

Principles of *Sola Scriptura* with Special Emphasis on Church and Ministry (Part 1 & 2)

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Part One

“Is it necessary to dig into the Scriptures to determine what is Bible teaching on the subject of Church and Ministry? Does the subject really concern us in our everyday life as Christians? Does it even concern Lutheran pastors in their full time church work? Isn't it rather an unimportant doctrine on the fringes of our faith? At a time when the inspiration of Scripture is being denied and the deity of Christ is being questioned, why be concerned about “Church and Ministry”?

“In the early part of this century it was sometimes said that the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods were one in all the important teaching; that the only differences existing were in the area of church and ministry, and that here, even though the Missouri Synod held a different theory, in practice it followed the Wisconsin Synod position. So why be concerned? Now that the break has come about between the two Synods and the doctrinal differences are multiplying and much more obvious, why be concerned about those two fringe areas of difference: Church and Ministry?”

The above comments may not be yours. Some of you were more personally involved in these issues and may be ready to throw up your hands at the thought of any WELS pastor being blasé enough to think this way. Yet is it not the thinking of many pastors, theology students and laymen today?

There are reasons, and plenty of them, to be interested in and aware of Bible teaching on “Church and Ministry” today. In our Confirmation Classes for children we use the Gausewitz catechism in most of our congregations. Through the Day School, Sunday School and Confirmation Classes unchurched parents are often gained. Many pastors use “What Does the Bible Say?” by O. Riess to instruct the adults. Unless a correction is carefully made by the pastor, the children in such cases are being taught one doctrine and their parents another! Our Catechism says: (Ques. 245) “Why do we also call *any visible assembly, or a denomination*, in which the Gospel is *preached and the Sacraments are administered* a church? (Ans.) *Such an assembly, or denomination, is called a church* because in its midst there surely are members of the invisible Church, even though we do not know them. (The visible Church.)” The Missouri Synod Adult Manual says: (Page 57) “*The Scriptures speak of churches, or congregations, established in certain localities for the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments.*” This is in answer to the question: “What do the Scriptures teach of *visible Christian churches*?” In the WELS Commission on Doctrinal Matters presentation on Church, the Antithesis states: “We hold it to be untenable to say that the local congregation is *specifically* instituted by God in contrast to other groupings of believers in Jesus name.. Returning to the adult manual “What Does the Bible Say?” the adult is taught on page 75: (“*The holy Ministry is the only office instituted by Christ. A congregation may, however, create auxiliary offices to assist the minister in his work, as day school teachers elders or deacons, Sunday school teachers, etc.*” Again, unless this is carefully corrected in class and in the book itself, the adult confirmand is being taught the very opposite of what he reads in the *Northwestern Lutheran*: (above mentioned presentation) “II. The Ministry ... Antithesis: *We hold it to be untenable to say that the pastorate of the local congregation (Pfarramt) as a specific form of the public ministry is specifically instituted by the Lord in contrast to other forms of the public ministry.*”

In addition to the need to speak clearly within our own congregations on “Church and Ministry,” there is also a need to either correct or correctly understand such Lutheran dogmaticians as Franz Pieper, C.F.W. Walther and A. Hoenecke. In our present day there is a need for Lutherans to understand why the Doctrine of

Church and Ministry is so central in our WELS dealings with the Concordia Lutheran Conference and the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation and just what the Scripture teaches. However, it should be noted that the scope of the assignment was not a study of past and present dogmatic expressions and formulations, but of the Scripture teachings on these subjects. It is hoped that these introductory words have shown the need for such study. The effort will be made to use the Historical-Exegetical approach to find the purpose for which the words were spoken and the context of those words—immediate context, the context of the entire book, the person of the writer and the historical times in which he lived.

