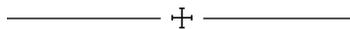


# The Divine Institution of the Preaching Office: A Trail Map of Instruction and Comfort for Christ's Bride or How to Slay Bridezilla

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## INTRODUCTION

If you have been a baptized Christian for any length of time, then you are painfully familiar with the wrinkles and moles which the Bride of Christ bears. When the baptized individual looks in the mirror, he still sees a sinner in need of the Law's fatal blow and the Gospel's resurrecting balm. Additionally—and not surprisingly—this sin bears itself out within the corporate life of the gathered Church. We are soberingly aware of how the drop-dead gorgeous Bride of Christ can sometimes look more like a hideous Bridezilla. A terrifying creature, indeed. Teeth bared, claws sharpened, ready to pounce. Specific to our purposes today, this can happen when both pastors and laity sinfully forget that they together are the Church—that you can't have one without the other. When pastors lord it over the lambs of Christ, which all of us are tempted to do at times; when the sheep of God not only stray in ignorance, but even fight in zeal against the undershepherd whom God has given them; in all of this the temptation can be to think that God's Word has somehow failed—that it's not as powerful as we thought it should be. The pastor is tempted to think, "There's no good dirt to be found, so why bother sowing the seed? It's one thing to sow the seed onto a path where birds *might* pluck it away; it's another thing when the path willingly sets the table for the crow." The tares are in cahoots with the thorns; the Law and Gospel that together are strong to save seem to be choked out. We'd settle for leaven in half of the lump. We'd be happy with a sapling of a mustard tree, because the tree worthy of bird's nest seems a distant pipe dream.

So what are we to do when such wrinkles and moles appear? When pastor and/or laity forget their God-given vocations in times of sinful weakness? Too often the answer is given that *we* must take it upon ourselves to perform a kind of plastic surgery on Christ's bride. Clearly *something* is not working, so let's try anything, as long as it's new and attractive. Nip the current pastor and get a new one. Tuck the dusty liturgy aside and give the Church a facelift with a new and inspiring worship service. Inject her with the Botox of streamlined, result-producing, church growth principles. Get her

gussied up with a comfortable atmosphere—a community vibe—complete with a coffee bar and trendy, authentic leadership. Maybe my critiques are a bit heavy-handed. Maybe. But you get the point.

However, when we're done with all of our nipping and tucking of Christ's bride; when we have copiously slathered on the world's make-up; when we set out to make over the Bride of Christ, no matter how clean and attractive she may emerge from the operating room—what inevitably happens is that we unwittingly assume the role of Dr. Frankenstein. A foot from there, a limb from here, a hand from over there; stitch it all together, conceal it with make-up, cover it over with an expensive gown, and voila! We've created St. What's-Happening-Now Lutheran Church that may *look* very beautiful, but whose beauty is utterly and humanly manufactured. There are actually more moles and wrinkles than before—now they're just covered over and ignored. Bridezilla has been successfully unleashed: a church who cares more about what she looks like to the world than she does in the eyes of her Groom. And if I may push the metaphor just a tad harder, in the last 3 or 4 decades, for the sake of "growing the church", we have taken the already gorgeous bride of Christ, subjected her to this plastic surgery, dressed her up like a glamorous call girl, and sent her out as a woman of the night to the street corners of the world, making seductive promises. "Come here. I have what you want. I'll fulfill your desires. I have something for everybody. Come in, and you will not be sorry." An extreme metaphor? Perhaps. But not by too much. It certainly wouldn't be the first time God's people had played the harlot.<sup>1</sup>

So, rather than asking what *we* must do to conform the Bride of Christ to our image and make her attractive to the crusty, carnal, old Adam—which always ends in adulterous and idolatrous disaster—instead we ought to ask how we are to be faithful to what God has already created. What has He already given his Bride that will guard her and keep her in the faith handed down once for all to the saints?<sup>2</sup> It is God, after all—not us—who daily makes beautiful his Bride. With *his* Word and *his* Sacraments God continues to adorn *his* church by killing her and making her alive; transforming her and making holy *his* people according to *his* good pleasure. And yes, that reality isn't always as evident to our human eyes as we would hope. No, from our human perspective, it looks like a tiny mustard seed, or a little bit of leaven. But that doesn't mean that the Word has failed.

So, what does all of this have to do with Walther? Well, it is within this kind of difficult situation that Walther's second thesis on the Office can be seen as a trail map of

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. for example Judges 2:17; 8:27, 33; 1 Chronicles 5:25; Psalm 106:39; Isaiah 1:21; Jeremiah 3:1, 6, 8; Ezekiel 16:15-17, 25-26, 28-29; Hosea 2:2, 5; 3:3; 4:10, 12-15.

