

Reaction to Pastor Jonathan Hein's Essay

The Shepherd-Leader at Work: Moving Forward

Symposium on the Pastor as Shepherd-Leader

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Do you know what day of the church year it is? Today is the second Tuesday after Taste of Mequon. Taste of Mequon is an opportunity for area restaurants and businesses to introduce themselves to area residents. My wife and I took an hour shift at our Christ Alone tent. During that hour God handed me an opportunity to have an extended conversation with a young couple. While their two children enjoyed the sidewalk chalk we provided and sipped from the water bottles we distributed, I learned that both husband and wife had grown up Catholic. However, since moving to Mequon, they hadn't found a church of any kind to call their own. While the conversation did not include a full law/gospel presentation, there was opportunity to point them to our church just a block behind where we stood.

What does that have to do with Pastor Hein's essay? Everything! Taste of Mequon has happened for years within the shadow of our steeple, but our congregation was never a formal part of it. What changed? As Christ Alone came into existence last year as a merged congregation,¹ the first year saw a complete reorganization of our structure that included a six-month strategic planning process resulting in a detailed ministry plan. The first-ever Christ Alone tent at Taste of Mequon was a result of careful listening and careful reasoning. And so multiple conversations with those in our mission field took place at a venue where we had previously been absent.

In his essay, Pastor Hein drew from years of experience from his own life, from his congregation's ministry, and now from his work with many congregations, to help us do the one (careful listening) without leaving the other undone (careful reasoning). Here are some insights I underlined.

- As Pastor Hein sought to help us understand the institution of leadership on pages 2-6, it was delightful to see emphasis on the image of God. That glorious gift that clearly marks human beings as the crown of God's creation receives far too little emphasis. Even though God's image was lost in the Fall, the gift has been given back in Christ and is simultaneously being renewed in us day by day. We can hardly emphasize too much the wonder that God has restored the privilege of being his holy-in-Christ children who serve as his masks, as clay-jar glimpses of his compassion, in all our God-given, and therefore holy, callings.
- On page 6 the essayist stressed that God didn't provide detailed directions for how any given congregation of his people will carry out gospel ministry. God has not given us detailed canon law, and, in the essayist's brief aside ("We might like him to."), he reminded us that it isn't just Roman Catholics who long for it. Instead of careful reasoning, my lazy sinful nature would much rather just be told what I can and cannot do in every area of life. My sinful nature lusts for just such a rules-made-by-man place to lay his self-righteous hat (deluding himself into thinking he has fulfilled everything on "God's list"). How much better that God comforts and empowers us by his grace, provides general direction in his Word, and then calls us to make wise decisions as

¹ Christ Alone began in July 2017 as a merger of Calvary, Thiensville, and Trinity, South Mequon.

we carry out gospel ministry in the unique settings and cultures in which he calls us to serve with his unchanging Word and sacraments.² That takes much more careful listening followed by careful reasoning than does canon law, but God's kingdom is thereby well served!

- Pastor Hein has also touched on a very sensitive issue that hinders careful examination of our own ministry and honest dealing with personal weaknesses. In his point #3 on page 8, he wrote: "It can be hard enough to endure the existence of these weaknesses. To *broadcast* them...! That thought can be unbearable. This too is a corruption. We have a *corrupt sense of identity*, tying feelings of personal worth to perceptions of personal skill. E.g., 'I'm worth something because I am such a good preacher.'" While every Lutheran knows to say instantly, "Of course, what makes us who we are is that I am a dear child of God through faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ," yet that does not change the *simul justus et peccator* reality that our natural hearts are drawn to the futility of trying to establish our sense of identity from what we think we do well. All of which easily leads to defensively cobbling genuine concerns for the honor of public ministry into a whitewashed wall guarding our misguided egos. On page 11, Pastor Hein reminded us how critical careful listening is here! Daily we need to die to such arrogance and rise to live again as those who learn ever anew that our only secure identity is founded solely in God's grace that he has lavished on us in our calling as his children! That careful listening gives us the courage – along with the humility to admit that without Christ and his gospel we are nothing but flawed clay jars – to welcome feedback on our ministry from spiritually mature lay men and women as well as from peers in public ministry. "How can I give Christ my best if no one tells me where I need to improve?" (11).
- On page 20, Pastor Hein reminds us to design our tactics of carrying out ministry in ways that do not impose upon the Spirit (as if God asks us to shoulder his divine responsibilities to convert and strengthen hearts). Yet the essayist also urges us to trust the Spirit to work as he has promised (planning to get more of his Word, to more people, more often).
- On page 21, I also respected Pastor Hein's candid sharing of how critical it was for him to schedule evangelism and straying sheep calls. "I *never* wrote 'Do text study' anywhere in my Day Timer. Why not? I would be perfectly happy doing *nothing but* studying and writing....Now what you *would* find in my Day Timer is every single evangelism or delinquent call I ever made. Those terrified me." I hear in those words the echo of what Pastor Jim Radloff – yes, the same mission counselor who encouraged Pastor Hein about hospitality – told me: "Schedule to your opposite." Each one of us needs to know whether what needs to be in our schedule is what will chain us to our desks (because being out with people is as natural as breathing) or what will cut that chain (as in Pastor Hein's scenario). We need to die to the lopsided way our sinful nature would design ministry with personal comfort in view. As Pastor Hein noted, his thirty minutes of putting these visits into his calendar "was an encouragement to seek Christ's help in picking up what, for me, was a cross." (21)