In Matthew 16:18 the word church is introduced into the Gospels for the first time; Matthew is the only Gospel writer who uses the word, and he uses it only three times, each time in giving the words of Christ. “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Not a visible organization, but an eternal entity is spoken of here. The apostles’ Creed commentary on this church is “holy, Christian, the communion of saints.” Invincible is the adjective suggested by God, even against the Prince of the powers of wickedness and all of his unholy angels. It is holy, for God’s Son Himself builds it; it is “Christian,” for this is the full, confessional name of the Savior, the Son of the living God, as beautifully testified by Peter, speaking by the revelation of the Father in heaven, verse 17. ἐκκλησία, -ας; ἡ

But why is this precise word used here by our Lord? What does the word suggest? The meanings listed in Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich are 1. assembly, as a regularly summoned political body. 2. assemblage, gathering, meeting. 3. the congregation of the Israelites, esp. when gathered for religious purposes. 4. of the Christian church or congregation. a. a church meeting. b. the church or congregation as the totality of Christians living in one place. c. of house-churches. d. the church universal, to which all believers belong. Though it might seem superfluous, let us also study the Thayer Lexicon on this work, which is central for any teaching on “The Church.” Thayer defines: properly a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place; an assembly. 1. of the people convened at the public place of council for the purpose of deliberating: Acts 19:39. 2. in the Septuagint the assembly of the Israelites, esp. when gathered for sacred purposes. 3. any gathering or throng of men assembled by chance or tumultuously: Acts 19:32, 411 [sic]. 4. in the Christian sense, a. an assembly of Christians gathered for worship (singular or plural, see 1 Corinthians 14:19, 34, 35). b. a company of Christians or of those who, hoping for eternal salvation through Jesus Christ, observe their own religious rites, hold their own religious meetings, and manage their own affairs according to regulations prescribed for the body for order’s sake; aa. those who anywhere, in city or village, constitute such a company and are united into one body (singular or plural; the church in one’s house=the company of Christians belonging to a person’s family; others less aptly understand the phrase of the Christians accustomed to meet for worship in the house of some one—for as appears from 1 Cor. 14:23, the whole Christian church was accustomed to assemble in one and the same place). The name is used even by Christ while on earth of the company of his adherents in any city or village; Matthew 18:17. bb. the whole body of Christians scattered throughout the world; collectively, all who worship and honor God and Christ in whatever place they may be: Matthew 16:18. cc. transferred to the assembly of faithful Christians already dead and received into heaven. So far Thayer.

Is not the inspired use of this specific word helpful for forming the picture of church? The group of believers in “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” has been called out of the world of sinners. Some say that Christ is John, some Elias, some Jeremias or one of the prophets. But they, called and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, make this wonderful confession. As Abraham was called out of his homeland and from his kindred, so the believer is called out, to be still in the world, but no longer of it. He is called to be a fellow citizen with the saints, and to be of the household of God. Jesus Christ Himself is the chief corner stone. Ephesians 2:19-22.

When we see that the church is called out by the Father through the Holy Spirit, that it makes a sincere confession from the heart, of the Lord Jesus being the Christ, the Son of the living God, that it will never be vanquished, then we see that only true believers are members of this church. Because man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the Heart, the membership of this church will be visible to God perfectly, but will be invisible to man. The context shows us how this calling is a miraculous working by God in sinful men. The Pharisees and Sadducees reject his miracle of the feeding of the four thousand and seek “a sign

from heaven.” The disciples misunderstand when Jesus speaks to them, learning of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Peter who has just made the wonderful confession is not ready to accept Jesus, the Son of the living God, as speaking the truth about His suffering and death, and this happens just shortly after the confession! Truly, the church is not of men’s, but of God’s building!

