

The Doctrine of the Holy Preaching Office – Parts II, III, IV

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II. The second question which we want to lay before our readers is: “What does Scripture teach about the origin and development of the offices of the church? [*Gemeindeamt*] Our thesis: According to the Scriptures the proper organization of the congregational or pastoral offices falls within Christian freedom when it pertains to the structure or divisions of a congregation; in short, everything that does not belong to the essence of the public office of ministry, but belongs to the outward form or function. A Christian congregation has freedom in anything that has not been instituted or ordained by God, that have to do with its own affairs and needs.

1. In direct opposition to our thesis stands the Roman teaching of the origin and development of the ecclesiastical offices. According to the Roman teaching Christ gave the apostles partly before his death, partly after his resurrection in Acts 1, explicit instructions about the institution of the church. This institution of his church Christ handed over to the Apostles and their appointed bishops the office to teach and to rule. These men should have the successor of Peter as their central figure. In the individual congregations they should appoint elders, however the office of elder was not independent of the bishop, but has authority to function only as an apostolic helper and by order of the bishop. For the administration of this apostolic call the apostles handed down to their successors the gift of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands, which propagated the office through the same means in an unbroken succession from one bishop to the next. Whoever received ordination into the office in this order instituted by Christ, he is rightfully the shepherd of the congregation. However, because a legitimately ordained bishop can fall away from the Catholic Church, so the teaching requires yet another feature in order that the genuine apostolic office can be distinguished from the false one. This feature is the connection of the bishop with the head of the church, as far as the church is visible with its visible substitute for the head, namely the pope. He has, in this order and in connection to the ordained

priests, the personal and enduring ability and responsibility to carry out the office, especially to offer mass and to forgive sins. Without this succession and aside from this order, no one has the authority to administer the means of grace. Furthermore, all spiritual duties done by the laity as well as priests who have rejected the Roman episcopate must be considered null and void.

Obviously all, who at the very least have outwardly rejected the papacy, protest against and disagree with this papistic error. Unfortunately, many of them—those among the entire Protestant fellowship and a great number of Lutherans—have not been able to let go of the papist error inwardly. Here we will deal with the Romanizing Lutherans.

According to their understanding, *the office of apostle* has existed according to God's will and command as *the root* from which all other ecclesiastical offices have grown from, whether higher or lower offices in their essence. Evangelists, shepherds, teachers, elders and deacons are not offices which had first been established by God as new afterwards, but they were instituted in and with the apostolic office at the same time. Their development out of the office of apostle was the necessary result and indispensable proof that God was divinely working his vital energy through them. Thus the office of pastor [*Pfarramt*] as we know it, has been appointed, instituted, and ordained not merely according to its actual essence, but also according to its outward form and design in and with the office of apostle by God. In fact, many of these Lutherans allow that *the possession* of this instituted office of pastor could only be possible through the help of the divinely authorized congregation. However, they maintain here the idea that the congregation at the same time came down from heaven, where had already existed as Gods idea as an organism that is put together to fit. To the consequences of this idea we will return later.

The well-known professor of Erlangen, D. Höfling had already spoken out more than sixty years ago short and to the point about this Roman and Romanizing error. In his somewhat of a discourse, yet excellent and well worth reading book *Grundzüge ev. luth. Kirchenfassung* (3rd edition, Erlangen, 1854) he writes on page 217ff.:

“To us at least, it appears as if it is not possible to assert, that at the same time the *precedence of the invisible church* and the existence of a divinely instituted order, according to which the effectiveness of the spiritual office has been bound to the member of a privileged special position in Christianity. The acceptance of such a divinely instituted order makes the church from the outset into an outward and visibly structured community.

If the office of the administration of the means of grace had not in an immediate way been divinely given and appointed at the same time with these men themselves, then the office itself would have been handed over as a special social status given by God sitting at the same level as the divine conditions and the institution of the means of grace. It would have been from the outset only given to those who on the basis of this special divine command or an explicit order of the Lord as those who have been called to the office. Thus this command would have brought about a legalistic servitude of the church but viewed as divine. The fellowship of believers even from the beginning would have existed merely as an outward and visible fellowship among professional teachers. Or the church would have existed, as if it was divinely appointed as nothing other than a visible form of a flock under a lawfully appointed shepherd.

We know that a person is called to justification in looking [to the teaching] of the apostles as the divinely privileged first bearers of this office of public ministry [*Kirchenamt*], namely the apostle, and upon those who were appointed by the apostles as presbyters. But the Roman Catholic Church openly argues that presence of the church and the office of public ministry is found at one and the same time, from the beginning, and ever after in the apostles themselves. Their entire dogmatic system lies as a result of this argument. For us Protestants, the calling of the apostles to their special place as those who are divinely privileged, proves neither more nor less.

We do not date the founding of the church without good reason from the choosing or calling of the apostles. Instead we date the founding of the church from Pentecost. The Apostles had a divine mission for the church of all times. Their work and divine purpose was to be witnesses of Christ for the entire world. Their work demonstrates the authenticity of their revelation and of salvation in Christ in the authentic and canonical Word which they preached. Their work hands down the means of grace in an authentic and canonical way for the church of all times. Looking back on the apostles, what distinguishes them from others, are the people who became believers in the Lord through their words. They carefully examined not so much the followers who bore the offices of public ministry [*Kircheamte*], but much more the Lord himself. Christ himself points us and our faith to the example of his apostles; *without their witness he would not be here for us at all*. The apostles are from this point of view, not so much the first possessors of the office of public ministry, rather much more the divinely enabled agents of his own fulfillment.

Through them the means of grace would be handed down to the church in an authentic and canonical way, which illustrates the basis and essence of the office of public ministry.

The office of apostle was by its nature divinely bound to specific people. *However what was necessary for the apostolic office is not necessarily required for the public ministry*, because there exists a great difference between the first authentic and canonical presentation [of the gospel] and the further administration or use of the once divinely instituted and offered means of grace properly administered.

Christ said to his disciples, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21), “He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me,” (Luke 10:16), or “Feed my lambs,” (John 21:15). With all these words he was either establishing a continuing apostleship in the Roman Catholic sense or an office, which was *only needed so that he could divinely establish* [his church] through his appointed bearers. Once it was founded, however, the bearers of this office themselves sought for and carried out that *divino iure* by all, which is rightly instituted among believers.

The Lord does not say something further in those passages: “As I am sending you, so you send others in my place,” or “Whoever listens to those sent from you in my place, listens to me...” On the contrary he prays in related verses from John 17:18-20 aside from the apostles not only for their appointed successors, but “for those, who will believe in me through their word.”

No ceremonially appointed successor should inherit the office of apostle, as far as can be seen from the discussion at all. Rather the fellowship of believers is illuminated further when comparing Matthew 16:18ff with Matthew 18:15ff. If the personal honor of the office of apostle had continued in an official way, then we must also teach as the Roman Catholic Church teaches. Yet if that were so, also their special divine gifts which were given to them personally ought to be able to be passed down in the same visible and instituted way.

