

## “Pure Doctrine: The Laity's Responsibility”

### The LC-MS: Are We Still Following Jesus?

“My sheep hear My voice ... and they follow Me.” (John 10:27, NKJ)

**1A - MANY TODAY SUGGEST** that only pastors and church officials should worry about doctrine and practice, thus denying the God-given role and responsibility of the laity.

As Lutherans we are bound to ask the catechetical question ...

### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

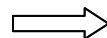
Simply put, when God, through the congregation, bestows the use of the Keys upon His called servant of God, or, when congregations band together as a synod and entrust the work of the priesthood to elected officials, they are not relinquishing their God-given rights and duties; they still retain them. This use of the Keys is the right and duty of the Royal Priesthood to proclaim the Gospel in homes and workplaces, etc., as well as the right and duty to know, be occupied with, and to judge doctrine. This right and duty is not given to pastors or synodical officials in a way that causes the vast majority of the Royal Priesthood (i.e., the laity) to lose the use of the Keys.

### WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

This right and duty of the entire Royal Priesthood is a high and holy work that God not only expects, but commands. As such, it is not to be **neglected** by the laity nor is it to be **taken from** them by any human authority.

Luther speaks of this duty in his explanation to the Third Commandment (Large Catechism):

*“And indeed, we Christians ought always ... be occupied with nothing but holy things, i.e., daily **be engaged upon God's Word**, and carry it in our hearts and upon our lips.*



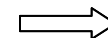
*“Therefore not only those sin against this commandment who grossly misuse and desecrate the holy day, as those who on account of their greed or frivolity neglect to hear God's Word or lie in taverns and are dead drunk like swine; but also that other crowd, who listen to God's Word as to any other trifle, and only from custom come to preaching, and go away again, and at the end of the year know as little of it as at the beginning. ... Know therefore that **you must be concerned** not only about hearing, but also about learning and retaining it in memory, and **do not think that it is optional** with you or of no great importance, but that it is **God's commandment** Who will require of you how you have heard, learned and honored His Word” [Triglotta, L.C. 3<sup>rd</sup> Comm., p. 607f].*

Here we see that God takes this right and duty of the entire Royal Priesthood with utmost seriousness. He will not hold guiltless those, who out of apathy, either neglect this right and duty or allow it to be taken from them. Thus Luther writes: *“To recognize and judge doctrine behooves **each and every Christian**, so much so that he is accursed who infringes upon this right by as little as a hairbreadth. For **Christ Himself has established this right** by various and unassailable statements, such as Matthew 7:15: ‘Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing.’ But how can they avoid them if they do not recognize them? And how can they recognize them if they do not have the right to judge them? But now He gives them not only the right but also the command to judge...” (What Luther Says, #1233, p. 418)*

### HISTORICAL LUTHERANISM TEACHES US

Luther quite obviously recognized the proper role and dignity Christ has bestowed upon the Royal Priesthood. He wrote His Small Catechism so that fathers, in their role as royal priests, could teach the faith to their households. In fact, every Christian in his **vocation**, whether merchant, slave, or man of letters, is a priest through his example and through his everyday, ordinary conduct.

The serious and active involvement of the laity in the days of the Reformation was critical toward the spread of the pure Gospel. In fact, the Preface to the entire Book of Concord was

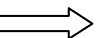


signed by 48 dukes, counts, and princes, as well as 34 mayors, town councils, and entire city governments, **but two clergy only**. This shows that the Lutheran Reformation was in large part a movement of the entire Royal Priesthood. It was neither clergy-dominated nor completely clergy-driven. The Lutheran Reformers recognized the important role **all** the godly play in protecting sound doctrine when they included these words: *“Therefore let **the godly** consider the great errors of the kingdom of the Pope and his tyranny, and let them ponder, first, that the errors must be rejected and the true doctrine embraced, for the glory of God and to the salvation of souls.” (Power and Primacy of the Pope, para. 52). Had it not been for the Reformation’s rediscovery of the Gospel along with the faithfulness of the entire Royal Priesthood, especially the laity, we might still be under the tyranny of Rome today.*

C.F.W. Walther's *Church and Ministry* sets forth the historic and official doctrine of the LC-MS. In his 4<sup>th</sup> Thesis, Walther writes: *“It is to this true church of believers and saints that Christ gave the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven, and it is the proper and only possessor and bearer of the spiritual, divine and heavenly gifts, rights, powers, offices, and the like that Christ has procured and found in His church” (Church & Ministry, p. 10).*

In writing this, Walther is careful to demonstrate that pure doctrine is the responsibility of the entire Royal Priesthood. And he does so by going back through the writings of our Lutheran forefathers, our Lutheran Confessions, Luther, and Scripture, thus showing the unbroken chain of testimony to this truth. This is important, because by such method, Walther shows that his teaching is nothing new, nor was it established by any church council, synod in convention, or any human authority, but rests solely upon the Word of God.

