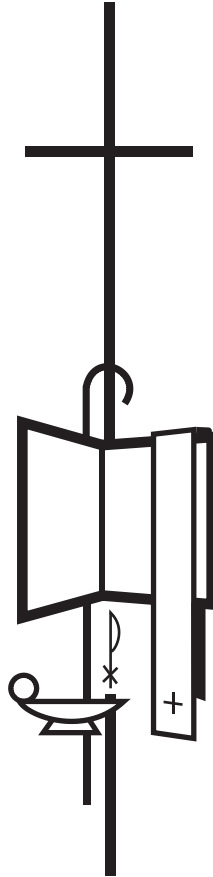


HOW THE FALSE DOCTRINE ON CHURCH AND MINISTRY

(as it is taught by the WELS, CoLC, and in the ELS)

ENDANGERS OTHER PLAIN TEACHINGS OF THE BIBLE



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One proper method of examining false teaching is *to draw the false teaching out to its logical conclusions*. This method has precedent in many historic controversies where the implications of the opponent's teachings were shown to be in conflict with Scripture. (EXAMPLES: Flacius on Original Sin; Zwingli and Calvin on the Lord's Supper; the Election Controversy in the old Norwegian Synod) This effective method has been left unused, to a large extent in public discussions of the false doctrine on the Church and its Ministry as it is presently being taught by the WELS, CoLC, and in the ELS.* This paper is therefore written for the benefit of those who are inclined to say, "*What difference does it make if a person joins the Wisconsin Synod and accepts their doctrine on Church and Ministry?*" and for the benefit of those who have difficulty following this false teaching to its logical conclusions.

*WELS—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod; CoLC—Church of the Lutheran Confession; ELS—Evangelical Lutheran Synod (The Norwegian Synod)

A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE TRUE DOCTRINE ON THE CHURCH AND ITS MINISTRY

THE HOLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH, THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS (The Una Sancta)

The Bible indeed speaks in many places of the Church (*ἐκκλησία*) as *the sum total of all true believers in Christ throughout the world*. MATT. 16:18, "*Upon this Rock I will build My Church;*" EPH. 1:22, "*Gave Him [Christ] to be the Head over all things to the Church which is His Body;*" EPH. 5:23, "*Christ is the Head of the Church;*" EPH. 5:27, "*A glorious Church not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing.*" This is God's Household of which every true Christian is a member, EPH. 2:19, "*Fellow citizens with the Saints and of the Household of God.*" This is the great spiritual Temple in which every true believing Child of God is a Living Stone, I PETER 2:5, "*Ye, also, as Lively Stones, are built up a Spiritual House;*" EPH. 2:21, "*In whom all the Building fitly framed together groweth unto an Holy Temple in the Lord.*"

THE LOCAL CONGREGATION OF TRUE BELIEVERS

The Bible *also* applies the name Church (*ἐκκλησία*) to a group of *true believers in a definite locality*, I THESS. 2:14, "*For ye brethren, became followers of the*

Churches of God which in Judea are in Christ Jesus;” II COR. 1:1, “*Unto the Church of God which is at Corinth;*” ACTS 2:47, “*The Lord added to the Church [at Jerusalem] such as should be saved;*” I THESS. 1:1, “*Unto the Church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.*” At times the Apostle Paul writes, PHIL. 1:1, “*To all the Saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi,*” and COL. 1:1, “*To the Saints and faithful Brethren in Christ which are at Colosse.*” The word Church (ἐκκλησία) is therefore used in Scripture to designate a specific group of true believers in a certain locality or definite place. This is the local congregation as God sees it—the local congregation of the Una Sancta in which alone is vested the full power of the Keys. Only God knows this group of true believers, II TIM. 2:19.

THE LOCAL VISIBLE CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION

But man cannot see through the eyes of God. The Lord therefore accommodates Himself to use the word “church” (ἐκκλησία) to designate *the local congregation as it is seen by men* and can therefore be made to function among men. This is the local visible Christian congregation which may contain also hypocrites (ACTS 5:1–11; III JOHN 9–10) and which *by God’s command, establishes* the office of the ministry in its midst, *gathers together* regularly, frequently, and consistently around the Word of God and the Sacraments, *exercises* the duties of Christian fellowship and love, and *carries out* the proper discipline of the Church. In such local churches the members could be named and counted, ACTS 1:15, “*The number of names together were about an hundred and twenty*”; they gathered regularly for the hearing of God’s Word and to celebrate “often” the Lord’s Supper, ACTS 2:42, “*They continued steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers*”; they came together to settle a case of church discipline, I COR. 5:4–5, “*When ye are gathered together...to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*”; they were asked to give or to receive greetings (ACTS 18:22; COL. 4:15; I COR. 16:19); to send and to receive letters (ACTS 15:23); to read an epistle in the public assembly and to have contact with other local congregations (COL. 4:16); to take up a collection (II COR. 8:1–4; 11:8; 9:1–15); and mention is made about customs in the churches (I COR. 11:16). In their assemblies, women are not to teach men (I COR. 14:34; I TIM. 2:12–14); the men of the congregation were to establish the public ministry in their midst (ACTS 1:15–26; 14:23; TITUS 1:5); they elected men to serve in an office of help (*auxiliary*) to the office of the ministry. The local visible Christian congregation is thus set before us in Scripture as the only God-ordained functioning unit in the Church by which the full exercise of the Office of the Keys is to be carried out *among men*. It is this group only that has the promise of God that there are Christians in its midst because of the Marks of the Church which it possesses—because here the *constant watering* with the Word and the administration of the Sacraments are carried on, ISAIAH 55:10–11, “*As the rain cometh down and the snow, from heaven...*”; I COR. 3:6–9, “*I have planted, Apollos watered...*”; I COR. 1:21, “*It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching...*” Only here can the final step in Church Discipline, according to Christ’s command in MATT. 18:17, be properly put into effect. Only when this local

