

WE HAVE THIS TREASURE IN JARS OF CLAY

by

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Introduction

Here we have the establishment of the church before there was any government of the home and of the state; for Eve was not yet created. Moreover, the church is established without walls and without any pomp, in a very spacious and very delightful place. (*AE 1:103*)

Thus Luther wrote about the Lord's command to Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil which he had planted in Eden. We might call this church St. Eden's Church. It was the church which the church shoppers, whom we see some Sundays, lust for, but never find. Its membership was two (both pillars of the congregation). No vestments needed to be cleaned. No one slept during worship. Its altar, if you will, was a tree. Its Bible was a command. Save those which came from the lips of the Son of Man, no better sermons have ever been heard than those spoken by the Lord *in the cool of the day*. There were no better listeners than Adam and his bride.

You know the rest, about the trouble that slithered into church. The question it asked was a sly sneer, "Are you really getting what you need from worship here at St. Eden's? Are they helping you to become truly spiritual? Does this teaching work for you; is it really practical?" The serpent's first temptation was not atheism, hardly his best attack: rather, it was religion. It was a religion which sought God and spirituality by means which God had not ordained. Luther called Adam and Eve the first "enthusiasts," a word which carries other baggage for us today. It literally means "God in me" (en - theos), as Satan said, *...you will be like God*. God forgave this first venture into Mormonism by issuing a promise; a promise to which the Church still clings to this very day for its hope of redemption. This is the Church's Gospel, or good news, a guarantee to be later written in large letters with the blood of his Son. The altar and the Bible which had served the Church in Eden were left behind. The Gospel became the new altar and Bible of the Church. Satan would renew his old attack on God's Word, and he would find easier prey in the fallen children of Eve. Therefore God would repeat his **Gospel** again and again in Old Testament times. He would localize it in visible **means** (e.g. the sacrifices, the Ark, the rainbow, etc.). He would also institute a priesthood, or **ministry**, to proclaim this promise (e.g. the patriarchs and later the Levites).

The three things just mentioned: Gospel, Means, and Ministry have been woven into one fabric. These three are the Church's hope and salvation. On account of this, Satan, wise fellow that he is, has made very effort to shred this fabric. The Sadducees of old and the higher critics of today have scoffed at the reliability of the Gospel of God. The enthusiasts, both ancient mystics and their modern counterparts, have gaped heavenward in search of the Spirit, but have looked down on the means: water, bread, wine, and preaching. Since it has always been this way, can we believe for a moment that Satan will leave the last thread in this fabric, the Ministry, untouched? He will not. He has not. Satan hates the Gospel of salvation, and since the Means and the Ministry serve the Gospel (indeed, are Gospel!), he hates them also.

And the ministry is very much an issue today. It is eye-opening to see how many of the things which now face our synod have a direct or indirect connection with the Ministry: we are currently debating what constitutes the Ministry; the roles of men and women to a large extent deal with ministry; we have the establishment of a staff ministry program at New Ulm; there are the questions pertaining to the ordination of male teachers; there were the recent synod conventions which increased the participation and power of the laity; there are efforts to produce lay-lead Bible studies; a recent series of articles on this subject appeared in the **Northwestern Lutheran** and in the **Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly**; and the Conference of Presidents has requested that all conferences study this matter.

What lies behind at least a part of the debate is the long-standing difference about church and ministry between the Wisconsin and Missouri synods. Though not always helpful, the difference between the two on this point was put this way: Missouri believed that the local congregation was the only divinely ordered form of the Church and that the pastoral ministry was the only divinely ordered form of the public ministry. Wisconsin believed that the Bible taught that there was no divinely instituted form of the Church or of the Gospel ministry. Simple explanations like this were not entirely fair to either side. Both parties agreed that God had given his people a priceless treasure in the Gospel and in the ministry which dispensed it. As St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *We have this treasure in jars of clay.* (2 Co 4:7)

The Ministry of the Gospel is Mandated in the New Testament and Has Precedence in the Old Testament

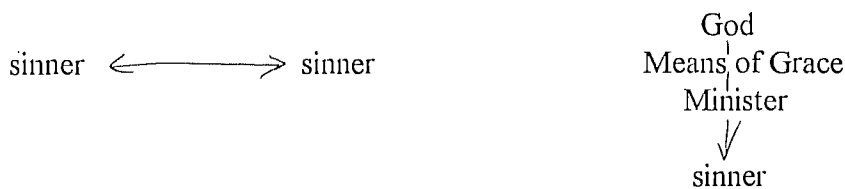
Your conference essay committee has asked, “Is there a specific institution of gospel ministry in the Bible.” To answer yes would be true enough, but it would not do justice to all that the Bible reveals about the ministry of the Gospel. Patriarchal altars, priests, priestly vestments, tabernacle, temple, sacrifices, ceremonies, church year, and prophets were all mandated by God. An authorized, personified ministry of salvation was God’s gift to his people. Though a spirit, Jehovah showed himself to be the God of place and of ministers when he told Moses, *Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.* (Gn 3:5/KJV) He would place his Word in the trust of men whether they stood before a portable tabernacle or a temple on a holy hill. God gave his people spiritual shepherds. People were called into this ministry, either directly by God (e.g. Isaiah) or by appointment of the Church (e.g. the Levitical succession). There was no tolerance for unauthorized prophets in Israel. God could say of them, *...I did not send or appoint them.* (Jr 23:32) As one of our conference brothers has noted, even something as simple as “Who holds the staff at the Battle of Rephidim?” was not dealt with by delegation (Ex 17). No line of volunteers took turns holding a “magic wand,” the “staff ministry” belonged to the authorized prophet Moses.

