, prevalent misrepresentations about the peculiarity of our evangelical Lutheran Church is also this: That it would not be Lutheran to enforce church discipline; that this would much rather be peculiar to those legalistic, so-called Reformed Churches; it is a unique characteristic of the pure evangelical Church, called Lutheran, that, because it lays all importance upon pure doctrine, it regards church discipline in the area of life as an adiaphoron (*Mittelding*), or, in any case, as a matter of much less, a far subordinate, significance.

Now it is by all means true: We Lutherans believe, teach and confess from our

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CPH. 1888. P. 92

hearts: It is not church discipline but solely the Word of God that makes the church the church; not through insisting on a pious life, but solely through the preaching of Christ, through the joyful proclamation that all sinners are redeemed, the church is born, founded and preserved. Further, it is not to be denied that in our Lutheran Church, since its visible appearance, in only a few places has church discipline been carried out in true form and consistently. But it is an error to say that our church looks upon church discipline as unimportant or unnecessary. Certainly our church has expressly rejected the Schwenkfelders' principle: "That there is no true Christian church present where there is no public exclusion or orderly process to issue the ban,"<sup>5</sup> in her last confession as enthusiasm. But see that it is just as strongly affirmed in the Apology to the Augsburg Confession, among other places: "So it is at all times acknowledged by our preachers that those who live in public vices, in adultery, divorce and alike, for example, are, by that, denied the holy Sacraments;"<sup>6</sup> also in the Smalcald Articles we Lutherans confess: "The true Christian ban is that public, stubborn sinners must not be allowed to the Sacrament or granted other fellowship of the church, until they improve and shun their sins."<sup>7</sup>

So far be it from our devout fathers to justify the many faceted deficiencies in the discipline in our churches. **For, much rather, and universally, all rightly fashioned Lutherans from the age of Luther to the present have universally brought bitter complaints about this deficiency as a great weakness and a great sin in our church and declared that church discipline, after pure doctrine, is the second pillar of the whole building of the church and the collapse of discipline is the chief reason for the collapse of our church.** Far from considering this lack of church discipline an advantage of our church over the Reformed, Luther had much rather even made this noteworthy concession, when in the year 1537 the Swiss had approached him about negotiating a re-establishment of church fellowship, when they specifically brought up just this

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<sup>5</sup>See Formula of Concord, Article 12.

<sup>6</sup>See Article 11. On Confession

<sup>7</sup>See Part III, Article 9. On the Ban

issue of church discipline and the ban: "Perhaps, in this area, things are more solid among you than among us."<sup>8</sup>

So there is no doubt: Even in our precious evangelical Lutheran Church, **church discipline is not considered a matter of freedom or discretion, but rather of sanctification, yes, of necessity.**

Thus, the treasuring of the Word of God, the eternal treasure of every child of God, turns sinners away from their sins and punishment to the heavenly Christ, their crucified Savior, in their midst, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end of their faith, as he has commanded his faithful to find him and his grace and every blessing in the Word preached, and the Sacraments administered according to the Gospel. This is the right and responsibility of each and every member of the congregation, and the pastor, acting in their name and according to their authority, in public matters.

Saving faith includes the desire and hunger for sanctification, rebuke of sin, the continuing enjoyment of grace. The desire for sanctification is the sign of living and active faith, which constitutes a Christian and indicates the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. If this is missing in the individual or the church it indicates there is no faith, as Christ's means for sanctification are not used or abused (which means do not include Promise Keepers or other "new measures").

### **3. Communion as the Sanctifying Sacrament for the Converted/Faithful.**

Two other "commands" of our Lord that are to be "observed", valued and cherished are Confession and Absolution, as well as Holy Communion. While it may be claimed by some that liturgical expression of routine Confession and Absolution prior to Holy Communion is scarcely supported in Holy Scriptures, certainly the Maundy Thursday Gospel and the washing of feet by our Lord, plus the command to do so with each other, is not a very veiled reference to preparation for receiving Holy Communion that is echoed by Paul's admonition to Corinth to "examine yourself." "If you would judge yourselves, you would not be judged."

A doctrine barely whispered in the Lutheran church of our day is the mutual responsibility of brothers to reconcile before receiving the holy Supper, when they have sullied each other's walk with sin. Desiring to be reconciled with God is irreconcilable with a heart that refuses to be

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<sup>8</sup>See Luther's Works, Walch, XVII, 2598.

reconciled with our fellow believers.<sup>9</sup> So, also those living in intentional, planned, chosen sin, are not to be considered in the faith.<sup>10</sup>

This also stands behind our practice of closed communion. If one who claims to be a Christian is holding false doctrine by his public confession of faith in an erring church body, he is in a state of public sin against the Second Commandment (false doctrine under God's holy Name is misusing, thus, sinning against the Name of God). Admitting him to Communion is confirming him in his sin, rather than washing his feet, rather than him being absolved for sin repented and shunned. Thus communing with those who hold false doctrine (or any intentional, unrepented sin) defeats the sanctifying purpose of Communion and is, therefore, an abuse of God's grace for which there will be an accounting required on the last day. Such is not administering the Lord's Supper according to the Gospel, God's sanctifying and restoring love, but according to the failed tenets of human love that so tragically exults itself above God's Word.

So the priesthood, in repentant faith, avails itself faithfully, and often of this precious grace of God, receiving the very price paid for sin, the body and blood (sacrifice) of Christ and in doing so, after the OHM has preached Christ crucified, the priesthood here gathers to, by their actions and reception, "Show forth his death till he comes." This even as they receive Christ's body and blood in repentant faith for forgiveness, life and salvation. The priesthood is also concerned for all who commune, that they be in a state of orthodox faith and repentance, lest they be judged.

#### **4. Mission Work Outside the Congregation.**

Commenting positively on the establishment of missionary societies in Germany, following a movement back in the direction of orthodox Lutheranism, Walther makes this comment in his Sermon to a Missionary Society, among other places:

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<sup>9</sup>C.F.W. Walther, "Why it is Necessary to Seek Brotherly Reconciliation Especially Before Receiving Holy Communion?" *Occasional Sermons and Addresses*. Mark V Publications. 2006. pp 374f. [available in e-Book format from: c:\www.markvpublications.com\Walther\_OSA.htm]

<sup>10</sup>C.F.W. Walther, "That One Who is Ruled by Sins Can Take No Comfort in God's Grace, Nor Worthily Receive Communion." *Occasional Sermons and Addresses*. Mark V Publications. 2006. pp. 387f. [available in e-Book format from: c:\www.markvpublications.com\Walther\_OSA.htm]

Yet, my friends, the establishment of missionary societies, which were signs of newly awakened Christian life were also, at the same time, signs that the church, as a whole, was really not as it should be. For if it is established as it ought to be, it would not be necessary for little missionary societies to form themselves, for the church itself must be one big missionary society. She is instituted by Christ himself to be this.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, making disciples, the Great Commission is directed to the church in every place as also an aspect of the Office of the Keys, which must include not only the Holy Absolution but the preaching and sharing of the Gospel, which is a general absolution to all through the merits of Christ.

#### **5. Passing the Church On to the Next Generation.**

As a special instance of mission work, parents are given the duty and obligation to bring their children up in the fear and admonition of the Lord, to bring them to the services of God's house and, thus, bring them, as Christian parents, to the LORD Jesus, through baptism and Christian education, to become mature and faithful Christians and parents, themselves.

#### **In Summary,**

the basic, Biblical tenet of our faith that molds our practice, congregational polity and our confidence in practice is that Christ bestows his own presence, and the Office of the Keys, that is, the authority to distribute the grace that he won for us on the cross, directly to the congregation, the church, that is, all Christians who are true believers. Under his gracious mandates and the institution of the OHM, he distributes this grace and himself publicly to the Christians gathered around his invisible presence, through the preaching of the Word, the Sacraments of Baptism, the LORD's Supper and holy Absolution. The faithful have, therefore, in their Christian congregation all that they need from God for this world and the next.

The common faith in the mandates of Christ, to use his means to create and sustain faith, that is, to convert sinners to faith and to sustain them in faith and sanctification until the LORD calls them home to the church triumphant, is what unites them with Christ and, in fellowship with Christ, one to another. If that faith in the need for forgiveness (caused by their sin) and in their receiving that forgiveness is lulled to sleep by indifference, or love for the world, the Office of the

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<sup>11</sup>Walther, C.F.W., *Lutherische Brosamen*. CPH. 1876. P. 283

Keys, held by all Christians, is to be used to awaken them with the threat of God's wrath, which comes with loss of faith, to awaken that faith, **OR** those Keys will manifest their lack of faith (refusal of grace for their sins) and cause expulsion from the congregation until there is repentance. Despising grace proves loss of faith and unbelief. Such a member is not a member, since faith and faith alone is what God views as membership in the church, the body of Christ. When God's Word (of Law or Gospel) is rejected and it is plain and clear that it is, the person rejecting it is not to be regarded as a Christian, but an unbeliever by all the congregation. Intentional sin indicates no faith. They are to be bound to their sins publicly. Rejection of the Word is rejection of God. Christ's command is then to 'tell it to the church. And if they will not listen to the church, regard him as a heathen man and a tax collector.'

The church's task is to use the means appointed by Christ to create and sustain his church, and to remain faithful and satisfied with Christ's grace, that is, his Means of Grace, though they are disdained by the world and by unbelievers in the church. The church trusts these means and Christ's promise to use them and to accomplish his purpose through them, as much as she trusts Christ. When she turns to her own 'better' methods for creating and maintaining the church, she becomes unfaithful to her Lord, and any success that she appears to win by those methods are cursed, because they lack the command of the LORD and, therefore, stem from the flesh of man.

**This has nothing to do with politics, or position, or vocation**, but with the mandates of Christ for his church. Kinship and other political friendships or alliances, that preserve life in this world through overlooking fault and failings in order to promote a common good, have no place here, since the basic tenet of faith is that faults must not be preserved, but must die and be redeemed with Christ. Politics that prevent the carrying through of the Office of the Keys is the deadliest of sins that ruins not only the individuals who promote such politics, but whole church bodies and entities.

Congregational autonomy is not freedom to flaunt the mandates of Christ, but to carry out the mandates of Christ, just as Christian freedom of the individual is not freedom to do what one wants, but freedom to obey God's commands. If it is, indeed, CHRISTIAN freed, it is only freedom in CHRIST, that is, freedom to remain in his Word, that sets us free, lest we be bound to sin.

### III. With Congregational Autonomy, Why a Synod with her Offices?

Having established the sufficiency of the Christian congregation as the sufficiency of Christ and his Word, and seeing the expansive responsibilities that come to each congregation and each member as those to whom Christ has immediately given the Office of the Keys, each according to his station in life, we see the great wealth and dignity of both the congregation and the individual Christian, as those whom Christ has given the treasure, which alone gives peace in the conscience here on earth, and which alone gives the sure and trustworthy promise of eternal life.

With this congregational sufficiency, it might be asked, so why do we need a synod, or synodical officers?

The answer is, in short, 'it is a divine and blessed redundancy.'

As the church grows by the redundancy of the Gospel of God's grace, as speaking the Absolution creates faith in sinners and reproduces Christ, the first fruit of the dead, in other Christians, as fruits of his death and resurrection, thus creating the redundancy of believers called church, or congregation, his mandate also causes the redundancy of these groups of Christians in various places and at various times, receiving faith and all the benefits of Christ. No Christian congregation, sufficient as she is, can say "I am" or "I want to be the only one." She, the church, the bride of Christ and the mother of all believers, wants to bear children, more believers and more congregations.

#### A. Recognition of the Household of Faith (Fellowship)

The fact of Synod is the recognition of the body of Christ in all places where the Gospel is purely taught and the Sacraments administered according to the Gospel. Thus Synod is recognition of the household of faith throughout the world and in all times. Yet, this is not a subjective opinion, but is based purely, objectively, upon the sole rule and norm of Christian faith and life that exists in every Christian congregation, that is, the 'all things' of Christ, told us in Scriptures, that are to be taught and cherished. For again, it is the Word and the Word alone that creates and sustains the church and is, therefore, that which makes the church recognizable.

## 1. Universal Gospel in every Congregation (Roster of Congregations).

So, the Office of the Keys given the church, and the public administration of the same through the OHM, and all the implications for its responsible use, as delineated in the sections above, is the criteria for identifying the church. As Walther pointed out above, church discipline and excommunication of manifest, stubborn sinners, is not what creates the church, but, an aspect of sanctification, which, as necessary for salvation, cannot be omitted without ultimately forfeiting the faith and rebelling against God, and therefore, rejecting also his Gospel. There is no Gospel that leaves a sinner a sinner. It must sanctify him, though sanctification is not completed, so far as the believer is concerned, in this life.

**The congregation as a whole is like each Christian within her.** She still has the sinful flesh, which loves the world, the damned bride of the devil, which wants the glittering lies of the world rather than the plain (and sometimes painful) truth of God. And just as the Christian in the congregation needs to recognize his own on-going need for the Savior because of this, and has fellowship with his fellow believers, partially for this very purpose, to watch out for others who might fall from faith, as he needs others to look out for him, to arouse him back to faith when it grows weary and dull, so each congregation must humbly observe from its own life and the history of the church in Scriptures and through the ages, that **a congregation can also fall asleep in the faith, as its members can, so that Christ must say to some congregations what he said to the church in Sardis: “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.” (Revelation 3.1) Or to the congregation at Ephesus (Revelation 2.5): “Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place – unless you repent.”**

Thus, as Christians recognize and help each other with their own flesh, so congregations, vested with the Office of the Keys, not only recognize the presence of Christ and his grace in other congregations, but also their own need, because of the flesh in their congregations (in both pastor and members), for help from other congregations, to be rebuked and corrected if they, as a congregation, stray from God’s Word of Law or Gospel. All congregations (believers) are being sanctified by the Holy Spirit; that means they are also in danger, in as much as they allow the flesh instead of the Spirit to rule, to fall from faith as churches have done and still do.