² Yes, there is another side here that helps keep us balanced. As Jaroslav Pelikan rightly observed many years ago, while traditionalism (of which canon law is an example) is the dead faith of the living, tradition is the living faith of the dead. Part of careful reasoning means we don't act in arrogant and ignorant isolation from the history of the church and without considering carefully the impact of our actions on brothers and sisters in Christ who live and serve elsewhere. As the Apostle Paul reminds us, "Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?" (1 Corinthians 14:36) Of course, that also means, in reverse, that we observe the 8th Commandment when talking *with* others about decisions *they've* made.

As this formal reaction closes, please allow four observations:

- On page 11, footnote 54, the essay could speak more strongly when it said: “Our rationale will rarely be entirely self-less and pure.” Until heaven, I will never leave my sinful nature behind. Therefore, I won’t achieve selflessness and purity of motive in anything. That isn’t said to paralyze us but to keep us from being paralyzed because perfection is beyond our grasp.
- On page 24, I’m not sure we have enough information to declare that “Bill” is turning “a promise to the New Man into an excuse for the Old” (although see the point just above for the ever-present challenge!). It is good for us to be very careful as we encourage participation in activities at or through church and school that we honor the tension between 1) the holy work God’s people do in all their holy callings; and 2) the holy work they do together as the holy gathered people of God. In one direction lurks a Lutheran monasticism in which we unintentionally give the impression that truly holy works are those listed in the bulletin. In the other direction lurks severing the close connections between every part of Christ’s body.
- On page 26, is it wise to speak of a member making “sacrifices...for you...when you ask fervidly.” While building strong relationships will help us have heart-to-heart discussions with the sheep we serve, there would seem to be wisdom in interjecting a “for us” element into what is really a “for Christ” (and their neighbor) transaction. After all, we may soon take a call (or be called home), and we don’t want that to remove a key reason for their service in the kingdom.
- This last suggestion involves the language of the section on Replicational Leadership (beginning on page 22). The reality that the doctrine of vocation has too often languished in theological backwaters has stunted the development of our vocabulary for how to speak about the interrelationship of the universal priesthood and our individual callings (vocations). Might the following nomenclature help answer that challenge? In baptism, the effective Call (the upper case is intentional) of the Spirit through the gospel brought us to faith as a child of God. That Call to faith always remains our primary Calling since it is our identity (as referenced before!) and without that Call we are neither in the Universal Priesthood nor will we grasp the real beauty of being God’s masks as we serve as glimpses of his compassion in his world. For those Called to faith, the Universal Priesthood is the larger umbrella concept that we are in Christ God’s holy ones doing holy work everywhere God has placed us. As God’s Called ones, the specific concrete situations in life where we live out our Universal Priesthood are the multitude of unique callings (vocations) in which God has placed us. Some of our callings (vocations) are more formal and longer lasting (spouse, parent, sibling, son/daughter, employer, employee, etc.) and some are less formal or even of the passing moment (neighbor to that person in need buckled next to us in seat 14C). As those Called to faith by the Spirit, we belong to the Universal Priesthood, and we bring glory to the goodness of our God in the concrete and often “holy ordinary” tasks that are part of our unique callings (vocations).

Thank you again, Pastor Hein! Careful listening. Careful reasoning. It is that simple. It is that hard. Your work gives evidence of just such careful listening and careful reasoning. Such careful listening and careful reasoning led Christ Alone to put a tent up at Taste of Mequon to facilitate conversation with our mission field. My brothers, may the fruit of Pastor Hein’s paper be thousands of even better examples of such careful listening and careful reasoning. With gospel confidence and strength, apply the fruit of your careful listening and careful reasoning broadly across all the many callings in which you and your people serve as clay-jar glimpses of God’s compassion!