

THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH AND MINISTRY AND ITS IMPORTANCE TO THE CHRISTIAN PASTOR AND HIS CONGREGATION

PART II

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INTRODUCTION

In our last Essay we dealt with PART I of this topic, concentrating on the Divine institution of the local congregation. We saw that God has especially commanded Christians in the one locality, of the same doctrine and faith to join together and organise local congregations. This is not optional, but obligatory according to God's Institution. Other smaller or larger gatherings of Christians (eg. Church Synods, Young people's Societies) are merely of human arrangement, not commanded by God and therefore established when the necessity arises. But no such liberty exists in the formation of local congregations.

The necessity of a study of this Scripture doctrine was brought about due to the false teachings of a number of Lutheran Church bodies (WELS, ELS, CoLC), and the fact that a small group in Australia (Grace Lutheran Church, Australia) is in doctrinal fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod and thus co-responsible for its errors on the Church and Ministry. It is in order that the members of the ELCR may be informed of these errors and know why we cannot partake of fellowship with this group since its teaching and practice is contrary to clear Scripture doctrine that these Essays are being written.

What are these errors in the doctrine of the divine institution of the Ministry?

Though often the false teachings of WELS and others on the doctrine of the Ministry themselves are unclear and confused, the following statements will give an idea what is taught.

"Similarly we look in vain in Holy Writ for a word of institution of the pastorate in a local congregation.... It came as a shock to some members of our Synod and in Missouri, when e.g. Professor J. Schaller spoke of the historical development of the pastorate through the centuries into what is in our congregations today. And yet it is true...." (Quartalschrift, Vol. 47, No. 2, p.103f).

"The public office in the Church is, as soon as it is concretely established, an external institution. But in the whole New Testament there is nowhere a clear word of formal institution for any specific form of it, if one looks away from the apostolate." (Quartalschrift, January, 1913, p.40).

"We deplore and reject any doctrine of the Public Ministry which interprets Scripture as teaching a divine institution of outward form.... We hold in Christian liberty the Church may and does exercise the functions of the Public Ministry when it calls qualified persons into the pastorate, into the work of Christian Day-school teaching, into a professorship at its High Schools and Colleges, or as elders and deacons who are to assist pastors and teachers in their ministry." (Concerning Church and Ministry, CoLC, p.35).

Since these churches regard the office of the public ministry in the local congregation merely as an "historical development" of the church and thus a human arrangement and since it is said to be on a par with other auxiliary offices in the church (Christian Day School teacher, elder), it is vital that we become clear about what SCRIPTURE has to say concerning these things, to accept Scripture teaching and to abide by it.

So let us now look at PART II.

PART II.

THE DIVINELY INSTITUTED OFFICE OF THE HOLY MINISTRY

I. What Scripture has to say about the vital doctrine of the Ministry.

II. The importance of this doctrine to the Christian Pastor and his congregation.

I.

WHAT SCRIPTURE HAS TO SAY ABOUT THE VITAL DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY MINISTRY

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC MINISTRY?

The office of the Public Ministry is that office in the divinely instituted local congregation (Pastoral office) by which the one appointed to this office (shepherd, pastor, minister) uses and administers the Office of the Keys on behalf of this local Christian Congregation. It is his duty publicly to preach the Word of God and to administer the Sacraments by commission of a Christian Congregation and to perform the other duties and responsibilities (e.g. Confirmation classes, visitation of the sick) for which he has been Called.

That is what the word public here really means. It does not mean that the office is performed out in the open, in the public eye as opposed to privacy, being hidden, but it is discharged on behalf of, in the name of and by the authority of the Christian public the local congregation. Thus a pastor is fulfilling the duties of the public ministry when he ministers privately to a single soul, distributes private communion or visits a sick member in hospital, since he has been called to do this by the local congregation.

ALL CHRISTIANS - SPIRITUAL PRIESTS

To all Christians God has given the Office of the Keys. It is their privilege as well as their duty and obligation to proclaim the Word of God, especially the message of salvation whenever they have the opportunity. Christians should at all times remember this and do their best to fulfil these Scriptural duties.

Thus Peter writes, not only to the pastors, but to all Christians, “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people: that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9). To all Christians is given the command always to be ready to give an answer according to the hope that is in him (1 Peter 3:15), to teach and admonish one another (Col.3:16), and to preach the Gospel (Mark 16:15-16; Matt. 28:19-20).

