

A Fraternal Response to Dustin Kunkel

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The Philistines assembled to fight Israel, with ... soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore ... When the men of Israel saw that their situation was critical and that their army was hard pressed, they hid in caves and thickets, among the rocks, and in pits and cisterns ... Saul remained at Gilgal, and all the troops with him were quaking with fear. ⁸ He waited seven days, the time set by Samuel; but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and Saul's men began to scatter. ⁹ So he said, "Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings." And Saul offered up the burnt offering. ¹⁰ Just as he finished making the offering, Samuel arrived, and Saul went out to greet him. ¹¹ "What have you done?" asked Samuel. Saul replied, "When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Micmash, ¹² I thought, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the LORD's favor.' So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering." ¹³ "You acted foolishly," Samuel said. "You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. ¹⁴ But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command." (1 Samuel 13:5-14, NIV 1984)

Saul faced massive challenges. The text says the hostile soldiers before him were as numerous as the sand on the seashore. No wonder his men were quaking with fear. He simply could not be held hostage by Samuel's tardiness and a nitpicky concern for doing what is right and proper. To do so would be to jettison the very core of his kingship, the mission given to him to protect and expand Israel. And he would make no category mistake here. He knew Israel was not a land, but a people. Lives were at stake. Real people with real families back home. Common sense and all logic, yes, common decency was dictating his actions. And after all, he was doing it *for* the LORD and the LORD's people. And so he did not continue to wait for Samuel the priest. Instead he stepped into a role not given to him and offered the burnt offering. How devastating must have Samuel words been to him. "*You acted foolishly. You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you.*" ¹

¹ It should be noted that not only does Saul act foolishly in ignoring the LORD's established order, but so does David with respect to the Ark of the Covenant. When the Ark is brought home to Jerusalem on a cart rather than carried by the Levites, those established by God to carry it, and it begins to fall out of the cart, Uzzah, the priest, tries to prevent it from falling. The text tells us, "And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the Ark of God (2 Samuel 6:7)." David's reaction? "And David was angry because the LORD had burst forth against Uzzah (verse 8)." Here is another example in Holy Scripture of apparent pressing need, not being justification for ignoring God's established order.

The author of 1 Samuel vividly paints the challenge facing the people and leaders of Israel and the consequences of how they chose to solve that problem. As far as I know, no one has as succinctly or more powerfully expressed the ministry challenges facing the LCMS and the church catholic in America than Dustin Kunkel in his recent article “*Category Error, Common Sense, and the Office of the Public Ministry in the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod.*” Dustin should receive nothing but praise for endeavoring to make us aware of these challenges. Clearly his family upbringing and service in the church suggests a man strongly committed to the mission of the church. That commitment comes through every word of his essay as does, might I note, his commitment to the Holy Scriptures. In many ways, he is zealously contending for important truths of God’s Word. However, I would like to suggest that Holy Scripture often places before us what I call *two truths*, that is, two teachings or ideas that on the surface seem contradictory or difficult to reconcile. Historically, Christians have often gone astray when they affirmed one truth at the expense of another. The Trinitarian and Christological controversies are the clearest example of this phenomenon.² I believe that there are *two truths*, both from a biblical and from an experiential common sense point of view, that have to be considered when discussing what our Lord would have us do and believe in challenging times.

A classic example of two truths informing what we should do and believe is found in a sermon Luther preached on March 24, 1525. Here Luther expounds on 1 Timothy 1:18-20, where Paul commands the young pastor, Timothy, to “wage the good warfare.” Luther marvels at this clear example of *two truths* of Holy Scripture. He writes:

God is wondrous (*wunderbarlich*) in His ways. He wants me to know Scripture and be mighty in it; otherwise I am not to preach. Yet He does not want me to trust in my abilities. Paul exhorts Timothy to study without ceasing. Similarly, Christ wants us to possess a wealth of Scripture knowledge in order to defeat the rabble (*die Rotten*). He wants *learned men* (*das Gelehrte*) to preach, men who are equipped with Scripture and are able like knights (*Ritterschaft*) to contend for God; yet they are not to rely on their skill (*Kunst*) and wisdom (*Klugheit*), but the Holy Spirit is to teach them in the faith. In this way the devil is subdued (*mat*). God wants to do this work. He wants to open our lips and give us a wisdom which all our enemies will not be able to contradict or resist ... [here Luther cites the example of Gideon in the Old Testament, who God commanded to fight with men, but with a limited number to show the power of God] ... But why, since He wants to fight for them, does He command them to possess armor? He is a

