

The Office of the Keys *vis a vis* Congregational / Synodical Polity

June 14, 2015



Synopsis:

The doctrine of the Church has many lenses through which it might be considered. Theology tells us what God has instituted in his Church as his saving franchise in the World and gives us some insight as to how God's salvation reaches into the hearts of people to save them and to become a part of his Church. This interaction between God and man unto salvation then provides us a history to study, for God made his revelation to people in the context of earth's history. This made God's Church an agent, or an actor on history's stage. Thus the Church may be studied as a history and in her historical contexts. In this history, and in her relationship to God's Word, the Bible, the Church may also be examined from the standpoint of her internal history or tradition. As such, in various geographies and centuries, some aspects of her tradition and history vary with time and place, while other aspects remain predominantly the same. Scripture itself refers to traditions, even in the earliest history of the New Testament Church, and Paul admonishes the Church not to depart from the traditions received from the apostles (2 Thess. 3.6).

While God is a God of order and not of disorder, and God himself has all authority and institutes that power to save in the Office of the Keys to the Church, and as God has not prescribed the precise forms and rites by which those Keys are to be used in his Church for the discipline and edification of his people, tradition and history allow us to examine various forms that the Church has used and employed in order to apply God's grace to his people. As such, hierarchical Churches, investing greater ecclesial authority to Popes and Archbishops and Bishops than to the parish Pastors or Priests, and other Churches who local parishes are barely connected to offices outside the parish and the Pastor's themselves are barely distinguishable in their authority from the parishioners they serve. And Christians in each of these traditions have been arguably served and been delivered by means of these various Churches from this vale of sin and death into heaven.

The purpose of this study is to examine the tradition of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod and her governance both within the congregation and as a national and international synodical organization.

Outline:

The Office of the Keys vis a vis Congregational and Synodical Polity (Governance)



- I. The Essence of the Church; Christ's Office of the Keys and his Institutions and It's New Creation
 - A. How do we know? Sufficiency/Application of all Scriptures to all/ or Gospel reductionism?
 - B. Salvation totally earned; Gift given through the Means of Grace.
 - 1. Institution; command and promise; Violations: occasions for Confession; separation.
 - 2. Rites and traditions; good or ill?
 - C. The Status of the believers w/r/t Christ and the holy things of God.
 - D. The Office of the Holy Ministry in relation to Christ and his Church.
 - E. Authority, what does this mean? Privilege, Responsibility, Accountability, Power (?), Service
 - F. Authority of the Church *vis a vis* Secular Governments.
 - G. Authority of the Church w/r/t Order of Creation.

- II. LCMS – Congregational Polity
 - A. Reaction to lessons learned by confessing Stephanism who desired Episcopal polity.
 - B. Considering the American context (Walther's explanation).
 - C. How can a congregational be autonomous? How dare it not be autonomous?
 - D. What is Synod with respect to "Autonomous" congregations?
 - E. Why has the Synod trended towards Bishops and hierarchy (/with examples)?

- III. Authority within Christian Congregations.
 - A. The role of the Catechism and Confessions.
 - B. The dependence of each member on Christ and his Church.
 - C. The role of each Spirit filled/gifted member.
 - D. Division of Authority
 - 1. Clergy/Laity
 - 2. Men/Women
 - 3. Parents/Children
 - E. Boards and Committees/Voters' Assembly
 - F. Women Pastors, Officers, Voters and St. Paul (1 Tim. 2.12); History, tradition and God's Word.

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I. The Essence of the Church; Christ's Office of the Keys and his Institutions and It's New Creation

A. How do we know? Sufficiency/Application of all Scriptures to all/ or Gospel reductionism?

From our Confirmation vows....

P: Do you hold all the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures to be the Word of God?

R: **Yes, I do.**

P: Do you confess the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, drawn from the Scriptures, as you have learned to know it from the Small Catechism, to be faithful and true?

R: **Yes, I do.**

P: Do you intend to hear the Word of God and receive the Lord's Supper faithfully?

R: **I do, by the grace of God.**

P: Do you intend to live according to the Word of God, and in faith, word, and deed to remain true to God, Father Son, and Holy Spirit, even to death?

R: **I do, by the grace of God.**

P: Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?

R: **I do, by the grace of God.**

Why do we require this vow? Is Confirmation mandated in Scripture? What is?

See: Mt. 28.19f; 1 Thessalonians 2.13; 2 Tim. 2.13; 3.16; So what's the nature of these vows?

Now does subscription, submission to the Bible and the catechism apply to faith only, or to life (God's ordering society and his moral law);

See: 1 Cor. 14.26f

Does the Reformation come from rebellion against Papal Authority or submission to Biblical authority? What is faith's relationship to God's Word? Can faith ever say no to God? If it doesn't say "no" to God when he speaks, what DOES faith say? What can we say about a "Christian" who will not heed or submit to the Word of God? Why must we say this?