The other use of “church” in the Gospel is in Matthew 18:17. Here Christ twice uses the word in a very different connection. He speaks about offending little children of the church (“which believe, in Me”); then He speaks of offenses which cause the loss of salvation, warning against wrong actions of hand or foot which lead away from God to hell, and of wrong desires of the eye. Returning again to “little ones” He speaks of the love of the Father and Son for the lost. With the same thought of God’s not willing that one of these little ones should perish, Jesus speaks of ways in which an erring brother is to be regained for eternity. The seeking Shepherd’s will is that he be loosed from his sins. The procedure to be followed in seeking to regain the trespassing brother is clearly outlined in three steps. The third step is: “And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.” v. 17. Obviously, this cannot be the sum total of all believers from Adam till the end of time. Here the correct meaning must be “the church or congregation as the totality of Christians living in one place” (Bauer-Arndt) or, as Thayer words it, “the company of His adherents in any city or village.” The basic meaning of the called out of God reminds us that these who are themselves believers, who know the Lord’s interest in the one of a hundred sheep gone astray, these will want to regain that lost one. Wherever synagogue is used in the New Testament, its basic meaning of a “place where people are led together” emerges in a neutral group, not yet decided for or against the Savior Jesus Christ, or, made up of both believers and unbelievers in a mixed group, or finally in Revelations seven letters to the churches, as “synagogue of Satan.” By that time in history it was almost impossible to go into a synagogue and start preaching that Jesus is the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. Whereas this word means a group ignorant of Jesus, not decided about Jesus, or against Jesus, the word church in the New Testament always means something good, because it means called of God. The group of true believers in a larger religious unit may be a small fraction of the total group, yet they alone make it “church” for they only have in their hearts been called by God from unbelief to faith. It need be only two or three, as Jesus says in verse 20 of Matthew 18: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” And in Revelations 3:4 “Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments: and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.” This group in Sardis has only a few within it who are true believers, yet it is still called “Church.”

Does Matthew 18:17 refer to the local congregation only? Is this the *Ortsgemeinde*? When we hear “church” referring to a building we consciously or unconsciously think of pews, altar, pulpit, baptismal font. We think of hymn books, choirs, organ, Christmas trees. When we hear “tell it to the church” we may think of our kind of organization, our kind of voters’ meetings, our membership lists and transfer forms, and of our fear of trespassing into the forbidden territory of another pastor’s flock. Are not both pictures wrongly transferred to the early church? Traveling missionaries, wandering tradesmen like Priscilla and Aquilla, visiting delegations from Jerusalem, a persecuted and homeless diaspora, can these facts of early church history be forced into our pattern of *Ortsgemeinde*? “Church” rather was the group of believers knowing and loving and wanting to help the erring brother, some because of their personal acquaintance with him, some because of an awareness of his problem, perhaps because they had experienced the same problem in their own lives and some in their personal experience in helping others, some because they possessed the God-given gift of being peacemakers. “Am I my brother’s keeper?” —Yes, answered the church, that is, those called by God out of darkness into His light, who are now to let their light shine before men. The ministry of the keys was not given to the churches, plural, but to the Church, that is, to all believers. The body of concerned believers acting together may be an organized congregation, a group of servicemen meeting in a hotel room in Vietnam, a body of students at a school, a Synod, a District, a Conference, “Tell it to the church” applies to any such grouping, gathered together in His name, with the Lord of the Church in the midst of them. “Church is ecclesia, the body of Christ, unrestricted by forms creating its own forms as occasion demands in reflection of glorious New Testament liberty.” (“Church and Ministry in the Light of 1 Timothy 1-3” by Theo. Hartwig). Most of these groupings were in certain