² The Nicene and Athanasian Creeds were confessions of two truths in the face of those who wanted to defend one truth at the expense of another. This still goes on today. Truth one: There is one God. Truth two: The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. Modern day Jehovah’s Witnesses defend the “oneness” of God and, therefore, deny the second truth. Modern day Mormons defend the second truth and, thereby, deny the first truth. Truth one: Jesus truly has a divine and human nature. Truth two: these two natures are never separated in the one person of Jesus. Eutychianism defends the unity of the person but thereby dissolves the two natures. Nestorianism defends the two natures at the expense of the unity of the person. Lutherans, with orthodox Christians of all times, have always confessed both truths.

wondrous (*wunderlicher*) God: He does **not** want to do the work **without** our armor, **yet not through** it; He wants us to use swords and yet not depend upon them. Thus He also wants me to work in order to support myself; and yet He says He wants to support me, as He does the birds, without my labor (Mt. 6:26). Therefore we must become use to this: God wants us to make use of external means and yet not rely on them.³

Here are two truths, in tension, yet we must remember both of them and act accordingly. “Work as if it is all up to you” **and** “pray as if it is all up to God.” We must not allow our “trust in God” to hinder our study. On the other hand, we must not allow our study to replace our trust in God. It is not enough to confess or live by only one of these truths.

In his article, Dustin analyzes the work of the Task Force’s Report pursuant to Resolution 4-06A of the 2013 LCMS Convention on Licensed Lay Deacons. Throughout his analysis, Dustin is rightfully concerned about the participation of the local congregation in these discussions as both Holy Writ and common sense affirm. Indeed, one important truth of Scripture is that the laity and the members of the local congregation are not only capable but responsible to judge the things of this life.⁴ I think most of us would recognize a common sense truth that even the pagan philosopher Aristotle understood when he notes that “a helmsman [is a better judge] of a rudder than the craftsman; and so is the guest of a banquet rather than the cook.”⁵ This is an important truth. One which we must never forget. However, Dustin does not seem to sufficiently consider another important truth of Holy Scripture and of history when he writes

The LCMS has a blind spot flowing from category error. It is an over-attention to **clergy focused questions**, rather than to common-sense, field-based needs. TF 4-06A sets up a straw man of ‘discord’ over the issue of LLDs. Why straw man (sic)? The discord is raised exactly by **those who are not served by LLDs**, nor impacted by their ministry. It would be true discord if congregations served by LLDs were asking for a change and not being heard. (emphasis mine)

In this regard, I believe we must also sufficiently consider another important truth of Holy Scripture and of history, namely, *Ubique peccatum originis domi est*, “original sin is at home everywhere.” It is at home among the laity and among church officials, yes, even among the

³ “Martin Luthers Lection wider die Rottengeister, und wie sich weltliche Obrigkeit halten soll“ St. Louis Edition, IX, 917-18, translation mine, emphasis mine.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 6: 2-3, “do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know we will judge angels? How much more then, matters pertaining to this life!” C.F.W. Walther’s classic, “The Congregation’s Right to Choose Its Pastor,” shows that the LCMS has always understood the vital role of the laity.

⁵ καὶ πηδάλιον κυβερνήτης τέκτονος, καὶ θοίνην ὁ δαιτυμῶν ἀλλ’ οὐχ ὁ μάγειρος (translation mine) Aristotle, Politics, Book III, Chap. XI

clergy. But it is especially the clergy's job to point out sin or the danger of sin. Thus, it should be noted that Saul's men raised no discord over Saul's actions. It was Samuel, the clergyman, who raised the discord by noting the inappropriateness of Saul's sacrifice. And why would Saul's men raise any objections, since Saul, their king, a church official, said it was alright. Why would anyone question it? Years later, Elijah, the clergyman, was tagged the "troubler of Israel," while the people raised no discord over the rise of the worship of Baal, again probably partially because King Ahab, the church official, promoted it. During the Reformation, it was not chiefly the laity who had issues with Rome's teachings or with the concept of indulgences. And those who had issues with Rome often had issues with things that were not the main point. Luther, the clergyman, created some of the greatest discord in history by insisting on the Gospel. A discord, I might add, that we will be joyfully celebrating next year!

