

The Difference Between the WELS and LC-MS on the Doctrine of the Holy Ministry

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“Parochial school teachers are laypeople!”¹

“Dr. Sauer, like all other Synodical officials, is not a pastor.”²

“Their [teaching] office is a public office and an office of the ministry, although it is not the office of the public ministry of Word and sacrament, that is, the pastoral office.”³

“The teacher is not a layman; he is a clergyman.”⁴

These quotations indicate that this essay could probably accomplish its assigned purpose with a modified title: “The Differences Within Missouri on the Doctrine of the Holy Ministry.” Missouri’s official position has witnessed quite an evolution and is now far closer to Wisconsin’s than in 1932. This is perhaps the most useful observation this study can make. And perhaps the most frustrating snag in this evolution is that some of the resounding conservative voices in Missouri are fighting this trend with all their strength.

Wisconsin and Missouri obviously share the same view regarding the doctrine of the ministry in many of its parts. We will not discuss these at all. Newer developments such as the role of women in “ministry” and trends regarding ordination also will not receive attention. We limit the discussion to the debate that has been going on now (in America) since Grabau first sent out his *Hirtenbrief* in 1840.

The plan we will follow is: 1) a look at some pertinent Scripture references (but this is not an exegetical or even isagogical study); 2) a chronology of the debate, with commentary; 3) the idea that those in the office of the ministry must use all forms of the means of grace; 4) perceptions of what is at stake in the debate; 5) a summary of where things now stand; 6) thoughts toward a solution.

The issue is most clearly stated something like this: “Did Christ institute merely the ministry in the abstract, *das Predigtamt*, the *genus* of the ministry, or did He institute the pastorate of the local congregation, *das Pfarramt*, the *species* of the ministry?”⁵

A SAMPLING OF SCRIPTURAL INPUT

Acts 6: The Twelve said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”

Are the deacons holders of the “office of the ministry” or of something else. Stephen was active in the Synagogue of the Freedmen. Did he hold the office of the ministry already by virtue of being a deacon (WELS)? Or did he later become a “minister” and then preach? The question applies also to Philip who later “proclaimed the Christ” in Samaria. Acts 6 is often cited as evidence of “auxiliary” offices in the church. At a

¹ John Drickamer [?], “Episcopal Church – Missouri Synod,” *Christian News* (June 30, 1986) p 11.

² Clyde Nehrenz, letter CN July 21, 1986.

³ CTCR (Commission of Theology and Church Relations LC-MS), *The Ministry* 1981 p28.

⁴ “Report of a Committee on the Status of the Teacher,” 42nd Convention of the Lc-MS (1953), p 296.

⁵ Editorial preface to: Elmer Moeller, “Concerning the Ministry of the Church,” *Concordia Theological Monthly*, v. XXII, # 6 (June, 1951) p 385.

Free Conference in San Mateo earlier this month, Kurt Marquart called Acts 6 “the paradigm of the one established divine office of Word and Sacrament.” In related comments he said that a District President is in an auxiliary office which presupposes the office of Word and Sacrament.

Titus 1:5: “The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.”

Acts 14:23: “Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church...”

These passages simply do not exclude other workers from the office of the public ministry.

Commenting on Titus 1:5, Elmer Moeller in 1951 wrote about the appointment of *presbyteroi*: “This office, therefore, through St. Paul, is God’s ordinance. It is the same office which a pastor of a congregation fills. He, in our day and age, being over a congregation and feeding it with God’s Word, is its *episkopos*, filling the one office in the public ministry of the word which dare not be lacking.”⁶ But it is one thing to conclude that the office of parish pastor dare not be lacking; it is another to say that Jesus instituted this office as the genus, and not a *species* of the *genus*.

“This text can be made to teach no more than that it is God’s will that congregations have pastors who serve them, and that they are placed there by the Lord. This teaches neither of the two positions on Church and Ministry [old-Missouri], but rather contradicts them.”⁷

Ephesians 4:11: “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers...”

Paul Zimmermann (then President of Concordia, River Forest) has questioned whether the translation should be “some pastor/teachers.” He cites Kittel and Dibelius. See also an exegesis by Henry Hamann (*Concordia Theological Quarterly*, ’82) which takes a KJV translation view. Moeller comments that the mention of prophets and evangelists could refer to laymen who operated through their *charismata*. These people would then hold positions in the public ministry of the Church, which is not the same as the public ministry of the Word.⁸

August Pieper has written: “From Ephesians 4, 1 Corinthians 12, and other passages it is clear at a glance that the Lord did not give his Church only one type of office and one type of gifts for their execution, but many kinds of offices and many kinds of men to execute them.”⁹

Acts 20:28: “Guard yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God...”

“That the holy ministry is a divine institution is clearly stated by Paul when he tells the pastors of Ephesus, ‘Take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers...’”¹⁰ Yes, the “holy ministry” is a divine institution. But it is an unwarranted assumption to move from the *episkopoi* of Ephesus to the parish pastor of today, or to conclude that the ministry which Christ thus instituted is embodied only in today’s parish pastorate. This passage does not prove that the parish pastor is the office of the ministry in its entirety.

⁶ Elmer Moeller, “Concerning the Ministry of the Church,” *Concordia Theological Monthly*, v. II, # 6 (June 1951) p 401.

