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# Wilhelm Loehé's Doctrine of the Office of Ministry in Historical and Contemporary Perspective

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## Introduction

Wilhelm Loehé's teaching on the office of ordained ministry has left its mark on many Lutheran churches across the world, including my own church in Australia. In preparing this article, I reread my own church's public teaching on the ministry<sup>1</sup> and its authorized Rite of Ordination<sup>2</sup> and found much of Loehé's teaching clearly preserved there, together with other influences, of course.

In its own time, however, Loehé's teaching on the ordained office and its place in the polity of the church was a highly controversial one. It is not hard to understand why. Loehé sometimes expressed his views in provocative terms: He said the pastorate is a "sacred aristocracy"<sup>3</sup> in the church and that pastors are "strong

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princes of the church"<sup>4</sup> who rule their congregations in Christ's name. He believed that Scripture teaches us to "elevate the office, so that the man sanctified thereto not only has the call to inward sanctification, but the congregation has the call to hold the sanctified one sacred (*heilig*)."<sup>5</sup>

In the years following the publication of this teaching in his first book of *Aphorisms* on church and office in 1849,<sup>6</sup> Loehé was involved in a stormy trans-Atlantic debate. His views drew unfavourable reactions from the theologians of the Lutheran theological faculty in Erlangen,<sup>7</sup> and from some of the Lutherans from the missions in North America to whom he was of course deeply connected at this time.<sup>8</sup> He was strongly criticized as hi-

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1. The Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) formed in 1966, adopting the *Theses of Agreement* as its doctrinal basis of unity, part 6 of which (first agreed and adopted in 1950) deals with the church's doctrine of the office of the ministry. See <https://www.lca.org.au/departments/commissions/cticr/>, accessed March 5, 2024.

At the time of the Loehé conference in 2022, when this paper was presented, the author was Lecturer in Pastoral Theology and Director of Formation at Australian Lutheran University, Adelaide, Australia.

2. Lutheran Church of Australia, *Church Rites*, ed. David Schubert (Adelaide: Open Book Publishers, 1994), 137-145. Note in particular that many elements regarded as suspect by Loehé's opponents in the 1850s and by later critics are in this ordination rite, including the prayer for the Holy Spirit to pour out the gift of grace on the ordinand for ministry to the people of God and the use of the formula "I ordain and consecrate you..."

3. Wilhelm Löhe, *Aphorisms on the New Testament Offices and their Relationship to the Congregation* (1849), in *Aphorisms on Church and Office, Old and New*, trans. John R. Stephenson (St. Catharines, Ontario: Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary, 2022), 58; see also, 87. Note how in its context this statement reads somewhat differently than when quoted on its own. Loehé is not implying that the ordained presbyterate are some kind of elite class in the church. He uses the word "aristocracy" (*Aristocratie*) in a more technical sense to refer to a group appointed or chosen from above, rather than elected by and from the assembly. He explains this at the end of his first book of *Aphorisms*, where he is talking about applying the biblical teaching in the current circumstances; 87ff.

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4. It seems highly likely to me that Loehé's somewhat provocative choice of words here has to do with the specific cultural-political context at the time of writing, in which the princes and government were trying to interfere in church affairs. Loehé may well be making the point that their political authority is out of place in the church, and that in the church the office of leadership ("prince") is that of the pastor, not any state official. See Walter Sundberg, "Ministry in Nineteenth Century European Lutheranism," in *Called and Ordained: Lutheran Perspectives on the Office of the Ministry*, ed. Todd Nichol and Mark Kolden (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 85.

