

The Ministry: By Christ Through the Church

Current Discussion Concerning the Doctrine of the Ministry

By John F. Brug

Introduction

The doctrine of church and ministry is without doubt one of the hottest topics in Lutheranism today. When the ELCA merger was joined in the USA a decade ago, the doctrine of the ministry was the only doctrine that caused considerable public dispute. The negotiators from the ALC, LCA, and AELC were unable to reach agreement on this doctrine. The point of contention was whether the church should have three forms of ordained ministry, bishops, pastors, and deacons. After going five years without agreeing on a doctrine of the ministry, the ELCA decided to have one form of ordained ministry—that of the pastor. Although bishops were distinguished from pastors, there was not to be a different level of ordination for them. Deacons and similar workers were not to be ordained. In all Lutheran bodies in America there is currently considerable discussion about the proper relationship between of the service rendered by the laity and the service rendered by the called public ministry of the Word. There is also much discussion concerning the relation of other forms of public ministry to the pastoral ministry. In America there has also been considerable discussion about a difference between so-called Wisconsin Synod and Missouri Synod views of church and ministry.¹ In Europe as a whole and in Scandinavia and Finland in particular, the main issues under discussion seem to be very similar to those discussed in America

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 concerning the ministry. A thorough consideration of any one of these questions would provide more than enough material for one paper so we will have to limit ourselves to an introductory overview of each issue.

What is the proper use of the terms “minister” and “ministry?”

This has been quite a problem for English speakers because the words “minister” and “ministry” have changed in meaning since the time of the King James Bible of 1611, which was the standard Bible in the English-speaking world for more than three centuries. The English word “minister” like its Latin parent originally meant “servant.” At the time of the King James translation, the word “minister” referred to servants of every sort. Gradually however, “minister” came to be used almost entirely as a technical term for two types of service. English dictionaries usually list “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.

The question now being asked is: Can we properly say “Every Christian is a minister?”

In recent years in everyday usage the English word “minister” has most often meant “pastor.” The English and Latin words “minister,” however, were originally used to translate the Greek words *diakoneo* and *diakonia*. In the Bible the use of these two words is not limited only to the service rendered by men whose work corresponded to that of our pastors. The biblical words for minister and ministry also refer to other kinds of service, including waiting on tables.

In the wide sense, therefore, the words “minister” and “ministry” can refer to other forms of service in the church besides that of the pastor (such as the service provided by Christian teachers, missionaries, or deacons). The New Testament uses the same words to refer to waiting on tables, to the pastoral ministry, and to

¹ It is, however, an 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 of North America 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 so-called “Wisconsin Synod view.” In fact, one could compose an excellent summary of the “Wisconsin Synod view” using nothing but quotations from LCMS sources. An appendix to this paper briefly summarizes this debate and is available to those interested in reading it.

other forms of spiritual service. In fact, the specific biblical application of the Greek word for “minister” (*diakonos*) is not to the men whom we would call pastors, but to those we call “deacons” (1 Timothy 3:8).

A “minister” is “one who acts as the agent of another.” In this sense everyone who is called by the church to carry out some service in the name of the church is a “minister.” This is what we often call “public ministry” or “representative ministry.”

We must be careful, however, that we do not confuse the service which Christians do on their own initiative as part of the priesthood of all believers (private ministry) 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. When the term “ministry” is used in a wider sense to refer to types of service other than the pastoral office, this should not be done without careful explanation, so that the distinction of the priesthood of all believers from the pastoral ministry and from other forms of public ministry is not blurred or confused. If properly explained, all of the following uses of the terms “ministry” and “minister” agree with the usage of Scripture:

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 “ministry” 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)

In this passage “the ministry that brings death” is God’s law. “The ministry that brings righteousness” is the gospel. Our Confessions, which refer to “the ministry of the Church” as “the Word preached and heard” (FC, Ep12, Trig. 840), clearly say that this “ministry,” that is, the Word, has been entrusted to the whole church:

Because the priesthood of the New Testament is the ministry of the Spirit² or an office (Amt) through which the Spirit works³ 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, Trig. 404.

That we might obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. AC5, Trig. 44.

Time does not permit full discussion of the view that the divine institution of the public ministry is the topic of Article 5 of the Augsburg Confession, other than to note that Article 14 of the Augsburg Confession is the specific locus dealing with the public ministry (church order). In spite of the appearance given by its title, Article 5 of the Augsburg Confession 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.

Luther also says that this ministry of the Word is given to every believer:

² According to the Latin.

³ According to the German.