Nothing changes in New Testament times. Indeed, the ministry of the new era was prefigured in the old. Harold Senkbeil in his book, **Dying to Live, the Power of Forgiveness**, shows how the sacraments were prefigured in the Exodus: Communion has its type in the Passover and Baptism has its type in the rescue/destruction in the Red Sea. What is typical in the practices and events of the old era is directly foretold by the prophets. Jehovah promised, *I will place shepherds over them*

who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified...(Jr 23:4) The call to an authorized, personified ministry is everywhere in the new era. Where the Gospel is, so are the Means and the Ministry, they are inseparable. From the commission to the Eleven to preach the Gospel worldwide, to the qualifications for the overseer in the pastoral epistles, from the questions about Jesus' teaching authority brought by his enemies (which he answers), to the angels of the seven churches of Revelation, the New Testament speaks everywhere of the Ministry of the Gospel as a given, a divine given. In what many see as his "last will and testament" Paul tells Timothy, *And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.* (2 Tim 2:2) The Church has never been some esoteric society which secretly passes the mysteries of the faith from person to person saying, "There, you have the Bible. Go in peace and find another disciple." Rather it is the redeemed children of God gathered around the Gospel, and the Means and the Ministry which hold the gospel. These redeemed ones, like Philip of old, have told others, *Come and see*, and have brought them to the place where means and ministry can be found. The ascended Christ has given these gifts to the Church. (Eph 4:11)

The Ministry is Defined by the Gospel

If we are to define the ministry, then we must define the Gospel. The Gospel assures sinners that God's and Mary's Son has suffered on the cross the wrath of God against all sin and is risen on account of their acquittal (Ro 4:25/Greek). The Gospel bids sinners to climb aboard the Ark, Holy Baptism, and sail through the troubled seas of life to the heavenly shore. The need to escape is urgent for this present world is reserved for destruction. On account of our ungodly love affair with this world the Lord troubles us with our wealth, health, and relationships in order to prompt us to board the Ark. This escape is mankind's greatest need. This is not mankind's greatest desire, however. Man defines his needs quite differently: love, money, health, emotional well being, affirmation by others; the list goes on and on. Now these are real needs. Yet the Savior finally hid himself from people with these real needs. *Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?* Jesus told the man who was being cut out of the will (Lk 12:14) But not even the Lord could change the minds of many who sought to use him for here and now. Their gospel was not the Lord's Gospel. When the Gospel has been redefined to mean, "Jesus makes me feel better now!" then the Ministry will be redefined also. Ministry then becomes sinners (with all their misconceptions) dealing with other sinners, much like in an AA meeting, instead of the spokesman of God announcing the pardon of the Gospel to people whose temporal circumstances may remain largely unchanged.



Herman Sasse writes in his excellent **We Confess** series, "Fruitful ethics can be found also in Confucianism, a resplendent hierarchy also with the Dalai Lama, scientific theology also in the synagogue, a battle against alcohol also among the Turks, and a youth movement also in Moscow - forgiveness of sins alone with Jesus Christ." (*We Confess the Church, vol 3, p 16*)

Once Gospel and Ministry have been redefined, then the Marks of the Church need redefinition as well. When temporal/emotional needs shape the definition of the Gospel and the Ministry, then the definition of the Marks of the Church will be shaped by the fulfillment of those needs. "I was accepted at that church. I get fed there. They care there." When acceptance, relevant sermonizing, love, etc. become the marks that the Church is present, instead of the Means of Grace, then anything which can produce these marks seems serviceable. Usually the Law seems to be the most "effective" tool for this. Then the true marks (Word and sacraments), which alone can bring spiritual renewal, are set aside. Looking for the true church by looking for signs of renewal can be deceptive. Luther noted:

However, these signs cannot be regarded as being as reliable as those noted before since some heathen too practice these works and indeed at times appear holier than Christians; yet their actions do not issue from the heart purely and simply, for the sake of God...

(AE: 41:167)

Gospel, Means, Ministry, and Marks have all been redefined to the right and to the left of the Lutheran Church. On the right is the Roman Church which much like a large hospital distributes medicine (Gospel power) through its physicians (the priesthood using the sacraments), helping those sick in the soul to heal, if not now, then in extended care (Purgatory). On the left is Protestantism (the Reformed) which cannot fully trust the Gospel promise of free and full remission, either because it does not believe that Jesus died for all, or that the gift of forgiveness is contingent on the sinner's acceptance. In this tradition what comfort can't be derived from God's promise can be found in the "fully devoted life" of discipleship (e.g. "I know I'm God's child because I live a Christian life."). Here the minister is not so much a physician as a coach who spurs the team on with inspirational talks (largely the Law). As our dogmaticians have always said, those who vitiate the scope of Christ's saving work, in one way or another, must look to the Law and their sanctification for comfort. But these marks are as unreliable as the salvation to which they are suppose to testify. In spite of the shameless self-promotion which one sees in the weekly church ads (e.g. "We've Got the Spirit!") Luther's assessment of his church remains true of ours today, "there are just as many bad Christians among us as under the pope" This truth, which is a mutual frustration to those on the right and on the left, makes the real marks of the church all the more inviting and comforting, for we have all been pained by this same truth in our own lives. Our schools and churches are not Christian schools and churches because our behavior is always exemplary, but because Christ crucified is preached. There is no eternal comfort in what we have done; Christ alone is our hope.

There was an impatience and dissatisfaction with efforts at producing these evidences of the Church's presence in post-Reformation Lutheranism. This led to Pietism, which emerged in 17th century Germany and continues down to this very day. Dissatisfaction with the Marks meant dissatisfaction with the Means, which in turn meant dissatisfaction with the Ministry, and so an anti-clerical attitude developed. Lay-led groupings of "better" Christians met privately for their special sort of edification. It's easy to see that if the minister is coach, then everyone can learn and lead the cheers. Also, if renewal is the Mark of the Church, then there is a possibility of progressing beyond the need for the unspectacular Ministry of Word and Sacrament. Some of

our synod's early churchmen were pietistic in their leanings, though they generally had a high regard for the Ministry.