5. Löhe, *Aphorisms on the New Testament Offices*, 74.

6. See above, n. 3, and below, n. 13.

7. Loehé's opponents at Erlangen were J. C. K. von Hofmann and J. W. F. Höfling.

8. J. A. A. Grabau (of the Buffalo Synod) and C. F. W. Walther (of

erarchical and clericalist, and way-out-of-sympathy with Luther and the Confessions.<sup>9</sup> The Missouri Lutherans in the early 1850s were still recovering from the damage caused by bishop Martin Stephan, who had egregiously abused the office.<sup>10</sup> It is therefore hardly surprising that they found Loehé's views difficult to accept. He was also widely scorned as having "Romanizing tendencies," a charge later perpetuated by Franz Pieper in his landmark *Christian Dogmatics*.<sup>11</sup>

Twentieth century scholars expressed doubts about it, too, as a betrayal of the Reformation's liberation of the laity from clerical domination.<sup>12</sup> And in our current cultural milieu, where equality and equity are so highly prized, speaking of the pastoral office as a spiritual aristocracy is about as offensive a thing as can be imagined.

There is also the obvious and immediate practical question: *how* could Loehé's vision of the ordained ministry actually be enacted in the church today? Some would ask if it is even possible? How would a pastor and congregation deal with it? On the other hand, let me foreshadow my own view by posing the question: does this high doctrine of the office have something important to offer us or to teach us today? The short paper which follows offers an initial answer to this question.

### Loehé's teaching on the office: Some facts and fallacies

Wilhelm Loehé's view of the office of the ministry is chiefly developed in his two books of *Aphorisms* on church and office: *Aphorisms on the New Testament Offices and their Relationship to the Congregation* (1849) and *Church and Office: New Aphorisms* (1851).<sup>13</sup> The view of the office he proposes in these two brief volumes has been popularly characterised by some as an onto-

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The Missouri Synod). Loehé became involved in this debate in order to mediate a dispute between Walther and Grabau about the ordained office. In many ways his teaching is a *via media* between the two. His attempt to bring the two opponents together was, however, unsuccessful, and Loehé ended up alienated from both men.

9. Walter Sundberg, "Wilhelm Löhe on Pastoral Office and Liturgy," *Word and World* 34, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 193.

10. Wilhelm Löhe, in *Kirchliche Nachrichten aus und über Nord-Amerika*, no. 8 (1859); quoted in C. F. W. Walther, "Do We Draw the Lines of Fellowship Too Narrowly?," in *Editorials From "Lehre und Wehre"* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), 75-76.

11. Pieper criticises Loehé as a Romanizer for his stance on the institution of the office of ministry by Christ through the apostles, because it denies that it is "conferred by the call of the congregation as the original possessor of all spiritual power." Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3 vols., trans Walter W. F. Albrecht (St Louis: Concordia, 1953), 3:447.

12. For example, Sundberg, "Wilhelm Löhe on Pastoral Office, 192-194.

13. Wilhelm Löhe, *Aphorismen über die neutestamentlichen Ämter und ihr Verhältnis zur Gemeinde* (1849), in *Gesammelte Werke* (hereafter GW), ed. Klaus Ganzert, 7 vols., (Neuendettelsau: Freimund-Verlag, 1951-1986), 5.1:255-330; and *Kirche und Amt: Neue Aphorismen* (1851), GW 5.1:523-588. John R. Stephenson provides English translations of both works in Löhe, *Aphorisms on Church and Office* (see above, n. 3).

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logical view.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps this label has been given to it because of its practical and pastoral focus on the office itself, rather than its function, the ministry of Word and Sacrament. This emphasis in Loehé's view is often contrasted with what has been called the opposite functionalist view, characterized by the so-called transference doctrine (*Übertragungslehre*), in which the pastor is essentially just a functionary appointed by the congregation, deputized to administer the means of grace which have been transferred to the pastor's care as a human arrangement.