visible Christian congregation acts can we then be certain, according to God's Word, that true believers are acting—because only in such a group can we actually be certain that there are Christians present as the Lord God Himself assures us.

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

The 112 times in which “*church*” (*ἐκκλησία*) is used in the New Testament (with reference to a Christian group) fall only into one of these three categories: **1)** The Holy Christian Church or the Communion of Saints (*Una Sancta*). **2)** The Local Congregation of True Believers. **3)** The Local Visible Christian Congregation in which there may also be hypocrites. This word is never used in the Scriptures for any other gathering of Christians. Reaching for straws, as it were, to defend their position, the heterodox Lutheran bodies (mentioned above) try to make a sedes for their doctrine out of MATT. 18:20, “*For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.*” But it must be obvious to the most unlearned that this passage does *not* set forth a definition of “*church.*” This passage is simply a gracious and wonderful promise of our beloved Savior’s presence wherever even the smallest group is gathered in His name. That a group of this size, under certain circumstances, could be a local congregation and thus a church in the Scriptural sense is possible, but highly unlikely. It is obvious, however, that the Lord Jesus, in this text, is not at all telling us that two or three gathered together in His name is “*church.*” This is simply reading something into the text which our Savior does not say! Notice that in verses *16* and *17* the same number of people are spoken of, yet, they are not called “*church*” but are told rather to “*tell it unto the church.*” To say that any group of people assembled “*in Jesus’ name*” are necessarily true believing Christians also cannot be proven from Scripture because we may see people outwardly gathered together “*in Jesus’ name*” who may be hypocrites, and then to say that any such group is therefore “*church*” is consequently an unscriptural deduction.

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

The Apostle Paul refers to himself, the Apostle Peter, and Apollos, who were local pastors of the church at Corinth, as “*ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God,*” I COR. 4:1. Speaking of the duties of the local pastors as shepherds and overseers of the Flock of God, the Apostle Peter refers to them as elders and to himself also as an elder, I PETER 5:1. The office of the Ministry of the Word was already established by the Son of God, as an extension of His Prophetic Office, when He called the Apostles to the office of preaching the Gospel and the care of souls, MATT. 28:19–20; MARK 16:15–16; JOHN 21:15–17. That the Lord was here instituting a real ministry, a distinct office, and not merely certain functions or the use of certain gifts of all disciples in spreading the Word, is clear from the fact that this office is definitely separate from the spiritual priesthood of all true believers, as it is shown below.

There are some distinctive features of the Apostolic Office which were special primarily to the Apostles and have passed away, such as the immediate call, the inspiration of God’s Word through them, and, generally, the special gifts of miracles.

But the ministry of preaching the Word of God and administering the Sacraments established by the calling of the Apostles is to continue until the end of time. The Apostles, therefore, identify themselves with the incumbents of the pastoral office in the local congregation (I COR. 4:1; I PETER 5:1; COL. 4:7); and the pastoral functions, duties, qualifications, authority, responsibilities of, and honor due to the Apostolic Office are the same as that due to the local pastor. This is clear from the following passages carefully considered and compared: II COR. 5:21, “*We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us.*” COL. 1:25, “*I am made a minister.*” ACTS 6:2,4, “*We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.*” I COR. 4:1, “*Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ.*” I COR. 3:5, “*Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers...?*” I COR. 9:14, “*Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel.*” GAL. 6:6, “*Let him that is taught in the Word communicate unto [share with] him that teacheth in all good things.*” II COR. 4:5, “*For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake.*” JOHN 21:15–17, “*Feed My sheep...feed My lambs.*” ACTS 20:17–28, “*Take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers.*” I PETER 5:2–4, “*Feed the Flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof...*” HEB. 13:17, “*Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls...*” I TIM. 3:1–7, TITUS 1:5–9, the qualifications of elders or bishops. I THESS. 5:12–13, “*Know them which labor among you and are over you in the Lord...esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake...*” I TIM. 5:17, “*Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor...*” II TIM. 2:2, the responsibility to train a future ministry.