And why would we expect congregations served by licensed lay deacons to complain? They are being served Word and Sacrament and they trust their church officials that these licensed lay deacons are properly trained. In their eyes, the Synod has told them this is perfectly alright. But if we are being fair, I think we ought to recognize that the ramifications of the use of licensed lay deacons won't be seen until many years down the road. The conditions of the church at the time of the Reformation did not occur over night nor even after a mere thirty or forty year period. It was gradual and unforeseen until the damage was already done. It eventually became so bad that Luther cries out

The deplorable conditions which I recently encountered when I was a visitor constrained me to prepare this brief and simple catechism or statement of Christian teaching. Good God, what wretchedness I beheld! The common people, especially those who live in the country, have no knowledge whatever of Christian teaching, and unfortunately many pastors are quite incompetent and unfitted for teaching. Although the people are supposed to be Christian, are baptized, and receive the holy sacrament, they do not know the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, or the Ten Commandments, they live as if they were pigs and irrational beasts, and now that the Gospel has been restored they have mastered the fine art of abusing liberty. (Tappert translation, 338)

If you had asked the congregations at Luther's time, or better yet the congregations when the initial causes of these deplorable conditions first began, how they were doing, my guess is that you would have received few, if any, complaints. There would have been no "discord" created by these congregations or by their pastors. The cause of "discord" in Dustin's sense all came from Luther and his colleagues. So today, the concerns that Dustin has labeled as "discord," rightfully come from outside the congregations served by licensed lay deacons. Yes, congregations are capable of judging, indeed, they are commanded to judge these things. But it is their duty to obtain all the facts to make a proper judgment. Yes, the laity can judge properly. But sometimes they must be reminded to do so, as St. Paul had to remind the Corinthians. Why? Because original sin is at home everywhere. Thus, any judgment by the laity must be based on biblical knowledge and understanding, not on the mere word of church officials. Again, why?

Because original sin is at home everywhere, even among church officials. The acceptance of ideas and practices on the mere word of church officials was precisely one of the main things that the Reformation rejected.

So what are the concerns of those troubled by the notion of “licensed lay deacons?” Why would they create such “discord” by calling into question some districts’ current practice? The first and most important concern is that what has been commanded to the church for all time is being circumvented or downplayed, as Saul ignored the command of God concerning sacrifice and did what was not given to him to do. This is never wise. The following quotes from Walther and from the Task Force show what we have traditionally believed about the pastoral office.

*The preaching office is not an optional office but one whose establishment has been **commanded** to the Church and to which the Church is properly bound till the end of time. (C.F.W. Walther, Thesis III on the Office, Church and Office, Harrison, 181, emphasis mine)*

The LCMS has, since its inception, recognized our Lord’s mandate for the pastoral office, as attested to in Scriptures and the Confessions. (2013 Resolution 4-06A Task Force: Report to the Synod, 3)

I would like to state that Dustin’s honesty in his article is refreshing and to be commended. Nowhere in his article do we find him arguing for the use of licensed lay deacons for “emergency” situations and then trying to justify as “emergencies” things that may or may not be emergencies.⁶ Indeed, he is arguing for something much more radical. If I understand him rightly, he is arguing that congregations can decide whether they actually need a pastor or not. Our traditional insistence upon the role of the pastor in the local congregation is viewed by Dustin as a category error. In his view

The central issue is this: category error underneath TF 4-06A’s recommendations informs a reductive application of the Office of the Public Ministry. Our inherited,

⁶ Lutherans have always recognized that emergency circumstances exist. For all of the concern that is manifested (and rightfully so) for the royal priesthood of all believers, the notion of licensed lay deacons seems to be a bit problematic in another way. It seems that one could make an argument that the idea of “licensed lay deacons” is in itself a stifling of the royal priesthood and of local authority! Indeed, the historical Lutheran arguments for laymen stepping into the office in emergency circumstances always indicate that **any** Christian can and should do it! Then why the need for “licensed lay deacons?” I think one can make the argument that as soon as you require any sort of training beyond that required of the common Christian, you are no longer in the realm of emergency or necessity, as these situations were envisioned by our Lutheran forefathers.

stratified forms for The Office do not fit the manifold expressions for The Office, or functions under The Office, found in the New Testament.⁷

From whom did we inherit this category error? From Luther and those who followed him. Basically Dustin appears to be saying that it was not a big deal for there to be category error in the sixteenth century, but now it is a different story, because the church is no longer an “insider,” but an “outsider” to society.