Thus, it is with a sense of autonomy that one can acknowledge that, with the Office of the Keys, each church has everything that they need, just as every Christian can say that in Christ they have everything they need. Yet it is in the humility of our sinful state that a Christian also desires

to be corrected by that Word, whenever and wherever possible. So this is also the case with congregations, being vigilant and united in that Word. It is, therefore, in thanksgiving and joy that we acknowledge the church wherever Christ is found in his pure Word and Sacraments, but we as sinners and as churches full of sinners, desire watchful eyes that will warn us about what we cannot see in ourselves or in our congregations that would eventually cause us, unwittingly or stubbornly, to depart from God’s Word and abuse the Word in thanklessness, to stop listening to it as our rule and guide, and cause God, in his wrath, to remove the lamp of God’s Word from its lamp stand in our congregation’s midst as we would deserve for following flesh.

So Synod rosters congregations in which the pure marks of the church, the pure Word and unfalsified Sacraments are administered as a recognition of where the church is to be found for the faithful, and where the Office of the Keys are being administered according to Christ’s commands. Synod exists because of the blessed redundancy of the church of Christ. No congregation is alone. She, as a community of sinners, desires to have watchful eyes that can also help keep her from straying.

## 2. The Pentecostal Gifting and Mission (Roster of Pastors)

In addition to recognition of the household of faith in every time and place by the marks of the pure Gospel and the Sacraments, there is a need for the preparation of the servants of the church, who are ‘apt to teach.’ Besides the well known ‘qualifications for the office’ that are delineated by the apostle in Scripture, it must be recognized that it is Christ who teaches his called servants, in the OHM, which carries forward to all generations the office of the apostles, whom Christ himself originally taught. Also, prominently pointed out by our theologians, special gifts of the Spirit are necessarily poured out upon the ministry to enable them to preach the Word of God. This preparation, given the apostles by Christ, was his personal instruction in God’s Word and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost which is associated with the gift of tongues, of knowing and speaking the Gospel in other languages.

Walther talks about this preparation of pastors as a gift of God and a necessary task of the church in his sermon on the occasion of the installation of two professors in the Seminary<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>C.F.W. Walther. “Address at the Installation of Two College Teachers: What Must be Our Confidence When Men Who Have Prepared for the Office of Saving Souls, Yes, Who Have Already Blessedly Held that Office, Have, Upon the Call of the Church, Accepted the Call to the Teaching Office in our Institution of Higher Learning? Isaiah 49. 3.4.” *Lutherische Brosamen*.

Now, this office [the OHM] not only has a great array of duties and so many sorts of duties but, also, demands so many and various higher gifts, that no man is in a position, even in one single, minute aspect of it, to complete all the work of the same by himself. As the mediating office of Messiah fell into three different offices, into the prophetic, the high priestly and the kingly offices, so also the office of the church falls into the various, the manifold gifts of the Spirit demanded by the office. Fully carrying out the office of the church demands, among other things, not only that those holding the office feed the flock of Christ in every respect and fight for them but, above all, that they also care enough for them that after they are gone, there will always be new true shepherds and warriors prepared to take up, to employ and to wield the shepherd's staff that will fall from their hands and the sword that is torn from their hands by death.

It is certainly true that not only the first shepherds and warriors of Christ back then had been prepared and equipped by him alone, through the extraordinary miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, for their offices but, even now, true shepherds and warriors of Christ go forth exclusively from out of his school and that of the Holy Ghost. Only it has pleased Christ to now extend what equips people for the conduct of their office, which he at the time of the foundation of his church gave quickly and suddenly in extraordinary ways, to, thereafter and, even now, do this by the ordering of diligent study, with fervent prayer, and under the direction of a faithful teacher.

The pure knowledge and the untainted wisdom which filled and enlightened the souls of the apostles like a lightening flash on the first Pentecost; the aptness of the Spirit to present the truth and to defeat the heresies they would engage, came to the apostles in a moment on the first Pentecost like the blooms and buds of Aaron's dry staff, that sprouted over night; finally, the knowledge of all the languages in which they should preach and the ability to speak them came down upon them on the first Pentecost as quickly and suddenly as the fire of Elijah: All this must now, as I have already said, be sought and achieved in the order of untiring diligence under the guidance of a faithful teacher.

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CPH. 1876. P 349f.

**It is, therefore, not a human order, that there are men in the church who arise and instruct god-pleasing lads so that they some day might be competent to carry out the office that preaches reconciliation. Your office is a holy, divine office, a branch (Zweig) of the office that Christ instituted and initiated with the superabundant keys of the heavenly kingdom.** Yet, not only the gifts that are necessary for the task to ground boys more deeply in the knowledge of the divine truths but also the gifts that are necessary to instruct boys in general and to teach them the various dead and living languages of the peoples; these gifts are also gifts of the Holy Ghost which the Savior, now ascended into heaven, pours down upon his church for the establishment and preservation of the holy office. As it is written: "He has ascended to the highest -- and has given gifts to men -- and he has placed some as apostles but some as prophets, some as evangelists, some as shepherds and teachers; that the saints be carried into the execution of good works of office by which the body of Christ is built up." (Ephesians 4. 8, 11, 12.) "There are manifold gifts but it is one Spirit. There are manifold offices but one LORD. In each one of them the gifts of the Spirit are employed for the use of all. One is given to preach of wisdom by the Spirit; -- another diverse tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues." (1 Cor. 12. 4,5,10.)

**So then let us keep in mind, most esteemed co-workers in our present institution of higher learning, and find confidence in this. Our office is also God's office. We also stand here and work here in God's place. We are also instruments of the Holy Spirit. The first teacher of languages in the Christian church was God, the Holy Ghost. But if he who searches all things, even the deeper things of the Godhead, was not ashamed to bear this office, then how could we ourselves be ashamed to do so?** Much rather, may we say with JESUS Christ: "I thought that I labored in vain and employed my skill for nothing and uselessly, though my task was that of the LORD and my office was of God."

Thus the equipping and rostering of pastors is a necessary task of Synod, an 'extension, or branch, of the preaching/teaching office (OHM)' and the means that God is using to equip servants of the Word and approve them for this service. And what is the standard for this process of Pentecostal preparation? It is the doctrine of Christ and defense of the same over and against

error, and, prominent in both the writings of Luther and Walther, the preservation of the dead languages of Scripture, lest Scripture be perverted by false translation into the modern languages lest the Biblical Word be freighted in translation with sinful human thought. The love and interest of Lutheranism, or the church, for education, is the love of the languages of the original Word of God; that the Word would be preserved against corruption. This is not an option, but a necessary stewardship of the Gospel, which is the same yesterday, today and forever, and which has the same application and use for every generation, the salvation of sinners by grace through faith.

### **B. Universality of Congregations at the Right Hand of God**

Yet this recognition of the Office of the Keys, or Christ's gracious presence among his people in all times and places is not just a recognition between the points of God's delivery of his grace, but it is a fellowship, that is, since the same Christ is acknowledged as multiplying his Christians and his mystical body at those places, there is a congruence, an equivalence, an actual unity. The same Christ is being partaken of, or shared, in all those places and all those times (and he is even, if we think about it, being shared no less with those who are gathered in heaven). This unity and fellowship is in the object of the faith of all the faithful, Christ. He is their forgiveness, holiness, sanctification, resurrection and life. Though separated by time and space, they are united in the sure promises of Christ, their LORD.

Since this is not an idea or a principle, but a fact as sure as is the truth of God's Word and the gracious presence of Christ, this fellowship between local congregations is not incremental or partial (it is not analog, that is, on a sliding scale going from sure to dubious), but is either yes, or no. It is either altogether sure or doubtful, and any degree of doubt is not sure. Faith that accounts God's Word as true, and man as a liar in spiritual matters, thus, trusts God's Word alone as God-sure.

That has real and concrete ramifications for the relationship of one (independent) congregation towards another.

#### **1. The Gracious Redundancy of Christ at God's Right Hand.**

The catholicity of the church, that is, the universality of the Christian church, its unity in faith and in Christ and in worship, stems from the fact that there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, who sits at the right hand of God, not as a location in isolation from the world and his Christians, but

as the one who, as he says in the Great Commission, has all authority, and is all present according to both his humanity and his divinity, by nature of his divinity and the personal union.

Thus all gather around the same Lord and the same office. This recognition of the one Lord leads to one worship of the Lord, since all are in the same relation to the Lord as the others, that is, sinners gathered around a gracious and grace-bestowing Lord.

This has concrete ramifications in this fellowship. Since all are gathered in various times and places, there is Christian freedom, for Christians are being freed from their sins that would enslave them, but there is also the right use of freedom. It is never autonomous freedom, but freedom bound within Christ and his Words, his mandates. The bride that frees herself from her bridegroom is the bride who proves herself a whore. A bride who does not submit to her husband is the bride who wants a two-headed creature, a freak, even according to nature.

This freedom, found at the right hand of God in Christ, where rests all power and authority, is always threatened and the devil has his own agencies within and outside of the church that would either lull the Christian and the church into pleasant sounding error, or threaten the church with consequences to enslave, once more, the little flock of Christ. As Walther looked back at the founding of Synod, some 20 years later, he described the battle being waged by the right hand of God, a battle in which both Christian freedom in the Word and the proper use of that freedom would bring opposition from every side to their orthodox church. Yet that opposition merely affirmed the Word that led them and even served as a blessed curb on every side to keep them from straying from the Word and misusing their freedom. Hear what Walter says in his Sermon at the Synodical Convention of 1866<sup>13</sup>

Now, as twenty years ago sixteen preachers in the city of Fort Wayne, in the state of Indiana, gathered with the goal of drafting a Constitution for the Synod of Missouri, Ohio and other states, which was newly formed at that time, these preachers carried out their work in the conviction they had accepted, by God's grace, that the evangelical Lutheran Church of the unaltered Augsburg Confession was the true visible church of God upon earth and that, therefore, the doctrine laid out in the public confessions of the same were pure, as silver refined in a crucible, proven sevenfold. They were convinced that Luther was not merely a witness of this or that important truth, but was the angel promised in God's Word with the

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<sup>13</sup>*Brosamen*. p. 535ff

eternal Gospel, who must fly through the midst of heaven, the Reformer of the church elected, awakened and called by God himself, and that **the Reformation, carried out by his service to victory, was a real Reformation, a true revival of the original apostolic church, not inventing anything new, but in every aspect in doctrine and practice (Praxis) returning the church of the Reformation back to its original form. Having come to a clear knowledge of the pure Scriptural doctrine and, thus, to an unshakeable foundation of faith through the public confessional writings of the evangelical Lutheran Church, as also through the private writings of Luther and his faithful co-workers and their predecessors, they allowed neither the alleged new discoveries of the scholars in the institutions for learning in the old homeland nor the opposing institutions of our new fatherland keep them from laying vigorous hands upon the work, so that here a church would be built, as long before, nearly three hundred and fifty years ago, through the work of the Lutheran church Reformation, it had arisen out of the dust of a thousand years. As weak and unfit as they felt themselves to be for such a great and difficult task, it was just by this awareness, in not seeking to follow their own wisdom and cleverness nor their own glory, but in starting by following in the footsteps of the servants of God whom God himself had made victorious and seeking God's glory and the salvation of souls alone, that they were made strong and cheerful.**

As now our synod stepped forward into life, not only confessing without reservation the collected symbols of the ancient evangelical Lutheran Church publicly before friend and foe, and beginning her work joyfully with the motto on her banner: "God's Word and Luther's doctrine will never pass away," but also truly beginning to employ those symbols and her motto in doctrine and defense, in Constitution and practice, loud and pointed opposition arose immediately from both sides and in a wide variety of ways.

