

The Origin and Development of the New Testament Ministry*

By John Schaller

Among us no question can arise about the real essence of the New Testament ministry. Christ gave his disciples only one commission. He has therefore also established only one office, one ministry, in the church, the ministry of preaching the gospel. He summarizes his will briefly in the words, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15). That same commission lies in the words, “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Mt. 28:20); for only someone who does not know the gospel of Christ will lapse into the view that Jesus is here speaking about ethical precepts somewhat like those he gave in the Sermon on the Mount.

According to John 1:17 Jesus’ preaching is grace and truth, in contrast to the preaching of Moses. Since he sends out his disciples with the same commission which he received from his Father (Jn 20:21), nothing else could have been committed to them but the preaching of grace and truth. Hence Paul describes this preaching in particular as the ministry which has been established and instituted as a result of God’s reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18ff.). He expressly contrasts the New Testament ministry, as the office of the Spirit, with the ministry of the preaching of condemnation, which was promulgated through Moses (2 Cor 3:6ff.). If the New Testament is the covenant of grace and of God’s reconciliation through Christ, then the New Testament ministry is concerned with nothing other than this very gospel.

It should at once be mentioned here that this New Testament ministry, the preaching of reconciliation in Christ, did not first begin with the coming of the Son of God into the flesh. We call the proclamation about the woman’s Seed the Protevangel because God through that one brief word offered mankind for their acceptance complete salvation in Christ. He there at once placed beside the old covenant of the law the new covenant of reconciliation and thereby without doing anything further established the ministry of reconciliation among men.

Even the extremely brief account of the primeval age makes that evident. Should someone perhaps doubt that the sacrifices of the first people were linked to the original promise, only a most superficial exegesis can deny that gospel preaching is spoken of when Genesis 4:26 says, “Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord.” Believers certainly did not then first begin to offer heartfelt prayers. The “calling upon” which is spoken of here must therefore have taken place publicly, festively and impressively, as in our congregational worship services. But that implies preaching, as Luther emphasizes, and its content was the name of the Lord, the God of the covenant, the God of the promise—in short, the gospel of the coming Christ.

The accounts of Abraham’s and Jacob’s preaching activity are similar (Gn 12:8; 21:33; 33:20 [literally, Jacob “called it (the altar) the mighty God of Israel]), not to mention the safe assumption that the patriarchs immediately shared the promises they received through God’s revelation with the members of their families. Thus they carried on the preaching of redemption. With Moses then a new line of prophets begins whose principal ministry down to Malachi was preaching this same message.

It lies in the very nature of the gospel that it is a *preaching*. It is a Word, God’s Word and Christ’s, the Word of reconciliation, which God has placed into our midst (2 Cor 5:19), which is near the justified, namely, in his heart *and in his mouth* (Ro 10:8). In so far as a believer holds the gospel in his heart, it is God’s Word *to him*, which is something objective for him, a message to which he must continually cling. In so far as he takes the gospel into his mouth, however, it is immediately God’s message through the believer to others. Hence it is called *εὐαγγέλιον*, the Good News.

* This essay by Prof. J. Schaller, president of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary from 1908 to 1920, was published in the Seminary catalog of 1911–1912 and again in 1917–1918. The translation is a composite prepared by graduate students Roger Fleming, Mark Jeske, and Daniel Schaller, the last named a great-grandson of the author, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the course “Church and Ministry” offered at the Seminary this past summer. The translation has been revised and edited by the course instructor, Prof. Wilbert R. Gawrisch. Professor Schaller’s essay is presented to our readers as a contribution to the understanding of this vital doctrine that is of lasting value.

Unpreached gospel would be a contradiction in terms. Where there is gospel, it is there as a result of preaching. The Bible is speech, God's preaching to him who reads it. In Baptism and the Lord's Supper not the action with the outward element is the gospel, but rather the Word which is spoken with it. Consequently, gospel and preaching are concepts which are as inseparably linked as mother and child. The one implies the other. Strictly speaking, therefore, the ministry of the New Testament is posited by the gospel itself and was instituted by God through the gospel when he revealed it.

Accordingly, Scripture also teaches that those who have embraced the gospel in faith become preachers through that faith which they possess. The Word is near you, namely, *in your mouth* and in your heart, Paul says. Faith and preaching go hand in hand. We believe, therefore we also speak (2 Cor 4:13). Therefore it is hardly an appeal to a special apostolic mandate when Peter and John declare before the high council, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Ac 4:19, NIV). For in the next similar incident Peter says, "We must obey God rather than men." He gives the reason for his obedience toward God, however, in these words, "We are witnesses of these things, *and so is the Holy Spirit*, whom God has given to those who obey him" (Ac 5:29-32, NIV). The Holy Ghost, who is given through the gospel, through that very gospel produces witnesses. Through the gospel he creates preachers of the gospel. And that, to be sure, is an inevitable effect which God really intends and therefore in every case achieves.

That is taught by the beautiful passage in Peter which testifies that believers are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, for the *purpose* or with the *intent* that they should show forth the praises of him who has called them out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Pe 2:9). God creates his Christians for himself in such a way that they, prompted by their new nature, preach the gospel. Whoever is not a preacher of the gospel does not yet belong to the chosen nation, because it is a God-willed and God-ordained function of the new nature that a believer proclaims the gospel.