Furthermore, the Holy Scriptures wanted to deliberately teach us, how little through the founding of the office of apostle, the effectiveness of the distribution of the means of grace depends upon the divinely chosen bearers of the office, or upon the outward way they were called. We read in Acts Chapter 8 that Christianity was not first spread outside of Jerusalem through the apostles who had remained there after Stephen’s stoning, but through that persecution which began on account of Stephan and scattered the “believers.” What is more, continual and

important progress of the spread of the Gospel went out not by appointed bearers of the office of apostle or people who possessed a special apostolic “mandate.” In Acts 11 the Christians who remained after the persecution from Acts 8 spoke the word of God to no one, except to the Jews alone. While this was happening, a few Christians from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they came to Antioch, spoke to the Greeks, without a mandate or some other power, nor with prior knowledge of the apostles. It was there, “there the grace of the Lord was with them and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.” To the astonishment of the congregation in Jerusalem, in Antioch the first Gentile congregation was called into existence. Also it was there that the name “Christian” first came into being, because the congregation was not built on a foundation of Jews or proselytes to Judaism. Furthermore, Paul was not called through the apostles, but he was called immediately by the Lord himself. And the Lord did not use an apostle or some apostolic official to explain further to Paul his calling, but a simple disciple from Damascus, whose name was Ananias.”

2. With the wonderful outpouring of the Holy Spirit, it was on the day of Pentecost that the first local Christian congregation [*Ortsgemeinde*] came into being. Three thousand souls were converted through the powerful sermon of Peter and now formed a visible confessional fellowship bound through the invisible bond of faith. Not only were they baptized, but we also read the results of this baptism, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). *However, Scripture does not breathe a word saying that these Christians organized themselves outwardly soon afterwards or designed their structure.* The Apostles naturally took the lead at the head of the congregation. They preached the word in the temple and in the peoples’ homes. They performed great signs and wonders and filled all of Jerusalem with the Gospel. However, they did all of this publicly not as called bearers of a specially appointed office of the congregation, but in proper accordance with the command of their ascended Lord. His command: that they should be witnesses, first in Jerusalem and from there in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8) Their parish was not really a specific local congregation [*Lokalgemeinde*], but the entire world.

The first beginnings of a congregational form of organization are reported to us in Acts 6:1-6. The apostles had at the beginning performed all the congregational duties alone. The

distribution of the congregation's property was entirely in their hands. Their duty also included the care of the needy (especially the widows) with food and other things for their bodily needs. Since it could be no other way, when they received the help of individual brothers who happened to be present, it happened most often only by chance. The growth of the congregation rested upon the apostles. However, it was not possible for the Twelve to fulfill all their obligations and services at the same time. Their actual office, namely, the preaching of the Word, visibly suffered harm while they waited upon tables. (Acts 6:2) For this reason they asked the congregation to put forward men who had a good reputation and were full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom so that these might take over a portion of their responsibilities. They were to assume these duties not on account of an office, but out of love. From those who were outwardly qualified, the congregation chose seven men. After choosing there were put before the congregation and apostles and placed into their service with prayer and the laying on of hands. This office of deacon [*Diakonenamt*] thus grew to fruition out of a need of the Jerusalem congregation. By instituting this office, the apostles certainly took the initiative, but the congregation carried out the choosing of the seven deacons. To be sure, they did this without receiving special divine instructions, because the words of the Twelve had pleased them. The apostles simply disposed, for the first time, the responsibilities which made an unusual demand on their strength and hindered them from carrying out their actual office, namely the preaching of the Gospel.

Furthermore the successive deacons, who actually were the first to possess the title "deacon", at first, had even humbler duties to carry out. The young men, who were in the company of Paul and Barnabas, or just Paul alone, whom we have learned to know, were instructed for the most part by one apostle. (Acts 12:25, 19:22; 2 Tim 4:11). Most of them at first had only the honorable task to personally help the apostles and perhaps also to offer a helping hand in their apostolic duties. However, since those who excelled intellectually and spiritually from the congregation members were taken for such service (see Acts 16:1ff), it became self-apparent that these had taken part in varying degrees (some helping more, some helping less) with the actual carrying out of apostolic duties. They took over the work from the apostles to the congregations and so it carried on from there. They reminded the congregations of the words of the apostles and reported to the apostles news about the spiritual condition of the congregation (Phil 2:19,25; 1 Th 3:1ff). So in the local congregation the position deacon formed in the course

of time *a special branch of service to the congregation*. Caring for the sick, the poor, and disabled during public worship became their business in the individual congregations, as described in instructions of the pastoral epistles, which the Apostle Paul gave for the for the order of the office [of deacon]. On account of their work with the affairs of the congregation the command clearly shows that deacons must be above reproach and free of greed. (1 Tim 3:8). The same is also required from the elders and bishops (vs 3). The rest of the command, that a deacon should not be double-tongued, that he should instruct with righteousness, that he carry himself in righteousness, since he oftentimes conducts his call in the individual houses, what could be for him a temptation to gossip and slander.

From all these points, we think some clarity emerges showing, *that the office of the deacon did not emerge somehow out of the office of apostle*, still less that it was instituted by God through a special command. *Rather, it was a result and a fruit of that particular congregation's conditions and needs*. The institution and development of the diaconate in this way stands clearly within the realm of the Christian freedom of the congregation. (cf. Acts 6:5).

3. Approximately a decade after the election of deacons Paul comes (in Acts 11:30) accompanying Barnabas to Jerusalem, in order to bring a gift from the gentile congregations in the region of Antioch *to the elders or presbyters* of the mother congregation. This is the first indication of a "further office", which became a living component of the apostolic church. However, concerning the particular way this office came into being and the time of its origin we have no report from within the Jewish-Christian congregation. Only from those reports of gentile Christians do we have information (in Acts 14:23) that there [among the gentile Christians] Paul and Barnabas appointed elders everywhere (*χειροτονήσαντες*). There can be no doubt of the existence of this office from then on. Only a short time after that on paper the term "elder" takes on the meaning of the office of apostle in certain ways. For chapter 15 will tell us, that a controversy in Antioch concerning the circumcision of the Gentiles arose. By the agreed decision the congregation would defer to the judgment of the apostles *and elders* in Jerusalem. The delegates from the congregation were received and welcomed *by both of these* [apostles and elders]. Once again, it was these two groups, who met according to Acts 15:6 in order to decide the question at hand. At the writing of the letter to the Antiochan congregation in verses 22 and 23

besides the apostles and elders also the congregation or the gathering of brothers were named, in order to state the unanimity of all the members of the mother church in this matter. One other time the elders are mentioned at the farewell of the Apostle Paul from the congregation in Ephesus. The Apostle ordered them to shepherd the flock, over which the Holy Spirit had set them as bishops (ἐπισκόπους—“Overseers,” namely of the flock; presbyters, bishops, shepherds or pastors are also obvious synonyms). He reminded them of their duty, which he urgently laid in their hearts already many years earlier, and in fulfilling those words himself, Paul had given them himself as a evident example. A third time in Acts 21:18, the elders appear with the return of the Apostle Paul to Jerusalem in the house of James, in order that they discuss with Paul his reputation among the Jews and to give him suitable advice for his behavior in Jerusalem.

Among the letters of the apostles, the Pauline pastoral epistles make themselves noteworthy through their careful and thorough discussion of the offices of “elder” or “bishop”. In Philippians the apostle greets the congregation right away at the beginning together with the bishops and deacons. In 1 Timothy 3:1-7 the high value of the offices of elder or bishop are emphasized and of their significant requirements. In 1 Tim 4:14 a spiritual gift of the Holy Spirit is attributed, that which has been given to Timothy for the laying on of presbyters hands. In 1 Timothy 5:17ff the apostle gives instructions: the elders, who are in fact in charge, are worthy to be given a double-honor, especially those who work in the Word and in teaching, and not to make an investigation against them, without a compelling reason. It is noticeable that the apostle here expressly distinguishes between the two kinds of elders before us. If those of the one kind, namely the elders [Ältesten] who work with the Word and doctrine, had been prescribed and instituted by God in the fashion of a ceremonial law, then the other kind, the so-called lay elders [Laienältesten], also must have been fitted into the divine establishment of the church from the beginning. There must have existed then in the congregations *always and in all circumstances* not only the pastors, but also the so-called lay leaders.