Again, this [our current use of pastors] is logical for the sixteenth-century era (and succeeding centuries of specialization) in which the church was primarily *the insider* to authority structures and cultures.” (83, emphasis his)

In other words, the category error was already made by the Lutheran reformers, it just didn't have the repercussions then as it does now. But I believe our Lutheran forefathers were pretty precise in what they said and thought. Therefore, our LCMS forefathers distinguished between the office *in concreto* and *in abstracto*,⁸ that is, between the office in view of the persons holding the office and the office in view of the functions it performs. I don't think if they were alive today that they would agree that they were mistakenly embracing category error.

Yet, for the sake of argument, if it is true we need to broaden our understanding of the Holy Ministry (whether within the bounds of the Confessions or not), it is important to note that none of the biblical and historical examples Dustin offers seem to refer to those who shepherd the local congregation. The examples from the New Testament that Dustin cites to show what he believes is the error of a reductive understanding of the office are outside the congregation. They are, to coin a term, engaged in extra-congregational mission.⁹ Licensed lay deacons do not primarily engage in extra-congregational mission. They engage in intra-congregational mission. They shepherd the flock.

⁷ He makes this point in several places. “It is category error to apply the Office of the Public Ministry in a reductive manner to congregations struggling to proclaim Christ in their secular communities.” (Kunkel, 92-93)

⁸ Here follow a couple of examples of this careful use of this distinction. After citing the Augsburg Confession Article V, Walther in *Church and Ministry/Office* writes, “This statement, of course, does not speak of the preaching office *in concreto* or of the pastoral office but of the office *in abstracto* ... (Harrison translation, 169).” On the other hand, E. W. Kähler discussing the Augsburg Confession Article XIV notes, “We say the public office of preaching (*Das öffentliche Predigtamt*) in order to show that we do not mean the office *in abstracto* but rather *in concreto*. We mean by this that what will be considered is not the office itself *apart* from the person (*losgedacht von den Personen*) who bears it, but rather the ministry *in view* of the person (*in Absicht auf die Personen*) who is in this office.” (*Lehre und Wehre*, Vol. 20, No. 9, page 17, translation mine, emphasis mine)

⁹ I coin the terms “extra-congregational” and “intra-congregational” *mission* because, as Michael Barram has shown, “the ongoing nurture of established Christian communities is as constitutive of [Paul's] missional vocation as are initial evangelism and community formation” (*Interpretation*, January 2007, Michael Barram, “The Bible, Mission, and Social Location: Toward a Missional Hermeneutic, 55).

Dustin writes,

This strong-arming of the text by TF 4-06A is the result of category error in thinking: Philip does not match our sixteenth-twentieth century reductive model for The Office, so we lay him on a procrustean bed and lop off any bits that do not fit. (85)

What he views as lopping off, I see as being careful to not over-interpret the New Testament evidence. The Task Force makes the point in several places that we do not have enough evidence to say anything with certainty about the functions of deacons.¹⁰ It is telling that Dustin does not engage the issue of the laying on of hands with respect to Acts 6. I believe he would probably argue that we should not read “ordination” back into that. But it is just as true that we ought to be careful to not read our notions of deacons back into any of the biblical allusions to them. So too, his citing of New Testament prophetesses does not parallel the use of licensed lay deacons. The church did not say to these New Testament women, “We want you be a prophetess in our midst.” No, these women received immediate calls from the Holy Spirit directly, not mediated calls from the church. Shepherds have mediated calls. Prophetesses had immediate calls. If anyone had an immediate call, these were traditionally associated with miracles of some kind to prove their legitimacy.¹¹ This is nothing new. In the Old Testament, priests had mediated calls, prophets had immediate calls. Mediated calls remind us that God is a God of order. Immediate calls remind us that, as a result of the Fall, the structures God has ordained can be misused, that God’s established representatives can sometimes not represent God. That original sin is at home everywhere. So God has to intervene, so to speak, from outside of His established representatives.¹² But neither pastors nor licensed lay deacons have immediate calls.