Thus it came about that the name of the Lord was preached in the primeval age and that the patriarchs, too, proclaimed the gospel. At that time, as far as we know, no one had received a special commission from God to preach publicly, and yet the preaching ministry was carried on. The preaching ministry had been given with the gospel. Let no one here object that it must be assumed that God expressly called the people who proclaimed the Word at that time and commissioned them for the ministry. In the first place, in theology assumptions not based on a statement in Scripture rarely lead to reliable conclusions. Furthermore, Scripture teaches, as indicated above, that preachers of the gospel will and *must* arise even without a special commission.

We find that attested by an example in Acts 8. The Christians in Jerusalem had been scattered throughout Judea and Samaria by the persecution connected with the murder of Stephen. Of all of them it is then reported, "Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went" (Ac 8:4, NIV). Those were ordinary congregation members, Philip, too, being one of them. They did not ask whether they were *allowed* to preach; they carried on the ministry of the New Testament on the basis of their call as Christians, as something that was their responsibility.

For that reason one cannot, strictly speaking, talk about the *right* to preach to the gospel, as if this activity of one's spiritual life were not permitted to the individual Christian until in some special way he receives a commission or permission for it. With equal "right" one could make his prayer activity subject to the limitation that he would dare to practice it only after coming to an agreement on it with others. The one as well as the other belongs to keeping the Second Commandment. Prayer and gospel preaching are moral matters, and as such stand on exactly the same plane. For Christians, as in all aspects of their sanctification so also in respect to preaching the gospel, that is, to carrying on the New Testament ministry, neither restrictions nor restraints but rather admonition and encouragement to more zealous activity are always in place.

It is undoubtedly in this sense above all that our Lord intended his commission to preach: Preach the gospel to every creature; make all nations to be my disciples by teaching them; you shall be my witnesses; etc. As we have seen above, the New Testament ministry was not thereby established; for it is an institution of God which was given immediately in conjunction with the first revelation of the gospel of Christ. The Savior rather gives these injunctions in the very same sense as he gives other explanations of God's holy will and

admonitions to put it into practice. The fact that gospel preaching has to do with saving sinners while other moral activities of Christians have to do largely with temporal matters certainly makes no difference as far as the nature of the commands as such is concerned. If one wanted to conclude from the Lord's royal command that he there instituted and called into being the gospel ministry as something new, one would then not only have to deny that the same ministry was previously conducted for the salvation of sinners during the first four millennia of the world as well as the fact that Christ's prophetic activity was gospel ministry; but one would have to be prepared to draw all kinds of other strange conclusions: When Paul admonishes parents to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, *Christian* education of the young must then have been established as a new institution; when he admonished those who are married to live in marriage in a Christian manner, Christian marriage must then have been instituted as something new; when he admonished Christians to let God's Word dwell among them richly, that must never have happened previously and must not have been God's will, etc. As little as one will let these conclusions stand, so little may one regard those commands of Christ of which we are speaking here as the institution of a ministry which did not previously exist and which without this special command could not have been established at all.

Someone will now immediately object, with a semblance of right, that Christ's commission would then have been superfluous. But this objection does not take into consideration the fact that the things which God desires, for which he created his Christians, and which for Christians are obvious without any further divine command, are by no means always done as they should be done unless Christians are instructed concerning them and reminded of them. In his state of innocence Adam needed no directions how to serve God and his neighbor properly, and it was not even necessary to remind him of this. His concreated perfection guaranteed that he by nature knew and did everything that God wanted. But ever since the fall into sin each Christian must learn day after day what God's will is. Since also that which he has once learned ever and again disappears from his consciousness, he must continually be reminded of it. His sinfulness, moreover, continually hinders him from fully carrying out what he knows is God's will, and so he constantly needs the stern admonition not to let his flesh rule over him.

Christ knew this about his own on earth. He did not, therefore, want to leave them in ignorance of the fact that the gospel as the Word of redemption which embraces all men was also intended for all men and that, consequently, the preaching of the Word should resound throughout the earth wherever men live. They should realize that the impulse of their hearts to proclaim the gospel with their lips corresponds exactly to his will, that he has prepared them for this good work, and that this really is the light that they should let shine. And when their sluggish flesh shrinks from the effort and sacrifice, they should hold this up to their old Adam as a command of God so that their flesh is struck down and permits the impulse of the Spirit in them to have free course.

Paul confirms this understanding of Christ's commission in a remarkably clear way. He writes in 1 Corinthians 9:16f.:

For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me.

The necessity of which he speaks is obviously not something external. It is, rather, the inner impulse which he has as a believing Christian. Woe to him if he fails to preach, because he would then not be a Christian. But when he is tempted to be despondent and reluctant about the ministry, he goes back to the *command* and thereby puts his flesh to silence.

As far now as the ministry of the gospel as such comes into consideration in Paul's activity, Paul occupies no exceptional position. Every Christian can immediately apply Paul's words to himself personally. We have always realized that and have demonstrated it in a practical way by the fact that at our mission festivals we have used those very commissions as fitting, fully adequate texts and have propounded them to our Christian people directly in connection with those thoughts of Paul. In doing so we have not somewhat cleverly

accommodated Christ's words to our circumstances. Rather, we have used them exactly as he originally intended—as instruction and admonition.

It is clear from this in which sense we can speak of the *divine institution* of the New Testament ministry. God very obviously wills the preaching of the gospel. He accomplished this will by calling people to the fellowship of the gospel, and thereby, that is through regeneration, awakens them to new spiritual life and makes them true active preachers of the gospel. Jesus' commands are not the original institution of the gospel ministry; they substantiate the fact that it had been instituted. He couldn't give a command to preach if he didn't already have preachers.

