

# Church and Ministry

*By A.T. Kretzmann*

[November, 1965]

## Introduction

This doctrinal discussion of the Church and ministry came into being because of a specific request by Trinity Lutheran Church of Crete at one of its Voting Assembly meetings to have me point out to them the difference between the so-called "Missouri" and "Wisconsin" positions on Church and Ministry.

The positions herein stated have been derived not only from the discussions which took place for almost three years at the Wisconsin Synod Seminary in Mequon, but also from the statements of position both on the part of the Wisconsin Synod Committee on Doctrine and statements found in Missouri Synod books and writings.

It is the conviction of the writer, the pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, that the real position of both church bodies on Church and Ministry is found in the practical position which both churches have followed, and which is identical; however, I hold that the theoretical position taught in the Missouri Synod, which differs from the practical position in the same Synod, is one which cannot be supported from Scripture and should therefore be given up.

It will also be pointed out in the paper that a recently organized federation of congregations formerly of the Missouri Synod not only hold that the theoretical position is correct and the only right one, but also hold that the practice within their church should be made to conform to that theoretical position. In agreement with this conviction, they have no mission funds held by the federation, and each congregation that is able to do so is requested to support specific missions directly. Being convinced that the pastorate covers every phase of the work of the ministry, some pastors of this federation are at present preparing young men for the public ministry, instead of having the federation itself do this. I hold that it is not wrong to do so, but that the conviction that it ought to be done this way according to Scripture is not supportable by Scriptural teachings. It is my position that they would be doing the Scriptural thing if they caused their theoretical position to agree with what Missouri and Wisconsin Synods have practiced.

I am also convinced that the theoretical position held by Wisconsin Synod people, and by some of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, is exegetically untenable when, for example, Matthew 18:20 is used to define what the Church is. On the other hand, the Wisconsin Synod men, and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod men who agree with them, are giving proper emphasis to the fact that the presence of the Church, according to Scripture, is always to be determined by the presence of the "marks of the Church". In my opinion, such a presence would be sufficient proof, and the use of Matthew 18:20 only darkens the waters and creates difficulties.

NOTE: When reference is made to the "Missouri position" in theory, this does not mean that the Missouri Synod has ever gone on record to confess this position; it means merely that many eminent teachers and professors of the Missouri Synod have taught this position, and as a result many pastors and teachers hold it to be a Scripturally correct position. Other professors and teachers, including Dr. Albrecht of Concordia Seminary in Springfield, and Dr. S. W. Becker, River Forest, have taught the so-called "Wisconsin position". In a similar manner, the "Wisconsin position" has been taught for the last fifty or sixty years in the Wisconsin Synod, and is quite generally accepted by most pastors, but not by all. Before that time, the "Missouri position" in theory was apparently taught and held by many in the Wisconsin Synod. It was during the decades beginning with about 1910 that the Wisconsin Synod began to bring its "Wisconsin position" in theory into agreement with the practical position followed by both synods during their entire existence.

## Part I: Of the Church

### Area of Agreement

As far as we know, all who have participated in the discussion of the doctrine of the Church readily declare their agreement with the presentation in the *Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod*, There it is stated:

24. “We believe that there is one holy Christian Church on earth, the Head of which is Christ and which is gathered, preserved, and governed by Christ through the Gospel. The members of the Christian Church are the Christians, that is, all those who have despaired of their own righteousness before God and believe that God forgives their sins for Christ’s sake. The Christian Church, in the proper sense of the term, is composed of believers only Acts 5:14; which means that no person in whom the Holy Ghost has wrought faith in the Gospel, or—which is the same thing—in the doctrine of justification, can be divested of his membership in the Christian Church; and, on the other hand, that no person in whose heart this faith does not dwell can be invested with such membership. All unbelievers, though they be in external communion with the Church and even hold the office of teacher or any other office in the Church, are not members of the Church but on the contrary, dwelling-places and instruments of Satan, Eph. 2:2. This is also the teaching of our Lutheran Confessions: ‘It is certain, however, that the wicked are in the power of the devil and members of the kingdom of the devil, as Paul teaches, Eph. 2:2, when he says that ‘the devil now worketh in the children of disobedience,’ etc.’ (*Apology. Triglot*, p. 231, paragraph 16; M., p. 154.)”

25. “Since it is by faith in the Gospel alone that men become members of the Christian Church, and since this faith cannot be seen by men, but is known to God alone, 1 Kings 8:39; Acts 1:24, 2 Tim. 2:19, therefore the Christian Church on earth is invisible, Luke 17:20, and will remain invisible till Judgment Day, Col. 3:3,4. In our day some Lutherans speak of two sides of the Church, taking the means of grace to be its “visible side.” It is true, the means of grace are necessarily related to the Church, seeing that the Church is created and preserved through them. But the means of grace are not for that reason a part of the Church; for the Church, in the proper sense of the word, consists only of believers, Eph. 2:19, 20; Acts 5:14. Lest we abet the notion that the Christian Church in the proper sense of the term is an external institution, we shall continue to call the means of grace the “marks” of the Church. Just as wheat is to be found only where it has been sown, so the Church can be found only where the Word of God is in use.”