¹⁰ Compare Task Force footnote 3 and 21. I would add, early on deacons and pastors *might* be the same thing! In Acts 16:4, apostles and elders are distinguished. In Acts 6, deacons are being distinguished from apostles (the twelve) not pastors. It is true that later within the New Testament deacons seem to be distinguished from pastors (overseers). But when exactly did that happen? Compare how “elders” was once a term for any leader in the church, whether clergy or lay, but over time it became associated with the laity and elders and pastors were distinguished. The point is one cannot be dogmatic about any of this.

¹¹ Thus, for instance, Chemnitz, “And they who have thus been called have the testimony of the Spirit and of *miracles* (*durch den Geist und Mirackel Zeugniß*) that they do not err in doctrine ... But God endows those whom He calls without means either with *the gift of miracles* or with other testimonies of the Spirit (*gibt er die Gabe Wunderzeichen zu thun, oder andere öffentliche Zeugniß*) with which to prove and confirm their call. Thus, Moses established his call before Pharaoh with the gift of miracles, Ex 4:1ff. Therefore Paul also calls signs, wonders, and mighty deeds proofs of the apostolate, 2 Cor 12:12. Christ speaks of these, Jn 5:36; Mt 10:8. But one should not believe false doctrine that leads away from God and conflicts with the Word, even if miracles follow it. Dt 12:1ff; Mt 7:22-23; 24:23-24; 2 Th 2:9.” (Ministry, Word, and Sacraments, translated by Luther Poellot, 30-31, German additions mine, emphasis mine)

¹² The seven seem to be somewhat of a bridge group connecting the *immediate* calls of the time of the apostles with the *mediated* calls of our day. Thus, they were chosen by the church, (mediated call), but they were directly approved by the apostles (those who had an immediate call). It should be noted that, of the seven we actually hear about, namely Stephen and Philip, they also did miracles. For Stephen see Acts 6:8. For Philip see Acts 8:6. Perhaps this was the Lord’s way of showing His approval of such future arrangements, since the process of the New Testament mediated call was going to differ from the process of the Old Testament priesthood.

Even if one grants that some of the examples he cites *might* be intra-congregational activity, it is odd that for someone otherwise attuned to the impact of changing conditions, he does not seem to consider the changing conditions that occurred in the church even while she was an outsider. In this respect his analysis seems strangely flat. We need to take seriously the impact of the loss of the authoritative living voice of the apostles and that Scripture's qualification that those who shepherd ought to be "apt to teach" began to have an even greater importance with the loss of that living voice. The move from the living voice of the apostles to *written* Scripture increased the need for careful examination of the written documents.¹³ The rise of various heresies, again within the time of the apostles (and therefore still clearly within the outsider period!), led to the same need.¹⁴ Indeed, the move of the church from her original settings and the original languages, while still an outsider, in no way lessened the need for educated pastors, in fact, it only accentuated the need for proper training, especially in the languages.

For someone calling us to leave our cultural baggage behind by reaching back beyond the Reformation to New Testament times, it is telling that Dustin does not deal with the insights of the Task Force regarding biblical usage of terms. To cite the Task Force, in the New Testament, those who were responsible for Word and Sacrament ministry locally,

are seen as being and functioning principally as *shepherds*, men who personally tend, care for, and even give their lives for their sheep. Indeed, the people under the care of the holder of the Office of the Holy Ministry are never called 'those overseen'; they are regularly called the "sheep" or the "flock."

Is that not what these dedicated "licensed lay deacons" are doing on the local level? Of course, it is. And what is the New Testament term for people doing these sorts of things? Is it not, "shepherd?" And what does the Latin word "pastor" mean? Shepherd! I would invite those who insist on a special caste known as "Licensed Lay Deacons" to consider that.