Loehé himself certainly never used the terms "ontological" or "functional." The most preliminary inquiries into this polarized understanding of the debate show it to be ill-fitting and unhelpful. The various positions taken in the debate of the 1850s are much more complex and nuanced, and argued along different lines altogether. Loehé's view of the office did not grow out of any rationalist philosophical paradigm. It proceeds, as we will see, from a pre-enlightenment—some might even say, pre-reformation—reception of the New Testament structure and patterns of the pastoral office, and it is shaped by practical pastoral concerns.<sup>15</sup>

### Brief summary of Loehé's teaching from the *Aphorisms* (1849 and 1851)

Loehé recognized the rich diversity and multiple configurations of the offices and polity found in the New Testament church,

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14. It is unclear who first applied this label to Loehé's view, but it seems to have gained some currency through its use on the Löhe *Wikipedia* page (and its various referents), where it is assumed as a self-evident. The descriptor "ontological" is borrowed from contemporary Roman Catholic discussions regarding priestly ordination; it has stuck as a term to describe Loehé's view of the office even though it has more than once been shown to be spurious (see note 15). Loehé did say that the pastor exercises the ministry of Word and sacrament because of ordination *into the office*. Some have seen this as analogous to the Roman Catholic teaching that ordination into the priesthood makes a person *ontologically* different because through ordination they undergo a fundamental change of character, *becoming* a priest. Loehé never espoused such a view.

15. See Loehé's own account of how he developed his view in his Preface to the 1849 *Aphorisms on the New Testament Offices*, 1-2.

yet he also recognizes some clear constants.<sup>16</sup> Despite the diversity of ministry contexts and arrangements, it is clear that there is one *ordained* presbyteral office in the New Testament.<sup>17</sup> The means of grace, Word and Sacrament, require individuals to administer them. It was for this purpose that the office of the ministry was divinely instituted through the apostles, most immediately and expressly by Jesus (Matt 28:18-20; John 20:21-23), but also by the Father (1 Cor 12:28; 2 Cor 5:18-19) and the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28). The pastoral office receives its spiritual authority primarily from Matthew 28:19, where Christ, who holds all authority in heaven and earth, hands this on to the apostles (and no others) in the form of a command to preach and administer the sacraments.<sup>18</sup> Those in the office therefore represent Christ himself, who instituted this distinct office (*Amt*), as a position of responsibility, occupied by specific persons with divinely delegated duties and powers. It is not given “in general” to congregations or churches to administer among themselves (Rom 10:13-15; 2 Cor 3:1-11, 5:19-20; Eph 4:11ff.; John 20:21).<sup>19</sup> The office of the ministry that operates in the church to this day is not a “continuation” or “succession” of the apostolic ministry, which was spiritually and historically unique. It is rather the living channel through which the ministry of the apostles continues in the church from the time of the New Testament “as branches from a single trunk.”<sup>20</sup>

Likewise, Loehe repeatedly asserts that the pastoral office does not originate from the spiritual priesthood of the baptized (1 Pet 2:5-9). While he says clearly that the office exists as a “calling in life *within* the spiritual priesthood,”<sup>21</sup> that is, inside the church, he makes the important point that “there is not a single passage in Holy Scripture that would identify this undeniable priesthood of all Christians with the special calling in life of the holy office.”<sup>22</sup>

Loehe maintains that the office of ministry is passed on not by or through congregations but by others who stand in the office. This is a point on which he leaves himself open to misunderstanding. In some places, it almost seems that he may be suggesting that the clergy exist as a separate “caste,” operating entirely above or over against the congregation. Keeping in mind Loehe’s broader ecclesiology, however, I think we can only take his real point here to be that pastors are trained, selected, and ordained in and for the church not by congregations, but by pastors whose particular calling it is to order this area of the church’s life. While congregations of course must have some say about the pastor they call,<sup>23</sup> the congregations themselves do not “elect” or choose who will be

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ordained (2 Tim 2:1-2).<sup>24</sup> Loehe spends some space elaborating this point in both books of *Aphorisms*. It is this point on which he disagreed most vehemently with his opponents, and which he wants to contest. Again, he uses somewhat provocative language. He says that the office “does not derive from the congregation.” If anything, it is the opposite: “the congregation derives from the office.”<sup>25</sup> So, “the office stands in the midst of congregations as a fruitful tree that contains its own seed.”<sup>26</sup>

