

# The Doctrine of Church and Ministry in the First One Hundred Volumes of the Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly

by John F. Brug

There is no doctrine that has been a more consistent and persistent concern of the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* during its 100-year history than the doctrine of church and ministry. The bibliography which follows this article lists 55 articles on the topic. In addition, many news items and book reviews in the *Quarterly* have dealt with this topic. A sampling of them is also included in the bibliography.

The articles are concentrated in two main periods. In the first twenty-five years of the *Quarterly's* history there was a lot of attention devoted to the topic because the Cincinnati Case had made the right of synods to carry out church discipline a hot issue. Was the synod really a church? This controversy led to a thorough examination of the whole topic by the Wauwatosa men, Koehler, Schaller, and Pieper. Many of their reflections appeared in the *Quarterly*.

In the last quarter century of the *Quarterly's* existence church and ministry has again been a topic of great concern, because the difference between the so-called Missouri Synod and Wisconsin Synod positions on this issue has been a cause of considerable strife in sister churches, and it has greatly impeded our efforts to establish fellowship with other small churches with a Synodical Conference background. Secondary factors which prompted the latest surge of articles were concern about deteriorating respect for the pastoral office, the development of new forms of the ministry within our synod, and debate about the relationship of the pastoral ministry to other forms of public ministry and to the priesthood of believers. In addition, this topic is being strongly debated in Lutheranism beyond the confines of the old Synodical Conference. Even in the ELCA, church and ministry is the doctrinal issue that stirs the most passion.

There was a surge of interest in this topic during the 1950s and 1960s, as the Synodical Conference was coming to its end. This interest led to the adoption of the WELS Theses on Church and Ministry in 1969, but the issue received relatively little attention in the *Quarterly* at that time, probably because of the greater urgency of the fellowship issue.

The most urgent theological issue for the Synodical Conference during the early years of the *Quarterly* was the continued fall-out of the Election Controversy, but the second theological issue that emerged to dominate the first decades of the *Quarterly's* life was the doctrine of church and ministry. Although J. P. Koehler had led the way in raising questions about the way that this doctrine was being taught and applied in Synodical Conference circles, August Pieper supplied the bulk of the articles on this topic in the *Quarterly*. Koehler observed:

It remained for three men after the synod had washed its hands of the Cincinnati Case to clarify the thinking regarding the doctrines of the church and ministry.... In the ensuing controversy about the Church and her Office of the Ministry, as precipitated by the Cincinnati differences, the three Seminary men stood shoulder to shoulder. (*History*, p 234)

The position held by the Wauwatosa professors was extensively presented in the issues of the *Quartalschrift* in the early years of the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Admittedly, Pieper did the bulk of the writing. John Schaller contributed articles on "The Origin and Development of the New Testament Ministry," and "Von der Entlassung aus einer Ortsgemeinde." Schaller's thoughts on the development of the parish pastorate can also be found in the preface to his *Pastorale Praxis*. Koehler was limited by the need to provide a text for church history and therefore was not able in his own estimation to do his part of the writing. However, a sample of Koehler's thoughts can be found in a book review on Stoeckhardt's commentary on First Peter, in his *Kirchengeschichte*, and in his *History of the Wisconsin Synod*.

The Wauwatosa men noted a similarity of approach in the way that the doctrine of church and ministry was being debated in American Lutheranism and the way in which election *intuitu fidei* had been defended during the Election Controversy. Too often, those who were engaged in doctrinal debate were looking to the 17<sup>th</sup> century Lutheran dogmaticians for support rather than first of all looking to the Scriptures. The Wauwatosa professors made a fresh, exegetical study of Scripture and demonstrated that

God has instituted the public ministry of the Word for the benefit of his people, but he has not prescribed specific forms of the ministry. God's people are free to establish those forms which suit their circumstances. It is God's will that believers gather together for mutual edification and to carry out the work God has given the church to do. Nevertheless, God has not prescribed what organizational forms the church must take. Wherever two or three gather together in Christ's name the church is present.

Throughout the century-long discussion several points of emphasis have run through the *Quarterly* articles on this topic. The most important has been an emphasis on *sola scriptura*. The second chief concern has been to maintain a proper balance between the rights of the local congregation and the duty of larger groups such as synods to exercise church discipline. A third concern has been to uphold both the rights of the priesthood of all believers and the special duties of the public ministers of the Word, the pastors in particular. Fourthly, in the discussion concerning various forms of public ministry the chief concern has been to maintain both the special role of the pastor as overseer of the congregation and the right of the church to establish other forms of ministry which support the work of the pastor within the congregation or which aid and extend the church's work from outside of the congregation.

Finally, although their concern was chiefly exegetical, the Wauwatosa men and their successors emphasized that their view was no innovation. Their view, and even to a considerable degree their terminology, was derived from Luther. They also repeatedly pointed out that any differences between them and Walther were differences of terminology, not differences of doctrine. In fact, their disagreement was more with misinterpretations of Walther than with Walther himself.

We will make a historical review of these five concerns, largely by means of citations from *WLQ* articles on this topic.<sup>1</sup>

### **I. Concern for *Sola Scriptura*.**

Professor Max Lehninger began his historical review of the church and ministry controversy, which appeared in the 1950 *WLQ* as part of WELS's centennial observance, with an emphasis on the role of *sola scriptura* in the debate:

In the decades following the founding of the Synodical Conference and the controversies thereafter, a weariness in our Church began to manifest itself in a growing tendency to settle questions of doctrine by a reference to the Confessions or to the writings of Luther and old teachers of the Church, or of Walther, the champion of Lutheran orthodoxy in America.

It was after the turn of the century when an incident which called for a reorientation relative to the doctrine of the Church and the Ministry brought this home to us. Two men in our synod, J. P. Koehler and Aug. Pieper, professors of our theological seminary, were alerting us to the danger of trying to settle a disputed point of doctrine by quoting the words of a prominent teacher of our Church, which were biblically correct when spoken to controvert a specific error with which that teacher then was concerned. They averred the basic unsoundness of a procedure which wants to prove a point of doctrine by quoting human authorities, even the Confessions and Luther. They reminded their fellow-Lutherans to show themselves true pupils of Luther by recognizing no other authority than the holy Scriptures. They stressed the self-evident maxim, theoretically acknowledged but so often forgotten in practice, that we Christians must always go to the only fountainhead and source of faith and knowledge, the well of living water, the Bible as the norm by which all things in the Church, doctrine and life, must be judged.

The incident just referred to was this. In the beginning of this century two pastors and their congregation in Cincinnati had been suspended by the Central District of the Missouri Synod. In 1904 they applied for membership with the Wisconsin Synod. Wisconsin deferred action on

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<sup>1</sup> There has been some up-dating of archaic punctuation, terms, and word order as well as a few editorial clarifications in the quotations. Otherwise, the style of the original articles has been retained.

this application because Missouri was still dealing with the applicants. Now a number of committee meetings ensued which delayed the settlement of the case till 1911. We are not concerned here with the outcome of the Cincinnati case. During the time when the suspension was in force some Wisconsin pastors fellowshipped with the congregation and their pastors by appearing in their pulpit. Their action aroused a lively discussion in our Synod. This discussion brought to the surface a latent confusion in synod concerning the doctrine of the Church and the Ministry. Professor August Pieper in a series of articles appearing in the *Quartalschrift* maintained that a suspension from synod membership should be respected by the members of that synod and of the sister synods. The warning not to undermine the discipline of the sister synod and keep hands off was met with the statement that a cultivation of church fellowship with men under synodical discipline is justified on the ground that synod, after all, is only a human arrangement, whereas the discipline of the divinely instituted local congregation (*Ortsgemeinde*) must indeed be respected, since it lies on a different level and is in its effect a severing of church fellowship. This dissensus in our own synod called for a thorough restudy of the doctrine of the Church. The theological faculty, then consisting of Professors John Schaller, J. P. Koehler, and August Pieper, undertook this study, and, after an examination of the Scripture passages referring to the subject, arrived at a full agreement in the matter. At first they met with opposition in our own synod. And while some Missouri men sided with them, the Missouri Synod as a whole and the faculty in St. Louis were dissenting. Through the years a number of conferences between the two faculties were held, but have not resulted in a full agreement to this day....