To be sure, the Gospel brings about renewal, but most simply stated it is a verdict of acquittal. It alone saves, not good works, which can be found in any mosque or synagogue. And what's more, the Gospel is the whole thing! Baptism gives the full Christ! A cradle-to-grave integrated course of Christian studies can give no more of Christ than what Baptism and confirmation give. That is a truth which is as certain as the church's desire to continue to feed the sheep of God until they part this life. Yes, the Gospel is the whole thing! Good news, indeed.

Since the Gospel is good news it is to be preached and its visible form administered. Therefore it needs preachers and ministrants. Since it is news it also requires hearers and receivers. God wants his Christians to know where to find him, especially since Satan has false marks which point to his church. Whether the Gospel is preached, offered in a sacrament, or is the final object of church discipline, it still remains the one, holy Gospel. It requires only one office to administer it, not a group of specialists.

There Is One Ministry

However, the New Testament seems to present us with a sizable list of specialists as it speaks about those who served the churches of the **Book of Acts**. Whether apostles, evangelists, pastors, overseers, teachers, elders, deacons, it speaks about them in a matter-of-fact way as if 20 centuries did not separate us, and as if we modern readers understand exactly what it speaks about. The names themselves sometimes give us access to their meaning: the pastor/shepherd combination being the most obvious. Yet some names refuse to yield much to us. Maybe that's the point: they don't have to yield their meaning. It is not the titles which tell us how to form church, but the Church's Lord. He has simply commanded his Church to preach, administer the sacraments, and use the keys. The last sentence is a reflection of how our confessions refer to the work of the Ministry. It is remarkable how often the combination: preach/sacraments/keys is used in the confessions and by Luther. A precedence is found in Acts 2:42, *...apostles' teaching...fellowship...breaking bread (see also 1 Jn 5:7)*. This **trinity**, so to speak, has the character of a formula (*AC XXVIII, 5-9; SA:IV; AE 38:200*). It is also worth noting that the confessions, like the New Testament, use many of the titles just noted interchangeably. However, what the New Testament does within the scope of the first century is not advisable when 20 centuries separate us. We need to be careful that we do not slide too easily between the New Testament and our day, transferring terms from era to era as equivalents (e.g. elder = elder). Care also needs to be exercised when we speak about **forms** of the Ministry. Traditionally we used the term **the Ministry** as a heading which described a group of forms: pastor, teacher, missionary, professor, administrator, etc. It seems today that the list of forms has expanded to include any service rendered in the name of Christ. However, when Paul gives us the only descriptive information about any of the New Testament titles (1 Timothy 3), in this case overseer and deacon, one of the two "forms" is actually a position of Christian service which enabled the apostles to be about the work of the Gospel ministry (*Ac 6*), not the preaching of the Gospel itself. If the Ministry is proclaiming the Gospel, then the diaconate rendered a different service. The more one looks at the New Testament the more "forms" and "ministries" dissolve into one thing. Also, one would

be hard pressed to identify in the titles listed in the start of this section specialists in preaching, baptizing, communion, administration, and excommunication.(1) What's more, it is not very convincing to say, "Well, didn't Paul say in 1 Corinthians 1:17 that he was not sent to baptize?" The fact remains that Crispus and Gaius were baptized by Paul (v 14). When the extraordinary circumstances of Paul's pioneering work are used as proof of the multiplicity of ministry forms, or the specialization in one form of ministry, then we've pushed too far. Perhaps both Jesus and Paul refrained from baptizing to avoid elitism ("I was baptized by Paul!"). And before anyone promotes a "ministry of administration" based on 1 Timothy 5:17, he had better look at the Greek and the preceding context.(2) Given the interchangeability of the titles given above one might make the bold statement that there is one ministry, one office, one form. That one **could** become a baptizing specialist does not take away from the fact that the **trinity** of preaching /sacraments/keys is the common coinage of the Ministry. As we look at the varied titles applied to ministers in the Bible we can hardly know what each did, but we can hardly imagine them not involved in some way with preaching, the sacraments, and the keys (see Ac 20:7, 11 for possible instance of Paul celebrating the Supper). The Augsburg Confession put it simply:

That we may obtain this faith, the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel
(*German: Predigtamt = Preaching Office*) and administering the Sacra-
ments was instituted. (AC 14)(3)

The idea of an office (German: amt) is not foreign to the Bible. Paul said of himself, *Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God. (Ro 1:1)* This apostle (lit. "sent one") could later write those well known words: *And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? (Ro 10:14-15)* He himself could have elders elected in the churches (*see footnote for Ac 14:23*), and could comfort the elders of Ephesus with the truth that the Holy Spirit had made them *overseers (Ac 20:28)*. To be called means to enter a calling, or as we say "a vocation" (from the Latin word "voce" = voice, hence to call). It means to leave one station to enter another. The station which all Christians possess is that of priest (*a holy priesthood, 1 Pe 2:5*). This priesthood is not an office of the church but the birthright of the baptized. The reformers went to great pains to show that the priesthood belonged to all believers and not just to a special clerical caste as in the Roman Church. All believers held the keys to the kingdom of heaven. But the reformers didn't stop there. There was an office which was given the keys, to this people were called. Luther wrote:

For none of us is born as apostle, preacher, teacher, pastor through baptism, but we are all born simply as priests or clerics. Afterward, some are taken from the ranks of such born clerics and called or elected to these offices which they are to discharge on behalf of all of us. (AE 38:188)