As we declared the church where the doctrine of the unaltered Augsburg Confession is really the norm of practice, to be the true visible church of God on earth and all other ecclesiastical fellowships to be false Churches and sects, we were charged with entertaining a papistic view of the church. As we confessed the conviction that the evangelical Lutheran Church Confessions were pure and

without any error in the faith and that every servant of the church, so long as he desires to be one, has a holy obligation to teach according to them, so we were charged with placing human writings next to, yes, even above, God's Word and with introducing an unsufferable burden on consciences. As we confessed Luther as God's chosen instrument for a true Reformation of the church, and bore witness that, above all, following God's Word, out of his writings, pure doctrine was to create our church, to give counsel for the right understanding of her confessions, we were charged with trying to deify Luther and ascribing to him a papistic infallibility. But as we also, loudly and officially, protested against those erring Lutherans who declare that the visible evangelical Lutheran Church is the one holy Christian church, apart from which is no salvation and blessing, and, as we, therefore, also admitted quite frankly that the church of believers and those being saved is also outside of the visible evangelical Lutheran Church, even deeply hidden in the midst of the sects, even under the rule of the Roman Anti-Christ, so, from the other side, we were charged with being unionists at heart. Yet as we, at the same time, not only battled against every error in faith that strove against God's Word, as something that endangers the soul, and also said we wanted nothing to do with any blending of religions (*Religionsmengerei*), and drew back from every outward churchly union that lacked inner unity of faith and of confession and from all mission societies made up of various different believers for the common work of the extension of the kingdom of God, so we were charged, by still others, with pharisaical intolerance, being contentious and judgmental, being narrowminded and lacking in love and zeal for the work of the LORD. As we, along with Luther and the church of the Reformation, granted the preaching office no other and no further authority than that of the Word of God, and granted to believing Christians the full dignity of the spiritual priesthood, so we were charged with surrendering and subjecting the authority of the divine preaching office to the whims of the wild mobs and subjecting the holy Christian faith to the decisions of the majority voice. **But as we, at the same time, were mindful to lay the foundation for an evangelical church order and discipline, and prohibited the temporary hiring of preachers and insisted on them being regularly called, and retained the institution of announcing for confession (Beichtanmeldung), to exercise the use of the binding Keys against the stubbornly unrepentant, and the like, so**

we were charged from the other side as papistic power mongers, hierarchical, and tyrannical. As we, with Luther and the ancient Lutheran church, would not allow our conscience to be bound to any human church order, in our new situation in this place, freely choosing an appropriate ordination and altogether standing upon our freedom in those matters neither commanded nor forbidden by God, in all so-called adiaphora (*Mitteldingen*), so the one crowd charged us with being against all discipline and order, being a 'bubble of liberty' and lovers of innovation. But as we, at the same time, retained tried and true, ancient, edifying customs and ceremonies, which inform our faith against heresies, and would not allow that to be called a sin, so the second group charged us as being on the road to Rome. As we asserted the primal equality and independence of each church and congregation and acknowledged no superior authority of one church over another and no synod over any individual congregation, so we were charged as being schismatic lovers of independence. But as we even structured the synod with orderly oversight and offices of visitation, so we were charged with bringing hierarchical tendencies against the freedoms of the congregations bearing our seal. As we, along with Luther and the Church of the Reformation, made the doctrine of justification through faith alone without any works of the law to be the constant fulcrum of our doctrine, as we wanted nothing to do with the so-called 'new measures' from the movements of the so-called religious revivals and awakenings, nor of any other means of grace, but the Word of God and the holy Sacraments, and always went back to purity of doctrine as the chief issue, so we were charged with being enemies of a living Christianity, legalists, trusting in a so-called 'dead orthodoxy' and dead formalists. But, at the same time, as we preached that true faith only resides in a repentant heart, a heart that is purified, renewed and born again, so we were charged with demanding a pietistic, legalistic Christianity. As we condemned the new Gospel of this recent age of the inbred inalienable rights of man, of the universal freedom and equality of citizens, as a war against God's order among fallen men, so we were charged with approving tyranny and injustice. And, finally, as we wanted nothing to do with a so-called continuation, or much rather, a supposed improvement, or Reformation, of the doctrine of our

church, as now the scholars within, that is, within our former fatherland, strove to bring about by mingling it with philosophy and, as we ourselves confessed that we were not setting out, in either doctrine or practice, to seek and to introduce anything new, but rather to retain what we had, so we were charged with pridefully maintaining the status quo and opponents of theological learning and progress; that we lack the Spirit and his creative power; that our theology is only dead mechanical instruction and a rote recitation of what our forefathers have said.

So a quick, certain failure or, at best, a tremulous existence, without blessing or influence, was forecast for our synod. Our synod was seen as a tree that certainly may have been green, bloomed, and bore fruit back in the sixteenth century but which, now planted in this different kind of soil in the nineteenth century, must, by necessity, quickly wither. Nothing could have been expected from her but the same mischief, disturbance of the peace, as in the past, the troubling of consciences, bickering, strife and division.

But, as vociferously as we were pressured from every side to force us out of the position we had come to, yet we didn't allow anything to make us waver, but with the model of the Reformation of the church constantly in our eyes, we confidently moved forward upon the path that we started walking, not letting attacks from the left or the right make us stray.

And what has happened? Has this prediction of our critics been fulfilled? No.

So Walther acknowledges Christ and his Word as the unifying agent and the agent of success for the LCMS in its first 20 years and lays out the course of his church through her opposition to the left and to the right. Freedom was in Christ and his Word, and never outside of it, and the Gospel alone was the means Christ used to create and maintain his church. This quote is worthy to be studied in detail, especially in connection with church practice and the use of tradition, not as law, but as confession and teaching. The understanding of grace, freedom and practice which Walther and Luther received from the Scriptures would diagnostically help us all as church, and as Christians, to repent of our own prejudices against God's Word, our own desires to deny due freedom, and our own desires to misuse freedom to indulge the flesh, caving in to people's dissatisfaction with the Gospel to the detriment of the church.

To sum up, this understanding would place us properly at the right hand of Christ and under his authority, the only authority and the source of all rightful authority in the church. This brought uniformity to thought and approach which united Lutheran congregations in both doctrine and practice and the expression of their thoughts and prayers, even in public worship.

## **2. Redundancy of Worship Fellowship**

It is in relation to the fellowship, the common gathering around Christ, in every local congregation in order to receive the one Lord in the one faith by those who are in one Baptism, that worship is the believer's heaven upon earth, since there Christ has promised all of his body to be present to sustain and feed them, with his banquet of grace, with the living waters of his Word. It is this unity that is observed when worship practices are in common and in common order, where the 'old Gospel', given by Christ in the Word and the Sacraments are distributed, which fill those hungering and thirsting after righteousness with Christ, who is our righteousness.

Here the mark of faith is satisfaction with the 'all things' that Christ has given. Here is not an arena for competing tastes and preferences which pull the discussion of worship away from Christ and his divine mandates. Here expressions of disappointment where the Gospel is being preached and distributed in the Sacraments, if, indeed the Gospel has actually been preached and the Sacraments distributed according to their institution, is the sign of an unbeliever, one not satisfied by the Gospel, that is, a person who is not converted to love things eternal, but whose mind is carnal and whose appetites are for the world.

Thus it is the Lord who sets the agenda for his worship with the whole counsel of his Word and with the mandates capsulized in Luther's Small Catechism. Those expressions of worship and response that allow children of God to speak God's (Biblical) Language and show appropriate truth regarding self as sinner and receiver of grace, and Christ as the one present who is giving grace, is appropriate. That which expresses the weight of our sins, which he graciously bore, and the joy and thanksgiving for that deliverance is true and right. That which boasts of sinners instead of boasting of Christ is offensive both to Christ and to his believers.

The church at worship is not a place to make the devil, the world, or, especially, our sinful flesh in any way comfortable, but crucified; but where sinners, tormented by the fact of their flesh and lingering sin, find rest in God's grace. Worship, as good preaching, is a place where those comfortable with their sins must be afflicted, and where those afflicted by their sins find comfort. It is, therefore, a place where both God's Law and his Gospel find their spiritual use; the Law to

convict and put to death, the Gospel to bring the dead back to life.

Worship is not a place where Jesus' Name is used to entertain (It must not be used in that way in any setting). Whenever that is done it is a sin against the Second Commandment, a misuse of Jesus' Name. Why? Because Scripture itself tells us what his Name is for "There is no other Name under heaven given among men by which we must be (not entertained but) saved." (Acts 4.12).

## **3. Redundancy of Congregation's Fraternal care.**

The independent status and location of congregations, with their full possession of Christ and his authority of the Keys, also has ramifications for people who move from one city, or location, to another. As they leave Christ and their fellowship with him behind, they do not lose their home nor his fellowship. They pray to God and they make it a high priority to, if possible, investigate before they leave whether they have a church home, a fellowship that can receive them at their destination.

In that situation, he, as a believer and a member of the church, is also taking his spiritual priesthood with him. He is one whom St. Paul describes: "but he that is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is judged of no man," (1 Corinthians 2:15) but why? Not because he is all knowing, but because, as Paul goes on to say, "We have the mind of Christ," that is, the instruction of Christ in the holy Bible. The spiritual man judges the church he encounters by the Word of God, the Word which will someday judge him also.

So it is the obligation of the Christian joining a congregation to find out whether the congregation preaches the Word of Law and Gospel and whether Holy Communion is being distributed as a means of sanctification, or whether it is being abused by using it to affirm sinners in their sin rather than using it to take their sins away and struggle against flesh in sanctification, as the Lord desires. This must be recognized before joining because, according to the Lord's warning, already mentioned above, a congregation can have a name that it is alive (Lutheran) and, yet, be dead (no longer authentically Lutheran). It may be a place where the flesh finds refuge and is affirmed, even in the name of the Gospel, and where true believers will not find their rest; where the lies and errors that plague them will never be condemned by the Law, and thus, the Gospel preached there, if it is even preached, will be robbed of its use and its sweetness; where hunger and thirst after righteousness will never be fostered, and so, the depths of the love found in Christ's cross will never be plumbed, if the cross, indeed, is preached at all.

So there is also, secondarily, a concern for hospitality that a congregation must exhibit that is very healthy. Will a brother or sister coming here from another sister congregation recognize this one as Lutheran? Will they feel at home? Or have we made this church a stranger to the family of God, even in the interest of looking more like the world? Is the world, God's enemy, here being courted? Is the church here being conformed to the world, when Christ's goal is the opposite, that is, to take people out of the world and convert them into something else?

The other concrete ramification of the redundancy of Christ at the right hand of God is that the status of a person in one congregation must be equivalent to his status in another congregation since they are under the same authority. Thus a person justly excommunicated and bound to his sins in one congregation, must be considered the same in another congregation in that fellowship. If both membership and exclusion, the use of the Keys, are valid and certain in heaven, it must be so everywhere on earth. A person under just discipline, for not being repentant for sin, thus, is giving evidence that he is not in faith, must be treated not according to the blindness of human love, but by the dictates of Christ's Words to the unrepentant, for his spiritual good. Different solutions to a known sin are evidences of lack of fellowship, since in the fellowship only one answer to sin exists in the one Lord, that is, grace, and faith that turns from sin to the Savior, that is, by repentant faith. Other answers are lies and leave sinners under judgement. That kind of love is a sham that buries God's love, the Keys.

### C. The Purpose of Synodical Redundancies

**To this point there has been little or no mention of synodical structures or offices.** Why? Because, in a sense, they are not necessary. Since congregations are independent and are in Christ and his authority, nothing more is necessary.

Yet, it is to God's glory and to his praise, that we have also already acknowledged the catholicity of the mission and presence of the church. If Christ multiplies his church in time and space, we cannot but be a part of it under his mandates, nor can we ignore this great grace and work of God. So we have rejoiced in considering the need to train and to roster certified pastors, under Christ's authority, as the modern Pentecost of God's gifting for the church, and in the mutual recognition of congregations possessing the true marks of the church, to also be helped by each other in the battle the church militant wages upon earth under Christ's armor and in the midst of opposition on all sides.

Since congregations are the church and are independent, and church bodies or synods

are formed in recognition of the redundancy of these congregations in time and space, it must be perfectly permissible to speak of the synodical apparatus as redundancy. It cannot have any authority that the individual churches do not have (Christ and his Word), certainly no greater authority, and it cannot have any task which is not dictated by Christ as being a concern for each and every one of his congregations.

As such, as a redundancy, a synod and its offices must have as its purpose the same purpose as any redundancy that is added to any complete system, that is, as a safeguard, a back up, an extravagant blessing that comes when all of the necessities have been met and there is extra blessing and wealth, that makes it possible to create backups to catch a system when it weakens and is vulnerable to failure, before it gets too bad.

One might, at this point, become a classic congregationalist and say, since this is a redundancy that is not commanded in Scripture, and since church hierarchies have historically abused the church, we are prohibited from establishing them. In fact, to have a synodical structure is to completely lack faith in the sufficiency of Christ and his Gospel in the local congregation. Now if that is the case, if we see synodical mechanisms we establish as what will save congregations because the Word and Sacraments are not enough, then, certainly, **Synod will have become an idol** that God will not and cannot bless, but will certainly curse.

However, going back to some of our basic tenets of the faith, remember that the nature of the Christian is to recognize that, in his flesh, he is an enemy of God that can destroy the precious gift of faith. That is why he continues confessing his sin and, most importantly, receiving Christ and his grace in church for forgiveness and sanctification. Remember, as the Christian, so the congregation, composed of believers and pastors with their flesh, who **can** overrun the church and cause it to 'have a name of being alive, but being dead.' So, it is in humility, in the recognition of the flesh and unbelief that can and have destroyed the faithfulness of individuals or whole congregations, that a proper attitude and faith are reflected by which the redundancy of offices within the Synod would be created in a God pleasing way.

But what might be the form of this redundancy, this extra safeguard? One form might be that which resulted in the papacy. Make a redundancy of the OHM so that pastors and congregations were under a super pastor (a pope) who will become a super holder of the Office of the Keys over the pastors and congregations. While Lutherans reading this will recoil from the idea, and while the Roman Papacy is rightly condemned and judged the very Anti-Christ by our Confessions, the idea of such an arrangement is not totally dismissed or ruled out by the Confession, if the Pope would only allow the Gospel to be preached and would admit that his

office was by human arrangement, not by divine right. That is, if this super Pastor would respect the one institution of the OHM in the congregations and would, thus, be a servant of the Word instead of the Judge, censor and one who can add to that Word as did the Pope.

