

The Divine Institution of Gospel Ministry

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Preface

Presenting an essay on the ministry at this time has its risks. Like a latecomer to a long and complicated conversation, the essayist may step on toes without realizing or intending it. He may naively use a turn of phrase which says more than he wants to say, at least in the minds of those who know books and articles he has never studied. He may laboriously reinvent the wheel, or he may take for granted points that deserve a closer look.

The conversation on the ministry is centuries old, and the amount of literature produced in the last one hundred fifty years alone is daunting. The ministry was a matter of keen interest among Lutherans in the nineteenth century.¹ Professional New Testament scholars took up the issue intensively in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth.² The early part of the century saw some intensive study of the issue within the Wisconsin Synod as well.³ Questions about the ministry continued to receive attention thereafter, but it seems that in recent years the study of the ministry has gone back into high gear. The ministry is a hot issue in many denominations, particularly among Lutherans, and the WELS shares in that surge of interest.

With such a topic, and such a history of discussion, I submit this essay to the correction of wiser heads, and I look forward to the improvements which you, esteemed brothers, may suggest.

Part I: Defining Issues and Terms

Gospel ministry

Apart from my addition of the word "divine," the title of this essay was suggested at the time I undertook the assignment. The last phrase strikes me as a little ambiguous. Does "gospel ministry" refer to "the ministry of the gospel," a phrase which even today, despite the recent vogue of "everyone a minister" slogans, most readily calls to mind the gospel-proclaiming work of specially called ministers (pastors, missionaries, and other called servants of the word)? Or is the absence of the definite article a deliberate

¹There is a valuable survey by Holsten Fagerberg, *Bekentnis, Kirche und Amt in der deutschen konfessionellen Theologie des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Uppsala: Lundequistska, 1952).

²Olof Linton surveys about fifty years of scholarship in *Das Problem der Urkirche in der neueren Forschung: eine kritische Darstellung* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1932).

³J. P. Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, ed. Leigh D. Jordahl (St. Cloud, MN: Sentinel Publ. Co. for the Protestant Conference, 1981), 230-239. The early decades of the Wisconsin Synod's seminary publication, *Theologische Quartalschrift*, contain numerous contributions on the subject. Some of these appear in translation in the *WELS Ministry Compendium* (WELS Parish Services, 1992).

hint that "gospel ministry" is to be taken more broadly as a designation of the speaking of the gospel by any Christian? In that sense a Christian father explaining a Bible story to his family would be engaging in "gospel ministry." Or should we take it still more broadly, understanding "ministry" as service of any kind and "gospel" as an indication of the motive for serving rather than the thing being served? With that definition, "gospel ministry" would include doing laundry for the family or giving the boss a solid eight hours of work each day so long as it is done out of love for Christ.

My own preference is to steer the investigation toward the first option and ask, "What can be said about the institution of the ministry of the gospel in the sense of the ministry of those who are specially called to serve the gospel?" Whether or not one agrees that such a question is at the very center of discussions on ministry now and over the past one hundred fifty years, there can be no doubt that the question I just posed keeps coming back.

New Testament expressions parallel to "gospel ministry"

A second reason for steering the investigation in that direction is the biblical usage of δίακονος (minister, servant) and the related words διακονέω and διακονία. I do not wish to imply that our usage of "minister" and "ministry" must slavishly follow the biblical usage of the corresponding words in Greek. But it is worth noting how the New Testament uses these words. I can find only a few passages in which a word of the διακον- family is grammatically linked to a word referring to the gospel; in other words, a few passages containing phrases closely parallel to English phrases like "the ministry of the word" or "gospel minister." In each of them, the ministry in view is the ministry of the specially called, not a ministry of Christians in general. At the very least that suggests a special appropriateness in taking our title phrase "gospel ministry" to refer to gospel proclamation by the specially called.

In Acts 6:4 the apostles, having suggested a way of serving the needs of the widows, explain why they won't attend to those needs personally: "we will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word" (τῇ διακονίᾳ τοῦ λόγου). They did not wish to "abandon the word of God" (v. 2). Other Christians could devote themselves to meeting the needs of the widows without abandoning a special God-given responsibility, but the apostles were specially called to the ministry of the word and did not wish to slight it.

In Ephesians 3:6-7, Paul says that the Gentiles are sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus "through the gospel, of which I became a minister. . ." (διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, οὗ ἐγενήθην διάκονος). The context makes it clear that this is the ministry Paul had by special call. He connects "the administration of God's grace given to me with respect to you" and the special revelation he received concerning the inclusion of Gentiles in God's plan (vv. 2-3), a revelation made also to other specially called ministers, "the holy apostles and prophets" (v. 5). He includes in his description of "this grace given to me" one of the specific emphases of his special call, namely preaching the gospel to the Gentiles (v. 8).

Colossians 1:23 is similar: "the gospel. . ., of which I, Paul, became a minister" (τοῦ εὐαγγελίου. . . οὗ ἐγενόμην ἐγὼ Παῦλος διάκονος). Again there are clear contextual indications that he is speaking not of a role common to all Christians but one entrusted to him by special call (v. 25).

The fourth passage is controversial among Lutherans. In 2 Corinthians 3:5-6 Paul says, "Our competence is from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant" (διακόνους καινῆς διαθήκης). Though some take "us" here as referring to all Christians, to me that seems to ignore the signals in context. Regularly in this part of the letter Paul contrasts first person plural pronouns ("we" = Paul and other faithful ministers of the gospel) and second person plural pronouns ("you" = the Corinthian Christians). When he momentarily enlarges the scope of the word "we" to include Christians in general, he signals that shift by saying "we all" (3:18). Besides, his opponents here are not simply false Christians who claim the right to teach in consequence of the priesthood of all believers. They claim to be special ministers who have a right to be paid for their ministry (2:17), and they back up their assertion of a special office by producing letters of recommendation (3:1). Against such claims, Paul asserts that God has made him and his associates "ministers of a new covenant" in the sense of specially called servants of the gospel.

We could add a few similar phrases from 2 Corinthians: "the ministry of the Spirit" (3:8), "the ministry of righteousness" (3:9), "the ministry of reconciliation" (5:18), and "ministers of righteousness" (11:15). In each case, context supports the view that the ministry in view is the ministry of specially called ministers.

What about the broader ideas which some attach to the phrase "gospel ministry"?

If biblical usage supports taking "the institution of gospel ministry" in a narrow sense as referring to the ministry of specially called servants of the gospel, and if that is a matter of particular interest in the ongoing discussion on ministry, does that mean that we should exclude from our investigation the rights of all Christians as priests, in particular their right to speak the gospel? By no means! For it is impossible to give an adequate account of the special ministry of the gospel or of its institution without an understanding of the priesthood of all believers and its institution.

It may be that those who suggested the title of this essay recognized the hint of ambiguity which recent usage puts into the phrase "gospel ministry" and deliberately worded the title to include both ideas. I choose to retain "gospel ministry" in the title because the ambiguity, whether deliberate or not, can serve as an invitation to clarify some distinct but closely related ideas.

Why focus on the concept of institution?

When a pastor friend of mine heard of the essay topic I had agreed to write on, he asked, "Why bother about the institution? Why not just tell them what Jesus commands about the ministry?" Perhaps he was only being facetious. But if so, part of the joke is that we commonly react that way. Faced with an abstract term like institution, we often feel a burning urge to be practical and leap ahead to do's and don't's.

It is not hard to see, though, that institution can be a practical concept. When Jesus was asked to answer a practical question about marriage, he pointed to and expounded the institution of marriage in Genesis 2 (Mt 19:3-6). When Paul needed to address abuses in the Corinthian celebration of the Lord's Supper, he quoted the words of institution (1 Cor 11:23-25) and showed how the institution of the sacrament governs

practice. Similarly, when we deal with questions about baptism, we find our answers either by going straight to the institution of baptism or by listening to the apostles' statements about baptism. Their authoritative understanding helps us to see what our Lord was doing in instituting this means of grace and what he would have us do in practice.

On the other hand, when we discuss the practice of confirmation, it is useful to know that Jesus never instituted the rite of confirmation as such. It was developed freely by the church as a way of meeting needs that arise on a more basic level--the need of youngsters and neophytes to grow in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to examine themselves before communing, to confess their faith in word and deed, and in other respects to grow up to the full stature of Christ as members of his body, the church. Those purposes of confirmation instruction are not optional, for they are indissolubly linked to the means of grace which God has instituted, but the rite of confirmation as such is not divinely instituted. We need to know the difference.

So is the ministry of the gospel divinely instituted or not? And if so, what exactly does that mean, and what implications follow from it? The answers to those questions depend in part on the definition of institution.

How shall we go about defining institution?

We can begin with some impressions which I hope will not be considered tendentious or controversial. In the area of religion, we use the word institution to designate a founding or establishing of things which have some degree of permanence and importance, such as the sacraments, or marriage, or civil government. We would not say that Joshua instituted prayers for the sun to stand still since we are not led to regard that miracle as a permanent arrangement or to suppose that we are to repeat Joshua's prayer whenever we are running out of hours of daylight. We would not say that our synod has now instituted the use of burgundy-colored hymnals, for that is a matter of no importance.

I spoke a moment ago of founding or establishing *things*, because (at least in English) we don't talk about instituting persons. We could add that we don't talk about instituting things that are purely material objects, like church buildings. The things that can be spoken of as divinely instituted tend to be actions or arrangements of some kind: a form of worship (e.g., the Levitical ceremonies), an impartation of grace (as in the use of the Keys, or the sacraments), an office endowed with authority (think of the Old Testament offices of king, priest, and prophet), or a relationship such as marriage or a covenant.

Those impressions of the religious use of the words institute and institution put us, I think, in the right ballpark. But we might wonder if we can put more precision into the definition by examining usage more closely, and we might ask whether biblical usage will give us our answer.

Does biblical usage define institution?

The short answer is no. While the words institute and institution can be properly used to express a biblical *concept*, simply as a matter of vocabulary they are ecclesiastical words (like sacrament and trinity) rather than biblical words (like grace and justify). The King James Version doesn't use institute or

institution at all. Flacius's big dictionary of significant terms in the Latin Bible, the *Clavis Scripturae Sacrae* or *Key to Sacred Scripture*, contains no entry for the word *institutio*.⁴

Granted, some translators occasionally include institute or a similar word in their versions of the Bible. But as I check the original texts I find no evidence that the apostles or prophets regularly used certain words in a way that should be translated as institute in English. Neither do I find that the Greek and Hebrew words which occasionally can be translated that way are capable of establishing for us a precise scriptural sense for the word institute.

For example, the NIV uses the word instituted five times. In three of them (Nu 28:6, 1 Kgs 12:32,33), it is a translation of the extremely common and flexible verb פָּעַל, "make" or "do." That tells us very little, for it doesn't help us much to say that instituting can be a kind of making. Another NIV passage, 1 Peter 2:13, uses "every authority instituted among men" to paraphrase πάση ἀνθρωπίνῃ κτίσει. A paraphrase is not much to go on, especially one that talks about human rather than divine institutions.

The NIV rendering of Romans 13:2 is a little more interesting: "he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted" (τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ διαταγῇ). Could it be that the Greek διαταγή and διατάσσω will give us a precise and appropriate sense for the theological usage of institution and institute? I think not. Only rarely in the New Testament can we use institute or institution to translate these Greek words (e.g., perhaps at Ga 3:19). The problem is that the verb covers a broad range of meaning--command, make arrangements, instruct--and it can be used for either temporary or permanent situations. I am afraid that trying to treat institute or institution as a biblical word so as to find a precise definition with biblical authority is a dead-end street.⁵

Samples of ecclesiastical usage of institution with reference to ministry

Since biblical usage doesn't settle the meaning of the word for us, we must consult ecclesiastical usage to define institution. Here, too, we encounter difficulties, and we are not alone. One of the results of ecumenical discussions of the ministry at Edinburgh in 1937 was reported this way: "At the Edinburgh Conference while all would agree that the ministry owes its origin to Jesus Christ and is God's gift to the Church, there are differences of judgment regarding the sense in which they may say that the ministry was 'instituted' by our Lord."⁶

⁴Matthias Flacius Illyricus, *Clavis Scripturae Sacrae*, revised and enlarged by Theodorus Suicerus (Frankfurt & Leipzig, 1719). There is a brief item on the use of *ordinare* (col. 817) in the sense of institute at Romans 13:1,2 and 1 Corinthians 9:14.

⁵One of the German words for institute, *stiften*, is appropriately used in Luther's version of Hebrews 9:18, but it leads us nowhere. Here the Greek verb is ἐγκαινίζω, which occurs in only one more New Testament passage. Septuagint usage shows that it is not an established term for institute.

⁶Constantine N. Tsirpanlis, *Greek Patristic Theology: Basic Doctrines in Eastern Church Fathers*, Vol. 2 (New York: EO Press, 1984), 165.