An important distinction needs to be made here, one made necessary because of a change in the way we use the word **ministry**. The word has become swollen in size because things which we never associated with the Ministry now fall under this category. Still, in the minds of most people, ministry is associated with preaching/sacraments/keys. We're simply stuck with the word ministry, and any hope of coming up with a distinctive term like the German's **Predigtamt** will be

overwhelmed by practical problems. Yet a distinction between the proclamation of the Gospel and works of Christian charity needs to be made. The Apostolic Church made that distinction when it established the diaconate (*Ac 6*). The deacons weren't appointed because the apostles were above table service, but that the apostolic office demanded all from them. This was in no way to demean acts of Christian service, but it rather showed their temporal nature in distinction to the eternal, saving nature of the Gospel Ministry. While it is true that the New Testament uses the word **ministry** (from which we get **deacon**) to speak of both types of service, it would be wise to make a distinction. There are some important reasons for this: a) We can easily forget the chief purpose of the church (Gospel or social gospel?). b) We can become confused about the means that the church is to use (Gospel or meeting temporal/ emotional needs). c) We can become confused about the true marks of the church (Gospel or "He's such a nice pastor!"). When there is a choice, as you might guess, the Gospel will lose out. The issue here is a very vital one: What is the very essence of the Church, its purpose, and its Ministry?

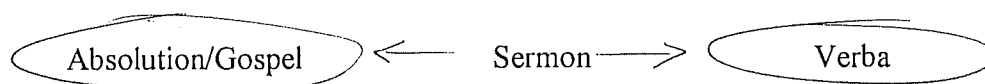
We can become involved in a long, drawn-out debate as to when one leaves the realm of the Predigtamt and enters the realm of acts of Christian service, a line not always easy to draw. The fact remains that preaching the Gospel saves. Auxiliary acts of service, while helpful to the church and a delight to the Lord, do not save. When a pastor leaves the preaching ministry to serve as an executive secretary for our synod, he leaves the Ministry (if you use the restrictive definition given above). If we agreed not to call his service ministry would that be a slap in the face? The distinction here is not one of prestige, but of the nature and function of these two areas of service. They both serve the glory of the Savior, yet we may distinguish between them. The preaching office (Predigtamt) is distinguished from other works because it is preaching. But there is something more here, for it is also an office.

The Ministry is the Incarnation of Christ

The Lord comforted fearful Moses by telling him, (*Aaron*) *will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if you were God to him. (Ex 4:16)* Moses would not only be *God* for Aaron, but also for Israel and a haughty Pharaoh. *Therefore, say to the Israelites: "I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians." (Ex 6:6)* God's ministers are God for friend and foe alike. *He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me... (Lk 10:16; Jn 13:20)* God's ministers have been placed into an office, or we might say, into a role. It is common among us to speak about **public** or **representative** ministry, meaning "in the name of the congregation." More important than this is that the minister is in the role of Christ. He is **in the stead** of Christ (*TLH p 16*) or **by his authority** (*CW p 26*). Luther notes this in his commentary on John's Gospel:

Therefore wherever you hear the Gospel properly taught or see a person baptized, wherever you see someone administer or receive the Sacrament, or wherever you witness someone absolving another, there you may say without hesitation: "Today I beheld God's Word and work. Yes, I saw and heard God Himself preaching and baptizing." (*AE 24:67; see also LC IV:10*)

The “someone” of this quote is not just anyone. Luther was death on “clandestine preachers,” as he called them, and he was certainly the inspiration of the confessional principle: “...no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called.” (*AC XIV*) Although the priests of God will show forth his praises in word and deed, we speak here of the office of the Ministry. Of that ministry Luther goes on to say in the previously quoted section, “Thus here we do not separate, or differentiate between, God and His Word or ministry...” (*AE 24:67/see also Tr 24*) The Divine Service, for instance, is a grand drama in which the minister plays the role of Christ. Therefore he speaks the Lord’s own “I” in the absolution, Gospel, and words of institution (“I forgive... I tell you the truth, Jesus replied.... this is **my** body...”). The sermon, as someone has said, is a hinge which links the two portions of the service, which are highlighted by the Absolution/Gospel and the Verba (the words of institution). It should point in both directions and link everything together:



“Yes, I saw and heard God himself preaching today!” That’s one of the reasons why we stand at the reading of the Gospel: here Jesus speaks in the first person. “Get a good view, Zacchaeus, the Lord is here! Stand up, let’s honor him!” The presence of Christ is also seen in the sacramental nature of the Absolution. Perhaps you know that our confessions sometimes list Absolution as a sacrament, even permitting ordination to be called a sacrament. (*AP XIII:11*) And it fits! Apply our catechism definition of a sacrament to Absolution: a) Instituted by Christ, b) the promise of forgiveness, c) earthly element (water, bread and wine, **the fleshy minister!**). You see, God wants his Christians to be sure where to find him. It will not be in the musings of their own minds, or in the latest apparition of the Blessed Virgin or an angel. For this reason Luther urged preachers to “boast” about their ministry. “The reason for our proud boasting is that we are in a divine calling and in God’s own work, and that the people need to be assured of our calling, in order that they may know that our word is in fact the Word of God.” (*AE 26:20-21*) We do not boast about ourselves but that God’s people may find him. Indeed, there is no reason for a pride turn inward here. Ministers are just God’s masks (*AE 24:67*), and even the devil can conduct the Divine Service! (*AE 38:200*). The diagram above brings to light a safeguard which the Church has given preachers. Even if they utterly fail in their preaching, the Divine Service brings Gospel assurance to God’s people: Absolution/Gospel/ Verba! They may say, “Though Mr. Preacher bored me to death or spoke heresy, God has spoken to me today about the truth of my salvation!” The man in the pulpit may lie, but he must speak the truth in the Distribution! “So has the Church, in **liturgy** and **song**, In faith and love, through centuries of wrong, Borne witness to the truth in ev’ry tongue: Alleluia!” (*CW 248:3*)