26. “We teach that this Church, which is the invisible communion of all believers, is to be found not only in those external communions which teach the Word of God purely in every part, but also where, along with error, so much of the Word of God still remains that men may be brought to the knowledge of their sins and to faith in the forgiveness of sins, which Christ has gained for all men, Mark 16:16; Samaritans: Luke 17:16; John 4:25.”

30. “The Original and True Possessors of All Christian Rights and Privileges.—Since the Christians are the Church, it is self-evident that they alone originally possess the spiritual gifts and rights which Christ has gained for, and given to, His Church. Thus St. Paul reminds all believers: “All things are yours,” 1 Cor. 3:21-22, and Christ Himself commits to all believers the keys of the kingdom of heaven, Matt, 16:13-19; 18:17-20; John 20:22-23, and commissions all believers to preach the Gospel and to administer the Sacraments, Matt, 28:19,20; 1 Cor. 11:23-25. Accordingly, we reject all doctrines by which this spiritual power or any part thereof is adjudged as originally vested in certain individuals or bodies, such as the Pope, or the bishops, or the order of the ministry, or the secular lords or councils, or synods, etc. The officers of the Church publicly administer their offices only by virtue of delegated powers, conferred on them by the original possessors of such powers, and such administration remains under the supervision of the latter, Col. 4:17. Naturally all Christians have also the right and the duty to

judge and decide matters of doctrine, not according to their own notions, of courses but according to the Word of God, 1 John 4:1; 1 Pet, x:11.”

At its 1950 Convention in St. Paul, Minnesota the Synodical Conference (Missouri Synod, Wisconsin Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Synod, Slovak Synod) adopted the *Thiensville Theses* which say:

1. “It is God’s will and order, as we understand from Holy Scripture, that Christians living in the same locality also enter into outward communion with one another, in order jointly to exercise the duties of their spiritual priesthood.”
2. “As we understand from Scripture, it is furthermore God’s will and order that such local congregations of Christians have shepherds and teachers who in the name of all (*von Gemeinschafts wegen*) perform the ministry of the Word in their midst.”
3. “As we understand from Holy Scripture, it is God’s will and order that local congregations of Christians give expression of their unity of faith with other congregations and perform the work of the Kingdom of God in fellowship with then outside of their own circle also, as for example it is done among us in the free form of a synod.”
4. “Since every Christian is in charge of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, a judgment expressed by a single Christian or by a number of Christians in any kind of a combination, if expressed in agreement with the Word of God, has validity also in haven. Still, as we understand from Holy Scripture, it is God’s will and order that an action against a sinning brother cannot be regarded as having begin concluded until a local congregation has acted. The disciplinary action of a local congregation and of a synod will not come into conflict with each other, if matters are handled correctly, because the local congregation excludes from the local congregation and not from synod, and synod excludes from synod and not from the local congregation. Note: -- The exclusion as put into action by the local congregation we call excommunication, in agreement with ecclesiastical usage,”

### **Area of Disagreement**

#### **“Missouri Position” in Theory**

The so-called “Missouri Position” in theory is set forth in the Majority Report of the Interim Committee of the Synodical Conference in 1918 as follows:

“I. A thorough study of the question of Church and Synod on the basis of Scripture and the Confessions compels us to the following conclusions:

- a. That a congregation is a group of professing Christians who by God’s command regularly assemble for worship (Col. 3:16) and are united for the purpose of maintaining the ministry of the Word in their midst (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Cor. 16:19; Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5f; Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 11:20ff);
- b. That the congregation is the only divinely designated body or unit of the visible Church (1 Cor. 16:19; Matt. 18:17, Acts 20:28);
- c. That the congregation exercises its powers (i.e... calls pastors uses the Keys, etc.) only by virtue of the believers in it (1 Cor. 3:21; Col. 3:16; Rom. 16:17; Matt. 18:17f; John 20:22-23).”

“II. Synods and other co-operative organizations (Pastoral conferences, mission societies, children’s friend societies, etc.) may be formed for the purpose of carrying out certain specific commands of the

Lord (Mark 16:16; Matt. 28:19-20) which the individual congregation, because of human weakness and other limitations, may not be able to carry out by itself (Gal, 6:2). But such organizations are an outgrowth of Christian love and Christian liberty. The work so done is both divinely appointed and God-pleasing (Matt. 28:19), so long as it does not violate the authority vested by God in the local congregation (e.g., Matt. 18:17f; 1 Pet, 4:15).”