To some extent that is true also within conservative Lutheranism. It is common to find Lutherans speaking of the ministry as divinely instituted, but Lutheran theologians find a divine institution in so many places that it is not always easy to see which elements of meaning are stable and precisely conceived in their usage of the word institute or its Latin and German equivalents.

For example, some speak of an institution of the ministry which goes back to the Garden of Eden. But what do they mean thereby? Melancthon and Gerhard mean that God sets the public ministry going, both by serving as the first preacher of the gospel and by making Adam the first in the line of patriarchs and prophets.⁷ On the other hand, John Schaller finds in Eden the divine institution of a gospel ministry of all believers. He has in mind the act of giving the first gospel to Adam and Eve, since by its very nature the gospel both authorizes and moves believers to share the good news.⁸ My point is not that the thing instituted by God differs in these examples (public ministry in Melancthon and Gerhard, ministry of all believers in Schaller), but that the kind of action which is said to do the instituting differs. To institute by setting a precedent (God as first gospel preacher and Adam as first patriarch or prophet) is not quite the same thing as instituting by a creative act (the creation of faith which inevitably results in the confession of faith).

In one of his sermons Tilemann Hesshusius affirms the institution of the ministry in Eden without explaining what he means, and a few lines later he says that God the Father instituted the ministry by sending Christ and that the risen and ascended Christ is the one who instituted the ministry by sending his apostles and preachers out into the world with the gospel.⁹ Thus Hesshusius (like some others) speaks of multiple institutions of the ministry.

Some, like C. F. W. Walther and A. Hoenecke, trace the origin of the New Testament ministry to the calling of the apostles.¹⁰

And while Lutherans who speak of an express institution of the ministry commonly point to some event or occasion on earth, Gerhard also speaks of the ordering or establishing (*ordinatio*) of the ministry as something that took place in the will of God as declared in 1 Corinthians 1:21, "God was pleased through

⁷Philip Melancthon, brief commentary on Matthew from 1558, in his *Opera*, Vol. 3 (Wittenberg, 1563), 270. John Gerhard, para. 49 of *de ministerio ecclesiastico*, in *Loci theologici*, Tom. VI (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1885), 32a.

⁸John Schaller, "The Origin and Development of the New Testament Ministry," trans. R. Fleming, M. Jeske, D. Schaller, and W. Gawrisch, *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 78 (January, 1981), 30-51 (cf. especially 30-32, 46).

⁹Sermon on John 20:19-23 in Tilemann Hesshusius, *Postilla* (St. Louis & Leipzig: Dette, 1878), 195b-196a.

¹⁰C. F. W. Walther, *Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt*, 3rd edition (Erlangen: Deichert, 1875), Part II, Thesis 2, pp. 193, 195, 196. Adolf Hoenecke, *Ev.-Luth. Dogmatik*, Vol. 4 (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publ. House, 1909), 180-182.

the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe."¹¹

So we have here quite a range of possibilities. To me it seems clear that there is a great potential for talking past one another. Two persons who have differing notions of the meaning of the words divine institution could find themselves disagreeing vehemently about mere terminology even if they understand the Scriptures in the same way. Two others might agree in saying, "The ministry of the gospel is divinely instituted," but they might be far apart in their understanding of what that means.

Let's sort out three of the dimensions in the usage of the word institution, and at the same time, let's widen our scope beyond the specific issue of ministry and include other things which theologians commonly refer to as having been instituted. That will give us more evidence to work with as we try to discover the legitimate range of usage for the words we are analyzing.

Dimension 1: How many institutions can a thing have?

In Lutheran usage, institution can refer to a single act or occasion, or it can refer to any of a series of acts or occasions that all have foundational significance or tend to establish something. The institution of the Lord's Supper took place on a single occasion, the meal Jesus had with his disciples in the upper room on Maundy Thursday.

Baptism, however, is another matter. We confess with Luther in the Large Catechism (1529) that baptism is founded (*gegruendet, fundatus*) on the words of Christ in Matthew 28:19 and the similar passage in Mark 16, and that it is therefore divinely instituted (*eingesetzt, institutum*),¹² but that is not the same as saying that the institution of baptism is strictly limited to those passages. In his great baptismal hymn of 1541, *Christ unser Herr zum Jordan kam*, Luther sings of Christ's baptism in the Jordan: *da wollt' er stiften uns ein Bad zu waschen uns von Suenden*--"there he meant to institute for us a bath to wash away our sins."

Thus it would be in accord with Lutheran usage to speak of either a single institution or multiple institutions of the ministry.

Dimension 2: Is a divine institution a matter of action or of words?

A divine institution can refer to actions or words or both together. We see both together in the institution of the Lord's Supper, where Christ's action of giving the elements is inseparable from the words of promise ("this is my body for you. . .this is the new covenant in my blood. . ."), and they in turn are immediately followed by the words commanding repetition ("do this. . .").

Similarly, we find action and words together in the institution of marriage. On the sixth day God created Adam with a built-in need for human companionship, and later the same day he created Eve to be a helper

¹¹*De ministerio ecclesiastico*, para. 3.

¹²Large Catechism, Baptism, para. 3-8, in *Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1921), 733.

suitable for Adam and brought her to him. These divine actions were closely followed by Adam's words announcing the institution: "This is now bone of my bones. . . .For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." Adam is God's prophet here, so the words are the words of God, as Jesus recognized by saying, "*The Creator* made them male and female *and said*, 'For this reason. . .'" (Mt 19:4,5).

In contrast, the institution of baptism in Matthew 28:19 is a matter of words, not actions.

And if we want an example of an institution which is basically action rather than words, we could think of civil government. Lutherans commonly include it among the things instituted by God. Luther himself says in the solemn profession of faith at the end of his *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper* (1528) that "the holy orders and true religious institutions established by God are these three: the office of priest, the estate of marriage, the civil government."¹³ But how and when was civil government instituted by God? The Lutheran answer is in the Large Catechism's exposition of the Fourth Commandment (para. 141): "In this commandment belongs a further statement regarding all kinds of obedience to persons in authority who have to command and govern. For all authority flows and is propagated from the authority of the parents."¹⁴ Thus the same creative act which instituted marriage and the family also instituted civil government. There are divine words affirming and explaining this institution of civil government, such as Romans 13:1-7, but these words come later in time, and it could hardly be said that civil government was a merely human institution in the days before Moses.

So if we are looking for a divine institution of gospel ministry, it could be a combination of action and words, or it could be words only, or it could be an action whose meaning is spelled out later in Scripture.

Dimension 3: Does a divine institution imply necessity?

A third dimension in the usage of the word institution is the presence or absence of the notion of necessity. What human beings choose to institute may last a long time, but such things are open to change by human beings. The reason they do not possess a transcendent necessity is precisely the fact that they rest upon a merely human act of institution.

But when we speak of divine institutions, we ordinarily are talking about things that we are not free to ignore, alter, or terminate. They may not be absolutely necessary for every individual, but God has instituted them to meet important, ongoing needs, and we cannot disregard his institutions in favor of our own contrary way of meeting those needs.

¹³Trans. Robert H. Fischer, in *Luther's Works*, Vol. 37 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), 364 (=WA 26, 504). Cf. the Augsburg Confession, Article XVI.--Incidentally, by "office of priest" Luther here means the special ministry of some who serve the church, not the priesthood of all believers. In his next sentence he speaks of this "office of priest" as "the clerical office of ministry of the Word" and lists as incumbents of this office "those who preach, administer sacraments, supervise the common chest, sextons and messengers or servants who serve such persons."

¹⁴*Concordia Triglotta*, 621.

That is most obvious in the case of the means of grace. God instituted the means of grace for our salvation. We dare not ignore his gospel message or supplant it with a gospel of our own. And the same is true of the divinely instituted sacramental forms of the gospel. While it is possible for a person to be saved without receiving the Lord's Supper and even without being baptized, that does not give us the option of ignoring the sacraments or creating rival sacraments of our own. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are necessary for the life of the church.

The necessity of the sacraments is twofold. It is rooted above all in their character as gospel, since the gospel is our life. To live by the gospel is to welcome every article of the gospel as something precious and essential. In our plight it would be impudent folly to decline the sacraments on the grounds that they are not *absolutely* necessary in all cases. But the general necessity of the sacraments for the life of the church is not only a sound inference from their character as gospel; it is also made explicit by the commands Christ gave in instituting the sacraments ("make disciples of all nations, baptizing them. . ."; "do this in remembrance of me").

In the kingdom of God's left hand we also find divine institutions which are necessary in some sense. Marriage is not absolutely necessary for all individuals, but it is necessary for those who are fit for marriage and lack the gift of continence (1 Cor 7:1-9; cf. Large Catechism, Sixth Commandment, 211). We are not free to seek non-marital forms of sexual intercourse, nor may we turn God's institution into a temporary union or a homosexual imitation of marriage. Here, too, we may speak of a twofold necessity. First, marriage is deeply rooted in the nature God gave mankind in creation and thus it corresponds well to our needs; it is not an arbitrary imposition upon us. Second, that general necessity which is rooted in the nature of mankind is also made explicit in divine commands (cf. again 1 Cor. 7:1-9).

Similarly, there is a twofold necessity in civil government. Since God's own nature is characterized by order (1 Cor 14:33), he has created mankind in such a way that the importance and authority of good order in the associations of human beings is self-evident. Second, God's institution of civil government as a means of maintaining order is made explicit in the Scriptures (Mt 22:21; Rom 13:1-7). We are not free to advocate anarchy or to disregard legitimate government ordinances in favor of contrary measures that appeal to our fancy. God stands behind the existing forms of civil government, calling them his servants (Rom 13:4,6) because they belong to a sphere of authority which he has instituted.

The nub of the matter

Now the question is, did God institute the ministry of the gospel in a sense that attaches a kind of lasting necessity to the ministry of the gospel? With that question we touch the nub of the matter.

In fact, it seems that the question of the necessity of the ministry has been the nub of the matter for Lutherans over the centuries. In some cases, the question has been, what kind of ministry is necessary? Did God institute as necessary for the church an independent, self-perpetuating clergy? An order of priests with exclusive power to perform the sacrifice of the mass? A specific form of office? In other cases, we have had to answer the question, is it necessary for the church to have some sort of called ministry, or is such a thing completely optional?

For now, permit me to cite the words of Chemnitz and Gerhard--not to settle the issues which we will explore exegetically in Part II, but simply to point out that these theologians plainly saw a connection between a divine institution and a necessity in the life of the church.

In his *Examination of the Council of Trent*, Chemnitz writes, "Now there is no doubt that the ministry of the Word and the sacraments as we have described it above was instituted (*institutum esse*) by the Son of God also in the New Testament. For the church has a command (*mandatum*) about calling and appointing ministers."¹⁵ The command which indicates to the church the necessity of calling and appointing ministers is here viewed as a reason for saying that the ministry was instituted by the Son of God.

Gerhard, too, sees a connection between divine institution and necessity: "Let this portion of heavenly doctrine be commended to us first of all by the *necessity* of the ecclesiastical ministry. . . .The necessity depends on divine establishment (*ordinatio*)."¹⁶

One occasionally finds a Lutheran theologian speaking of a divine institution without thereby wishing to imply that the instituted thing itself is actually necessary, but that sort of usage seems unusual.¹⁷ Since it is in accord with Lutheran usage to use the notion of a divine institution to imply necessity, and since the presence or absence of necessity has been a focal point of Lutheran discussions of the ministry over the years, let's incorporate that focus into our study. We will not be trying to see if we can justify speaking of a divine institution of the called ministry in any weaker sense. We want rather to see if God instituted the

¹⁵Part II, Ninth Topic: Concerning Holy Orders, Section III, Chapter III, translated by Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia, 1978), 691 (= page 478b in the Preuss edition, *Examen Concilii Tridentini* [Berlin: Schlawitz, 1861]). Chemnitz seems to be quoting the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, XIII (VII), 12: "For the church has the command to appoint ministers" (*Habet enim ecclesia de constituendis ministris*), Trigl. 311. That same passage in the Apology later proved to be the focal point in the controversy surrounding J. W. F. Hoefling's *Grundsätze evangelisch-lutherischer Kirchenverfassung*. As Hoefling put it in his third edition (Erlangen: Blaesing, 1853), "The sense in which the church can be said to have a *mandatum de constituendis ministris* is certainly the chief point of controversy between us and our opponents, if not the only one" (p. 259, note 18).

¹⁶*De ministerio ecclesiastico*, para. 3 (cf. ftnt. 11 above).