Since the church owes its birth to the Word, is nourished and strengthened by it, It is obvious that it cannot be without the Word. If it is without the Word, it ceases to be a church. A Christian, thus, is born to the ministry of the Word in baptism (*zu dem Amt des Worts geboren ist*), and if papal bishops are unwilling to bestow the ministry of the Word except on such as destroy the Word of God and ruin the church, then it but remains either to let the church perish without the Word or to let those who come together cast their ballots and elect one or as many as are needed from those who are capable. (“Concerning the Ministry,” LW 40, p37; SL X, 1592-1593)⁴

That is why in cases of necessity anyone can baptize and give absolution. This would be impossible if we were not all priests. (“To the Christian Nobility,” LW 44, p 128)

In the widest sense then “the ministry” is the right and duty to preach the gospel which is given to the whole church, that is, to all believers.⁵

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. The gospel entrusted to all believers is the same gospel as that entrusted to public ministers of the Word. We call this private use of the gospel “personal ministry” or “private ministry” so that it is not confused with the public ministry of the Word. Such ministry is a part of the exercise of the priesthood of all believers. Luther says:

Even though not everybody has the public office and calling, every Christian has the right and the duty to teach, instruct, admonish, comfort, and rebuke his neighbor with the Word of God at every opportunity and whenever it is necessary. For example, father and mother should do this for their children and household; a brother, neighbor, citizen, or peasant for the other. Certainly one Christian may instruct and admonish another ignorant or weak Christian concerning the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer. And he who receives such instruction is also under obligation to accept it as God’s Word and publicly to confess it. (“Psalm 110,” LW 13, p. 333)

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.” Luther says:

For although we are all priests, this does not mean that all of us can preach, teach, and rule. Certain ones of the multitude must be selected and separated for such an office.... This is the way to distinguish between the office of preaching or the ministry and the general priesthood of all baptized Christians. The preaching office is no more than a public service which happens to be conferred on someone by the entire congregation, all the members of which are priests. (“Psalm 110,” LW 13, p.332)

The pastoral ministry is the most comprehensive form of this public ministry of the Word, but it is not the only form. Sometimes when speaking of the pastoral ministry, we call it “the public ministry,” “the ministry

⁴ Luther quotations are from the American edition of *Luther’s Works*. I have included titles to make it easier to find the quotes in other editions. In a few cases I have simplified the English or word order to make it easier to translate.

⁵ The Missouri Synod’s CTCR report also 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)

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 that we have been talking about ministry of the Word. Can areas of service in the church which do not deal directly with the Word be called “Ministry”? Scripture uses the term “ministry” in this way. Although the area of service of the “deacons” in Acts 6 was distinguished from the ministry of the Word, their work too was called “ministry” (*diakonia*). Furthermore, 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 a public ministry or service for the church even though they were not pastors or ministers of the Word.

The text of Acts does not tell us whether the preaching which the deacons Stephan and Philip did in later years (Acts 7 and 8) was done as the private work of laymen or on the basis of a later expanded call from the church that is not mentioned in Acts. Luther was of the opinion that they did this preaching as laymen (LW 40:3 8; LW 3 9:3 09-3 10). Years later, Philip is called an evangelist (Acts 2 1:8).

Since “public” means “representative” and “Ministry” means “service,” it would be legitimate to speak of a “public ministry” of the church that does not directly involve the Means of Grace. However, we in the WELS do not customarily use this term in this way, but we limit the term “public ministry” to the ministry of the Word. Scripture does, however, permit the wider use of the term.

5) We prefer not to use the term “lay ministry” without careful explanation. This term 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 may carry out publicly as called representatives of the congregation or the church.

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?

I would like to emphasize that the Wisconsin Synod strongly defends the divine institution of the public ministry, including the pastoral ministry. Our doctrinal statement says, “The public ministry ... constitutes a special *God-ordained* way of practicing the one ministry of the Gospel” (*WELS Theses on Church and Ministry, IID*).⁶

The following are among the points of evidence for the divine institution of the public ministry of the Word:

*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 in Scripture (1 Tim 3, 1 Cor 12).

*Public ministers are to be supported by those they serve (1 Cor 9:7-14).

The exact form of ministry exercised by today’s parish pastor, however, is not specifically instituted by the Lord to the exclusion of other forms of public ministry. (*WELS Theses, II, D6*) 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. A congregation may have one pastor or three. Several pastors of one congregation may all share the same duties, or they may specialize in certain aspects of the ministry. A congregation may call catechists, teachers, deacons, or evangelists to assist the pastors. This is

⁶ The view of Hoefling, which traces the origins of the public ministry to mere expediency, is explicitly rejected by the *WELS Theses II, D, 5*.

what we mean when we say that the pastoral ministry is not instituted in *contrast to* or to *the exclusion* of other forms of the ministry.