⁷ A.T. Kretzmann, FAL periodical ??, p7-8.

⁸ Moeller, op. cit., p 391-393.

⁹ August Pieper, “Concerning the Doctrine of the Church and of its Ministry,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* v. 59 # 2 (April, 1962) p. 120-121.

¹⁰ L.W. Spitz, “The Universal Priesthood of All Believers,” *The Abiding Word* v. 1, ed. Theodore Laetsch (St. Louis: Concordia, 1946), p. 332.

The Wisconsin position was set forth in 1970. See appendix. Notice especially under D.6. that the many functions the Bible describes are evidence that the one public ministry may take various forms.

Summary: old-Missouri exegesis will establish that the office of *episkopos/presbyteros* was necessary and established in every location. Therefore it is the divinely established office of the ministry. Wisconsin will point to the various functions of the public, called ministry and conclude that these are the divinely established office of the ministry.

CHRONOLOGY WITH COMMENTARY

1840 - Grabau's romanizing *Hirtenbrief*

1841 - Altenburg disputation, clarifying issues after the Stephan incident.

1851 - Walther's Theses

mid 1880 Synodical Conference pastors and teachers in the Manitowoc/Sheboygan area begin a "real exegetical and historical analysis of [ministry] questions ... that was destined to have its repercussions."¹¹

1892 - J.P. Koehler reports questioning of a Hoenecke paper which "attached the teacher's call to the pastorate in the usual way.... It becomes necessary, since the Word of God does not specifically mention the parochial school teacher, to incorporate this office in some way into the pastorate.... This was questioned, even as at Manitowoc: Why detour thru the office of the pastor in order to establish the divine character of the teacher's call ... ? [The teacher also 'labors in word and doctrine' Acts 6:2-4] Why then should not Acts 20:28: 'The Holy Ghost hath made you overseers over the flock' apply to teachers as well as to pastors... ? Prof. Hoenecke acknowledged the comment as novel and worthy of careful study."¹²

1899 - Cincinnati Case: initial discipline. Missouri suspends Trinity congregation for its judgment that a teacher had become self-excommunicated.

1904-9 Cincinnati Case: appeal to Wisconsin Synod and debate.

1909 - Prof. Schaller (Wauwatosa, post-Hoenecke), on the basis of Acts 6, delivers an essay which describes all offices other than the pastor as "auxiliary, not ordained by God but branched off from the pastoral office..."¹³

1909-18 - "The doctrine of the Church and Ministry was threshed out by the faculty over against the muddled or erroneous ideas that had been current for thirty years or more..."¹⁴

1929 - August Pieper's essay: "Concerning the Doctrine of the Church and of its Ministry, With Special Reference to the Synod and its Discipline." Southeastern Wisconsin District; Minnesota District, *Quartalschrift*.¹⁵

1932 - Thiensville Theses. "2. It is furthermore the will and ordinance of God, revealed in the Scriptures, that such local congregations have shepherds and teachers who on behalf of them, and in their midst administer the

¹¹ John Philipp Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, (Sauk Rapids, MN, The Protes'tant Conference, [1925], 1981) p 231.

¹² Ibid., p 232.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., p 230.

¹⁵ English tr. in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, v. 59 #2, Apr. '62)

office of the Word.”¹⁶ These were never ratified by the respective synods but were ratified by Synodical Conference in 1952.

The Floor Committee report to this 1952 convention commented in part: “...there had been a great deal of misunderstanding among members of the Synodical Conference concerning differences pertaining to the doctrine of Church and Ministry, where unity of doctrine actually existed. [But these theses] do not resolve all the difficulties that still exist... [A lack of agreement exists] when these basic concepts ... are translated into the practical life of the Church...”¹⁷

In 1965 A.T. Kretzmann wrote “...the real position of both church bodies on Church and Ministry is found in the practical position which both churches have followed, and which is identical; however, I hold that the theoretical position taught in the Missouri Synod, which differs from the practical position in the same Synod, is one which cannot be supported from Scripture and should therefore be given up.”¹⁸ He also indicated that Professor Siegbert Becker, while teaching at River Forest, taught the Wisconsin position. Kretzmann later explains that if Missouri followed its theory, local congregations couldn’t have delegated church work to, e.g., mission boards.

1932 – Brief Statement (old-Missouri, but no mention of auxiliary offices).

1948 – Interim Committee of Synodical Conference. “A Thorough Study of the Question of Church and Synod...” (old-Missouri)

1951 – *Concordia Theological Monthly* article by H. G. Brueggemann. “It is a mistake to identify the pastorate with the ministry or to speak of other church offices as auxiliary offices to the pastorate. To assume that the pastorate is the one divinely instituted office and that all other offices flow out of the pastorate is a misapprehension. The ministry of the Word is the one divinely instituted office, and the pastorate is a branch of that ministry, just as other church offices are a branch of the same ministry.”¹⁹ Moeller’s remarks above under Titus 1:5 are the opposite view (response?) from the same year.

1952 – Synodical Conference convention ratifies the Thiensville Theses and calls them “soundly biblical;” but they “do not resolve all the difficulties that exist among us.”