Thus Dr. Luther writes:

“When we were made Christians through this Priest and His Priesthood (namely, through Christ) and in Baptism were by faith incorporated in Him, we were also given the right and power to preach and profess the Word we received from Him before everybody, everyone according to his station and calling. For, though we are not all in public office and calling, still every Christian should and may teach, instruct, admonish, comfort and reprove his neighbour with God’s Word whenever and wherever he finds someone in need of it; for instance, a father and mother, their children and servants, brother, neighbour, citizen, peasant or other. For a Christian certainly can teach the other one who is still ignorant or weak and admonish him with the Ten Commandments, the Creed, Prayer, etc., and he who hears it is in duty bound to receive it from him as God’s Word and join in confessing it publicly.” (St. L. V: 1038).

Thus every Christian possesses individually the Office of the Keys and has the duty as a Christian to proclaim the Word. But the Lord also wishes and has commanded that His Word be preached publicly in the local assembly of Christians, the local congregation and that the Sacraments be administered in their midst. If God had simply left things to themselves, anyone would be able to stand up and perform these duties, in fact all would be clamouring to preach or to distribute the Lord’s Supper and administer Holy Baptism. What confusion and disorder would result!

In order to avoid this disorder the Lord has instituted and commanded a special Office in the church to perform these duties in behalf of the Christian congregation. This is the Office of the PUBLIC MINISTRY. Since all Christians in the Congregation possess the Office of the Keys, they then appoint one, their pastor, to exercise or use this office on their behalf. Thus when the Pastor publicly preaches the Word or pronounces absolution, he is doing it in the name of and by the authority of that group of Christians who called him, the local congregation.

Thus Dr. Walther writes in his book The Church and the Ministry:

“The holy ministry is the authority which God transfers to certain men who by their public ministry are to exercise all the prerogatives of the spiritual priesthood on behalf of the Congregation; this the Lord does through the agency of the congregation, which invested with the spiritual priesthood and the Office of the Keys.” (Quoted in “What is Christianity and other Essays”, p.109).

Dr. A.L. Graebner also writes:

“The police power of the state is shared by all the members of the state. But not every citizen is empowered to exercise this power by restraining his neighbour’s private rights or punishing him for a disregard of his restraint. Thus even on general principles it would appear that the exercise of the powers of the church is not at the arbitrary disposal of every member of the church. But Christ has not left it to the church to adjust this matter in general principles; He has Himself established an order of things which His apostles and the early church have put into practice from the beginning and which He has ordained for all time.” (Theological Quarterly, Jan. 1902, Vol. VI. No. 1).

Thus M. Loy, a prominent theologian in the Ohio Synod writes:

“When the believers in any locality have organised a congregation and made provisions for the public administration of these means it is a matter of course that someone is called publicly to perform the work. The whole congregation cannot as a body preach and administer the Sacraments. Individuals must do that, otherwise confusion and trouble must ensue; for as all are brethren and all are equal, one has just as much the right and the duty to preach and to baptise as the other. Thus there could be no decency and order in the public ministrations of the church. Even if our Lord had made no provisions for the need arising from the conditions presented, the judgement of Christians would have impelled them, in the exercise of their liberty, to appoint some agency to act, for the sake of order, in behalf of all and thus to establish a public ministry. But God in His wisdom and mercy did not leave this to the discretion of His people. He ordained that proper persons should be chosen for this important work. The public office of the ministry was instituted. To this office His people should call men whom they find qualified, and no one should then presume to discharge the functions of such office in the church without a regular Call.... The members of the congregation thus calling a minister to perform the public functions necessary in their corporate capacity do not abdicate or forfeit the gifts and privilege which they possess as kings and priests, to whom the Lord has entrusted the Means of Grace and thus the Keys of the Kingdom of heaven. They retain all their rights and powers, in virtue of which they call a minister for the public discharge of the duties which these involve. They have signed away nothing when they have elected a pastor.... When the work of the congregation is to be done, according to the Lord’s direction they appoint someone to do it in their behalf, because it is impossible for each individual to discharge the duty directly in his own person. But the work which is thus done according to the Christian people’s call is their work, for the public performance of which they have made the minister their agent. For the right conduct of such ecclesiastical office they hold him responsible to the church whose representative they have called him to be; and as the work which they have called him to do is that which the Lord has primarily and immediately consigned to them and for which He has given the

necessary instructions. He holds them responsible to Him for its performance according to His revealed will. He is thus at once the minister of Christ and of His Church. As the congregation is thus responsible for the discharge of the public office according to the Lord's will, it is manifest why the Church must insist that no one should publicly in the church preach or administer the Sacraments unless he be rightly called." (Quoted in Pastoral Theology, p.30-31).