Contrary to Walter Sundberg’s critique, I can find no place in Loehe’s writings where he suggests that ordination to the pastoral office effects some kind of essential qualitative change in the fundamental character of the ordinand (as in some streams of Roman Catholic teaching regarding “indelible character”).<sup>27</sup>

Loehe certainly does maintain that ordination (called the “laying on of hands” in the New Testament) is a “consecration” of individuals into the office.<sup>28</sup> He also insists that ordination confers “energies” (*Kräfte* [*charismata*]), given by the Holy Spirit to enable the ordinand to perform their ministry (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6).<sup>29</sup> This “endowment” of the Spirit for ministry is necessary since no natural endowment is “sufficiently pure, strong or mighty enough to discharge the office of the New Testament.”<sup>30</sup>

### The reception of Loehe’s teaching today

Many would ask: Does such a view of the pastoral office, which

16. Wilhelm Löhe, *Church and Office: New Aphorisms*, in Löhe, *Aphorisms on Church and Office*, 110. Because of this paper’s narrower focus on the ordained office, I have not dealt with Loehe’s material in the *Aphorisms on deacons, prophets, evangelists* etc.

17. Löhe, *Aphorisms on the New Testament Offices*, 9-10.

18. Löhe, 12; *New Aphorisms*, 115.

19. Löhe, *Aphorisms on the New Testament Offices*, 10.

20. Löhe, 11; *New Aphorisms*, 117-118.

21. Löhe, *New Aphorisms*, 125 (emphasis mine).

22. Löhe, 125.

23. Löhe, *Aphorisms on the New Testament Offices*, 48, 65, 69.

24. Löhe, 68-70; *New Aphorisms*, 143-44.

25. Löhe, *Aphorisms on the New Testament Offices*, 10.

26. Löhe, 48.

27. Walter Sundberg, “Ministry in Nineteenth Century Lutheranism” in *Called and Ordained*, 85. Sundberg’s reading of Loehe’s *Aphorisms* moves beyond what Loehe himself says when he claims that Loehe saw the office of ministry as a “means of grace” itself.

28. Löhe, *Aphorisms on the New Testament Offices*, 69-70. It seems that Loehe’s usage of this word *Einweihung* (“consecration” or “dedication”) was provocative to some other Lutherans, who regarded this as Roman Catholic language concerning ordination.

29. Löhe, 70-71. This point in Loehe’s teaching also seemed to inflame particular objections by others, who read it as an adoption of the Roman Catholic teaching that uses similar language. Note however that Loehe argues here squarely on the basis of Scripture (1 Tim 4:14 and 2 Tim 1:6) and refers to Gerhard’s phrase *gratia ordinationis* in his *Loci Theologici*. See also nn. 1, 2 above.

30. Löhe, 122.

emphasises the authoritative role of the pastor, have a place in today's Lutheran churches, especially in times when the functions of the office are in some places being shared by the laity:<sup>31</sup> And what about current deep concerns about toxic clericalism and abuse of clergy-power in the churches, which has led to abuse of various kinds? Who would deny, for example, that the truly terrible revelations of child sexual abuse by clergy have been a significant factor in the general crisis of Christian identity? This is also true in my own homeland, Australia, where a colleague of mine recently was publicly harassed while walking through a city square wearing clerical dress. This public loss of trust has brought the status of clergy low, with the result that many pastors are ill-at-ease and ambivalent about their role. Some say that they are even ashamed, and uncertain of what authority they have to speak and act in Christ's name.

How do we respond? External boundaries are put in place. We turn in every direction, setting up codes of conduct, mentoring programs, safe-guards, and supports to help those in ministry. We increasingly feel the need for these as the work of the ordained office becomes more challenging in a society that does not see clergy as people to be trusted, honored, and regarded as "holy."