<sup>2</sup> Jude 3.

sorts, with the final goal and destination being faithfulness to Christ's Word. "X" marks the faithful spot, if you will, and the fruit that is borne from following the trail is twofold: 1) diligent instruction and 2) great comfort. This second thesis is, on one hand, a call to repentance. The fact that the Office of Holy Ministry is divinely instituted is a call to both pastors and laity to repent of their pride and idolatrous human opinions which are all-too-often imposed upon the Church for the sake of making her relevant and attractive. No, there is a road—a path to follow—and we would do well to remain on it. And so this thesis is, in a sense, a reminder that this Church—including the Office of the Ministry—is not ours to do with what we like. No, she is Christ's; *we* are Christ's.

But that also means that the second thesis is a kind of good news; the proclamation that it is Christ who is at work here. Yes, he does his work *among* and *through* his Bride—but ultimately *despite* her and, most importantly, *for* her. It is Christ who makes pastor and laity together who they are as the Church. They have been joined together on a journey not of their own making, but by the external means of grace gifted by their Lord. Each has a distinct and good vocation on the journey, and the divine institution of the Office is a kind of trail map to guide them. As Marquart says, "Priesthood and ministry each have their own sphere and orientation. Competition between them is as pathological as conflict between lungs or feet and the rest of the body."<sup>3</sup> When both pastor and laity consult the map frequently along the journey, the symbiotic relationship<sup>4</sup> between their two distinct and good vocations is a wondrous and beautiful thing. When the map is ignored by either party and the Church meanders off into the enthusiastic wilderness of human whims and desires—beware. Bridezilla is sure to come out of hibernation. And so today my goal is to present the second thesis as a sort of safeguard. A way to slay Bridezilla. But in addition to that, it is a source of diligent instruction that results in great comfort for the Church.

Let us now move to the thesis itself to discover the instruction and comfort that it can provide. Thesis II on the Office states that "[t]he preaching office or the pastoral office is not a human institution but an office that God Himself has established." In other words, the Office is divinely instituted. First we turn to the Scriptures.

## THE SCRIPTURES

That the Office of Holy Ministry is divinely instituted is straightforward enough, if one takes the Scriptures seriously. There are a number of passages that teach this. Let's just review some of the "greatest hits".

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<sup>3</sup> *Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics, Vol. IX: The Church, p. 107.*

<sup>4</sup> Marquart describes this relationship as "contrapuntal" and an "organic equilibrium" (*Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics, Vol. IX: The Church, p. 104*).

- In Matthew 10 and Luke 9, Jesus sends out his apostles and gives them authority to perform certain and specific duties. Jesus is the one doing the sending. Contrast this to Jeremiah 23:21-22, for example, where God is angry because prophets are going forth whom he did *not* send.
- In Matthew 16:18-19, Jesus gives the Office of the Keys to Peter. In John 21:15-19 he gives Peter the charge of shepherding, and in John 20 he gives the keys to all the apostles. And the point is that Jesus is the one who gives these things.
- In Matthew 23:34 Jesus promises to the scribes and Pharisees that he *will send* prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom they *will kill* and crucify, and some they *will flog* in their synagogues and persecute from town to town... Notice the future tense here. Christ promises that the preaching office would continue even after his early ministry is accomplished, and his words are certainly fulfilled in the lives of his apostles, not only in the fact that he sends them (Acts 1:8), but also that they are persecuted, flogged, and killed on account of Christ. Again, notice that Jesus is the one doing the sending.
- In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus commissions his apostles to make disciples by baptizing all nations and teaching them to observe or guard the entirety of Christ's Word. Again, who is doing the commissioning? Jesus is.
- In Acts 20:28 Paul reminds the Ephesian elders to pay careful attention to themselves and all of the flock, *in which the Holy Spirit has made them overseers* to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. It is noteworthy that Paul uses the imagery of flock and, by correlation, shepherd. This is exactly the office Jesus gave Peter in John 21:15-19 with the threefold charge to feed his lambs. Also, Paul reminds the elders how the Church is obtained: by Christ's own blood, which is no small thing. This is no ordinary gathering of people. These are the ones who have been purchased with the holy, shed blood of Christ. And finally, it is the church "of God". It belongs to him and no one else.<sup>5</sup> This is one of the clearest examples of the divine institution in Scripture.
- In 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 Paul says that the ministry of reconciliation which they carry out as ambassadors is *from God*.
- In the pastoral epistles, of course, we have the list of qualifications for those who would fill the "office" (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).

