

Current Debate Concerning the Doctrine of the Ministry

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Introduction

The doctrine of church and ministry is without doubt one of the hottest topics in Lutheranism today. After five years of having no doctrinal position on this subject ELCA is on the verge of adopting a position. Will ELCA adopt two levels of ordination, one level for pastors and a second for teachers and other ministers? At present the tide seems to be running against this recommendation. Will ELCA distinguish bishops from pastors in some way? Within the Wisconsin Synod and Missouri Synod current discussion centers on the relationship of the service of the laity to that of the called public ministry and on the relation of other forms of ministry to the pastoral ministry. Discussion of this topic between members of these two synods is, of course complicated by the differences between the so-called "Wisconsin Synod view" and "Missouri Synod view" of the ministry.

This article serves as an introduction to a series of exegetical articles of the chief passages of Scripture which deal with "ministry." What are the main problem areas and disputed issues? What is the status of the controversy between the so-called Wisconsin Synod and Missouri Synod views of church and ministry? There seems to be considerable interest in going back to some of the issues raised during that debate.

It is, of course, a gross oversimplification to contrast "Wisconsin Synod" and "Missouri Synod" views of church and ministry. During the years in which this issue was being debated within the Synodical Conference the division was never strictly along synod lines. Both before and after the breakup of the Synodical Conference many people in the LCMS held the "Wisconsin Synod view." In fact, one could compose an excellent summary of the "Wisconsin Synod view" using nothing but quotations from LCMS sources. Today the disagreement between various viewpoints held within the LCMS is much greater than the difference between the so-called Wisconsin Synod and Missouri Synod views as they have usually been expressed. Nevertheless, some of the issues raised during the debate within the Synodical Conference do provide an introduction to issues which are being discussed throughout Lutheranism today.

Although it is somewhat of an oversimplification "the Missouri Synod position" has usually been thought of as asserting that the local congregation is the only divinely instituted form of the church and that the pastoral ministry is the only divinely instituted form of the ministry. All other offices and forms of organization are human institutions, which are auxiliary to the divinely instituted forms. The most rigid version of this position would deny that the synod is church or that anyone other than a parish pastor is serving in the divinely instituted ministry. Some in the LCMS and in groups which have split from the LCMS hold this rigid view, but today most advocates of "the Missouri Synod view" seem to hold a modified version of this view.

In summarizing the "Missouri Synod view" I am going to refer primarily the 1981 LCMS-CTCR study of *The Ministry, Offices, Procedures and Nomenclature* and to the recent books on this topic by Kurt Marquart (*The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry and Governance*) and Robert Preus (*The Doctrine of the Call in the Confessions and Lutheran Orthodoxy*). Since both of these men are widely respected as solid scholars who represent the conservative confessional wing of the LCMS, their views give at least some indication of the current status of the debate between Wisconsin and Missouri positions on this doctrine. In reviews of these books in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* (Fall 1992, p 312-315, Winter 1993, p 71-73) I categorized both of these books as valuable contributions to the discussion of church and ministry. WELS readers would find themselves in agreement with most of both presentations. In this article, however, I will be referring primarily to those areas which cause problems or raise questions for adherents of the "Wisconsin Synod view."

Within the Wisconsin Synod there is a consensus that Christ established one ministry in the church, the gospel ministry, and that this one ministry may be exercised privately by any Christian and publicly by those who have been called by the church to do so. The public ministry has been instituted by Christ, but the church is free to create various forms of public ministry according to needs and circumstances. The form or forms into which the church organizes itself to carry out its work are not prescribed by Scripture, but are left free to the church.

The Main Issues

We turn now to a consideration of the main questions or difficulties that seem to play a significant role in the current discussion of this issue. A thorough consideration of any one of these questions would provide more than enough material for an article, so we will have to limit ourselves to an introductory overview of each issue.

1) What is the proper use of the terms "minister" and "ministry?"