1953 - “Report of a Committee on the Status of the Teacher,” LC-MS 42nd convention, Houston. “The teacher is not a layman, he is a clergyman.” And from that same convention: “Because the parochial school teacher performs a basic and very important part of the public ministry of the Word, he belongs to that class of elders who labor in Word and doctrine and who are to be accounted worthy of ‘double honor’ (1 Tim. 5:17).”²⁰ Recall Koehler’s similar comment above.

1962 - An amendment to the constitution allows men other than parish pastors to be ordained. The LC-MS constitution had previously read: “A candidate for the ministry may be ordained only when he has received a legitimate call from and to a certain congregation...” The change expands ordination to include any candidate to whom “A call shall have been extended by a congregation or a proper board expressing preference for a particular candidate to be assigned to the function of pastor or other synodically approved office.” Nehrenz comments: “The ‘public ministry’ was now expanded to include all those men who perform public-ministry

¹⁶ in *Moving Frontiers*, Carl Meyer, ed. (St. Louis: concordia, 1964) p 412

¹⁷ Proceedings of the 42nd Convention of the Synodical conference, 1952, p 144-145. Also in A.T. Kretzmann “Church and Ministry,” (Crete, Illinois: private essay, 1965) p 2 of corrections.

¹⁸ A.T. Kretzmann, “Church and Ministry,” (privately published: 1965) p 1.

¹⁹ H.G. Brueggemann, “The Public Ministry in the Apostolic Age,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* v.XXII (February 1951) p 99. Quoted in Pragman, *Traditions of Ministry*, p 171.

²⁰ Mo. Synod, *Proceedings*, p 323. Also cited in *Moving Frontiers*, Carl Meyer, ed. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1964) p 391.

functions for any group of Christians gathered together to further the work of the Gospel.”²¹ That sounds like a pretty fair rendition of the WELS position!

1970 - WELS adopts “Theses on the Church and the Ministry.” See appendix.

1970 - Lutheran Churches of the Reformation declare WELS position divisive of church fellowship.

1980 - ELS adopts position like Wisconsin’s

1981 - CTCR document: “The Ministry.” This had been branded by some as an apology for the Wisconsin position, but it still makes a distinction between “The Office of the Public Ministry” and “Auxiliary Offices.” The document is old-Missouri in a statement like this: “There is only *one* pastoral *office*, but the office which we formally refer to as ‘the office of the public ministry’ has multiple *functions*, some of which are best handled by another, e.g., the parochial school teacher who is performing *that* function of the pastoral office.”²² The document is closer to the Wisconsin position with this statement: “District presidents who are charged with the oversight of the overseers of the flock, or professors who are charged with the oversight of the men who are preparing to be the shepherds of the church ... [or campus or military pastors] ... can be properly said to be serving in the office of the public ministry of the church.”²³

Under “Theses 3. The church establishes facilitating offices,” we find this about elementary teachers: “A Christian teacher... is not merely a Christian who teaches but a servant of Christ and the church who, at the call of the church, is helping the called pastor to fulfill his mandate to teach the Gospel.”²⁴ At the recent Free Conference Professor Marquart, in response to a question about this statement, commented that it might be better to derive this teaching responsibility from parental rather than pastoral responsibility.

The document expresses a different understanding about vicars: “Vicars and interns are students ... They are not in the office of the public ministry. They may be placed by the whole church for the sake of order. They are not ‘called.’”²⁵ Compare the first paragraph in *The Shepherd Under Christ* under vicar: “The Lord has not defined or limited the form which the public ministry is to have.... ‘The Gospel creates its own forms’ as circumstances and special needs require. Therefore, although Scripture does not use the term ‘vicar,’ the vicar’s office is a proper form of the New Testament ministry.”²⁶ Old-Missouri obviously is distressed by the CTCR document. Consider the following from Wilhelm Oesch, old-Missouri’s overseas spokesman: “The admiration for German scholarly theology is an important factor in the Missouri Synod CTCR’s surrender of the Luther-Walther doctrine of the ministry and therewith also of their doctrine of the church, according to the CTCR report of September 1981.”²⁷ Does this explanation find any parallel in the WELS which has avoided added scholarly training?

1986 - “Concord” Document in *Affirm*

MUST SOMEONE HOLDING THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTRY FUNCTION IN CONNECTION WITH EVERY ASPECT OF THE MEANS OF GRACE?

²¹ Clyde Nehrenz, “The Missouri Synod and Its Churchless Ministry,” *Christian News* (June 25, 1984) p 9.

²² CTCR, op. cit., p 19.

²³ Ibid., p 20-21.

²⁴ Ibid., p 23.

²⁵ Ibid., p 25.

²⁶ Schuetze, Habeck *The Shepherd Under Christ* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1974) p 363.

²⁷ Wilhelm Oesch, *An Unexpected Plea*, (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1983), p 66.

More simply stated, what Scripture references establish that someone serving in the office of the ministry must preach/teach, absolve (keys) *and* administer the sacraments on a regular basis? The parochial teacher or synodical official “labor in Word and doctrine,” as Koehler and the 1953 LC-MS report indicated.