Even Walther, in his Address to Synod of 1848, speaks positively of times in history when Lutheranism had different structures<sup>14</sup>:

It may well be that there are times and circumstances when it is to the church's advantage to place the highest decision making and ordered authority into the hands of a few, into the hands of those delegated to do this. Who would dispute, for example, that the consistories in our German fatherland had been an indescribable blessing to the church in their day [he means when they were instituted], that is, as even fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah in the German churches: "And kings shall be your foster fathers and queens shall be your nurse maids" (Isaiah 49.23) Further, how could anyone, only slightly familiar with history, deny that the Swedish Church, even with its constitution under bishops, has been gloriously built, especially so long as men like Laurence Petri, the famous Swedish expositor of the Bible and Luther scholar, had gloriously borne their bishoprics nobly and so long as men like both of the Gustavuses bore the royal crown of Sweden? But if we take a look at the situation in which the church finds herself today, we might very soberly acknowledge that a different kind of Constitution is more beneficial, as that in which the congregation freely governs itself, while she, walking in a synodical union, engages in constant fraternal discussion, supervision, and guidance and in the united extension of the kingdom of God and to enable and support the goals of the church at large, as it exists among us with God's help.

But the danger of a hierarchical arrangement is that terrible Romanizing tendency to draw the authority of the Office of the Keys from out of the midst of the congregation, where Christ placed it, into the hands of someone outside that congregation. It takes the judgement away from the believer and gives it to a man-made super office. It can parasitically take away the responsibilities invested by Christ in the congregation as a whole, to someone who is serving by human arrangement outside the congregation. This can work if that office's authority is nothing

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<sup>14</sup>*Brosamen*. p. 524

more than the use of the Word of God. So, as a Christian who is competent in the Word, the official who observes flesh and sin being fostered in a congregation rather than submission to the Word of God and its guidance, can, as Luther and Walther did, wield the sword of that Word to silence the flesh that is demanding obedience, to bring to repentance what is sin, and to point the sinners, so frightened, to God's grace in the Word and Sacrament; while honoring throughout the possession of grace and Christ by that congregation, and the call of the public servant whom Christ placed there to employ the Office of the Keys publicly in their midst.

This tolerance for a church hierarchical system, as well as the lack of a Biblically mandated system for this redundancy of the creation of synodical offices places the organization of Synod into an area of Christian freedom and is a great example of how freedom is not a freedom to do anything, but Christian freedom is to be used in respect to glorifying and honoring what God has done and instituted, which is not, in any way, a matter of freedom, lest we be rebels and enemies of God, but to use this freedom to do what is good and honorable towards God. Thus the creation of a synodical system, whatever form it may take, must serve the purpose of safeguarding what God has done in his church of his own initiative and out of grace for us people, who cannot add to or even preserve them in the least, but who humbly know our weakness and propensity to fail, and seek structures that will (**redundantly**) use God's means, our only help, as our aid, that is, that will use nothing but God's Word to stop error that would infest the church through the flesh of man or the enmity of the world and Satan.

## **I. Positive Purposes of Synod**

### **a. Multiply Resources for Common Work, Mandated by Scripture**

The redundancy of congregations means that all congregations have certain interests that lie beyond their congregational borders. We have already pointed out that every Christian and every congregation is to be a mission society, yet the expensive work of training and sending missionaries is aided by the common work of Synod in home missions where there are no congregations and in foreign missions.

We have already also mentioned the training of future holders of the OHM as well as teachers, a task that the Synod as a whole, and every congregation, has as its responsibility.

Thus Synod has been a gathering point for the limited resources of the blessings of the congregations and schools to multiply and, in order to do, corporately, what might not be possible

at the level of an individual congregation. Under the mandate of Christ, this joint work must be well pleasing in his sight.

**b. Discuss Common Problems and Tasks; Apply Scriptures and Convince.**

In his sermon to the Synodical Convention in 1848<sup>15</sup> quoted above, entitled, “*Why Can We and Must We Cheerfully Carry Out Our Work, Even if We Posses No Authority but that of the Word*”, Walther discusses the frustration that Synodical Convention delegates, pastors and lay delegates, might have been sensing as they met because the only authority which they had at Convention was that of the Scriptures and to convince. They had no binding authority over and against the congregations. The congregations were free to take or leave their recommendations that were not prescribed by Scriptures. Walther introduces it this way:

But perhaps we are all moved, some more and some less, by one thought of concern, that could easily render our discussions fruitless. I have in mind the thought that we, according to the Constitution under which our Synodical association stands, only have the authority to advise, that we only possess the authority of the Word and of persuasion. Explicitly, in our Constitution, we have no right to make decrees, to issue laws and ordinances, or, in any matter which is at all the responsibility of the congregation, to render a judgement to which the same must submit unconditionally. **In no way does our Constitution make us any kind of consistory; in no way into the highest courtroom of our congregations. It must rather allow the congregation, in every way, the fullest extent of its freedom, with no exceptions, except in regards to God's Word, the faith and love.** According to our Constitution we do not stand over our congregations, but **we stand in them and at their side.**

Walther goes on to explain the godly nature of the polity that was introduced in the Missouri Synod and the respect this polity pays both to the authority of Christ and his Word and

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<sup>15</sup>*Brosamen*. pp. 517ff

the dignity of the believers, redeemed and gathered around him in the congregations:

So, it is beyond doubt, reverend brothers in the office and most highly esteemed congregational delegates, we are denying no one their legitimate rights when we, as servants of the church and as members of an ecclesiastical synod make no other authoritative declaration but upon the authority of the Word. For in the church, where Christ alone rules, there can be no other authority to which all would have to submit. Indeed, there are matters about which the Word of God does not speak but must, nevertheless, be set in order in the church; but all such matters must not, in any way, be ordered as authoritatively standing over the congregations, but rather the congregations (this is, teachers and hearers) order themselves, free from all compulsion, yes, according to what appears necessary and beneficial for her to do.

So what do those do who would claim any kind of authority apart from the Word? They rob the church of Christ of freedom, that he has so lavishly purchased with his divine blood, and they demote this free Jerusalem that is here below, in which are only kings, priests and prophets, this kingdom of God, this heavenly kingdom of truth, to a police state, in which one must be subject to every human ordinance. They oppose Christ, the single true king, according to his royal crown and make themselves king over his kingdom. They push Christ, the one true master, away from his lectern and raise themselves up to be masters in his church. They seek to separate Christ, the single true head, from his church and exult themselves to be heads of his spiritual body. They lift themselves above the holy apostles and account to themselves an authority which in God's Word is outrightly denied them, yes, which is extended by God to no man, no creature, not even to any angel or archangel.

So can it really be so disheartening, my brothers, that we now universally have been entrusted in our American preaching offices with no other authority than the authority of the Word, but also, especially, that no other authority has been invested in this assembly? Oh truly, no! Just this fact must stimulate us to carry out our office in this land and the work at hand with great joy. For thus the church, even among us, is exhibiting her true character, that of a heavenly kingdom; thus Christ remains among us as he is, that is, as the single LORD, the single king, the

single head, the single master; and our office and work retains its true apostolic form. How could we lust after an authority which Christ has forbidden us and which no apostle had appropriated and exercised, and that would rob our congregations of the character of the true church and her true apostolic form?

### c. Foster Trust in Scriptures Alone.

Finally, Walther, as a practical consideration, reminds the delegates at the 1848 convention that it is precisely the respect that the Convention itself shows for the Word of God that will ultimately encourage congregations not to see Synod not as a foe or an opponent, but as a trusted aid and advisor, and would win the trust of congregations to also follow the resolutions of Synod that are not directly handled in the Word, as being treated in proper Christian freedom and also in Christian responsibility to God and neighbor. Here's Walther:

But we have good reason to hope for something completely different than that **when we desire our congregations to unconditionally submit to nothing but the Word, under which we also kneel, when we leave it to themselves to rule and when we stand by her side to advise.** We may not be worried that, in this way, worldly elements of a political democracy will infiltrate the church so, in that way, a subservience to the ruling of the people, a papacy of the people, will develop and that we, who must be servants of Christ will, thereby, become servants of people. How can this ungodly rule of the people come about when the people are using the rights that are given them by God? How can it be a papacy by the people, when the priestly nation of Christians do not let themselves make any human laws in matters which God has left free, and will only, then, heed the preacher unconditionally in the Word, as Christ himself is speaking through him, that is, when he preaches his Word? No, a disgraceful lordship of the people only takes place when the people presume to prescribe to the preacher what he may or may not preach from God's Word; when they presume to oppose the Word of God and to hinder the conduct of his office according to the Word in any way; or when the people take the authority to make regulations in the church, making the claim that it is their privilege alone, excluding the preacher from this authority, and

demanding him, then, to be subject to the regulations they make. Therefore, the preacher is also only a servant of man if he doesn't faithfully serve Christ because he is afraid of people or in order to gain the favor of the people, when he surrenders anything in doctrine or the practice of God's Word, and thus preaches to the itching ears of his hearers. But only where the preacher has been given the authority of the Word, but that means the full authority of the same, there, where the congregation, so often as they hear the Word of God from their preacher's mouth and receive it as God's Word, there the preacher stands in his right position to his congregation; he stands inside of her, not as a despicable wage earner but, rather, as one sent by God the most high; not as a servant of men but as a servant of Christ, who teaches in Christ's place, admonishes, chastises. Just there, therefore, will the apostolic admonition be rightly followed: "Obey your teachers and follow them, for they watch over your souls as those who must give account; that they may do so with joy and not with sorrow, for that would not be good for you." But the more a congregation sees that the one who stands before her in the LORD desires nothing but that the congregation be subject to Christ and to his Word; the more she sees that he does not desire to be lord, yes, that he, himself, watches over the freedom of the congregation itself with vigilant eyes, the more willing she will be to listen to his wholesome suggestions, even in matters that God has left free. She will follow him in that, not as their task master, because she must but, rather, as her father in Christ, because she is glad to do so of her own good will.

Our synodical body also has this same intention, as a wholesome influence, when it seeks to work by nothing but the authority of the Word. Certainly the battle also awaits us, but it will not be those little disheartening battles over obedience to man-made laws but, rather, the holy war for God's Word, thus for God's glory and kingdom. **And the more the congregations see that we desire to exercise no other authority over them than that divine power of the Word, which saves all who believe it, an ever more widely opened door will our advice also find in them. Indeed, those who do not want the Word will separate from us, but to those who love it, our fellowship will be a comforting sanctuary. And when they receive our resolutions, they will not regard them as a heavy burden imposed upon them by strangers, but rather as a benefit and a gift of**

**brotherly love and as advocating, announcing and preserving her independence.**

**2. A Purpose Synod Can NEVER have: Possession of the Office of the Keys.**

**a. Synod Applies Standards of Doctrine and Life to Rosters of Congregations/Pastors.**

The bestowal of Christ's presence and the Office of the Keys in each congregation gives us pause to see that what is great is not necessarily what appears great to the eyes. If we were to consider a small rural congregation where on an average week, perhaps 30 members attend, and compare that little bunch to a rich bustling urban congregation worshipping a thousand on a weekend, and then compare that with a 2.7 million member synod, we would be considering things in ascending order as our reason judges things. But reason errs by leaving out what is most important, Christ. The glory of an assembly, rightly considered, does not reside in the number of sinners present, but in the presence of the One who is at the right hand of God. Thus every congregation has the glory of that One as does the whole Christian church on earth. The glory of it all is only one. It is found in the One Lord, or grace is not grace.

In keeping with the task and the dignity that takes place as normal practice and routinely, that is, the bestowal of God's grace unto sinners gathered there, the Synod, the structures developed freely by the congregations, as impressive as they might be over and against any podunk, little congregation, cannot replace or take the place of what happens in the most meager congregation. Synodical offices are not the church, but are offices created and elected by the church. They do not possess the Office of the Public Keys, though as Christians, synodical office holders, certainly possess the Keys for their private use and in their vocation, that is, as their office and duties are defined by the church as their servants, but not as their pastors.

The idea of District Presidents being the pastors of the pastors is, thus, patently wrong, since it is not the duty of a pastor's district president to feed him God's Word and Sacrament to sustain his faith but to, by God's Word, approve or correct him and his Church, if he or his people act contrary to Scripture and the Confessions.

SP's and DP's have been given administrative functions. It is good they are called "presidents" which is an honorable, administrative title, and not Bishops, those who are called to preach and teach and to administer the Sacraments to a church. SP's and DP's do not have the responsibility to excommunicate or to bring into church membership, but, using the Biblical and

Confessional standards, that also the laymen are taught to use when they go to live in new territories and seek a church, to maintain a roster of churches that fit these criteria and a roster of pastors who fit the criteria of faith and life prescribed in Scriptures, based on the promises of the congregations and Ordination vows of their pastors, and their visitation of the same.

And this, as already suggested, is a helpful redundancy. When administrators have rightly applied the Biblical and Confessional criteria of fellowship upon pastors and congregations, and when laymen seeking a church do the same thing, and find the same results, there is reason in God's Word to thank God for the redundancy and to trust the Synodical system.