The English word "minister" like its Latin parent originally meant "servant." At the time of the King James translation, which shaped theological English, the word referred to servants of every sort. Gradually however, "minister" came to be used almost entirely as a technical term for two types of service. My English dictionary lists "clergyman" or "pastor" as the number one meaning of "minister." The other main meaning of "minister" is a government official like the Prime Minister of England.

We can, therefore, agree with warnings against a simplistic parroting of the claim, "Everyone is a minister." This claim can, however, be properly used and properly understood.

Although in recent years "minister" has most often meant "pastor," older English translations of the Bible, such as the King James, used "minister" and "ministry" to translate a group of words in the Greek New Testament which more recent translations, such as the NIV, often translate with the concept of "service." In the New Testament the most important of these words, *diakoneo* and *diakonia*, are not limited to describing the service rendered by men whose work corresponded to that of our pastors. These words also refer to other kinds of service, including waiting on tables.

When we use the words "minister" and "ministry" to refer to other forms of service in the church besides that of the pastor (such as the service provided by Christian teachers), we are simply returning to this wider usage of the term "service" or "ministry" found in the New Testament. We are simply recognizing that the New Testament uses the same word group to refer to waiting on tables, to the pastoral ministry, and to other forms of spiritual service. It did not have a specialized technical term, equivalent to the term "minister" in recent English usage. This wider usage of the term "minister" is also supported by a less common use of the English word "minister," which the dictionary also defines as "one who acts as the agent of another." In this sense everyone who is called by the church to carry out some service in their name is a "minister." This is what we often call "public ministry."

If we are going to use "ministry" in this wider sense, a number of cautions are necessary. Since the wider usage of "ministry" is called archaic by the dictionary, to avoid confusion we must make it clear to our hearers that we are returning to a wider usage of the term "minister" than that which has been common in the recent past. We must be careful that we do not confuse the service which Christians do on their own initiative as part of the priesthood of all believers with the service which they carry out in response to the church's call and in the name of the church (public ministry). We also must be careful that we do not diminish respect for the pastoral ministry, the most comprehensive form of the public ministry of the Word. If "ministry" is going to be used in a wider sense which reflects both its Latin meaning and the usage of the Greek word *diakonia*, this should not be done without careful explanation of the shift in usage, so that the distinction of the priesthood of all believers from the pastoral ministry and other forms of public ministry is not blurred or confused.

In the recent past there has not been a clear and consistent use of terms for ministry in American Lutheranism. It would be good if the church agreed on uniform, consistent terminology to avoid confusion. Careful distinctions in the terminology which we use will help prevent confusion concerning various meanings of "minister." If properly explained all of the following uses of the terms "ministry" and "minister" are valid.

1) In its widest and most basic sense the term "the ministry" refers to *the gospel ministry* or *the ministry of the Word* established by Christ and given to the whole church. This usage is essentially the same as our usage when we speak of the "ministry of the keys." This one ministry of the Word is exercised in two ways, privately and publicly.

This wide usage of the term is present both in Scripture and the Confessions:

Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness!--2 Corinthians 3:7-9

Because the priesthood of the New Testament is the ministry of the Spirit (Latin) or an office (Amt) through which the Spirit works (German) as Paul teaches (2 Cor 3:6) it, accordingly has but the one sacrifice of Christ, which is satisfactory and applied for the sins of others... The ministry of the Spirit is that through which the Holy Spirit is efficacious in hearts. AP24, Trg.404.

The ministry of the Church, the Word preached and heard.. EP12, Trg,840.

That we might obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. AC5, Trg44.

Time does not permit full discussion of the view that the divine institution of the public ministry is the topic of AC5, other than to note that AC14 is the specific locus dealing with the public ministry (church order). In spite of the appearance given by its title, AC5 really speaks about the New Testament ministry confessed in 2 Cor 3:6-9, that is, about the means of grace, rather than about the public ministry.