Here is a typical old-Missouri statement: “Always the office’s sphere of activity is the entire congregation, which shall be edified thereby. No other body, no office other than the ministry in the congregation carries all this out in such fashion with such direct design.”²⁸

Discussions of “the only God-ordained institution” of either church or ministry often seem to start from a broad truth and then draw too narrow a conclusion. Such logic is apparent in the following by Oesch: “...to this very day the congregation is the only external form where the command of Christ to teach all that He commanded, baptizing and administering the Lord’s Supper and the office of the keys is actually carried out and therefore the only form to which a believer can and must belong to be under the full sway of the Gospel and himself do what it commands.”²⁹ I agree with parts of the statement: that only in the congregation does the Christian (typically) come into contact with each of the means of grace; that the believer will belong to a congregation to be under the full sway of the gospel. But how does this prove that the congregation is the only divinely established expression of the church? In a similar way, how does that fact that Jesus wants ministers to preach, baptize, commune and absolve prove that one must hold an office which performs all of these to be a minister of the gospel?

This is exactly the logic which Oesch uses as he continues directly after the above quotation. “This means that only the congregation is directly and fully identified and authenticated by the public Means of Grace in use, functioning in their aspect as public, God-given MARKS, to be the entity which Scripture calls Church...”³⁰ [Yes, the congregation uses the marks fully in a way the synod does not; no, it is not the only entity which Scripture calls church.] “...Scripturally speaking according to the MARKS they [synodical offices, professors, etc.] are *auxiliary offices* [emphasis his] serving the interests of the divinely ordained congregations and their pastorates. According to the divine MARKS then, the composite church body or synod is not a divine institution but *derives* [his] its character as church from the churchly quality of the divinely ordained constituent congregations.”³¹

Oesch’s concern is clearly fear of hierarchy. He writes: “Failure to recognize the distinction made by the MARKS between the congregational ministry and the ministry of the synodical superstructure results in the clergy becoming the dominating factor, constituting a virtual bureaucracy...”³²

Nehrenz dreams of a solution to what he calls the “episcopal problem.” He states that, after such a solution, seminary graduates “hired” to fill some synodical position would not qualify for ordination. “‘Why is that?’ someone will ask. Because the office of the ministry of Word and sacrament is not being conferred on him by his Synodical ‘call.’ Why? Because Synod is not ‘the’ or even a possessor of all ecclesiastical power...”³³ Even if we would grant this last statement, where is the Scriptural warrant for requiring “ministers” to possess or function with all ecclesiastical power? This same old-Missouri assumption or conclusion about possessing (using) all ecclesiastical power occurs in the following from the LCR. “How strictly he [Hoenecke] defined the preaching ministry (Predigtamt) appears in his farewell sermon (1891) as pastor of St. Matthew Congregation, Milwaukee, as he relinquished his pastorate there to enter upon full-time service as president of the seminary. He preached on the theme *What Makes Separation From the Ministry (Predigtamt) So Hard?* and repeatedly made the point that only in the divinely-instituted pastoral office can the *full* [my emphasis] ministry be discharged.”³⁴

²⁸ Concordia Seminary correspondence to Wauwatosa Seminary, 8/1916, in “Basic Documents of the Church and Ministry Discussions,” *The Faithful Word*, v. 7, #1, (Feb. 1970) p 27.

²⁹ Oesch, op. cit., p 76.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., p 77.

³² Ibid.

³³ Nehrenz, “Ordination: The Continuing Crisis” *Christian News* (June 30, 1986) p 14.

³⁴ “Basic Documents in the Church and Ministry Discussions – II,” *The Faithful Word*, v. 7, #2 (May 1970) p 20.

In my reading I did not find (or overlooked) any exegetical treatment which concluded that someone in the office of the ministry must function in connection with each of the marks of the church.

The CTCR document, “The Ministry,” moves away from the position just discussed. Consider this question and answer from a section on practical applications. “Are elected District or synodical officials ‘in the ministry’? That depends upon the call of the church. If the office is such that it is an exercise of the office of the public ministry *by virtue of its functions* [my emphasis], or if the functions are definable as directly auxiliary to the pastoral ministry, then a person accepting such a call retains ministerial status in the church.”³⁵ But this seems equivocating. In a document which so precisely distinguishes “public ministry” from “the office of the public ministry” the terminology of the answer will not satisfy all questioners.

WHAT DID WALTHER REALLY MEAN?

Simply to ask this question is to insult many participants in the debate - and to run the risk of being labeled rationalizing or worse. Especially Walther’s Thesis VIII has prompted the debate: “The ministry of the Word is the highest office in the church, and from it all other offices in the church flow.” Here we consider a variety of those who have risked to ask what Walther meant.

Koehler: “...it has been indicated that owing to Walther’s style of mainly submitting quotations from the fathers there is much room for misunderstanding the fathers or Walther himself, and that even Walther himself misunderstands at times.”³⁶

Marquart: “Contrary to Brother Nehrenz’ impression, I happen to believe, with the late Dr. Wilhelm Oesch, that C.F.W. Walther was the greatest Lutheran ecclesiologist and the most faithful interpreter of Luther in the 19th century debate about church and ministry. The trouble is that not everything given out as Walther’s position nowadays really was Walther’s position.”³⁷

Wicke: “... the LCR follows in the footsteps of those who in this particular item misread their great teacher, Dr. C.F.W. Walther. This is not surprising, since Walther himself in this matter did not speak consistently.”³⁸

Walther’s expression “from it all other offices in the church flow” has prompted much of the debate. Walther himself uses the term auxiliary offices in his elaboration of the thesis.³⁹ A typical explanation uses images of tree trunk (pastor) and branches (others). See Foelber’s Thesis IV in the appendix. Regarding Foelber’s comments we ask, Where is the scriptural distinction between “divine sanction” and “divinely instituted” regarding the ministry?