In Titus 1:5 Titus receives the order to appoint elders in all the cities according to the instructions that had been given to him earlier, with careful observance to the requirements, which were given by Timothy. The Romanizing Lutherans have always been fond of referring to this verse, in order to prove that the office of elder and consequently also the pastoral office must be a divine institution *a priori*. But they do not know what they are really saying. Above all even the

breath of a hint is missing showing that Paul had given to Titus those instructions with the power of apostolic authority in the name and on behalf of God. But even if this had been the case, it still would not necessarily follow that this would be permanent for all times and in all situations of the church as a valid divine and apostolic ordinance. Or if the apostle had also appointed perhaps a successor to Titus, would he have then ordered him to fill congregations which became vacant or in fact *every* congregation of Christianity in the whole world until the Last Day with presbyters, bishops or pastors? They accept as in the laying on of hands, an absurd assumption that gains only then an appearance of correctness. If one accepts the supposed succession an episcopate ordained and instituted by God, consequently, one also accepts the primacy of Peter and his supposed successor, the pope of Rome along with it.

In truth, our passage (Tit 1:5) contains only the report of a historical fact. What one otherwise reads into it, he has arbitrarily placed inside it. However, that this passage also, like all Scripture, is given from God, serves also the wholesome doctrine and admonition, goes without saying for every Bible believing Christian. We learn from this first of all, how seriously the apostle was concerned that the congregations of his time would be cared for by pastors after the heart of God. It is written as an example for us. The church of all times should care and make a constant effort, according to God's will, for the equipping of faithful servants of the Word, so that the entire world may be filled with pious servants of the church, who proclaim the world of God purely. Indeed the church should take care so that possibly each congregation might support to its own edification a necessary number of bishops.

Also in such places, where the elders are not expressly named, one recognizes their office in the admonitions, which were given for their sake to the congregations. So in Galatians 6:6 when the readers are reminded of their duty, to share with such, from whom they received instruction in the Word of God, all kinds of good things, Paul impresses an admonishment, which is reiterated through the added threats of Galatians 6:7ff. It is the same case with 1 Thessalonians 5:12,13. And in agreement with this also are the words of the letter to the Hebrews, where chapter 13:7,17, the leader (ἐγούμενοι, Luther did not quite translate this correctly as "*Lehrer*") are commended to the congregations as such, those they own thankful remembrance, willing obedience and respect. Likewise among the other apostles an intentional mentioning of this office is not missing. Peter calls himself in his first epistle, 1 Peter 5:1 the "fellow elder," where he reminds some of the elders

with the same words as Paul in Acts 20 of their duty and he commands the younger men to be submissive to them. James invites his readers in James 5:14, when they are sick to call on the elders of the congregation, so they can pray for them and anoint them with oil, so that the Lord will hear the prayer of faith and forgive the sins of the sick. Among the letters of John at least the third instance of such a position in the congregation is found, as it could be understood only about the elders.

With such a deep, far-reaching, and full meaning of the office of elder, the situation is quite conspicuous, that about its origin none or only an occasional mention is made. From this it is evident, that this member of the apostolic church order can not have been caused by *an explicit and formal prescription* of God. The view directs itself however, unwillingly on the almost universal agreement, which is observed between the office of elder of the Old Testament and New Testament. Such a fact would count in any other historical study as sufficient proof for a causal relation, of which prevails between the older and newer appearance of the office. Also the exegesis has since then and seemingly everywhere allowed that the office of elder in the New Testament is modeled after the office of the synagogue elder.

The first instance of an Old Testament elder is commonly acknowledged in the Mosaic times. They are mentioned in Exodus 3:16 and 4:29 as those, with whom Moses discussed the affairs of the Exodus. With them accompanying, he entered before Pharaoh (Exodus 3:18). And they also appear elsewhere during ceremonial occasions on behalf of the people before the Lord (Exodus 17:5,6; 18:12 et.) What actually in the previous cases was really an *adiaphora* between the natural right of the higher elders and a real office, that case was made in Exodus 18:13ff and Numbers 11:16, 24 on the council of Jethro and the command of God into an explicit office. The elders had the authority of these divine ordinances both in judging the affairs of entire people as well as in their individual tribes and towns in duty, as law-giver, to be judge, representative of the people, advisor to the king and later as leaders of the people of Israel. They were to be a spiritual and temporal group, for in general spiritual and secular things were not divided in the theocracy of Israel.

In this form the office of elder belongs until the period of the New Testament inclusive of everything from the life of the people to the individual congregations. Also the synagogues stood under their direction. Above each synagogue a group of elders was appointed, to whom belonged

the duty to lead the congregation, to examine all controversies that arise, to impose punishment and to expel individuals out of the fellowship (Luke 7:3; Matthew 10:17). In worship they lead the prayers and the readings. However, they were not entitled the responsibility of teaching in the synagogue or in the temple. That right, namely to present a commentary on the word under consideration, could be granted by the synagogue leader (*Vorstand*) to each participant in the worship or to guests (Acts 13:15). At the top of the synagogue and along with that at the top of the council of elders stood the synagogue ruler (*Schuloberste*, ἀρχισυνάγωγος) (Luke 8:41, 49; 13:14) a name, which at times was used for all the members of the synagogue leaders (Acts 13:15).

The precise portrayal of a Jewish congregational structure corresponded most likely with the structure of the heathen municipality, as they partly received it under the rule of Roman law, partly as it developed. The *ordo decorionum*, that is, the magistrates of the congregation, led the oversight of the actual affairs of the congregation in contrast to the affairs of the state, whose oversight lay in the hands of the officers of the state. So they are found not only in the middle-class congregations of Asia Minor and within the Roman dominion at the time of the apostle, but also in earlier times already in Greece, where they bore the name “overseer” (ἐπίσκοποι). At the head of the municipal leaders stood, after the fashion of the Roman consulate, the *duumwiri*.

If one has the observed facts in mind, then there can be no underlying doubt that the Christian office of elder has been fitted or modeled after the outward form of the Old Testament version, partly also in accordance to the heathen nations. The presbyter was originally nothing more than the chairman of the congregation, its special, exclusive office, much less a branch of the apostolate, than an extension of the diaconate, for congregational service, administration, and representation in general. (Compare 1 Timothy 3:13). The office for administering the means of grace does not seem to be tied *from the beginning* to the position of the elder. For the preaching of the Word besides the apostles and presbyters above all, prophets, evangelists, teachers, those who speak in tongues, and those who interpret tongues, etc., were active. Baptism was carried out by non-presbyters and bread was broken, “here and there in houses.” It was only natural that in the corresponding degree the church felt need, it always felt more compelled to define [the roles of offices] for itself more precisely, because of the essential meaning of the means of grace for its life. The church had to define not only the oversight of the administration of itself, but also to claim especially for the office of chairman in an orderly fashion the congregational administration on its

behalf. The gradual entrance of the presbyter, who functioned in administrative way in ecclesiastical affairs, in place of the free working of charismatic gifts concerning the actual preaching office [*Predigtamt*] was according to the clearest and most certain witnesses of the New Testament not the result of *apostolic statutes of ceremonial laws*, but it was the natural development of *internal needs*.