We are humbly thankful for the development of the doctrinal position of our Synod in these last fifty years even as in the first half of the century of its existence. It was brought about as a consequence of a controversy in our own synod, which forced us to a new evaluation of the spiritual priesthood of all believers, who as the elect Church of God, in the liberty that Christ has bought for us with His blood, receive and dispose of the gifts of their God in a way best suited to the needs of His Kingdom in their own midst. (*WLQ*, 1950, p 101-103, 105)<sup>2</sup>

The same emphasis on *sola scriptura* is reflected in Carl Lawrenz's review of Walther's theses on church and ministry:

As a rule such studies ought to be carried out by working first and foremost with the Holy Scriptures, the only normative source of scriptural doctrine. When the scriptural answers to a doctrinal issue have been carefully won by a thorough study of all the pertinent portions of Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions can serve well to show that the position presented has always been the position of the Lutheran church in its understanding of the Holy Scriptures. This should also be the purpose of quoting Luther and other orthodox Lutheran teachers. As gifted and faithful students of the Bible from the past, they can with their testimony likewise keep us from wresting Scripture, from forcing it to say what we might want to have it say, rather than what it actually says. (1982, p 106)

## **II. The Local Congregation and Synod**

Lehninger provides a brief summary of the main issues, beginning with the relation of congregations and synods, the point which had sparked the debate:

What then is the issue between the contending parties? For the sake of brevity we are using the names of the two synods, although we are well aware that there is not complete unanimity in either of the synods. Wisconsin teaches that every Christian is charged by his Lord with the

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<sup>2</sup> All *Quarterly* citations in the article are by year and page number. Full references can be obtained from the bibliography at the end of the article.

high privilege of administering the office of the keys by means of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament—Matth. 16, 16–19; 18, 18–20; John 20, 21–23; also Matth. 28, 19. 20; Mark 16, 15. 16. This describes the ministry with which the Lord has endowed each believer and, therefore, any group of them (Cp 1 Peter 2, 9). It is not a sound argument to claim that only the local congregation (*Ortsgemeinde*) has the power of excommunicating an unrepentant sinner, because it is divinely instituted and has the express command to do this, while a synod, or whatever name a larger group beyond the limits of a local congregation may have, is not even mentioned in Scripture. In proof of this argument our attention is called to Matth. 18, 17: “If he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.” This argument is really begging the question (*petitio principii*). It is an assumption at the outset of the discussion of something which is to be established in the course of the debate. The simple fact is, there was no “church” in the sense of the local congregation of later years (*Ortsgemeinde*) in existence when the Lord spoke these words. But there were Christians, groups of them, to which Jesus could and did refer. Whether we call these groups congregations, or synods, or by another name does not matter. The Lord is here interested in telling his disciples to leave no stone unturned in seeking the salvation of the erring brother. In the Bible there is no word of institution of the local congregation, in the sense we speak of it today, in contrast to other assemblies of Christians, like synods, conferences, mission societies, children’s friend societies, and so forth, whatever name may be given to Christians who are gathered for the furthering of God’s Kingdom on earth. But all these gatherings of Christians are creations of God the Holy Spirit and are in that sense instituted by God. For by working faith in them He has made them members of the spiritual body of Christ. God Himself then has thus instituted His Church, and that holds good for every group of Christians gathered in His name to do His work, for the local congregation and the synod, and the like. Cp Eph. 4, 5. 6. (1950, p 103-104)

In a review of a First Peter commentary written by George Stoeckhardt, J.P. Koehler gives a succinct summary of the Wauwatosa Theology’s view on the church and its ministry:

Whenever and however a gathering of Christians motivated by the power of the gospel sets about to arrange for the administering of the word and sacraments so that the gospel may have free course among them, that has come about by the agency of the Holy Spirit. (1913, p 69)

August Pieper wrote extensively on the relationship and duties of synods and congregations. Pieper asserted that since there is no one form of the church that has been specifically instituted by Christ and since a synod is a gathering of Christians, and, therefore, a true church “in the strict sense of the word” (1912, p 101), “therefore it has all ecclesiastical authority, the power of the word, the power of the keys.” (1911, p 140)

Thus the synod, as the sum of all its member congregations and Christians, as well as the synodical convention as its representative and as a Christian congregation, is a Christian confessional church and in fact a communion of saints, and the Lord is in its midst according to His promise with all the blessings he has gained for the salvation of sinners. (1911, p 140)

In his 1917 article on Luther’s doctrine of the church and ministry, after rejecting the claim that the parish pastorate is the only divinely instituted form of the ministry (see part iv of this article), Pieper turns his attention to the duties of a synod:

[The false notion that the parish pastor is the only divinely instituted form of ministry] has, however, helped to lead to the false conceptions that only the *Pfarrgemeinde*, local congregation, is Church in the real sense of the Word and that only this visible organization which is so constituted has the office (*Amt*) and can extend a divine call, whereas a synod

cannot bestow a divine office of the Word, because it is not a local congregation or *Pfarrgemeinde*! This opinion rests upon the error that the Lord did not give all Church authority to the Communion of Saints as such, but rather to the local congregation because of a definite visible organization or quality. Our Confessions (especially in Melancthon's *Tractatus*), Luther, and Walther (cp his fourth Thesis regarding the Church in *Church and Ministry*) so strongly warded off this error that it can only disturb the Church temporarily.<sup>3</sup> Luther and Melancthon (*Tractatus*) have taken their definition of the visible church especially from Matthew 18:20: "Where two or three are gathered, etc." and emphasized on the basis of this word that every gathering of Christians of only two or three has everything which Christ has won and given to the Church and so under certain conditions (if, thereby, good order and love are not transgressed) could also carry out the right of extending a call. The idea that a synod is not Church in the true sense of the word is an un-Scriptural and un-Lutheran illusion. All of the offices of the Word which are created by a Christian synod, no matter what they may be called, are of equal divine institution with those that are established by a local congregation. (1963, p 262-263)

Similar thoughts are expressed in Pieper's 1929 article *Concerning the Doctrine of the Church and Its Ministry*:

An association of local congregations into a synod is human only in its *form*, not in its essence. We do not need this particular *form* of mutual recognition and cooperation in the Gospel. But the recognition and cooperation in themselves are under our circumstances not the work of men, but the work of God. (1962, p 119)

If then the synod is Church in the proper sense of the word, it dare not tolerate false doctrine and offensive living in its midst unpunished any more than the local congregation may do so. It will have to punish its sinning and erroristic brethren and expel those who refuse to be corrected (I Cor. 5:13; Rom. 16:17f.; Tit. 3:10). (1962, p 125)

Even while defending the rights and duties of synods Pieper was always careful to safeguard the rights of congregations and to warn against synodical interference with those rights:

It is quite in order to emphasize that the local congregation is the primary grouping as compared with the synod as the secondary grouping. The preaching of the Gospel is by its very nature local and creates first of all local congregations. And because these originated first, the Apostles ordained elders in them first (Acts 14:23). For this reason also the local congregation must do the primary work in the kingdom of Christ: the frequent public preaching and the intensive personal care of souls together with brotherly admonition and public discipline. Furthermore, the local congregation is in its own sphere under the Word of God and brotherly love the supreme authority. In matters of faith and life it is subject to no human or ecclesiastical authority. No other church body, no other local congregation, and no synod can dictate anything to the local congregation. (1962, p 122)