Regarding Fuerbringer’s analogy we would say that the Office of the Ministry, not the pastoral office, is the trunk. Foelber even states, “However, the particular form which distinguishes one [office] from the other is not divinely fixed.” But then he goes on to “fix” the pastoral office as the trunk of the tree. What statements from Scripture indicate that our Lord instituted the trunk and gave us the right to establish branches? It seems better to say that our Lord instituted the tree.

In this part of the debate Oesch quotes Luther: “When the office of the Word is entrusted to a person, then he is entrusted with all the offices that are carried on in the church through the Word... For the office to preach the Gospel is the highest among all, for it is the true apostolic office which lays the foundation for all other offices.”⁴⁰ But Luther’s words do not require something like the trunk/branch analogy. His words could just as well lead to other offices of the ministry through a subtraction of functions. The teacher does not baptize.

³⁵ CTCR, op. cit., p 33.

³⁶ Koehler, op. cit., p 238.

³⁷ Kurt Marquart, letter in *Christian News* (July 21, 1986) p 9?

³⁸ Harold Wicke, “is the Pastorate in the Congregation the Only God-ordained Office in the Church?” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, v. 68 #2 (April 1971) p 114.

³⁹ Walther, (tr. Brickamer) *Walther on the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1981) p 103.

⁴⁰ Oesch, 42 (*Saemtliche Werke*, St Louis, X, 1592:75; also LW 40:36).

Prof. Carl Lawrenz has written on Walther's theses. Under Thesis II Lawrenz mentions August Pieper's observation about Luther's interchangeable use of *Pfarramt* and *Predigtamt*. "He (Pieper) likewise notes that Luther again and again makes it quite clear that with this terminology he is using an important species for the genus, that in mentioning this main species he has every form and phase of the public ministry of the gospel in mind."⁴¹

From his *Sermon on Keeping Children in School* Luther says: "The estate I am thinking of is rather one which has the office of preaching and the service of word and sacrament... It includes the work of pastors (*Pfarramt*), teachers, preachers, lectors, priests (whom men call chaplains), sacristans, schoolmasters and whatever other work belongs to these offices and persons."⁴² Lawrenz comments: "It is significant that Walther offers also this quotation as he supplies support from Luther's writings for Thesis I. Here Luther uses *Pfarramt* as a species of the genus public ministry. This gives us reason to conclude that Walther was not unaware of Luther's understanding of the wide scope of the public ministry nor in disagreement with it."⁴³

And finally Lawrenz adduces one and one half pages from Walther's address at the installation of two college professors. "It is therefore not a human arrangement, that there are men in the church, who train and instruct young boys so that they may some day carry out the office which preaches reconciliation. Their office is a holy, godly office, a branch of the office which Christ instituted and established in presenting the keys of heaven."⁴⁴ That this address is worthy of further study and may be some kind of a key in solving the debate is hinted at by St. Louis professor H. Armin Moellering in a review of James Pragman's book, *Traditions of Ministry*.⁴⁵ Pragman refers to this address on p146 of his book.

Another snag in sorting out Walther's view comes from a seeming bias in translation. Lawrenz writes: "We have already commented that we find the Drickamer rendering of 'vom Gemeinschaftswegent as 'in behalf of the congregation' inexact. The German phrase simply means: in behalf of all in whose name the particular ministry of the Word has been called to serve." Lawrenz translates "in behalf of the whole group."⁴⁶

One would expect the bulk of a WELS discussion of Walther's Theses to be, spent on Thesis VIII. But because of the previous two points (Drickamer's translation and Luther's interchangeable use of *Predigtamt* and *Pfarramt*), Lawrenz doesn't say much. His discussion of Thesis VIII is scarcely more than a page; Thesis III is over four and one half pages. Under Thesis VIII Lawrenz states that Walther uses *Predigtamt* in the generic sense. "A lesser office would be one that administers only the outward affairs of a congregation, such as a church treasurer, a church custodian..."⁴⁷ But in light of all that old-Missouri has said about the statement "and from it [*Predigtamt*] all other offices in the church flow" (the branching off of pastoral functions to others), one wishes that Prof. Lawrenz would have said more about this expression.

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Some voices within the ELS have supported the old-Missouri view. The following gives one answer to the question what's at stake for the life of the church in this debate? [Adherents to the Wisconsin position teach] "incipient antinomianism. They object to the claim of a *mandatum Dei* (command of God) for the local congregation and the pastoral office on the ground that this would introduce a legalistic element into the new Testament..."⁴⁸

⁴¹ Carl Lawrenz, "An Evaluation of Walther's Theses on The Church and Ministry" *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* v. 79, #2 (Spring 1982) p 126.

⁴² *Ibid.*, (LW v46, p 220)

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p 129.