When congregations are excluded from fellowship for straying from doctrine or being schismatic in practice (offensive abuse of freedom), are marked as heterodox, they are removed from the roster for Scriptural cause. At that point the congregation, in that discipline, has opportunity to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, as the Word of God and the Word alone is directly applied to their error to turn them from their flesh's dangerous direction (sin) to God's Word and grace. Their having sinned against God's Word would not, in that case, exclude them from being called church for the sake of the Gospel they might still retain, but their rebellion and willful rejection of God's Word would result in their being marked as heterodox and in need of repentance from their error. That church would still be acknowledged as church, but no longer orthodox; outside of our fellowship due to rebellion against God's Word. In removing such a church from the roster, the DP would be dealing with that church in the same way that every faithful congregation and Christian would want to be dealt with himself, by Christ in his Word. God's Word restores faith and unity to the straying. Submission to God's Word is the mark of faith, the bride of Christ. If the Word is rejected, the church must be derostered.

Now, as is universally the case, neither we nor the DP on our behalf would be damning every member of that church through the derostering. We would merely be marking and avoiding false doctrine according to the apostolic command (Romans 16.17; Matthew 16.6f). We could not commune those in that fellowship because their sin, pointed out directly from God's Word, is publicly held by their membership in that church that cannot be affirmed, but needs to be repented and forgiven in sanctification, not ignored.

The same would be true of called and rostered workers. If their doctrine or life excludes them from their office, it is the duty of the synodical officers to Biblically deal with them. However, public forgiveness is not theirs to give. That prerogative is given and carried out by Christ directly to and through his congregations alone when that public sin is confessed in their assembly.

**b. Roster Management Never Equated with the Call nor the Keys.**

So, it is an important facet of the congregation's holding the Office of the Keys, and all of its rights and privileges, that this grace of Christ be respected and honored in all facets of a church body's established polity. This is foundational, as Christ's institution, and the locatedness of grace in the church is for the confidence, encouragement, satisfaction and security of the faithful gathered there.

But a congregation is not orthodox because it is listed on a Synodical roster. Being on a Synodical roster is not what makes a congregation orthodox. Rather, it is a congregation's orthodoxy that is to be recognized by being on a Synodical Roster. But that is only a redundancy, a safeguard, a secondary help. The primary measure of their orthodoxy is the Scriptural standard that every Christian, as possessing the Office of the Keys, and instructed in the faith, is duty bound and every congregation is duty bound, to apply to and judge themselves. A congregation's being rostered does not create its orthodoxy, it is, at best, a recognition of her orthodoxy. The DP is designated to take a look for us.

A Christian congregation, whether rostered or not, is only an orthodox congregation in so far as it is under Christ and his Word. A non-rostered congregation that purely preaches the Word and distributes the Sacrament according to the Gospel gains nothing from its status as being rostered, she has Christ and all her grace. She is free to join an orthodox Synod and will want to do so for the sake of the One Lord of her sister churches.

So also, the roster status of a pastor is something completely different than his call. His call is given him by Christ through the congregation NOT THROUGH THE SYNOD. While the Synod has a task delegated to train appropriately, to certify, to advise, the call is between the pastor and the congregation. The congregation avails itself freely of Synodical resources to advise her, since she knows her flesh and that she can easily fall into error, but the congregation itself is responsible, as holders of the Office of the Keys, to call, to judge, to see that the office is rightly carried out in her midst and to revoke a call for Scriptural reasons. And all that under the direct Word of Christ through the Scriptures, not the DP. There is no other authority but that of the Word of Christ in the church, publicly administered on behalf of Christ for his church by the OHM. The synodical office is a safeguard to remind the church of the Scriptural mandate to call a pastor, not to suggest alternatives to the Scriptural responsibilities or to establish people to serve without the regular call (instituted by Christ) of the congregation. The only assurance the man is serving the Lord in the OHM is that he is called by the Lord through his regular means, through the

congregation, else he has not entered the sheepfold through the Door (John 10.9-10) and is a thief, stealing what the Lord has not given. He will be held accountable, as well as whoever gave him a boost over the fence instead of bringing him through the gate.

So the call is not dependent upon the DP or the roster, this secondary safeguard we've decided in freedom to implement, but upon Christ's institution of the Office of the Keys in the congregation. The roster is the safeguard created in Synod to certify pastors that congregations are then responsible to judge as they considering calling him, whether he is orthodox or not. The congregation retains the right to judge and elect according to the only authority, the Word of God. The roster does not make him orthodox. At best it recognizes his orthodox doctrine and practice. That assumes he is observed by the one responsible for the roster.

**D. The Genius of LCMS Polity**

**1. How Roster Decisions Must Relate to the Office of the Keys.**

Since Synodical structures are secondary safeguards to the church, or the congregations, and the primal and central authority of Christ and his office must be located in the local congregations, it is obvious that there can be no action impinging on the Office of the Keys that is isolated from the local congregation.

Some have used this fact as a reason to propose that DP's ought to be practicing pastors in their districts, that is, serving a local congregation. For many this is an intriguing possibility. And the principle stated just above could be rallied to that position. But I believe that is mistaken.

The functions of Synod over and against the congregation have been carefully distinguished, and that distinction is both helpful and clarifying.

If the function delegated to Synodical Officers is to apply Scriptural standards, which apply to all the congregations and the pastors of Synod, and if the Office of the Keys belongs directly and only to the Christians in their congregations, then the roster status of those entities in Synod are merely a function of standard and evaluation, a measurement against Scriptural standards and the Christian liberty of love, as described above, and are, thus, structures of measurement and law. Being on a roster is to be a public acknowledgment that the rule of faith and life is not being violated by that entity, but confessed and practiced by the congregations or church workers.

If that status changes for Biblical cause, then the church or the worker is derostered. In the case of a congregation, that means, by our Synodical Constitution/Covenant, they no longer are teaching and practicing the faith as the Word of God requires. It is a warning for our members

not to join there because they are heterodox or schismatic. It doesn't mean they are no longer church, but they have refused Biblical counsel and are renegade, in need of repentance, perhaps on the way to being dead, since disregard for God's Word WILL EVENTUALLY destroy a church, so that it has a name that it is alive, while it is dead.

In the case of a church worker, derostering for Biblical cause is to flag him as not being dependable, as being a poisoned well of doctrine, or as having ruined his reputation in the community by coarse sin so that his offense would be a stumbling block to the Gospel he preached. If he is a pastor in the church, his derostering does not terminate his call. The call is not from Synod, but from his congregation. But it points out public sin in their midst and in the teaching office in their midst. It gives the congregation both reason and a mandate to use the Keys to revoke the call (Please note well, ONLY IF THIS IS FOR BIBLICAL REASONS of false doctrine or a persistently evil life), in which case he will no longer be a pastor, but can be a member, if he repents of his sins and seeks forgiveness FROM THE CONGREGATION.

And this is the genius, the real gift of LCMS polity in its present form. The responsibility for the Office of the Keys is placed where it belongs. The structures of Synod thus take on a proper, secondary, servant's role of applying the Word of God and its standards in doctrine and life, when the congregation has failed to do so. But then, the responsibility for what to do with that failure, pointed out by the backup system, goes back to where it belongs; back to the local congregation. By the very nature of this, as it should be, if the primary system (the congregation) fails and refuses to function in their use of the Keys given them by Christ, then no secondary system can help it. But that failure must be seen as a congregation's own lack of faith and faithfulness, of failing to follow the Word of the Lord, and losing that Word because their own flesh has rejected that Word. Christ himself is there calling with his Word to repentance through the Synod, and he goes unheeded. The fault lies nowhere but in that congregation, and only Christ can restore it by his Word. But failing to heed his Word it will not be restored. And that's how it should and must be. The DP must then flag and inspect the congregation's own roster status if this reveals also her own refusal to use the Keys entrusted to her in obedience to Christ and to the salvation of sinners.

Thus flagging the roster status of a church or a pastor is the application of the Word of God that his people want to help them to apply the Keys, as Christ commands, in their midst. If a sinful pastor is flagged this way, it is up to the congregation, then, to be concerned for the office in their midst, to remove him if he is disqualified, and to forgive him when he repents of his sin. But only according to God's Word. If he is not guilty of false doctrine or practice according to God's Word and removed from his roster status, anyway, then the congregation must ask by whose authority

this has been done. If not from God's Word, then who is taking that authority upon himself? Such authority, seeking to rise above Christ's Word, must also be recognized as Anti-Christ.

Synodical officers, and congregations will then, under the same authority of God's Word not be in strife, but will be united in doing their tasks under God's Word, Synodical officials policing the public doctrine and practice, and congregations and pastors being safeguarded and forgiven by each other when they stray. Congregations and pastors are as every Christian believer. They know how easily they can fall, and love to be corrected and restored by Christ's Word and forgiveness. Or they are not in Christ.

## **2. How Present Implementation is Failing the Scriptural Test.**

It is more than legitimate to look at the state of our church and see disaster. Some see it as theological disaster, others as political, others financial. Its all true. Some suggest structural changes will help. Consolidation of offices? Restructuring organizational charts? Is that it? No.

Several times it has been asserted that as it is for the individual Christian, so it is with a Christian congregation, and so it is with our church body. Our security and our sense of satisfaction as Christians are only as sure as the Savior and our connection with him. Our salvation is by grace through faith. And anything that does not come from faith is sin. The problem lies in the combination and in the relationship between spirit and flesh in individuals, congregations, and the church body, because that's what we have, gathered in our churches around Christ.

If there is a problem in the church it is in the flesh, the sinful nature of the believer. The flesh does not love God's Word and cannot receive it. The flesh wants to displace the Word of grace and Christ and preserve its life rather than to lose its life. The flesh wants God to put up with and to enable its rebellious ways in the name of love, in fact, it demands that if God is loving, he must put up with our sin and leave us alone. Like the thief to the left of Christ on the cross, the flesh says to Christ, "If you are the Christ take yourself - and us - off this cross", in other words, don't pay for my sins and don't make me pay for them either. The thief that is our flesh wants cheap grace. It judges God as wrong for judging and punishing sins and therefore mocks both God's Law and his Gospel of dying love for sinners, all in the name of 'love,' fallen love.

Repentance is a gift of God, given in our death and despair to say as the other thief, "He does not deserve this, but we do," and then, to look to him, begging for grace and finding it.

The problem our church is experiencing is not one to be recognized in any Synodical office building without first recognizing it in our own pews and pulpets. How many open sinners

are tolerated in our churches but not warned? How many have promised to 'faithfully receive the Word and Sacraments' that is, God's means of grace, and used that promise of faithfulness to become 'graduates of the church' never to darken its doorsteps again (openly breaking their public vows and the Third Commandment)? How many people living in sin apart from marriage (publicly breaking the Sixth Commandment), are weekly communing in our churches with no repentance under the rubric of 'Christian freedom'? How many people publicly disagree with our "official practice" of communion being closed, and are allowed, contrary to Scripture, to hold vociferously to their 'opinion' which contradicts God's Word or even to practice to the contrary. And the church 'can do nothing about it.(?)' Flesh, opposed and not receiving the Word of God, is called 'faith' and indulged, instead of crucified with Christ and redeemed. The discomfort of the cross, God's curse for sin is avoided, though it is the only place a sinner can be saved, in the discomfort of being crucified by the Law, right next to Christ crucified.

Unlike our forefathers in the faith, we follow our own flesh that doesn't want to lose anything for God's Word and grace. If our children are breaking their Confirmation vows and turning their backs on church we are not willing to cause them or ourselves the discomfort of confronting them with their lying to God and breaking their vow. So, wanting comfort instead of exercising the Office of the Keys Christ has given directly to us as parents, we don't invest the effort to restore them, we bury the Keys, (we lose the Keys?). Instead of bucking our culture and calling sexual sin sexual sin, we don't want to make anyone feel guilty, so instead of spending our reputation by looking so rigid, instead of using the Office of the Keys and telling sinners about their sin from God's Word, we bury the Keys that Christ gave us to use (we lose the Keys?). Instead of bringing doctrinal charges to confront members of our church who do not agree with the Biblical practice of 'closed communion', or creation, or the male-only pastorate, or even the scandalous exclusivity of salvation through Christ alone and damnation outside of him, we don't want our doctrine to cost us any numbers in the pews or to offend God's enemy, the world, so instead of investing the aggravation of teaching Scriptures to those we already know have rejected their teaching (that is, unbelievers) we bury the Keys, the appointed means of restoring enemies of God, so it won't cost us numbers or unpleasant confrontations (we lose the Keys?). Matthew 18 is more and more used as a way of keeping sins from being dealt with by demanding 'proper channels', that often are 'improper', rather than using it as it is intended; that EVERYONE be concerned that sins be repented of and sinners be restored, not spared, but restored. It is used to look for loopholes NOT to deal with sins, rather than to actually use it for its rightful purpose, to retrieve sinners for Christ or to let them know that they are unbelievers and in spiritual peril.

The fact that the Keys are given to all believers, means that each believer will be held accountable to God for their use (Mt. 25.14f) on the last day. Those who have buried the Keys will have what God has given them to use taken away and they will be punished forever. That is the state of our congregations, as a whole. Restructuring isn't necessary. The basic structure, the congregation, is in tact. But Christ, even when he has his say, is being unheeded. But Gentiles (unbelievers) are overrunning the courts of the temple. And they may be us, who value Scripture so little that we will sacrifice nothing to keep and follow it.