For only in cases that occur in synodical activity can the synod act directly at all. Cases of sin and false teaching which occur only in a local congregation are as yet no concern of the synod. The synod will seek to urge the congregation in a brotherly manner through its visitor not to neglect the practice of discipline. In case the congregation is slow or negligent, it will call attention to the fact that, since the offense is a public one, the synod will have to practice discipline on those concerned as members of the synod, if the congregation fails to do so. Yes, the latter action will finally lead to a separation of the congregation from the synod if the

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<sup>3</sup> Fortunately (or unfortunately, depending on how you look at it) Pieper was a better theologian than prophet. How we wish his optimism about the short duration of the controversy had proven true.

congregation should refuse to practice discipline on such people. But there could be no thought of the synod taking the matter of practicing discipline in hand directly and ignoring the congregation. That would be interference with the office of the congregation. Only after the congregation has refused to practice discipline, could the synod act at all, and then only with the congregation itself. (1962, p 128)

This view is no different than Walther's view that the synod had only advisory power *in regard to the internal affairs of the congregation*. In commenting on Walther's Thesis IV, Carl Lawrenz shows that Walther did not limit the keys to the local congregation:

*It is this true church of believers and saints to which Christ gave the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And it is therefore the proper and only possessor and bearer of the spiritual, divine, and heavenly goods, rights, powers, offices, etc., which Christ has procured and which are found in his church.*

Significant in Walther's support of Thesis IV is also his quotation of Luther's interpretation of Matthew 18:17: "Christ gives both the power and the use of the keys to each Christian, when He says, 'Let him be to you as a heathen man' (Matt. 18:17), for who is this 'you' to whom Christ refers when he says 'Let him be to you'? The pope? Indeed, he refers to each and every Christian. And in saying 'Let him be to you,' he gives not only the authority, but also commands its use and exercise. For what else does the phrase 'Let him be to you as a heathen man' mean than to have nothing to do with him, to have no fellowship with him? This truly is to excommunicate, to bind, and to close the door of heaven. This is confirmed by what follows: 'Whatever you bind . . . shall be bound.' Who are those addressed? Are they not all Christians? Is it not the church? If here the giving of the keys to the church means not the use but only the authority, we would by the same source claim that its use has never been given to anyone, even to Peter (Matt. 16:19). For clearly the words of Christ are everywhere the same when he bestows the office of binding and loosing. If in one place or with reference to one person they signify a conferring of authority, they signify a conferring of authority everywhere. If they signify the conferring of the use in one place, they signify the conferring of the use everywhere. For the words of God are everywhere the same and we are not permitted to give them one meaning in one place and another meaning elsewhere, though these monks make bold to ridicule the mysteries of God with their fiction." This is from Luther's letter of 1523 "Concerning the Ministry to the Senate and People of Prague."

It would be difficult to harmonize this quotation used by Walther with the position that the ministry of the keys with reference to excommunication is entrusted solely to the local congregation. It would also not allow a position that questions that Christians assembled as a synod lack the power of the keys. (1982, p 111-113)

Later in the same article Lawrenz adds:

Note on what basis Walther claims the power of the keys for a local congregation. He says nothing about this that it is a special divine institution to which for that reason the power of the keys has been bestowed. No, it is because of the believers in its midst, even if there be but two or three. It is also because of these believers in its midst that the local congregation is called a church. Nowhere in his entire book on the church and its ministry does Walther adduce any other reason for the local congregation's being a church and having the power of the keys. He does not attempt to define a local congregation beyond this that in it believers are gathered in his name. He says nothing about its form. (1982, p 117)

That Walther also thought of congregational delegates assembled in a synodical convention as a church possessing the power of the keys by virtue of their Christian faith, and insofar as they

were Christian believers, is evident from his first presidential address at the Missouri Synod convention of 1848. It is evident from the very theme of his address: *Why Should and Can We Carry on Our Work Joyfully Although We Have No Power But the Power of the Word?* With this question he is already asserting that a synodical convention has the power of the Word. In the exposition he sums it up in these words: “Accordingly there can be no doubt, venerable brethren in office and respected delegates, that we are not renouncing any right belonging to us if we as servants of the church and as members of an ecclesiastical synod claim no other power than the power of the Word; for in the church where Christ alone rules there dare and can be no other power to which all must submit.” Then Walther adds: “To be sure, there are matters which the Word of God does not regulate, but which must be arranged in the church; but all such matters are not to be arranged by any power above the congregation, but the congregation, that is, pastors and hearers, arranges them, free of every compulsion, as it is necessary and appears salutary.”

Concerning the latter matter he also says: “But it is, of course, not to be denied, that the congregations have the freedom to relinquish their freedoms and rights in many things, to let themselves be represented and therefore to arrange for a church government through representatives, to which they transmit their rights; as this was and is the case among other things in our German fatherland.” He is here speaking of the church government carried on over the congregations by the Lutheran consistories.

Yet Walther adds: “Undoubtedly our congregations were free to follow this example and to invest the synod meeting in their name with a power besides the power of the Word; but it is a different question whether it would have been wise if they had done so. I say no, because under the prevailing circumstances we can confidently hope for auspicious success of our work, or rather of God’s work which we are promoting, if we use only the power of God. This is the second reason why we should and can carry on our work with joy, although we have no power but the power of the Word.”

Here we gain an understanding for what is meant when it is said that according to Walther the Missouri Synod was constituted to be an advisory body. He did not mean this with respect to the power of the Word which the synod in its nature as a church, as a gathering of believers, shared with its local congregations. When a synod wields the power of the Word, its decisions are therefore as binding upon Christians as are those of the local congregation in exercising the power of the Word. (1982, p 118-119)

### **III. The priesthood of all believers and the public ministers of the Word**

The Wauwatosa men always emphasized the priesthood of all believers. In his 1911 article on the origin of the New Testament ministry John Schaller emphasized that the task of preaching the gospel is given to all Christians:

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

presupposes this preaching activity and at the same time by the effect it has guarantees it will occur.

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

These thoughts lead us to a correct view of the forms of the New Testament ministry. We immediately get the impression that Christians are not only *de jure* preachers of the gospel, but also carry on this ministry *de facto* in many ways. In doing this they are not bound to certain times but seize the opportunity whenever and wherever it occurs. When a Christian laborer in his daily activities counters with a clear witness to Christ a scoffer who blasphemes in his presence, then he has engaged in gospel preaching, for he has borne witness to the contents of the gospel. When Christians at a social gathering privately discuss with one another the great deeds God has done to accomplish the salvation of sinners, even if this is in a most informal way, the gospel is then under discussion, and the one who gives expression to it is carrying on the ministry. When a member of the family or a Christian neighbor who is not a pastor, yes, when a mother, sister, or Christian neighbor lady offers a sick person the comfort of the forgiveness of sins or in some other way strengthens his patience by pointing to the goodness of God, our Savior, spiritual priests and priestesses are functioning in the New Testament ministry. Or are perchance such persons not doing what Christ meant when he said, "Preach the gospel"? (1981, p 38-39)

In his previously quoted article on Luther's doctrine of the ministry August Pieper summarized Luther's chief point concerning the one ministry of the Word:

There is one office in the Church, the office of the spiritual priesthood. The public ministry is only another phase of this same priesthood. (1963, p 247)

He then quotes Luther to support this point:

"We maintain firmly that there is no other Word of God than that alone which all Christians are told to proclaim; that there is no other Baptism than that which all Christians may administer; that there is no other observance of the Lord's Supper than that which belongs to every Christian and was instituted by Christ to be kept; also that there is no other kind of sin than that which every Christian may bind or loose, etc.... These are, however, always the priestly and the royal offices" (*To The People At Prague*, St. L. 10, p. 1589f.).