If we do not “differentiate between God and his Word or ministry,” then the very office itself has divine authority. People in government service who are not officeholders can still act on behalf of those who hold office, if the officeholder so designates them. However, they have no authority of themselves. Those who enter an office, by virtue of that office, have authority. The Office of the

Holy Ministry (Predigtamt) has as its very nature authority. All those who hold the office have all of the authority which comes with that office. In the case of a dual pastorate it may be decided that one of the pastors be designated as the senior pastor, but the other pastor could just as easily be appointed to that position because authority is part and parcel of the office which he already holds. His office, after all, is the very presence of Christ. (*Lk 10:18; Jn 20:23; 1 Th 5:12; 1 Tm 2:12; Ti 2:15; He 13:17*)

When the words **incarnation** and **incarnational** are applied to the ministry, the author does not mean to imply some sort of mystical, pantheistic concept. This is simply God's way of going about things - He uses things: a lamb, Temple, water, bread and wine, a minister, etc. Again, he wants his people to know where to find him! This contrasts to the way in which the Reformed spiritualize these things away. The most obvious example is their treatment of the Sacrament. We see it also in the common objection to the Absolution: "No sinner can forgive me my sins. God's got to do it!"

If the ministry is the incarnation of Christ, as the section title states, then Christ's gender is of significance. While we should not try to prove too much by Christ's gender, we should not ignore it either. "Thus here we do not separate, or differentiate between, God and His Word or ministry, given to us through Christ; nor do we seek God in another way or view Him in a different light." (*AE 24:67*) *Now the overseer must be...the husband of but one wife (1 Tm 3:2) And the things you have heard me say...entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others (2 Tm 2:2) I do not permit a woman to teach... (1 Tm 2:11)*. Do we only see in these words matters which pertain to the headship role, or do we also see the image of Christ?(4) Paul's description of the overseer in 1 Timothy 3 looms large in view of this. This list of qualifications is unique in the New Testament, unique enough to be repeated in Titus 1. It is one of five sections headed with the formula, *Here is a trustworthy saying (literally: Faithful the word/1 Tm 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tm 2:11-13; Ti 3:4-8)*. The other four sections speak of the love of God in sending his Son to be the Savior. When we come to Paul's list in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 we almost instinctively say "pastoral ministry." But what warrant do we have to say this, especially in view of the fact that we say that we can't be absolutely sure what words like **overseer** encompass. We know that these sections are important and we want to hold on to them. We don't want to relegate them to the realm of non-prescriptive practices of the early church, like holding all possessions in common (*Ac 4:32f*). The words speak about something, but we are hesitant to say what. 1 Timothy 3:1-7 does say something, but it is not a description of one of many forms of the public ministry (where then is the list for the evangelist?). Rather here are the high qualifications for the one Gospel Ministry which proclaims the love of God who sent his Son to be our Savior! It is the incarnation of Christ, and since it brings with it certain restrictions as to who may fill the office (e.g. call, qualifications, gender) it is a restricted office.(5) Yet the very nature of this restricted office makes it the comfort which the Lord intended it to be. Someone once noted in this regard that writing a love note to his wife is a nice thing to do, but how much more comforting for her to hear that sentiment spoken directly to her in person. This the Savior has done in his authorized, personified Ministry. Sinners have a **person** to whom they may go (that's were we get our word **parson**). The parson makes sinners truly wise unto salvation! Oh how good God is that he should use sinners to proclaim his grace! But sinners think that this is folly.

The Ministry is Foolishness

For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. (1 Co 1:21) Here is a crushing thunderclap from heaven: God won't be known! The very religious human heart is nothing more than "an idol factory" to use Luther's words. It can only get it wrong, all wrong, when it thinks about God. "That we may obtain this faith, the Ministry...was instituted." (AC V) But since the Gospel is foolishness, wise convincers need not apply for this ministry, their skills are not needed, the Gospel is its own power (Ro 1:16) In fact, God prefers that his ministers not be much; just look around you (1 Co 2:1f) Often he calls them servants. Paul said, surely thinking of himself and his co-workers, *But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. (2 Co 4:7)* So too with the Means which the minister uses. Comparing baptism to our good works, which many consider the Marks of the Church, the Large Catechism says with obvious irony, "But insane reason will not regard this, and because Baptism does not shine like the works which we do, it is to be esteemed as nothing." (LC IV:13) In stripping us of all things we count as strong and clever, and by putting these "ineffectual tools" in our hands, the Lord brings our reason into the captivity of his Word.

It is for this same reason that God allows scandals, scoundrels, and incompetent ministers into the church. Just as he wants his Christians to know where to find him, so he hides from Mr. Smart-Aleck. Try as we might to distance ourselves from the monkey business in today's church ("Oh, you see, we have nothing to do with Jim Baker and Jimmy Swaggert!"), the unbelieving world, in desperate need of an excuse, won't buy it. So we ought to say, "Come to Jimmy's church! Come to the church of hypocrites! Come to the manger and to the cross!" The proud will pass, but there are those who are so weak and heavy-laden that even this church will seem like paradise; and of course, it is!