“Synod is not a congregation as defined in Par. I, but an association of such congregations. Synod, therefore, has and exorcises only those rights and powers which are delegated to it by the constituent congregations, which, in turn, possess these rights and powers by virtue of the believers in their midst (1 Cor. 3:21; 1 Pet. 2:9),”

(Note: Quotations from Luther, Walther, Hoenecke, and the Proceedings of the 22d Convention of the Synodical Conference, which were included at this point with the Majority Report of the Interim Committee of the Synodical Conference, are here not included for the sake of clarity and brevity. Not included also at a later point are references from the writings of the same and other orthodox church leaders who support the so-called “Wisconsin Position”. Since our real proof must always be Scripture itself, this has been allowed to remain the deciding proof.)

“III. The formation of a congregation or the exercise of its functions does not deprive the individual believer of any of the inherent rights, duties, or privileges of the royal priesthood. However, the Scriptures clearly indicate that these rights may be exercised publicly (i.e., by order and in the name of the congregation, *von Gemeinschafts wegen*) only by authority of the local congregation (Tit. 1:5; Matt. 18:17; I Cor. 11:20 .”

“While the local congregation may delegate the exercise of some of its functions (or work, e. g., mission work outside its parish, etc.) to such groups as it may designate (e. g., Synod, mission societies, etc.), the exercise of the final step in excommunication can never be so delegated because of the specific command of Christ in Matt. 18:17: “Tell it unto the church” (τε ἐκκλησία, i.e., the local congregation).”

(Note: Divine institution is claimed for the local congregation in its improper form, made up of Christians and hypocrites.)

This position in theory is held by the members of a recently organized federation of congregations formerly of the Missouri Synod, who have cited the following Scripture passages, among others, in support of this position: Titus 10; Heb. 5; I Cor. 12:19; Rom. 10:15; Acts 13:1-3; Matt. 18:17, °Acts 20:28; I Cor. 5:13; II Tim. 2:2; Rev. chapters 2 and 3. They hold that these passages clearly teach that the local congregation is the only grouping of Christians which the Lord has instituted for the public administration of the keys. They hold also that their practice now be made to conform with this theoretical position. They also hold that these passages teach that the pastoral office includes all phases of the public ministry (e.g. preparing pastors and teachers).

### **“Missouri Position” in Practice**

The “Missouri Position” in practice differs from the “Missouri Position” in theory in this respect: The claim that only congregations may carry out the functions of the Office of the Keys in the name of others is not carried out when the work of the church is done in the Missouri Synod. If it were true that God has entrusted these matters only to the local congregation, then the local congregation could not delegate it to other groups of professing Christians, such as synods, mission boards, etc. Theoretically, the congregations are described as delegating some of these functions to groups of Christians outside of themselves which continue to function in these respects without any direct action of the congregations themselves. (Missionaries are sent out, professors

are called, and Holy Communion is distributed, at pastoral conferences, synodical sessions without any specific authority given to them for this purpose by the individual congregations.) Thus, in practice, the Missouri Synod Position is the opposite of that which has been assumed in the theoretical position. Synods and Mission Boards and Pastoral Conferences are functioning as a church in certain areas.

### **“Wisconsin Position” in Theory**

The so-called “Wisconsin Position” on the Church is set forth in the *Theses on the Church of the Doctrinal Commission of the Wisconsin Synod* in the following words:

“D—The Church, the communion of saints, is present there where the means of grace are in use, where the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered. (Marks of the Church).

1. It is through the Gospel that the Church has received its life. All of its members have been born again by the incorruptible seed of the Word of God. Through the Gospel the spiritual life of all its members is sustained. Through the Gospel the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. John 6:63; John 3:5-6; 1 Pet. 1:23-25; Rom. 1:16; Titus 3:5; 1 Car. 10:17; John 17:17.

2. Not all, of course, who hear the Gospel believe. Matt. 23:37; Acts 7:51; Heb. 4:2; C.A. Art. 5. Yet the promise of the Lord stands that His word will not return to him void, without accomplishing that which He pleases. Isa. 55:10-11; Matt. 28:18-20.

3. Hence Scripture bids us to look for the Church there where the Gospel is in use, where people are gathered together both to receive its blessings and to bring them to others. Matt. 18:20. Scripture designates such gatherings of people who profess faith in Christ and manifest it in the use of Word and Sacrament as churches. It does so, however, because of the believers found in their midst. Acts 2:11; Acts 4:32; 8:1; 501-11. Hypocrites are like chaff among the wheat, outwardly adhering to the company of believers but not a part of them. Until God exposes them, they, too, will be the outward recipients of the expressions of fellowship of the believers.