When Dr. Walther then says in his first thesis on the Office of the Ministry: "The holy office of the ministry or pastoral office is a different office from the priestly office which all Christians have," this dare not be misunderstood in this way as if it should have other functions than the spiritual priesthood; its difference rather lies merely in "a different use" of the same priestly office, solely in this that it is carried out in the name of, or with the consent of all the other priests that are involved. (1963, p 248)

Pieper adds this comment:



We wish here first of all to note that we prefer to avoid the terminology “public ministry” and “private ministry” because with these terms the false concept so easily slips in as if the public ministry were something entirely different from the private. Indeed, Luther teaches clearly enough that there is only one office or ministry common to all Christians and that the public office is only another use of the very same office as that which the individual Christian uses or puts into practice. We prefer to say, “public or common discharge or administration,” “private discharge or administration of the office.” Luther says with regard to point 3 in the same writing directed to the Bohemians: “We have, indeed, said all of this only about the common right and authority of all Christians. For since all things which we have mentioned so far are to be common to all Christians (to teach, to preach and to proclaim the Word of God, to baptize, to bless or administer the Sacrament of the Altar, to bind and to loose sins, to make intercession for others, to sacrifice and to judge all other teachings and spirits) and since we have also verified and proved this, it is, therefore, not proper for anyone to exalt himself and to appropriate to himself alone that which belongs to all of us. Let him assume this right and also put it into practice provided there is no one else present who also has received the same right. However, the right of the communion does demand that one or as many as the congregation desires be chosen and appointed, who in the place and in the name of all those who have the right practice these offices publicly, in order that there be no horrible disorder among the people of God and lest the Church, in which certainly all things are to be done decently and in order as the Apostle Paul has taught (1 Corinthians 14:40), become a Babel” (St. L. 10, pp. 1572 and 1589). (1963, p 254-255)

At the same time Pieper and his successors were always very careful not to minimize the necessity of the public ministry in any way. They supported Walther’s Thesis II:

*The ministry of the Word or pastoral office is not a human institution, but an office which God Himself has established.*

But they did not limit this only to the office of parish pastor (see the next section of this article).

Already in his 1912 review of Walther’s *Church and Ministry* Pieper was careful to describe the divine institution of the public ministry, including the pastoral ministry:

The Lord has purchased the office of the Word, the New Testament preaching office, through his blood and expressly commanded it for his congregation. Along with the gospel he has entrusted his believers with the office of the keys, which is to be used by them. They should practice it in the whole world. The public preaching office is both inwardly and outwardly God’s command and order for the Christian church. But it does not follow from the spiritual priesthood of all believers that all Christians are *eo ipso* preachers for the congregation. That which all have in common, no one may take to himself ahead of the others. “No one should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments without an orderly call.” Through the call to the office of preaching in the congregation the public administration of the priestly powers which are common to all are handed over to one or more individuals by a specific group of Christians. In this way the office of congregational preaching or the pastoral office comes into being. This is not to be regarded as a human, political arrangement, but as a divine ordinance. The pastoral office is mentioned in the Scriptures themselves along with the apostolate and office of evangelist as instituted (*eingerichtete*) species of the general office of preaching won and commanded by Christ. To this arrangement (*Aufrichtung*) the Christian church of all time is ordinarily bound. Whoever despises this despises Christ. (1912, p 33-34, translation J. Brug)

Lawrenz repeats this position many years later:

It would be false, of course, to declare the species parish pastorate (*Pfarramt*) to be a mere human arrangement. Concerning every species of the public ministry only the form is human. The substance of every species of the public ministry, the commission and authority to preach the gospel for its edification, to administer the means of grace, is in every case divine. (1982, p 127)

WELS writers were always careful to disassociate themselves from the view attributed to Hoefling, that the public ministry is simply a matter of expediency for the church. Lawrenz stated his support for Walther's Thesis III:

*The ministry of the Word is not an optional office, but one whose establishment has been commanded to the church and to which the church is ordinarily bound till the end of time.* Quoting Matthew 28:19–20, Walther rightly states: “From this it is evident that by the command of Christ the apostles’ ministry of preaching was to endure to the end of days. Now, if this is to be the case, the church must continually to the end of days establish the orderly public ministry of preaching and in this ordinance administer to its members the means of grace.”

Already Thesis II, inasmuch as it established the proper understanding of a divine institution of the public ministry, rejects the erroneous view of Johann Wilhelm Friedrich Hoefling, professor at Erlangen (d. 1853) in this matter. We can say that the entire thrust of Thesis III is against Hoefling's erroneous theory, in which he denied a divine institution of the public ministry and traced its origin to mere expediency.

In a footnote to his article on *Kraussold and the Doctrine of the Ministry*, Walther writes: “Regrettably it has come to this, that now everyone who rejects the romanizing doctrine of the ministry is reckoned to be a *Hoeflingianer* in this doctrine and is held under suspicion as being such, but Hoefling's doctrine of the ministry and that of the romanizing Lutherans are the opposite extremes, between which in the middle lies the pure Lutheran doctrine, to which alone our Synod has confessed itself and still confesses itself.” Thus we can see why Walther was induced to offer Thesis III in the above wording. Like Walther we in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, too, have had to defend ourselves against the suspicion of being adherents of Hoefling.

To quote Hoefling from his own writings he contended “that the regularly filled public (*gemeine*) office arises in a God-desired and God-directed manner with inner necessity without the need of our assuming an external necessity due to a ceremonial legal precept or a special divine institution different from that of the general office of all Christians.”

Hoefling recognized only the rights and the commission of the universal priesthood of all believers as divinely bestowed and instituted and held that the church of itself developed the public ministry to satisfy a need that always arises when all members of a group share common rights and obligations which they cannot under certain circumstances all exercise and carry out at one and the same time. In such circumstances a group out of expediency generally solves the problem by delegating individuals in its midst who are best qualified to do so to exercise the common rights and to carry out the common obligations for them and in their behalf so that everything will be done decently and in order.

As pointed out in our previous presentation we, too, with Walther and Luther, on the basis of Scripture, recognize that the public ministry serves such a need. Yet in contrast to Hoefling we hold on the basis of Scripture, that it is not the church but our divine Lord himself, who before the New Testament church was ever called into existence, took note of its future need, prophesying in advance that he would take care of it through the gift of the public ministry,

that he has set forth the qualifications for this public ministry for us in his New Testament word and continues to give to his church men with all the needed talents required to carry out all the tasks of the public ministry. (1982, p 131-132)

#### **IV. The special role of the pastor in relationship to other forms of ministry**

Though they strongly insisted on the divine institution of the public ministry of the Word, Pieper and his successors denied that the office of parish pastor was divinely instituted to the exclusion of other forms of public ministry. Lehninger summarizes the issue:

Similarly, we look in vain in Holy Writ for a word of institution of the pastorate in a local congregation (*Pfarramt in einer Ortsgemeinde*) in contrast to other offices in a congregation or a synod, as teachers in Christian day schools and professors at Christian high schools, colleges, and seminaries. It came as a shock to some members in our synod and in Missouri when, e.g., Professor J. Schaller spoke of the historical development of the pastorate through the centuries into what it is in our congregation today. And yet it is true; and the admission of such a development is in no way contradictory to the divinity of the pastoral call, and it does not make the pastorate a merely human arrangement. Paul writes: The exalted Lord “gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4, 11, 12). That should effectively dispose of the idea that only local pastors have a divine call, other church officials in congregation or synod only in so far they perform some spiritual work as helpers to pastors of local congregations. Speaking of the Church as the body of Christ, the same apostle says: “And God has set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues” (1 Cor. 12, 28). When he makes his farewell with the elders of Ephesus he speaks to them of “the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost has made you overseers, to feed the church of God” (Acts 20, 28). Before categorically saying, the elders then are the pastors now, we should learn from the Jews in Berea, of whom it is reported, “They received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17, 11). Doing likewise, we overhear Paul exhorting Timothy: “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine” (1 Tim. 5, 17). By what right can we vindicate the divine call of the local pastor and deny it to the teacher who also labors in the word and doctrine? More, we must admit that also those elders who do not work specially in the word and doctrine but are nevertheless serving in the building of the Kingdom in the government of the congregation or the synod are divinely called. God has made them overseers. He tells us in the Bible what the functions of an elder, bishop, shepherd (pastor), and teacher are, and leaves the rest, the ordering of the details in this frame, to the sanctified common sense of his Christians. Since God bestows these gifts to His Church, it goes without saying that they are not thrust upon the Christians against their will. Paul’s word applies here: “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace” (1 Cor. 14, 33), and the other one: “Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14, 40). (1950, p 104-105)