localities; as epistles were sent them dealing with local or area problems, errors, situations. But let us not read into these churches our concepts of organized congregations! They were the elect of God, at that period of history in that area or concerned with that area. Paul did not hesitate to give counsel in Corinth by long distance mail, though it involved excommunication and, later, reinstatement. Acts 15:22 says: “Then pleased it the apostles and elders with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas ...” That called church is the Jerusalem council, not a local congregation. Already in Acts 4:4 the number of men believing in Jerusalem was about five thousand; Acts 5:14 says that “... believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.” Acts 6:7 says: “the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly: and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.” These uncountable thousands were certainly not an *Ortsgemeinde*, and yet Acts 8:1 says: And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem.” Again here church refers to the called of God, the believers, in a designated area; so, too, the use of “church” in the addresses of many epistles. That churches acted together in calling workers is shown in 2 Corinthians 8:19: “... who was also chosen of the churches to travel with us.” In 1 Corinthians 14:23 we read: “If therefore the whole church be come together into a place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in ...” and yet there were also smaller groups in Corinth, also called churches: 14:34 “Let your women keep silence in the churches ...” In Paul’s letter to the Romans he sent greetings to churches there in verses 5, 10, 11; 14, and 15 of chapter 16. Our Doctrinal Commission summarizes: “Since believers ordinarily live at some local place, where they will desire regularly to nourish their faith through the means of grace, the local congregation will always be the primary grouping of Christians. Yet it is likewise the Holy Spirit who through the same bond of a common faith draws Christians together in Jesus’ name in other groupings, and draws Christian congregations together in larger groupings, such as a synod, that they may share their mutual gifts and gain strength for certain phases of the great task of the Church, such as the training of pastors and teachers, the establishment and maintenance of mission fields.... In essence the various groupings in Jesus’ name, for the proclamation of His Gospel, all lie on the same plane. They are all church in one and the same sense.”

Part II

In the first part of this paper, we saw how it is very necessary to make a distinction between Church as we consider it today and Church as used and understood and known in the days of the Apostles. If we fail to use the historical, exegetical approach, we find ourselves again and again putting our present day usage into the pages of the New Testament and thereby, misunderstanding what those early Churches really were like. The very same truth must also be applied to the word Ministry. Here, too, we must not look at the present day ministry with the professionalization of the office that we are familiar with. The early Christian Ministry was very often a part-time job. Not one individual, but many of the Christians in each of the congregations were involved in the work of the Church. They were involved in bringing other people into the fellowship of Christ. They were involved in caring for the poor. It was a case when the Church was organized for action as the title of a modern book describes it. Indeed, as we look at the weaknesses of our present day churches and the lack of growth of Christianity in the last centuries, we might very well study seriously whether this is not the direct result of a professionalization of the Christian Church in which the members of the congregation very often look to that one individual called and elected to the full time work in the Church as the one who must do everything. The gathering in of new members, the exhorting and admonishing of the members who need help and correction, the studying of the Scriptures, the leading of the organizations, and all of the other aspects of the work of the Church.

We could ask the question “Would our Christian Churches today be more vital, would they today be growing at a much more rapid rate than they are if they were patterned rather after the early Christian churches rather than in the present pattern?” Indeed if we look at books which try to bring out methods in which Christian churches can increase their outreach we will again and again find that what is really proclaimed there is a

spreading out of the work of the preaching ministry to many, if possible all, members of a congregation. In this way, not one mouth, but many mouths are proclaiming Christ.

Pastor Julian G. Anderson of St. Petersburg, Florida, has some very helpful thought on this subject of the historical background of the Church and Ministry: “I am convinced that the whole question of church and ministry in our circles has been approached with almost a total lack of attention to the historical context, which is one of the cardinal principles of exegesis. Any attention to historical terms would have avoided the identification of the scriptural terms ἐπίσκοπος and πρεσβύτερος with the local pastorate as we know it. It is true that the two offices overlap at points, but there are so many differences that the whole question has become clouded. I would suggest reading Edersheim, the leading Jewish authority (Jewish Christian, of course) on Jewish life; and particularly his discussion of the organization of the Jewish synagogues in the days prior to and current with the early church. I refer to the organization of the synagogue, with its board of 10 πρεσβύτεροι. This was really much similar to our Board of Directors, or better, the voters assembly or Church Council. They were responsible for the management of all affairs and services. Some of these men did, indeed, conduct the prayers and homilies, etc. One might have been selected by the others to do so regularly if he was particularly qualified, but this was not the universal practice. They might also hire a rabbi to do the preaching. Thus, every synagogue had 10 of these men—the administrators. And they were not local pastors in the sense we have today. The διάκονοι were their assistants, and the duties were largely the same, as were the qualifications. The Greek term (πρεσβύτεροι was Hebrew) for the same office was ἐπίσκοπος, and was a term and office of great prominence in the Greek πόλις. It served the same function—an administrator. Thus the two terms are really identical in scriptural language. The early Christian congregations (local, as we would say) were nothing but synagogues, as all of the original members were Jews or proselytes connected with the local synagogue. Note that Paul always started work in the local synagogue, and the work developed from there. Such being the case it is a practical certainty that the early Christian congregations were organized on exactly the same basis—with 10 πρεσβύτεροι or ἐπίσκοποι acting as a Board of Council to administer the groups business—services, charity, etc. If this is understood, then the confusion with our local pastorate disappears.