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<sup>5</sup> This is a good reminder to pastors that we should be careful how we speak. When a pastor refers to the congregation which he serves as "my people", he ought to be clear that what he means is that these are Christ's lambs which have been placed carefully into his pastoral care. This is not his church, but the church *of God*.

- And finally, of course, there is Ephesians 4:11-12. Who was it that gave the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherd-teachers? It was God. And as an aside, yes, there should be a comma after the clause “to equip the saints” in verse 12.<sup>6</sup>

That there is in fact a preaching office and that it is given by Christ to his apostles is quite clear in Scripture. Also, the fact that those apostles subsequently ordain more men to fill the same office *and* that they consider them as equals<sup>7</sup> shows us that the preaching office finds its source in the apostolic office (which was instituted by Christ) and is meant to continue.

Also, lest we think that the Office was a New Testament innovation, consider Walther’s inclusion of Gerhard, who describes Adam as the first human holder of the Office. It was given to him to proclaim God’s Word to Eve *for their good*. That Word included both the command concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil before their fall, as well as the promise concerning the Messiah after their fall—a promise which would continue to be delivered through the Office until the first Advent of Christ, and which continues to be delivered even now until his second Advent. Gerhard says in his fifth proof concerning the principle effective cause of the Office,

“For God not only administered the preaching office Himself in His own person when, in the state of innocence, He issued the command not to eat of the fruit of the forbidden tree and then after the fall, out of the deepest depths of His divine decree, revealed the promise concerning the blessed Seed of the woman, but He also conferred the teaching office to others by placing Adam and the other patriarchs at the head of the Church, which then was limited almost entirely to their families...”<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, we see this very thing with Noah, for example, whom Peter calls a *δικαιοσύνης κήρυκα*—a proclaimer of righteousness.<sup>9</sup>

There are certainly more Scriptures that we could discuss. But Walther, Luther, Chemnitz, Gerhard, and the rest all deal with the Scriptures sufficiently and I would simply refer you to them. The question today that I’m more concerned with is the proverbial, “So what?” What difference does the divine institution of the Office make in

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<sup>6</sup> For a good, concise treatment of the “comma debate”, see Philip J. Secker, “Ephesians 4:11-12 Reconsidered.” *Logia*, vol. V, number 2, 59-62. See also Henry P. Hamann, “The Translation of Ephesians 4:12—A Necessary Revision.” *Concordia Journal*, January 1988, 42-49.

<sup>7</sup> As in the case of Titus (1:5), Timothy (1 Timothy 4:14), the elders of the dispersion (2 Peter 5:1), Sosthenes (1 Corinthians 1:1, 4:1), Tychicus (Colossians 4:7), and Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25). See *Church & Office*, 168-69.

<sup>8</sup> *Church & Office*, 176. Also, consider Marquart’s quote of Luther’s *Sermon on the First Commandment* (1528): “Every house-father and house-mother is to be bishop and bishopess “that you help us exercise the preaching office [*Predigtamt*] in [your] houses, as we do in the church”” (*Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics*, Vol. IX: *The Church*, p. 108).

<sup>9</sup> 2 Peter 2:5.

the life of the Church? If the arguments and debates about the Office of the Ministry are no more than the entertainment of inside baseball—interesting to a few, but with no real bearing on the life of Christ’s Bride—then we would do well to invest our time and effort elsewhere. However, if the Office is divinely instituted as Scripture says that it is, then it should have direct implications for the Church that truly matter for everyone. This is where another map proves quite helpful: that of our own Lutheran Confessions. Like all other theology, the theology of the Office is, at the end of the day, Christology.

## THE CONFESSIONS

For this reason, the fact that the Office is divinely instituted should bring pastors and laity great joy and comfort. “What God ordains is always good,” as the good hymn declares. If God instituted it, he did it for our good. So what is the joy and comfort that the Office gives? What is the destination to which this trail map leads us? I don’t think we can say it much better than article V of the Augsburg Confession:

*“So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. Through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given. He works faith, when and where it pleases God, in those who hear the good news that God justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ’s sake. This happens not through our own merits, but for Christ’s sake.”<sup>10</sup>*