We have always been concerned that congregations be fed on Word and Sacrament. But we have always believed that those who provide Word and Sacrament within congregations are pastors. Thus, even in emergency situations, the historic Lutheran arguments seem to indicate that those doing the functions of the pastor are pastors (for a time). Thus, Melancthon, pointing to Augustine's example of two Christians in a boat, writes,

¹³ Compare Luther's concern in the Preface to the Smalcald Articles that even while he was alive and still writing people were twisting his words!

¹⁴ Thus, Luke reports that Paul warns, "I know after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remember that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears." (Acts 20:29-31) Indeed, there is a great deal of evidence in the New Testament of the early rise and prevalence of false teaching: Matthew 7:15, 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, 1 Timothy 1:3-4, 2 Timothy 4:1ff., 1 John 4:1ff., 2 John 7ff., and Jude 3-4.

Just as in the case of necessity (*necessitates/Not*) even a layman (*laicus/Laie*) absolves, and becomes the minister and **pastor** (*minister ac pastor/ ein Pfarrherr*) of another.” (Tractate, 67, Latin and German additions mine, emphasis mine)

On this basis, C.F.W. Walther notes

“Many at this time have a totally wrong conception of what the office of the ministry really is. They think that when an ordained minister preaches the Word, baptizes, absolves, etc., then the office is being administered; but when a layman presents the Word of God, baptizes, absolves, etc., then that is no administration of the office, but something else, of which they are not certain what they should call it. They evidently think that the pastor makes the office. According to the Word of God, however, it is the reverse: the office makes one a pastor (*das Amt macht zum Pastor*). Even as a person by what he does – what a writer, a porter, a teacher, a song leader etc., must do – becomes a writer, a porter, a teacher, a song leader etc., so also a person becomes a pastor (*ein Pastor*) by doing what a pastor must do; if he does it in an lawful way he is a lawful pastor; if he does it in an unlawful manner, he is an unlawful pastor, but in the last analysis he still becomes a pastor, for – he administers his office, which is what makes a person a pastor.” (*The Congregation’s Right to Choose Its Pastor*, 131, translated by Fred Kramer, German additions mine)¹⁵

Indeed, as I have personally experienced here in the Northwest these past twenty years, the laity get this. That is why I have on several occasions heard licensed lay deacons referred to as “Pastor” by the congregational members they serve. And rightfully so. The issue here is not what these dedicated and faithful men are ... according to our traditional understanding, they are pastors, not lay deacons, or whatever else we may devise to call them. And our congregations have the right to know that these faithful men, whom we have unfortunately labeled “licensed lay deacons,” are their pastors. And these faithful men have the right to know that they are pastors. The title “Pastor” might not be a positive to those outside the church, as Dustin suggests, but it certainly is to those within the church. Titles do mean something. Thus, it says something when a child refuses to call their step father or step mother, or adopted parents, “father” or “mother,” “mom” or “dad.” Let’s call these pastors what they are. They need it and their congregations need it.

It is the same for ordination. Ordination is an adiaphoron. It is neither commanded nor forbidden in Holy Scripture. But so are wedding ceremonies or even the use of marriage vows. That ordination is an adiaphoron does not make it “unimportant” or “meaningless.” It is the same with wedding vows and wedding ceremonies. Ordination is not essential to being a pastor, nor is a wedding essential to being married. But each one “is the public rite of the Church ... that

¹⁵ Translated from *Der Lutheraner*, Jahrgang 17, No. 22, June 11, 1861, page 171. Note that there is no ambiguity in the term “Pastor” as there can be in the term “Amt” or “Predigtamt.” This refers to an individual appointed to deliver the Lord’s gifts to His flock.

proclaims openly”¹⁶ something important! Let’s ordain these men. Let’s publicly and openly affirm that they are pastors. This is what the Task Force is urging us to do! Again, it is good for the congregation and it is good for the men shepherding them.

Those who raise concerns about the use of licensed lay deacons also are concerned about the Church’s future. Dustin as a good Lutheran desires us to be mindful of the lessons of history. Thus, he argues,

TF 4-06A’s recommendations lead to a future where the dwindling local church is held hostage by demands from a top-heavy structure and a specialized clergy class. For Lutherans steeped in Reformation history, this sounds sadly familiar.