In this regard, as noted above, Walther was careful to say that the Synod was not to be any sort of high, supreme court for the congregations. But he does use that sort of language for the congregational assembly, itself. In his fourth address to new members<sup>16</sup> he says: "**A Christian congregation is the highest court in her territory and whoever joins her becomes a part of it. A Christian congregation has the administration of the Keys to the heavenly kingdom on earth, and one who joins her becomes a co-administrator of the same.**"

And, he says of fraternal admonition in the same collection of addresses to new members in #6, p. 16, "Whoever either falls into dangerous heresies and wants to hold fast to them, or commits a severe fall or even gets caught in a crime, **will be fraternally chastised for it, first by the brother who sees and hears it and then, if this doesn't help, that brother will bring with him witnesses. When even this is not effective, then the one who has fallen into error, or sins, is summoned before the congregation and publicly admonished by it [and if he does not repent, is excommunicated.]**"

Walther stated (see p. 10) that church discipline was the second pillar, next to the Gospel, upon which the church stood. It is that pillar, and its associated effect on the Gospel, that, in taking away the need for the Gospel by normalizing sin, has resulted in the present state of chaos within the church. The topic of true faith in the Christian, though Scripture speaks of this exhaustively, is in a state of "don't ask, don't tell" in the church. We are afraid to test whether our brothers and sisters believe by seeing if they will repent when they are confronted by their sins. A universal demonic peace has been imposed in which we say to each other I won't look at your sins if you promise not to look at mine. That works in politics and makes strange or common bedfellows. But that's not the church. That is what destroys the church. Brothers wash each other's feet and let themselves be washed. Brothers want to be corrected by God's Word and they correct others as they would have others correct them. What a golden rule!

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<sup>16</sup>Walther, *Ansprachen und Gebete*. p. 12

### 3. Why Implementation is Failing; Icebergs and their Tips.

If, indeed, sins of the flesh are not being addressed with God's Word in the parishes of the church and flesh is being indulged instead of crucified by the grace of the Holy Spirit, through faith, then it could not be surprising if the secondary structure, created as a safeguard, will not only not be effective, but will reflect the error and spiritual disease within the body. If the watch guards know that those who are pursuing their flesh will be allowed to do so, that the high courts (the churches) have shut down, what can they do? A secondary redundancy cannot take the place of what Christ has instituted. Even if it originally sprang from faith, if the faith it came from is now gone, nothing good can come of it.

The secondary Synodical structures are breaking because they are trying to do what they were not designed to do. The churches, congregations, are invested with the Keys and the judgement of their pastors, but now the adjudication of church workers no longer takes place in the congregations. Now it is done purely by the COP, the Synodical officers. This cannot be.

Congregations are now often not permitted to call pastors under the ruling of their DP's. This is impossible. But it is done under the excuse that congregations are troubled or unable to afford a pastor. So the DP takes over the situation for them. But that is not what Christ instituted. The authority and responsibility for the Keys are given to that congregation directly by Christ. The question must be asked if the Keys are being used according to Christ's institution in that church. If not there is a good spiritual reason why they are having their lamp removed from their lamp stand. They must be **instructed in God's Word**, turned in proper repentance and humility, and implore primarily God's grace and aid, not the district office, for restoration and guidance.

What is true for the individual must be true for the congregation. They must seek their help in the LORD in his Word. Not in man made institutions. So much as these institutions are sought for anything beyond what they were designed to do, they become substitutes for the true resource that every congregation has in Christ and his Word and the gifts and stewardship to support the Gospel he has given them. And, as an idol, any substitute will do nothing but drive idolaters into slavery and bondage to what they hoped would help, but cannot.

Too long have Missourians dreamed of 'getting the right man into the office' when the right man has been in the office all the time, that is, Christ at the right hand of God. So long as Christ is made secondary, in any corner of the Synod, Christ has opponents in his church that want to diminish him and marginalize him to the edges of his church, from his rightful, central position.

The Synodical organs have their problems and some of them are quite visible, but they are

merely the most visible tip of the iceberg. To pay such close attention to them is to ignore the root and substance of the problem. The problems of faith in the congregations, in each individual.

What is the main theological problem behind this malady?

### IV. Conclusion: The Battle for the Bible Lives in Our Midst; Jude 9,10.

Our church body has been applauded in some circles as being the only denomination who, once infected by the bug of higher Biblical criticism, that is, the approach which takes the Words of the Bible captive to the context, real or imagined, in which the Words of the Bible were originally written, repelled the error. Thus, as an example, it is commonly held in critical circles that Moses did not actually write the first five books of the Bible, but various oral traditions and/or written traditions were edited a number of times into the Torah during the Babylonian Captivity. Under that context (real or imagined) the concerns expressed in the Torah are concerns of another place and time than what is being handled in the Words themselves. Legends of creation and stories from other cultures are supposedly woven together as a literary device to create the text received, and the authority of the text is, therefore, not historical, but spiritual. To get this spiritual truth, the context (real or imagined, and substantially different than the context the Bible claims) must be determined in order to 'cleanse it' of its cultural biases. Thus the interpreter is the one who must purify the text corrupted in the 'process of inspiration', which is completely opposite to the claim of Scripture itself to be pure, to not lie, and to, itself, make holy and to purify sinful men who read it and (do not doubt but) believe it. Its one or the other.

The Bible's meaning and truth is thus divorced from the Words of the text, which must even be sanitized from the cultural biases held by the author or editors by the Biblical interpreter. Thus the outcome or meaning of a text is totally dependent not upon the Words of the text, but the interpreter's presuppositions (real or imagined) about the context in which it was written, and the purposes the human author or editor was supposed to have had in writing and publishing it, none of which can be known for certain. The Word of God, thus, becomes dependent upon the imagination of the man who reads and studies it. He guesses at its meaning. So the text is said to contain the Word of God, but it is not the Word of God.

Our church body is the first to use this method and then to spit it out and reject its presuppositions. But dissatisfaction with God's Word is the foundational erosion which always must ruin the church of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus

Christ its main cornerstone. As Christ and his Word is what creates and sustains the church, it is at this point that the church is always under attack by the echo of those ancient, tempting words of tragic consequence, “Hath God really said?”

Though there was some noble wrangling over this issue, the process by which it was handled led to a great deal of confusion. After an appropriate and thorough investigation by a committee appointed by the Synodical President at the time, J.A.O. Preus II, the faculty of the St. Louis Seminary was found to be heretical because of the use of the Historical Critical Method and its presuppositions, and were declared by Synodical Convention to be heretical. This was appropriate and within the process of Synod. **But were they excommunicated?** In the process of finding heresy by the secondary support system for the congregations, which was correct, but extra Biblical, the Biblical process of excommunication was never carried through. Unless we were to contradict Walther, who said that the Synod was no “highest court in the land” or “consistory”, or “administrator of the Office of the Keys”, Synod had made a ruling of heresy. But the primary and Biblical process of “telling it to the church” that is, the congregation, the pastor and people with whom these faculty members gathered around Christ with the Office of the Keys, what Walther DOES call the highest court in the land, the Right Hand of God, was missing. It never happened. The secondary safety valve had taken the place of the mandated Office of the Keys.

Though the Battle of the Bible was fought and seemed to be won, it only seemed so. Why? Because the highest authority in the land and the church, Christ, had not made a judgement with his people, his priesthood, to settle the matter. The church had not respected the polity and the principles upon which she had been founded. She had made the right roster decision, but never sought to pursue it through the Office of the Keys, the congregations and pastors responsible for their being absolved or excommunicated. Why were their pastors and churches not charged and involved in trying the facts and demanding repentance or excommunication? It was missing.

And with the Office of the Keys disabled, because, after all, this is too much for the lay people to understand and sort out, all that we are left with is politics, hoping to get the right guy in the top office, getting enough votes to be elected, and ignoring the Right Guy who stands in his Office already and who is in the midst of people who are burying the Keys he gave them in the congregation. Let Synod do it. That abrogation causes a huge sucking noise worse than NAFTA. What else can result from that evacuation but the attempt to fill a (n unfillable) vacuum with power and politics? But the political problem is just the symptom of the general disease. It reflects the problem. It is not the problem itself. And, as a man-made redundancy, and ‘helping office’ established in freedom by the church, cannot take the place of Christ and his Keys, it can only be

a blessing in connection and in obedience to the same.

The church, the congregations should have been included, trusted and reminded of their duty to the professors under investigation. But maybe, just maybe, the popularity and the status of these St. Louis scholars would have demanded more respect in their churches and by their pastors than God’s Word. But what’s wrong with that? A church being revealed as dead, even while it has a name that it is alive, is not such a bad thing. That revelation keeps people who are believers from being fooled. It helps them know what to avoid!

#### **A. The Danger of Promoting the Material Principle over the Formal Principle.**

So if the second pillar supporting the church is church discipline (see Walther quote, p. 10 ), we must recognize that it is the Law and the Rule of Faith (doctrine and confession) that have been weakened or, better stated, are not being applied. This doctrinal standard is in all synodical and congregational constitutions, the doctrinal standards of Scripture and the Confessions, Scriptures being the sole rule and norm of the Christian’s faith and life, and the Confessions the ‘normed norms’.

The two great principles that describe this authoritative voice to be honored above all things in the church are the so-called “formal” and “material” principles. The formal principle directs us to the sole source of the reliable revelation of God, that is, the Holy Scriptures. The Scriptures alone authoritatively inform the church. The material principle targets us on the chief message, what MATTERS most in the holy Scriptures, that is, the saving doctrine of Christ, the justification of sinners for the sake of and by the merits and atonement of Christ, crucified and risen, by God, by grace through faith.

But which of those two principles comes first? The formal principle, the Bible, or the material principle, Christ? In the author’s personal observation, the material principle, Christ, or the Gospel, is placed before the formal principle, the Bible, in our fellowship. Even those who have utter respect for the Bible do so as an effect (secondary) with Jesus being the cause (primary), because they have found therein the voice of their Good Shepherd, Jesus, tasted his grace, and been converted and sated by his dying, martyred love for them and his victory over sin, death, hell and devil. Thank God that Christ has found them there, by his Word!

But a tendency to elevate the material principle, Christ, over the formal principle, the Bible, is the very danger which friends and opponents have leveled against our church, without, perhaps, helping us to understand why. It is the problem of anti-Nomianism, or, to say it another

way, Gospel-reductionism; a disaffection with the Law and a replacement of the authority of the Law with that of the Gospel. As such, the Law is not really and truly God's Law (hath God really said?), and his only Word to us is the Gospel. This view certainly shares some uncomfortable similarities to Historical Critical suppositions, and may be more dangerous because it is more subtle and closer to the truth.

But if the Law is not really God's Word, if God's curse for sin is not real and genuine, if the Law is a truth that really isn't the truth, and the Gospel is the thing that trumps the Law's authority and replaces it with something else, then all we must preach is the Gospel, since the Law is no longer relevant. And if the Law is no longer relevant, then repentance, or turning from sin is a lie, a turning away from nothing, the curse of God for sinners is emptied, as well as hell. God is no longer sending any sinners to hell because his Law, that stands against them, is no longer true and authoritative. Then the Bible is NOT the Word of God (inasmuch as it is Law) but only contains the Word of God (the Gospel). And then the faithful can no longer have a Word of God that tells them what kind of life and works please him, because God is not displeased with anything anymore, because his Law is no longer true.

This is not what our Catechism teaches us nor Scriptures. The Bible says, "The fear of God is the BEGINNING of Wisdom." Luther says in the explanation of the Commandments, "We should FEAR and love God." Fear comes, and still must come, from breaking His Commandments. And where do we learn his Commandments and his wrath over sin? In the Bible. In the Law.

Is Christ in that teaching of the Law? Yes. He alone was obedient to it. But the Law and the curse come before the promise of Christ and before his incarnation in the record of holy Scriptures. If Christ had not been promised or come, and if the material principle were not, "Christ delivered us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us", but were "you are sinners and God is going to justly send you to hell for your sins, and his Son is going to judge you for all of your sins and you will be in torment forever," the Word of God, the Bible would still be authoritative. It is not, per se, the Law or the Gospel that is authoritative, but God who speaks it. In fact, just that terrible judgement is going to be the material principle for unbelievers on the last day, despite the authority of the Gospel, which is salvation for all sinners. This is exactly the message of the Bible that will matter most to unbelievers on the last day. And it is a true message that is not overturned by the Gospel. God's Word is true is the first tenet of the faith. And for a person to be converted he must first believe that he is damned and that damnation is authoritative, from God. The material principle must follow after the formal principle just as to

convert sinners the Holy Spirit first uses the Law to kill, and then the Gospel to make alive.

The Gospel is the wondrous material principal precisely **because** the Law is true<sup>17</sup>. Christ came into the true and condemning Law, and, by the vicarious atonement, took the curse and removed it, so that all who are weary and heavy laden, directly as a result of the truth of the Law, can find rest in him. Thank God that is authoritative, also! See, the 'It is finished' from the cross does not nullify the Law, it fulfills it for us. It does not deny its authority, but spends and enforces the Law's authority beyond what we could ever have dreamed, that God would spend his wrath on his Son, sent under the authoritative Law to save us. The joy of Salvation is this; first being authoritatively sent to hell because of our sins, being sentenced by Almighty God beyond our guilt, beyond our remorse, beyond what we could ever imagine because we have not experienced it, beyond ourselves, all the way to the fate that we should arrive at forever, but then being authoritatively promised by our Savior himself, who endured our hell and is raised the right hand of God, that we will be with him in Paradise. If anyone is not joyful and satisfied in that, he has no faith or has fallen from faith. For that is the joy promised us that exceeds our experience and CAN only be grasped by faith as we are told it, as a gift of the Holy Ghost.

And if the authoritative absolution of the Gospel is not received in faith, the Law's authority is left for those who reject the Gospel, who, by their own rejection, refuse what God has appointed for their peace. Christ's Words in John 3 apply to him. "Whoever does not believe in the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains over him (the authority of the Law)."