The Missouri Synod's CTCR report accepts this wide usage of the term, but prefers the narrower use to refer to the public ministry "for the sake of clarity." (p. 12)

2) All Christians may exercise this ministry of the Word in their private dealings with others. They do this whenever they use God's law to condemn sin and his gospel to proclaim forgiveness. We call this *personal ministry* or *private ministry*. Such ministry is part of the exercise of the priesthood of all believers.

3) Only Christians who are properly qualified and who are called by the church may exercise this ministry publicly, that is, in the name of the church. We call this *public ministry* or *representative ministry*.

The *pastoral ministry* is the most comprehensive form of the public ministry of the Word, but it is not the only form. Sometimes when speaking of the pastoral ministry, we may call it "the public ministry," "the ministry of the Word," or even "the ministry," but we should remember that in such cases we are using these more inclusive names for one specific form of public ministry.

4) In the preceding sections we have been assuming that we have been talking about *ministry of the Word*. Can areas of service in the church which do not deal with the Word be called "ministry"? Although the area of

service of the "deacons" in Acts 6 was distinguished from the ministry of the Word, their work was called "ministry," they were called by the church to act as its representatives, and they were placed into office with the laying on of hands. From this it is clear that they were exercising public ministry for the church.

Whether the later preaching done by Stephan and Philip was done privately as laymen or on the basis of a later call not mentioned in Acts is not determined by the text. Luther was of the opinion that they did it as laymen (LW 40:38, 39~309-310) Much later, Philip is called an evangelist (Acts 21:8).

Since "public" means representative and "ministry" means service, it would be legitimate to speak of a "**public ministry**" of the church which does not involve the Means of Grace. However, we in the WELS do not customarily use this term in this way.

5) We advise against the use of the term "**lay ministry**" without careful explanation. It is often confusing because it does not distinguish clearly between service which lay people carry out privately as part of the priesthood of believers and that which they carry out publicly as called representatives of the congregation.

2) Is the pastoral ministry divinely ordained in contrast to other forms of public ministry which are only human institutions or auxiliary offices to the pastoral ministry?

It must be emphasized that the Wisconsin Synod position strongly defends the divine institution of the public ministry, including the pastoral ministry, every bit as fully as the "Missouri Synod position." *The public ministry...constitutes a special God-ordained way of practicing the one ministry of the Gospel.* (WELS Theses on Church and ministry, IID)

The following are among the points of evidence for the divine institution of the public ministry, which are regularly cited in WELS sources:

- *Ministers are explicitly said to be given by God. (Acts 20:28 1 Cor 12:28, Eph 4:11)
- *No one can serve as a public minister without a call. (Ro 10:15)
- *There are special qualifications for the public ministry. (1 Tim 3)
- *Specific offices or forms of the public ministry are named (1 Tim 3, 1 Cor 12)
- *Public ministers are supported by those they serve. (1 Cor 9:7-14)

The view of Hoefling, that traces the origins of the public ministry to mere expediency is explicitly rejected (*WELS Theses II, D, 5*).

The *WELS Theses* do, however, deny that the pastoral ministry is specifically instituted by the Lord **in contrast to other forms of public ministry**. (II,D6) The reasons for this include the following considerations:

There is no divine command, comparable to the institution of baptism or the Lord's Supper, commanding the **form** which the public ministry of the Word should take in New Testament congregations. The situation, therefore, is somewhat analogous to the divine institution of government. That government is instituted by God is directly stated in Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2, but there are no specific commands or regulations concerning the form of government. Although kings are mentioned as an existing form of government, the divine institution is not limited to monarchy, but applies to other forms developed by human beings. Therefore, specific forms of government are both divine institutions (Romans 13:1) and human institutions (I Peter 2:13).

Various forms of ministry existed in the New Testament churches. There is no indication that they were derived from the office of pastor, or even that the office of pastor existed in the exact form in which we have it today. The New Testament explicitly says there are "different forms of ministry" (1 Cor 12:5) Numerous examples show that this is true not only of ministry in the wide sense, but of public ministry of the Word as well. (1 Tim 4:13, 4:11 3:2, 6:2, 3:5, 5:17, Eph 4:11, 1 Cor 12:28, Rom 12:6-8, etc.)