Yet, we should not push aside Loehé's view of the office because of its lack of ideological and social currency. I would in fact like to venture the bold suggestion that Wilhelm Loehé's view of the office of the ministry places before us both a call and a gift that can help us toward greater health and faithfulness in ministry today. This is not easily seen from Loehé's *theological* writing on the topic alone. That is, we could say, only half the picture. The other half is Loehé's understanding of the pastoral ministry as a *habitus*, that is, a pattern of spiritual teaching deeply integrated into the pastor's life, character, and habits of practice.<sup>32</sup>

The *Aphorisms* sketch quite clearly the basic shape of *what the office is*, but they do not give us a lot about this other half of it: *how it works, how it is lived*. So, we need to read more widely. Besides the *Aphorisms*, there is Loehé's *Three Books About the Church*<sup>33</sup> and his two-volume pastoral handbook, *The Pastor*,<sup>34</sup> in which he shows the *habitus* of the pastoral office. There is of course also much to be observed from Loehé's own long and fruitful ministry in Neuendettelsau, where he developed his theological and pastoral vision of ordained ministry through years of integrated spiritual action and reflection.

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### **Loehé's pastoral *habitus*: The other half of the picture**

Critics of Loehé's theology of the ordained office have been suspicious that he was constructing a ministerium based on clerical power and control, in which the laity are disenfranchised. Such a regime would only create a church in which all spiritual vitality and activity was crushed by clerical authoritarianism. But what do we find in Neuendettelsau over the period of Loehé's thirty-five years there? An impotent and oppressed laity, made timid by a megalomaniac pastor? No, we find strongly ordered and highly effective ministry, in which Loehé and the members of the Neuendettelsau congregation and community lived out a mutually integrated and supportive spiritual mission.<sup>35</sup> This integrated missional community bore fruit far beyond itself, moving into lay-diaconal training, pastoral training, world mission, care for the poor, and much more.

Loehé's strong differentiation of the ordained ministry and the universal priesthood is not a dualistic separation which forces the two into competition, but a cooperative and complementary sharing of Christian ministry and service. Loehé's way of working was highly practical and therefore highly structured, with himself as pastor using the authority of the office to equip and facilitate a vital and organized spiritual community.<sup>36</sup> What is often overlooked here is that Loehé not only had a high view of the office of the ministry but also a corresponding high view of the priesthood of the laity and the congregation. His vision of both ordained and lay ministry finds their place within the divine reality of the church and its mission.<sup>37</sup> In *Three Books* he speaks about

35. Loehé discerns that effective order requires a flexible and yet structured approach: "There lurks in this relationship [between the office of ministry and the congregation] at once something *aristocratic* and something *democratic*, something constant and something in the state of flux." Löhe, *Aphorisms on the New Testament Offices*, 87.

36. Speaking about the church polity debates of his time, Loehé comments "People want no hierarchy and no democracy in the church and yet don't know how to avoid the one or the other. Quite simple! Hierarchy here, democracy there!" His point is that in any functioning community there must be leadership and authority *together with* consensus and cooperation.

37. Siegfried Hebart, *Wilhelm Löhes Lehre von Der Kirche: Ihrem Amt und Regiment* (Neuendettelsau: Freimund Verlag, 1939), 157-159.

31. I refer here to the controversial practice in the LCA of routinely licensing lay persons for Word and Sacrament ministry in places where pastors are in short supply.

32. See Harold Senkbeil, *The Care of Souls, Cultivating a Pastor's Heart* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2019), 17-23.

33. Wilhelm Loehé, *Three Books About the Church*, trans. and ed. James L. Schaff (Philadelphia: Fortress,) 1969. Wilhelm Löhe, *Drei Bücher von der Kirche* (1845), GW 5.1:85-179.