“If this point be recognized, then the confusion of term ἐκκλησία with the local congregation also disappears—that is, a local congregation served by a single pastor, as we have it in general use. Thus, I would suggest the broad historical approach first, and then a proper exegesis of the key passages.”

Edersheim has these points to make in regard to the synagogue. The synagogue became the cradle of the church. Synagogues originated during, or in consequence of the Babylonian captivity. In them Scriptures were read and explained to people who were sometimes ignorant even of the language of the Old Testament. It was but natural that prayers, and, lastly, addresses, should in course of time be added. The regular synagogue service thus arose. First on the Sabbath day, on feast or fast days, then on ordinary days, at the same hours as the worship in the temple. Jewish legend says that there were 460 synagogues in Jerusalem. Those synagogues were arranged according to nationalities and even crafts. If a community could not build its own synagogue, they might meet for worship in a private dwelling which was called a synagogue in the house, just as, for instance, in Philemon 2 we are told about the church in the house of Philemon, referring to the Christian church. A synagogue could not be erected in a place, unless it contained 10 men of leisure who could devote their time to the synagogue worship and administration. The lowest of the officials serving the synagogue was the minister, who often also acted as the schoolmaster. Great care was taken in his selection. He must be not only irreproachable, but, if possible, his family also. Humility, modesty, knowledge of the Scriptures, distinctness and correctness in pronunciation, simplicity and neatness in dress, and absence of self-assertion, are qualities sought for, and which in some measure, remind us of the higher qualifications insisted on by St. Paul in the choice of church officers. Then, there were the elders, or rulers. In the Greek the word is ἄρχοντες. The chief of these was the ἀρχισυνάγωγος. These are the rulers, or the shepherd, as we would say, pastors. All of the rulers of the synagogue were duly examined as to their knowledge, and ordained to the office. They also formed the local Sanhedrin, or tribunal. The chief ruler of the synagogue had the superintendence of divine service. He would, in each case, determine who were to be called up to read from the Law and the Prophets, who was to conduct the prayers, and to act as messenger of the congregation, and who, if any, was to deliver an address. He

would also see to it that nothing improper took place in the synagogue, and that the prayers were properly conducted. In short, the supreme care, both of the services and of the building, would devolve upon him. To these regular officials, we have to add those who officiated during the service. The delegates of the congregation, who, as its mouthpiece, conducted its devotions—the interpreter and those who were called to read in the Law and the Prophets, or else to preach (Edersheim: *The Life and Times of Jesus, the Messiah*. Vol. 1, page 430ff.). References in the book of the Acts of the Apostle to synagogue in these early days of the Christian Church are to be found in chapter 5, verse 5, where we read, “Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, ...” In chapter 24, verse 12 we have another reference. Paul, speaking of his being in the city of Jerusalem, says, “And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues nor in the city ...” In Chapter 9 of Acts, we have in verse 2 and in verse 20, and again in chapter 13 in verse 5, the picture of more than one synagogue in Damascus and in Salamis. In cities where the entire, or the great majority of the members of the synagogue became Christians, a synagogue building itself was taken over to become a Christian church. Whether or not the synagogue building was taken over to serve the Christians, most assuredly the offices and terms used in describing the work in the synagogue were taken over. The very same titles are used, presbyter, bishop, elder, shepherd. It is very interesting to note that these terms are used without a clear-cut distinction being made among them. The deacons, such as, Stephen and Phillip were appointed for a certain part of church work, namely, to relieve the Apostles of serving on tables. And yet we find that those men also were doing preaching and even working of miracles. Thus, in Acts 6, verse 8, we read, “And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.” Appointed to be a deacon serving the widows among the congregation, we find that he spoke with such wisdom and spirit that the enemies were not able to resist it: verse 10. Phillip, who was especially set apart for the work of a deacon, and the ministering again to the poor among the congregation, is described in Acts 8, verse 5, as going down to the city of Samaria, and preaching Christ unto them. The terms elder and bishop are used interchangeably.