⁴⁵ H. Armin Moellering, "Review Essay," *Concordia Journal* (January 1985).

⁴⁶ Lawrenz, *op. cit.*, p 134, 124.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p 135.

⁴⁸ Neil Hilton, "Church and Ministry," *The Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, v. 9 #1 (Fall 1968) p. 24.

Clyde Nehrenz has often written of the consequences he sees. We hear three of his observations. “It is agony to be a witness to the realization of the worst fears of our Missouri Fathers. What they feared more than anything else was subjection to ‘an arrogant clericalism’ and domination by the ‘hierarchical oriented.’”⁴⁹

“...the era of episcopal-building came to a close. All elements of the system are now in place: A special class of ranked clergymen the members of which share the power of the keys; a mass of people upon which to work with Word and sacrament; a controlling episcopate to which the clergy is accountable for the administration of its offices of the ministry - both the pretending office and the true office. The system is essentially the same as the German consistorial system... It is the very type of system that the founders of the Missouri Synod were so intent in protecting themselves against...”⁵⁰

“The pastorate of the local congregation, the only office instituted by Christ Himself, the incumbents of which are called by Christ as sure as were the apostles, has been robbed of its God given dignity and relegated to the position of lowliest ‘church’ office.” And if the ordination trend continues, “the field will have been cleared once and for all to make way for the establishment of a powerful hierarchy led by a class of arrogant ecclesiastics answerable to no one but its own members.”⁵¹

What’s at stake as far as Wisconsin is concerned? Concern for true exegesis, desire to avoid legalism. A larger concern is the status of all those who are not parish pastors. Harold Wicke wrote in response to the 1970 LCR document: “But just what Scripture permits such distinctions [”branches of the one divinely ordained office”], giving the LCR and others the right to make these and other servants of the Word [teachers, professors, even assistant pastors] less sure of their position as servants of God?”⁵² Let’s never let the issue be only one of theoretical concern for sound exegesis. My heart also goes out to those in groups like the LCR and CoLC who can’t find the joy of a larger fellowship. My heart goes out to those in Missouri who feel that the Wisconsin position opens the door to some kind of Lutheran Romanism. Continuing denominational fracturing would seem to be the future from a human point of view. But the Spirit has lead the church to greater unanimity many times in the past. He can do so again.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Wisconsin seems to have reached a consensus long ago. Missouri has varying positions, listed below according to a charitable editing of Clyde Nehrenz’ catalog of Ft. Wayne views. 1) Wisconsin’s view: Dr. Robert Preus, CTCR document; 2) Oesch’s view. (only the local congregation can establish the office of the ministry, but a synod can too by right of transfer from the congregations): Dr. Eugene Klug, editor of the translated edition of Oesch’s *An Unexpected Plea*; 3) ordination is not an adiaphoron and is more than public acknowledgment of the call: Dr. David Scaer; 4) something not quite as close to WELS as #1: Dr. Kurt Marquart; 5) Old Missouri: Nehrenz opines that this group is without a hero.⁵³

SOLUTIONS

This issue seems so complex; an easy solution doesn’t present itself. But such is not surprising after 100 years of debate. In comparing various writings one begins to feel a frustration similar to debating a Catholic about the number of sacraments. We don’t have the same starting point. Our discussions need a proper foundation. This foundation is the answer to a simple question, Is the pastoral office the genus or a species of what Jesus instituted?

⁴⁹ Nehrenz, “Ordination ...” p 13.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Nehrenz, “The Missouri Synod and Its Churchless Ministry,” p 9,10.

⁵² Wicke, op. cit., p 114.

⁵³ Clyde Nehrenz, letter to *Christian News*, dated 12-12-85.

So it will take good, objective, exegetical work. A.T. Kretzmann wrote: “Countless articles have been written in support of the different positions held on the doctrines of the Church and the Holy Ministry. In most cases the emphasis has been on what eminent scholars have held and taught. It is the contention of the writer that this controversy can be settled only by taking an unbiased look at the Bible passages adduced in support of these differing positions...”⁵⁴

We also must be sure that we are carefully listening to each other. Some people seem too ensconced (mired?) in the debate to see answers, or at least the answers that have been given. Romoser, in his 1970 LCR essay says: “I fear that the explanation for the neo-Wisconsin attitude lies at no great distance. How, for instance, shall the one neo-Wisconsin position that there is no special divine institution of the public ministry, the pastoral office, be reconciled with the Apology’s assertion, Art. XIII, of a *mandatum Dei*, God’s command ‘for the appointment of ministers,’ or with the declaration of the Tract of the Smalcald Articles, ‘We have a sure doctrine that the ministry proceeds from the general call of the apostles’?”⁵⁵ Is this really so difficult a question?

The same point could be made regarding characterizations of the WELS position as adhering to Hoefling. (Hoefling taught that Christians would establish the pastoral office from inner necessity, not from divine institution.) Both the 1970 Doctrinal Statements and the 1982 Lawrenz essay mention the difference with Hoefling. Yet both Oesch (p55) and Romoser (p42-43) connect WELS with Hoefling. (But Romoser does say, “We have asked on several occasions for a clear statement of the points in which the present Wisconsin position differs from that of Hoefling, but have not received a satisfactory answer.”)⁵⁶

Zimmermann offers this as another facet of a solution: “I feel uneasy even when people talk of ‘auxiliary offices’ in the church. I would prefer to see this term die and be replaced with the Scriptural term used by Paul in I Cor.16:16 when he speaks of ‘fellow workers.’ That term has the right flavor.”⁵⁷

It seems to me that a solution should start something like this: old-Missouri voices should stop throwing their conclusions at whoever will listen (via *Christian News*, etc.) and share more exegetical work for public discussion.