4. Specific forms in which believers group themselves together for the fellowship and work of the Church, the specific forms in which they arrange for the use of the means of grace in public worship, the specific forms in which they establish the public ministry, have not been prescribed by the Lord to His New Testament Church. It is the Holy Spirit who through the gift of their common faith leads the believers to establish the adequate and wholesome forms which fit every circumstance, situation, and need. 1 Cor. 3:21; 1 Cor. 1:1:33,40. God in His word merely bids them to gather together, MV 10:25, and through their faith rpm is them to do so. Since believers ordinarily live at sonic local place, here 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. Acts 15; 1 Thess. 4:9-10; Acts 9:31 (the Greek text: the church in Judaea, Galilee, and Samaria); 1 Cor. 1 :1 the churches of Galatia); 2 Cor. 9:2 (3 congregations—Macedonia and Achaia); 2 Cor. 8:18-19 (Macedonian churches had a common worker and jointly elected a traveling companion for Paul); Acts 16:1-2 (Timothy’s work praised by Derbe, Lystra, and Iconium). In essence the various groupings in Jesus l name,

for the proclamation of His Gospel, all lie on the same plane. They are all church in one and the same sense.

5. The right use of Word and Sacrament are the true marks of the Church, the marks by which the Lord points us to those with whom He would have us express the fellowship that we have in the communion of saints.

a. The Lord in His Word bids us to withdraw our fellowship from those who persistently teach, spread, condone error and demand recognition for it. Rom. 16:17-18; 2 Tim. 2:17-19; 2 John 9-11; Gal. 1:8-9.

b. Yet we rejoice in the fact that God in His grace and mercy can and does awaken, sustain, and preserve believers also in the midst of erring congregations and church bodies. 1 Kings 19:18. We remember, however, that He does so not through the errors that are taught and condoned there, but only through the true Gospel message that is still heard in these erring churches. We are therefore incited to proclaim the pure Word of God with great zeal and faithfulness and also with meekness and love at every God-given opportunity, so that our testimony may perchance be heard also by those who are God's children in erring churches and help them in overcoming the errors with which they are surrounded.

*Status Controversiae*: 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; that the ministry of the keys has been given exclusively to the local congregation."

Note: It was repeatedly pointed out at the Mequon meetings that when Synod is referred to by them as "church", this is not said of its visible organization, but refers rather to the larger fellowship of believers in a synod which carries out certain functions of the Office of the Keys.

### **"Wisconsin Position" in Practice**

The main difficulty which is encountered in connection with harmonizing the "Wisconsin Position" in theory with the "Wisconsin Position" in practice is that the theoretical position comes very close to labeling any group of professing Christians as "church" provided they are "gathered together" in Christ's name. Matt. 18:20. I hold that thereby more is read into this passage than can be proven to be the intention of Christ when He said these words. How much better would it not be if, in agreement with the rein points made in the "Wisconsin position" in theory, it were simply emphasized that where the "marks of the church" are present, there the church is present.

Outside of what I consider a mere exegetical difference on this point, I hold that the "Wisconsin Position" in theory and its position in practice agree, and that this can be fully supported by Scripture. This snug "Wisconsin Position" in theory and practice is also the Scriptural "Missouri Position" in practice, but unfortunately not in theory.

## **Of the Holy Ministry**

### **Area of Agreement**

All participants readily declare their agreement with the position set forth in the Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod, Par. 31-33, which reads as follows:

31. “By the public ministry we mean the office by which the Word of God is preached and the Sacraments are administered by order and in the name of a Christian congregation. Concerning this office we teach that it is divine ordinance; that is, the Christians of a certain locality must reply the means of grace not only privately and within the circle of their families nor merely in their common intercourse with fellow Christians, John 5:39; Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:16, but they are also required, by divine order, to make provision that the Word of God be publicly preached in their midst, and the Sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, by persons qualified for such work, whose qualifications and official functions are exactly defined in Scripture, Titus 1:5; Acts 14:23; 20:28; 2 Tim. 2:2.”

32. “Although the office of the ministry is a divine ordinance, it possesses no other power than the power of the Word of God, I Pet. 4:11; that is to say, it is the duty of Christians to yield unconditional obedience to the office of the ministry whenever, and as long as, the minister proclaims to them the Word of God, Heb. 13:17; Luke 10:16. If, however, the minister, in his teachings and injunctions, were to go beyond the Word of God, it would be the duty of Christians not to obey, but to disobey him, so as to remain faithful to Christ, Matt. 23:8. Accordingly, we reject the false doctrine ascribing to the office of the ministry the right to demand obedience and submission in matters which Christ has not commanded.”

33. “Regarding ordination we teach that it is not a divine, but a commendable ecclesiastical ordinance. (Smalcald Articles, Trig. p. 525, paragraph 70; M., p. 342.)”