But I wonder how steeped in Reformation history we really are. He notes that Luther “encouraged Melanchthon, a layman and the writer of a large portion of the Lutheran Confessions to preach.” This is certainly a part of our history. But Melanchthon was certainly a trained “theological expert.” After all, he was training pastors of his day. Ironically, it is this same Melanchthon, who certainly knew more about the Reformation and the situation that caused the conditions that led to it than any of us, who explains how things got so bad prior to the time of Luther by noting:

The adversaries ... neglect the condition of the churches; they do not care that the churches are rightly taught, and that the Sacraments are properly administered (*rite tractari*). To the priesthood they admit all kinds of persons indiscriminately (*sine discrimine*). (Apology of the Augsburg Confession, XXVIII, 3, translation mine, Latin additions mine.)

The German is even stronger, as it adds:

They ordain crude/incompetent (*grobe*) asses; thus the Christian doctrine perished, because the Church was not supplied with competent (*tüchtigen*) preachers. (ibid, translation mine, German additions mine.)

In light of this, it is a bit disconcerting that Dustin can state: “Having specialized theologians is not the issue; the Church will always need leaders who divide Law and Gospel well.” I fear that there is an assumption here that any preaching and any distribution of the Sacrament are sufficient. Martin Brecht, however, notes that for Luther, people should not come to the Sacrament merely out of habit, but “Only one who desires the sacrament should commune, and he alone is worthy to do so ... Desire, however, is awakened by the preaching of law and gospel.”¹⁷ If I understand Dustin’s statement correctly, what has been a minimal requirement for all preachers is now viewed as necessary for only a few. Knowing a little bit about Reformation history, such a statement raises concerns for me about the future. In his *Loci Communes*,

¹⁶ Task Force, p. 11.

¹⁷ Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation (1483-1521)*, 383.

Melanchthon, who, again not to put too fine a point on it, stands closer to the Reformation than any of us, notes:

impious rulers endeavor to destroy the churches. Others, indifferent, by their neglect deform [it] by **not fostering/cherishing/supporting studies** (*non fovent studia*), not seeking **learned** (*eruditos*) ministers, not providing a fair living for them ... Basil bewails that in his time the most unworthy, **unlearned** (*indoctos*), and laziest of all the ministers were elevated to the governance of the church. Afterward, as wealth increased, ecclesiastical offices became prey for the powerful. But the ministry itself was neglected and was corrupted by **unlearned** (*indoctos*) mercenaries partly out of superstition, partly out of avarice. Now again also in those places where the true doctrine has been received, many **unlearned** (*indocti*) and unworthy men are admitted into the ministry. Because the leaders neglect the whole matter, do not regard/support studies (*nec tuentur studia*), and are not concerned that ministers have a living, in this fashion, the church is afflicted with constant difficulties in the world (Chemnitz' citation in his *Loci Theologici*, III, 142 translation mine, emphasis mine.)

Whether such “affliction” is the result of the failure of the state or a Synod or a district or the local congregation or the individual student matters not. *Ubique peccatum originis domi est*, original sin is at home everywhere. According to Melanchthon, the “affliction” of his time resulted from not cherishing studies and admitting unlearned men into the ministry. I believe the Task Force’s suggestions are trying to prevent this from happening again.¹⁸ The Task Force’s recommendations flow from a genuine concern for the future of the church. And because “original sin is at home everywhere,” such concerns also argue for the broadest possible participation of the whole church in the placement of men into Word and Sacrament ministry. Thus, one concern is that districts are vetting the licensed lay deacons **alone** without the input of the church at large. The transparochial nature of the office is what is at stake here. This is exactly the point of the Task Force. A point, I might add, that Dustin does not address in any meaningful way. Local eyes can become myopic, as they were in the case of Saul and his men. We have always known this. This is why congregations did not historically call without the advice of experienced pastors, especially the district president. But I would argue that district offices can become myopic also. “Original sin is at home everywhere.” Because this remains true on this side of heaven, we don’t need fewer eyes, but the more eyes the better! The Task Force is trying to involve the greater church in the process. This is a good thing. Indeed it is something that was always recognized in the past. This is why we have our current system.¹⁹

¹⁸ Of course, one can argue that there is no lack of information in our day and age as was the case in the time before the Reformation. However, we now have the issue of “too much” information. In some ways this may be even more challenging than “too little” information. Thus, Uggla notes, “ ... globalization has contributed to the rise of a knowledge - or informational (Castells) – society in which it is not the ability to collect information, but the capacity to *interpret* the information that needs to be recognized as a key competence.” (Bengt Kristensson Uggla, *Ricoeur, Hermeneutics, and Globalization*, Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010, page 59)

¹⁹ Who is more likely to weed out unsuitable candidates? Any failures in this regard in our current system only further proves the point, for local congregations and districts do the initial vetting for our seminarians.