In Dr. Francis Pieper’s *Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod*, we are again reminded that: *“Since God has ordained that His word only, without the admixture of human doctrine be taught and believed in the Christian Church, (1 Peter 4:11; John 8:31,32; 1 Timothy 6:3-4), **all Christians are required by God** to discriminate between orthodox and heterodox [i.e. true and false teaching] church*



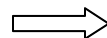
bodies..." And again, "Since the Christians are the church, it is self-evident that they alone originally possess the spiritual gifts and rights which Christ has gained for, and given to, His church... The officers of the church publicly administer their offices only by virtue of delegated powers, conferred on them by the original possessors of such powers, and such administration remains under the supervision of the latter, Colossians 4:17. Naturally **all Christians have the right and duty to judge and decide matters of doctrine, not according to their own notions, of course, but according to the Word of God, 1 John 4:1; 1 Pet. 4:11"** (p. 14).

Thus, Francis Pieper was teaching only what has been taught by Walther, Luther, the Confessions, and Scripture.

### HAVE WE FORGOTTEN HISTORY?

**Prior to 1992**, the synod had a well organized adjudication and appeals process. Each district and the synod had an **elected** Commission on Adjudication. Synod also had an **elected** Commission on Appeals that served as the final arbiter in all cases. These commissions were elected in convention by pastors and **laity**. Each Commission on Adjudication had 7 members consisting of 4\* ordained ministers and 3 **laymen**. The Commission on Appeals had 5\* ordained ministers and 4 **laymen**. To convene and hear a case, each Commission required a minimum of 5 members, with at least 2 ordained ministers and 2 **laymen**. [NOTE: \* 1 commissioned minister could replace 1 ordained minister.]

**In 1992**, the entire process was changed and renamed from "Reconciliation, Adjudication and Appeal" to "Synodical Dispute Resolution." With the name change the system took on a radical new look with a very restrictive system of final appeal. Each district had 4 Reconcilers **appointed** by the District Board of Directors, and no more than 2 could be pastors. All District Reconcilers made up the synodical roster of Reconcilers. If informal reconciliation efforts failed, a Dispute Resolution Panel consisting of 3 persons was convened to hear the case. At least 1 had to be a pastor and 1 had to be a **layman**. If the case proceeded to the end (i.e. informal and formal reconciliation



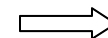
failed), then their decision, by majority vote, was binding, subject only to an appeal to the Commission on Constitutional Matters or the Commission on Theology and Church Relations on constitutional or doctrinal grounds, respectively. Even that appeal request required the wording be approved by the Dispute Resolution Panel before it was sent to either or both commissions.

**In 1995**, a formal appeal process was added. If requested, an Appeal Panel was formed, consisting of 3 **District Presidents only**. If they granted reconsideration, a Review Panel of 5 was formed from the list of reconcilers, at least 2 of which had to be pastors and 2 **laymen**. However, "*the Review Panel shall generally decide the issue on the record without further formal hearing ...*" (p. 127, 1995 Handbook.)

**In 2004**, the entire system was again changed and the process has been greatly complicated. The old process, which was 7 pages in the Synod's 1992 Handbook (7 1/2 in 1995), was divided into "Dispute Resolution of the Synod" and "Restricting, Suspending, and Expelling Congregations or Individuals from Membership." The Synod's 2004 Handbook now takes 27 pages (36-49, 59-71) to describe what formerly took 7 or 7 1/2 pages!

In the current "Dispute Resolution," on a Dispute Resolution Panel or a Review Panel, the representation of **laity** to pastors is either 1 to 2 or 2 to 1. Still, the final Appeal Panel is 3 **District Presidents only**.