A comment from Koehler seems pertinent: “It was again revealed that linguistic and historical incompetence, not only in exegetical but dogmatical works as well, will unnecessarily precipitate doctrinal controversy because both parties misunderstand each other.”⁵⁸

One of the more interesting avenues for solution comes from Hermann Sasse. He comments on the development of doctrine. Usually this expression would alert us to some unscriptural effort to add or subtract to Bible truth. Sasse points to the *homoousia* terminology of the Nicene Creed as an illustration. “The Primitive Church knew everything that is stated in the Nicene Creed. But only the titanic struggle with the paganism of antiquity enabled the Church of that period fully to recognize the importance of the true Godhead and the true manhood of Jesus Christ, and to declare this in its doctrine of the *homoousia*. In this and no other sense should it be understood when we speak of progress in the knowledge of faith.”⁵⁹

Sasse continues by pointing out that “even the Lutheran Church had not yet become completely clear about what the articles on the Church in the Augustana meant for the *life* [his emphasis] of the Church. [Recall comments by Kretzmann.] That is how it happened that the great Lutherans of the past century, and precisely those who did not merely theorize at their desks about the essence of the Church, but who at the same time had to build the Church, have left us a heritage that is far from being fully developed. The objective which has thus been established for our generations cannot merely consist in reviewing the formulations on either hand, and continuing the discussion at the point where it came to a standstill a hundred years ago, but rather on the basis

⁵⁴ Kretzmann, FAL p 8.

⁵⁵ Harold Romoser, “The Church and the Ministry,” p 9,10.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p 43.

⁵⁷ Paul Zimmerman, “The Lutheran Teacher – Minister of the Church,” *Lutheran Education* (Sept-Oct 1980) p 52.

⁵⁸ Koehler, op. cit., p 230.

⁵⁹ Hermann Sasse, “Letters Addressed to Lutheran Pastors,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, v.47, #1 (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1950), p 21.

of the experiences gained by the Church [history] and the possibility of a deeper insight into the teachings of Holy Writ which may here and there have been granted [exegesis], once more to think through what remained an unsolved problem at that time.”⁶⁰

The value of Sasse’s comments is apparent from how vehemently some refute the WELS position. “It took the Wisconsin Synod nearly 60 years to formalize its doctrine of the church and ministry, and no wonder. It is not an easy task to construct Scriptural-sounding words and phrases with which to express thoughts and concepts that are not Scriptural. The document [Theses... 1970] finally produced is a marvel of dichotomous double-talk designed to accommodate a bevy of opinions and to ease the squeamish consciences of those who endorse it with one eye closed and the other eye squinting.”⁶¹ Why should it be so surprising that clarity on a scriptural doctrine should require 60 years - after the issue arose in a frontier situation and after a couple centuries of European state-church Lutheranism? *Homoousia* didn’t come overnight either.

If Sasse’s observation is useful, then perhaps the current and next generation can continue the discussion without a need to defend “eminent scholars” and with proper humility before the exegetical task.

II. THE MINISTRY

A. *Christ instituted one office in His Church, the ministry of the Gospel.*

It is the task of proclaiming the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; John 20:21-23; Acts 1:8; 1 Pet. 2:9; Luke 22:19, 20. This office or service, the ministry of the keys, has been given to the Church, i.e. , to the believers ‘individually and collectively. Matt. 16:19; Matt. 10:32; Matt. 18:18; 1 Pet. 2:9.

A. C. (p. 44). “That we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, who works faith, where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel . . . 11

F. C. (1100, 20) “That the ministry of the Church, the Word preached and heard . . .”

B. *The purpose of this ministry is the edification of the Church, by winning ever further sinners for Christ, and by building up those who are already members in Christian faith and life. Matt. 28:18-20; Eph. 4:11-14; 1 Cor. 12:7.*

C. *From the beginning of the Church there were men especially appointed to discharge public (in behalf of a group of Christians) the duties of this one ministry. Acts 13:1-3; Acts 6:1-6.*

D. *This public ministry is not generically different from that of the common priesthood of all Christians. It constitutes a special God-ordained way of practicing the one ministry of the Gospel.*

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

⁶⁰ Ibid., 21-22.

⁶¹ Nehrenz, “The Mo Synod and Its Churchless Ministry” p 9.