What good news! As you well know, we cannot read Article V apart from Article IV. The “this faith” which is obtained through the preaching office is precisely outlined in AC IV, the article by which the church stands or falls: justification. Put another way, the Office is not an addendum, given by God willy nilly, but rather is given as the way that Jesus continues to justify sinners throughout history. It is how Jesus ensures that his gifts will continue to be given for the sake of forgiving sinners. It is through the Office that Jesus ensures his presence with his Church even to the end of the age, through the goods of salvation disbursed therein—Word, Sacrament, Jesus himself. Walther includes a portion from Luther’s Schwabach Articles, which state this very thing. Luther says that the Office is necessary “[o]therwise, there is no method nor means, no way nor path to obtain faith. For all thoughts, outside and before the oral proclamation, no matter how holy or good they seem to be, are nothing but lies and falsehoods.”<sup>11</sup> This echoes Luther’s Large Catechism where he says “for where Christ is not preached, there is no Holy Ghost who creates, calls, and gathers the Christian Church, without which no one can come to Christ the Lord.”<sup>12</sup> The point is that the Office of the Ministry is instituted

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<sup>10</sup> AC V, emphasis mine.

<sup>11</sup> *Church & Office*, 169-70.

<sup>12</sup> LC, Part 2, III:45.

by God *for the well-being* of the Church, who receives through the Office the objective means of grace unto salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

No wonder Paul calls aspiring to this Office a *καλοῦ ἔργου*.<sup>13</sup> And so the question, “Is the Office of the Ministry necessary or important?” actually answers itself and becomes somewhat silly when one understands it in light of AC IV. The Office exists to forgive sinners, after all. Of course it is necessary; even more, it is a good and cherished gift to the Church! And so the question is turned into a prayer of thanks and supplication: “Praise to you, O Christ, that you have granted a way to guarantee that repentance and the forgiveness of sins will be proclaimed in your name to all nations. Prepare and send forth faithful men, O Lord of the harvest, that your truth would be proclaimed with boldness and clarity.”<sup>14</sup>

## IMPLICATIONS

The central article of Justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone which the Office delivers certainly is the center of our discussion on Thesis II. And like a stone thrown into a pond, that center of justification ripples out so that there are implications that this divine institution has upon the life of Christ’s bride, so that she stays on the trail and is protected from the attacks of Bridezilla. If Pastor and laity are hiking on the same trail and the divine institution of the Office stands outside and over both of them to guide them, what instruction does this trail map provide, and how does it ultimately give them comfort?

I’d like to conclude with some implications about how a proper understanding of the Office’s divine institution can provide both instruction and comfort for both pastors and laity in their life together. We begin with those who fill the office: pastors.

### Instruction for pastors

When I was in my fourth year of seminary, I had a few interviews. I know that the existence of such interviews is a matter up for debate, and not unimportant, but I’d rather not discuss that here. Suffice it to say, I had an interview with a “progressive” congregation in the Synod. The church council had traveled to St. Louis, along with a representative from their district. The interview was par for the church-growth course and a couple of things happened in that interview that I think are instructive for our discussion today.

I was asked by the panel, “What would be your mission statement for the church?” I thought about it, and answered, in all seriousness, “Go, therefore, and make

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<sup>13</sup> 1 Timothy 3:1.

<sup>14</sup> Luke 24:47.

disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And surely I am with you, even to the very end of the age.” I thought that captured the mission of the church—both pastor and laity—quite well. Also, it was Christ’s idea, not mine, and so I thought it a safe response.

Their response was laughter. They laughed at the very commission of our Lord, as if it was cute, but not edgy enough for their relevant ministry. I must say it was quite an awkward moment when the laughter subsided and I failed to produce a “real” mission statement for them.

The next question was, “What would you do to grow the church?” I replied, fully aware that they wouldn’t like my answer, “Nothing. That’s not a pastor’s vocation, nor should it be the goal of the church.” I even referred them to Paul’s words about God bringing growth, should he desire to do so.<sup>15</sup> Well it was too much for the district representative, who then took on the role of teacher and proceeded to instruct this poor fourth year seminarian with a metaphor that the church is like a baby—the way you know it’s healthy is if it’s growing.

Now, my point in all of this is that a proper understanding that the Office of Holy Ministry is divinely instituted keeps a lot of this straight. In this example, the mission of the church precisely isn’t the pastor’s *or* the laity’s to make up. We’ve already been given it, and it’s our job to submit to it and be faithful to it. The Office is given by Christ, and therefore he instructs his pastors concerning what they are to be about—and growing the church isn’t part of it. That is God’s business. This congregation, and certainly many others, would’ve done well to consult the trail map before embarking on their journey to call a pastor, rather than wandering in the wilderness consulting their own human notions of what would be a “good fit” for them.