¹⁷Cf. John Schaller's statement: "Since a synod that confesses the orthodox faith comes into existence only through the power of the gospel and wishes to serve the gospel alone, it is a divine institution (*Stiftung*) and creation" (*Pastorale Praxis in der ev.-luth. Freikirche Amerikas* [Milwaukee: Northwestern Publ. House, 1913], 134. Schaller's use of *Stiftung* here seems odd in view of all the qualifications he must add. He makes it clear that synods as such are not directly commanded by God; what matters is not the organizational form we call a synod but the Spirit-given unity of faith and the outward confession of faith which is made by synodical membership.--In a review of this book, J. P. Koehler agreed with the essential point Schaller was making, but considered it inappropriate to use the word *Stiftung* (*Theologische Quartalschrift* 10 [1913], 298-302).

called ministry of the gospel in a sense that makes it a necessary part of the church's ongoing life, and if so, we want to be able to say what kind and degree of necessity it is.

Koehler's concerns: Avoiding unevangelical conceptions of ministry

The very idea of looking to see if there is a specific divine institution of the called ministry could strike some Lutherans as a dubious undertaking, particularly if we do so in the interest of determining whether such a ministry of the gospel is necessary. Some might say that the very thing we are setting out to do betrays a lack of appreciation for the gospel.

Consider this statement by J. P. Koehler:

We say that God has *instituted the ministry (Predigtamt)*. In doing so, we think of the fact that Christ said, "Preach the gospel to all creation." We think only of the *gospel* and leave out of our conception all *special* forms of the ministry. We say that God *instituted* the ministry. That does not mean that besides effecting the great reality of the gospel, God has also given the *special decree* that the gospel is to be preached. In the first place, from the perspective of the historical approach, that is a wooden way of thinking. Second, it smacks of the legalistic mode of thought, which is always ready at hand with law and rules. With the word "institute" (*stiften*) we want to indicate that God has *set in motion* the preaching of the gospel on earth through the gift of the gospel, nothing more, nothing less.¹⁸ (Koehler's emphasis)

A large part of Koehler's concern is that when a thing such as the preaching of the gospel has its impetus and authority in the life-creating gospel itself, we should not adopt modes of speech and thought which imply that the gospel is a poor, dead thing. We should not imagine that the ministry of the gospel would somehow lack legitimacy or authority without a separate institution or command. We should not suppose that gospel ministry must perish unless we can maintain it by basing it on a divine law.

A similar concern for the supremacy of the gospel led Koehler to emphasize the principle that the gospel creates its own forms as the church pursues its mission in changing circumstances.¹⁹ That is part of our New Testament freedom in Christ. External forms of ministry and worship were described in detail for the religious life of Israel in the Old Testament, and the Israelites were commanded to observe those forms; but in the New Testament, all such restrictions are gone (Gal 4:1-11; 5:1-6; Col 2:16-17). For New Testament believers, the one great given is the gospel itself, and the gospel produces faith and love, and love sums up the whole range of God's will for the life of Christians (Rom 13:8-10). To compromise that inner, gospel-born spirit of love by imposing arbitrary, external requirements would be a step

¹⁸Review of Schaller's *Pastorale Praxis*, in *Theologische Quartalschrift* 10 (1913), 300-301.

¹⁹The thesis "the gospel creates its own forms" informs Koehler's thinking in general, not only in the area of church and ministry. Cf. the article on Lutheran hymnody in which the thesis is highlighted in the title, "*Das Evangelium schafft sich selbst seinen Ausdruck im lutherischen Kirchenlied*," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 9 (1912), 160-175.

backward into the bondage of Old Testament ordinances. Hence we should not expect God to prescribe arbitrary, external forms for ministry in the New Testament, or expect to find such forms instituted as necessary for the life of the New Testament church. The forms will take care of themselves since the gospel will move God's people to find appropriate ways of letting the good news be heard.

Response concerning the authority derived from the gospel itself

These concerns for the supremacy of the gospel deserve a response. First of all, the emphasis on the sufficiency of the gospel as a source of legitimacy and authority for the ministry of the gospel is welcome. Obviously there is something wrong if Christians can see no authority for preaching or otherwise speaking the gospel in the gospel itself. Those who think laws and rules are the ultimate embodiment of authority have missed the character of Christianity.

The authority required to say "Your sins are forgiven" is so great that hostile observers were scandalized when Jesus forgave the sins of the paralytic (Mt 9:1-8). We who believe that pronouncement of forgiveness for our own sins have all the more reason to speak of the authority of the gospel. We know it as the power that has called us out of darkness, delivered us from the strong judgment of God in our own conscience, and promised us ultimate deliverance when heaven and earth shall pass away. The gospel is full of authority and needs no extraneous help to create a gospel ministry.

But what if God himself does provide a distinct institution of gospel ministry in addition to simply giving the gospel? What if there are divine commands relating to the ministry? Surely there is nothing legalistic about paying attention to God's commands with a heart full of grace and trying to understand what they may tell us about that ministry which is ultimately rooted in the gospel itself.

Is an institution of a definite "form" inherently objectionable?

Koehler's thoughts on "forms" also require some reflection. Must we, in order to keep our conception of doctrine free from ceremonial laws, preclude any possibility that God has instituted a form of ministry? What if we find evidence that God has instituted, not *arbitrary, external* forms, but a form of ministry which is inherent in the character he has chosen for the church and to that extent necessary?

That is so abstract a way of putting it that it may not mean much to you even as a means of raising a question. Perhaps some illustrations and a diagram will help.

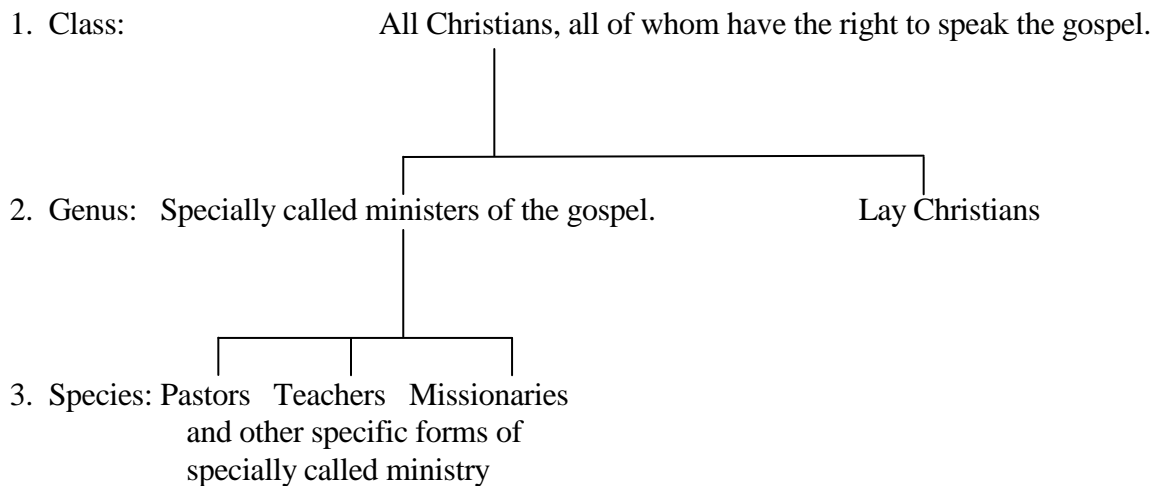
First the illustrations, one from the area of the gospel, and one from the area of the law. In the Lord's Supper, the gospel itself assumes a certain definite form. Christ specifies particular earthly elements--bread and the fruit of the vine, not lettuce and oil--and he specifies the word which is added to the elements, "This is. . ." Apart from that form, there is no sacrament, yet no one will protest that Christ has here perpetuated something of the externalism of the Levitical ceremonies.

On the other hand, someone may say that the gospel is sheer gift, and so of course it is to be accepted in whatever form it is given, and that therefore the thing to look out for is the imposition of specific forms of *law* on New Testament Christians. And that is true if we are talking about arbitrary, external ordinances,

like the ban on clothing of mixed fibers (Lv 19:19) or the calendar of sabbatical years (Lv 25:1ff). But think of marriage. In so far as the ancient will of God concerning marriage corresponds to the permanent nature of man and woman in this world, it remains valid for New Testament Christians. It is not addressed to their New Man as such (1 Tim. 1:9), but it is useful in view of our present mixed character of Old Man and New Man. In God's ongoing will concerning marriage, the fundamental principle of love assumes a definite form--a lifelong union of one man and one woman, in which the husband is the head of his wife--but we do not relegate this divine will to the scrapheap of obsolete Old Testament ordinances by arguing that a definite form of love is here mandated for married couples. Such form as marriage has is rooted in the facts of human nature; that is why it remains part of God's holy will.

So let me raise the question again: What if the called ministry of the gospel is comparable to some extent? What if God chose to institute it not as an arbitrary, external imposition on the church, but as something that corresponds to the nature God has given to the church?

Consider this diagram:



The point is this. It is easy to speak of a divine institution of the gospel activity described on level 1. Most of the questions arise as we proceed to levels 2 and 3. Already at level 2 we can speak of the genus on the left as a more specific "form" of what is going on at level 1. If so, does that in itself eliminate the possibility of speaking of a divine institution of the genus "specially called ministers of the gospel"? In other words, would we automatically burden ourselves with the conceptions of ceremonial law by speaking of a divine institution of that "form" of gospel proclamation which we can designate as the called ministry of the gospel? As I indicated above, I do not see that such a conclusion follows inevitably. It depends on whether that "form" of ministry reflects permanent, divinely created characteristics of the church or merely human decisions based on changing historical circumstances. It also depends on whether the Scriptures actually indicate a divine institution of that genus. It is very much a question for exegesis--exegesis without the blinders of unwarranted preconceptions.

Summary of Part I

1. Our prime focus will be on the specially called ministry of the gospel, but to do justice to that topic we will have to start with the priesthood of all believers.
2. Since Scripture does not provide us with a precise definition of institution, we will use the word in accord with ecclesiastical and above all Lutheran usage.
3. Lutheran usage permits us to speak of either single or multiple institutions of a particular thing, and to regard words, actions, or a combination of words and actions as God's way of instituting things.
4. Ordinarily we designate as divinely instituted only things which are in some sense and to some degree necessary. Since much of the discussion on ministry has revolved around the question whether the called ministry in general or some specific form of it is necessary, we will investigate to see whether God has instituted the called ministry of the gospel as necessary in some sense and to some degree.
5. We will need to be on guard against doctrinal conceptions which shortchange the gospel and the freedom it gives us. But we will not rule out the possibility of a divine institution which establishes a certain "form" of ministry if that form is not an external, Levitical imposition on the church but rather something that corresponds to the very nature of the church.

Part II: Examining the Scriptures

A. The priesthood of all believers

Why is it necessary to establish a right to speak the gospel?

It might seem to a non-Christian like a tempest in a teacup. He might say, "Suppose I concede to you Christians, just for the sake of argument, that your gospel message is true. Why then should it matter who speaks the gospel? The facts of the multiplication table are also true, but that doesn't mean we make an issue of who has the 'right' to say 'Two times two is four.'"

God, however, does not regard his saving gospel as a sterile fact in the public domain. The gospel makes all the difference in the personal relationship he so deeply desires between himself and his human creatures. To treat a message of such importance with contempt by refusing to accord it the trust it is meant to engender, is to profane the holiest thing on earth and look with complacency on estrangement from God. So when the pseudo-Christian mouths the word of God, God does not congratulate him by saying, "Well, at least this time you said something true--keep it up." Instead, "to the wicked, God says, 'What right have you to recite my laws or take my covenant on your lips?'" (Ps 50:16). Similarly, Jesus says that many evildoers will say to him on the last day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name. . .?" He will say to them, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" (Mt 7:22-23; cf. Jr 12:2).

It is impossible to please God without faith (Hb 12:6), no matter how good one's actions seem to be. Only he who has clean hands and a pure heart may stand in God's holy place (Ps 24:3-4).

Priestly rights belong to all believers

Knowing that the right to speak the gospel is no trivial matter, we turn to the *locus classicus* of the teaching concerning the priesthood of New Testament believers. In 1 Peter 2:4-5, the apostle says to his readers, God's elect (1:1), that "as you come to him, the living Stone,. . .you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God *through Jesus Christ*."

It is the merits of Jesus Christ that make the spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. Those merits are received through faith in Christ, as Peter emphatically declared on a different occasion: "All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Ac 10:43). Since Peter in his epistle is talking to believers, he includes all of them in the statement "once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (v. 10). The basic distinction between faith and unbelief is also made explicit in verse 7. So faith in Christ is how we "come to him" (v. 4) and how we are "built" (v. 5) as living stones upon the living Stone, and faith is how we receive the priestly right to offer acceptable spiritual sacrifices.