(NOTE: With regard to the authority being the same, remember that while the Apostles spoke the Word of God by inspiration and therefore with divine authority, the ministers of the Word speak with the *same authority* today when they proclaim the Word of God as taught by the Apostles and Prophets. LUKE 10:16, “*He that heareth you, heareth Me.*”)

This specific office of the ministry (as well as the personal mission testimony of all disciples of Christ) is to continue until the end of the world, for the Lord Jesus concludes the Great Commission (MATT. 28:20) with the words, “*Lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world.*” Therefore, the Apostles served early congregations while they were among them; but, when they left, they had men called by the various congregations into the ministry of the Word in their place, ACTS 14:23, “*And when they had ordained [χειροτονήσαντε] them elders in every church...*” TITUS 1:5, “*Ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee.*” The Apostles taught that these men were divinely called ministers of the Word, COL. 4:17, “*And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord.*” ACTS 20:28, “*Take heed...unto all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers to feed the church of God.*” I COR. 12:28, “*God hath set some in the Church...teachers.*” TITUS 1:7, “*A bishop...the steward of God.*” EPH. 4:11, “*He [Christ] gave some...pastors and teachers.*” The Apostles made provision or gave instructions for the continuation of this office, II TIM. 2:2,

“The same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” I TIM. 3:1–7, TITUS 1:5–9, the qualifications for this office.

This ministry is, therefore, the authority to administer *publicly* the common rights of the spiritual priesthood in behalf of the local congregation. No man, however, is to take this honor unto himself unless he is rightly called by those in whose behalf he is publicly to administer the Office of the Keys, HEB. 5:4. In TITUS 1:5 we read, “For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting [τὰ λείποντα—*lacking*], and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed [διεταξάμην—*charged, commanded*] thee.” This Bible passage, in particular, teaches that the Christian congregations are commanded by God to choose for themselves ministers of the Word. This Scripture text cannot be brushed aside lightly as though it applied only to conditions in those days. The Apostle Paul does not command in matters of Christian liberty. The word which is translated “*appointed*” in this text has really a stronger meaning (διεταξάμην) in the original Greek. It should be translated as “*commanded*” or “*charged.*” Notice also that the Apostle Paul states in this passage to Titus that something is *lacking* when churches do not establish in their midst the Ministry of the Word, namely, the Pastoral Office.

A local church may, in Christian liberty, establish auxiliary offices or offices of help to the Pastoral Office. This is plain from ACTS 6, where deacons were elected by the church at Jerusalem (v. 5) and appointed by the Apostles (v. 3) to take care of the needs of the widows in the congregation. This “*office*” of deacon was not a divinely instituted or divinely ordained office at all; but, as the context clearly shows, it was established in Christian liberty by the local congregation at the request of the Apostles—because of their particular need for help with the temporal affairs of the church at Jerusalem so that they could devote their own energies to “the ministry of the Word” (vv. 2–4). I COR. 12:28–29 and also EPH. 4:11 indicate that such offices of help were evidently set up by the early Christian churches to assist the Apostles and local pastors in their work. Such offices today include not only the regularly elected “church officers” but also assistant pastors, parochial school teachers, choir directors, youth counselors, and the like. While such auxiliary officers indeed “*serve*” the local congregations as helps to their respective pastors and are therefore *loosely* called “ministries” in some church bodies, they were *never* directly instituted by the Lord as *special distinct offices* or ministries. Neither are such offices, properly speaking, “*part of the ministry of the Word, the Pastoral Office,*” to function as independent entities, responsible directly to the congregation, apart from the supervision of the divinely-called “*overseer over all the flock*” (ACTS 20:28). The fact that certain auxiliary officers (assistant pastors, parochial school teachers, and even Sunday school teachers) teach the Word of God as part of their responsibilities—God-pleasing *work*, to be sure, as they assist the shepherd of the flock—does not, however, make theirs a “*divine office*” in the sense that it is instituted by God, nor their incumbency in such office the result of the “*divine call*” of the Holy Spirit—as these can only rightly be spoken of, in the Light of God’s Word, with reference to the Pastoral Office. Nevertheless, where such offices have been established by the local congregation, honor and respect is due their

incumbents under the Fourth Commandment because they are properly authorized agents of the divinely-called Pastor and overseer “*over all the flock*” (ACTS 20:28). The local church may, however, establish, keep, or do away with such auxiliary offices as circumstances and conditions may require, *but not* the office of the public Ministry of the Word (the Pastoral Office), which is the *only* divinely instituted, God-ordained, and consequently the *highest office* in the church.

(NOTE: Synodical offices and the offices of seminary professors are also *auxiliary* offices to the one Office of the Ministry whose incumbents are elected by the local congregations either by direct referendum or through the delegates in convention assembled.)

THE FALSE DOCTRINE BRIEFLY SET FORTH

1. Every group of Christians is *church*. Ladies’ Aids, Young People’s Societies, Men’s Clubs, Conferences, Bible Classes, Synods, Conventions, Classrooms, Youth Camps, etc., are all churches on the same plane or with the same authority and responsibilities as the local congregation.