4. It would be concluding too much, if we wanted to follow the further historical development of the office of the presbyter into the post-apostolic age. We mention only the following. The presbyters were the leaders of the congregation under the leadership of the bishop, whose advice was called for by Cyprian. They had the authority for carrying out of the so-called priestly functions, which included: baptizing, the offering of the Eucharist, blessing and absolving. With time as the original congregations ever expanded so also would a division of the needs. Some established their own parishes in the countryside *parochiae rurales* and appointed over them individual presbyters, who performed in the name of the bishop of the mother church the office of pastoral shepherd [*Seelsorgamt*]. These men were only independently appointed members of a college of presbyters. As later one in the city individual half independent congregations were built and were done under such a presbyter. In this arrangement, congregations in accordance with their needs were gradually led to be entirely independent. They had to be led by their own public ministers with accountability to the congregations themselves. Thus this became the origin of the later office of pastor [*Pfarramt*], that in its historical developed *form* finally became also transplanted into the Lutheran church of America.

One or even most congregations call usually a parish minister or pastor, to whom they hand over the collective functions of the preaching office [*Predigtamt*] on behalf of their collective ministry [*Gemeinschaftsamt*]. While among our free churches there is missing not only the typical hierarchy found in the state church among their accredited ministerium, but also, with a few exceptions of us Germans who still “have the German blood stuck in them,” none of the office titles. We know in this country neither superintendents, nor deans, nor metropolitans, nor the lord archdeacon, nor the deacon, nor the subdeacon and whatever other titles there are. Besides this much has changed among us in the outward order of the parish pastor. Not only do the congregations have a definite and sometimes deciding word in matters pertaining to the office of

public ministry [Amt], but also the office of the lay elders plays a significantly greater important role in our congregations compared to the state church. Our congregations have allocated to the school teachers for the most part an entirely independent position in the flock of Christ's lambs under their oversight. If also most of the control of the school is handed over to the pastor, then the congregation would thus have the right and freedom, to arrange these things and others.

The congregation in St. Louis of Walther's time offers a particularly instructive example of evangelical freedom in the way it distributes the responsibilities of the pastoral office. This "First German Evangelical Lutheran Congregation of the U.A.C." was divided into four "Districts" from which eventually every one formed an independent congregation under its own independent pastor. Only in certain matters were these four congregations a unified body, for example the official calling of the circuit pastors [*Distriktspastoren*], the declaration of excommunication, and other similar things passed to. The "pastor" of the collective congregation was the advisor of the four "pastors." He had the leadership in the gathering formed out of the leaders of the district congregations, the "joint church council" [*Gesamtvorstandes*] and likewise in the "general meetings" [*Generalversammlungen*], that is, the congregational meetings of the voting members of the unified congregations. On top of this, he had the responsibility from time to time to preach in one of the four congregations. Besides this he was in the district congregation, which he and his family belonged to, while according his entire position *praecipuum membrum ecclesiae* (chief member of the church), still only a voting member like the others.

Whether or not this order was practical is a matter of its own. However as much that followed from this, still the blessed Dr. Walther considered the outward organization of the office of public ministry as adiaphora. And thus we too consider in this issue, that each congregation can and ought to establish the functions of its congregational offices [*Gemeindeamt*], everything that corresponds to the needs and affairs *outward* organization, in short, everything that belongs to "form" in Christian freedom. Only they must take care according to God's will, that under the aid and leadership of the Holy Spirit the Word of God works and grows, will all joy, as is fitting, is preached and Christian congregation is made better through it. That only Christ be preached!—this Word of the apostles applies here. The manner and way that should happen, however, in this form or that, God hands over by grace to his dear congregation, "which stands ready in fear of him."

5. However, doesn't this view of the origination and development of the office of the pastor stand in biting contradiction to Acts 20:28?¹ The Holy Spirit, so some argue, has appointed the presbyters in Ephesus as bishops, thus clothing them *in the office that has been divinely established*. The Holy Spirit appoints the presbyters or bishops; thus the appointment of presbyters must really be a new divine law and the exercising of this law must be effective through the Holy Spirit. We respond: this exegesis is certainly twisted. If the apostle in his encouraging address to the appointed presbyters says, that the Holy Spirit has appointed them to be bishops, it does not follow that this is the establishing of an office by an explicit command of the Lord. It remains much more the reality here that nothing is reported to us concerning an outward institution of the office of presbyter in the Scriptures. However, it is the case that the Holy Spirit, whose ministry should be carried out in the congregation and by the congregation. He is the one, who gives the public ministry and makes the person capable of carrying out that ministry. And finally, he is the one who also works it out, that the congregation recognizes in those people who are gifted for the orderly placing of their existing gifts into appointed offices of public ministry. Whoever is always gifted for the office of public ministry and has been called by the congregation to the appointed carrying out of congregational needs in the proper and orderly way, he can and must be regarded as appointed by the Holy Spirit and look on himself that way. Concerning the formal institution of a particular office, that endures as people come and go, the apostle says nothing.

We have a similarly special case with Ephesians 4:11. It says here: "Christ has given some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers," that does not indicate a prescribed order and instruction of Christ, but the distribution of gifts, which he has given out to his church for its edification. It is obviously a grave misunderstanding in this passage, if one accepts that Christ had given the church apostles, evangelists, pastors, and teachers forever and had left behind a command here to remember such. The Lord has not given here a command, which consequently means those who bear office in the church *should always* possess these specific offices, but what he has given and continually gives is gifts and those who possess those gifts. The church needs them, sometimes temporarily, sometimes permanently, in

¹ Luke records the meeting of elders (πρεσβύτεροι) with Paul in Acts 20, where he now says the Holy Spirit has made them "overseers" (ἐν ᾧ ὑμᾶς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἔθετο ἐπισκόπους)

order to carry out her functions in the right way and so that her public ministers can possess office in an orderly fashion.

Finally, as far as 1 Corinthians 12:28-31 is concerned, one could perhaps want to think here for the sake of ἔθετο, rather of a law-given ordinance of God. But the context clearly shows that among the established works of God, through which there are in the church apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle workers, those with gifts of healing, those who help others, those capable of administration and various kinds of speaking in tongues. Nothing other than the distribution of charismatic gifts can be understood, with which he has given as much diversity of gifts as the diversity of those who serve. It is clear from as many of those who had been led to take up the office who did not hold at all to the concept of their office. There were so few who ever had been given a special permanent office as prophet or evangelist in the church to carry out an “office” to do miracles, to heal the sick, to speak with tongues, etc., although these functions were carried out for the common good in the apostolic age. And fewer still were those who had received with the charismatic gifts the inner divine call and with it the right along with them, who could also be described as “appointed by God.” Thus the discussion is speaking here not everywhere about lasting actual offices in the church, but only about specific functions or duties or especially gifted people.

III. How should we judge according to God’s Word and the confession of our church the teaching that the pastoral office [*Pfarramt*] is a lasting and directly appointed prescription of God outside of the priesthood of believers?

To this third question we give the following answer: *Such a teaching not only has no basis in the holy Scriptures, but it is also directly contradictory to the Scriptures and therefore also the confessions. It is thus not only an ἄγραφον teaching, but also an ἀντιγραφον teaching.*

1. That which was created by God already in paradise the “ministry of the new covenant” is none other than that, of which the New Testament declares by Christ. Furthermore, God appointed the Christians as bearers of this work and therefore his entire church and every individual congregation as well. This fundamental teaching we have already shown in the first part of our handling of this issue from God’s Word. We now direct the attention of our reader to but

a few witnesses from Scripture, which prove and form the foundation of what we have already explained more precisely.