Pieper summarized the issue briefly:

From Ephesians 4, 1 Corinthians 12, and other passages it is clear at a glance that the Lord did not give his Church only one type of office and one type of gifts for their execution, but many kinds of offices and many kinds of men to execute them. (1962, p 119-120)

At the beginning stages of the debate Schaller had written:

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

The only things that can really be proved with regard to the question before us is the very important fact that God recognized the bishops, elders, pastors and teachers, who admittedly were chosen by the *congregations*, as *divinely* called, as gifts given to the congregation by God. That is also clearly shown by comparing the verbs that are used: Acts 20:28 and I Corinthians 12:28 say, "He has *made* or *set* them" [ἔθετο]; in Ephesians 4:11, however, we read, "He has *given* them" [ἔδωκεν]. In so far as the passages are parallel, we have according to this the explanation of the Holy Ghost himself that the verb "set" is to be understood not of the institution of the offices mentioned *in abstracto*, not therefore of a command of God to establish such offices, but of the placing or giving of the individual *persons* who carry out the activity which the title of the office indicates. (1981, p 47-49)

Pieper demonstrates that this view on the various forms of ministry was also the position of Luther:

The question here is what Luther's view in this matter was. Luther also is enlisted to support this interpretation [namely, that the pastor is the only form of ministry] because people usually know him only from passages torn out of context. A more thorough knowledge of his writings teaches us something else. Luther speaks much about the divine institution of the local pastorate, but on the one hand it is clear from many passages that he does not declare this particular species, the local pastorate, to be divinely instituted *in contrast to* other species of the public preaching ministry or the ministry of the Word, but that rather he declares this species to be divine *together with* the other species. Since he usually speaks concretely in the figure of speech known as *species pro genere*, he calls the local pastorate at the same time also the ministry of the Word, or the ministry of the Gospel, or by some similar name. On the other hand, he characterizes other species of the public ministry (even the office of visitor, St. L. 17, p. 1155) as being instituted by God. In the third place, he declares in a long explanation that the form of the office of local pastor does not matter as long as the Word is used in an "orderly" manner. [ A long string of quotations from the St. Louis edition follows.]

From all of these testimonies it is clear that Luther considered the local pastorate to be instituted by God, not because it is "local," but because it is an "office," that is, the public ministry of the Word. It does not depend upon the name, but rather upon the essence of the thing. The essence of the public ministry consists in this 1) that it preaches God's Word and 2) that it preaches in behalf of the Church. All offices in the Church which have these two essential characteristics are of divine institution whatever they may be called: apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, teachers, school masters, missionaries, circuit preachers, presidents, visitors, professors; even doctors, such as Luther was, can take pride in the divine institution not of their *title*, but of their *office* (The Ministry of the Word, Augustana V). (1963, p 258-261)

Note the use of the word “office” to designate not a particular title or position, but a duty or function given by Christ, namely, to preach the gospel. Pieper continues:

We wish to cite here still another passage from Luther’s writing, *Infiltrating and Clandestine Preachers*, concerning the freedom of the forms of the public ministry. In this treatise he refers to the congregation in Corinth, which did not have our usual form of the pastoral office but rather carried out the public ministry in a way that this one or that one from among the large number of prophets that God had given the congregation would stand up and speak. Luther says: “Although this system has been lost that the prophets, or preachers, sit in the church and speak back and forth as St. Paul here says, nevertheless, a small trace and footprint of the same has remained, namely, that in the choir we sing responsively, and lections are read successively, and then everyone sings antiphonal hymns or responses. If one preacher would translate the lection of another, and still another would explain it or preach on it, this would be the right method of teaching in the Church, described here by Paul. For one would sing or read in tongues, another would prophesy or translate it, the third explain it, and another again would substantiate or improve it with passages and examples as St. James did, Acts 15, and Paul, Acts 13.... That such a method should be re-instituted and the pulpit done away with is something that I would not advise, but rather help prevent....” (St. L. 20, p. 1675, par. 24–28). Luther could not have expressed more clearly that he considered this form of the public preaching ministry established by Christ, commonly called the local pastorate among us, a form which is a human historical development. So far as we know, the congregation at Corinth had at that time neither bishop nor pastor, but a number of “seated” prophets, who carried out the office of the congregation in that they took turns speaking, and Paul does not insist that they must do away with the alternate speaking as something ungodly, but rather insists on this that within this way of doing things everything must proceed honorably and in order. Together with Luther we consider the office of local pastor to be a form which is “more orderly” for our people; but if anyone would force this upon us as a legalistic demand, then we would have to get rid of it and introduce the Corinthian form or some other in its place—that is, if God were to give us the necessary gifts for this—so that we would not become the servants of men and so that the freedom of the Gospel might be maintained among us. (1963, p 263-265)

Lawrenz demonstrates that when the whole context of Walther’s theses is studied, it become clear that Walther does not disagree with the view of Luther:

August Pieper points out that also Luther frequently uses *Pfarramt* and *Predigtamt* as interchangeable terms, in other words, that he employs *Pfarramt* at times as a general term for the ministry of the Word. But he likewise notes that Luther again and again makes it quite clear that with this terminology he is using an important species for the genus, that in mentioning this main species he has every form and phase of the public ministry of the gospel in mind.

In his *Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper*, for example, Luther says: “All who are engaged in the clerical office (*Pfarramt*) or ministry of the word are in a holy, proper, good and God-pleasing order and estate.” That the public ministry was a very wide and comprehensive concept for Luther, covering every form and phase of the ministry of the word can be exemplified from a quotation from his *Sermon on Keeping Children in School*. There Luther says: “The estate I am thinking of is rather one which has the office of preaching and the service of the word and sacrament and which imparts the Spirit and salvation, blessings that cannot be attained by any amount of pomp and pageantry. It includes the work of pastors (*Pfarramt*), teachers, preachers, lectors, priests (whom men call chaplains), sacristans, schoolmasters, and whatever other work belongs to these offices and persons.”

It is significant that Walther offers also this quotation as he supplies support from Luther’s writings for Thesis I. Here Luther uses *Pfarramt* as a species of the genus public ministry.