Let's take an analogous example. We speak of marriage also quite correctly as a divine institution, even though we do not have a single word of Scripture which commands marriage. For we find a thousand proofs in God's Word that God recognizes the marriage bond between husband and wife as being in accord with his will. How then did God institute marriage, and how does he now establish each individual marriage bond? After Adam had been convinced by personal observation that among the other living creatures there was no one like him with whom he could enter into union, God created the woman and placed her before Adam when he awoke from sleep. God gave no command because none was necessary. Adam recognized the woman as the being that belonged to him, and the marital union of the two naturally followed. God *created* man and woman in such a way that no special divine command was needed to bring about their union. Marriage was instituted through the *creation* of two people fashioned for marriage.

The origin, the divine institution, of the New Testament ministry occurred in exactly the same way. God *creates* his Christians in such a way that it lies within their new spiritual nature to carry out his will. When he later in addition puts his will into words, these words do not then first produce preachers. Rather, they merely show the created preachers who are already at hand how they can execute their commission in a God-pleasing way.

One cannot therefore say, without denying the facts, that God instituted the ministry *in abstracto*. We can indeed form a mental picture of the ministry, the purpose of which Scripture richly describes for us, a picture which fits each individual case. But the ministry has never existed *in abstracto* as little as a marriage has existed *in abstracto*. These things were created by God as something concrete, something which can be apprehended.

This is basically nothing other than the doctrine of the *spiritual priesthood*. The New Testament church has taken this term for the relation between a believer and God from 1 Peter 2:9. In this passage it has found the truth expressed that every believer, on the one hand, can deal with God personally, without an earthly mediator, and, on the other hand, that in dealing with his fellow men he is to exercise a priestly function. Since every Christian is a spiritual priest, the special priest class which God ordained in the Old Testament here finds its antitype and is thereby abolished. But whatever could be said about the nature of an Old Testament priest's responsibility now applies to every believer on earth by virtue of the fact that the Holy Ghost applies the term to him. When Malachi 2:7 says, "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law in his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts," that now applies not to a special *class* in the time after Christ, but to *each individual Christian*. He is to grow in the knowledge of God and so possess God's doctrine ever more perfectly (Col 1:10; 3:10; Eph 4:13f.). One is to teach and admonish the other with the Word of Christ (Col 3:16) because each one is a messenger of the Lord (1 Pe 2:9). In this capacity the New Testament priests are to judge the doctrines of others (1 Jn 4:1) and are directed to pronounce judgment on false doctrine by outwardly separating themselves (2 Jn 10: Ro 16:17).

Pursuing this line of thought, one might here point out that the words which are used in Scripture to describe the preaching activity of Christians by no means indicate a specific manner or a certain fullness of presentation. *Κηρύσσειν*, *εὐαγγελίζεσθαι*, *ἐπαγγέλλειν*, and whatever other similar terms there are, are synonyms because at the root of all of them lies the concept of speaking, proclaiming and communicating. As far as the special characteristics which distinguish the individual terms from one another are concerned, the only thing that comes into consideration here is that the term "to evangelize" at once includes the idea of proclaiming,

speaking, communicating *the gospel*. With the other words what is communicated must be determined from the context.

This fact must be mentioned here because linguistic usage has very significantly narrowed the concept “preaching.” Hearing this word, we think first and often exclusively of a formal evangelical address, which proceeds from particular viewpoints, which is developed according to a definite plan, and which is delivered in a public gathering by a person who has been designated to do this. Under the influence of linguistic usage one is then all too apt to make the mistake of immediately reading this concept with its significantly narrowed scope into all passages in the Bible in which the term “preaching” of the gospel is mentioned.

How this can lead one astray a single example amply illustrates. In Acts 20:7 we are told that Paul at Troas *preached* at a gathering of disciples and prolonged his speaking till midnight. This long “preaching” has struck most readers of the Bible, and now and then a long-winded pastor whose sermons exceed an appropriate length has excused himself by citing this example of the apostle, one of whose hearers, moreover, fell asleep with downright unpleasant results.

Not a word is mentioned, however, in this passage that Paul delivered a formal sermon. His activity is described as *διαλέγεσθαι*. Everyone sees at once that the word “dialogue” is derived from this Greek word, and that Luke therefore is not speaking here about a sermon in the form that is customary among us. Paul certainly indeed led the discussion in that gathering, not, however, in an uninterrupted address, but rather in the form of conversation. Luther translated the very same word in verse 9 with “*reden*” [speaking], and he switches back and forth in the places where this word occurs in Greek, translating it as preaching, teaching, speaking, or discussing, depending on the circumstance (compare Mk 9:34; Acts 17:2; 18:4, 19; 19:8ff.; 20:7, 9; 24:12, 25; He 12:5; Jd 9). The passages Mark 9:34; Acts 24:12, 25; and Jude 9 also show that the word *διαλέγεσθαι* does not in itself denote a preaching of the gospel. It is not, therefore, a technical term for conducting the New Testament ministry. Hebrews 12:5 makes it abundantly clear that the *διαλέγεσθαι* need not take place publicly but can also refer to a private discussion.