Various forms of ministry have been recognized throughout church history, including the time of the Reformation. (cf. especially LW 46:220, 37:364; Chemnitz, *Examination II*, p. 682-685; Koelpin, *Compendium*, p. 756-758)

How does this WELS emphasis relate to views current in the LCMS today? Concerning such forms of the ministry it is striking that Marquart begins his presentation with the admission, "At first sight the New Testament features a luxuriant and irreducible variety of offices" (p 120). He goes on to state, however, that behind the *appearance* of multiformity there is one basic ministry, the "one Gospel-ministry which is confessed to be divinely instituted in AC V." We have no problem with this claim that there is one gospel ministry, as long as that one gospel ministry is not narrowly limited to the pastoral office as we know it, but is inclusive of other forms of called ministry of the Word. Although the public ministry is divinely instituted, no single form of it (except perhaps for the apostolate) is divinely instituted by specific command and job description, not even the pastoral office as we have it today, which is a historical development.

There are positive points about Marquart's approach. He does not limit the one office only to the parish pastorate. He includes seminary teachers, for example, in the divinely instituted ministry of the Word. We would not have to quarrel with Marquart's assertion that the "diaconate" in Acts 6 was a human institution and an auxiliary office, in so far as it was limited to meeting the physical needs of members and in so far as it was distinguished from the ministry of the Word and prayer. Although we do not have this form of the office of "deacon" in the WELS today, we do have auxiliary positions in our synod and in our congregations which are filled by people whom we do not classify as called ministers of the Word.

Problems arise, however, when Marquart arbitrarily excludes certain forms of ministry of the Word which the church has established from the ministry of the Word established by Christ. He grants that teachers in institutes of theological training and possibly some catechists may be within the one gospel ministry, but asserts that Christian day school teachers whose main work is to teach secular subjects are not (p 141-142).

Robert Preus makes the same kind of distinctions without adequate scriptural basis to justify them. (p 21 ff) He includes theological professors in the ministry of the Word in the strict sense. He seems to approve of Gerhard's view that the office of theological Professor is by divine right and can be traced to Christ's ministry as rabbi. He laments the fact that in the LCMS theological professors no longer function as teachers of the whole church as professors did during the Reformation period, but this function has been taken over by the CTCR, an appointed group with no call to the ministry of teaching. (p 16-17) But if the church may call some men to teach future pastors and to serve as teachers to the whole church (seminary professors as envisioned by Preus), why may it not call some men to teach future pastors (seminary professors) and other men to serve as teachers of the whole church (a doctrinal committee). Whether the two jobs are joined together or separated depends on the call of the church. It also does not make any essential difference whether either of these jobs is full-time or part-time. Among us the job of seminary professor is normally full-time (with a bunch of other things thrown in too). In a small free church the seminary teaching might be done on a part-time basis by parish pastors. This is determined by the needs of the church and by the call it extends.

Preus excludes the following from the call: social work, works of mercy, political action, fundraising, accounting, public relations, Sunday school and parochial school, director of education, evangelism, and church administration (including synod president.) (p 21, 31, 32) We don't have much quarrel with his exclusion of most of the first items on the list. Normally, we do not call workers whose primary role is social work or purely administrative to the ministry of the Word. But people who serve in works of mercy may be serving in a public ministry of the church in the sense discussed above. However, when it comes to the later items on Preus's list, such as Christian teaching, evangelism, and certain types of administration, it is arbitrary to exclude them from the ministry of the Word. A person who is chosen simply to serve as an administrative "bookkeeper" would not be called to the ministry of the Word. But our synod and district presidents are not to be administrators in this sense. They are called to be spiritual leaders to the church, responsible for the supervision of doctrine, and must have pastoral qualifications. It does not make an essential difference whether the men who serve in this way do so on a full-time or a part-time basis. This is determined by the needs and the call of the church. (Incidentally

all WELS district presidents and synod vice presidents are parish pastors. Only the synod president is a full-time calling.)