The last point affords a caution about how we measure the Church and its ministry. *"You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. (Jn 6:67)* Of course not, no one else had the words of eternal life. But many left, and had Jesus' ministry been judged on the basis of visible success we would have counted him a failure here. "And how many souls were added to the kirk," a man asked an old Scots preacher about a recent revival. "None," came the reply, "But we got rid of a few we've been trying to rid of for a long time." That too can be a revival. Yes, it is God's will that the church grows, but that says nothing about the individual populations of churches and schools, which seem to wax and wane like the moon. Jesus said, *The kingdom of God is...* It has its full compliment of saints at any given time. When the church says, "We want the church to grow!" it comes perilously close to asking, "How can we make the church grow?" Then puny, sinful men add their things to God's things and things become a mess. Then a dangerous kind of pragmatism emerges and the question is no longer, "Is it appropriate?" but, "Did it work?" God's Word does the work of "growing the church." And when God's Word works, so do the priests of God!

The Universal Priesthood

It was noted earlier that the term **priest** was reserved by both the Bible and the confessions for all Christians. Not all are called or qualified for the Ministry; but all believers are priests, that's their baptismal birthright. They are reminded of that birthright at the very beginning of the Divine Service, *In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*. As Lutherans we know well that the Universal Priesthood was one of the great rediscoveries of the Reformation. Ironically, it may be that we're having problems with the Ministry because we don't understand the Universal Priesthood. In 1517 it wasn't that Rome had not given enough church jobs to the laity and that the Reformation did, but that the Reformation gave esteem to the common labor of the day as had not been done before. Luther notes how the Roman Church had taught that everyone was a minister by "sanctifying" all sorts of churchly tasks, some useful and some seemingly frivolous. In reality the Reformation served to consolidate most of these tasks into the Ministry of the Gospel (*Æ 38:213f*).

At the risk of oversimplification it has been said that the Ministry is best reflected in the doctrine of Objective Justification (God, for Christ's sake, has pardoned the world), and that the Universal Priesthood is best reflected in the doctrine of Sanctification (our holiness of life). The vocation of the Ministry is spiritual in nature, though physical people administer it. The vocation of the Universal Priesthood is largely physical in nature ("be a friend ...in every bodily need"), though it is administered by people who are spiritual. It is significant that the qualifications of the one Gospel Ministry in 1 Timothy 3 are set next to the qualifications of the diaconate. Is too much being read into this juxtaposition? The Ministry of the Gospel/the Universal Priesthood. The latter enables the former to be the Lord's call to the lost. The former encourages the latter to works of Christian charity outside of the church, and auxiliary works within the church. These two "arms" of Christ reach out to a world sick in body and soul. The Church does not work well with just one arm - it needs both!

We do not value the priesthood by hunting for work for the priests to do at church, but by valuing what they are already doing at home, work, and in the community. Are we dragging the priests of God (especially fathers and mothers) away from their families and each other all in the name of religion? Is this a "religion" which is more and more comprised of make-work jobs, and of programs which are not in the realm of the Church's work? Is the effort to evaluate the "spiritual gifts" of our members based on the Bible, or on our perceived need to give our people "a sense of ownership" of a busy church operation? Don't misunderstand, there is plenty for the priests to do around the church and school, but in a day when expanding programs are seen as a sign of spiritual health, could it actually be true that the truly healthy churches are the ones which are finding ways to reduce bogus church work and sending the priests back home? Admittedly, being a good spouse, parent, worker, etc. seems less glamorous and spiritual than serving on some special committee at church, but we **have been** called to the former, not necessarily to the latter. (*SC: Table of Duties*) Finally, the devil, as Luther said, can plague us with holiness. (*WLS:745*) Are we any further ahead with spiritual renewal as we look back 30 years or so? How do we fare compared to those who stood by our theologians in the inter-synodical strife, who supported our mission growth of the 60s, and whose loyalty to Word and Sacrament we admire? The answer:

For all our activity, probably about the same. But God be praised for that! Preach the Gospel, the rest will fall into place. It seems so simple! It is that simple.

Some Final Thoughts

-Let us give this matter of the Ministry careful study, trusting that God has taught clearly about it in his Word and that it has been elucidated for us in the confessions. Let's not be afraid to put the pat answers to the test. While the careful use of terms pertaining to the Ministry, service, and Universal Priesthood will be helpful, this is a matter of doctrine, not semantics.

-Let us remember that the Marks of the Church are finally not renewal and success (whatever that means). The Means and the Ministry are the Marks. Even the nice sounding exhortation, "Let's get our people into the Word!" can in some cases be more an evidence of dissatisfaction with the results of renewal than an interest in the doctrine once delivered to the saints. Also, when renewal becomes the Mark of the Church, then legalism is not far behind.

-Let us give attention to the study of the Divine Service, and the reverent practice of the same. Here God meets us! Perhaps we should be discussing issues like more frequent celebration of the Supper rather than having seminars on things which pertain to Sanctification.

-Let us not view this matter as a debate over "non-fundamental" doctrines. This touches on the very heart of the Gospel. Confusion about the **Ministry** (justification) and **ministry** (sanctification) will result in confusion about the Gospel.

-When we do not speak precisely about the ministry (qualifications, scope, call, etc.) we open the door for the enthusiast who deputizes himself saying, "I guess this is my ministry for the Lord," even if his ministry has nothing to do with the Ministry.

-Let us not let a proliferation of "ministries" cause us to lose our focus about the true work of the Church.

-Let us value the Ministry and uplift our ministers, helping them to be about the work which they have been given to do (not the work which is not theirs).

-Let us measure our ministers on the basis of their faithfulness, not their "effectiveness."

-Let us thank God for our lay people. They struggle against great odds and they love their church.

-Let us return the practice of stewardship, especially financial stewardship, to the parish. (Is there such a thing as a "ministry of planned giving"?)

-Pray that God grants us trust in his Means so that we don't fall for the lures of pragmatism (i.e. "If it works, it's good.").