All participants also declared themselves to be fully agreed with the position set forth by Dr. Adolf Hoenecke in his *Ev. Luth. Dogmatik*, Vol. IV, where it is stated in part:

“We treat here of the ministry concretely considered, that is, of the office of service in the Word. Scripture teaches regarding the ministry concretely considered, even as concerning the ministry abstractly considered (Ps. 68:115 Heb. 1:1), that it is of divine institution, or *de jure divino* (1 Cor. 12:28; 2 Cor. 5:18; Jer. 3:15; Joel 2:23); and that, indeed, not only by God in general, as in the last passages, but institution of the ministry in concrete is asserted of the Father (Heb. 1:1; Gal. 1:16), of the Son (Matt. 10:1; 9:1; Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15; Eph. 4:11; John 20:21; 1 Cor. 1:17; 4:1-2; 2 Cor. 5:20), of the Holy Ghost (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; hence *diakonis tou pneumatos*). Quenstedt: *Deus est auctor ministerii*; I. *promittendo doctores ecclesiae*, Jer. 3:15; 23:4; Joel 2:23; II. *dando, quod promisit*, 1 Cor. 12:28; 2 Cor. 5:18 III. *conservando ministerium usque ad consummationem saeculi*, Eph. 1:11; IV. *ipso docendi munere fungendo*, Heb. 1:1; V. *doctores ecclesiae necessariis donis instruendo*, 2 Cor. 3: 5.”

“Over against the view that the ministry was only a free activity rising out of the Christian spirit and only given the name of a ministry we find the divine institution of the ministry also in the concrete sense proven by the fact that:

1. The apostles were called to a real ministry by the Son of God.

a. They are called by the Son of God (Matt. 10:1; Luke 6:13, where Christ gives them the name ‘apostle’; Luke 9:1-10; Mark 6:7; Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15) and were actually installed as apostles.

b. It is expressly named a ministry in Acts 1:17-25; Rom. 1:5: “grace and apostleship,” whence it follows that the office is not merely a product of the Christian spirit, for that would already be

contained in the word “grace” and Paul could not add “and apostleship”, for which addition the office appears as something existent which can be committed to a person. In Rom. 15:15-16 Paul points out that it is a donation of God that he is a servant of God; that is, he is placed by God into a ministry already existent by divine institution. In 1 Cor. 9:17, op. v.16, Paul says “a dispensation is committed unto me.” Here it is clear that Paul not only calls his activity out of free love a ministry because he purposes to discharge it faithfully, but that he knows a ministry instituted by God which does not at all derive (simply?) from his being a Christian and from his soul’s urging, etc., but is really existent, without all that, by divine institution.

2. God has given ample direction and commands with respect to the attitude of Christians towards servants of the Word. Now, when God gives such precepts and declares violation of them to be sin, the ministry in concrete, faith which these precepts deal, cannot rest on human institution or merely the soul’s urging, but must be *de jure divino*.”

(Here - pp. 177-179 - Hoenecke deals with the erroneous positions of Koestlin, Hoefling, Hase, Luthardt, etc.)

“P. 180ff., under Thesis II:

I. The regular ministry is the continuation willed by God Himself of the extraordinary apostolic and is of divine institution in and with the apostolate. The divine institution of the apostolate *in concreto* was proven in Thesis I.”

### **Area of Disagreement**

It has been maintained by some that the pastoral office in a congregation comprises and includes all functions of the public ministry, and that therefore such activities as serving as a Christian Day School teacher, or as a theological professor all lie within the pastoral office in a congregation. It is held by them that the pastoral office, proceeding from the general office of the apostles, is the only divinely instituted office in the Church. Therefore, a Christian teacher or professor is but carrying out some of the functions which were given to the pastor when he accepted his call (so-called “Missouri Position” in theory).

Dr. Fritz, Pastoral Theology, p. 285 says about the Office of the Ministry, in part:

“The office of the ministry, or the pastoral office (*Pfarramt*), is a divine institution.

1. The Scriptures clearly distinguish between the office of the ministry and the priesthood of all believers. While all Christians are priests before God and as such “should show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into His marvelous light,” I Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6, not all Christians are bishops, pastors, ministers (synonymous terms); for the Bible speaks of the latter as being incumbents of a special office in the Church, the office of the ministry, or the pastoral office, and demands that these men have certain necessary qualifications for that office, 1 Cor. 12:29; Jas. 3:1; 1 Cor. 4:1; Acts 20:28, Titus 1:5; 1 Tim 3:1ff.”

Note: Unfortunately, the impression is given here, as also in several instances in Dr. Walther’s writings, that the Pastoral Office (*Pfarramt*) is to be identified with the entire office of the public ministry. In other instances, Dr. Walther, and other orthodox teachers in the Lutheran Church, make very clear that this is not the case.