As has been shown by the discussion above, we must reject as confusing Marquart's opinion that the Wisconsin Statements lead to a "virtual identification of universal priesthood and ministry" and to a "failure to distinguish the one gospel ministry from auxiliary offices." (p 220) The first confusion arises because Marquart here fails to acknowledge adequately our distinction between ministry in the wide sense and public ministry. The universal priesthood may exercise both ministry in the wide sense and private ministry of the Word, but it does not exercise public ministry. The proper place to make a distinction, therefore, is not between the priesthood of believers and ministry, but between ministry in the wide sense, private ministry, and public ministry. In the second instance the important distinction is not between the one gospel ministry, defined as the pastoral office, and other auxiliary offices in the ministry of the Word, but between the public ministry of the Word (including the pastoral office) and other auxiliary offices which do not involve the ministry of the Word and prayer.

In his summary (p 144), Marquart states that the church has the evangelical freedom to create new auxiliary offices and to change old ones, to recognize and provide for specializations and concentrations within the one gospel ministry, to attach auxiliary functions to gospel ministers or to detach them. Except for his arbitrary distinction between the pastoral ministry as primary and all other offices as auxiliary, we could read this as a statement of the WELS position. Marquart's position is not as sharp a contrast with the "WELS position" as the more rigid version of "the Missouri synod Position" would be. There are potential openings for fruitful discussion, but there are remaining problems concerning Marquart's exclusion from the gospel ministry of certain offices which he regards as only auxiliary.

The LCMS-CTCR report limits "the office of the public ministry" to the pastoral ministry (p. 12). It includes district presidents, professors who prepare pastors, college deans or chaplains, and military chaplains in the pastoral ministry (p 21).

2b) The situation created by Marquart's views concerning forms of the church is very similar to that which exists concerning forms of the ministry. In contrast to the narrower version of the Missouri position which denies that synods are church, Marquart maintains that synods very clearly are churches (p 221), but he would apparently exclude from the classification "church" some other types of cooperative groups formed by Christians which WELS would recognize as groups which carry out some duties and exercise some rights of the church.

Auxiliary groups within WELS congregations, such as a women's group or a youth group, do not exercise independent church functions or church discipline, as caricatures of the WELS position have sometimes suggested. The point of the WELS claim that other organizations of Christians besides the local congregation and synod can and should function as the church can be illustrated by imagining a situation in which a professor at an independent Lutheran college, affiliated with the synod, but not directly controlled by the synod, becomes a persistent defender of false teaching. The governing body of the college should remove him from office, not only on the basis of violation of his contract or by denial of tenure, but on the scriptural grounds of adherence to false doctrine which disqualifies him from service in the church. If he is on the clergy roster, the district and synod should deal with him in regard to his synodical membership. His congregation should deal with him in regard to his congregational membership. In each case a form of the church is acting in its own area of responsibility. Each acts in obedience to Christ's command. Each bases its removal of the offender on the power entrusted by it by the Word.

3) What is the relationship of ordination to the public ministry of the Word?

Marquart holds that the substance of ordination, namely, the bestowal of the divinely instituted office, is a divine institution. The how of that bestowal, namely, through a ceremony of laying on of hands, is not a

divine institution. We can accept this as correct if it means that no one should preach or administer the sacraments in the name of others without a call (AC XIV). But there is no divine institution in Scripture for a rite of ordination, nor is there any limitation of the laying on of hands to pastors.

WELS observers have been concerned about the views on ordination expressed by some LCMS writers. Space does not permit a discussion of the issue here, but questions about this topic would undoubtedly be a necessary part of any discussion of the doctrine of ministry between adherents of the Wisconsin and Missouri views.

3b) The ordination of teachers

The WELS has recently authorized the ordination of male teachers. This was a controversial decision. It was defeated the first time it was presented, and some have requested its repeal. However, both those who are for and those who are against this practice recognize that this is an issue of adiaphora and tradition, not a question of scriptural doctrine.