-Let the Church *renounce secret and shameful ways (and) not use deception (2 Co 4:2)*. We don't need "hooks" to get people in the doors, just open the doors! In other words, let's give people what they need, not what they want.

-Remember, God will not lose any of his elect. He calls us to faithfulness to duty, not to bring about results. That some turn up their noses at what we offer should not lead us to desperate (and disastrous) measures to "win souls."

-Our school staffs should never be made to feel that they have failed because they have not been the "mission arm" that some expect. They are called to teach those who sit at their feet, not those who might have come. Nor should they be made to feel that they and their work are too expensive. Schools are expensive - so what? And let's pay a decent wage!

-Let us insist on the integrity of the two-track system at MLC, and take a second look at the staff ministry program (Can congregations justify these additional salaries? Will these "ministers" rob the priests of the work they do have around the church? Will these poor folks end up standing idle in the marketplace when our churches refuse to call them?)

-Beware of the anxious words, "If only one soul is saved it will be worth it!" This has sometimes been the open door to practices which, at best, were tacky, at worst, heretical.

-Let us remember that we have not yet resolved all of the differences among us in regard to the roles of men and women, especially as that pertains to our subject.

-Finally, the best thing that the Lutheran Church can be for the world is the Lutheran Church! (Sasse)

Our namesake, who rejoiced in being a jar of clay, prayed thus about his ministry:

Dear God, I have begun to preach, and to teach the people. It is hard. If it offends here and there, may no harm be done. Since you have commanded me to preach your word, I will not stop. If it fails, it fails for you. If it succeeds, it succeeds for you and me. Amen.

End Notes:

(1) This essay advocates one form of the Office of the Ministry. It's very instructive to study the ministry titles used in the New Testament in this light. One is struck by the interchangeability of the titles. The titles are mixed enough that one must conclude that we are not speaking about many offices or forms, but rather the one office of the Predigamt. Even today we use a multiplicity of titles to designate this one office: pastor, minister, preacher, Rev., teacher, etc. However, support is found for the multiplicity of forms in the oft cited Luther quote (*AE 46:220*) in which he lists these positions of the preaching office: "...pastors, teachers, preachers, lectors, priests (whom men call chaplains), sacristans, schoolmasters..." It should be remembered that most of these individuals were usually theologically trained, with the exception of the sacristans (sexton is the corrupted form) who prepared the altar for the Sacrament. One wonders if Luther included their work because, although it was auxiliary, it was closely connected with the sacramental life of the church. Those on the rest of the list were obviously involved with the proclamation of the Gospel. (See page 231 of the reference where Luther appears to take the sacristan out of the ministerial office.) Older Lutheran theologians speak of the division of ministerial work as "grades," much in the manner of the division of duties when two or more pastors serve a parish. However, this was always done by mutual agreement. This division did not take a minister out of the locale of preaching/sacraments/keys.

(2) 1 Timothy 5:17 is often cited to show that administration is a part of the ministry. The NIV translates, "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching." The phrase "affairs of the church" is not found in the Greek. Literally the verse reads, "Let the well ruling elders be deemed worthy of double honor, especially the ones laboring in speech and teaching." The preceding context speaks about family relations. This "ruling" may simply apply to ruling one's house well. That fits well with the placement of the word "especially" which would then mark the transition to a discussion about work in the church (vv 17b-18).

(3) Currently there is a debate about the meaning and inner structure of the articles of the **Augsburg Confession** as they pertain to the matter of the ministry, especially articles V and XIV. If I'm reading them correctly, most WELS writers on the subject seem to view V as the establishment of the more general commission to preach the Gospel or to use the Means of Grace, with XIV dealing with the call into the public ministry, whatever form that ministry might take. One even comes away with the thought that there is an identification of Article V and the Universal Priesthood. At any rate these writers definitely shy away from identifying the **Predigtamt** of V with the pastoral ministry, especially in view of the fact that we consider LES teachers in the office of the Ministry. (see end note 4) However, in view of the current unguarded use of the word **ministry**, one wonders just how elastic is Article V? Is the VBS teacher in the **Amt** or does she act in her vocation as a priest who is showing forth the praises of the Savior? When lay people witness about Christ have they entered the **Amt**? Where is the line drawn? Some may issue little slips of paper nicely printed on their new laser printers which read, "Call to

Teach VBS,” but is that how we want to handle the Ministry, especially in view of what Scripture and the confessions say? However, most of us would be hesitant to place the VBS teacher in the Predigamt; but then why does the female LES teacher have the office? I’m not asking the questions because I don’t know the answer which we have been giving. We draw the line between the “public” or “representative” proclamation of the Gospel and that done privately. Here the Lutheran Confession’s **trinity** of authoritative teaching, administration of the sacraments, and the use of the keys, in addition to 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 become very significant. In other words, call, qualifications, and scope of this work become very important. I have hardly begun to grasp the sacramental nature of the ministry and to understand the central role which Communion, along with preaching, should hold in our work. We have yet to adequately address the issue of an every Sunday celebration of the Sacrament, putting our past answers in this regard to the test. In other words, until we understand the scope of the Predigamt, especially in this relatively unexplored area of the Sacrament and things sacramental, we will remain content with our current position, “If you proclaim the Gospel at the behest of the congregation, or the synod, you are in the Ministry (training, gender, ordination aside).” Putting it in another way: A synod which has not in my lifetime formally addressed the issue of more frequent communion, and does not see a service without communion as truncated in any way, will probably have little problem assigning the Predigamt to those who witness to the Gospel without ever being engaged in the use of the Sacrament and the official use of the keys, especially the binding key (not to mention the exercise of authoritative, doctrinal discernment).