2. The local congregation, which can be numbered, listed, seen and heard *has never been instituted* (ordained, authorized, or put in a class by itself) in Scripture by the Lord of the Church.

3. There is *nothing* in Scripture to safeguard a local congregation from being dominated by a synod, or super church—the only guarantee for the local congregation’s being recognized as the primary form of the church is the mutual agreement among professing Christians according to love and good order, GAL. 5:13, I COR. 14:40.

4. The public ministry is *not* limited to the pastoral office but also includes synodical officials, professors, etc., whose offices are on the same level with the office of the local pastor.

(Direct quotations from the WELS, CoLC, and ELS in support of these false positions are cited at the end of this document.)

THE PLAIN TEACHINGS OF THE BIBLE WHICH ARE ENDANGERED

SOLA SCRIPTURA (The Battle Cry of the Reformation) IS UNDERMINED

This peculiar false doctrine (as set forth above) actually *undermines the Scriptural Principle* that the Word of God alone establishes articles of faith. Those who uphold and defend this false teaching on the Doctrine of the Church and its Ministry are guilty of a subtle form of rationalism—arriving at their doctrine, to a great extent, by means of a deduction from etymology and *not* by the clear passages of Scripture (*sedes doctrinae*). Thus it is asserted, contrary to the usage of Scripture, that any grouping of Christians (or at least any group gathered in the Lord’s name) is an *ἐκκλησία* (church) and that any servants in the church (at least those who work with the Word of God) are *ὑπηρέτας* (ministers) on the same level with the

local pastor. As they derive and develop their doctrine of the church essentially from those passages which speak of the *Una Sancta* (the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints) so also they develop their doctrine of the ministry primarily from those passages which speak of the universal priesthood of all true believers. They consequently draw the conclusion that wherever there are believers, whom they characterize as “*two or three* [professing Christians] *gathered together in Christ’s name,*”—as though this makes the true believers visible to them, there is “*church*” with the full power of the keys, and they picture the office of the ministry as many offices formed in Christian liberty by the universal priesthood of all true believers which is described as a tree whose various branches include not only the pastoral office but any other office in the local congregation, synod, or conference which the Christians may determine to establish.

As in the case with all false teaching, here also the clear passages (*sedes*) of Scripture are forced into the background or are twisted so as to agree with a preconceived set of human deductions. There is absolutely *no* passage in Scripture which commands many different public ministries in the church outside of the Pastoral Office.

CONFUSION IN THE AREA OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Since, according to the *false teaching* on Church and Ministry, the church on earth has many forms and every group of Christians is “*church*” with the full rights and privileges of the Office of the Keys, it must then follow that any group and every group of Christians may decide on a case of excommunication. “*Tell it unto the Church,*” MATT. 18:17, therefore means to tell it to the church in any form or to whatever group of Christians is the most convenient. In response to this, those who adhere to this false doctrine, appeal to I COR. 14:40, “*Let all things be done decently and in order*” and to “*brotherly love*” GAL. 5:13 which is required of all Christians—and *on this basis* they teach that the local congregation, in which the person being disciplined claims membership, should always be taken into consideration even though they admit that the matter of the local congregation’s being the “*primary form of the church*” is only by the mutual agreement of professing Christians and that it is *not* the only divinely-ordained functioning unit in the Church.

CONFUSION IN THE AREA OF BAPTISM, THE LORD’S SUPPER, AND THE CALLING OF A PASTOR

They teach that it is wrong to restrict the full use of the Office of the Keys to the local congregation and hold that any group of Christians, anywhere at any time, may exercise the rights and privileges of all the functions of the Church. It is then perfectly natural to conclude that the Sunday School, Ladies’ Aid, Young Peoples’ Societies, Pastoral Conferences, Synods, Church and Synodical Committees, Christian Colleges and Seminaries, etc., all not only have the right but also the Christian responsibility and duty to call pastors for themselves to preach the Word of God and administer the Sacraments publicly in their behalf since such groups, by their definition, are “*church*” and since it is God’s command that Christian

Churches should do these things (as we have seen above). Here again they appeal to decency, orderliness, and brotherly love. But where does this lead them? With one hand they give to every, any, and all Christian groups the title “*church*” and with it the rights and privileges to perform all the functions of the Church *but* with the other hand they take away the use of these rights and privileges which, they say, God has given them, and bestow these rights and privileges arbitrarily upon only a few groups, such as the local congregation, pastoral conferences, synods, and even summer camps—all *in the name of decency, order, and brotherly love*. Now then *who* is to decide this? *Why* does the Synod retain such important powers but not a Bible Class which certainly meets more often? Is a Synodical Body *more* decent and orderly? *Who* can say that this is so? Is the Synod a *better* and *more qualified* church? On what basis? *Why* do pastoral conferences retain these powers but not a men’s club or college class? Is a pastoral conference *more* decent and orderly? Is it a *better* church? At this point an appeal is made to our “*sanctified common sense,*” but *whose* sanctified common sense is going to decide these things? Can anyone positively say, on the basis of “*common sense,*” that it is indecent or disorderly for a college class or men’s club to call a pastor, to baptize infants, and to administer the Lord’s Supper, or a Bible Class to excommunicate its teacher or a member? This is the modernistic theology of Schleiermacher, Ritschl, etc.—cf. Mueller’s *Christian Dogmatics*, pp. 3–78.