Those who hold the so-called “Wisconsin Position” in theory and practice maintain that the ministry of the Means of Grace or the ministry of the Gospel is divinely established. They also teach that the up public ministry in which the Means of Grace are administered in behalf of a group of Christians, is one form of



practicing that Ministry and is also by divine institution since “these public ministers are appointed by God.” They hold that the pastoral office, or that of a Christian School teacher, or that of a professor who helps to train pastors and teachers are all different forms of this public ministry, and that it is therefore wrong to claim divine institution for the pastorate of a congregation in contrast to other forms of the public ministry. This position is set forth in part as follows in the *Theses on the Ministry* by the Doctrinal Commission of the Wisconsin Synod:

C. “From the beginning of the Church there were men especially appointed to discharge publicly (in behalf of a group of Christians the duties of this one ministry.

D. “This public ministry is not generically different from that of the common priesthood of all Christians. It is merely a special tray or form of practicing the one ministry of the Gospel.

a. Christians are equal before God, neither superior nor inferior to one another, and all are equally entrusted with the same ministry of the Gospel. I Pet. 2:9; Hence no one may assume the functions of the public ministry except through a legitimate call. Art. Smalc. p. 522:67-69: The authority to call (*ius vocandi*) is implied in the authority to administer the Gospel (*ius ministrandi evangelii*) given to the Church. Hence the derived right of local congregations to call.

b. God is a God of order; He wants us to conduct all of our affairs orderly, 1 Cor. 14:33-40, and in the spirit of love; 1 Cor. 16:14.

c. Christians are not all equally qualified to perform publicly the functions of the ministry. The Lord sets forth the needed qualifications of those who are to perform publicly the functions of the ministry. 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-11. God gives to the Church men qualified for the various forms of the work required. Eph. 4:7-16; Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 14:33-40; 28-31.

d. These gifts should be gratefully received and developed. 1 Cor. 12:31; 1 Th. 5:19-20; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6-9.

e. Thus these public ministers are appointed by God. Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:28. It would be wrong to trace the origin of this public ministry to mere expedience. (Hoefling)

f. There is, however, no direct word of institution for any particular form of the ministry. The one public ministry of the Gospel may assume various forms, as circumstances demand. The specific forms in which Christians establish the public ministry have not been prescribed by the Lord to His New Testament Church. It is the Holy Spirit who through the gift of their common faith leads the believers to establish the adequate and wholesome forms which fit every circumstance, situation, and need. Various functions are mentioned in Scripture: 1 Tim. 4:13; Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:28; Rom. 12:6-8; 2 Tim. 2:2; John 21:15-17 (Feeding); Acts 20-28 (watching); 2 Tim. 3:2; 4:11; 6:2 (teaching); 1 Tim. 3:5; 5:17 (ruling). In spite of the great diversity in the external form of the ministerial work the ministry is essentially one. The various offices for the public preaching of the Gospel, not only those enumerated above, e.g., in Eph. 1:11 and 1 Cor. 12:28, but also those developed in our day, are all gifts of the exalted Christ to His Church which the Church receives gratefully and employs under the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit for the upbuilding of the spiritual body of Christ; and all of them are comprehended under the general commission to preach the Gospel given to all believers.

*Status Controversiae*: 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.”

## **What Scripture Teaches on These Matters Under Discussion With Regard to Church and Ministry**

### **What is taught in the Texts Adduced to Support the “Missouri Position” in Theory?**

1. Titus 1:5 “For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee.”

This text teaches that there were things lacking among the congregations on the island of Crete, but does not indicate what those things were. The text does not say that the fact that elders were not found in every congregation was one of the things that were lacking, although without a doubt this was also a deficiency which had to be supplied for the welfare of Gods kingdom. However, this text can be made to teach no more than that it is God’s will that congregations have pastors who serve them, and that they are placed there by the Lord. If the fact that pastors were to be placed at these congregations by divine order proves that the congregations they served (this particular form) are divinely instituted, then would not the scattered groups to whom the Lord sent His evangelists also be divine institutions?

2. Hebrews 5:4 “And no man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.”

This text proves that Aaron received a divine call to serve as high priest of God, but does it prove that this call came from the congregation of Israel, let us say, or was this not a direct call from God? (cf. Ex. 28:1)

3. 1 Cor. 12:19 “And if they were all one member, where were the body?”

This text refers to the Holy Christian Church, which is the body of Christ and all Christians are members of that body. This text does not refer at all to local congregations as such although, of course, the local congregations, in the proper sense, consisting of believers, are a part of this body of Christ.

4. Romans 10:15 “And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things.”

This text proves that no one may administer the Office of the Keys publicly by preaching unless he has received a divine call to do so, but the text does not say that the local congregations alone can extend such a divine call.

5. Acts 14:23 “And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.”

This text shows that local congregations are expected by God to call elders or pastors to serve them, in other words, to administer the Office of the Keys publicly, e.g., in the name of the congregation, whether in public or private. The word “elders” here is apparently used in the sense of “pastors” and in that sense it would refer only to workers that have been called by congregations to assume these pastoral duties. This text does not, however, exclude other workers in the public ministry such as teachers and evangelists who also have a divine call and should be used by the Christian Church—the congregation of believers.