**More importantly**, in the case of "Restricting, Suspending, and Expelling," which formerly had both pastors and laity involved at all levels, now has neither simple parish pastors nor laity involved, but **District Presidents only** at all levels! We think it more than a little strange, and very disturbing that in less than a generation, the Synod, in seeking to adjudicate cases of erring pastors and congregations, has moved from a pastor/laity ratio of 4:3 (or 3:4) in 1989, to 2:1 (or 1:2) in 1992, to **ZERO:ZERO** in 2004!



### SUMMARY

To us, it seems as if, today, the LC-MS is being more than a bit double-minded.

On the one hand, we have greatly diminished the role of the laity in the "Dispute Resolution of the Synod," and we have completely removed the laity from the process of "Restricting, Suspending, and Expelling Congregations or Individuals from Membership."

On the other hand, at a recent pastors' conference, a district president encouraged the pastors to "release the priests." Presumably, his intention was to motivate pastors to encourage the participation of the laity, a proper concern. But how does greatly diminishing or completely removing the laity's participation in judging disputes, "release the priests," other than to wrongly release them from their divinely-given rights and responsibilities to know, be occupied with, and to judge doctrine and their shepherds? St. Paul asks, "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life" (1 Corinthians 6:2-3). Do we not agree with St. Paul that lay people are more than qualified to "test **all** things" (1 Thessalonians 5:21)?

May all Royal Priests rejoice in Christ's gift of the Keys, given to His Church, and boldly proclaim that "the Kingdom **ours** remaineth!"



Prepared for LC-MS congregations by participants and supporters of the "Called to Confess" Free Conferences begun in the Northwest District in response to the 2004 Synodical Convention.

**ADDITIONAL TESTIMONY FROM SCRIPTURE  
AND THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS  
CONCERNING THE LAITY'S RESPONSIBILITY  
FOR PURE DOCTRINE**

*"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but **test** the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world"* (1 John 4:1).

*"Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and **examined the scriptures** every day to see if **what Paul said was true**" (Acts 17:11).*

*"**Finally brethren**, whatever things are true, whatever things <are> noble, whatever things <are> just, whatever things <are> pure, whatever things <are> lovely, whatever things <are> of good report, if <there is> any virtue and if <there is> anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things" (Phil. 4:8).*

*"**Those who come to the Sacrament** ought to know more and have a fuller understanding of **all Christian doctrine** than children and beginners at school" (Large Catechism, Shorter Preface).*

*"All these (false teachings) and similar articles, and whatever attaches to them or follow from them, we reject and condemn as false, erroneous, heretical, and contrary to God's Word...**all pious Christians** will and should avoid these as dearly as they love their soul's welfare and salvation" (Formula of Concord, SD, XII, para. 39).*

*"Neither Peter nor the other ministers should assume lordship or authority over the church...**nor let anybody's authority count for more than the word**" (Power and Primacy of the Pope).*

*"6. And now, in the sixth place, because these highly important matters [the business of religion] concern also **the common people and laymen** [as they are called], who, inasmuch as they are Christians, **must for their salvation distinguish between pure and false doctrine**, we confess also the Small and the Large Catechisms of Dr. Luther, as they were written by him and incorporated in his works, because they have been unanimously approved and received by all churches adhering to the Augsburg Confession, and have been publicly used in churches, schools, and in [private] houses, and, moreover, because the Christian doctrine from God's Word is comprised in them in the most correct and simple way, and, in like manner, is explained, as far as necessary [for simple laymen]." (Formula of Concord, SD, Rule and Norm, para. 8).*

*"This being the case, **all Christians** ought to beware of becoming partakers of the godless doctrine, blasphemies, and unjust cruelty of the Pope. On this account they ought to desert and execrate the Pope with his adherents as the kingdom of Antichrist; just as Christ has commanded, Matt. 7, 15: Beware of false prophets. And Paul commands that godless teachers should be avoided and execrated as cursed, Gal. 1, 8; Titus 3, 10. And he says, 2 Cor. 6, 14: Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what communion hath light with darkness?" (Power and Primacy of the Pope, para. 41).*

*"But since the decisions of Synods are the decisions of the Church, and not of the Popes, it is especially incumbent on **kings** to check the license of the Popes [not allow such wantonness], and to act so that the power of judging and decreeing from the Word of God is not wrested from the Church. And as **the rest of the Christians** must censure all other errors of the Pope, so they must also rebuke the Pope when he evades and impedes the true investigation and true decision of the Church." (Power and Primacy of the Pope, para. 56).*