CONFUSION ABOUT WHAT IS DECENT, ORDERLY, AND LOVING

Here is *an illustration of what could actually happen* under this peculiarly twisted false teaching on the Church and Ministry: Suppose the first two stages of admonition had been completed without any change in the person who is a manifest and impenitent sinner. Now the two or three concerned Christians are prevented from bringing the matter to the congregation because the pastor is lax and the voters’ assembly is unconcerned. On what basis could these staunch, loving Christians be told that they could not take this matter to their men’s club or Bible class to conclude the process of Church Discipline—especially if there was a chance to gain the impenitent sinner or to prevent him from leading others into error? If this action were taken out of love for the erring brother and for the other members of the lax congregation, and everything was done with the utmost decency and orderliness, would such action be what the Lord requires in MATT. 18:17, “*Tell it unto the Church*”? The CoLC, WELS, and the majority in the ELS would have to answer, “*Yes!*” Such a doctrine can therefore lead to a misuse of Church Discipline as the Savior requires of us in MATT. 18.

HEBREWS 10:25 AND THE THIRD COMMANDMENT IS CRIPPLED

In this passage from Hebrews the Lord urges us “*not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is.*” It is evident that this passage refers to the assembling of a Christian congregation for public worship or to the congregational meetings at which matters in the work of the Church are acted upon (cf. I COR. 5:4–5). This text from Hebrews rightly belongs under the Third Commandment where we find it in our Catechism (Synodical Catechism, 1943)—

also in the Norwegian Synod's (ELS) catechism and in the Wisconsin Synod's (WELS) catechism. Now, if any and every gathering of Christians in Jesus' name is "church," does it not follow that it would be a sin not to gather at the meetings of our Conference, at Pastoral Conferences, Ladies' Aid, Men's Club, etc., especially in the light of this clear passage of Scripture? Or what is to prevent a family from saying that, since our household is "church," we can assemble together in our home and need not attend every service of our local congregation? Since all of these various and sundry groups are churches, on the same level with the local congregation, does the Lord's Word then require a person to be a member of many churches? *Great confusion!*—only to be held in check by some *human legalistic idea* of what is decent, orderly, or loving!

***I CORINTHIANS 14:34–35 (properly compared with I Timothy 2:11–12)
IS JEOPARDIZED***

Here the Apostle Paul says very plainly, "*Let your women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience.*" Since the false teachers claim that the Church of God is present even where two or three *believing* ladies (as though they can look into their hearts) are gathered in Jesus' name (Ladies Aid), would not this passage of Scripture make it impossible for them to speak, lead meetings, vote, etc., even in their own organization if such an organization is called "church" in Scripture? It would then also be against this Word of God for them to teach in such Christian groupings as Sunday School, Christian Day School, Christian Normal School, and even in the family—if every group of Christians is "church" with the same authority and responsibility as the local congregation.

***THE TRUMPET GIVES AN UNCERTAIN SOUND
WITH REGARD TO THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH***

The *marks* of the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints are *the Word of God and the Holy Sacraments regularly preached and heard, administered and received.* In ISAIAH 55:10–11 we find *a wonderful promise from the Lord,* namely that as the rain and the snow assure us of a harvest (and this moisture or watering must be a regular thing—otherwise a famine or drought will result) so the regular preaching and hearing of God's Word and the frequent use of the Sacrament (the visible Word) *will produce* that which God pleases and *will prosper* in the thing whereto He sends it, namely, it will make or produce and preserve true believers. This passage is corroborated by those texts which tell us: "*Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God,*" ROMANS 10:17; "*It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe,*" I COR. 1:21; "*I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase,*" I COR. 3:6. And where is such regular preaching and hearing of the Word of God and the frequent use of the Sacrament? It is *only* carried on *according to God's command in the Local Visible Church!* But can't the regular preaching and hearing of God's Word and the frequent use of the Sacrament be carried on in any group of professing Christians? If it is, then that group of Christians becomes a Local Visible Christian Church—for only

where there is such a group are we assured that true believing Christians are indeed present, namely, where professing Christians gather themselves together *regularly* to hear the Word of God and to partake of the Lord's Supper and, to this end, establish among themselves the office of the ministry.