The divine institution of the New Testament ministry, therefore, can be compared 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 (1 Peter 2:13). The Bible mentions the office of king as an office that serves in the government divinely instituted by God. It does not mention presidents. No one can say Finland and the USA do not have governments that are “established by God” (Romans 13: 1) because they have presidents not kings. One cannot say that governments of kings are instituted by God, but governments of presidents are not. In the same way, one cannot say that pastors are the only ministry instituted by God and that all other forms are not.

This is obvious from the fact that various forms of ministry existed in the New Testament churches. The New Testament explicitly says there are “different forms of ministry” (1 Cor 12:5). There is no indication that the other forms 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. Various forms and functions of the ministry are named in the New Testament (1 Tim 3:2 and 8; 1 Tim 5:17; Eph 4: 11; 1 Cor 12:28; Rom 12:6-8, etc.). Among the forms named are apostles, prophets, evangelists, elders/overseers, pastors and teachers, and deacons. All of these men are specifically said to be serving in divinely established ministries (1 Cor 12:28, Eph 4:11). It is therefore untenable to hold that the form of parish pastor is the only form instituted by God.

There were also different forms of public ministry in the Old Testament. Priests were differentiated from Levites, and there were various forms of ministry among the Levites, not all of which involved direct use of the Old Testament means of grace.

Various forms of ministry have been recognized throughout church history, including the time of the Reformation. Luther states this very clearly in his “Sermon on Keeping Children in School”:

The estate that I am thinking of is rather one which has the office of preaching and the service of the word and sacrament and which imparts the Spirit and salvation, blessings that cannot be obtained by any amount of pomp and pageantry. It includes the work of pastors, teachers, preachers, lectors, priests (whom men call chaplains), sacristans, schoolmasters, and whatever other works belongs to these offices and persons (LW 46, p 220).

The church today can choose to have various forms of ministers: bishops, pastors, head pastors, assistant pastors, deacons, missionaries, professors, administrators, and so on. It can also call members of the congregation to serve the church publicly as Sunday school teachers, evangelists and so on. When “lay people” serve in response to a call from the church, they are serving in a “public ministry” even if they are working only on a part-time or volunteer basis, since no one has the right to serve in a public capacity without a call from the church.

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. The church may also carry out its mission of spreading the gospel through organizations other than the local congregation, such as synods, mission societies, etc. A missionary sent by a mission society is sent as a messenger of Christ just as much as one sent by a congregation. This would not be true if the local congregation was the only form of the church and the pastor was the only form of the ministry.

All organizations within the church, such as mission societies, should carry out their work in accordance with the biblical directives for the church. Local auxiliary groups within congregations, such as a women’s

group or a youth group, do not exercise independent church functions or church discipline. But organizations such as mission societies and Christian universities must exercise church discipline. If a professor at a Lutheran university becomes a persistent defender of false teaching, the governing body of the university 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 as a pastor, the church body or synod must deny him the right to receive a call. His congregation should remove him from his congregational membership. In each case, a form of the church is acting in its own area of responsibility without interfering in the duty of another. Each group acts in obedience to Christ's command. Each bases its removal of the offender upon the power entrusted to it by the Word, and so it is acting as a form of the church. Every form of the church has the right and the duty to practice Matthew 18.

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

The substance of ordination, namely, the bestowal of the divinely instituted office of the ministry through public recognition of a valid call into the ministry of the Word, may be called a divine institution. No one may preach or administer the sacraments in the name of others without a call (AC 14). For this reason some Lutherans have at times called ordination a "sacrament." The exact manner of giving such public recognition of that call, however, such as through a ceremony of laying-on of hands, is not a divine command. There is no divine institution in Scripture for a specific rite of ordination, nor does Scripture limit the laying-on of hands to pastors. There can be a laying-on of hands for offices other than pastor (as was done in Acts 6), but the pastoral ministry should not be confused with other forms of ministry.⁷

Can women serve in the gospel ministry?

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, such as serving as teachers for women and children or as deaconesses. They cannot serve in any office or in any way which would require them to exercise authority over men. This excludes them from serving in the pastoral office, which exercises authority over the whole congregation. This restriction is 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.

At times in its history the ancient church installed women into permitted forms of public ministry, such as deaconess, with a laying-on of hands. Since "ordination" is not a scriptural term, there is no biblical reason why such laying on of hands could not be called "ordination" if a clear distinction was maintained between such so-called "ordination" and ordination to the pastoral ministry. We, however, do not use the term "ordination" for women, since this cannot be done without offense at this time because the term "ordination" has traditionally been limited to the pastoral ministry, and because calling the installation of women into a church office "ordination" would cause great confusion at a time when most Lutherans are ordaining women to the pastoral ministry and others are being pressured to do so. It must be stressed, however, that the exclusion of women from the pastoral office must be based on the Bible passages mentioned above, not on tradition or human arguments.