Thus the Scriptures on many occasions speak of the office of the Minister, the Pastor, the Shepherd. Says St. Paul (2 Cor. 5:18), "God.... hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation." St. Paul and others to whom God has given a ministry are ministers of God (2 Cor. 6:4; 1 Tim. 3:2) or ministers of Christ (1 Tim. 4:6). Others, Appollos (1 Cor. 3:5), Tychicus (Col. 4:7), Timothy (1 Thess. 3:2) and Epaphras (Col. 1:7) are called ministers of God and Christ.

Writes Dr. Graebner:

"A minister (diákonos, GLW) is one who labours in the service of another, performing the task committed to him by him who would otherwise have to perform it himself. One who gives a ministry to another makes him his agent to do the work of his principal." (Theological Quarterly, Jan. 1902, Vol. VI. No. 1).

So when the minister or pastor performs his duties he acts as the agent of the congregation.

So also Scripture uses other words to refer to a pastor. Some are BISHOP (epískopos = overseer, guardian) Acts 20:28, Phil. 1:1, 1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:7; ELDER (presbýteros = one aged) Acts 11:30, 14:23, 15:2, and 4, Titus 1:5. These words do not refer to different ranks of pastors but simply are different terms for one and the same office. Just as we call a pastor also a minister and a shepherd, so also Scripture uses various terms to refer to one and the same office.

SUMMARY: God has given to all Christians the Office of the Keys, the command to preach the Word of God and administer the Sacraments, (Priesthood of all believers). It is the Lord's will that this power be exercised publicly, in behalf of the local congregation by the pastor called for this purpose (Office of Public Ministry).

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN OFFICE OF HOLY MINISTRY AND SPIRITUAL PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

Setting forth the differences between the Office of the Ministry and the Spiritual Priesthood of all believers, Luther writes:

"Though all of us are priests, we may not on that account all preach or teach and govern. However, from the whole congregation some must be selected and chosen to whom this office is to be committed; and whoever holds this office is now, because of it, not a priest (like all the rest), but a servant, or minister, of all others. And if he can or will no more preach or serve, he steps back into the common crowd, commits his office to someone else, and is now again no more than every common Christian. Behold, thus must the office of preaching, or the ministry, be distinguished from the universal priesthood of all baptised Christians. For this office is nothing more than a public service, which is delegated to one by the whole congregation, though all of them are priests together." (St. L. V: 1037).

Both offices (the Spiritual Priesthood and the Public Ministry) have been instituted and commanded by God; both offer the Grace of God merited by Christ's blood; both must preach alone the Word of God and dare not go beyond it; both have the promise of being able to work and engender the one true Christian faith in the hearts of the hearers; both have the same object in view, the salvation of immortal souls (1 Tim. 4:16).

Yet Scripture places before us some vital and important differences between these two offices.

- a) All Christians, whether they have the gifts of ability to teach and the deeper knowledge of the Word or not, are commanded to proclaim the Word of God, (John 6:45; 1 John 2:27). However, as Dr. Pieper writes:

“The public ministry demands a special, a higher ability to teach and presupposes a greater efficiency and a more adequate ministerial training.” (What is Christianity, p.126) Thus St. Paul writes to Timothy: “And the things which thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” (2 Tim. 2:2).

In Titus 1 and 1 Tim. 3 St. Paul outlines those qualifications necessary for a pastor rightly to perform his duties.

- b) All Christians, by the fact that they are members of the spiritual priesthood are commissioned to proclaim the Word individually. Those however who administer the public ministerial office, must be duly Called by the Christian Congregation to perform this task. (cf. Acts 20:28; Titus 1:5).

Thus the Fourteenth Article of the Augsburg Confession speaks of this pastoral office: “Of ecclesiastical order they (our churches) teach that no one should publicly teach in the church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called.”

- c) The sphere and functions to which the pastor is called are to feed the whole flock, or congregation over which he has been made overseer. (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2; 1 Tim. 3:5).

The duty of feeding the whole congregation does not belong to the ordinary church member.

- d) While all Christians, commanded to proclaim the Gospel, are to support themselves with the labour of their hands, Christian ministers are to “live of the Gospel” (1 Cor. 9:14) and not to “mingle themselves with the affairs of this life” (2 Tim. 2:4).

- e) Scripture “demands that the official teachers of the Church be especially esteemed as such as speak the Word of God, Heb. 13:7;.... That the elders (pastors, GLW) that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those that labour in the Word and doctrine.” (Mueller, Christian Dogmatics, p.565).