Walther **never** placed the material principle first when delineating the principles of the church's doctrine. Walther's citing of these two principles and their order in his theology are myriad and consistent in his sermons. I will not belabor an exhaustive series of citations on this count, but I could. Let the following suffice, from Walther's Sermon at the Synodical Jubilee<sup>18</sup>:

Our Synod has, then, constantly remained by this, her primal foundation, and has remained so to this present hour. It was nothing new that she sought to possess or that she also intended to use to enlighten both the world and Christianity. Much rather she had always been glad to be chided for not being forward looking, but always looking backwards and that she completely avoided any innovated

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<sup>17</sup>See Jesus' Words in Mt. 5.17-19; St. Paul in Romans 3, especially vs. 31

<sup>18</sup>Walther, *Brosamen*. p. 556f.

methods. Obedience to the apostolic command: “Guard what has been entrusted to you,” and “fight for the faith which was once delivered to the saints,” that, and nothing further, was our goal.

We have, therefore, **in the first place**, held to **the chief principle in all of Christianity**, that the canonic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, from the first to the last letter, the Word of the great God, inspired by the Holy Ghost himself, are **the single rule and norm of all faith and life and all doctrine and teachers and the highest judge of all religious disputes. We have, further, retained the second highest principle of our truly evangelical church, that the doctrine of justification of a poor sinner before God is only from grace, only for the sake of Christ and, therefore, also, only through faith, as the first and highest foundational article of the whole Christian religion, by which our church stand or falls.** Further, we have retained the doctrine that the eternal election of God is an election of grace, that the atonement of Christ, the God man, is universal and complete, but that sins and death are solely of the devil and of the evil will of man. Further, we have retained the doctrine that the Word and the holy Sacraments are the constantly effective, true and only Means of Grace that offer and distribute the Spirit, grace and salvation; that the Word of God is the power of God to save all who believe on it; that Holy Baptism is the water of rebirth to eternal life and the holy Supper is the true body and blood of JESUS Christ, the highest pledge of the forgiveness of sins. We have retain the doctrine that all people are, by nature, dead in sins, bereft of free will in spiritual matters, children of wrath and damnation and that, therefore, no one, by his own reason or strength, believes in JESUS Christ, his LORD or comes to him, but that a person, only through the Gospel by the Holy Ghost, and only in the terror worked in him by the law in true contrition and repentance, can come to faith, but that this true faith purifies the heart, makes a person born again and into a new person in heart, mind, spirit and in all his abilities. Further, we have retained the doctrine of good works, that these are only works commanded by God, works of love done in faith, and that they are necessary for every Christian. **We have retained the doctrine that the true church, apart from which there is no salvation, is the invisible assembly of all believers and saints, to which Christ has given the keys of heaven, by which she opens heaven in Holy Absolution and closes heaven by**

**the ban, that is, really and truly, she forgives and retains sins on earth, in a manner that also avails simultaneously in heaven.** We have retained the doctrine that the church has only one head, that is, the invisible head, JESUS Christ, but that the Roman papacy, which desires to be the visible head of the church, is the Anti-Christ the Scripture predicts, that man of sins and the child of perdition who would sit in the temple of God as God and act as if he were God. We have further retained the doctrine of Christian freedom, that is, that the churches as churches, the congregations as congregations, the Christians as Christians, are not only free from the curse and compulsion of the eternal, divine law, but are also completely free from all temporal laws, as well as from all human laws, so that no creature, no pastor, no churchly counsel, no Synod, no church council, not even the church itself could give any law and lay it on the conscience, that, much rather, nothing is commanded him but faith and love. **But we have also retained the doctrine that the church is responsible to practice discipline of faith and life and, therefore, to exclude from their fellowship all who stubbornly depart from sound doctrine or stubbornly sin against God’s clear command.** We have remained with the doctrine that the church in this world is and remains a kingdom of the cross and has nothing to await but the visible return of the LORD on the last day, to awaken the dead and to judge the living and the dead. In short, we have retained the old doctrine of the ancient primitive church, as the church of the Reformation has set them down in her confessions, not wanting to improve or change it a bit.

While the Battle for the Bible may have been fought and some declared victory on that basis, the question remains in our church body as to the use of the Law and its application. Is the Law to be used to continue to frighten sinners? Are those who claim to follow Jesus allowed to act in freedom against the doctrine of Christ and the Law of God because of Christ’s Gospel? Or does faith not only save a person, but also, then, drive him to hate his sin that still remains in him, to war against it, to still plead for grace for it, and to desire and strive to be in the image of Christ, who is united and obedient in mind, heart, spirit and work with the Father in love? If the Gospel does away with God’s will for what a person is to be as dictated in his Law, then it is a license to sin. But if faith regards the truth and goodness of God in both the Law and the Gospel and sees Christ as the one who binds all together, Law and Gospel, God and sinful man, justification **and**

**sanctification**, then the formal principle will be first, and there will be no seam between the formal and the material principles; between the authority of all of God's Word and the saving and sanctifying grace that we have in Jesus, our Savior. Then the Word of God will be the norm and standard and guide, not only for faith, but also for the new life that stems from faith. And from that Word, what does not come from faith, will be hated by the sinner himself insasmuch as it is also hated and rejected by God, and will be the source of the Christian's desire to be rebuked when he sins to be pointed to grace, and his wanting to do unto others as Christ has done unto him; to rebuke and to save others, as the Christian himself has been treated by Christ. And as the Christian, so the church. And as the church, so the Synod and her organs in rostering and overseeing.

### **B. Removing Logs and Dealing with Splinters.**

As the Christian so the church. What about the Christian? Jesus says in his Sermon on the Mount, "First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

The Christian is not equipped to remove the blindness and hindrances, the sin and rebellion of the flesh in others, unless he is first helped by God's grace. A plank is large and ponderous, while a splinter is small and minor. The plank in our own eyes, our own spiritual malady and sin, blinds us. And it is always greater than the sin we notice in our neighbors. In fact it is our spiritual ignorance, our blindness, that is so good at seeing some minor sin in our neighbor while disregarding our constant state of sin that we live in. But if we are living in a lively recognition of God's Law and become aware of the sin living constantly in our own flesh, we must be overwhelmed by our terrible problem and fear for our own salvation and be helped by fleeing for refuge to the infinite mercy of Christ in his Word and Sacraments, who forgives us so much everyday, freely in his love. It is a pitiful sight to see an unconverted person, who lives in the illusion of his own righteousness, by his own blindness to his sinfulness, try to convert an unbeliever. Walther mentions this in a sermon for the First Sunday in Advent<sup>19</sup>:

Now it would certainly be a great travesty if a person wanted to convert others and didn't bother about his own conversion. An unconverted person trying to

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<sup>19</sup>Walther, *Brosamen*. p. 3

convert others is not a pretty sight. His zeal to convert others is only based on and dominated by showing off his works, or parading his spiritual pride.

The Christian church is not the place where people are converted to faith, but where they come because they are converted and are in faith (with the plank in their eye removed). Walther often states Biblical fruits of faith, in conformity with being a new Creation in the image of Christ. He does so not only as a means of Biblically identifying what faith is like, but as a diagnostic for whether a person has faith, if he understands the true nature of his sin and God's grace, if he has love for God's Word, and submission to the Word as authoritative. These are how the Bible characterizes faith, when the plank has been graciously removed from a sinner's eyes. We must have been shown this by God in his grace, bringing us to repentance and joyful rescue in Christ, before we dare to help others with the smaller blemishes that we can see in their lives, compared to our own. Hear Walther's 13<sup>th</sup> address to new members of his congregation<sup>20</sup>:

A Christian congregation is, as the word itself reveals, an assembly of Christians and, indeed, of true Christians.

It is certainly true that there is no visible congregation that consists purely of true Christians. Also people who are only pretending to be Christians (*Scheinchristen*) are always sneaking into a Christian congregation. But such people are, in God's eyes, not members of the congregation, even if they are considered so in the eyes of man, and whenever they are, ultimately, revealed publicly to not be Christians, a true Christian congregation must expel them again from herself, if she cannot bring them to repentance.

But then who is a true Christian? A true Christian is, putting it briefly, a person whose heart believes on Christ.

The fact that a person comes from Christian parents, that he was once baptized as a child, that he diligently attends church, goes to confession and the holy LORD's Supper, that he outwardly leads a Christian life does not, in itself, make him a true Christian. No, no work, in short, nothing external makes a person a Christian. This is a matter that much rather is determined by his inner condition, the condition of his heart.

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<sup>20</sup>Walther, *Ansprachen und Gebete*. pp. 26ff

A true Christian, as was said, is one whose heart believes on Christ. But, in the first place, only a person has this faith on Christ **who actively acknowledges that he needs a Christ, a Savior, a Redeemer from sins, a Sanctifier, that he, therefore, is a lost and condemned sinner without Christ, who, therefore does not consider his sins a trivial matter, but is troubled and sorrowful because of them, and whose heart is disturbed for the sake of his salvation. But this being disturbed about his salvation must, then, also have led him to make Christ, that is, Christ's life, suffering, death and his service to him his sole comfort and, thus, and to believe in him from his heart.**

But there are many who have also experienced all this, but, either suddenly or gradually, have inwardly fallen away.

So how can a person see whether he still stands in faith and has not fallen away again? The most important evidences are these:

**A true Christian desires God's Word from his heart.**

A true Christian does not cling to the world, does not take part in its vanities, nor does he live by worldly principles.

A true Christian not only reads and hears God's Word, but also searches it, and considers every clearer understanding that he receives in divine matters a precious treasure.

A true Christian is not ashamed of his faith when in the presence of unbelievers, but confesses it before the world and gladly bears scorn for the sake of his faith.

**A true Christian is, indeed, still assaulted every day by manifold sins of weakness, but he no longer loves any sins, but is prepared to die before willfully committing what he knows to be a sin** and he, therefore, avoids those situations of temptation.

A true Christian loves, more than anyone else, those whom they observe to be genuinely pious.

A true Christian not only regularly prays his morning prayer, his table prayers, and his evening prayer, but is often driven to bend his knee before God and to fervently cry out to God in his many responsibilities.

A true Christian does not seek to become rich and to accumulate wealth, but is satisfied with the blessings God has given him, and the more earthly wealth he

has been given by God, the more generous he becomes.

A Christian is not proud, does not seek to exalt himself above anyone, does not strive for glory from men but, much rather, **considers himself the chief of all sinners, and is glad to be chastened by his brothers.**

These are, then, the most important evidences of a true Christian.

Well then, today, upon your entrance into our congregation, take a look at yourselves in this mirror. If you find your image in it, blessed are you! If, on the other hand, you find the opposite, then, by all means, repent this very day!

That last line is an admonition to hypocrites that they may be joining the church, but apart from recognizing the plank of sin that is still in their eye and embracing the grace Christ is present to give, they are not truly converted nor members of the church. It is a warning that they will be looked for and excluded when they evidence their not being a Christian by not receiving the Word or the restoring rebuke of the brother. The rest of the description of what Walther calls a 'true Christian' is pointing out the plank that has been removed from their eyes to become a Christian if they are. Pride in self over others. Greed. Indifference or hatred towards God's Word. Refusal to learn and to be corrected by God's Word. All these are characteristics of the plank of the flesh's rebellion that the Gospel has forgiven and removed. And faith still struggles and confesses these attributes of the flesh, and brings them to God's grace in Christ, at his right hand, in the midst of the congregation, in Word and Sacraments. This is definitive of the church and of God's people. They are in a state of repentance in his grace.

That is why justification through faith is always synonymous with justification by grace. Grace does not pour into us in such a way that we become, ontologically holy, but holy only by God's declaration and grace, the declaration of Christ from the right hand of God through the OHM, the means of Grace.

**A Christian does not accept in himself what is against God's Word, Law or Gospel, but recognizes such things as a real and present spiritual danger, lies from the father of lies, which need a stronger man than himself, Christ, to be defeated. Thus he is dependent, spiritually, on Christ and his grace. Independence from the same, is independence from Christ and to fall back under the sentence of the Law.**

**It is this life and death dependence of faith on Christ that gives steadfast commitment to church membership.** As Peter said, "Lord, to whom shall we go, you have the Words of eternal life." Those who depart from the Lord have not that faith. They must be warned by true Christians,

if the Christians care about them and their salvation. But this care for others is no more and no less than that care that the Christian has for himself. He himself knows that he can fall easily from faith and that is why he values the rebuke of his Christian brothers. The fact that he himself wants to be watched and corrected from his error, leads him to have the same concern to rebuke others in the faith. This is also a reason for joining the Christian congregation. EVERY CHRISTIAN WITH TRUE FAITH **DESIRES** TO BE REBUKED WHEN THEY DO WRONG. It is the mark of unbelief to say I have no sin and no need for rebuke. The apostle says such a person calls God a liar, and the truth (Christ) is not in him.

Walther's sermons are filled with warnings against being Christians, but not having faith. He warns the church against keeping people in the church when it is obvious that they are no longer Christians, when they do not want to be rebuked and corrected by God's Word, when the Gospel becomes an excuse to do anything, instead of being freed to do the will of the Father and make their living a life of service to God rather than to self and self interests. He says in his 14<sup>th</sup> address to new members<sup>21</sup>:

In our old fatherland it is thought to be of utmost importance that all who are born into the state church (*Landeskirche*) must be tightly bound to her.