Now, the appeal is made to MATT. 18:20, "*For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them,*" and on the basis of this passage it is taught that any two or more (professing) Christians gathered in Jesus' name are "*church.*" But does this Word of God say that? This Scripture text simply promises that the Lord will be graciously present wherever two or three come together in His name, perhaps to pray, to hear, to read, or to study His Word or to do His work. He does *not* say that this group is "*church*" and He does *not* say that there are true believers there. It may be a Christian congregation, *but* it may also *not* be—and it more than likely is not (Compare: MATT. 18:16). It is certainly reading something into this text which isn't there when it is said that the Bible teaches that two or three gathered in Jesus' name is "*church.*" Such *false teachers* are in danger of grossly minimizing the *marks* of the Church (the regular and consistent preaching and teaching of God's Word and the use of the Sacraments) *under which conditions alone*, in all of Scripture, God gives us this specific promise in ISAIAH 55:10–11, that true believing Christians are indeed there.

A DANGER OF TEACHING ANTINOMIANISM

Some who hold to this false doctrine on the Church and Ministry have become guilty of teaching antinomianism. They object to the teaching that Christians are commanded by God to form a local congregation and to establish the office of the ministry (pastoral office) on the grounds that this would introduce a legalistic element into the New Testament—as if God gives no commands to Christians (antinomianism). But every Christian, because he has an Old Adam, needs the application of the Law to himself as a curb, a mirror, and a rule. However, the divine commands regarding the local congregation and the pastoral office are *not* legalistic demands but *gracious provisions for our salvation*. Their value is not in our acts of obedience to God, but in what our dear Lord thereby offers and gives us, namely, His grace conveyed by the *regular* use of His precious Word and Sacrament. But this does not make these Christian responsibilities matters of Christian liberty!

THE DANGER OF A FALSE HUMILITY

A pastor in the WELS, or CoLC, (perhaps *also* in the ELS), may feel that *because* the position of his church body is one that seemingly diminishes the importance of the pastoral office, and *because* humility is pleasing to the Lord, *therefore* the position must be Scripturally correct that the pastoral office is *not* ordained by God any more than any other office in the Church but that it is simply an office established in Christian liberty by a local congregation. Such humility, however, which sets aside the Word of God is actually *pride* of the most insidious and deceptive kind. Of what other office is the Lord speaking in His Word when He says, "*Take heed...unto all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers,*" ACTS 20:28? Of what other office is He speaking when He says,

“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls as they that must give account,” HEB. 13:17? Of what other office is He speaking when He says, *“Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof,”* I PETER 5:2? What office is especially referred to in I TIM. 5:17, *“Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double Honor, especially they who labor in the Word and doctrine.”* Of which other office is the Lord speaking when He says, *“And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake,”* I THESS. 5:12–13? Of what other office is the Lord speaking in these and similar passages but the Pastoral Office in the local congregation? And the qualifications *required exclusively* for the incumbents of this office are plainly and carefully recorded in Scripture, I TIM. 3:1–7; TITUS 1:5–9.

Do these words of God leave the impression that the establishment of the Pastoral Office in the local congregation is a matter of Christian Liberty? If the Pastoral Office is established in Christian liberty, it then follows that a congregation may also discontinue the pastoral office or dismiss its pastor as a matter of Christian liberty for any reason whatever—that a pastor may simply be hired or fired at the will of the congregation. But the Apostle Paul writes with regard to the pastoral office, *“Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God,”* I COR. 4:1. A true Christian pastor should *recognize* and *uphold* the Scriptural status and nature of his office as well as its solemn obligations and responsibilities. The false teachers overlook the practical decency and order *which the Lord God Himself has set forth in His Word* relative to the Pastoral Office as the highest office in the Church. Oh, beware of that pastor, who, bubbling over with *false* humility, tells his people that his office is on the same level with that of a Christian Day School teacher or a synodical official. This, of course, does not vitiate the fact that the pastor should always, in *true* humility, regard himself as the servant (slave) of the congregation and is not to lord it over the flock, I PETER 5:3.

A Comparison with THE GAINSAYING OF CORE

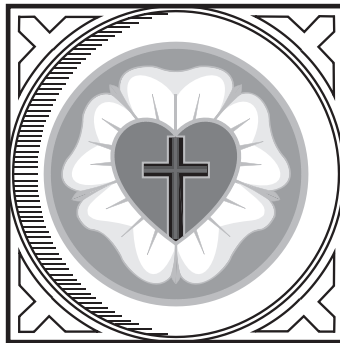
Such a *false position* on the Doctrine of the Ministry is not without precedent in the Bible. In this connection the Apostle Jude speaks of such false prophets as being guilty of *“the gainsaying of Core,”* JUDE 11–12. The account of Korah’s rebellion, to which Jude here refers, is found recorded in the *sixteenth chapter of Numbers*. Korah and three other prominent men of Israel gathered a following of *“two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown”* and revolted against the leadership of Moses and Aaron. Their formal complaint is set forth in *verse 3*, *“Ye take too much upon you, all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them; wherefore, then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?”* In external Christendom today there are prominent men, men of renown, famous for their scholarship and ability, who raise this same objection to the Office of the Ministry (the Pastoral Office) as the highest office in the Church. They say, in effect, *“Ye take too much upon you, ... wherefore lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord? The*

pastoral office is **not** the highest office in the Church. Synodical officials have the same or even greater authority!”