It is sometimes argued that Peter's terminology warrants the conclusion that believers have a priesthood only as a group. Peter does in fact use a collective singular noun here, "you (plural) . . .are being built into

a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood" (ἱερότευμα, singular). But it would be an arbitrary restriction on the text to suppose that the only things which qualify as spiritual sacrifices are the group activities of Christians who gather to exercise their collective priesthood. No such restriction appears in other New Testament passages that refer to the spiritual sacrifices of Christians, such as Romans 12:1 and Hebrews 13:15-16. We may also note that the Book of Revelation repeatedly refers to Christians as priests using the plural noun ἱερεῖς (1:6; 5:10; 20:6). A look at New Testament history makes it clear that the early Christians exercised priestly rights individually, not just collectively. So while we are one united priesthood, we are also individually priests.

Since Peter speaks of a priesthood without distinction for all who have faith, it follows that the priestly right of offering acceptable sacrifices to God belongs to all believers in the same degree, whether they are baptized babies or plumbers or pastors. They all possess these rights even if they do not yet know it.

It will be helpful to explore the priesthood of all believers a bit more by considering 1) the range of activities which are included, 2) the other factors which affect the use of priestly rights, and 3) the institution of the priesthood of all believers.

The range of activities which New Testament priests have the right to engage in

As we have already noted, the New Testament idea of spiritual sacrifices is broad. That breadth becomes explicit in Hebrews 13:15-16: "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise--the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased." The doing of good (εὐποιΐα) is very general indeed. The whole Christian life is included in the doing of good, and therefore the spiritual sacrifices of a Christian are his whole Christian life.

Our particular interest is in those activities which have an important place in the called ministry, such as speaking the gospel in general, administering the sacraments, using the Keys, teaching Christians how to live, and praying. If we speak simply of rights without taking into account other factors which may affect the exercise of those rights, it can be said that all Christians have all these rights. That is an appropriate inference simply from the fact that all of these activities are ways of praising God and doing good, and therefore all of them qualify as spiritual sacrifices. We find confirmation of that general inference in specific New Testament passages.

The right to speak the gospel

All Christians are exhorted to "declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pe 2:9) and to "be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Pe 3:15). Christians do both of those things by speaking the gospel.

The right to administer the Lord's Supper

When Christ instituted his Supper, the same disciples who were told "Take, eat" and "Take, drink" were also told "Do this." Those disciples represented the church at both moments. It would be arbitrary to say

that they represented the church in the moment Christ said "Take, eat" but then represented only the church's clergy in the moment when Christ said "Do this." Christ is in effect talking to his whole church when he says "Do this," and therefore all believers have the right to administer this sacrament. (We will look at factors which restrict the exercise of this right later.)

The right to administer baptism

The great commission in Matthew 28:19-20 is the clearest indication that all Christians have the right to administer baptism. The original hearers of this commission were "the eleven disciples" (v. 16), but that is no reason to restrict the application of the commission to clergy. The same little group of men represented the church a few days earlier at the institution of the Supper, so they can represent the church on the mountain in Galilee just as well. (Hence there is absolutely no need to lean on the sheer conjecture that maybe other believers were present at the giving of the great commission, perhaps even the five hundred of 1 Corinthians 15:6.)

That they are being addressed by Christ as representatives of a larger group rather than as the entire apostolate of that time is clear enough from the words "I will be with you always, to the very end of the age." Certainly Christ is with his apostles now as they await the resurrection, but just as certainly that is not what he meant by giving this assurance. He was talking about being with his baptizing and teaching disciple-makers in their work on earth until the end of time.

Once we recognize that the eleven are addressed here as representatives, the only question left is whether they here represent a clergy that will last till the end of time or the church as a whole. (I reject the suggestion that they here represent both clergy and church simultaneously as a needless multiplication of senses.) Nothing in the vocabulary of this section (vv. 16-20) points to the narrower understanding. Such hints as we do find, point in the direction of the whole church. The use of the designation "the eleven *disciples*" (v. 16) doesn't tell us by itself whether Matthew wants us to think simply of their attachment to Jesus as believers or of the special call and special training they had already received. But when Matthew expresses Jesus' commission using the verb *μαθητεύσατε*, "make disciples" (v. 19), we hear the implication. Commanding "disciples" to "make disciples" of all nations makes sense when interpreted as believers making believers of all nations, but it comes off very odd indeed if we take it as clergy making clergy of all nations. Besides, from a literary point of view, the broader scope of a great commission addressed to the representatives of the whole church makes a grander conclusion for the closing words of St. Matthew's Gospel than a commissioning intended for clergy only.

Incidentally, there is something collective about the form of the great commission, just as Peter's reference to the priesthood of believers is collective in form. At any rate, I do not suppose that Jesus is commanding each individual member of the church to personally travel to all nations and baptize and instruct all converts; that would be utterly beyond the capacity of individuals (and think of the millions of rebaptisms each convert would have to undergo so that each Christian could personally carry out such a command!). Obviously the commission in this comprehensive form is addressed to the church as a whole. But that collective command implies the rights of individual Christians to take their share of the responsibility.

The right to administer the Keys

Earlier we spoke of a general right to speak the gospel to the praise of God. Here we have in view the specific right to speak that most pointed, direct, and central declaration of the gospel, "Your sins are forgiven you," as well as the corresponding declaration of the law, "Your sins are not forgiven you."

In Matthew 18:15-20, Jesus gives that right to the members of the church, both collectively and individually. The collective right is clear from the description of the final stage of the efforts to regain an impenitent sinner: "Tell it to the church. . . Whatever you (plural) bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you (plural) loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. . . Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

The individual right is implied in the initial stage of admonition. If a brother sins against me, he thereby also sins against God. Jesus indicates that the whole problem can be taken care of in the initial, private encounter if the sinner repents. Obviously the individual Christian is empowered to tell the penitent sinner not only "I for my part forgive you for what you did to me" but also "God forgives you for sinning against him." If that latter pronouncement could be made only by the church as a whole, it would be hard to see why Jesus lets the matter come to an end after a successful private admonition. If only the church as a whole could say "God forgives you," there would be good reason for the penitent sinner to appear before the church for divine absolution.

The right to teach Christians how to live

This right is included in "teaching them to keep everything I have commanded you" (Mt 28:20). The same right is covered by Colossians 3:16, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish (νουθετεοῦντες) one another with all wisdom. . ."

The right to pray

Christians are constantly exhorted to pray all kinds of prayers (Mt 6:9-13; Eph 6:18; 1 Th 5:17-18; 1 Tm 2:1-2), including private, individual prayers (Mt 6:6), because through faith in our great High Priest we have access to the throne of grace and may pray confidently (Hb 4:14-16).

Comparison of priesthood and ministry with respect to these rights

The activities listed above are the prime "parts" or duties of specially called ministers of the gospel. But as we have seen, specially called ministers do not have a monopoly on them. The right to engage in these activities--that is, the possession of the proper spiritual status which is a prerequisite for God-pleasing performance of these activities--belongs to all believers, both collectively and individually.

Other factors that affect the exercise of these rights

Having the right to do something does not in itself mean that one will use the right in particular situations. Three other factors that enter the picture for Christians are 1) the Spirit-created impulse to serve the cause

of the gospel, 2) the Spirit-given gifts with which Christians are variously equipped, and 3) the Spirit-guided awareness of what is appropriate in varying circumstances.

1) God does not simply give Christians rights and treat it as a matter of utter indifference whether they decide to use them or not. Neither does he leave the Christian internally neutral about these matters but externally obligated by laws that force him to use these rights. Rather, he gives his believers his Holy Spirit, who gives birth in us to our spirit, our New Man, who delights in the gospel and in promoting the cause of the gospel. So the Christian prays "Abba, Father" at the prompting of the Spirit of sonship (Ro 8:15; Ga 4:6). Looking forward to the outpouring of the Spirit on the church, Jesus said, "'Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.' By this he meant the Spirit. . ." (Jn 7:38-39). The general principle Jesus cited to account for the evil words that men utter--"Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" (Mt 12:34)--applies also to the good words, above all the gospel words, that believers speak. So Paul says, "Be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" (Eph 5:18-19). The Spirit provides the impulse.

2) God has decided to make Christians alike in some respects and different in others. We all have faith, the gift of salvation, the rights of priests and kings before God, the indwelling Spirit, and Christian love; we differ in the strength of our faith and love, in the particular gifts of the Spirit, and in our natural gifts as well. These differences certainly can affect our exercise of our priestly rights. The infant believer can't preach a sermon at all yet, and the adult neophyte had better not try to teach a seminary dogmatics class (Ro 12:3).

3) The Spirit who fills us with love also teaches us what love means in various circumstances so that we do not presume to use our rights in an unloving way. He teaches us to prefer order to confusion (1 Cor 14:33,40). He teaches us to respect others and their gifts instead of trying to push ourselves forward (Php 2:3). He teaches us to observe divinely created structures of authority (1 Cor 11:3; Hb 13:17) and not use gospel rights as an excuse to overturn those structures (1 Pe 3:1-2). He teaches us to look at the whole picture instead of focusing only on the part of the picture which seems to legitimize our intentions. For example, the institution of the Lord's Supper confers the right of administration on believers ("Do this"), but part of the very nature of the Supper is that it is a community meal. Accordingly it would be an abuse of the Supper for individuals to celebrate it on their own or in separate little groups that disregard the community to which they belong. That would be a way of turning the Lord's Supper into one's own supper (1 Cor 11:20-21).

Giving all these factors their due will keep our exercise of our priestly rights from being listless, overambitious, self-indulgent, and chaotic. It will help us to realize God's design for energetic, coordinated, loving service as we grow up together "and become mature, attaining the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13).

The divine institution of the priesthood of believers

When did the priesthood of believers, including the right of believers to speak the gospel, enter the world? Obviously it happened when the gospel of the Serpent-crushing Seed of the woman was first revealed. That gospel engendered faith, and by faith Adam and Eve were cleansed of their guilt and given the status

of holy priests before God. And their joy in the gospel prompted them to use that gospel in the raising of their children, as is apparent in the case of believing Abel (Gn 4:4; Hb 11:4).

God is the one who revealed the gospel in the Garden of Eden and used it to produce faith in our first parents. The priesthood of believers was *divinely* instituted there.

We could trace the priesthood of believers through Old Testament times (cf. Ex 19:5-6), demonstrating in detail the right of Old Testament believers to praise God by speaking the gospel (e.g., Ps 103), both in united public worship (Ex 15:1) and in private settings (Dt 6:20-23). There is a continuity in the essence of the priesthood of believers stretching uninterruptedly from its first institution until now, and it will last beyond the end of this world.

But besides the continuity, let us note also the development. The one-and-the-same gospel was revealed with progressively increasing clarity and fullness. The explicit content of the gospel which believers could share grew as salvation history unfolded and God gave more prophecies concerning the coming Savior, more promises detailing what God's grace means for his people, more demonstrations in sacred history of how he keeps his promises with mighty deeds of salvation, such as the great deliverance from Egypt to the Promised Land.

At some moments in the history of salvation we see developments so striking that it is appropriate to include them in the institution of the priesthood of believers. In view of that, it is useful to be able to speak of multiple institutions, that is, multiple occasions having a foundational significance for the priesthood of believers.

Since Abraham is regarded as the "father of all who believe" (Ro 4:11-12, 16-17; cf. Is 51:1-2), we could speak of God's promises to him as an institution of the priesthood of believers. Perhaps we would do the same for Exodus 19:5-6, where the word priesthood is first used explicitly with regard to God's people as a whole. Here, as part of the formal organization of Israel as God's people, God makes it clear that the real blessing, namely that of being a royal priesthood in his eyes, is not secured by biological descent and outward membership in the nation but by faith--not sham faith but faith that produces obedience.

But without a doubt, the biggest turning point for the priesthood of believers is the ministry of Jesus Christ. His coming made it possible to speak the gospel from a new perspective, that of the fulfillment of the central gospel promises of God. Furthermore, Jesus Christ instituted the New Testament sacraments, and in so doing instituted important new features in the scope of the priesthood of believers. By fulfilling the law of Moses, he made obsolete the external restrictions according to tribe and family which prevented non-Levites from performing certain sacred duties. He also made obsolete the matter of membership in the Jewish nation as a requirement for full membership in the outward fellowship of his people.

So while the apostles were sure of the essential continuity between their own faith and the faith of Abraham, and thus were sure of the essential continuity in the priesthood of believers (it is no accident that 1 Peter 2:9 quotes phrases from Exodus 19:5-6), the apostles were no less impressed with the foundational significance of the changes brought by Christ's ministry.

That is why Paul tells Gentile Christians, "You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone" (Eph 2:19-20). Certainly the church was founded with the giving of the first gospel in Eden, but the ministry of Christ and the interpretation of that ministry revealed to Christ's apostles and New Testament prophets together constitute the foundation for unrestricted Gentile membership in the church. (The argument itself, the word order "apostles and prophets," and the use of "prophets" in Ephesians 3:5 and 4:11 make it clear that Paul is talking about New Testament prophets.) Since Christ's ministry and the interpretation of it revealed to his apostles and prophets have this foundational significance, it is appropriate to speak of both that saving ministry and that revealed interpretation as belonging to the institution of the priesthood of believers. If we are to use the ecclesiastical word institution in this area, it certainly is useful to think of multiple institutions.