34. Wilhelm Loehé, *The Pastor*, trans. and ed. Charles P. Schaum and Wolf Dietrich Knappe (St Louis: Concordia, 2015). Wilhelm Löhe, *Der evangelische Geistliche* (1852/1858), 2 vols., GW 3.2:7-317.



this essential and practical unity of the church across ethnic lines and throughout the generations. This is based on and flows from the preaching and enacting of the “apostolic Word,” a dynamic in which the preaching office and the priesthood of the baptized work together to strengthen the church’s unity in Christ as it presents Christ to the world in service and mission.<sup>38</sup>

The work of the pastor is then organically central to the congregation; as the one called and ordained to preach and teach the apostolic Word, the pastor is connected both directly and indirectly to all spiritual ministry that takes place in the church. Loehé’s understanding of pastoral care (*Seelsorge*), laid out clearly in the second of the two volumes of *The Pastor*, shows why and how his high view of the ordained office works. Everything a pastor does (preaching, leading worship, administration, visiting the sick) serves the pastoral care of the church, not only the whole congregation corporately but also individual members,<sup>39</sup> just as a faithful and loving shepherd cares not only about the flock but also goes looking for the one lost sheep.<sup>40</sup>

At this point I venture to offer an observation that reaches beyond Loehé’s own explicit understanding of the office, but which is nevertheless very clear from his own life as a pastor. In order to fulfil the glorious office that represents Christ to others, the pastor participates in and is called to imitate Christ’s *kenosis* in self-emptying service. This becomes the ordering of a pastor’s life and work, which not only demands but also provides. It requires the engagement of the whole person and entails sacrifice. This sharing of Christ’s *kenosis* in ministry is clearly seen not only in Loehé’s own tireless dedication to the ministry of the Word but also in his writing and reflection about it. If the pastor is a “prince of the church,” the pastor is also and at the same time the church’s most lowly and devoted servant. The pastor’s embrace of humility and self-giving service is a working out of the office’s Christological origin and institution. The phrase “simultaneously human and divine,”<sup>41</sup> which turns up repeatedly in Loehé’s *Aphorisms* in relation to the office, is explicated more fully by his pastoral writing and practice. It expresses the point that the pattern of the pastor’s ministry follows that of Jesus Christ, the one who is “simultaneously human and divine” in the highest and most complete sense. It means the same for the pastor as it did for Christ in his ministry—a kenotic reversal: the *highest and most glorious* office lived out through the *lowliest and most dedicated service*. Christ is exalted in and through his complete self-emptying for the love of the world (Phil. 2:6-11). This calls those ordained into the highest of all human callings

38. Loehé, *Three Books*, 62-63.

39. Loehé, *The Pastor*, 289. See also Johannes Deinzer, *Wilhelm Löhés Leben: Aus Seinen Schriftlichen Nachlass zusammengestellt*, vol. 2 (Neuendettelsau: Buchhandlung Diakonissenanstalt, 1935), 174-200. Deinzer gives some significant accounts of Loehé’s compassionate pastoral care of the sick and dying.

40. Loehé, 39-40.

41. See, for example, Löhe, *Aphorisms on the New Testament Offices*, 16, 48.

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on earth<sup>42</sup> to an ever-deeper humility in their *habitus* of service. While this certainly implies high personal and pastoral standards of accountability, love, patience, and diligence, Loehé allows no room for the pastor to use such virtues to glorify himself, to expand his own ego, or to gain kudos or power. Ordained ministry requires, most centrally and crucially of all, giving oneself up to the ministry of the “apostolic Word.” The extent to which pastors give themselves and their energies up to the apostolic Word is the extent to which they are faithful in their office.<sup>43</sup> Loehé’s teaching about the office of ministry follows the pattern of the chief shepherd of the church, Christ, reflecting the mysterious Christological nature and pattern of the whole church, bearing the very mark of Christ’s two natures, not separated, not confused, operating as one person, one *habitus*.