In this same connection, maybe now is a good time to question a statement that has become an axiom in our circles; namely, “We’ve always said that there is nothing in Scripture prohibiting a woman from becoming a pastor just as long as she does not usurp the authority of men (e.g. in an emergency, serving only women).” This is not a ridiculous, hypothetical case. It poses a legitimate question which gets to the nub of the matter: Can a woman ever be in the Predigamt? Luther is cited in defense of an affirmative answer to the question (*AE 41:154f; Tr 67*). Yet, in all the cases I’ve looked at he is speaking of emergency cases and never says that a woman in these instances has entered the **office** of the ministry, but rather performs the functions of the office on a temporary basis (*SA, Tr 67*). The quote cited above actually proves the opposite! A woman would serve in such cases as a member of the Universal Priesthood. She can’t do otherwise. The stipulations of 1 Timothy 2 and 3, which both deal with authority and gender, prohibit it. It was mentioned before that this is not some ridiculous, hypothetical case. We don’t have to congeal up a vision of some Amazonian church. With women’s retreats in our synod on the increase the matter of women serving women in this way becomes an issue.

Consideration must also be given to principle set forth in the confessions that all public ministers are equal, and that any grades are by human agreement (*SA, Tr 11*). The headship principle of the Bible forces us to make grades between female teachers and pastors. How do we reconcile that with the confessions?

Finally, I would challenge all to look again at Scripture before they bestow the Predigamt on women, taking into consideration the following sections: 1 Co 11:2f; 14:33f; 1 Tm 2 & 3; Tt 1; Hb 13:7, 17. It’s also very worthwhile to do a study on all of the ministerial titles in the New

Testament: deacon, elder, overseer, herald, preacher, evangelist, etc. After this examination, then ask yourself, “Do we want to call women into the Predigtamt?”

(4) The case of the Lutheran elementary school teacher presents us with a unique problem. It is difficult to find an equivalent to this position in Bible times. There were schools in Reformation times; indeed, Luther expressed the highest admiration for the schoolmaster. But even here not everything is analogous. It appears that many of the schoolmasters were theologically trained, and women did not hold the position (the case in the very early days of our synod). Does the male LES teacher come under Augsburg, Article V? A relative of your essayist answers the question with a question, “How do you want to slice the pie of the **Predigtamt**?” We have answered yes to the first question, and we have assigned certain functions of this office to those who teach in our schools (especially so when it comes to principals and the oversight which they must exercise). Therefore the divine call seemed appropriate, especially in the early days when the only teachers were men. The ordination of male teachers is the logical progression of our doctrine on the ministry, inconsistencies with regard to the status of female teachers notwithstanding. Yet a part of the teacher’s call comes from the parents. Luther sees all earthly authority starting at this point, and in the **Large Catechism** he connects that to the schoolmaster. We read, “For where a father is unable alone to educate his (rebellious and irritable) child, he employs a schoolmaster to instruct him.” (*LC:141*) This can be said of all who instruct the young. The pastor who takes the catechism, which Luther put into the hands of the father, has parental authority attached to the book. If the **Predigtamt** is incarnational and authoritative in nature, as this essay asserts, then we would have to say that female teachers are not in the **Predigtamt** of Article V. Their office or call is derived from the parents. Furthermore, they are called by the congregation and asked to represent the congregation in this station. The same qualifications would be required. In practice nothing has changed, at least on the surface. Theologically it gives another answer to the question, “Which call has she answered.” She acts in her vocation as a priest, but one beholden to the parents and congregation. In this approach pastors and male teachers would act in the vocation of the Predigtamt, also beholden to the parents and congregation. All, of course, beholden to Christ. Incidentally, this was the way this issue was handled in the Missouri Synod, for both male and female teachers.

(5) With the qualifying thoughts of the point 4 above in mind I should attempt an answer to an anticipated question, “Is the pastoral ministry the only form of the Holy Ministry?” I would prefer to approach the matter differently by asking the question, “Where will Christ be found on earth?” Of course he will be found in the Word, sacraments, and keys. God will have people to handle and dispense these things, because he wants his Christians to know exactly where to find him. Since that is so, then call, qualifications, and gender become important issues, especially in view of the words of Paul. If one says that the pastoral office is the most comprehensive form of the ministry, I won’t quibble with him, but nor will I quibble with someone who says that it is the Ministry. If people are troubled by that, then I have to wonder whether matters of prestige are entering in. The Lord saved some of his harshest words for those who forgot their servant status (*Lk.9:46f*). When not a few of our pastors are a hair’s breadth from packing it in many days the word prestige doesn’t have much of a ring to it, even though we pastors might sometimes strut like lords. In view of what the Bible and the confessions say about the awesome responsibilities

given to the Holy Ministry, is it wise and even fair to drop these responsibilities on our teachers?
(*See SA, Tr 60-62*)

A related issue is the matter of lay-led Bible studies by non-called workers. What once was a rarity is now a synod goal. After reading all the books in the bibliography, and many more, and after twenty years in this work, I tremble when I think of handling the treasures of God. I feel less adequate now than when I began. I hope that's because I've become wiser and more knowledgeable. The issue of the call and qualifications weigh very heavily here. About the matter of having a lay teaching ministry I have to ask the question, "Why?" And I will listen very carefully to the answers. In his 1515 lectures on Romans (which show a very developed theology of Justification) Luther compares the "good" works of an unbeliever to the ministerial acts of a layman, saying that the layman "is only playing church and deceiving himself and his followers." (*AE 25:234-235*) One may argue that the absolution of a layman is just as valid as that of an ordained pastor. True enough, but Luther's concern ought to be our own: In the minds of the tormented the former may appear less certain. Nothing, except emergency cases, should be a reason for the laity to serve in the place of those who administer Word, sacraments, and keys!

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