Another very big implication that the divine institution has for instructing pastors is in their preaching and teaching. They’ve been given the content of their preaching and teaching through the revealed Word of God: it is Christ, crucified and risen for the forgiveness of sinners. It is Law and Gospel. It is repentance and the forgiveness of sins. It is, wouldn’t you know it, the six chief parts of the Small Catechism. So, the pastor ought not wander off into preaching the 3 steps to a healthier marriage, or the 7 steps to a healthier body, or the 42 leadership principles found in the

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<sup>15</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:6. The use of the grammar in the phrase “grow the church” has always fascinated me. How do we presume to ask a question using the verb “grow” in a transitive sense, especially when the direct object is the Church, which Paul elsewhere calls a “body”? I am not aware of any situation wherein one individual is able to “grow” another’s body. In fact, in the transitive sense, we don’t actually “grow” anything, which is explicitly clear Paul’s agricultural example in 1 Corinthians 3. It’s a bit like turning the noun “church” into a transitive verb: to “church” the “un-churched” or “de-churched”. Frankly we are able to “grow” the body of Christ about as much as we are able to “grow” the bodies of our children—or “church” them, for that matter.

book of Nehemiah. He can comfortably avoid anything that God may have “laid on his heart” that week, and can instead stick to the Word. If a pastor’s sermon doesn’t need the biblical Jesus to make sense, he has failed in the preaching task and frankly, wasted his hearers’ time. After all, they could probably find a much more engaging self-help book at the bookstore and sleep in on Sunday morning. It is a good and instructive thing that the preaching office is given by God, for it grants the pastor good guidance in his noble vocation, and protects the laity from the tyranny of his own hobby horses.

### Comfort for pastors

In addition to instruction, there is also comfort for pastors. The pastor’s stole is heavier than the laity often realize. The divine institution of the Office also provides comfort to the parish pastor who bears the heavy yoke of rightly dividing the word of truth;<sup>16</sup> keeping a close watch on the teaching;<sup>17</sup> and instructing in sound doctrine and rebuking those who contradict it.<sup>18</sup> The parish pastor striving for faithfulness can easily relate to the stories of the prophets of old, whose message largely fell on deaf and unrepentant ears. The parable of the sower springs to life as more than an interesting story, for the seed of God’s word often seems truly wasted. In such situations, the pastor finds comfort in the Office into which he has been placed by the Lord of the harvest. Therefore it is not the pastor’s job to save the sheep from sin, death, and the devil; it is his job to faithfully proclaim the crucified and risen Shepherd who does.

Also, not only is the pastor prohibited from making up his job description—he doesn’t have to. He is an unworthy servant, and only does what his Master commands.<sup>19</sup>

### Instruction for laity

This is an apt segue into the instruction and comfort that the divine institution brings to the laity. The first piece of instruction that it can provide pertains to how laity evaluate pastors. God has not only told *pastors* exactly what their duties are, but he has also told laity exactly what the pastor’s duties are. And so, if evaluations do happen—and I do believe there is a place for them—they ought to evaluate the pastor on what the Lord says he should be doing. Is he upholding sound doctrine and placing it before the laity? Is he rebuking false teaching when it arises? Is he delivering the gifts of Christ to the homebound and hospitalized? Is he faithfully catechizing the entire congregation, young and old? Is he faithfully practicing the Lord’s Supper (and yes, that includes closing the table to those for whom it would be inappropriate to commune)? These are

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<sup>16</sup> 2 Timothy 2:15.

<sup>17</sup> 1 Timothy 4:16.

<sup>18</sup> Titus 1:9.

<sup>19</sup> Luke 17:7-10.

the things the pastor has been put in the Office to do, and they are not optional. Therefore, laity would do well to remember this—and to remember, as mentioned before, that this is a heavy, heavy yoke. If evaluations do happen, they need to evaluate the pastor appropriately in light of the Office he has been given by God. This is tangentially related to another debated issue, which is this: the idea that the pastor is an employee.