The purpose of this change was to give a public testimony that we classify teachers as called ministers of the gospel, not as hired employees. There was no intention of removing necessary distinctions between the scope of the calls extended to pastors and teachers. There was no intention to authorize teachers to celebrate the Lord's Supper as some LCMS writers have incorrectly implied. In WELS congregations both teachers and lay leaders of the congregation are sometimes authorized to assist in the distribution of the Lord's Supper. I know of no cases in which either teachers or laymen are authorized to celebrate the Lord's Supper without a pastor.

4) Can women serve in the gospel ministry?

We certainly have no quarrel with Marquart's assertion that women may not be ordained to the pastoral ministry which leads and serves the whole congregation. We would, however, have to disagree with his statement, "Women cannot occupy the office of the gospel ministry," (p 166) since it is a reflection of his narrower view of gospel ministry which excludes from this ministry Christian day school teachers and other forms of ministry by women which are not in conflict with the scriptural principle of headship and submission. (cf also Preus, p 41) This position is apparently not accepted in the LCMS as a whole, since the press has reported legal action by the LCMS to gain government recognition of its women teachers as ministers of the church for legal purposes.

Christian women may use the keys entrusted to them in private ministry. They may also be called by the church to serve in forms of ministry of the Word which do not violate the scriptural principles concerning the roles of men and women. Some treatments of this topic from LCMS sources seem to deny to women a privilege of serving in the ministry which Scripture does not deny to them. On the other hand, LCMS treatments of the topic sometimes too narrowly limit the application of the scriptural principles governing the roles of men and women. The application of these principles cannot be limited to the pastoral office nor to pastoral functions. Christian women should honor these principles in both private and public ministry and in all areas of church work. Furthermore, limitations which restrict women from serving in some forms or some circumstances of ministry should be based on the scriptural principles of headship and submission as taught in 1 Corinthians 11 & 14 and 1 Timothy 2, not on analogies to the maleness of Christ and the apostles.

Since ordination is not a scriptural term, and Scripture does not limit the laying on of hands to the pastoral ministry, women could be installed into permitted forms of public ministry with the laying on of hands. There is no doctrinal reason why such laying on of hands could not be called "ordination," if a clear distinction was maintained between such "ordination" and ordination to the pastoral ministry. This could not be done without offense at this time because of the traditional limitation of the term "ordination" to the pastoral ministry and because of the confusion that this practice would cause at a time when most Lutherans are ordaining women to the pastoral ministry and others are being pressured to do so.

5) What is the relationship of the public ministry of today (especially the pastoral office) to the office of the apostles?

Another area that needs careful discussion is the relationship of the pastoral office to the apostolic office. From our point of view Marquart and others seem to make the pastoral office too directly descendant from the apostolic office, although he makes a definite effort to preserve the distinctness of the apostolic office.

The faithful gospel ministry is always apostolic in its doctrine. However, nothing in Scripture indicates that the office of pastor or any other public ministry of the Word is derived from the apostolic office. Christ appointed other servants of the Word without connecting their office to that of the apostles. (Luke 10:1,16. Cf AP, Trg. 243) There is nothing in the New Testament which indicates the other forms of the ministry current during the New Testament era, were derived from the apostolic office (although holders of such offices were sometimes appointed by the apostles, acting as leaders and representatives of the church). Even while the apostles were on the scene, ministers of the gospel were appointed by Christ through the church, not through the apostles without the church. "By Christ through the church" is the origin of all forms of ministry in the New Testament, except in those few cases where there was a direct call from Christ.

"By Christ through the church" is also the position of Walther. (See his Thesis 7 on ministry) It is ironic that an excessive emphasis on the role of the public ministers, rather than the church, in appointing more ministers of the church seems more sympathetic to the approach of Grabau than to that of Walther.