Korah and his followers bolstered their claim with the words, “*All the congregation are holy, every one of them!*” Today, these false teachers minimize the pastoral office by *not* distinguishing clearly between the ministry in the wider sense (the universal priesthood) and the office of the ministry (the pastoral office). They emphasize, “*Ye are all kings and priests before God,*” but minimize the office of those “*who watch for your souls as they that must give account!*” They would overthrow the pastoral office as the only divinely ordained office in the Church, appealing to the sinful flesh of the individual Christian by proposing freedom and selectivity, only to lead them into the bondage of synodical authority by “*divine right.*”

Korah and his followers defended their action by stating “*The Lord is among them!*” Today, the appeal is made to MATT. 18:20, “*Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them,*” as though this is a definition of the “*church*” spoken of in MATT. 18:17, “*Tell it unto the Church,*” on the basis of which they give to any chance gathering of professing Christians (even synodical boards and committees) the same powers which God has exclusively invested in each local congregation.

May it be the *fervent prayer* of all of us that our Lutheran pastors and their followers do not fall into this snare which is so similar to the “*gainsaying of Core,*” which *undermines* the unique dignity of the Pastoral Office, *destroys* the autonomy of the local congregation, and *overthrows* its powers as a sovereign body under God and His Word alone. Amen.



References for the False Doctrine of the WELS, CoLC, and ELS

1. Every group of Christians is *church*. Ladies' Aids, Young People's Societies, Men's Clubs, Conferences, Bible Classes, Synods, Conventions, Classrooms, Youth Camps, etc., are all churches on the same plane or with the same authority and responsibilities as the local congregation.

“The specific forms in which believers group themselves together for the fellowship and work of the Church, the specific forms in which they arrange for the use of the means of grace in public worship, the specific forms in which they establish the public ministry, have not been prescribed by the Lord to His New Testament Church” (WELS, “*Theses on the Church and Ministry*”).

“In essence the various groupings in Jesus' name for the proclamation of His Gospel all lie on the same plane. They are all Church in one and the same sense, namely in this sense that on the basis of the marks of the Church [use of the means of grace] the Lord lets us apprehend the presence of the *una sancta* (the Holy Christian Church) in each such grouping of people, and thus enables us to acknowledge them as gatherings of believers possessing the ministry of the keys with the right of exercising this ministry in accordance with the considerations of love and order” (WELS, “*Theses on the Church and Ministry*”).

“Any group of professing Christians gathered in Christ's name (Mt. 18:20) can rightly be called ‘church’ because of the Christians in it” (CoLC, “*Concerning Church and Ministry*”).

“The New Testament knows of no specific forms that have been prescribed to restrict or limit, geographically or functionally, the manner in which the individual Christian will govern his association with his brethren in the administration of the Means of Grace. (Col. 2:20f; Gal.4:9f) In the same sense in which a ‘local congregation’ is ‘church,’ therefore, a wider association of Christians reaching beyond the boundaries of a ‘local congregation’ is also rightly called ‘church’” (CoLC, “*Concerning Church and Ministry*”).

“One may not say that a Christian, or any confessional combination of Christians, has the authority to baptize but not to provide for the administration of the Sacrament of the Altar; the right to teach but not to preach the Gospel; the right to forgive sin but not to retain it. Yet such is the implication of the position taken by some who insist that Christians in a local association may exercise the functions of church discipline, but that Christians assembled as a synod may not” (CoLC, “*Concerning Church and Ministry*”).

2. The local congregation, which can be numbered, listed, seen and heard *has never been instituted* (ordained, authorized, or put in a class by itself) in Scripture by the Lord of the Church.

“We hold it to be untenable to say that the local congregation is specifically instituted by God in contrast to other groupings of believers in Jesus’ name” (WELS, “*Theses on the Church and Ministry*”).

“The peculiar idea that only the local congregation has been ordained or instituted by God, and can possess the Gospel, Sacraments and power of the Keys only in this form, that the synod on the other hand is a purely human organization serving as human advisor to the congregation...rests upon a confusion of the essence with the outward form of the church. ...The fact is that the New Testament Church has not a single prescribed outward form, no outward divine institution, but that the Lord has given to His Bride, His communion of saints, the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, the Gospel, has entrusted it to her for her own use and for a preaching to all the world, commanding her to be a faithful steward of His goods and to let everything also in outward matters be done decently and in order. To this end He endows her through the Holy Spirit with specific men and gifts which she is to place into her service according to her best judgment. A particular church form...He did not prescribe for her” (CoLC, “*Concerning Church and Ministry*”).

“This normally is done through the external forms of the local congregation, synod and denomination. Although it is God’s will that Christians gather for public worship, these external forms, as such, however, are not divinely instituted” (ELS, “*Doctrine of the Church*”).