6. Matthew 18:17 “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 a heathen man and a publican.”

Since the church to whom the matter of discipline is to be brought in the third step is a definite group of people whose existence and whereabouts are known, it seals quite apparent that this is almost exclusively a reference to local congregations. However, a careful study of the text will also show that the church’s function here is to admonish the sinning brother, something which the local congregation ought to do but if this admonition is not heeded, then the singular is used “let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican” which apparently is a collective “thee” and by no rules of grammar can be referred back to the church referred to at the beginning of this text. In other words, all believers, *ekkleesia*, who at any time come into contact with such an individual who has refused admonition must treat him as a heathen man and a publican. There is no support for the contention that other congregations and other Christians will do this only as a necessary honoring of the action taken by a congregation, but through obedience to God’s command in this text, since this text does not say that the congregation must do this.

7. Acts 20:28 “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”

There was an *ekkleesia* of God at Ephesus which was made up of all the believers in that large and flourishing city. Over this number of Christians residing there, several bishops were placed as overseers by the Holy Ghost. We have no right to assume that the Christians at Ephesus were all members of one congregation, nor do we have any warrant or support for the supposition that there was more than one congregation there. It is an argument from silence, which is never acceptable, to assume either one or the other. This “flock” could have all been members of one congregation or of several.

8. 1 Cor. 5:15 “But them that are without, God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.”

This text indicates that the *ekkleesia*, the church, to which this letter is addressed, referred to as “The church of God which is at Corinth to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ their Lord” were to treat this unrepentant sinner as a heathen man and a publican. The fact that this grouping of Christians, scattered over a large area, is told to do so, cannot be made to limit the meaning of the word “*ekkleesia*” in the Matt. 18:17 passage, but each text must be permitted to stand in its full force.

9. 2 Tim. 2:2 “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”

This passage makes clear that Timothy, as a supervising bishop in charge of larger areas containing local congregations, was to find men who had the ability to teach God’s Word and that these men be used in the service of God’s kingdom. This does not exclude that some of these teachers may have been, for example, evangelists rather than pastors, for evangelists like Philip were carrying out the teaching ministry also.

10. Rev. 2 & 3 (entire chapters)

The seven churches mentioned in these chapters are called churches in an improper sense, since it is plainly stated that these congregations or groups of congregations (the church at Ephesus?) consisted of believers and also hypocrites and unbelievers. In fact, the congregation at Sardis is spoken of as consisting mostly of unbelievers with only a very few believers among them (Rev. 3:4), yet it is called *ekkleesia*, the

church, because of the few believers that belonged there, While admonitions are directed to all who belong to these churches and severe rebukes administered to those who had left the saving faiths the fact that they are called churches in no way proves that this outward form consisting of believers and unbelievers was divinely ordained. There has been some question as to the meaning of the expression which recurs again and again, the “angel of the church.” Since Scripture does not explain itself on this matter, we dare not place our own interpretation upon this phrase, as if it were a doctrinal teaching of Scripture.

On the basis of these texts it is evident that the position which is practiced by the Missouri Synod is the one which can be proven from Scripture, rather than the theoretical position mentioned on pages 4 and 5. If it is true that God Himself has given the right to administer the Office of the Keys publicly only to the local congregation, then there is no Scriptural warrant permitting local congregations to delegate this to other groups such as synods, mission boards, etc. (It is not a parallel to say that, even as congregations delegate the carrying out of functions of the Keys to pastors, so congregations may also delegate other matters to a synod. In the first instance, we have numerous Scripture texts which say this should be done; in the other instance, there is no such divine command and permission given. If only local congregations are told by the Lord to do this, then they may not delegate this to groups which they claim are by human right only.) The fact that local congregations have always permitted Synod to call missionaries and professors to their offices and to administer communion at convention meetings, without any specific permission from the local congregation, shows that the Synod has always held in practice that other groups of Christians also possess some of these rights, if the “marks of the Church”, the means of grace, are administered in their midst. The purpose for which the Christians group themselves together determines which rights this group has been established to carry out.

It is impossible to prove from Scripture that the local congregation, in its improper form made up of Christians and hypocrites, is a divine institution. No divine function pertaining to the Office of the Keys have been given to such a mixed group, but only to the Christians that are present in such groups. However, the validity of the acts carried out by the local congregation, in its improper sense, is attested to by Scripture in numerous texts. God operates through the existing visible organization but does so because of the Christians in them. It is also apparent that an improper emphasis has been placed upon the text Matt. 18:17 since, as pointed out, this text does not teach that the local congregation alone can excommunicate, even if it could be proven that the word “*ekkleesia*” means “local congregation.” All that this group of professing Christians is asked to do is to admonish in the third degree. The exclusion from Christian fellowship is required of all Christians (“Let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican”), including especially those in the local congregation. Also the precept and example of the Corinthian congregation in 1 Cor. 5, of “putting away from among yourselves that wicked person” proves no more than that, of course, local congregations must do this. However, this text does not limit this exclusion from the Christian Church to local congregations.