How wide is the application of the rule "no one should teach unless rightly called"? (AC XIV)

This requirement applies not only to pastors, but to anyone who represents the church in any form of the ministry of the Word. The formality of the call may vary in different circumstances. For example, the call of a Sunday School teacher may be quite informal. However, no one can assume this office without being called by the church to do so. No one should publicly represent the congregation in any way without a call to do so. A congregation might have to ask a self-appointed evangelist who was going around in the name of the congregation to desist if he was unqualified and hindering the work of the congregation rather than helping it. Such an individual would, of course have the right to speak in his own name, not as a representative of the congregation.

What is priesthood of believers? How does it relate to the public ministries of the old and New Testaments?

This is not necessarily a point of controversy, but both WELS and LCMS writers need to speak about this a little more carefully than they sometimes have in the past. The impression has sometimes been given that the New Testament priesthood of believers is a new thing, which in some ways replaced the Old Testament priesthood. This is incorrect. The New Testament priesthood of believers is simply a continuation of the priesthood of believers which already existed during Old Testament times. (Ex 19:6) The New Testament priesthood of believers is described in terms which applied to the whole people of Israel, not in terms descriptive of the levitical priesthood. (1 Peter 2:9) Both the levitical priesthood and the New Testament pastoral ministry are special forms of the called public ministry. The priesthood of believers does not give any individual the right to usurp the duties of either of these public ministries without the call to do so. Misguided attempts to usurp the public ministry on the basis of a universal priesthood are not new. They were already happening during the Old Testament era. (Numbers 12:2, 16:3) Reference to the call refuted the pretensions of Miriam and Korah, Dathan and Abiram. It also refutes those who despise the called ministry today.

The unique duties of the levitical priesthood find fulfillment and succession neither in the NT priesthood of believers nor in the NT public ministry, but in the unique priesthood of Christ.

The History of the Controversy

Both Marquart (p 220) and Preus (61) oversimplify the historical development of the "Wisconsin view" and the resultant differences that arose between Wisconsin and Missouri.

It is sometimes stated that "Old Missouri" and "Old Wisconsin" agreed on this doctrine. It is true that there are statements in Hoenecke's dogmatics which could be characterized as in accord with the so-called Missouri position, but it must be remembered that these were written before the careful restudy of Scripture which was brought about by the fallout of the Cincinnati case. The WELS would also maintain that our position is in agreement with that of Walther and that his position has not been correctly understood by some of his followers, nor has enough attention been given to the circumstances which he was addressing in his writings. In some places we would not word things the same way Walther did, but we have no disagreement with his doctrinal position. We do not find the Drickamer translation acceptable in some places. Special areas of concern for us would be the understanding of Predigtamt and Pfarramt in Theses 1, 2 and 7 and the translation of Gemeinschaft in Thesis 7 as congregation. A full treatment of this topic can be found in Lawrenz, WLQ, Spring 1982, or Compendium, p. 465-521.)

The role of J.P. Koehler in developing the "WELS position" should not be overstated. He was the exegetical pioneer, but J. Schaller and A. Pieper and later John Meyer had crucial roles in the thorough restudy of Scripture and the explanation and defense of the position. It was this careful restudy of everything which Scripture has to say on this doctrine which was the impetus for the "new Wisconsin" view. A thorough treatment of this topic can be found in the articles by Fredrich (1992) and Dobberstein (Part 3, 1991) in the WELS Compendium.

WELS has sometimes been accused of being crypto-Hoeflingites on the basis of a favorable comment Koehler made about Hoefling, but Koehler distanced himself from his early comments which could be understood as a blanket endorsement of Hoefling, when he realized more fully what Hoefling had really said. (It is interesting to note that Walther was also accused of being a Hoeflingite. *Lehre. und Wehre, 1858, p. 354*)

When we read the writings of men like Walther, Hoenecke and Pieper, we must be careful to keep in mind the specific historical circumstances in which they were writing and the specific questions they were addressing. If they were writing today in changed circumstances and when different issues and dangers are confronting the church, they might word things differently or emphasize different points. Even when applying the statements of the Confessions and of Scripture, we must be careful to give full attention to their whole context, so that we do not misapply the passages by using them to answer questions which the authors were not addressing.