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 since there has been renewed discussion of this point which has produced a certain amount of confusion.

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 directly from the apostolic office without going through the church. Christ appointed 70 other servants of the Word without connecting their

⁷ For more information, see John F. Brug, "Ordination and Installation in Scripture", *WLQ*, Fall 1995, p 263-270.

office to that of the apostles (Luke 10: 1, 16. Cf AP, Trig. 243). There is nothing in the New Testament which indicates that 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.⁸ “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.⁹

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. It may be nothing more than that the pastor who has been entrusted with oversight of the work of the congregation asks this person to teach on behalf of the congregation. When I as an ordained professor of theology am invited to preach in a congregation, my “call” to do so may be nothing more than an invitation extended to me by the pastor, using the authority entrusted to him. However, no one can assume any office or function in the church 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 was 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, but not as a representative of the congregation. The absolute necessity of a call is illustrated by the fact that even our Lord Jesus himself did not assume his ministry without a call (Hebrews 5:4,5).

We commonly use the term “called workers” only of those who have a formal call to serve as pastors, professors, missionaries, or teachers and the like. We should not forget, however, that no one can serve in any form of public ministry by his own authority, but must be called by the church. Luther says:

“We are all priests and there is no difference between us. That is to say, we have the same power in respect to the Word and all the sacraments. However, no one may make use of this power except by the consent of the community or the call of a superior. For what is the common property of all, no individual may arrogate to himself, unless he be called. Therefore, the “sacrament” of ordination, if it is anything at all, is nothing else than a certain rite whereby one is called to the ministry of the church.” (“The Babylonian Captivity,” LW 36, p 116).

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

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 a continuation of the priesthood of believers which already existed during Old Testament times. 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 (compare Exodus 19:6 and 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 did not and does not give any individual the right to usurp the duties of either of these

⁸ For more detail see John F. Brug, “The Ministry of the Apostles and Our Ministry”, *WLQ*, Summer 1995, p 168-178.

⁹ “By Christ through the church” is also the position of Walther (see his Theses 6 and 7 on ministry). It is ironic that a renewed emphasis on the role of the public ministers, rather than the congregation, in appointing more ministers of the church seems to be increasing also in the Missouri Synod and some of its sister churches, since such a view is more sympathetic to the approach of Grabau than to that of Walther.

public ministries without a divine 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 of Moses and Aaron refuted the attempts of Miriam and of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram to intrude on the ministry of Moses. The doctrine of the divine call 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.¹⁰

Conclusion

Whenever questions arise about the nature of the ministry, to resolve those questions we must 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 are terms like “ministry” and “call” are being used? Unless there is clarification and understanding of the terms which are being used by various parties, there will be continual confusion and misunderstanding. This is even more critical when more than one language is involved.

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. We must do a thorough study of Scripture, the *norma normans*,¹¹ before we are ready to discuss our understanding of the *norma normata*,¹² that is, the Confessions and other human writings. The key factor in resolving any question is 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*,¹³ back to the Scriptures. They must be 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 must be ready to correct their view. If our terminology has drifted away from that of Scripture, we must get our terminology back in line with Scripture. We cannot adjust Scripture to fit our terminology.

Scripture makes it clear that we cannot justify a doctrine of the church and ministry which deprives the church of its God-given freedom to organize itself and its ministry into forms which meet its needs. Any limitations on the church’s freedom must be directly commanded by 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 alone is the proper doctrine of the ministry.

To be in fellowship churches must agree on the doctrine of the church and ministry. They do not, however, need to have the same forms of church organization and ministry. For example, the WELS sends out missionaries to the heathen only through the synod, not through mission societies. But if there was another church in which people who loved the gospel sent out missionaries to the heathen through a mission society, and if they believed that those missionaries were truly Christ’s messengers to the heathen who were speaking not the words of men, but the Word of God, that church too would be practicing the so-called “WELS doctrine of the ministry.” This is true because Christ has prescribed that missionaries be sent out. He has not prescribed the exact forms by which this work should be done. Another example--in the WELS we do not have an office of “lay preacher.” But if another church allowed “lay preachers” who had a certain amount of training and some form of recognition from the church to do certain kinds of limited preaching and teaching in proportion to their training and calling, we would not object, because that church would be using the freedom Christ has given

¹⁰ For more detail see John F. Brug, “The Priesthood of All Believers and the Ministry”, *WLQ*, Spring 1994, p 117-125.