The passages we have in mind are 2 Corinthians 3:6ff., 4:1 and 5:18ff. For in these places the Apostle speaks about the “ministry of the new covenant,” the “ministry of the Spirit,” and the “ministry of reconciliation.” Paul describes with these expressions certainly first his apostolic office, but not in the sense of an enduring, propagating office but a divine institution. He has in mind here rather, the definite function of preaching the Gospel for this New Testament, not in the literal, but spiritual sense: no condemnation, but reconciliation which serves not to stop but to remain. God has bestowed this preaching of the Gospel to the ability and competence of all Christians. In the last mentioned passage, 2 Corinthians 5:18ff, the Apostle writes, “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation (τὴν διακονίαν τῆς καταλλαγῆς): that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.”

Where he connects with “and” can be scarcely no chance that the following “us” (ἡμῖν) in verse 18 wanted to take on a different subject than the previous “us” (ἡμᾶς). It seems harsh in the highest degree to think that the Apostle had thought only about his fellow apostles with the one “us” and with the other “us” however, all believers. Rather, it seems obvious that the Apostle thought of both groups among all believers. In fact it is so, that on the one hand both are objects of the reconciliation since they belong to the world, so also on the other hand all have been called to this ministry of reconciliation. The words, “he gave us the ministry of reconciliation” contain the words, “And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.” However little we ought to think of a particular enduring, self-propagating divine institution in the expression, “the word of reconciliation,” we ought to think just as little in the expression, “the office, that preaches reconciliation.” We can imagine the Apostle to speak as he does, when he maintains the office of preaching the Gospel as something, to which he himself was certainly called as apostle in a special way. However, on the other hand what his call is still none the less the common responsibility and call of every Christian.

Therefore, neither from the explained passages nor from the rest of Scripture can it be shown that the office, that which preaches reconciliation, ought to be identified from outset or in its quintessential nature with the pastoral office [*Pfarramt*]. Naturally we are not denying that the pastoral office, namely that of minister, which is carried out according to God's will by pastors in their congregations, is nothing other than the minister of the new covenant ordained by God, or similar words the *ministerium verbi et sacramentorum*. The Apostle writes in Colossians 1:25ff, that he had become the servant of the congregation, "of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God (κατὰ τὴν οἰκονομίαν τοῦ θεοῦ) that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints."

Every preacher of the gospel who is called today indirectly [through the church] must and needs to express the same idea about himself and his office. He also has become a servant of the congregation, which called him. Even the household office of God (*Haushalteramt Gottes*) has been handed over to him through the calling of his congregation, which has given him also the goal that he should richly preach the Word of God, namely the gospel, according to God's will and plan. What we reject in this matter as contrary to Scripture is the teaching that God has bound this divine office of the gospel ministry [*Predigtamt*] originally and directly to an office of public ministry in his church [*Kirchenamt*] established by him. We reject the teaching that the congregation hands this one office over to specific individuals through a valid and legitimate call, but that *also from the beginning* this office continues independently from the spiritual priesthood of all believers and that it exists as a divine institution and is propagated through a valid ordination. Such a teaching of the public ministry, by its essence, cannot be distinguished from that of the papacy. If from these thoughts the Roman church is an institution for representing Christ on earth in an authorized, outwardly appointed institution, then entirely from these thoughts it rules with a special privilege coming down from above. It can think of nothing else than the continuing reality that the Lord who is ascended in to heaven is here on earth, just like a baron who cannot be everywhere at the same time rules through a representative whom he appoints on his behalf as an authorized agent. For this reason the Roman church considers it necessary that the Lord must have an appointed representative for the continuing and executing of his work of redemption.

It suddenly seems clear that the doctrine of the public ministry in Romanizing Protestantism is essentially the same thing, but to a far worse extent. It attributes to individual pastors or preachers the same extent of qualifications and rights to establish “divinely appointed” rituals, which the Roman church allotted to its priests deliberately but only in the dependence upon the unified structure of church hierarchy. If there also was in our church such a position, which held the distinction as the divine institution and as possessor of a *special* divine right, this position would have to be acknowledged as a divine license for the carrying out of the public ministry [*Lehramt*]. And in this way every Protestant congregation would have indisputably a divinely appointed doctrinal authority, a pope in their midst. The priesthood of all believers would then be finished once and for all. It would then only exist in name, but not in practice or in reality.

2. As the Romanizing teaching of public ministry contradicts the Scriptures, so it also contradicts the confessions. We lay our fingers here on more important parts of our symbols, which clearly show that the Lutheran church regards and confesses the scriptural doctrine of the holy office of preaching [*Predigtamt*]. In Article 5 of the Augsburg Confession our church confesses:

To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel. It teaches that we have a gracious God, not through our merit but through Christ’s merit, when we so believe.

Condemned are the Anabaptists and others who teach that we obtain the Holy Spirit without the external word of the gospel through our own preparation, thoughts, and works.²

While here the divine institution of the office of preaching [*Predigtamt*] is preserved, at the same time it is expressed how and in what way God has appointed this office. Simply put that he has

² Kolb, Robert and Timothy Wengert, Eds. *The Book of Concord*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000. The original German reads: *Solchen Glauben zu erlangen, hat Gott das **Predigtamt eingesetzt, Evangelium und Sakramente** gegeben, dadurch er, als durch Mittel, den Heiligen Geist gibt, welcher den Glauben, wo und wann er will, in denen, so das Evangelium hören, wirkt, welches da lehrt, daß wir durch Christus’ Verdienst, nicht durch unser Verdienst, einen gnädigen Gott haben, so wir solches glauben. Und werden verdammt die Wiedertäufer und andere, so lehren, daß leibliche Wort des Evangelii den Heiligen Geist durch eigene Bereitung, Gedanken und Werke erlangen.*

given “the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, [etc.]” *While God has given the means of grace, he has also divinely appointed the office of their administration and usage.* This office exists everywhere and in effectiveness, where there also exists an administration and a use of the means of grace in the correct way. And the Anabaptists are not condemned because they refuse, by restricting the right to administer the means of grace to a particular condition in Christianity, but because they have in general despised the living Word of the gospel and want to obtain the Holy Spirit without this living Word.

What is understood in Article 5 under the divinely instituted office of preaching emerges even clearer in the Latin text:

Ut hanc fidem consequamur, institutum est ministerium docendi evangelii et porrigendi sacramenta. Nam per Verbum et sacramenta tamquam per instrumenta donator Spiritus Sanctus, qui fidem efficit ubi et quando visum est Deo, in iis, qui audiunt evangelium, scilicet quod Deus non propter nostra merita, sed propter Christum iustificet hos, qui credunt, se propter Christum in gratiam recipi, [Gal 3].

*Damnant Anabaptistas et alios, qui sentiunt Spiritum Sanctum contingere sine verbo externo hominibus per ipsorum praeperatione et opera.*³

The connection that stands between the “*institutum est ministerium,*” etc. [the ministry was instituted] and the following “*Nam per verba et sacramenta,*” [For through the word and the sacraments] etc. clearly shows that under the “*ministerium docendi evangelii et porrigendi sacramenta*” [the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments] nothing else should be understood here beyond that which the words first and foremost mean, namely the divinely instituted service [*Dienst*], the divinely instituted function [*Funktion*] of preaching the Word and administering the sacraments. Obviously this service can not hang in air, rather, there must exist people, who according to God’s will carry it out. But who these people are, this is not our issue here, and according to the concept of the Augsburg Confession cannot be the issue.