The necessity of the priesthood of believers

Since I promised earlier to focus on institutions that implied some kind of necessity, I should at least briefly indicate why we can say that God instituted the priesthood of believers as something necessary.

First, if we recognize that spiritual sacrifices become acceptable to God through Jesus Christ, and that we receive Christ's righteousness through faith, then it is inevitable--intrinsically necessary--that all who believe in Christ will have the priestly status of being holy to the Lord by imputed righteousness.

Second, if we think in terms of God's plans and purposes, the priesthood of all believers is seen as functionally necessary to achieve his ends. He did not want his saving message to be something discoverable by the clever thoughts of man, nor did he want it to pop up inside our minds by direct action of the Spirit. He wanted it to come to us as something clearly not our own, something *extra nos*, something communicated to us by external means. But only rarely has he chosen to speak aloud from heaven or sent angels to preach. Ordinarily he wants the message to be delivered by human beings. In doing so he suits the messenger to the message, letting frail, dying human beings hold out the message of Christ crucified as the only hope. Another reason he uses human beings to speak that message is that he wants to give us the joy of promoting the cause of the gospel directly. And he wants that word to dwell among us richly, not as the exclusive prerogative of a small fraction of the church. Put all of those divine decisions and purposes together, and it is clear: only the priesthood of believers will make such a plan possible. God instituted the priesthood of believers, including above all the speaking of the gospel by believers, as something necessary to achieve his goals.

Now, what about the ministry of the gospel by the specially called?

B. The ministry of the gospel by the specially called

Where do we begin?

Let's go back to the beginning--not because it will provide a decisive and illuminating answer, but to get some misconceptions out of the way. An explicit starting point for the ministry of the gospel by specially called individuals is not all that clear. Adam was the Lord's spokesman in Genesis 2:24, but that was before the gospel was revealed. When it came time to reveal the gospel, God announced it himself instead of revealing it through Adam (Gn 3:15).

Later we read, "At that time men began to call on [or proclaim] the name of the Lord" (Gn 4:26). Did that development involve the use of called gospel preachers for the first time, or would that be reading too much between the lines?

In Genesis 20:7 God calls Abraham a prophet, and we know that some of the direct revelations he received from God were gospel promises. Where in the line of the godly patriarchs does this prophetic ministry of the gospel begin?

Or should we say that the first gospel promise in Eden *indirectly* instituted the called ministry by creating the possibility of calling special ministers of the gospel--a possibility that would eventually prove to be a necessity?

At this point I am not interested in pressing any of these passages in an effort to find the absolute earliest moment at which we can speak with confidence of an institution of the called ministry of the gospel. My reason is that priority in chronology is not the key issue for us New Testament Christians.

Just as the church itself, though founded in Eden, has a New Testament foundation in Christ himself and secondarily in his apostles and prophets, so it is with the ministry. We can find important antecedents for the called ministry of today in the Old Testament and in the ministry of John the Baptist, but their chronological priority does not matter compared with the decisive foundational significance of Christ's ministry. With that in mind, let us see if the writings of the New Testament show us an institution of the specially called ministry of the gospel distinct from the great commission in Matthew 28 and other passages which speak of the gospel rights and responsibilities of all Christians.

The ministry of Christ

The ministry of Christ is the great fountainhead of all gospel-speaking in these last times. "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" (Hb 1:1-2). Jesus Christ is the Prophet of whom Moses spoke (Dt 18:15; cf. Jn 1:21), "the apostle and high priest whom we confess" (Hb 3:1), the minister *par excellence*. He now continues his ministry through his church. The question is, did he leave it up to the church whether or not to have a specially called ministry, or did he institute such a ministry as an ongoing and in some sense necessary feature of the work of the church? Let's look at gospel history.

The first disciples

In John 1:35-51 we hear about the first disciples of Jesus, namely Andrew, Simon Peter, Philip, and Nathaniel. Clearly they were already believers in the promises of God before Jesus was revealed as the Son of God at his baptism. They now become "Christians" in the sense of recognizing Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ promised by God. They are invited to become better acquainted with him and learn from him. They follow him and become his disciples (Jn 1:43; 2:2). But they have not yet been called to the special ministry of the gospel in any permanent sense. Occasionally they do administer baptism under the supervision of Jesus (Jn 3:22; 4:1,2). But in time, at least some of them go back to their families and their regular work.

Later Simon Peter and his fishing partners are astonished at the huge catch of fish Jesus provides for them. Peter is overwhelmed: "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" Jesus replies, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men" (ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν ἀνθρώπους ἔσῃ ζῶντων). "So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him" (Lk 5:8-11). Now they have a permanent call into the ministry, not just an invitation to learn, and they recognize that accepting this call means a change in occupations. They leave their nets and boats and homes and follow Jesus.

In this case the call preceded not only the ministry he was calling them to but also most of the training for that ministry. In view of the training he would give them before sending them on a formal mission, Matthew's parallel account uses a future tense: Jesus says, "I will make (ποιήσω) you fishers of men" (4:19). Luke, to emphasize that Jesus' invitation here is in fact a call into the ministry, expresses that dimension in the words "from now on." From that point on they were in the ministry by divine call even though much of their ministerial training lay ahead of them.

All of this took place before any of the disciples were called apostles or given miraculous apostolic powers. The first office of ministry Jesus created by extending a call was not the apostolic office as such but a "generic" office of using the gospel to "catch" people. Nothing more specific is indicated at this point.

Apostles

At a later point we see that Jesus now has twelve men whom he begins to call his apostles (Mk 3:14; Lk 6:13; cf. Mt 10:2). As he sends them out to preach the gospel, he equips them with power to drive out demons and heal diseases (Mt 10:1; Mk 3:15; Lk 9:1-2) and an assurance that the Spirit would give them the right words to say even in their direst need (Mt 10:19-20). But this mission was limited in its scope and temporary in duration: for the time being, they were not to go to the Gentiles or Samaritans (Mt 10:5). They would have more than enough to do in testifying to the people of Israel--"you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes" (Mt 10:23). However mysterious that sounded originally, the coming of the Son of Man referred to here could be Christ's resurrection, after which he replaced their restricted mission with a mission of worldwide scope and unlimited duration.

Other ministers called by Jesus

Apart from the apostles themselves, the most memorable sending of ministers by Jesus before his passion is the sending of the seventy-two in Luke 10. The instructions Jesus gave them included some details particularly suited to that time and place, but much of what Jesus says here is of permanent importance for the New Testament ministry. "Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. . . .The worker deserves his wages. . . .He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me" (vv. 2, 3, 7, 16).

Significantly, Luke places just before the sending of the seventy-two a group of topically related incidents which appear in the NIV under the heading "The Cost of Following Jesus" (Lk 9:57-62). As is so often the case with passages concerning the special ministry, this section can be applied more widely to Christians in general, but that should not obscure for us the immediate focus. The man who said to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go," is not using "follow" as a metaphor for believing in Christ and living the Christian life. He wants to join Jesus' traveling seminary and missionary institute. It would have been possible for this man to be a faithful Christian at home like many others in Palestine at that time, but he wanted more. But first he needed to count the cost. "Foxes have holes. . ." Jesus doesn't promise his preachers a cushy and stable position. His call may lead them into surprising and difficult situations.

The focus on the called ministry becomes even clearer when Jesus says to another man, "Follow me," and deals with his excuse by saying, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and *proclaim the kingdom of God*" (vv. 59-60). Hence his words to the next man, a volunteer with less than full commitment, likewise have in view the called ministry: "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God" (v. 62). Then the theme of the called ministry continues as the very next verse reads, "After this the Lord appointed seventy-two *others* and sent them two by two. . ." (10:1).

Thus the apostolic office as such did not serve as a channel for the sending of all ministers by Jesus. Rather, we here see him continuing that more general office of the ministry which he had first given to Peter, Andrew, James, and John before he ever made them apostles (Lk 5:10-11; Mt 4:18-22).

Duration of the "generic" office of called ministry

In Luke 12 Jesus showed as part of his teaching concerning the end that there would be called ministers of the gospel at his return for judgment.

He warned his disciples to be watchful, "like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet. . . .It will be good for those servants (δοῦλοι) whose master finds them watching when he comes" (vv. 36-37). Peter asks, "Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?" (v. 41). While that might sound like saying, "Is this meant for us believers or for all people?", Jesus' answer seems rather to take it as asking, "Is this talk about servants meant for us called ministers or for all believers?" Without denying the applicability of the word "servants" to all Christians, Jesus provides a special admonition in answer to Peter's question by shifting terms: "Who then is the faithful and wise manager (οἰκονόμος), whom the master puts in charge of his servants (ἐπὶ τῆς θεραπείας αὐτοῦ) to give them their food

allowance at the proper time? It will be good for *that* servant (ὁ δοῦλος ἐκεῖνος) whom the master finds doing so when he returns" (vv. 42-43). The description here and in the rest of the section clearly indicates that Jesus means the sort of οἰκονόμος who is a steward of the mysteries of God (1 Cor 4:1). There will still be incumbents of that office at the end of the world.

Easter Sunday

How shall we interpret John 20:21-23, the post-resurrection giving of the Keys? Is it talking about a sending of the whole church, or a sending of called ministers?

Let's start at verse 19. "On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples (μαθηταί) were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord."

"Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent (ἀπέστειλεν) me, I am sending (πέμπω) you.' And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.'"

I take this to be a sending of called ministers rather than of the whole church. (The possession of the Keys by the whole church is not thereby called into question; it is amply covered by Matthew 18:15-20.) I see this as the great post-resurrection institution of the called ministry of the gospel--the genus, rather than any more specific form of it.

This is not the re-establishment of the apostolic office as such. Ten of the eleven apostles were present, but they are not designated as such here. We know from Luke 24:33 that the Emmaus disciples and some others were in the room with the apostles. Most significantly of all, John 20:21-23 mentions none of the powers or responsibilities which were the distinctive features of the apostolic office as such. Rather we hear about the very core of the called ministry of the gospel in all its forms: the power to forgive and retain sins.

Why do I not take this as an empowerment of the whole church, a post-resurrection repetition of Matthew 18:15-20? My reasons for understanding it rather as referring to the called ministry are these:

1. It is irrelevant whether we take "disciples" in verse 19 and 20 as simply believers or as implying those whom Jesus had already called to a special ministry. The point is not what they were when Jesus appeared but what he made them by this sending. Whatever they were to start with--laymen, some of the seventy-two, or apostles whose short-term assignment (Mt 10:5-6, 23) was soon to be replaced with a permanent call--there is nothing to hinder the view that Jesus now calls all of them to be ministers of the gospel of forgiveness through the risen Savior.

2. There is no appreciable difference between ἀποστέλλω and πέμπω in John's Gospel, but it is striking that he uses these verbs without any immediate indication of place or purpose. That is a type of usage familiar from the Old Testament, and it refers to a sending into the called ministry. God asks, "Whom

shall I send? And who will go for us?", and Isaiah responds, "Here am I. Send me!" (Is 6:8). The same quasi-technical sense of the word "send" is used negatively of false prophets: "I did not send these prophets, yet they have run with their message" (Jr 23:21).

3. Earlier in John's Gospel we hear of a "sending" by Christ twice, and both times it refers to the special ministry of called ministers (4:37 [cf. Mt 9:38], and 17:18,20).

4. The disciples, John tells us, "were overjoyed when they saw the Lord" (v. 20). Their joy indicates that by now their doubts are overcome. Clearly they already have faith, and through faith they already have the sanctifying Spirit as well as the priestly right to use the Keys. There seems to be more point to Jesus' solemn act of actually conferring the Spirit if we see this gift not as the sanctifying Spirit common to all Christians but rather as the "Spirit of office," as some have called it. For while all Christians have the sanctifying Spirit, they differ in the diverse manifestations of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:7-11), and those diverse manifestations of the Spirit include the called ministry of the gospel in whatever form that office is given (1 Cor 12:28).

5. With this interpretation, we have a striking parallel between Christ and his ministers. "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. . . .Receive the Holy Spirit." Jesus received a special gift of the Spirit when he was sent by the Father into his ministry at the time of his baptism (even though he had the Spirit previously), and now the disciples receive a special gift of the Spirit as they are sent by Christ into the ministry (even though the sanctifying Spirit was already with them).

Certainly this was part of a new chapter in the history of the church, for on that Easter Sunday the newly risen Lord first revealed the new and glorious life which he had entered as our trailblazer. His solemn act of conferring the Spirit and the Keys on his ministers certainly impresses us as an act with permanent significance (those who wish to see this as the conferring of the Spirit and the Keys on the church as a whole often make the same point). There is no need to raise questions about others who were absent, such as Thomas, for the main point here is the institution of the office, not the identity of the individuals who received calls. What Jesus so solemnly instituted on the first day of his resurrection life, he instituted for all time.