If, therefore, we want to gain a correct understanding of the forms of the ministry as we find them in the church of all times, we have to free ourselves from the thought that only official public proclaiming is gospel preaching. This false view betrays itself immediately when one simply identifies the ministry [*Predigtamt*] with the pastoral ministry [*Pfarramt*], even when the clear presentation of thoughts demands something else, as for example, if one takes the sentence, “The ministry [*Predigtamt*] is the only office [*Amt*] that Christ ordained in his church,” and construes it without further thought as if it were speaking exclusively about the pastoral office. Our studies, which have adhered strictly to what is set forth in the Holy Scriptures, incontrovertibly show that the ministry, that is, the commission to preach the gospel, is given to every Christian; that at conversion not only the ability but also the impetus for this preaching is implanted in him; and that the gospel by its very nature as a *message* presupposes this preaching activity and at the same time by the effect it has guarantees it will occur.

Who now wishes to be so bold as to limit the way the ministry is carried out to a single *form* of presenting the word of salvation, a form which, to be sure, exists on a limited scale? How long does a speech have to be in order to be a proclaiming of the gospel? Can indeed any Christian at all talk about the gospel without carrying out his office as a preacher of reconciliation? Is not the spoken word of the gospel an actual and under all circumstances adequate preaching of it? If this were not the case, what would become of our oft-repeated assertion that John 3:16 is a brief summary of the whole preaching of the gospel? If this statement stands, then when Christ spoke these words, he was preaching the gospel; and when a Christian repeats the passage today, he is preaching.

These thoughts lead us to a correct view of the forms of the New Testament ministry. We immediately get the impression that Christians are not only *de jure* preachers of the gospel, but also carry on this ministry *de facto* in many ways. In doing this they are not bound to certain times but seize the opportunity whenever and wherever it occurs. When a Christian laborer in his daily activities counters with a clear witness to Christ a scoffer who blasphemes in his presence, then he has engaged in gospel preaching, for he has borne witness to

the contents of the gospel. When Christians at a social gathering privately discuss with one another the great deeds God has done to accomplish the salvation of sinners, even if this is in a most informal way, the gospel is then under discussion, and the one who gives expression to it is carrying on the ministry. When a member of the family or a Christian neighbor who is not a pastor, yes, when a mother, sister, or Christian neighbor lady offers a sick person the comfort of the forgiveness of sins or in some other way strengthens his patience by pointing to the goodness of God, our Savior, spiritual priests and priestesses are functioning in the New Testament ministry. Or are perchance such persons not doing what Christ meant when he said, “Preach the gospel”?

This is also by no means done by individual Christians only in private, but often quite publicly.¹ For our congregational worship services we have chosen a liturgical form which actually compels every Christian to function in the preaching ministry in a public way. In Colossians 3:16 Paul calls the joint singing of Christians “teaching,” and in fact a teaching of the Word of Christ. This is a way in which Christians can let the gospel dwell among them richly. When, therefore, a Christian takes part in congregational singing, he is preaching the Word of Christ as it is contained in our precious hymns. When the Lord’s Prayer, the confession of sins, and the Creed are spoken by the entire assembly, this is in each instance for those who truly participate from their hearts a part of the public preaching in which they personally engage.

Just in this respect the Lutheran worship service differs, for example, from the religious assemblies of the Roman church. Among us the congregation actively participates in the preaching of the gospel and so continually exercises its spiritual priesthood. We are so free in this in practice that under certain conditions we permit the public preaching of the gospel even by *children*. It may perhaps not immediately be clear to everyone that in the Christian catechetical instruction, in the examination for confirmation, and in the vow made by confirmands, the children are in fact preaching the Word of Christ.¹ Nevertheless, no one can deny that in the children’s service at Christmas the little ones, too, proclaim the praises of the Lord. The congregation of adults rejoices at this and involuntarily recalls that Jesus expressly acknowledged this preaching ministry of children (Mt 21:16).

There is no denying that these forms of Christian preaching are, to a certain extent, subject to the option and discretion of Christians. One acts according to the circumstances which, under God’s providence, may take this or that form. For the children to preach on Christmas Eve has certainly not always been customary. It is up to Christians to recognize the opportunities and then to fulfill their calling as preachers of the gospel.

The form that the preaching ministry takes in the family seems to be somewhat different. That it is present in the Christian home, i.e., that the members of the family as Christians one and all possess the office of the ministry, is obvious. It is equally obvious that the office of the ministry is exercised every time home devotions are conducted, or when the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and hence the use of the gospel, noticeably comes to the fore in the training of the children. But it is also certain that the *father* of the family has a special call to conduct the family devotions, to carry out this more formal preaching of the gospel, and that according to Ephesians 6:4 the parents in particular have the duty to apply the Word of God in the training of their children. It may seem, therefore, that this is a form of the ministry *ordained by God*.

Whoever investigates more closely, however, will recognize that this, like the preaching at a sick bed, for example, is occasioned by the circumstances and the opportunity that is presented by those circumstances. It is not brought about through a special divine institution with respect to the ministry. As Paul and Christ both clearly teach (Mk 10:1–9; 1 Cor 11:7–8), marriage is a natural order which was in existence before the gospel. All relationships of authority in the family are not dependent on the gospel, therefore, but are in force also among unbelievers and heathen. When the gospel is added, it does not change anything in the natural order, but permeates and sanctifies it, and takes it into its service. The head of the family instructs and teaches his wife and children, and he does this as his natural right; it is his right under all circumstances. When he proclaims the gospel, he does this as a Christian who is at the same time the head of the family.

¹ A reader who is troubled about *publicly*, used in this general sense, is referred to footnote No. 3, which describes the technical sense.

² At the time this essay was written it was customary in many congregations for the pastor to conduct catechetical instruction on Sunday afternoons in the presence of the congregation.