The issues that Dustin and others raise are real and need to be diligently and thoroughly discussed. However, I don't believe they are completely new. Martin Brecht writes,

Luther's chief concern was for the pastors. This was not just because of his interests as a professor of theology and a preacher. Pastors were the most important mediators of God's Word; if they did not do their job, the church would be in danger. But the professional needs of the pastors, viz., compensation and authority, were frequently ill provided. The church's income from its own property and from gifts had decreased even more sharply than the number of clergy. The church was thereby threatened with ruin. Pastors and their families often suffered want. If they had debts they were in no position to repay them. Not only was there a lack of money, but also of suitable and qualified theological candidates ... Moreover, the inadequate pay discouraged people from entering the ministerial profession ... Luther was clearly acquainted with the lack of personnel, because congregations frequently appealed to the Wittenberg theology professor when a pastoral position had to be filled ... Several times Luther advocated making schoolmasters pastors and preachers ... This was not strictly a solution born of necessity. The schoolmasters possessed professional experience that was also valuable for the tasks of preaching and teaching. (Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church* (1532-1546), 272-73)

In no other time in our past, as far as I can tell, have we had licensed lay deacons or anything equivalent to them. The schoolmasters that Luther pursued became pastors. He chose them because they were "apt/fit to teach." He did this not because he was Germanic or a product of the industrial revolution, but because he experienced firsthand what lack of proper theological training resulted in within the Church. He called them "deplorable conditions." I worry, that if we are not careful, we might be beginning to leave similar conditions as a heritage to those who follow us.

I share Dustin's concern about our congregations' ability to support pastors. We face massive challenges. And Dustin is correct in that the burden cannot fall solely on them. This is where I think we can all agree. The Task Force has made several fine recommendations. But more ideas need to be generated. Sadly, such discussions will likely be sidetracked until we can agree on our understanding of the Office of the Holy Ministry and the role of pastors.

Luther, in the sermon previously mentioned, continued to marvel at this marvelous example of two truths. He wrote:

Therefore we must become use to this: God wants us to make use of external means and yet not rely on them. Thus here, too: He wants us to be well read in the Bible; yet we should also carry out our work through His help. David says (Psalm 44:6): "I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me"; again (Psalm 147:10): "He delights not in the strength of the horse; He takes no pleasure in the legs of a man." Why do you lie

(*leugest*), David? Since you say you have no confidence in your armor, why, then, do you not let it hang at home on the wall? Although David did not rely on it, he still did not want to be without his armor; for that would be tempting God.²⁰

Let us not tempt God. Let us fully train those who are to labor in the Holy Ministry. Let us give our shepherds the weapons they need against the wiles and snares of the devil. But let us also trust that the Lord will provide laborers for the harvest. Jesus said, “Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into His harvest.” Pray as if it is all up to God. But let us work, let us give, let us study as if it is all up to us!!!

I want to end by saying I am blessed to be part of a district that believes that “Lutheran Mission Matters.” I also, however, strongly support the suggestions of the Task Force on licensed lay deacons. My prayer is that those who support the idea of licensed lay deacons would at least realize that those of us who question the notion of licensed lay deacons are not just being jerks or that we lack concern for the lost, or that we worship the Confessions, but that perhaps on judgment day, we simply don’t want to hear, Samuel’s words to Saul, “*You acted foolishly. You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you.*” God grant us His grace that we might discuss these things as brothers and come to God pleasing agreement. Amen.

²⁰ “Martin Luthers Lection wider die Rottengeister, und wie sich weltliche Obrigkeit halten soll” St. Louis Edition, IX, 917-18, translation mine, emphasis mine.