³ Translated from *The Book of Concord*: So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and the sacraments as through the Holy Spirit is given, who effects faith where and when it pleases God in those who hear the gospel, that is to say, in those who hear that God, not on account of our own merits but on account of Christ, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace on account of Christ. Galatians 3[14b]: “So that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” They condemn the Anabaptists and others who think that the Holy Spirit comes to human beings without the external Word through their own preparations and works.

A quick glance on the train of thought of the Augsburg Confession should convince everyone. After it has handled in the first four articles the order concerning God, concerning original sin, concerning the Son of God, concerning justification it naturally shows next in Article 5 through which means God works the justifying faith, namely through Word and sacrament. Then it takes the theme up again, while it speaks in Article 6 concerning the fruit of justification, the new obedience; in Articles 7 and 8 concerning the church as the communion of the justified and the marks of the church; in Article 9 and 10 specifically concerning the sacraments; in Article 11 concerning confession and in Article 12 concerning repentance; then in Article 13 concerning the use of the sacraments.

Now finally, after it has dealt with the primary articles of faith, of which it confesses, the Augsburg Confession comes to Article 14 under the title “Concerning Church Government” [*Vom Kirchenregiment, De ordine ecclesiastico*], to address the office of preaching [*Predigtamt*] in the narrow sense with the words: “Concerning church government it is taught that no one should publicly teach, preach, or administer the sacraments without a proper call.”⁴ Or in Latin: “*De ordine ecclesiastico docent, quod nemo debeat in ecclesia publice docere aut sacramenta administrare nisi rite vocatus.*”⁵ Accordingly church government belongs to those in the church—naturally *iure divino*—by God’s valid, divine order, that the means of grace in the church or congregation should be *publicly* distributed only by those who have been *properly* called to do it.

Consequently, the public office of preaching and administering depends on the *ministerium docendi evangelii et porrigendi sacramenta* [the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments] instituted by God, namely properly handled in the hands of properly called public ministers [*Amtsträger*]. But in Article 5 does not go so far as to say, the administration of the means of grace is restricted alone to these ministers or to any given position prescribed *in law* by God with special privileges. Rather the confession states that wherever and from whomever the gospel and sacraments according to Christ’s institution are offered, the Holy Spirit works faith through these means where and when he wills. If he would like it to be from a properly called preacher of the Gospel, one who teaches the gospel and distributes the sacraments or from a

⁴ *The Book of Concord*. The original reads: *Vom Kirchenregiment wird gelehret, daß niemand in der Kirche öffentlich lehren oder predigen, oder Sakrament reichen soll ohne ordentlichen Beruf.*

⁵ Translated from *The Book of Concord*: “Concerning church order they teach that no one should teach publicly in the church or administer the sacraments unless properly called.”

simple Christian, it is always and everywhere the working of the means of grace itself, instituted by God, which the Holy Spirit gives. Incidentally, in Article 14 the “*docere aut sacramenta administrare*” [teach or administer the sacraments], is not made dependent upon the “*rite vocatum esse*” [be properly called], on the contrary only the “*in ecclesia publice docere aut sacramenta administrare*” [publicly teach or administer the sacraments in the church]. Thus, the doctrine that the office of the gospel and the sacraments be identified from the outset and quintessentially as the office of pastor [*Pfarramt*], contradicts directly the foundational confession of our church.

The Romanizing Lutherans do not consider what it would lead to if Article 5 spoke not about the service of *administering* the means of grace in general, but about a prescribed *order of servants*, that it would be established “*ut hanc fidem consequamur*” [in order that we may obtain this faith]. In this way the office of preaching itself would be made into a means of grace. Höfling correctly writes, “If you create for the living Word of the gospel some command and assert by *principles of the law* that certain privileged bearers should carry this gospel, then you establish in these people a special vocation and a divine position of privilege as a *new means of grace*. And then it becomes evident that this position does not appear so much dependant upon Word and sacrament, as these two means of grace rather, appear in view of their effectiveness to depend upon the man. You cannot escape from this logical extension in spite of every examining of the thoughts. Rather, you end up stuck deeper in them if you want to help yourself out. This is the case when one says, ‘The means of grace are Word and sacrament, given through the office of public ministry. Christ is presented in Word and sacrament through the office in his church, or the office is to the means of grace, the Word and the sacraments, as the mouth is to speech.’ All of this cannot only then establish the idea of *a third means of grace beside and above Word and sacrament*. If the office of public ministry, according to our understanding of the Augsburg Confession, is recognized as one that is *divinely established—directly in and with the means of grace—* therefore, it truly exists everywhere a properly instituted use of Word and sacrament occurs. It is necessary, however, that this above mentioned idea must prove itself, when the opposing viewpoint of the office of administering the means of grace is accepted especially as *an institution and order established by God’s law* for all believers, existing alongside the divine givens of Word and sacrament. Obviously God has given according to this opposing viewpoint not merely the gospel and sacraments, as the only means through which he works salvation. On the contrary, the Spirit

gives at the same time also a divine order of prophets and priests *through whom alone* each means of grace can and should be *truly effective* for establishing fellowship with believers. We can find in looking at this really the entire basis for the Catholic viewpoint, much less however, something congruent with protestant teachings and the concept of salvation or of the church (227).”

The actual *locus classicus* for the Lutheran teaching of the public ministry [Amtslehre] is found in the first appendix to the Smalcald Articles. Müller argues: “In addition to this, it is necessary to acknowledge that the keys do not belong to the person of one particular man, but to the church, as many most clear and firm arguments testify. For Christ speaking concerning the keys in Matthew 18:19 adds: ‘If two or three agree on earth...’ Therefore he grants the keys principally and immediately to the church, and for the same reason the church has primary possession of the right to call ministers. For just as *the promise of the gospel belongs certainly and immediately to the entire church*, because the keys are nothing else than the office whereby this promise is communicated to every one who desires it, just as it is actually manifest that the church has the power to ordain ministers of the church. And Christ speaks in these words: ‘Whatever you bind...’ and indicates to whom he has given the keys, *namely to the church*, ‘Wherever two or three gather together in my name...’ Likewise Christ gives supreme and final jurisdiction to the church, when he says: ‘Tell it to the church.’⁶

“Thus we must all confess, that the church is not built by the power of one man, but it is built on the gospel ministry which brought the confession Peter gave: Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Therefore he speaks this confession as a servant of the gospel ministry, when he speaks this confession and should live according to the teachings it contains within: on this rock, that on *this preaching and office of preaching* [Predigtamt]. Now we see that the preaching office is tied to *no specific place or person like it was bound in the law to the office of the Levites*. Rather it is distributed throughout the entire world and is in the place, where God gives his gifts: apostles, prophets, pastors and teachers, etc. *The person does nothing to the Word or the gospel ministry, commanded by Christ. It preaches, it teaches where it wills*, where hearts are who believe it and hold onto it. There it is experienced, as hearts hear and believe it (333).”

⁶ Müller is quoting *Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope*, paragraph 24 of the German text.