The same thing is true also as far as the activity of parents in bringing up their children and the children's being subject to the control of their parents are concerned. That Christian parents carry out the whole training of their children in the light of the gospel is the result of combining their natural duty to rear them with their call as Christians to preach the gospel. Ephesians 6:4 does not, of course, exclude the fact that children may on occasion comfort their father or mother with the gospel and hence, likewise, according to the circumstances that obtain, engage in the ministry of preaching.

From all of this it should be clear to us that God certainly has given no definite commands about the time, person and form of preaching as far as the vast majority of situations that call for gospel preaching are concerned. It is his concern that the gospel sound forth loudly in the world for the salvation of sinners. For this reason he provides his Christians, all of whom have been called and equipped to preach, with all kinds of opportunities to fulfill the commission of their Lord, giving one this kind of opportunity and another a different kind. And so the preaching activity of Christians each time assumes a form that corresponds to the circumstances. This thought obviously rings through Paul's words in Philippians 1:18, "The important thing is that in every way ... Christ is preached" (NIV). The circumstances that he describes in the preceding verses were admittedly unique. But the reason for his joy, something therefore over which he as a *Christian* could rejoice, was the fact that so many preachers who had no special call to preach (the majority of the brethren, and so of course members of the congregation who were not pastors) were proclaiming the gospel with greater boldness. He finds only their personal motives reprehensible in part, but not their activity itself.

Nevertheless, Scripture does indeed speak of special forms of the evangelical preaching ministry, both in the time before Christ's birth as well as after. In Old Testament times the specially called persons were called "prophets" in the narrow sense of the term. In the time after Christ's ascension they were called "apostles." Neither the prophets nor the apostles permit the slightest doubt to exist concerning the fact that they received their commission from God *directly*. Entirely apart from the convincing power of their word, they usually proved that they were special messengers of the Almighty by means of signs and wonders. Among us it can be taken as an established fact that the Old Testament prophets were by virtue of their office preachers of the gospel, also in their special calling, and that they preached no other gospel than that which we have (Ga 1:8). Their preaching had, therefore, essentially the same content as ours.

Furthermore, it hardly requires any proof that this preaching was not restricted to the prophets, but that the believers in Israel took to heart exactly what the prophets said and broadcast it further, especially when the prophets had received an additional Messianic revelation. In this way they also carried out their preaching ministry, for Peter, of course, took that glorious word about the spiritual priesthood from the mouth of the prophet Moses (Ex 19:6). So likewise Isaiah (40:9) certainly addresses Zion-Jerusalem of his day also as a preacher of the gospel. Furthermore, it can be shown from 1 Kings 18:4; Amos 7:14, and a number of other passages that the prophets who preached in Israel were by no means all directly called by God, but somewhat like our pastors they served the people as teachers of God's truth according to the conditions and arrangements that prevailed in the church at that time.

Prophets, in the narrower sense of the term, were then such people to whom God gave direct revelations and at the same time the commission to proclaim them publicly. That, of course, no person could give to himself. But that God thereby established in the church of Old Testament times a special order of prophets can be said only in this sense that, looking back now, we see the inspired prophets as a related group. Such a prophet was, rather, each time a *separate* gift of God to the church; he came with a specific commission, preached his revelation, and left behind no successor who by virtue of his office took over his special work. In other words, God raised up these prophets according to the need of his church which he in his wisdom recognized; and while, to be sure, his eternal plan of revelation was being progressively carried out, each individual prophet was an independent member in the chain of instruments through whom God was accomplishing his purpose. The special work of a prophet, that is, his specific office, ceased with his death. It could not, of course, be inherited or passed on since it consisted in proclaiming new revelations. That is also why the prophets one and all approach us in the Scriptures that have been preserved for us as independent

individuals, who do not derive anything at all from one another. None cites another as the source of his special message; indeed, it is very seldom that one of them even refers to another.

While, therefore, the activity of these directly called and inspired prophets constitutes a special form of the God-ordained ministry, it is, nevertheless, also no less certain that this form existed as the result of a special act on the part of God and only for a certain length of time. Self-evidently, the responsibility of the prophets included all the responsibilities of the ministry as it still exists in the church; it did not originate as a foreign element. Of course, this form of the ministry did not in any way lie in the hands of the believers, but it was like the other forms in that it was adapted to the conditions. Whether now this adaptation is achieved by God directly or is accomplished by him indirectly through the church does not come into further consideration as far as the proof is concerned that all of these forms do not belong to the essence of the ministry. It is certain that the retention of the form of the ministry as we find it in the prophets *could* from the very nature of things not be enjoined or instituted.

We meet an identical phenomenon in the apostolate. That both of these forms of the ministry belong to one class Paul shows us with the words, "Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Eph 2:19). With these words he not only wants to make the apostles fully equal in honor with the prophets, and vice versa, but he also testifies that they were sent by God in the same way to lay the foundation on which the temple of God is built (compare Lk 11:49). If we ask the apostle further whether there is a difference between his preaching and that of the prophets, he gives us a clear answer: "I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen" (Ac 26:22, NIV). As soon as we become aware of this parallelism, we begin to notice, besides the very insignificant differences, all kinds of similarities between the prophets and apostles. We at once recall that the title *apostle* was in the early days of the Christian church by no means limited strictly to the Twelve, but could in its original sense (messenger, ambassador, delegate) even be used of Christ (He 3:1) and was probably quite commonly used for those preachers who went out to do mission work as a term to indicate the nature of their office (Ac 14:4, 14; cf. 13:3. The passage Romans 16:7 probably actually means: those who were held in high regard by the apostles. In the passages 2 Corinthians 8:23 and Philippians 2:25 the word *apostle* means nothing more than a messenger sent by the *congregation* to Paul.) Jesus, however, of course also gave the twelve whom he chose and sent out this name as a special official title (Lk 6:13). That this was a special form of the New Testament ministry Paul clearly indicates every time he emphasizes that he was sent to preach the gospel. As far as the *content* of their preaching is concerned, there was not the slightest difference between the apostles and other servants of the Word (cf 1 Cor 3:5–9; 1 Pe 5:1). Yes, their testimony was not essentially different from that which has been entrusted to all Christians (Col 3:16).