This gives us reason to conclude that Walther was not unaware of Luther's understanding of the wide scope of the public ministry nor in disagreement with it. (1982, p 126-127)

While emphasizing the divinely given freedom of the church to create other forms of ministry of the Word, studies of the ministry in the *Quarterly*, nevertheless, continued to emphasize the special role of the pastoral office. In an issue of the *Quarterly* almost entirely devoted to the pastoral ministry, Thomas Nass commented:

I sense a general understanding among us, however, that there are four functions of the public ministry which ordinarily will be done only by pastors. The four functions are these: 1) formal preaching in public worship services, 2) general doctrinal and spiritual oversight of congregations, 3) administration of the sacraments, 4) and leading worship. Certainly, in case of emergency any of these functions may be performed by any Christian because all Christians have the keys. ...It's not that pastors have a greater importance or a higher "rank." It's just that pastors in our circles have been specifically trained to carry out these functions. Others have not. (1994, p 259)

WELS writers emphasize both the sameness of different forms of ministry and their differences:

The sameness of these various forms of ministry consists in two points: 1) the holders of all these offices or forms of ministry are serving in the one gospel ministry established by God; 2) those who serve in all these forms of ministry are called by Christ through the church. The differences between these various forms are in the scope of the work which the church assigns to them in its call. Some may be called to serve in a comprehensive ministry of the Word and sacraments, as most pastors are. Others may be called to serve in a limited sphere, such as teaching the Word to children.... In using the expression "forms of ministry" we are attempting to emphasize both the points of identity and the points of difference between the various offices of ministry. (2000, p 125)

## **V. Their view was drawn from Luther and agreed with the view of Walther**

All of the Wauwatosa men and their successors were very conscious of the fact that their teaching was the teaching of Luther. As we have seen in numerous quotations above, Pieper devoted an entire article to establishing this point:

These teachings the public teacher should know indeed directly from Luther himself and not second or third hand; not from fragmentary Luther quotations, but from his own complete writings. As we as evangelical teachers know the Word of God directly from Scripture, so as Lutheran pastors we must know Luther's teaching directly from Luther himself. This is a special curse of our time, the second, third, and fourth generation after Walther, that we know God's Word and Luther's teaching only second or third hand in fragmentary Luther quotations, and then rest content as though we knew both Scripture and Luther. This creates a false security. It might be enough for confirmands to know a number of chief passages from Scripture. Whoever is to teach God's Word and teach it in public, must be able to draw from the complete fullness of Scripture and must have the logical and historical context of those passages clearly in mind; it is from this that they win their full and exact, intended meaning. This is much more the case with a fallible writer, above all with a Luther, whose speech is often so unsystematic, whose expressions are often free and unrestrained, whose argumentation is so often cut to fit a specific situation, so that the uninitiated can easily draw false generalities from it. With such an original, powerful man, who always confronts the whole, always judges each situation from the essence of the whole, a man who especially in battle swings the sword

of Siegfried, one must become “personally” acquainted in order to understand him, and this is possible only through repeated, exact study of his chief writings. (1962, p 15)

We note that this comment about the writings of Luther is equally applicable to the writings of Walther and Pieper.

### **C.F.W. Walther and the Church-Ministry Debate**

Just as Luther had stressed the rights of the individual Christian over against the authority of the pope and the clergy, so Walther emphasized the rights of the local congregation over against the authority of the German state-controlled churches and the abuse of pastoral authority by Grabau and Stephan. We need to keep this historical context in mind so that we do not read thoughts into Walther’s theses on the church and ministry which Walther did not specifically express. The title page for Walther’s treatise states that this work was intended to repel the attacks of Grabau. When we examine Walther’s treatise in light of its historical setting, we can see that his treatise was not intended to be the final word on every aspect of the Church and Ministry question. The preface of the 1852 edition states:

It could, of course, not lie within our intention to present the doctrine of our church in its entirety concerning the church and its ministry. Whoever wants this will find it in the larger dogmatical works of the teachers of our church, among others in the masterful works of a Chemnitz and Gerhard. It can only be our concern to set forth those points concerning which difference has arisen and to carry along only as much of what is not controverted as becomes necessary to keep the matters in context. (Quoted by Lawrenz, 1982, p 87)

In addition, Walther’s own writings do not always speak consistently on the issues at hand, and at times Walther’s writings can lend themselves to differing interpretations. J.P. Koehler makes the following observation:

It has been indicated that owing to Walther’s style of mainly submitting quotations from the fathers there is much room for misunderstanding the fathers or Walther himself, and that even Walther himself misunderstands at times. (*History*, p 238)

Although the Wauwatosa men offered some mild criticism of Walther’s tendency to slight exegesis in favor of citations from the fathers, his former students and their successors, nevertheless, tried to explain and, in part, to justify Walther’s practice of relying heavily on citations from the fathers in his controversies with Grabau:

In fairness to Walther it should be remembered that the Missouri Synod had been accused that its doctrinal position on the church and its ministry, and its church polity established on that position, were un-Lutheran. Thus Walther’s book aimed to show that both Missouri’s doctrinal position and its polity were indeed Lutheran and were in accordance with the Lutheran understanding of the Scriptures as set forth in its confessions and in the writing of its orthodox teachers. Indirectly Walther’s theses were to reveal that the traditional church polity which had developed in Lutheran territorial churches and which was defended even by most of the confessional Lutherans was unscriptural and un-Lutheran. Walther’s book was to squelch the suspicion that the Missouri Synod was introducing American democratic ideas into church government....

Walther’s method of argumentation must therefore be recognized as being fully consistent with the goal which he had set for himself. According to the very title of his book of 1852, it was to set forth “the voice of *our church* on the question concerning the church and the ministry.”

What we find regrettable, however, is that Walther's method of argumentation became a model frequently followed for doctrinal presentations within the Missouri Synod. His method of argumentation ought not to be followed generally as a model when new doctrinal questions and issues arise and call for a thorough study. (1982, p 105-106)

Though the Wauwatosa men and their successors sometimes mildly criticized Walther's terminology, they never felt that his doctrine was different than theirs. They attributed the differences between them and certain men in Missouri as due to a misunderstanding of Walther by the Missourians. They attributed this misunderstanding, at least in part, to a failure to view Walther's comments in context: Walther had no intention of addressing such issues as the role of school teachers. He is responding to the hierarchal views of Grabau and other similar views. Lawrenz writes:

[Another] reason may be adduced for a thorough study of the historical background which led to Walther's theses. It can keep one from misunderstanding and misusing these theses in expecting them to speak precisely to new points of controversy which have arisen since Walther's day concerning the doctrines of the church and the ministry. We will realize that these are points to which Walther was not addressing himself and to which he had no occasion to address himself. We will see that he had no inducement to endeavor settling them at the hand of Scripture, of the Confessions, and of the writings of orthodox teachers. It is quite possible that if he had had such an inducement he might in some instances have chosen a different wording. He might have amplified certain expressions. For while the expressions which Walther used were quite adequate in covering the scriptural truths under controversy, they can be misunderstood when used to settle a different controversy. We will have occasion to come back to this point in discussing the individual theses. We will then have an opportunity to show from Walther's other writings and from his own practice that he saw clearly also on the points that have been in controversy since his time. They were not elucidated in the theses at hand because he had no inducement to address himself to them. (1982, p 87-88)

Incidentally, this observation is applicable also to the writings of Hoenecke, which do not directly address many of the issues being debated today.

New controversies often require clarification of terms that had been adequate during previous discussions. The chief terminological problem in Walther's writing is his interchangeable use of the terms *Predigtamt* and *Pfarramt* in Thesis I on ministry. Pieper observed:

When Dr. Walther then says in his first thesis on the Office of the Ministry: "The holy office of the ministry or pastoral office is a different office from the priestly office which all Christians have," this dare not be misunderstood in this way as if it should have other functions than the spiritual priesthood; its difference rather lies merely in "a different use" of the same priestly office, solely in this that it is carried out in the name of, or with the consent of all the other priests that are involved. Incidentally, one should mention here that we do not consider Walther's identification of the public preaching office with the pastoral office as a happy one. From this some people who have not thought or studied independently have drawn the conclusion that the public office, that is the office of the Word which is transmitted from the church to an individual person, and the pastoral office are equal and exchangeable concepts and that therefore only that form of the public preaching office which we call the pastoral office (*Pfarramt*) is of divine origin. It would be false, however, if one would declare the distinctive pastoral office to be a human arrangement. What is human in every species of the public ministry is only the form, the outward arrangement. The content, the command, the commission, the power directed to the Church to preach the Gospel through capable men as also to dispense the Sacraments in an orderly way is and remains divine. (1963, p 248)

Even this was viewed as a terminological unclarity, not a difference of substance. Commenting on Thesis I, Lawrenz says:



This thesis<sup>4</sup> distinguishes the office of the public ministry from the priestly office which belongs to all believers. As Scripture basis for such a distinction Walther properly quotes 1 Corinthians 12:29: “Are all apostles? are all teachers?, etc.” and Romans 10:15: “How shall they preach, except they be sent?” These are offered in contrast to 1 Peter 2:9: “But ye are a chosen generation; a royal priesthood, a holy nation, ... “ addressed to *all* Christians....