The only possible sense of this tremendously important point is clearly lying in our hands. It has to do with the office of the keys. It has to do with the divinely instituted offices for administering the means of grace. This sense says that it is God's divine institution through Christ that counts as *principaliter et immediate* [first and without mediation]. It does not have to do with particular individuals, who carry out the office in their particular callings for the sake of the communion of believers, but rather it has to do with the *entire church*. The church or congregation has, therefore, the *principaliter ius vocationis* [primary right for calling]. Evidently for this reason, the church or congregation can carry out equally its congregational right and its responsibility in no other way as through called and committed public servants. Thus, the issue here is nothing other than the right of the entire church over against a special pastoral position. Through the words of the confession, "Thus, he grants the power of the keys principally and without mediation to the church," pastors are denoted irrevocably as secondary and indirect holders of the office.⁷ If one is allowed to use and carry out such a use of the keys, only then can he have rights and responsibilities to carry out or use the keys, but in a way that is *principaliter et immediate* [first and without mediation].

Summary: It is crystal clear that our confession shows the gospel ministry belongs to the entire church. First we proved that by what Christ said to Peter, to all the apostles. Then we have shown that what belonged to all apostles was not a special divine command in their particular office or calling in the body of Christianity, but it belongs to the entire church.

It is very important to the interpretation of the Lutheran/confessional teaching of the doctrine of public ministry to also consider the following point from the second appendix to the Smalcald Articles: "Pertinent here are the words of Christ that assert that the keys were given to the church, not just to particular persons: "For where two or three are gathered in my name..." (Mt 18:20). Finally this is also confirmed by Peter's declaration: "You...are a royal priesthood." *These words apply to the true church, which since it alone possesses the priesthood, certainly has the right of choosing and ordaining ministers.*⁸"

To these words of the confessions Walther remarks, "It is of first importance that the keys were originally given to the entire church, that is to the believers, whether it was two or three (but

⁷ The citation from the *Book of Concord* translation of *Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope*, paragraph 24. It is from the original Latin rather than the previous German: *tribuit igitur principaliter claves ecclesiae et immediate*

⁸ *The Book of Concord; Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope*, paragraph 68ff.

not only the *one* pope, likewise “not just to particular persons,” likewise also not just to pastors!)... Finally, therefore, it is especially important that the call of the pastor was promised to the true church of the believers, since according to 1 Peter 2:9 they alone, namely the congregation of believers, possess the priesthood. The key is this: while everyone possesses the priesthood himself, then naturally everyone single individual can call for himself a servant or a public minister, which carries out those priestly acts. For example the Levitical priests could choose someone out of them to do the priestly acts. This point is so important, because it clearly shows that the preaching office [*Predigtamt*] is not a *specifically different position* from the priesthood of Christians, rather only a God-pleasing order under those who are *originally* equals.”

A similarly important point of the confessions is what immediately preceded: “Where the church exists, there also is the right to administer the gospel. Therefore, it is necessary for the church to retain the right to call, choose, and ordain ministers.”⁹ Also to these words of the confessions we add Walther’s explanation: “The key here is this: if everyone has something to do, then they naturally can also ask other people to do it. Now then, the church has the command to preach, thus, it naturally must also have the power to ask people to do this. Also out of this it is crystal clear that our church teaches that the entire church originally possesses the gospel ministry and to this it also has the power to allow through a particular person called from among them to be pastor, to publicly administer the gospel. It is just like the housewife, who has the power herself over her house; she also has the power obviously to employ servants and maids for the tasks. Or just like a free people, who are all united under one government, have the power to elect and install their public officials.”

3. If there was room, we could add a great number of quotes to the former number of points that already have been made, especially showing that Luther in his private letters and writings taught the same doctrine of the preaching office as the Lutheran church teaches in its public confessions. From the beginning of his course towards reformation Luther recognized, confessed and defended the scriptural principles in the coming debate. Already in the year 1519 in his debate with Dr. Eck concerning the power of the pope, Luther struck the right chord with the

⁹ *ibid.* paragraph 67.

words, “Where faith is, there also is the church. Where the church is, there also is the bride of Christ. Where the bride of Christ is, there is everything, what belongs to the bridegroom. In this way faith possesses everything which comes from faith: the keys, the sacrament, power and everything else.” And this bright and clear tone rings anew in the Scriptures in ever new combinations and harmonies. Let us permit ourselves to examine only two examples from his last years of life, which clearly show that he has remained faithful in his teaching about church and ministry up to his blessed end.

In his interpretation of Psalm 110 from the year 1539 Luther writes, “Look, in this way one must separate the preaching office [*Predigtamt*] or office of ministry [*Dienstamt*] from the priesthood of all baptized believers. For such an office is nothing more than *a public service, when someone is commanded by the entire congregation, who are altogether priests at the same time*. But you ask, then where does the priesthood of Christians exist? Or where are their priestly works? Answer: teaching, giving offerings, and praying. But you must know that Christ is the one high priest, whose priestly office we must possess before, it does any good for us, that he gives any of us our own such priestly works to do... In this way we have become Christians through this priest and his priestly office and are absorbed in baptism through faith in him. We therefore receive also the authority and power to teach the Word which we have received from him and to confess before all people, each according to his vocation and position. Although we are not all in the public ministry and call, each Christian still *may, even should teach, instruct, admonish, encourage or chastise his neighbor through God’s Word when and wherever he needs to do so*. Thus each Christian possesses and uses such priestly works. But beyond the scope of the universal gospel ministry comes the doctrine of the public [gospel ministry], to which belong pastors and preachers. For in the congregation they cannot all wait for the minister, but it is also not proper for everyone to baptize in his own house and distribute the sacrament. For this reason you have to choose and order a few for it who are in this way trained to preach and skilled for this work in the Scriptures, who are also able to carryout and defend the preaching office. Likewise they take care of handling the sacraments on behalf of the common good so that you may know who has been baptized and that everything else happens in an orderly way. Otherwise, if everyone preached to his neighbor or did everything without any order, the church would be slow to become a church or have structure.

However, the priesthood does not exist for itself, but *it is a public office for all the priests, namely for all Christians*” (St. Louis, ed. pg 1038, 1040).

In his sermon for the dedication of the Castle Church in Torgau in 1544 Luther said, “But we are in the kingdom of Christ. Thus we are not bound to a class or place, so that we have to have only one kind of people in a particular place or a particular class of people or any other kind of select person. *Rather we are all priests, so that we all should proclaim the Word of God at all times and in all places.* We are also priests so that out of all kinds of people, races and social classes some might be specially called to the preaching office, who have the grace and mind to teach the Scriptures to others. Thus we are also lords of the Sabbath with Christ and through Christianity, etc... For when we come together as a congregation, what I preach is not my word or my doing, but happens for your sakes and for the sake of the entire church. In either case, one person must be the one who speaks the Word and guides by the command and assent by the others, so that by doing this, they all hear the preaching, they all confess to those words, and then also teach others. When a child is baptized, it is not the pastor alone who does it, but also the sponsors as witnesses, and really the entire church. For baptism, like the words of Christ himself, belongs to all Christians. It is the same with praying, singing, and meditating and everything in between—here there is nothing that one has or does for himself alone, but what each one has that also belongs to the others” (St. Louis XII, pg 1964, 1972).

Out of these and all other testimonies, in which Luther dealt chiefly with the teaching of the holy office of public ministry [*Predigtamt*], the following [reality] emerges unchallenged. *At no time did the reformer confuse or mix the priesthood of all believers of Christians with the public ministry [gemeinen Amte] of the church.* Rather he constantly repeats what he wrote already in 1521 in his answer to Emser. “You deny so much, saying that I have made all lay people into bishops, priests and clergy, that they may also carry out the public ministry without a call. Hold your tongue if you are so pious, that I wrote this: ‘No one should wriggle his own way in [to carrying out acts of the public ministry] without a call, except in the direst of need.’”