2. God is a God of order; He wants us to conduct all of our affairs orderly, I Cor. 14:31-33, 40, and in the spirit of love, I Cor. 16:14.
3. Christians are not all equally qualified to perform publicly the functions of the ministry. The Lord sets forth the needed qualifications, of those who are to perform publicly the functions of the ministry. I Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-11. God gives to the Church men qualified for the various forms of the work required. Eph. 4:7-16; Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-11, 28-31.
4. These gifts should be gratefully received and developed. I Cor. 12:31; 1 Thess. 5:19, 20; 1 Tim. 4:14; H Tim. 1:6-9.
5. Thus these public ministers are appointed by God. Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:28. It would be wrong to trace the origin of this public ministry to mere expediency. (Hoefling)
6. There is, however, *no direct word of institution for any particular form of the public ministry*. The one public ministry of ' the Gospel may assume various forms, as circumstances demand. Acts 6:1-6. The specific forms in which Christians establish the public ministry have not been prescribed by the Lord to His New Testament Church. It is the Holy Spirit who through the gift of their common faith leads the believers to establish the adequate and wholesome forms which fit every circumstance, situation, and need. Various functions are mentioned in Scripture: I Tim. 4:13; Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:28; Rom. 12:6-8; 11 Tim. 2:2; John 21:15-17 (feeding); Acts 20:28 (watching); I Tim. 3:2; 4:11; 6:2 (teaching); I Tim. 3:5; 5:17 (ruling). In spite of the great-diversity in the external form of the ministerial work, the ministry is essentially one. The various offices for the public preaching of the Gospel, not only those enumerated above, e.g., in Eph. 4:11 and I Cor. 12:28, but also those developed in our day, are all gifts of the exalted Christ to His Church which the Church receives gratefully and with due regard for love and order employs under the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit for the upbuilding of the spiritual body of Christ; and all of them are comprehended under the general commission to preach the Gospel given to all believers.

Antithesis: We hold it to be untenable to say that the pastorate of the local congregation (Pfarramt) as a specific form of the public ministry is specifically instituted by the Lord in contrast to other forms of the public ministry.

(from Doctrinal Statements of the WELS, 1970 Theses on Church and Ministry)

The Abiding Word - vol. 2
The Office of the Public Ministry

Thesis IV

The Office of the Public Ministry is, strictly speaking, the only divinely instituted office in the Church.

The functions of the Office of the Public Ministry are many and varied. To indicate and distinguish them from one another the Scriptures employ a number of terms. They speak, for example, of apostles, evangelists, teachers, bishops, pastors, elders, deacons. We today have pastors, assistant pastors, associate pastors, vicars,

teachers, elders, deacons, professors, presidents, executive secretaries, superintendents, visitors, and various -other synodical officials. How are all the offices, filled by these servants of the Church, related to each other? Are they all divinely instituted?

As we undertake to answer these questions, we begin by recalling that God gave us Christians the command to preach the Gospel as individuals and as congregations. In order to carry out this command as congregations, we have received from God the Office of the Public Ministry. This Office of the Word is the only one instituted by God for the building of His kingdom. The Scriptures mention no other. (Wisconsin, 1892, p. 16.)

What shall we say, then, of the various offices listed above? Which are divinely instituted? Which not? Inasmuch as through all of them the Gospel is preached and through them the congregation acts, each one has divine sanction. However, the particular form which distinguishes one from the other is not divinely fixed. Wherefore our synodical writings liken the Office of the Public Ministry to a tree with many branches. The preaching of the Word as it is performed by the pastor of the congregation is the trunk of the tree. The preaching as it is carried out by the various auxiliary or ancillary offices constitutes the branches. So O. Fuerbringer pictured it in the following words: "Therefore the bishops, superintendents . . . and others assisting the pastors have, without question, a divine call; their offices are, however, only branches of the one divine ministry as the center, out of which, in Christian liberty and in accordance with the example set by the apostolic Church, they are organized and distributed up and down." Using another image, Dr. Pieper declared that all other offices flow from the Office of the Public Ministry and are consequently auxiliary offices, such as that of elders (I Tim. 5:17), church government (Rom. 12:8), diaconate or any other which may be created. (*Lehre und Wehre*, 1855, p. 6; p. 229.)

The oneness of the Office of the Public Ministry and the diversity within it are described by Dr. A. L. Graebner in these words: "These deacons were subsidiary or assistant officers in the churches. Their office was not properly a second ministry with different duties and functions, as the functions of a secretary differ from those of a treasurer. The duties assigned to these assistants had previously been performed by the Apostles as pastors of the congregations, until these pastoral labors exceeded their united energies and the church began to suffer in consequence, Acts 6: 1 ff." (*Theological Quarterly*, 1903, p. 22.)

Dr. Walther, in the eighth thesis of his classic exposition of the doctrine regarding the Office of the Public Ministry, calls it the highest office in the Church. From his development of this thesis it is clear, however, that he does not mean to indicate that God instituted various offices, some higher, some lower in authority and efficacy. He has in mind rather the pastorate of a congregation, large or small, and contends that it occupies the center of the Office of the Public Ministry. He expresses himself as strongly as he does to voice his opposition to the Roman Catholic form of church government with its gradations of offices of varying powers. Commenting on our own form of church government, Walther stresses that synods and other ecclesiastical forms of government can have for the individual congregations only an advisory status. On the other hand, congregations should be encouraged to join with other congregations to form synods for the purpose of extending the kingdom of Jesus Christ and preserving the unity of faith. (*Lehre und Wehre*, 1870, p. 182; 1878, p. 273; 1889, pp. 330-M2; Walther, *Die Stimme, etc.*, p. XVI 1870, p. 182.)