Thus Holy Scripture clearly distinguishes between the general command given to all Christians to act as spiritual priests in the proclamation of the Gospel, and the unique and special office of the Holy Ministry which exercises the Office of the Keys on behalf of the Christian congregation to which he is called.

OFFICE OF HOLY MINISTRY - BY DIVINE INSTITUTION AND COMMAND

Dr. Walther writes in his book The Church and the Ministry:

“The holy ministry, or the ministerial office, is an office distinct from the priestly office which all believers possess.”

Again: “The office of the ministry, or the ministerial office, is no human ordinance, but an office which God Himself has instituted.”

“The public ministry is not optional, but an office which God Himself has commanded and to which He has obligated all Christians, under all ordinary circumstances, until the end of time.” (Quoted in WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY AND OTHER ESSAYS, p.110).

It is not left to the option of the Christians who live in a certain place and have established a local Christian congregation whether they wish to establish the office of the ministry among them or not, but they have a divine command to do so.

Concerning this special Divine command that the Office of pastor be in existence and occupied, Scripture gives abundant proof.

a. INSTITUTION OF OFFICE OF MINISTRY

Writes Dr. Walther:

“The divine institution of the ministry of the New Testament appears from the call of the holy Apostles to the ministry of teaching by the Son of God, as recorded Matt. 10; 28:18-20; Luke 9:1-10; Mark 16:15; John 20:21-23; 21:15-17 (‘Feed My Sheep’), and of the seventy disciples, as recorded Luke 10:1-20.”

When our Lord gave His great commission shortly before His ascension into Heaven, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them...., teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you”, He not only commanded that the Gospel be preached to the end of time, but also that the public office of the ministry be established in order to proclaim this Word on behalf of the Christian Congregations. That this was the Lord’s command we see from the practice the Apostles followed when congregations were established.

The Apostles belonged to the Office of the Public Ministry, but they also had distinctive features and abilities which all other pastors of the New Testament called by Christian Congregations do not have. They were directly called by the Lord, were directly trained by Christ during His three year Ministry, were directly sent by Him to proclaim the Word of God to all nations and also had the gift of inspiration in their public preaching and writing. These gifts, unique to the Apostles, have passed away. But the Office of the Holy Ministry, commanded by God has continued and is to do so until the Last Day.

Thus the apostles were pastors just as much as those ministers who were called by the Lord through Christian congregations, (cf. 1 Cor. 4:1; 1 Peter 5:1; Col. 4:7; Phil. 2:25; 2 Cor. 5:20; Col. 1:25).

Dr. Fritz states:

“The Apostles themselves made no distinction between themselves and the pastors as far as the work of the ministry is concerned, but spoke of these as having the same duties, 2 Tim. 2:2; 1 Peter 5:2, the same authority, Heb. 13:17, performing the same service, 1 Cor. 3:5; and regarded them fully as their fellow ministers, Col. 1:7; 1 Cor. 3:22; cf. 4:1; 1 Peter 5:1.” (Pastoral Theology, p.32).

b. PRACTICE OF THE APOSTLES

When the Apostles came to a particular town or city, they began preaching the Word in a synagogue or market place according to their divine commission. Once some of the inhabitants had been brought to the Christian faith, they were not simply left to themselves, but were organised into local congregations, or assemblies of Christians (Congregation at Corinth, at Ephesus, etc). The Apostles did not just leave it at that, but now saw to it that pastors (elders, bishops), were called and appointed by each congregation to fulfil the duties of the Office of the Ministry. Thus the will of Christ was fulfilled in the establishment of the Pastoral Office.

Thus in Acts 14:23 we read, “And when they had ordained (Greek: conducted elections for pastors) them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.” The word for “ordained” in the Greek is simply the word for “voting by lifting up the hand to signify assent.” (Theological Quarterly, Jan. 1902, Vol. VI, No. 1). Thus the Apostles did not themselves appoint pastors, but these were appointed or called by the voting members of each local Christian congregation. Notice that this procedure occurred in “every church”, in all local congregations that were established. So the Apostles did not only have pastors called when they thought conditions warranted them, but obeyed the Lord’s will and command in establishing the Office of the Ministry in every local Christian Congregation.

To prove that this was not only the God-ordained practice of the Apostles, but that all Christian congregations of the New Testament are commanded to call pastors, St. Paul also placed this duty before Titus.