The uniqueness of the apostles (Ac 1:25; Ro 1:5; 1 Cor 9:2; Ga 2:8) consisted in the first place, as with the prophets, in their *direct personal call* (Ac 1:2; Ro 1:1; Ga 1:1; 1 Pe 1:1; etc.), and indeed a call to a very special service in the church and in the world. At stake was the fact that the Word of the cross was to be proclaimed far and wide as soon and as quickly as possible. Therefore the Lord did not want these chosen men to be tied down with certain duties in particular congregations, but he wanted them to be able to direct their steps wherever he led them either by a direct revelation or by offering them favorable travel conditions. This is, of course, not to be understood as if such general mission work were forbidden to other Christians. The Christians of that day did not understand it in that way (cf. Ac 8:4; 13:3); and if in our days in the zeal of faith a Christian who is bound by no other ties and who has the necessary means wishes to carry the gospel message freely to the heathen in a similar way, who could rightly forbid him? The fact that Jesus personally and directly made this kind of preaching activity the responsibility of the apostles did not and does not abrogate the general call given to all Christians: "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations."

For the apostles, however, as for the prophets, a real added distinction was that they could speak with *authority*. They were men who received their message, both the subject matter as well as the words, directly from God so that with respect to the gospel they have become the authoritative teachers of the church, yes, of the whole world, until the last day. This is the distinctive character of the apostolic office in comparison with the office of other preachers. Since Christ's ascension no one in the world other than the apostles has had this distinction. This special quality pertained not only to their oral preaching, but also to what they wrote. Their

accounts of gospel history and their letters are for all time, together with the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament, the sole source of all true doctrine. They are, therefore, also the fountain from which the general ministry of the church must continually draw. Only through the apostles did and still does the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ arise (2 Cor 4:6), and whoever proclaims another gospel opposed to the gospel which they preached is under God's curse (Ga 1:8f.).

From their direct personal call and training the apostles, like the prophets before them, became conscious of their independence in relation to all other people. Nowhere do we read that the one sought confirmation of his doctrine from the other. Only seldom do they refer to one another in their letters. Indeed when Paul mentions his meeting with certain pillars of the congregation at Jerusalem, he does so only after he has previously strongly emphasized that he learned from no man anything of that which he preached (Ga 1:12). Over against these pillars he then asserted his personal call in such a way that they conceded to him that preaching to the gentiles was his special responsibility (Ga 1:15f.; 2:9). For that reason at the apostolic council Peter, Paul and James appear throughout as equal teachers of the church, none of whom needed to learn something about the nature of the gospel from the others; and Peter writes to the churches which Paul had founded without referring to him. He writes as a man who comes with independent authority (1 Pe 5:12). So then these men, each one individually and not as members of a special order or a closed circle, were special gifts which Christ gave to his church (Eph 4:11) because the circumstances of the church at that time required that the ministry be conducted also in such a manner and by men so endowed.

Here we now at once need to understand that there can be no talk about a *transmission* of the apostolic office. Our church has from the beginning properly rejected the doctrine of an apostolic succession in every form. The special commission and the special endowment which the apostles received *in additon to* the ministry common to all believers, that namely which made them apostles, was a purely personal possession and ceased with them. When an apostle died, with his death not a *part* of the apostolic office came to an end, but the *entire* commission which made this man an apostle. Nowhere have the apostles even so much as hinted that they handed over these parts of the apostolate to others. If someone thinks that passages like 1 Timothy 6:20 and 2 Timothy 2:2 seem to sound that way, he is overlooking the fact that Paul is speaking there about the *content* of the apostolic message and not about a certain form of the New Testament ministry, and the fact that he did indeed transmit the doctrine of which he is there speaking to *all* Christians in the same way (1 Cor 11:23; 15:3; etc.). With the apostolic doctrine, which of course is nothing else than the gospel, all who accept it receive, as was demonstrated earlier, the commission to preach, and it produces in them the corresponding activity, the ministry [*Dienst*, literally, service] of the New Testament. We have also seen that this ministry is not something new which first came into the world through the apostles. Moreover, logically it is also nonsense to say that a *direct* divine call and an endowment received directly could be passed on from the one receiving it to others, because the transference would from the outset lack the characteristic of coming directly from God. That is why Elijah did not transfer anything to Elisha but made the fulfillment of the desire which Elisha had expressed dependent on divine revelation (1 Kgs 2:9–12).