That Walther is not in disagreement with these truths themselves is evident from Thesis VII, in which he himself states that “the holy ministry is the authority ... to exercise the rights of the spiritual priesthood in public office in behalf of the whole group (*von Gemeinschafts wegen*).” Yet when Thesis I is read or quoted by itself a different understanding can readily arise. Instead of speaking of two distinct offices we therefore prefer, with August Pieper, to say that Christ instituted one office in his church, the ministry of the gospel, given to all believers individually and collectively. The public ministry is not generically different from that of the common priesthood of all Christians. It rather constitutes a special God-ordained way of practicing the one ministry of the church.

Under Thesis I Walther himself offers a lengthy quotation in which Luther presents the relation of the public ministry as a special God-ordained way of practicing the one ministry of the gospel. It is taken from his treatise of 1522: *That a Christian Assembly or Congregation Has the Right and Power to Judge All Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers, Established and Proven from Scripture*. Luther says: “For no one can deny that every Christian possesses the word of God and is taught and anointed by God to be priest, as Christ says, John 6 [:45] ‘They shall all be taught by God,’ and Psalm 45 [:7], ‘God has anointed you with the oil of gladness on account of your fellows.’ These fellows are the Christians, Christ’s brethren, who with him are consecrated priests, as Peter says too, 1 Peter 2 [:9], ‘You are a royal priesthood so that you may declare the virtue of him who called you into his marvelous light. (1982, p 124-125)

The Wauwatosa men’s overall evaluation of Walther was to give him high praise. Already early in the controversy August Pieper had reviewed Walther’s *Church and Ministry* and offered this assessment:

Walther’s chief work was that he purely “re-primed,” or better “reproduced” both of these doctrines [justification and church and ministry] from Luther and the confessions and brought the majority of the Lutheran church in America to recognize them. That assures him of a place among the greatest theologians of the church and gives him a claim to the thanks of all who love Zion.... The on-going discussion among us concerning church, synod, and discipline calls each one of us urgently to study the doctrine of church and ministry anew. For this study Walther’s classic book is the most convenient and best pre-school. (1912, p 36, 40)

The theologian most responsible for the development of the LCMS’s position that the *Ortsgemeinde* and *Pfarramt* are the only divinely instituted forms of the church and ministry was not Walther, but his theological successor, Franz Pieper.<sup>5</sup>

Although articles in the *Quarterly* come largely from WELS sources, several articles from outside sources demonstrate that the so-called WELS view was not limited to the WELS in contemporary Lutheranism. In his letters to German pastors, Herman Sasse sets forth several points of the WELS view:

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<sup>4</sup> **THESIS I** *The holy ministry of the Word or pastoral office is an office distinct from the priestly office which all believers have.*

<sup>5</sup> At times Pieper appears to recognize the synod as a church, but he also says that Matthew 18 must be restricted to the local church (*Dogmatics III*, p 421) and that only a congregation can establish the public ministry. (p 439-440)

No one who considers the statements of the Bible will in these days be so bold as to claim to have discovered in the New Testament a complete system of church organization, valid for all time. And those Lutherans of the 19th century, who with all their precaution did not escape the temptation to inquire into the true, the Biblical form of the Church and its organization, would today simply bow before the fact that there existed in the Church of the New Testament a number of possibilities as to the manner of organizing the spiritual ministry and the Church as the congregation of saints. (1950, p 24)

The “catholic” theory does not do justice to the fact that Jesus Himself gave to the smallest individual congregation imaginable (Matth. 18:19f. Cf. also Tertullian’s “*Ubi tres, ibi ecclesia*”) the same promises and the same authority as to the entire Church. The “congregational” theory, on the other hand, is not able to understand the fact that the Church of Christ extends beyond the reach of the local congregation and exists outside of it. (1950, p 112)

## VI. Why Was This Issue Not Divisive?

The question has often been asked why the difference between the Wisconsin and Missouri synods on the doctrine of church and ministry never was treated as divisive of church fellowship. From 1914 up until the split between Missouri and Wisconsin, intermittent attempts were made to resolve the differences between the two sister synods. The three primary attempts in the teens, thirties, and fifties of the last century, resulted in the Wauwatosa Theses, the Thiensville Theses, and ultimately in the WELS Theses on Church and Ministry.

Each round of discussions revealed that all were in full agreement that the church is nothing other than the communion of saints, that the essence of the local congregation is ordained of God, and that congregations in their Christian liberty can associate together with those of the same faith for the furthering of the work of the church. Concerning the doctrine of the ministry, both sides acknowledged that the proclamation of the Word is a command given to all believers. Both agreed that the proclamation of the Word has different species “wherever and whenever the Word is used.”<sup>6</sup> Both agreed that the essence of the pastorate is derived from the priesthood of all believers in that the called pastor acts in behalf of the congregation who has called him. Therefore, there was agreement that the local pastorate is ordained by God. Both faculties had stated their acceptance of Walther’s theses.

However, points of difference existed. On the doctrine of the church, it was disputed whether the local congregation and synod could equally be considered “church,” whether the synod as well as the local congregation possessed the rights of the church (such as discipline), and whether the local congregation has a special word of institution that other gatherings of believers do not have. Concerning the doctrine of the ministry, it was disputed whether the term “the ministry” is applicable to offices other than the *Pfarramt*, whether other offices involved in church work such as synod offices are of divine origin, and whether the pastorate has a word of special institution that other forms of the ministry do not have. It was clear that for complete agreement to be reached, the LCMS’s claim for a special *Stiftung* for the *Ortsgemeinde* and *Pfarramt* would have to be resolved.

During each of the resolution attempts LCMS representatives conceded that they could produce no Bible passages to support their claim of a special institution of the local congregation and parish pastorate. During the first attempt at resolution the St. Louis representatives had conceded:

Throughout the whole New Testament the public ministry is spoken of in such terms as can be used only of a divine arrangement. Though we are indeed able to offer *no word of specific institution* [emphasis added], yet the whole New Testament shows us that divine ordering is involved.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Faithful Word*, “Basic Documents in the Church and Ministry Discussions,” p 28.

<sup>7</sup> *Faithful Word*, “Basic Documents in Church and Ministry Discussions,” p 25.

During the second round of discussions, Prof. John Meyer directed the following question to Prof. Engelder: “What is the prescribed form of the local congregation and where is the direct Scriptural proof for it?”<sup>8</sup> Engelder responded: “What external form, according to circumstances, this congregation must assume, *on that Scripture gives no directions* (emphasis added).” And to the question, “Which form of the local congregation, with its office, did our Savior institute?” Engelder’s response was: “*I cannot answer* (emphasis added).”<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the Wauwatosa and Thiensville men were overly optimistic in believing that the theses which were adopted at the conclusion of each round of discussions were a full resolution of the problem, but we can understand their optimism, since their counterparts from St. Louis had granted all their chief points of concern.<sup>10</sup> They soon realized their mistake, however, when subsequent publications by the LCMS made it clear that the St. Louis men had not really changed their view.