¹¹ “the rule which rules”

¹² “the rule which is ruled”

¹³ “to the fountains”

them to establish a form of ministry that meets their needs. The Word those men speak is not simply the words of men, but the Word of God.

The essence of the biblical doctrine of the ministry, therefore, is this: Christ has entrusted his Word to all believers. He has also commanded that qualified and trained men be called by the church to preach that Word publicly and to administer the sacraments. He has left the church much freedom concerning the exact forms of organization and the offices which they use to do this. The church must strive to keep a proper balance between the priesthood of all believers and the public ministry of the Word. A high appreciation for the priesthood of all believers in no way diminishes respect for the public ministers of the Word. As Luther said:

Christendom must have men who are able to floor their adversaries and take armor and equipment from the devil, putting him to shame. But this calls for strong warriors who have complete control of Scripture, can refute false interpretation, know how to wrest the sword they wield from the hands of the adversaries (that is, the Bible passages they use) and beat them back with them. Not all people can be so adept at defending doctrine and the articles of faith. Therefore, we must have preachers and teachers who daily study and search Scriptures and can fight on behalf of others. Yet every Christian should certainly be so well armed that for himself he is sure of faith and doctrine, and he should be so firmly grounded on passages from God's Word that he is able to hold his own against the devil and to defend himself when people want to convert him to some other view. In this way he helps to uphold and defend the doctrine. ("Sermon on Ephesians 6," *What Luther Says*, Vol. I., p 419. SL 9, 820)

May God bless Finland with such pastors and people that a faithful ministry of his Word may be maintained.

Appendix on the History of the Controversy about so-called Wisconsin and Missouri Synod Views of the Ministry

In America some of the discussion of church and ministry has been framed in terms of a supposed difference between a so-called "Wisconsin Synod" and "Missouri Synod" view of church and ministry. It is, however, 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 of North America, 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. Although I do not have statistics, it seems that today a majority of people in the Missouri Synod hold the so-called Wisconsin Synod view. 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, we can say that "the Missouri Synod position" in its strict form has asserted that the local congregation is the only divinely instituted form of the church and that the pastoral ministry or even the parish pastor 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 or any other larger grouping 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. The most serious fault of this view is that it denies that any other group besides the local congregation can exercise church discipline according to Matthew 18.

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. In other words, Christ has given only one mission to the church: to

preach the gospel. The gospel entrusted to public preachers of the Word is not essentially different from the gospel entrusted to all believers. In this sense we can say they have the same ministry, namely, to share the gospel. All Christians may share the gospel with others, but so that this gospel may also be preached publicly, the public ministry of the Word and sacraments has been instituted by Christ. The ministry of public ministry of the Word is differentiated from the priesthood of all believers by the call public ministers receive. The most common and comprehensive form of this public ministry is the pastoral ministry, but God has given the church freedom 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.

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, a dispute concerning events in a Missouri Synod congregation around 1900. This study led to a more careful statement of some points. 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, namely to reject the anti-congregational views of Grabau. In some places we would not word things the same way Walther did, but we have no disagreement with his doctrinal position. In his theses themselves Walther does not always make it clear that *Predigtamt* (office of preaching or ministry of the Word) is a wider term than *Pfarramt* (pastoral office) (Theses 1, 2 and 7). The quotations with which he supports the theses, however, show that Walther recognized the existence of various offices. We also do not find the English translation of Walther to be acceptable in some places, for example, the translation of *Gemeinschaft* in Thesis 7 as “congregation,; rather than “the whole group.” (A full treatment of this topic can be found in Lawrenz, *WLQ*, Spring 1982, or *Compendium*, p. 465-521. A copy of this paper is available for those who want it.)

The role of J.P. Koehler in developing the “WELS position” should not be overstated. He was the exegetical pioneer, but John Schaller and August 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 on Ministry*.

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. Hoefling denied the divine institution of the public ministry. The WELS asserts the divine institution of the public ministry, but does not believe Christ has limited the church only to the form of parish pastor. (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, and yes, even Luther, 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, when words have shifted meaning, 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. Similar false statements have from time to time been made by people in Finland as well. 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 only one form of the ministry was divinely instituted to the exclusion of all other forms; they were not writing against a divine institution of the public ministry which distinguishes it from the priesthood of believers.

The WELS clearly distinguishes the public ministry from the priesthood of all believers and upholds the pastoral ministry as a ministry established by God. It does, however, maintain that there can be other forms of ministry, whose area of responsibility is limited by the scope of their training and call, and that forms of the church other than the local congregation also can exercise church discipline on the basis of Matthew 18.

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