Apostles again

If John 20:21-23 is not a post-resurrection institution of the apostolic office as such, did such an event occur? Yes--in Acts 1:1-8. In verse 2 Luke focuses our attention on the apostles (" . . .until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen"). In verse 8 he refers to the special power they would receive, the worldwide scope of their special ministry, and their role as witnesses. Here Luke is not talking about the sort of witnessing all Christians can do by speaking of their conviction that the gospel is true and has revealed its power in their hearts. He means literal witnesses of the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus, for that is the kind of witnessing which is spoken of later in the chapter at the choosing of Matthias (vv. 21-22).

It is a striking repetition: just as Jesus originally conferred the generic office of "fishers of men" before creating the apostolate, so now after his resurrection he first confers the generic office of the Keys (John 20) and only later reestablishes the apostolate with a new scope of action (Acts 1).

Christ continues to send ministers

In Ephesians 4:11, Paul looks at various specific forms of the New Testament ministry of the gospel--apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (or pastors who are also teachers)--and says that they were all given to the church by the ascended Lord. He gave them to perform a task which remains unfinished until the end of time, namely to equip the saints "so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ" (vv. 12-13).

The verb in verse 11 is an aorist: Christ "gave (ἔδωκεν) some to be apostles, some to be prophets. . ." He no longer gives apostles, and we have no promise that he continues to give prophets. Those specific offices were not instituted in the sense of ongoing offices that must continually be filled as the incumbents die off. By the same token, then, this passage does not explicitly indicate that the specific offices of evangelist, pastor, and teacher (or pastor/teacher) in the form that Paul knew them must be continued. For that matter, in strict logic the passage does not explicitly require the continuation of the genus "called ministry of the gospel." Conceivably someone could argue that just as we still benefit from the ministry of the apostles though there are no more apostles on earth, so also Christians could build on the work of past ministers in general without having a called ministry of their own.

There may be exceptional cases of that nature, in which a small group of Christians struggle along without having a called minister of their own. But those who use Christian freedom as a cover for anti-clerical views and despise the gifts Christ still gives to his church are not in step with Paul's thinking. How highly he values the called ministry and how important he considers it for the ongoing life of the church can be seen from two commands.

The command to appoint ministers

In some ways very general and yet focused on the ministry of the word is the command to Timothy, "The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Tm 2:2). Paul is concerned to perpetuate the genus "called ministry of the gospel" because he recognizes the vital role of such a ministry (Eph 4:11-16). The details of organization within that genus are less important.

In Titus 1:5, Paul tells Titus, "The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished (τὰ λείποντα, the things still lacking) and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you." He is not talking about needs peculiar to one or two congregations but rather something that needs to be done throughout the Cretan mission field (κατὰ πόλιν, town by town; compare Acts 14:23, where Paul and Barnabas appoint elders κατ' ἐκκλησίαν, church by church). The pastoral function, which can be spoken of apart from a local congregational setting (Jn 21:15-17), is here adapted to the typical needs of typical young congregations as Paul lists basic qualifications for congregational elders and describes the

use of the word in spiritual oversight. Even at that he does not specify how many elders there are to be in each town or how they should divide up the basic responsibilities of the called ministry. But the importance of the function and of the use of called ministers to perform it comes through loud and clear.

Can we speak of the necessity of such a ministry?

If we understand it properly and explain it carefully, we can speak of the necessity of the genus "called ministry of the gospel." There are three reasons. 1) Christ himself not only conferred this office on some before his passion and taught that it would be in existence at his return, but he also solemnly established it on the day of his resurrection and perpetuates it from the right hand of the Father by giving ministers to the church. 2) Paul commands its continuation in a manner that does not betray a purely local or temporary concern. 3) Such necessity as the "generic" called ministry has, corresponds to the nature of the church. It is not the sort of necessity which comes from arbitrary, external regulations; it is not a Levitical imposition on the church. That third point deserves further attention.

The nature which God has given the church includes the fact that the church is a *body*. We Christians are not mere individuals pursuing our individual paths to heaven who occasionally happen to get together. We belong together, and Christ wishes that to find expression in our lives. That is one of the reasons he instituted the Lord's Supper: "Because there is one bread, we, many as we are, are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:17). Our coming together, however, is not to be chaotic, with all exercising their priestly rights in different ways at the same time, or some taking advantage of others by taking the lead on their own without consideration of the rights of the others. Having a called ministry contributes to the preservation of order. Perhaps most important, the body of Christ is not a collection of interchangeable parts. All have the same gospel rights, but not all have the same spiritual gifts. Not all are capable of speaking the word clearly and fully, yet that clear and full word is vital for the health of the church. It is *necessary* for the church to cultivate that kind of preaching and teaching of the word, necessary for the church's own good, and the chief way the church can do that is to receive qualified speakers of the gospel from the ascended Lord by training and calling them.

We must not go too far, however, in speaking of the necessity of the called ministry. In no way can we say that having a called ministry is necessary for salvation; that can be said only of the means of grace. Even the sacraments are not absolutely necessary for salvation, though as special ways in which forgiveness is communicated to us they belong to the essence of the church. The called ministry comes farther down the scale of necessity, and the old dogmatic phrase fits it well. The called ministry pertains *non ad esse sed ad bene esse ecclesiae*--it belongs to the wellbeing of the church, not the essence of the church. Where two or three are gathered in Christ's name, there is the church, whether the group has a called minister or not. Paul, Barnabas, Titus, and Timothy do not appoint an elder or elders as soon as they have converted a tiny nucleus of Christians in a city; for the good of the church they wait until the need for spiritual oversight and adequate teaching of the word can be met in a responsible manner.

The usefulness of the concept of divine institution with regard to the called ministry

There is some value in speaking of the divine institution of the called ministry. It teaches us to hold the ministry in high regard whether we are lay persons or incumbents of the ministry. It can also give us

some direction as we chart our congregational or synodical course for the future, since the concept of the divine institution of the ministry can help us to see what are the "parts" or duties of the ministry in God's sight.

I mentioned the chief ones earlier; let me explain how I arrived at them. The parts of the called ministry which we can trace back to Christ *and* which have a permanent, necessary place in his understanding of the ministry may confidently be included as belonging to the divinely instituted called ministry. John 20 provides the absolute focal point of the ministry, namely the exercise of the Keys (that is true even if you disagree with my exegesis and take John 20:21-23 as a giving of the Keys to the whole church). Along with these most pointed statements of law and gospel, "Your sins are not forgiven" and "Your sins are forgiven," comes the whole doctrine of the law and the whole doctrine of the gospel, including the sacraments. Christ pictures his stewards as feeding their charges when he returns (Lk 12:42), clearly a picture of word and sacraments being put into use through the work of called ministers.

Prayer is an essential accompanying responsibility. Jesus' own prayer life was an important part of his ministry, and he taught his disciples how to pray. That it is an important part of the ministry he instituted is clear from Acts 6:4, where the apostles refuse to let it be driven out of their ministry by other tasks. Since prayer is nowhere said to be a distinctive feature of the apostolic office as such, it seems proper to conclude that it is a part of the office of the gospel ministry in general.

On the other hand, I would not include the function of food-distributor to the poor. Though Jesus himself fed the five thousand and the four thousand, and though the apostles recognize the importance of helping the poor (Ac 6:1-6; Ac 20:34-35; Ga 2:10), it is less clear that this permanent concern of all Christians is a permanent part of the divinely instituted office. Where Christians cannot meet their basic needs, fellow Christians are obligated to help, but that can be done through informal, individual efforts (1 Tm 5:4,16; 6:17-18) rather than through an organized office. If the church finds it best to organize such an office (Ac 6:1-6; 1 Tm 3:8-13?), or if it even finds it necessary to do so in some circumstances because the need can be met in no other way, it is good to lay down appropriate spiritual qualifications. But there is no clear indication that such an office should be perpetuated as necessary for the wellbeing of the church.

Exorcisms, healings, and other miracles were prominent features of the ministry of Jesus, the apostles, and some others in the early church. But there is no indication of permanence for these activities. They do not belong to the "generic" called ministry of the gospel.

About the first part of 1 Timothy 5:17 I am not entirely sure. What did those elders do who were said to "preside well" or "manage well" (οἱ καλῶς προεστῶτες πρεσβύτεροι)? If "elder" is used here with the same range of meaning it has in Acts 20:17 (Paul summons the Ephesian elders to say farewell), and if the organization of the ministry at Ephesus did not change between the time of Paul's farewell and the time of 1 Timothy 5:17, there is reason to infer that these "presiding" or "managing" elders were doing something which belongs to the divinely instituted ministry of the gospel. For in Acts 20:28-31, Paul designates the whole body of elders to whom he was saying farewell as overseers appointed by the Holy Spirit with pastoral responsibilities. Those who did not "labor in preaching and teaching" (κοπιῶντες ἐν λόγῳ καὶ διδασκαλίᾳ) may have heard confession and pronounced absolution; they may have presided at the Lord's Supper (cf. Justin, *Apology I*, 67); they may have reconciled quarreling Christians and disciplined

heretics and impenitents. But if the connection with Acts 20 seems too insecure, it would be better to plead ignorance about these elders than to assume that they were divinely called ministers of the gospel and that "ruling" even apart from the word of God is part of the divinely instituted ministry of the gospel.

At Northwestern College I teach Latin and Greek. The teaching of Latin and Greek in itself is no part of the divinely instituted ministry of the gospel. But the church wants me to present not only facts and opinions about Latin and Greek in my classroom, but along with them to communicate the gospel and a gospel-centered way of thinking and living. Those things, together with my teaching of a religion course, my preaching in chapel, and my spiritual counseling of students in private, belong to the divinely instituted ministry of the gospel. It is useful for me to keep that in mind. It is also useful for the church to focus above all on those activities which belong to the divinely instituted ministry, and to keep them most clearly in mind when she issues calls.

Summary of Part II

- 1) The rights of the New Testament priesthood, including the right to speak the gospel and administer the sacraments, belong to all Christians through faith in Christ.
- 2) How these rights are exercised depends on other factors, e.g., zeal, qualifications, and situation.
- 3) These priestly rights were given with the first gospel in Eden, but they became clearer and broader with time, finding their most decisive institution in the ministry of Christ and in the apostolic declaration of the meaning of Christ's ministry.
- 4) The explicit origin of the ministry of the specially called is hard to trace in the Old Testament, but what matters most for us are its roots in the ministry of Christ.
- 5) By various acts and words (notably Lk 5:11; 12:43; Jn 20:21-23; Eph 4:11-13) Christ established the "generic" called ministry of the gospel.
- 6) That this "generic" called ministry of the gospel is not completely optional but rather necessary in some sense, is seen most explicitly in the apostolic commands to appoint ministers. Thus we may speak of a divine institution in the full sense of the term, namely as implying some degree or kind of necessity.
- 7) The necessity of the "generic" called ministry of the gospel is not that of an arbitrary, external imposition on the church in the manner of a ceremonial law. It is a necessity rooted in the nature of the church. It is not an absolute necessity. Rather, the called ministry is ordinarily necessary for the wellbeing of the church, not for its essence.
- 8) Thinking through the institution of the ministry can help us to see what "parts" belong to the called ministry of the gospel by divine institution.

Part III: Confessing the Doctrine

A. The Lutheran Confessions

In this section we will look at some of the statements made in the Lutheran Confessions about the ministry, its institution, and its necessity.

Augsburg Confession, Article V
(Trigl., p. 44)

Though I have given the pagination in the Triglot, I will quote the first part of the article in German from the critical edition²⁰: "*Solchen Glauben zu erlangen, hat Gott das Predigamt eingesetzt, Evangelium und Sakrament geben, dadurch er als durch Mittel den heiligen Geist gibt...*"

I have not searched the literature for all possible understandings of these words. It seems to me that there are two big questions. What does *Predigamt* refer to--is it the *function* of sharing the gospel, regardless of whether that function is performed by called ministers or by lay Christians, or is it the special *office* entrusted to some by a call into the ministry of the gospel? Second, what is the relationship between *hat Gott das Predigamt eingesetzt* and the following words, *Evangelium und Sakrament geben*? Connected with this second question is a grammatical question about *geben*.

Most Lutherans take *geben* here as a short form of *gegeben*; short forms of that type are not at all unusual in sixteenth century German. In that case we could translate literally, "To attain such faith, God has instituted the preaching ministry, given gospel and sacrament, through which as through means he gives the Holy Spirit. . ." (I am using "preaching ministry" to straddle the fence between office and function, not to refer to the ministers themselves.) Of the following four interpretations, the first three take *geben* as equivalent to *gegeben* (the fourth takes it as an infinitive).