On the other hand he has also never made a distinction between the priesthood of all believers and the particular church offices, as some wanted, who would have liked to have seen a partition of ceremonial law established between them. The certainty and steadfastness in his reformation view is that Christ, “does not have two kinds of bodies—a spiritual and a worldly.” He

goes on to say that, “the Christian people is not divided, and two kinds of priests do not exist within it,” that there is, “nothing other than an office [*Amt*] to preach the Word of God, common to all Christians.” Or he also says, “the one, true, genuine preaching office [*Predigtamt*], just like the priesthood and offerings, belongs to all Christians,” and, “Baptism like the word of Christ himself, are the common property of all Christians.” Finally, “All Christians have the same power in the Word of God and in each of the sacraments.”

We can only say concerning the public ministry in direct opposition to the priesthood of all believers only so far as Luther’s attitude just as Luther said, “There must be a public ministry, of which the public ministers belong to all Christians, established for the sake of us all.” Only in so far as a particular or typical ministry is necessary on the basis of the priesthood of all believers and in their own interests according to holy and gracious will of God, can or should it be distinguished from the priesthood of all believers. If the spiritual office from the beginning would belong only to those who have been called in a outward, legal way for carrying out the work, then we could no longer say with Luther, “The Christian people is not divided, and two kinds of priests do not exist within it.” Then there would exist two different priesthoods: one full the other emptied; one active the other passive; one the priesthood of pastors, which alone is entitled to the divine public ministry and a position of character, and a priesthood of the laity, that is only allowed to function in connection with the official public ministry and is dependent upon it.

So here we summarize, what we also reject and oppose as a false doctrine running directly counter to God’s Word and Luther’s teaching. Whoever explains a particular form of the office of the keys as one given to the entire church, or whoever explains the holy preaching office [*Predigtamt*] as a special divine foundation in the sense that it is an established ordinance teaches, whether he wants to know it or not, that the Word of God teaches this error in respect to others.

IV. To what extent is the pastoral office [*Pfarramt*] and every other congregational office [*Gemeinschaftsamt*] of the church a holy, divine order and foundation? For the ease of our readers, we don't make very high demands of them, we confine our answer to this last question this time in the following summarized explanation.

1. The right of every congregation of Christians is one bestowed upon it by the Lord of the church himself as a divine right. The congregation carries out its divine right above all through calling of congregational ministers. In this way they are the people, whom the congregation called to be holy servants and handed over to them their congregation's office [*Gemeinschaftsamt*] in a valid, legitimate way—pastors, school teachers, chairman, professor, etc. They have been appointed, made and sent as overseers of the flock of Christ through the divinely authorized call of the congregation from the Holy Spirit himself (Acts 20:28). And as such, they ought to be regarded as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God (1 Co 4:1). The divine right of the congregation to call guarantees each pastor and every other called servant of the congregation the divine origin of the office handed over to him by the congregation.

2. Just as the congregation has this divine right, it also has the divine responsibility to call and appoint servants of the church, who should administer the Word in whatever form as servants on behalf of the congregation. "In the congregation," writes Luther in his interpretation of Psalm 110, "they cannot all wait for the minister; they all ought not do everything among each other in disorder." So that everything happens in a fitting and orderly way (1 Cor 14:40), the calling and ordering of specific individuals for the purpose of carrying out the gospel ministry that belongs to all [*gemeinen Amtes*] is required. They must create "pastors and preachers", really the most competent and skilled to be called to such an office. And this order is not a human one, but a divine one, which has its basis in God himself and so has a claim of divine tradition, (1 Cor 14:33).

In opposition to this claim that is morally obligated the most disgraceful disorder and confusion would arise, if in the congregation everyone were allowed to do everything among one another without distinction and order. If only for the sake of divine order, it is the divine responsibility of a congregation to establish the public ministry in their midst. A servant of the

church called in accordance with order can be certain, as a result, that he stands on this basis in the divine order called by the congregation in a divine office.

3. However, not merely for this reason do we call every particular called office of the church a holy, divine foundation, not only because the divine law of order requires its establishment, but also because in spite of the essential equality of the members of the church there exists a difference between individuals in view of their natural and spiritual gifts. And this difference between spiritual gifts is the thing that makes the church into an organic body of the Lord, made up of many parts. In 1 Corinthians 12:4 the apostle writes, "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit." The variety of spiritual gifts which exists in spite of the unity of the Spirit should always assert itself according to God's will in the church. Luther speaks correctly, when he deals with the appointing of public ministers, only about those, who "have the grace and understanding of Scripture," or who, "are sent to preach and doing practice what is in the Scriptures, who are able to lead and to put the public ministry [*Lehramt*] into practice and to defend doctrine." Yes, he describes in his interpretation of Psalm 110 those, who "should be taken out of the masses of Christians, so that they might lead other, on the basis of Ephesians 4:11,12. Still more important to them, "God gives special gifts and skills to those, so that they might be useful to the public ministry." Stoeckhardt writes about Ephesians 4:11, "Also the regular pastors of the individual congregations, all Christian pastors are gifts of Christ. Their academic preparation for the ministry is not excluded. Those who have been educated and trained and are enabled and willing for service in the church, are called first for the church and then for the congregations, which have the right and command from God to call. The risen Christ is the one who makes these people willing. He works in them the decision to serve him in the church. He gives them his blessing in studies. He bestows upon the students a special measure of his Spirit to add to their natural abilities spiritual gifts. He opens the secrets of the kingdom of heaven to them. He makes them able to teach others (*didaktikoûç*). He calls them through the call of the congregation into their office and places them where he wants them. In this way Christ gives his church pastors and teachers. He stands at the side of those, whom he has given. He does not allow them out of his

hand. He equips them with the Spirit and with gifts and enthusiasm and makes them always capable and skillful to carry out the ministry of the New Testament.¹⁰

4. Finally however, the particular called office of the congregation is above all a divine foundation according to God's Word because as the office of administering and dispensing the divinely given means of grace it is essentially an office of serving Christ and overseeing God's secret things. It is an office of dealing with people in the name of God. Christ has given to accomplish this very goal not only apostles, prophets, and evangelists, but also pastors and teachers, "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up," (Ephesians 4:12). They have been given and approved for "the work" or, "the duty of serving," which is "the building up of the body of Christ," the church. Thus, this office exists even in teaching and preaching.

In this way we confess on the basis of complete testimony to the two theses in two parts from Walther's book about church and ministry, "*The preaching office or pastoral office is no human ordinance, but an office established by God himself.*" Likewise the third, "*The preaching office is no arbitrary office, but such an office, which has its establishment commanded to the church and in which the church is bound in an orderly way until the end of days.*" But we add as an amendment what Walther wrote in a different place, "*It is not a human order, that there are men in the church, men who are servants of grace educated and instructed, so that they might be able to carry out foremost the office to preach redemption. Your office is a holy, divine office—one side of this office is that Christ bound and established foremost with presenting the keys to the kingdom of heaven on earth...This same office is not only a divine foundation, but all its works have no other end goal, no other final purpose than to glorify the name of God and bring salvation to the lost world.*"¹¹

¹⁰ Stöckhardt, Georg. *Kommentar über den Brief and die Epheser*. St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1910. pg 198.

¹¹ Kähler p 246.: "See the explanation of these passages in Walther's *Luth. Brosamen*, p 346ff.