This so-called “Missouri Position” in theory, to which the members of a recently organized federation of congregations formerly of the Missouri Synod agree, actually disagrees with what has always been practiced in the Missouri Synod. For proof of this, one need only look at the calls which are extended to pastors and read them and you will find that no pastor is ever called to prepare members for the pastoral and teaching ministries or to serve as a professor. Very seldom do these calls even specifically state that they are to serve as evangelists, although mission work is to be performed by them. In other words, in practice the Missouri Synod does not claim that the pastoral call includes all other calls of the public ministry. This Scriptural practice for 100 years, I hold as the Scriptural position of God’s Word, and with this position in practice in the Missouri Synod, the Wisconsin Synod also agrees both in practice as well as in theory. That all functions of the public ministry do not lie within the Pastoral Office in a congregation is proven in Eph. 4:11 “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;”.

### **What is Taught in the Texts Adduced in Support of the “Wisconsin Position” in Theory and Practice?**

The Wisconsin Synod has always practiced in identically the same way with regard to Church and synod as has the Missouri Synod. They state in their declaration that the local congregation is the primary grouping and have explained this to mean that when there appears to be a conflict of authority between a local

congregation and the synod, e. g., with regard to excommunication and other matters, the local congregation always takes precedence over the synod. They have also emphatically stated that the local congregation is never to be made subject to the synod as an ecclesiastical authority or super-church, but the synod is merely advisory to the churches which establish it.

They claim divine institution neither for the form of the local congregation nor for the form of a synod. The only part of their position which appears to be untenable is their claim that whenever Matt. 18:20 “two or three gather together in my name” is applicable to a group of Christians that these groups are “Church”. As a result, they find it difficult to explain why a Men’s Club and a Ladies’ Aid and other similar organizations may not carry out all the functions of the Office of the Keys, as does a local congregation. The main reason offered to explain this is that it could be a violation of decency and order. In reality, a more cogent reason for excluding such organizations from the same classification as congregations is rather the purpose for which they exist and have been established. While the undersigned is unable to agree with some other exegetical statements found in their Commission’s declaration on the Church (pages 6-8), these are purely exegetical differences. To the writer, the real proof of the correctness of that position is the fact that it places the proper Scriptural emphasis upon the marks of the Church, as is proper. The only difficulty connected with the “Wisconsin Position” with regard to the Holy Ministry is that the expression “public ministry” used by Wisconsin Synod people appears to be an intangible thing, comprising as it does all acts preferred in the place of others in administering the Word of God and the Sacraments. It is difficult to distinguish this public ministry, as they refer to it from the ministry of the Word which has been given to all believers. The position held by Wisconsin with regard to the public ministry of the Word is one that can be supported strongly by Scripture texts.

### **Conclusions Which Must Be Drawn from Scripture**

- I. Christians, the entire Christian Church, are not only the original possessors of the Office of the Keys, but the only possessors of the Ministry of the Keys. Also individually they possess the full Keys, regardless of the group with which they may become associated from time to time.
- II. The Church is present whenever the Means of Grace, the Marks of the Church are present and in use. The purpose for which the group exists and has gathered as a Christian group determines to what extent and which functions it is empowered to carry out as a group.
- III. The position on Church and Ministry which has been practiced by orthodox Lutheran churches of all times has never supported the so-called “Missouri position” in theory. The practice in all Lutheran churches has consistently agreed with the so-called “Wisconsin position” and this practice, I hold, is in full agreement with God’s Word.

While this paper has been written for study and discussions it is not being offered as merely “exploratory”, but as the firm conviction of the writer, who holds it to be fully Scriptural. The author invites any reader to offer criticisms of the paper or any of its contents, and will gladly make whatever corrections are necessary to bring this paper into full agreement with God’s Word, if it is shown to be necessary to do so.

Since the doctrines of Church and Ministry seem to be a serious obstacle standing in the way of a closer drawing together of some of the orthodox church bodies in America, it is my hope and prayer that the study, and discussion of the contents of this paper may serve in some small way to help remove our differences, so that with God’s blessing, these synodical groups may be drawn together more closely, perhaps in the form eventually of some kind of federation of synods similar to the now practically defunct Ev. Lutheran Synodical Conference. As our Confessions say: “The rule is: the Word of God shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel.” (*Smalcald Articles Concordia Trigla*. P. 467, Paragraph 1).

It is because the writer is convinced that the Wisconsin Position on Church and Ministry in theory and practice agrees fully with the Scriptural position in practice of the Missouri and Wisconsin synods, and for other reasons, that he has applied personally for membership in the Wisconsin Synod.