1) The words "given gospel and sacrament" are an appositional phrase explaining "God has instituted the preaching ministry": God has instituted the preaching ministry, that is, he has given gospel and sacrament. If we now take "preaching ministry" in a purely functional sense and understand it to include all speaking of the gospel and administering of the sacraments by Christians, we have the idea that by giving the gospel and sacraments, God instituted gospel work as a task to be carried out by his priests. As we have seen in Part II, that thought is doctrinally correct.

This is the interpretation of AC V which we find in the "Theses on the Church and Ministry" (II.A) in the 1970 *Doctrinal Statements of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*. There is something to be said

²⁰*Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 2nd ed. (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1952), p. 58.

for this interpretation, but I am less sure of it than I once was. I am no Luther or Melanchthon expert, but over the last months I have been looking for examples in which either of them clearly says that Christians in general exercise the *Predigtamt*. I know of no place where Melanchthon writes in such a manner. Luther occasionally uses *Amt* or *ministerium* with reference to all Christians²¹, but so far I have found very few decisively clear examples in which he uses *Predigtamt* to refer to the gospel activity of lay Christians²². Often the word is explicitly or implicitly limited to the specially called, or it is used ambiguously enough that we could take it that way in line with what seems to be the prevailing sense of the word.

2) In view of that prevailing usage, some take *Predigtamt* as the office of the called rather than the function of all²³, and then apply to that an appositional reading of *Evangelium und Sakrament geben*. That amounts to saying something like this: God has instituted the specially called ministry, that is, he has given gospel and sacrament. Presumably that would mean that the specially called ministry was at least implicitly instituted in the very giving of the gospel and the sacraments. Doctrinally, one can make a case for making such a statement, since the necessity of the specially called ministry is derivable from the nature God has given the church even without taking into account the distinct and explicit institution of the called ministry. One may wonder, though, whether such a reading of AC V does not make the called ministry seem to be the only gospel channel worth mentioning. Even if this reading does not actually deny the efficacy of the gospel in the mouths of lay Christians, it would tend to marginalize it.²⁴

²¹WA 8, 422, 29; 8, 423, 40; 8, 425, 8; 8, 496, 34; 12, 180, 17; 12, 181, 17.

²²WA 8, 495, 12 (cf. 8, 498, 16); 12, 521, 15-37.

²³I used to think that the seventh of the Schwabach Articles, one of the important antecedents of the Augsburg Confession, is a strong argument against taking AC V as referring to the called ministry. It reads, "*Solchen glauben zu erlangen oder uns menschen zu ergeben, hat Got eingesetzt das predig ampt odder mundlich wort, Nemlich das Evangelium. . .*" (WA 30 III, 180, 14). "To attain such faith or to give it to us human beings, God has instituted the preaching ministry or oral word, namely the gospel. . ." The phrase "oral word" seemed to me to suggest the speaking of the gospel by any Christian. But in the Smalcald Articles, "oral word" is distinguished from the "mutual conversation and consolation of brethren" (Part III, Article IV; Trigl., 490). Here at least in the Smalcald Articles "oral word" refers to public preaching.

²⁴I must concede, though, that particularly when Luther emphasizes the proclamatory nature of the gospel as a message for the world at large, he views the called ministry as the ordinary means of getting the message out--so much so that he sometimes uses gospel and (public) ministry as interchangeable terms: "*Kurz Es heisset, das Evangelium odder predigampt sol nicht im winckel, sondern hoch empor auffm berg und frey offentlich am liecht sich lassen horen*" (WA 32, 304, 1-3). "In short, it means that the gospel or preaching ministry should let itself be heard high up on the mountain and out in the open in the light, not in the corner"--this as part of an argument advocating a properly called ministry instead of sneaks and corner preachers. If he can use gospel and (public) ministry as interchangeable terms, it is at least conceivable that such a usage might affect the phrasing of AC V.

3) Perhaps someone will take *geben* as equivalent to *gegeben* without treating the phrase as an apposition. In that case, we would have two separate acts: God has instituted the preaching ministry, and God has given gospel and sacrament. But what would account for mentioning the institution of the preaching ministry first and the giving of the gospel and the sacraments second?

4) A minority view is that *geben* is an infinitive expressing purpose. If so, the article reads, "To attain such faith, God has instituted the preaching ministry to give gospel and sacrament. . ." ²⁵ That would make the German read much closer to the Latin, which says that the "ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted." The advocates of this infinitive reading of the German understand "preaching ministry" as the office of called ministers of the gospel; conceivably someone might retain the infinitive but take "preaching ministry" as the gospel activity of all Christians. Either way there would be no doctrinal objection to the interpretation. But until someone shows me that an infinitive without *zu* could express purpose here, I will regard this reading of the German text of AC V as very unlikely. What is more, the grammatical difficulty is compounded by the difficulty of accounting for the early history of the text if we take *geben* as an infinitive. ²⁶

Augsburg Confession, Article XIV
(Trigl., p. 49)

"Of Ecclesiastical Order they teach that no one should publicly (*oeffentlich, publice*) teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called."

Whatever sense one attaches to "publicly," ²⁷ this article reflects an understanding that the special ministry

²⁵Prof. Kurt E. Marquart has adopted this interpretation in his book, *The Church and her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance* (Fort Wayne: International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, 1990), p. 120. I owe Prof. Marquart thanks for a letter in which he informs me that this interpretation was held by A. F. C. Vilmar and cites the reference in Hellmut Lieberg, *Amt und Ordination bei Luther und Melancthon* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), p. 273, nt. 26.

²⁶Note that the explicitly participial form *gegeben* appears in the "Revised Form of the Confession, June 15, 1530" in M. Reu, *The Augsburg Confession: A Collection of Sources with An Historical Introduction* (Chicago: Wartburg Publ. House, 1930), p. 172*. The form *gegeben* begins to reappear in printed versions of the Augsburg Confession already in the sixteenth century.

²⁷I was taught to understand "publicly" as "in the name of the community," an indication that the called minister represents the calling body. I have great respect for the living teachers and the departed Synodical Conference fathers who have held that view, but I should like to see a rigorous demonstration that *oeffentlich* had such a meaning in 1530. (The lexicographers Grimm and Heyne find no such sense before the eighteenth century.) Certainly Luther taught that a minister called by the church performs his ministry in the name of the church, but I do not see that he uses the word *oeffentlich* to convey that sense. The Latin *publice* can mean "in the name of the people," but it can mean other things as well. As I read Luther, Melancthon and the dogmaticians, I find many passages where "publicly" means "out in the

of word and sacraments is conferred by a call. Other passages in the Lutheran Confessions make the theological context of this article explicit. The church's right to call is itself of divine origin, being given with the gift of the gospel: "For wherever the Church is, there is the authority to administer the Gospel. Therefore it is necessary for the Church to retain the authority to call, elect, and ordain ministers. And this authority is a gift which in reality is given to the Church."²⁸ In other words, AC XIV is not simply talking about the church's call into the church's ministry, but a divine call into the divine ministry through the church.

Apology, Article XIII, 11-12
(Trigl., 311)

"But if ordination be understood as applying to the ministry of the Word, we are not unwilling to call ordination a sacrament. For the ministry of the Word has God's command²⁹ and glorious promises, Rom. 1, 16: *The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth*. Likewise, Is. 55, 11: *So shall My Word be that goeth forth out of My mouth; it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please*. If ordination be understood in this way, neither will we refuse to call the imposition of hands a sacrament. For the Church has the command to appoint ministers. . ." (*Habet enim ecclesia mandatum de constituendis ministris.../Denn die Kirche hat Gottes Befehl, dass sie soll Prediger und Diakonos bestellen...*)

Despite the quotation of very general promises concerning the power of the gospel, the reference to ordination makes it clear that the ministry in view here is the ministry of the specially called, not the gospel activity of Christian priests in general.

"The Church has the command to appoint ministers." That is an appropriate translation. A more literal translation of the Latin would be, "The Church has a command about appointing ministers." But more literal is not necessarily more accurate in conveying meaning. It would be an error to suppose that Melancthon means, "The Church has a command telling her how to go about appointing ministers *if* she decides to have any in the first place." Both the context and the authoritative German translation eliminate that thought.

The Reformers were not hesitant to affirm the necessity of the called ministry or to cite apostolic commands in proof of that necessity. In "The Misuse of the Mass," Luther cites Titus 1:5ff and comments, "Whoever believes that here in Paul the Spirit of Christ is speaking and commanding will be

open" or "in the public assembly of the church," and the adjective "public" often has a comparable meaning. "Public" sometimes means "pertaining or belonging to the people," but I haven't found any early uses of "public ministry" where the specific notion of "representing a calling body" is clearly necessary.

²⁸Tractate "Of the Power and Jurisdiction of Bishops," 67 (Trigl., 523).

²⁹The German translation here explicitly mentions institution: "*Denn das Predigtamt hat Gott eingesetzt und geboten.*"

sure to recognize this as a divine institution and ordinance, that in each city there should be several bishops, or at least one."³⁰ In 1550-51 Melanchthon wrote, "Titus was expressly told in writing, 'You are to appoint elders in each town, just as I ordered.' Likewise, 2 Timothy 2: 'The things you heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to faithful persons who are qualified to teach others.' Likewise, 1 Timothy 5, 'Lay your hands quickly on no one.' These sayings plainly show that the church is commanded to choose ministers."³¹

I see no reason to doubt that the statement in the Apology, "The Church has the command to appoint ministers," is based on 2 Timothy 2:2 and Titus 1:5. When Melanchthon issued a revised version of the Augsburg Confession--the *Variata* of 1540, notorious for its weakening of Article X--he made a quite harmless addition to Article XIV, in which he added a reference to Titus 1:5 to support the principle that no one should teach publicly in the church without a regular call.³²

Tractate, 9
(Trigl., 504)

While the Scriptural exegesis of the Confessions is not binding in all details, I find it interesting that the Tractate takes John 20:21 as a sending of ministers. The context is a discussion of the relative authority of the apostles. Against papal pretensions of supreme authority for the alleged successors of the alleged supreme apostle, Melanchthon demonstrates that there can be no such supremacy by divine right. Part of his demonstration is that all the apostles were equal in authority: "In John 20:21, Christ sends his apostles³³ equally, without distinction, when he says, 'As the Father has sent me, so I too send you.'" I do not object to Melanchthon's referring to "apostles" instead of using St. John's word, "disciples" (20:19,20) so long as one doesn't insist that only the apostles were there with Jesus or that this sending set them apart from other gospel ministers. In Melanchthon's defense we can at least say that John's Gospel gives no clear indication that any but the apostles were addressed when Jesus said "I am sending you".³⁴

³⁰Trans. Frederick C. Ahrens, in *Luther's Works*, Vol. 36 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), p. 155 (=WA 8, 426, 32-35). This treatise of 1521 was carefully written by Luther and remained a special favorite of his; late in life he said he would not retract any of it (*LW* 36:131-132).

³¹From his comments on 1 Timothy 3, *Opera*, Vol. 4 (Wittenberg, 1577), pp. 391-2.

³²Arthur Carl Piepkorn, "The Sacred Ministry and Holy Ordination in the Symbolical Books of the Lutheran Church," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 40 (1969), p. 562. The *Variata* is cited from *Corpus Reformatorum* 26, 360.

³³Oddly, the Triglot has "disciples," following the German translation (*Juenger*) rather than the Latin original.

³⁴Chemnitz nicely refers to John 20:21ff as the "ordination" of the "disciples." *Examen*, II, XIII, III (Preuss edition, 480a) = *The Examination of the Council of Trent*, Vol. II, p. 695.

Tractate, 10
(Trigl., 506)

Melanchthon proceeds to use Galatians 2 as proof that Paul was not dependent on Peter for the authority of his office and did not even desire to seek Peter's confirmation of his call. The Latin text then says, "He teaches that the authority of the ministry depends upon the Word of God (*docet auctoritatem ministerii a Verbo Dei pendere*), and that Peter was not superior to the other apostles, and that it was not from this one individual Peter that ordination was to be sought."

The authority of the ministry depends on the word of God: the power is in the message, so when the message is entrusted to someone by divine call, that person has the power of the message by divine call. If one gets the Keys from God, one doesn't need to get them from Peter.

The German translation of this passage by Veit Dietrich is very free and interpretive. I would turn it into English this way: "We have a sure teaching that the preaching ministry proceeds from the common call of the apostles (*dass das Predigtamt vom gemeinen Amt der Apostel herkommt*), and it is not necessary for all to get their call and confirmation from this one person, Peter, alone."