Let us summarize what we have up to this point seen to be scriptural doctrine concerning the origin and development of the New Testament ministry. The New Testament ministry [*Predigtamt*, literally, office of preaching], better termed service [*Predigtdienst*, literally, service of preaching], began with and through the first preaching of the gospel in Paradise and appears wherever the gospel is in any way communicated. For the gospel is a *word* which is to be preached, and it immediately through the very process of conversion turns those whom it brings to faith into preachers of it. Thus every believer since the beginning of the world is according to his spiritual nature a preacher of the gospel, not only *de iure* but also *de facto*. There is no one who has this commission *de iure* who does not also carry it out *de facto*. God did not institute a ministry *in abstracto*, but he continually creates the ministry of preaching [*Predigtdienst*] through his gospel. Because of the needs of the church God in the time before Christ raised up the prophets, and later the apostles, by a direct, immediate call and by a special endowment with the Holy Spirit in order that they might perform the service of preaching in a special form. Their activity did not differ *essentially* from the preaching activity of *all* Christians. They wanted and were to proclaim nothing but the Word of Redemption. Their ministry differs from that of other believers

only in this that they became such bearers of this Word that God gave an ever clearer revelation through them and made their writing for all time the source of the Truth to which all other believers are bound in carrying out their ministry of preaching. Neither the prophets nor the apostles constitute a special order or the beginning of a special order in the church to which the ministry would be given exclusively. This work always remains the duty of all Christians and of every individual Christian until the end of days. Where there is no believing Christian, there is also no commission to preach. But wherever there is a single true Christian, there there is not only a person who is invested with the ministry, that is, one who has the commission to preach, but also one who actually proclaims the praises of him who has called him if he finds ears to hear.

With this we might say that we have actually covered our topic. For among us there is no difference of opinion concerning the fact that since the conversion of Paul God has called no one *directly* and has commissioned no one for a special ministry in the church. Perhaps the description of several charismatic gifts which were present in the early church might lead one or the other to think that the persons who had these gifts also on occasion received a direct commission. But it is an established fact for all of us that when these charismatic gifts ceased, all direct calling by God certainly also ceased. When therefore in the Holy Scriptures in addition to the apostles also prophets, pastors, teachers, elders and bishops who carried on the ministry publicly are mentioned, indications of various kinds make us certain that these men were indeed also called by God, but through men, through Christians, through the congregation. Now, however, the *question* arises: Did God *command* that the above mentioned forms of the ministry or any other form should be present in the church? If not, how do they originate?

Let us take note that one can speak of an *institution* of the apostolate only in an improper sense. God did not *command* that there be apostles, but he *made* apostles, and thereby that special ministry was established. We can also consider it as settled that nowhere in the New Testament can a definite *command* be cited that Christians should establish a *particular form* of the public ministry in their midst. But if one wishes to speak about an institution, one must, of course, be able to cite the instituting *command*.² It was supposed, to be sure, that the divine institution of at least *one* form of the public ministry had been *indirectly* established. But it is certainly a questionable undertaking to try to establish a divine command, and hence a positive moral precept, by means of circumstantial evidence. Is it God's practice otherwise in serious matters that directly concern our soul's salvation to leave it to our reason to make a deduction concerning a particular act of the will? The Savior did not do it that way in the case of Baptism, and neither in the case of the Lord's Supper. There we have a clear institution. Neither do we in other matters make laws in the church where the grounds for doing so might actually seem much stronger. It has never occurred to truly evangelical people to consider foot washing an institution, a commanded ceremony, even though the Savior even said concerning it, "You should wash one another's feet." Whoever is satisfied with an indirect institution can on the basis of the apostolic Scriptures amply prove an impressive array of divine ordinances and institutions. We could then speak of a divinely ordained office of fund raiser and of a God-ordained Sunday offering (1 Cor 15, 16), of a divinely instituted office of almoner (Ac 6), of a divinely commanded deaconess ministry (1 Tm 3:11), of a divine institution of the use of certain widows in the service of the church (1 Tm 5), perhaps even of the divine institution of Christian slavery (Col 3:24; Phm; etc.), and many other examples which could be cited.

Whoever properly will not agree to such conclusions because in fact an express command of God in these matters is lacking, dare also not draw the conclusion from Acts 14:23 or Titus 1:5, for example: It is a divine command that every congregation have elders or bishops. That conclusion would, moreover, be of precious little use to us since we have no information about how the ministry of the elders was organized, what exactly the bishops had to do, how many elders and bishops each congregation must have, etc.; in short, we would be in the precarious situation of having a divine command without knowing exactly what really is

³ It is to be noted that Professor Schaller is pointing out that no one form of the public ministry has been divinely instituted. At the same time it should also be noted that Scripture clearly teaches that it is God's will that there be a public ministry and that Christian congregations have shepherds and teachers who in the name and on behalf of the congregation carry out the duties of the ministry of the Word in their midst (cf. the Thiensville Theses of 1932, *Proceedings of the Forty-Second Convention, Ev. Luth. Synodical Conference of North America*, 1952, pp. 142f.).

required. Indeed, we would not even be able to counter the admittedly false conclusion that only apostles or disciples of apostles or at least pastors are able to appoint elders, bishops and preachers for the congregations.

Above all, in the attempt to prove by indirect means that in the New Testament certain forms of the public ministry [*Predigtienst*] have been ordained by God, sufficient care has not always been taken not to prove *too much* from the Scripture passages that are used. Very briefly, we refer to Hebrews 5:4, where it has been supposed that a reference can be found to the divine institution of the particular form of the public ministry, the pastoral office. But the passage does not at all treat specifically of the ministry, but of the high priestly office of Christ and of its type. Neither does it treat of the institution of this office, but of the call to it; and if indeed something were proved by this passage, then it would be that an official preacher of the gospel must be called as *Aaron was, that is, directly*. Paul's question is also cited, "Are they all teachers?" (1 Cor 12:29). But if anything is said there about an institution which must be complied with, then the other questions recorded there would of course have to have the same force, and we would suddenly have the doctrine that the office of apostle, the office of performing miracles, the office of speaking in tongues would for all time be established for the church with the command that they be perpetuated.