Some of the elders evidently worked in the Word and Doctrine, whereas others did not. 1 Timothy 5, verse 17 we read, “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.” Paul calls himself an apostle in many of the introductory statements in the first part of his epistles. Yet, at the same time, he also calls himself a minister in 1 Corinthians 3, verse 5. The disciple, Peter, calls himself an apostle in his first epistle chapter 1, verse 1. Yet at the same time he calls himself an elder in chapter 5, verse 1, “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, ...” The bountiful goodness of our Lord toward His Church is shown in Ephesians chapter 4, verses 11-13, “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man; unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ:”

Pastor Julian Anderson gives an excellent summary:

Every congregation (or every large city) had many men of many talents, all doing the work of the Lord there. The work was generally the same as we do today, but the organization was much, much different! The office of the ministry was there, but it was carried out in a much different way not by one pastor in each congregation, as we do today. The whole situation was so different that one can hardly equate the two, as is usually done; although the work is the same. In other words, the forms of the church have changed down through the years to adjust to new conditions. Our present-day organization, where most all the work is done by one full-time man, is much different than in the 1st century! I think if this could be brought out, the whole dispute would die, as it should.

The Lord God has ordained that the believers should proclaim the Word that has brought them unto faith so that others may also come to faith. He has commanded we should go into all the world and preach the

Gospel. There hardly is any debate within the Lutheran Church that there is such a thing as a universal priesthood of all believers. Our topic is not the universal priesthood, but the public ministry. The Lord has most certainly also instituted the public ministry. He did this by calling the disciples. He did this by sending out the seventy two by two. He did this by calling in a miraculous way the apostle Paul. He did this through Paul and through the other disciples by calling others to share in this work of proclaiming the Gospel. The public ministry is commanded by God, and yet the particular form is not commanded by God. The list given in Paul's letter to the Ephesians chapter 4, verse 11, reads apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Is it not a bit of pride to nick out the fourth name in this listing, pastors, and say that this is the one group instituted by the Lord to the exclusion of the others, that the others have their position only under that one pastor. To be sure, the early Missouri Synod had to take very vigorous steps to counteract the teaching that pastors have their office from the apostles in a kind of apostolic succession. They had to counteract the influence of bishop Stephan and his teaching that he was the head of the church. Very correctly, they pointed out that this is not true, that there is no such thing as an apostolic succession by virtue of which this descent from one to the other gives power to the individual who is thus ordained in such a succession. But did they go far enough in getting away from such teachings? Has there not been ever since that time a confusion between the office of the ministry or *Predigtamt* given to the church and the pastoral office or *Pfarramt* assigned to particular Christians by the call of the congregation. As pointed out by Professor Theodore Hartwig in a paper on Church and Ministry in the light of 1 Timothy 1-3: "There is an almost studied indifference to and calculated vagueness about the exact nature of each ministry which the New Testament presents to us. He might say that the Holy Spirit so ordained it and arranged it in anticipation of the incipient, legalistic traditionalism which was about to invade the church. The importance of the New Testament ministry is not in its outward form but in its content. Instead of magnifying the form, let the admonition connected with that form be taken to heart. (1 Timothy 3:10)" Let us look at the meaning of the Greek words. The Greek word ἐπίσκοπος is defined by the Bauer dictionary as "overseer." It is further defined as "said of persons who have a definite function or a fixed office within a group." Further definitions are "Superintendent, guardian, bishop." In Paul's letter to the Philippians we read in the first chapter, first verse: "Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons." In the third chapter of Paul's first letter to Timothy we have the familiar words: "This is a true saying, if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A Bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife ..." Here again the two offices are mentioned together, as in verse eight we read, "Likewise must the deacons be grave ..." In Paul's letter to Titus, chapter one, verses three and following we read, "For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; ..." Then further on in verse nine we read, "Holding fast the faithful Word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gain sayers." The word bishop is also applied to Christ in 1 Peter 2 verse 23 where we read, "Ye are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." We note in the Philippians passage the plural: Bishops as again and again we will find these terms used for the servants in the New Testament ministry in the plural form. In *Cruden's Complete Concordance* we have this very interesting notice: "In the New Testament Church the Elders, or presbyters, were the same as the bishops. It was an office derived from the Jewish usage of elders or rulers of synagogues."