In 1929 August Pieper addressed the issue from the perspective of one who was a prominent participant in the early stages of the discussion:

The study of the teachings of Scripture, of the Confessions, of Luther, Walther and others on the specific subject of the local congregation and of the synod, which resulted from this difference of opinion, soon showed that in the beginning of the discussion both sides were not entirely clear on some specific points of doctrine, that both had spoken inaccurately or ambiguously on this or that specific term, which naturally led to false assumptions concerning the views of others and sometimes to the suspicion and the insinuation of false doctrine. Meanwhile Christian consideration had by and large gained the victory thus far. Several exceptions to this can be patiently overlooked. Both sides were perfectly agreed in regard to the essential derivation of the public ministry from the spiritual priesthood of all believers, the so-called doctrine of transference. Both sides maintain the divine institution of the public office of the ministry, with this difference that the one insists on a particular institution of the parish ministry in the local congregation and derives all synodical offices from it and in that respect declares them also divine, while the other believes that the particular institution of the parish ministry cannot be proved and derives it as well as all synodical and general offices of the Word in the Church from the general institution of the public ministry as it is given in Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15, 16; Luke 24:46ff.; Ephesians 4:11ff.; I Corinthians 12; II Corinthians 3 and other passages, as a species from a genus. There is likewise perfect agreement in regard to the doctrine of the Church in this respect, that in the proper sense of the word the Church is nothing else than the communion of saints, and that God gave the command to preach the Gospel and thus the ministry of the keys to this Church and not to some specific external form of the Church. From this common ground it should be possible, if we continue to love one another, also to resolve the remaining unclarity and differences in the doctrine of the essence and the authority of the synod, of its relation to the individual congregation, of synodical discipline, of suspension, the exclusion from synodical fellowship, and whether and when the latter have the same force and effect as the action of a local congregation.

The dispute has thus far not been able to destroy the unity of the spirit between us. The two parties were not cleanly divided along synodical lines. With the common adoption of certain theses in 1916 the discussions were essentially concluded, even though unanimity was not attained in all points. (1962 p 84-86)

Edward Fredrich updated this assessment in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Synodical Conference:

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<sup>8</sup> John Meyer-Theodore Engelder correspondence, Nov. 22, 1931.

<sup>9</sup> *Faithful Word*, “Basic Documents in Church and Ministry Discussions,” p 30.

<sup>10</sup> A recent LCMS publication observed, “The mystery is how the Saint Louis faculty agreed to these theses in the first place. There did not appear to be any concession on the part of the Wauwatosa men at all.” *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, 2001, p 311.

A final item for consideration is the church-ministry discussions with Missouri that developed early in this century and were still going on when the Synodical Conference ruptured. ...From the start the division was not strictly according to synodical lines. Some Missourians, especially among its teachers, held the Wisconsin position. Some Wisconsin men, notable among them being Ernst, never agreed with August Pieper on the point.

This explains in part why the difference did not lead to a break and why it was still being debated when Missouri and Wisconsin split over another issue. Another reason was the assumption that the matter was more practical than doctrinal in view of the fact that Missouri's well-oiled synodical machinery and Wisconsin's individualism on the local level seemed to belie the basic synodical positions. It was hoped that discussion would clarify the situation and reveal basic doctrinal agreement.

The discussions culminated in the well-known "Thiensville Theses" of 1932. Were they a compromise, unworthy of church bodies claiming to be confessional and standing for full doctrinal agreement? The "Thiensville Theses" represent an agreement but it is reached only by substituting the term "God's will and order" for the actually disputed point of "divine institution."

If the effort was viewed as the final word on the subject, it is open to valid criticism. On the other hand, if it was to be a first step of establishing areas of agreement before getting at the core issues, then a more favorable judgment is in place. A strong case can be made for the second alternative. It is true no immediate follow-up meetings were held but this was because attention was diverted to Missouri's involvement in ALC and ULCA discussions and not because of doctrinal indifference. (1977, p 52-53)

The first article in the *Quarterly* to recognize that this had become an issue divisive of fellowship came in a 1971 article by Harold Wicke. This article was a response to the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation, which had raised this issue as a barrier to fellowship between them and WELS:

The Lutheran Churches of the Reformation are not the first to champion the above teaching as their position. In the past it was quite generally accepted as the teaching of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, although the fathers of that church body did not so consistently hold that position as we are sometimes led to believe. In the early years of this century the matter became a focal point of doctrinal discussions between the faculties of St. Louis and our Seminary, and was never totally resolved. At present there are two opinions still held in the Missouri Synod. The Lutheran Churches of the Reformation (LCR), however, insist that the pastorate in the congregation is the *only* God-ordained office in the Christian Church. They claim that by so teaching they are upholding the Biblical, old-Missouri doctrine. And so says also Pastor H. W. Romoser, administrator of the LCR and member of its Commission on Doctrine and Practice. He had upheld this position not only in discussions with the members of our Synod's Commission on Doctrinal Matters, but has now put it in writing in the August-November issue of *The Faithful Word, A Journal of Doctrine and Defense* in a detailed article entitled "The Church and The Ministry" (pages 30–68). This article, originally read to the LCR convention of July 7–9, 1970, was accepted by the representatives of the LCR without a dissenting vote. They have thus made it their official position and have, on that basis, suggested to their congregations that they no longer practice church fellowship with the congregations of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod as being a church body which persistently holds to an un-Scriptural doctrine on the Church and the Ministry. (1971, p 113)

An issue which had been treated as an effort of brothers who were in harmony on the basic doctrine and who seemed to share a common practice to reach agreement also on remaining unclarities of terminology and exegesis had now been made divisive of fellowship by the adoption of a view that

draws invalid inferences from Walther and which is not supported by Scripture. Many, unfortunately, have followed the LCR in this view.

## CONCLUSION

For the men of Wauwatosa, Thiensville, and Mequon the discussion was never primarily about a concern for certain forms of ministry or church organization. They saw in the LCMS more forms of ministry and more emphasis on synodical organization than they were interested in for themselves. The debate began because they felt the obligation as brothers to defend the synodical actions of the LCMS, not as a defense of WELS. For the men of Wauwatosa and their successors the main concern was always to uphold the efficacy of the means of grace when used by all believers within any organizational form. They were concerned to uphold the scriptural emphases of Luther and Walther on the possession and right to use the keys by all believers and the will of Christ to call public ministers through the church. They were determined to preserve for the church and for individual Christians all the freedom which Christ has granted them. On a practical level, their concerns were to preserve unity of doctrine and practice among us and to clarify and resolve any differences that arose with confessional brothers in a patient, loving way. A strong corollary was their insistence on the necessity of the priority of Scripture in all doctrinal discussions. All other sources can have only a secondary role in the debate. Though the primary responsibility for such discussions today has passed from the seminary faculty to the Commission on Inter-Church Relations, the priorities, concerns, and commitments remain the same as those articulated by the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* during its first century of life.

### *Quarterly* Articles on Church and Ministry

The articles from the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* are listed in the order in which they were written. Since all quotations from these articles cited in this article are in English, if articles were published in the *Quarterly* in both German and English, this bibliography gives the English reference first, and the year of the German original is in parentheses. All page numbers in the footnotes of this article refer to the English edition if there is one. Articles especially useful for gaining an overview of the debate are marked with an asterisk or double asterisk.

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Review of E. Koehler's *Summary of Christian Doctrine*, August Zich, Summer 1939, p 221-222. Got the discussion going again.

"Congregational Autonomy," Carl Lawrenz, Winter 1978, p 62-64. On the history of congregational autonomy in the LCMS constitution.

"Advice for Pastors," J. Brug, Fall 1989, p 232–233. What laypeople expect in a pastor.

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\* Review of Kurt Marquart's *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance*, J. Brug, Fall 1992, p 312-315. A modified Missouri view.

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"Priests and Ministers," L. Dobberstein, Spring 1992, p 146.

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