Above all, however, support is sought in Acts 20:28, "Over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers"; 1 Corinthians 12:28, "God hath set some in the Church," etc.; and Ephesians 4:11, "He gave some, apostles," etc.. This line of argument has many weaknesses. The fact that God placed the *persons* who are mentioned into their office is far from proving that there is a divine command to commission other people for the same position. But if this understanding of the passages were correct, then the conclusion would again immediately be that God ordained not only *one* form of the public ministry, but many different forms; and we would be obliged to have in every congregation not only bishops and elders, but also apostles, prophets, pastors and teachers, because the passages contain absolutely nothing which indicates that some of the offices mentioned should continue in the church only for a time. The only things that can really be proved with regard to the question before us is the very important fact that God recognized the bishops, elders, pastors and teachers, who admittedly were chosen by the *congregations*, as *divinely* called, as gifts given to the congregation by God. That is also clearly shown by comparing the verbs that are used: Acts 20:28 and 1 Corinthians 12:28 say, "He has *made* or *set* them" [ἔθετο]; in Ephesians 4:11, however, we read, "He has *given* them" [ἔδωκεν]. In so far as the passages are parallel, we have according to this the explanation of the Holy Ghost himself that the verb "set" is to be understood not of the institution of the offices mentioned *in abstracto*, not therefore of a command of God to establish such offices, but of the placing or giving of the individual *persons* who carry out the activity which the title of the office indicates.

The attempt has also been made to prove the divine institution of certain forms of the public ministry from the fact that God has indeed given detailed regulations for conducting the office in the congregation and concerning the characteristics of the persons who are placed into the congregational offices. But this conclusion, too, lacks the persuasive force necessary. Whoever closely examines the source of the requirements which 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1 and Acts 20 make of bishops will very quickly recognize that they have nothing whatever to do with the gospel but merely contain applications of moral principles to the situation at hand. What is required of bishops is required in part of every human being and in part of everyone who has an important responsibility to fulfill in the world. Summed up they say nothing else than that for God's work only such men should be chosen who are suited for it with respect to their talents and character and that they then should be faithful and without offense in carrying out their duties.

Paul is therefore doing nothing more here in respect to the office of bishop than to set down for the already existing organization the proper standards for judging the intellectual and moral qualifications of the persons in question. Therewith he recognizes the arrangements that have been made as legitimate in God's sight, without, however, saying that they have been instituted by God in that form. He does the very same thing here that he does elsewhere when he sets the relationship of Christian masters to their slaves and vice versa in the light of proper morals, without making it possible for someone to prove from this that God has established slavery as an institution. In the same way he clearly shows in Romans 13 that God has of course instituted no

specific form of government; but where government exists, in whatever way it has been established and in whatever form people under God's guidance or permission have chosen, such government is ordained of God.

We come thus to the indisputable conclusion that God can indeed recognize something that has been established under his invisible dominion and yet also according to human decisions. One cannot immediately infer from this, however, that there is a formal divine command, a divine institution, for just that changeable form. When, moreover, we continue to hold firmly to the truth that whatever involves a preaching of the gospel is a form of the New Testament ministry, we will see clearly how these forms come into existence without God's special command and then are recognized by him.

As soon as a group of Christians gather together in any manner and at any place and the existing congregation can in that way be recognized, the responsibility for preaching which every individual Christian has as a believer remains unchanged. Through the fact that a number of Christians are together, however, the need for mutual confession and mutual edification quite naturally arises. From this an obligation arises for the whole group which the individual Christian does not have: because of its own need it must make provisions to let the Word of Christ ring out in its gathering. That this takes place is essential; *how* it takes place is incidental and depends in the circumstances of the congregation and on the opportunity. Among us it usually delegates to a single individual the responsibility to do the formal, solemn preaching on a regular basis, to conduct the public worship services, and in addition to serve the individual members of the congregation with the Word according to their needs. These things could also be arranged in an entirely different way since the pastorate in the form which is customary among us was very likely totally unknown in apostolic times. If the congregation then finds itself faced with the responsibility of seeing to it that the education of the children is taken care of in a God-pleasing way, it then places a teacher in the school as a preacher if the gospel and instructs him to administer the sacred office there. In the same way it additionally commissions a number of persons to train boys and young men in colleges and seminaries for congregational service, especially by instructing them in divine doctrine, and so it brings about a further development of the ministry. The spread of the gospel outside the affiliated group of Christians would not jointly raise the means for this work. Hence *congregations* send out mission workers, not because otherwise no one would have the call to do this work, but because it can be done more extensively when many hands bring their offerings for this purpose. As soon then as the congregation has established any such ministry and has called the men for it, God gives it his approval and calls the men whom he bestows on this church gifts and assures them that they have been appointed by the Holy Ghost. For whatever the Christian congregation decides upon to further the preaching of the gospel it does at the instigation and under the guidance of the spirit of Jesus Christ. This interpretation is the only one that agrees with the nature of the gospel, and it agrees with it fully. Already in the Old Testament, when God had placed the people of Israel under the yoke of magnificent but nevertheless burdensome forms, the message of the coming Savior produced an inner freedom in the heart so that they in faith transcended the outward forms and caught sight in silhouette of the picture of the salvation to come. We children of the last times are however freed by Christ from the yoke of those and all other outward ordinances. Not only has the Old Testament form been set aside as something fulfilled, but there is nothing, indeed, absolutely nothing, that has taken its place.