The Bauer Lexicon defines the word πρεσβύτερος in this way: 1. Elder—among Christians those who presided over the assemblies (or churches); that they did not differ at all from the bishops or overseers is evident from the fact that the two words are used indiscriminately in Acts 26:17, 28 and in Titus 1:5 7. And that the duty of the presbyters is described by the terms ἐπισκοπεῖν and ἐπισκοπή; accordingly only two ecclesiastical offices, οἱ ἐπίσκοποι and οἱ διάκονοι, are distinguished in Philippians 1: 1 and 1 Timothy 3:1,8. The title ἐπίσκοπος denotes the function, πρεσβύτερος the dignity; the former was borrowed from Greek institutions, the latter from the Jewish.

The Thayer Lexicon gives this definition of the word διάκονος: "One who executes the commands of another, especially of a master, a servant, attendant, minister." It further lists under point 2 "a deacon, one who by virtue of the office assigned him by the church, cares for the poor and has charge of and distributes the money collected for their use."

Trench in his *Synonyms of the New Testament* says that “Diakonos represents the servant in his activity for the work: not in his relation either servile, as that of the slave, or more voluntary, as in the case of a servant to person.”

How is the word πρεσβύτερος used in the New Testament? In the Gospels it is used to refer to the elders of the Jews. In the book of the Acts of the Apostles we see the beginning use of the word elders in the Christian Church. The Apostles are described in Acts 14:23 as having ordained elders in every church. We note that the plural is used here again, an indication that the synagogue order of ten elders for the administration of affairs was being followed. In chapter 15, we read: “... they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem to the Apostles and elders about this question.” Again we have a plural. Again and again these two groups are mentioned in the churches of Jerusalem: “the elders and apostles.” In verse 23 of chapter 15 we have three, “The apostles and elders and brethren.” In Acts 20 we read that Paul from Miletus sent to Ephesus, “and called the elders of the church.” Those men are admonished in verse 28: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers to feed the church of God which he hath purchased with His own blood.” Timothy is told by Paul, “Against an elder receive not an accusation.” Titus in chapter 1:5 is told to ordain elders in every city. In the Epistle of James 5:14 we are told that the sick man is to call for the elders of the church. In all of these cases the plural indicates something very different from our system of one pastor thus serving the congregation. In the early Christian church, then, there was a group of elders who were responsible for the work of the Lord in that place. It is interesting to note that even though reference is made to Christ as the head or chief Shepherd, there is not such a distinction made within the early Christian Church. There is no “head elder” over the rest of the elders. All elders are on one plane under that Chief Shepherd Christ.

The Public Ministry, then, is seen as an office which in different areas was shared by a number of different believers. These people were warned not to “lord it over the” congregation but rather to be examples to the flock. There was no legalist division of offices or work within the early Christian Church. Paul tells us that he had baptized only two people, and yet he, as the leading Christian missionary, could have baptized thousands. He chose not to out of concern for the best interests of the converts and the church; out of love, and not out of necessity to follow a legalistic division of territory of responsibility.