If the Office of Holy Ministry is divinely instituted, then the one who fills that Office is not a hireling, subject to the whims and opinions of the laity (or, employers?). He is a servant, yes, but a *servant of the Word*. He is not a butler to be ordered around by anyone other than his Lord Christ. Just because he proclaims the Word of God that riles up the Old Adam into a self-justifying frenzy, that does not mean the pastor can simply be fired. To do such a thing is tantamount to throwing God's Word back in his face. And all of this is because of what the *Office* is, not who the *man* is. Do not misunderstand me: this is not a defense of the pastor who would use any authority other than that of God's Word. The authority the pastor has comes only from the Office he holds, which is an Office of the Word. And so, when the pastor steps outside of or beyond the Word's authority, and subsequently refuses to repent when his error is exposed, then action certainly needs to be taken to remove him, and this *for the well-being of those under his preaching*.<sup>20</sup> But if a pastor is faithfully using the authority of God's Word to call sinners to repentance *so that* he can deliver the Gospel, no matter how unpopular he may be, there are no grounds to remove him from the Office.<sup>21</sup> That is what he has been called to do, not only by the laity, but ultimately by God himself. This leads us to the last of the implications I'd like to discuss today, which is the comfort for the laity that the divine institution of the Office brings.

### Comfort for laity

A divine Office requires a Divine appointment, or, a Divine Call. While there are some who would view the Divine Call as a man-made scapegoat for the "black shirt" to justify his actions as "Herr Pastor", the fact that pastors are divinely called should actually be comforting to the laity. They know exactly who it is that should be distributing the gifts of Christ in that place. And in our system, at least ideally, they can have confidence that the man put into that Office has been examined and proven himself competent to exercise the authority therein. Should any Jo Shmo walk in and declare that the Holy Spirit told him he should come and preach that day, the pastor can say with confidence, "No, he didn't tell you that. He told me that, and I have the document to prove it." And he can say that for the sake of protecting the lambs in his

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Romans 16:17-18.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Chemnitz, *Enchiridion*, Part I, par. 31.

care from the harm of false teaching. For this very reason, the rite of ordination into the Office, even if it is a human rite, should not be seen as mere formality of pomp and fanfare. No, the ordination rite confesses something. Perhaps to put it simply, ordination confesses that Christ is Lord—and no one else. Not pastor, not laity. Only Christ. The ordination of a man into the Office is for the sake of the entire Church. Both the pastor and laity are reminded in that rite that this pastor is here for a very specific duty, and everyone knows it. This should be comforting for the laity because they know, broadly speaking, exactly what to expect of this man. And what is that? Nothing less than that he deliver the teaching and gifts given only by Christ our Lord.<sup>22</sup>

Consider also the comfort this brings the laity in the weekly Divine Service. They know what they ought to be receiving in Divine Service. There should be no surprises. When the Office and its divine institution are taken seriously, the Divine Service actually takes on a new life. Since the Pastor fills an office given by Christ and since he speaks in the stead of Christ, the parts of the liturgy spoken by the pastor become wonderful, not because of the man speaking them, but because of the Office out of which Christ himself speaks. Put another way, upholding the Office's divine institution also upholds the reality that God is *actually* speaking to his people in every Divine Service. Conversely, to forget or reject the Office's divine institution, is also to forsake the wondrous comfort of the words spoken by the men who fill that Office. Again, not because it is their word, but precisely because it isn't. From the Invocation, the Absolution, the Salutation, the Sermon, the Words of Institution, the Distribution, the Dismissal Blessing, all the way to the Benediction, it is truly and actually Christ himself speaking to his people. And the pastor should take that seriously. He is not there to preach himself or his life as example for the less-experienced Christians to emulate. He isn't there to put on a nice, smooth, entertaining program for an audience. He is there to be God's mouthpiece so that burdened, sinful consciences would be given the easy yoke of Christ's redeeming work.<sup>23</sup>

## CONCLUSION

And so we strive for faithfulness; faithfulness to what Christ has already given; faithfulness in consulting the trail map to stay out of the wilderness in order to arrive at a destination that is actually quite comforting for both pastor and laity. Through this Office, with his double-edged sword of Law and Gospel,<sup>24</sup> Christ continues to slay Bridezilla and to make holy his Bride. Or, to use the more Lutheran vernacular: By daily contrition and repentance, the Old Adam in us is drowned and dies, with all sins and evil desires, and a new man daily emerges and arises to live before God in

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<sup>22</sup> For a good discussion on the weighty importance of the ordination rite, see Chemnitz's *Enchiridion*, Part I, par. 29.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew 11:29-30.

<sup>24</sup> Hebrews 4:12.

righteousness and purity forever.<sup>25</sup> The Office delivers the good gifts that are able to give such life, precisely because it is *not* a made-up or made-over human institution, but an office established by God himself, through which he makes *his* people beautiful as the baptismally-adorned Bride of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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<sup>25</sup> Luther's Small Catechism, Baptism IV.