3. There is *nothing* in Scripture to safeguard a local congregation from being dominated by a synod, or super church—the only guarantee for the local congregation’s being recognized as the primary form of the church is the mutual agreement among professing Christians according to love and good order, GAL. 5:13, I COR. 14:40.

“Since these visible gatherings (for example, congregations and synods) use the means of grace, they are called churches” (WELS, “*This We Believe*”).

“In essence the various groupings in Jesus’ name for the proclamation of His Gospel all lie on the same plane. They are all Church in one and the same sense...possessing the ministry of the keys with the right of exercising this ministry in accordance with the considerations of love and order” (WELS, “*Theses on the Church and Ministry*”).

“As the Holy Spirit leads Christians to group themselves together in Jesus’ name (Jesus’ name is His Gospel revelation), He always constrains them to do so in an orderly manner (1 Co 14:33,40) and in the spirit of love (1 Co 16:14). The Holy Spirit never leads Christians to group themselves together

in Jesus' name for a competitive purpose so as to duplicate, hinder, or disturb that scope of the ministry of the keys which is already effectively provided for by a previously established grouping of Christians" (WELS, *"Theses on the Church and Ministry"*).

"We hold that in the regulation of a proper relationship between the local congregations and the larger body, the highly articulate Scriptural rule of love and good order is a sufficient guide and admits of no conflict of interests or duties when faithfully followed" (CoLC, *"Concerning Church and Ministry"*).

"A synod is in its essence a sum of the local congregations involved; and by it, through its instrumentality, the congregations may choose jointly to administer the Keys in whatever manner they deem effective, expedient and consonant with Christian love and good order" (CoLC, *"Concerning Church and Ministry"*).

"So far as the relationship among the various external groupings is concerned, Christians will be governed by the law of love and will want to do things decently and in order. In external matters we uphold the autonomy of the local congregation; also the advisory capacity of synod to the congregations, as asserted in our synodical constitution" (ELS, *"Doctrine of the Church"*).

4. The public ministry is *not* limited to the pastoral office but also includes synodical officials, professors, etc., whose offices are on the same level with the office of the local pastor.

"There is, however, no direct word of institution for any particular form of the public ministry. The one public ministry of the Gospel may assume various forms, as circumstances demand. Ac 6:1-6. The specific forms in which Christians establish the public ministry have not been prescribed by the Lord to His New Testament Church. It is the Holy Spirit who through the gift of their common faith leads the believers to establish the adequate and wholesome forms which fit every circumstance, situation, and need" (WELS, *"Theses on the Church and Ministry"*).

"We believe that the church has the freedom to establish various forms within the one ministry of the Word, such as pastors, Christian teachers, and staff ministers. Through its call, the church in Christian liberty designates the place and scope of service" (WELS, *"This We Believe"*).

"We hold it to be untenable to say that the pastorate of the local congregation (Pfarramt) as a specific form of the public ministry is specifically instituted by the Lord in contrast to other forms of the public ministry" (WELS, *"Theses on the Church and Ministry"*).

"The office of the public ministry is not limited to any divinely fixed form as such, for example, the outward form of the 'pfarramt' or pastoral office" (CoLC, *"Concerning Church and Ministry"*).

“Under the influence of tradition and popular as well as theological custom this narrow use of the term ‘public ministry’ has tended to become an exclusive use; and the resultant identification of ‘public ministry’ with the pastoral office has not been without disturbing consequences. It has contributed to a widespread impression that only pastors are public ministers of the Gospel in the strict scriptural sense; and indeed it has encouraged the erroneous belief that God instituted the pastorate precisely in the form in which it is prevalent among us today. This belief in turn has led some to the conclusion that all other offices in the Church having to do with the administration of the Gospel are subsidiary offices which exist only as branches of the actual ministerial office. ...We hold that in Christian liberty the Church may and does exercise the functions of the Public Ministry when it calls qualified persons into the pastorate, into the work of Christian Day-school teaching, into a professorship at its High schools and Colleges, or as elders and deacons who are to assist pastors and teachers in their ministry. We believe that each and all of these offices are administrations of the Public Ministry, that their duties are such as are prescribed by the Lord for the Gospel ministry, and that their respective form is governed, not by divine decree but by the terms of the Call as issued by the Church” (CoLC, *“Concerning Church and Ministry”*).

“The specific area of the work of these public ministers is determined and defined in their respective calls by the assembly that has called them. There is no distinction in rank or power in the public ministry, even though there is a diversity of gifts and responsibilities” (CoLC, *“Statement of Faith and Purpose”*).

“We reject the teaching that the Public Ministry is limited to any one divinely fixed form, that is, limited to the pastoral office to the exclusion of other teachers of the Word” (ELS, *“The Public Ministry of the Word”*).

NOTE: Any official doctrinal statement from the WELS can evidently, at least at this time (2017), also be applied to the ELS. “The Evangelical Lutheran Synod is an American Lutheran church body of 130 congregations in full fellowship with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS)” (<http://els.org/about/our-synod/>).



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