Not one, but a group of elders of bishops served in each of the congregations, serving the Lord, and not competing for honor for their particular office. The early Christian Church has learned well the lesson of our Lord Jesus Christ who showed to the disciples that they should not ask the question about who is greatest in the kingdom of God, but that they should rather minister, or serve, one another as He Himself gave the example on Maunday Thursday evening.

The question may well, however, be asked: “Who is to use the office of the keys?” and “What part of the ministry of the keys is to be administered?” We have to remember that the office of the keys was given to the Christians, to all believers. It is through the call of the Christians acting together that the work of administering the keys is conferred upon a person called for that particular task. This must be done decently and in order. It would not be right for a group of Christians on their own to call one of them to give Lord’s Supper, nor to call another one to baptize. Rather, as Christians working together in harmony, they call a pastor to serve them with the keys as needs dictate. Paul did not baptize except in those two cases; a hospital or servicemen’s chaplain does also usually not baptize, yet he has the right to do so, and may in some cases. Every Christian has the right to use any and all of the keys, when this is done in harmony with their fellow Christians and the Scriptures. As Professor Carl Lawrenz of our Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon writes:

We would say that all Christians in the world and therefore any group of Christians gathered about the Means of Grace is in possession of the right to carry out the functions of the public ministry of Word and Sacraments. But whether they are authorized to exercise that function, that is, whether they could exercise it in a God-pleasing manner, is another question. This is determined by the very clear injunction of our Lord that Christians must carry out the public exercise of the ministry of the keys in accordance with love and good order. Hence, it would be

disorderly for any group of Christians gathered about the Means of Grace to carry out a public exercise of the keys for which an adequate provision has already been made. As we again bring out in our theses (on Church and Ministry) “The Holy Spirit never leads Christians to group themselves together in Jesus’ name for a competitive purpose so as to duplicate, hinder, or disturb that scope of the ministry of the keys which is already effectively provided for by a previously established grouping of Christians.”

Let us beware of the temptation to regard ourselves as men who can dispense the sacraments on our own; who hold the Ministry of the Keys in our own hands by our own authority. Rather let us remember that we do this as servants, servants, of God, and servants of the congregation which has called us to do this work.

One of the besetting sins of pastors is the sin of thinking too highly of ourselves. “*In jedem Pfarrlein steckt ein Pfaffein!*” When we have none to answer back to our sermonizing, when what we say is not questioned or contradicted, we may soon convince ourselves that we are eminent authorities. We could do very well to remember at our own installation services or those of neighboring pastors that these words, which in themselves are already very humbling words, were spoken first of all in the early Christian congregation, not to one individual similar to the pastor today, but to that group of presbyters or elders who together ruled as a board the congregation. Let us beware of the efforts to try to prove that our particular ministry is by divine appointment, through reference to the New Testament occasions where elders or bishops were ordained. Let us rather remember the difference between these group offices and the present pastorate of one person. Let us note how our modern ministry suffers by a comparison with the early New Testament Christianity explosion. Let us remember that our functions and duties as pastors are those that were given by the Lord to a larger group of Christians in the early congregations. Let us remember that whatever honor and dignity are ascribed to us are given to us as servants of Christ, and not because of any worth of our own or because of any particularly higher divine institution of our office in contrast to other Christians who serve with us as teachers, professors, missionaries, etc., within the Christian Church. Above all, let us learn from the lesson of history in the theological debate over church and ministry that we must be very careful not to use the Scriptures as a collection of independent proof passages for our particular viewpoint. Let us be very careful to study the context of the passages, the historical situation in which these words were spoken, and above all, to maintain that Christian spirit of humility and service which shines through them all. Let us be honored, rather than proud, that the congregation has seen fit to call us to serve them with the Word and with the Sacraments. Let us continually ask the Lord’s help that we may serve with our fellow pastors in harmony and in obedience to the Word of God. Let us ask the Lord to give His blessing that we may serve with other full time workers in our congregation in peace, realizing that we are together slaves of the Most High God. As the congregation’s call has spelled out these different spheres of our activity, so let us under God serve Him “without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality” (1 Timothy 5:21b).