So when recently the socialists and some other unbelievers, who were not being given their way, threatened to leave the state church, it caused a great stir and everything possible was done to keep them from leaving.

But that was so foolish.

It's as foolish as planting weeds in your garden; as foolish as not wanting to allow traitors in a besieged city to leave, as these pose the greatest danger; as foolish as a ship about to be shipwrecked by a raging storm not wanting to throw its ballast overboard into the deep; as foolish as not wanting to separate out the diseased sheep from the flock, who would ultimately infect the whole flock. So it is just as foolish to want to keep those who are not Christians in the church, or to receive them into membership, only in order to increase the number of members. For as sheep do not convert wolves, but the wolves slaughter the sheep, so unchristian people do not support the church, but destroy it.

**But this is also contrary to God's clear Word. Christ says in Matthew 18:**

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<sup>21</sup>Walther, *Ansprachen u. Gebete*. pp. 28f

**“Regard him as a heathen man and a tax collector,” that means, exclude him from the congregation.** As among the Corinthians, when an incestuous man was discovered and the congregation had not excluded him, **Paul harshly chastised the congregation** and gave them the direction that if anyone called himself a brother and lived by the works of the flesh, he must be expelled. “Remove from yourselves whomever is evil.”

Also, if someone is overtaken in false doctrine and has a false faith, so, according to God's Word, he should not be tolerated nor, much less, received. “So if anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house and do not welcome him. For whoever welcomes him makes himself a participant in his wicked works.” ( 2 John 10,11)

So you also are being received into our fellowship because we hope that you are true Christians and that you confess the true faith in word and deed. We hope that you have learned, by the illumination of the Holy Ghost, that you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven with a life that is manifestly lived in service to sin, but also not by a life that is only honorable by external appearances, that you, therefore, have come to true repentance and have, thus, become new men.

Oh, may you not disappoint us in our hope, either in doctrine, or in life!

The whole liturgical shape of the church in Walther's day was geared towards personal repentance, and the enjoyment and responsibility for the conduct of the Office of the Keys in the local, Christian congregation. It has been noted in a recent translation of one collection of Walther's sermons and addresses, that Walther and the church of his day were much more concerned with personal examination of faith and the need for on-going personal repentance, as diagnostic of the existence of true faith, than the church of our day.<sup>22</sup> This emphasis on personal repentance as fruit of living faith is observed in the cited collection (see footnote) in the series of sermons for their yearly day of repentance (liturgically scheduled on the Friday before Advent 1) and over thirty Confessional Addresses delivered before the celebration of Communion at Confessional Services those communing were required to attend (foot washing first) before

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<sup>22</sup>See J.R. Baseley, “The Mark of Grandfather's Church, Occasional Repentance,” from the appendix of his translation of *Occasional Sermons and Addresses of C.F.W. Walther (CPH 1889)*, Translated by J.R. Baseley, Mark V Publications. 2006. Available as a free download in e-Book format from: c:\www.markvpublications.com\Walther\_OSA.html

receiving Communion. These addresses pointedly asked the question, are you still in a living faith? And the basic tenets of the faith, fear of God for the sake of our own works, and trusting in God for the sake of his, were emphasized so that the Sacrament of the Altar would not be abused and taken to their judgement (used apart from true faith and to affirm a sinful life) but to their benefit (forgiveness and sanctification).

While we teach the Ten Commandments, I hope, in Confirmation class, are they used by all of our Communicants to examine their lives, to see their lack of righteousness, so that they can come hungry to the table and be satisfied by grace? Those who do so are blessed, and, in that true faith, desire the same for others. What God does for them in both Law and Gospel they want for others, for all. Blessed redundancy. The blessing of God.

In truth, does not a herd mentality prevail in our own celebrations of the Sacrament? Is there any care at all that our own members might be abusing and misusing the Sacrament? Is there an understanding that, Biblically, the concern is not frequency as a law, but the use of the Law as a self-examination tool, self judgement, according to St. Paul, that keeps us from being judged as we receive the Sacrament?

So, if I, as a believer, want to confess and be cleansed of everything in me that is offensive to God and sinful, if I understand that is God's will and plan in salvation for me, I must have the same understanding of the church, as a whole. As I, in faith, do not tolerate in my life what is against God's Word, but want it taken away and forgiven, lest I be condemned, then that is also what I want to have done, and will be a part of its being done for my neighbor, and especially my fellow church member. What frees me, in Christ, to rebuke and to correct what is displeasing to God is my thankful have been given such rebuke and correction from Christ. His rebuke is worth more to me than the world's praise. For his rebuke, in grace, always leads me to death and life in Christ's gospel. As I value Christ sanctifying me through rebuke and forgiveness, I must, in love for others, rebuke and protect others by grace.

As it is for the Christian, so it is for the church. As it is for the church, so it is for the Synod of churches and in our relations to other church bodies.

And in that alone is the hope for our beloved LCMS. Christ is still in our midst. The authority of the Office of the Keys is still in the midst of our congregations, as clearly taught in God's Word, as is confessed in our Catechism, as can be available to be taught, performed, preached and distributed publicly by the OHM, as is the immediate possession of our congregations since Christ is, according to his promise, in their midst, as the source of salvation and the fountain of living waters for those who will drink.

**But the body is sick from the soles of its feet to the head.** The Word is available but it is not being heeded. And those who openly do not heed it and disparage its authority to guide and lead both their faith and life are becoming more and more prolific like weeds that have overtaken a lawn. Opponents to God's pure Word demand to be included as members of the church, and those who respect the Word do not respect it enough to lose anything to keep it. So in fear they bury the Keys given them by Christ, do not use the Word, and then wonder why they are so afraid. They have every reason to be afraid, just for that reason. Christ could justly take our lamp from its lampstand and we deserve no less for our burying the Keys given us and fearing men, while Christ with all power and authority is there to be our strength! We fear man instead of God.

It is this sinful fear that each must face; the fear of loss for the sake of the Word. For that is the primal lie that Christ came to remove with the truth. If we have the Word, and, by God's grace we truly grasp it and keep it in faith, nothing can be taken from us. For the Word is God. With the Word we are partakers of the Godhead himself. There's nothing can be taken away from us if we have the giver of everything good and he is our Father, who loves us. Just at that point Jesus promises us true freedom. Freedom to lose everything and stand alone with God, our true wealth. That is the nature of the good fight of faith in every true believer. As Luther states in his marvelous Christmas Sermon on Isaiah 9<sup>23</sup>:

As Christ holds the victory without sword and physical prowess, He is being described as Gideon-like. He prophesies that this would be the new method of warfare in the kingdom of Christ. There would be no corporeal king nor would one fight on behalf of another, nor would one fight in concert with another. **Rather, each individual must overcome alone, by himself, through faith and the Spirit, as Christ overcame death, sins and the law. Each will depend upon no one except upon Christ alone. Only Christ must be established. For you cannot know who might be a believer or an unbeliever next to Him. That is why it is a wondrous battling in Christendom. Each single man shall stand against every devil, against the whole world, against death, sins and the law, and yet hold the victory...**

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<sup>23</sup>Martin Luther, *Festival Sermons of Martin Luther*, Mark V Publications. 2005. pp. 79f

The means to our restoration is confession of sins and reception, in faith, of God's grace and being satisfied in God's grace alone; excluding from our churches what God will never accept, rebellion to his Word and open rejection of both his Law, convicting of sin and guiding the sanctified life, and his saving Gospel.

We will not be judged on the last day as to our Synodical or Congregational affiliation, but with respect to our faith in his grace given us therein, and God will reward, by that same grace, the sanctification that he brought about in his people in their callings, their faithful use of his Word, the blessed Keys, he has entrusted to us, on that day. Each will stand alone in that judgement, as, by faith, he stood or refused to stand alone upon Christ, his gracious Savior. If God would give us what we deserve, we could only despair.

But if God would save us and bless us, it is by his grace. **Each must take responsibility** for not heeding his Word and instruction, following the world rather than "taking every thought captive to Christ", for burying the precious Office of the Keys under the fallen tenets of 'human love', for fearing to use them in whatever vocation given, for not valuing Christ and mining his doctrine for use in our offices, worth more than heaven and earth or anything that we might lose when we believe and follow and keep it and give our whole lives to supporting and practicing it. We must confess that we have earned the disaster coming our way; but we must confess this in the confidence that God wants to help us and forgive us as he faithfully promises.

For those who will not repent, this is just the beginning of a well deserved downward spiral which will be eternal. For those who do repent, even the coming disaster will only be for blessing and sanctification as we see idols fall, and our faith driven more closely to Christ and his Word, the shelter of his gracious promises. And what he forgives he will use as he wishes to bring forth fruits to himself of lives lived in service to him by serving our neighbor, and to his eternal praise! Amen.

### **C. Your Priesthood; Use It Or Lose It**

#### **Is Communion Being Used in Your Church for Sanctification or Is It Being Abused?**

This question must be addressed to each individual in our congregations. Does each person communing understand the depth of his sin problem, which still remains in his flesh, and the on-going need for God's appointed means of sanctification, that is, learning God's Word, confessing his sin for the sake of the Absolution, and receiving the Lord's Supper? Does each member DESIRE sanctification, that is, not the maintenance of his sins, but removal and victory over his sin by Christ's grace? Does he understand that if he fails to treasure and retain, but

despises or abuses the means appointed by Christ for his sanctification he will lose his salvation?

If that is the case for you, reader, then you MUST desire the same for your brothers and sisters in your church and for your family and neighbors. That concern for others is the nature of your priesthood and service to them.

Then, you must investigate your church to see if your goals (Christ's goals) are the same as your church's goal and practice. With your understanding of the Sacrament as the means of sanctification for sins which are acknowledged and shunned by the sinner, does your church commune people who openly break the Ten Commandments and intend to continue to do so? Does your church recognize false doctrine in other fellowships as sins against the Second Commandment that are publicly embraced by its members and that your church's responsibility is to help them out of their error and sin by first pointing out the sin of their confession and then helping them repent and shun that false doctrine (washing their feet), as marked by their having been instructed in the Catechism and publicly confessed the same, before communing them? Or are tenets of human love, that buries the Keys under an appearance of love, being used as an excuse to maintain sin through communion rather than removing it? In other Words, does your congregation practice open communion? If so she is abusing Christ's property and you are also accountable for that as a share holder in the Office of the Keys!

If this issue is not one that is open for discussion in your church, leave immediately and say why. Those who will not discuss a doctrinal issue are not acting under Scripture's authority. They must shy away from debate because they have no Word of God to stand on. The truth (Christ's Word) begs to be examined, the lie always wants to hide.

If the spiritual leadership will discuss it, use the Catechism to help you explain your concern. Express your concern over open communion to the district office with the charge that the Sacrament is being abused. Charge the pastors and elders and the congregation with misusing the Keys Christ gave to YOU. If they will not repent and return to Christ's authority, that is, his direction to mark and avoid false doctrine (Romans 16), then you must find a true church. Do not stay and fight if they will not listen to the Word. They are rejecting the only means both you and they have for fixing the problem. Use the judgement that you are given as part of the Priesthood, or you will lose it. Flee, lest you partake of her sins and perish! Find a congregation that does not have a name that it is alive but is dead, that is, a church that wants to follow Christ's Word no matter how uncomfortable or what the cost. Or find others in your church with this godly recognition and form a congregation that is in sure and pure fellowship with Christ.

This one issue is enough to expose where there may be true fellowship in our

congregations and where God's Word is being rejected. As laymen must judge their own congregations and pastors and the ones they encounter in this way, so pastors must engage this same question in their pastoral associations. Instead of don't ask and don't tell, they need to find out which pastors believe and teach that preaching/teaching as well as Holy Communion are Christ's only means of sanctification, not modern revivalistic movements or any other 'new measures' and that they will not let sentimental reasons or politics be used to commune those who are no longer in the faith, but that communion will be properly given those who truly feel and confess their sins, want to depart from them, and depend on Christ and his grace.

If area congregations are found that abuse Holy Communion and do not use it as a means of sanctification, but to affirm sin, then they also need to be reported to the district office with the expectation that they will be derostered and if not, with a demand to explain by what authority they are being kept on the roster when they violate God's Word publicly. And if they are derostered, they are not to be forgiven by Synod if they repent. They have the Office of the Keys. The pastor must repent to his congregation how he has misled them. They must repent to him for letting him mislead them. And all that based on the Word of Christ, which they hold immediately and must use or lose. The congregation must absolve the pastor if he repents and then decide if he can continue his call among them. And he as their pastor must forgive them. Based upon this sanctification by God's Word, the results can then be evaluated by Synod and their roster status appraised again with joy and integrity.

Though this process is dangerous and horrible, it is the good fight of faith, and it is the means by which we will recognize where the fellowship in our church is present and where it is not. If that means you end up in a much smaller fellowship than you now recognize, that's OK! It will be an honest number whatever it is. There will be peace in the fellowship that comes with sins forgiven and the confidence that we are not ignoring the voice of the Good Shepherd, but heeding and following/applying the same. But there are no double standards. There is only one who is over and above us all and is also in our midst if we would truly meet in his Name and not our own. The voice of Christ, the LORD, in its sole source, the Bible, is, for us as individuals, for us as congregations, for us as Synod the only authority that saves and will someday judge us. Who is listening? You first must answer for yourself. God grant you grace, faith and faithfulness!

*For who bears not the battle's strain, the crown of life shall not obtain.*

To God Alone Be Glory