In what sense does the ministry proceed from the common call of the apostles? Let's start from the key point in context, that of putting the apostles all on the same level. Veit Dietrich's paraphrase of the Latin is obviously not meant to say, "You need not go to Peter, but you must be able to trace your call back to at least one of the apostles through an unbroken string of ordinations." Rather, in keeping with the use of John 20 in the preceding paragraph, Dietrich ties all the apostles together and at the same time ties the ministry in general to them by virtue of the power they all have in common, the authority of the Keys. That power was solemnly bestowed on the disciples whom Jesus addressed late on Easter Sunday as he sent them into the post-resurrection ministry. It was not the distinctively apostolic empowerment in its full range (including inspiration and miraculous powers), but the Keys are the core of the apostolic office. The office received on Easter Sunday by the men we know as apostles is the office entrusted to me and other ministers today, and in that sense I subscribe also to the German version of Tractate 10.³⁵

That way there is no need to hunt for non-existent Scriptures affirming that Jesus ran all his calls through the apostles or that he created the ministry first in the form of a full-blown apostolate and then

³⁵One cannot lightly dismiss the confessional authority of the German here by saying it is only a translation and (as some would put it) a mistranslation at that. According to the introduction to the critical edition of the Confessions (*Bekennnisschriften*, pp. xxvi-xxvii), Veit Dietrich made his German version of the Tractate just after Melanchthon composed the Latin, and it was published already in 1541 and again in 1553. Before long, the Latin was being circulated anonymously and eventually fell into temporary obscurity. When the Book of Concord was published in 1580, the German edition included what was essentially Dietrich's translation of the Tractate; for the Latin edition, Selnecker, thinking the German was the original, translated it back into Latin. (The original Latin was restored to its rightful place in the Latin Book of Concord of 1584.) The German-speaking Lutherans who adopted the German Book of Concord in 1580 were subscribing to Veit Dietrich's translation of the Tractate.

perpetuated the ministry by explicitly subtracting the temporary features of that apostolic office. We can affirm the German of Tractate 10 without adopting those positions.

Tractate, 72
(Trigl., 524)

Here again I must refer to the critical edition.³⁶ The Latin autograph composed by Melanchthon is no longer extant, but it was copied by Spalatin. Spalatin's copy was signed by all the theologians present at Smalcald (except Luther, who was sick.) This copy contains a sentence which does not appear in the first printed edition (1540) or in the 1584 edition of the Latin Book of Concord or in the Triglot. It is, however, included in the text of the critical edition--rightly, I would say, in view of the fact that Spalatin's copy is the one that was signed at Smalcald. As I translate I will put the sentence in italics.

"From all of this it is clear that the church retains the right of choosing and ordaining ministers. *Therefore, when the bishops either become heretics or do not wish to perform ordinations, by divine right (jure divino) the churches are compelled to ordain pastors and ministers, using their own pastors to do this.* And the impiety and tyranny of the bishops become the cause of schism and discord. . ."

The sentence missing from the Latin column in the Triglot is present in the German.

We have here a testimony to the ordinary necessity of the called ministry of the gospel for the wellbeing of the church.³⁷

I have quoted these passages from the Confessions because it almost seems that this kind of strong language about the importance of the divinely instituted called ministry of the gospel has become unfashionable among us. Most of the material I have quoted comes from Melanchthon's pen simply because he wrote most of the relevant articles in the Confessions. I think that very nearly all of it could be supported with parallels from Luther's writings. It would be unfair to suppose that their emphasis on the necessity of the called ministry betrays legalistic thinking or fear of Roman criticisms. The Confessors spoke and wrote as they did about the ministry of the gospel precisely because the gospel was dear to them and because they were convinced that they were standing firmly on Scripture.

³⁶*Bekennnisschriften*, xxvi-xxvii.

³⁷The Tractate repeatedly uses the phrase "divine right" in distinction to "human right" (cf. paragraphs 12, 16, 20, 34, 36, 38, 57, 61, 65). What is done by divine right is not merely a God-pleasing option; it is commanded by God. If it is not commanded by God, it is not by divine right. If the bishops have the secular authority of princes, that combination of spiritual and secular authority is by human right, not divine. By divine right they have the Keys (60-61).

B. The WELS "Theses on the Church and Ministry"

While I have my doubts about the exegesis implied by the use of certain passages,³⁸ I agree with the doctrine presented here.

In particular it pleases me to see specific recognition given to the public ministry in general as a category or level of classification distinct from the common priesthood of all Christians on the one hand and particular forms of the public ministry on the other. At times the theologians at the Wauwatosa seminary left that level out of the picture, simply treating the gospel activity of the priesthood of believers as the genus and the particular forms of public ministry as species.³⁹

The way the point is worded in the "Theses" is this: "From the beginning of the Church there were men especially appointed to discharge publicly (in behalf of a group of Christians) the duties of this one ministry. Acts 13:1-3; Acts 6:1-6. This public ministry is not generically different from that of the common priesthood of all Christians. It constitutes a special God-ordained way of practicing the one ministry of the Gospel" (II.C-D).

I wonder, though, what is meant by "God-ordained" in that last sentence. Is that a synonym for "divinely commanded," as when the Confession says that the church has the command to appoint ministers? Or is it meant to be something less decisive, say, "divinely approved" or "based on divine precedents"? Or does it allow both understandings?⁴⁰ Unfortunately, I don't think that substituting "divinely instituted" for "God-ordained" would eliminate misunderstanding either.

It pleases me to read, "It would be wrong to trace the origin of this public ministry to mere expediency"

³⁸For example, John 20:21-23 and Acts 1:8 under II.A, and Acts 6:1-6 under II.C and II.D.6.

³⁹August Pieper, "*Zur Verstaendigung in der gegenwaertigen Diskussion ueber Kirche und Amt*," in *Theologische Quartalschrift* 9 (1912), pp. 204-5: "In the matter of the ministry, the parish ministry (*Pfarramt*) is not the genus instituted by Christ. The genus is the ministry of the New Testament, the ministry of the Spirit, which is mentioned in Matthew 28, 2 Corinthians 3, 1 Peter 2, and elsewhere. The fifth article of the Augsburg Confession calls it the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments. The parish ministry [pastoral ministry] is a species of it. And we too say: the parish ministry in the form familiar to us is the chief species, the most complete, most important, and most necessary species of the ecclesiastical ministry, but it is not the only divinely instituted form of the ecclesiastical ministry of teaching (*Lehramt*)."

⁴⁰J. P. Koehler considered the Thiensville Theses drawn up in 1932 by the St. Louis and Thiensville seminary faculties "just an intersynodical *modus vivendi*, a compromise, whether intended so or not." Among other things he drew attention to the ambiguity of a recurring phrase by inserting bracketed questions: "It is God's will [command? or pleasure?] and order [ordinance? or arrangement?]. . .that Christians who live together also enter into outward association. . .(and) that such Christian local-congregations have shepherds and teachers to discharge the common task of the office of the Word in their midst. . ." *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, p. 239a.

(II.D.5). But when Hoefling's name is attached as a representative of that rejected view, I do not know what to make of it. I have not read most of Hoefling's book. But according to Holsten Fagerberg,

It must be emphasized decidedly that Hoefling in no way denied the divine origin of the *ecclesiastical ministry* (*Kirchenamt*). That misunderstanding was not rare in the debate at that time. In his argument with Muenchmeyer, Hoefling was able to assert that he too accepted a "divinely established and instituted ministry."⁴¹

He also used expressions very similar to the "God-ordained way" which we find in the WELS "Theses." Hoefling said that the special ministry of the church was not a capricious, human arrangement, but that it exists "in a divinely willed and divinely directed way with inner necessity" (*in gottgewollter und gottgewiesener Weise mit innerer Notwendigkeit*).⁴² If Hoefling is going to represent a rejected view in our "Theses," it would be good to pin down the difference accurately.⁴³

The "Theses" oppose the view that the pastorate of the local congregation is divinely instituted in contrast to all other forms of the public ministry today. Like August Pieper, I see good reason to say that the pastorate of a local congregation as we are familiar with it is ordinarily the most important species of the called ministry,⁴⁴ and if perceived importance amounted to a divine institution, that might settle the matter. But even the existence of an apostolic command which takes local congregations into account (Tt 1:5ff) is not really a distinct institution of a specific form of called ministry.

Perhaps someone will say, "Aren't you being inconsistent? A foundation and an institution are closely

⁴¹Fagerberg, *Bekenntnis, Kirche und Amt*, p. 273.

⁴²Fagerberg, p. 280 (from Hoefling, *Grundsätze* 1853, p. 63).

⁴³Prof. Marquart certainly finds Hoefling's views deficient: "According to him, the only divinely established office is that of the priesthood of all believers. The concrete office of Word and Sacrament does not arise out of a direct divine command and institution. Rather, it emerges by an inner necessity out of the priesthood itself, that is, by the latter's delegation [*Uebertragung*] of its individual members' spiritual rights and powers to one of themselves, for the sake of good order. Hoefling's later attempts to make this scheme add up to a divine institution of the concrete preaching office [*Predigtamt*] after all, were really only cosmetic" (*The Church*, p. 113). If Hoefling is accurately represented in the first part of this description, it is right to reject his views here. Certainly there is an inner necessity which impels the church to call ministers, both because of the difference in spiritual gifts and for the sake of good order; and if the church had simply been given the gospel and had been left to figure out the need for ministers on her own, she still could have claimed the divine authority of the gospel itself as a fully adequate basis for calling ministers to her divinely given work. But the point is that Jesus never left the church in such a condition: he took the initiative in establishing, training, sending, and perpetuating a New Testament ministry, and his apostles followed his intentions in promoting and even commanding such a ministry in the church. The divine institution and the inner necessity are both true.

⁴⁴Cf. ftnt. 39.

related ideas. Earlier you acknowledged that the apostles and New Testament prophets belong to the foundation of the church for the purpose of including the Gentiles without subjecting them to the Old Testament law. If we can speak of the apostles and New Testament prophets as having a foundational or instituting role of that importance in Ephesians 2:20, why don't you say the same thing about Titus 1:5ff? Why not say that Paul's words here are a distinct institution of a distinct form of ministry, namely that of congregational elder or, in modern terms, pastor?"

I don't think I am being inconsistent. In Ephesians 2:20, Paul speaks of apostles and prophets as the foundation (with Christ the cornerstone) for the inclusion of the Gentiles, because it had been made known to them *by revelation* that the time for abandoning the barriers against the Gentiles had come. Paul emphasizes that in Ephesians 3:2-12 with such words as "mystery" and "revealed" and "made known." If Paul had said that the need for congregational elders was a mystery that had been made known to him and the other apostles and prophets, there would be some reason to speak of Titus 1:5ff as a distinct institution of a distinct form of ministry, the congregational elder (and even then, it would not automatically follow that the apostolic understanding of "elder" was the same as the modern understanding of "pastor"). But Paul is not sending Titus to appoint elders in response to a special revelation from the Lord. Rather, Paul is applying what he already knows about the divinely instituted called ministry of the gospel (that is, the genus instituted by Christ) to the congregational needs in Crete. There is a difference between instituting something new and applying an already existing institution.⁴⁵

Let's conclude by putting things in order.

The preeminent marks of the church belong to the essence of the church:

The gospel of forgiveness is absolutely essential.

Baptism, a special way of conveying forgiveness, is said by Christ to be necessary for salvation (Jn 3:5). The fact that we can see the possibility of exceptional cases in which a person is saved without baptism does not make this precious gift in any way optional.

The Lord's Supper conveys forgiveness for the strengthening of the church and is to be used by those who examine themselves. It too is a precious gift, and it is not to be despised through neglect ("Do this").

⁴⁵Maybe an analogy will help. Civil government was implicitly instituted along with marriage and the family. On that basis, all forms of civil government can equally be said to be established by God; that is how Paul speaks in Romans 13. The only form of civil government that could be said to have a distinct institution in contrast to all other forms is that form which God instituted at Sinai--emphatically by divine revelation. Just so, the called ministry was implicitly instituted in the very giving of the gospel in the Garden of Eden. We can speak with certainty of an explicitly instituted form of the called ministry when God established the Levitical priesthood by revelation; we can say the same of the apostolate instituted by the Son of God himself (though its lasting nature is not to be found in a continuing succession of actual apostles, and hence it is not an institution in the usual sense). Where is there evidence that the office of congregational elder was similarly established by revelation?

Below the means of grace come things Christ has provided for the wellbeing of the church.

High among these is the called ministry of the gospel, instituted by Christ to equip the saints and complement their individual and corporate use of the gospel with an orderly and specially qualified ministry of the gospel on their behalf.

Of the various forms of the called ministry, ordinarily the most necessary and important ones are those which serve the most pressing spiritual needs of local congregations, whether established or incipient (missions).

Some (but not all) of these forms would correspond closely to what we include under the designation "pastors."

Ordinarily less important, but still providing extremely valuable service, are ministers who meet more limited, specialized needs in areas involving the word of God either within a local congregation or in a larger grouping.

Lots of things that churches sometimes get wrapped up in come far below any of the above in importance. Let's hold in high esteem the called ministry of the gospel, and above all, let's keep the gospel itself at the top of the list.