Like Luther, some of our synodical conference writers (including August Pieper) sometimes emphasized their point by making strong sweeping statements which have to be qualified or explained when one is presenting a complete view of the doctrine in question. We would not insist on defending every choice of wording of Pieper, Schaller or other authors if changed circumstances now make their words likely to be misunderstood.

Inaccurate Caricatures

In the last year it has been disappointing to see a number of inaccurate misrepresentations of the WELS view published in independent Lutheran journals which have the declared purpose of promoting discussion and understanding among confessional Lutherans. Suggestions that the WELS position sees "no distinction between St Paul and the believer," that there is now no valid reason for the Wisconsin not to go ahead and give women supervision over Holy Communion, that the WELS position is that of Schleiermacher, and that the LCMS tolerated in WELS what it rejected in Hoefling (*Logia* Jan 1993, p.15, 16) are distortions which do not contribute to the discussion. The WELS position clearly maintains that the public ministry is a divine

institution, and it is distinct from the priesthood of all believers. Even in their strongest writings A. Pieper and J. Schaller were writing against the belief that one **form** of the ministry was divinely instituted in contrast to other forms, not against a divine institution of the public ministry.

Conclusion

Recent studies of this doctrine, such as those by Marquart and Preus perform a service in helping to define the points at issue, but they also show that a lot of work would have to be done to reach agreement between adherents of the "Wisconsin" and "Missouri" views. If it ever becomes possible for the WELS and LCMS to have substantive doctrinal discussions, the doctrine of church and ministry would have to receive a place of prominence right after church fellowship. There are significant differences that would have to be overcome before the WELS could reach a scriptural agreement concerning the doctrines of church and ministry even with those in the LCMS most faithful to the Synodical Conference's doctrinal heritage.

In the meanwhile, intra-synodical discussion should give priority to two approaches to the problem:

Terms must be defined clearly, so that people are not speaking past each other. In what sense, is the term "ministry" being used? Unless there is clarification and understanding of the terms which are being used by various parties there will be continual confusion.

Initially, the discussion should focus on thorough exegesis of all of the pertinent passages of Scripture. Unless there is agreement on what Scripture says about the matter, little progress can be made by debating interpretations of the confessions, historical precedents and contemporary practice. Useful as they are, most recent works by adherents of the LCMS view have focussed on the Confessions without laying an adequate foundation for this discussion in a thorough exegesis of Scripture. We must do a thorough study of the *norma normans* before we are ready to discuss our understanding of the *norma normata*.

The key factor in the development of the Wisconsin Synod position was the willingness of all the participants to set aside for the moment all their preconceptions and even the works of their teachers and to go *ad fontes*, back to the Scriptures. They were willing to reexamine every detail of their position in the light of Scripture alone. If this study revealed areas in which they had been operating with assumptions or interpretations not supported by Scripture, they were ready to correct their view. We cannot justify any doctrinal position which places any limitations on the freedom of the church to organize itself and its ministry into forms which meet its needs, unless those limitations are directly commanded in Scripture. We must preserve for the New Testament church all the freedom which Christ has given to it. On the other hand, we must require the NT church to observe every command which Christ has given to it. This is the goal (and I believe also the effect) of the so-called Wisconsin Synod view of church and ministry.

Perhaps in view of the current widespread debate about various aspects of this doctrine, the time is ripe for an renewed focus on an exegetical study of the chief Bible passages concerning ministry. As a contribution to this study upcoming issues of the *Quarterly* will present a series of exegetical articles on these passages in the hope that such a series will promote a more thorough discussion of the issues which this article has briefly presented.

WELS MINISTRY COMPENDIUM
Study Papers on the doctrine of Church and Ministry

Compiled by WELS Parish Services, 1992

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