### Closing reflection

This leads back to the pressing question we identified at the beginning of this paper: How? The concern immediately arises that this glorious office, which calls the one ordained to Christ-like *kenosis*, is actually more than any mere human can face up to.<sup>44</sup> Is Loehé’s teaching still too high and too hard after all? These questions drew my mind back to what at first I found a somewhat difficult and disturbing passage in Loehé’s first book of *Aphorisms*:

The office is of the Lord and from the Lord, and...the office bearers are *ultra sortem humanum elati*, this is, their

42. Löhe, 10.

43. See Loehé, *The Pastor*, 229-301. Loehé writes at length about the dangers of “pastoral methodism” in which pastors gradually begin to trust and rely on their own tips and tricks or their performance of the right pleasing behaviors instead of the central means of grace themselves.

44. Loehé reflects that many in his own day also saw his view as highly “impractical.” He reflects: “Yet there can be very different opinions about what is actually practical. Something can be in use and yet not practical, and something that is not in use and is decried as impractical can nevertheless be practical. It not infrequently happens that someone transfers obstacles within himself to outward things and conditions in order to excuse himself before himself.” Löhe, *Aphorisms on the New Testament Offices*, 2.

office elevates them to a standpoint superior to every other human calling. Without such a lofty standpoint, without confidence of their divine calling, the burden of the office is both too heavy and too light. Anyone who bears this office and does not occupy this standpoint has no footing.<sup>45</sup>

Pastors have a high calling from Christ himself. Unless they receive that in all its dignity, they will not be able to confidently empty themselves in ministry.<sup>46</sup> This is why Loehé places such emphasis on the Holy Spirit's bestowal of "a grace of office (*Amts-Gnade*)" upon pastors at their ordination;<sup>47</sup> without it they will not be equipped for the demands and sacrifices that will be required (1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6). In this way, God graciously provides pastors with all that is needed, beyond what we may think is practical or possible.

In light of this, Loehé offers a reflection about the state of pastors in his own time, which, I suggest, speaks prophetically to our own context:

Most pastors have themselves no conception of their office and hence lack all basis and confidence for their public activity. They exercise their office as if they had no right to do so, faint-hearted, intimidated by every Tom, Dick and Harry. What a wretched pity.<sup>48</sup>

In my work as a formator of future pastors and a pastoral carer of pastors, I have seen this dynamic in play all too frequently. Power-abusive behaviors arise not from an oversupply of true spiritual confidence but from the very lack of it. The lack of dignity (worth) and Christ-founded confidence in the office is fertile ground for the abuse of power to develop. Having little or no solid and legitimate sense of the pastoral office's divine authenticity and authority—and therefore, little understanding of its proper boundaries—pastors are sometimes tempted to use their office as a crutch for their own sagging self-confidence and sense of validation. Their view of their office as ordained servants of the Word is not too high, but rather too low. It cannot sustain them in any clear and confident vision of their call to proclaim the powerful apostolic Word and administer the holy Sacraments.

I offer these reflections as a pastor from a church that is experiencing a crisis of Christian identity.<sup>49</sup> A key factor in this struggle, as we noted above, has been and still is a crisis of clergy identity, in which pastors are uncertain and insecure in their office. The

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burden of their office is "both too heavy and too light." The divine dignity of the ordained office is essential to the church, a gift from Christ to his people. If we seek true spiritual renewal, we need to reaffirm this office so that it can function as Christ instituted it, in and for the church and its mission.

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45. Löhe, 10.

46. See Loehé's point about the Holy Spirit's provision of his endowment at ordination, which is needed because no human capability is able to meet the demands and dignity of the office; see above, pp. 6-7.

47. Löhe, *Aphorisms on the New Testament Offices*, 70-71.

48. Löhe, 13.

49. In Australia, the census figures tell the story as they do everywhere in the West. Between 1991 and 2016, the number of people identifying as Christians dropped significantly. Lutherans—always a small group in Australia—dropped from 1.5% to 0.7% of the population.