Thus Dr. Pieper writes:

“St. Paul commands the establishment of the public ministry by urging Titus to ordain elders in every city, as he had appointed him. His injunction reads: ‘For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting and ordain (Greek: establish, GLW) elders in every city as I had appointed thee’. (Titus 1:5).

“The peculiar conditions which prompted this apostolic decree were briefly these: Christian congregations had been founded on the island of Crete, but these churches had not yet been supplied with ministers of the Gospel. The reason why this had been neglected cannot be definitely explained. The Cretan Christians may have been lacking in Christian understanding and hence may have been under the impression that the public ministry was not a necessary institution or, at least, that it was an optional matter. They may have been loath, too, to establish the ministry because they dreaded the expense which this office would entail; or Titus himself may have been unduly hesitant. At any rate, St. Paul here issues to Titus the express command to ordain elders, or ministers. We need only consider his words: ‘For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things.... and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee.’

“Luther remarks with reference to this passage: ‘Every one who believes that the Spirit of Christ here speaks and decrees through Paul must surely realise that it is a divine institution and ordinance that in every city there should be many bishops or at least one.’ (Concerning the Abuse of the Mass, 1522; St. L. Ed., XIX, 1093).

“It is certainly as clear as day that in Titus 1:5 St. Paul does not merely advise Titus. His instructions do not simply amount to this: ‘See whether or not in Crete the ordination of elders proves to be a development out of the prevailing Christian sentiment and the peculiar conditions of the Christian congregations and act in accordance with the circumstances’. No indeed; his words are a command, a command, in fact, which the apostle issued before the actual establishment of the public ministry. It was a command which was to serve Titus as a rule and norm in his entire episcopal activity. The idea of establishing the public ministry in Crete was not developed by the churches, but was rather imposed upon them by the apostle, who had that idea in mind even before a single elder in Crete had been ordained.” (What is Christianity and other Essays, p.111-112).

In the Smalcald articles we read (Triglotta, p.523, par. 67):

“Wherever the Church is, there is the authority (command) to administer the Gospel. Therefore it is necessary for the church to retain the authority to call, elect, and ordain ministers.”

c. CLEAR PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE

Clear passages of Scripture speak of the fact that the public ministry was not simply established as a custom of men, but has been ordained and commanded by God.

Thus St. Paul under inspiration commands the Ephesian pastors who had been called by the congregation at Ephesus: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God" (Acts 20:28). No one can escape the force of St. Paul's words here. The pastors had not been appointed merely by men, but God Himself had called them to this office, had made them overseers of their congregations. This clearly teaches that it is by the Lord's will and appointment that pastors be called through the Christian congregation to the holy ministry.

In 2 Cor. 5:18, St. Paul states: "God hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation." It was not a custom of the church established simply for the sake of good order, but the office of the Public Ministry was established by God Himself.

1 Cor. 9:14 states, "The Lord ordained that they which preach the Gospel should also live of the Gospel." If the Lord has commanded that Pastors are to live from the Message of the Gospel they preach, it follows that the Office of these men itself is also commanded by God.

Eph. 4:11-12 states that it is Christ Himself who gives to His Church Apostles, prophets, pastors and teachers to perform the work of the Holy Ministry. The same is stated in 1 Cor. 12:28-29.

d. DISTINCTION BETWEEN SPIRITUAL PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS AND OFFICE OF HOLY MINISTRY

As was pointed out earlier, Christ definitely commands the establishment of the Office of the Public Ministry by distinguishing this from the command which all Christians have to spread the message of the Word of God (Spiritual Priesthood of all believers).

We see this also from:

- i) the description of the personal qualifications pastors are to have in knowledge and ability to impart that knowledge apart from normal Christians, 1 Peter 5:3; 1 Tim. 3:2-7; Titus 1:6-11.
- ii) the description of the special functions, duties and responsibilities unique to the Office of the Holy Ministry, Titus 1:9-11; 1 Tim. 3:5; Acts 20:28, 21; 1 Peter 5:1ff; Heb. 13:17.
- iii) the distinction Scripture itself makes between pastors and all other Christians, 1 Cor. 12:28-29.
- iv) the honour and dignity which are given to all who officially teach the Word of God. Thus St. Paul writes: "Let a man so account of us as ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God", 1 Cor. 4:1. See also Heb. 13:7.

WHAT OF AUXILIARY OFFICES IN THE CHURCH SUCH AS SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHER, ELDER, ETC.?

While a local congregation is commanded by God to appoint a pastor or pastors to perform the duties of the Office of the Ministry, nowhere has the Lord appointed and specially commanded that other offices in the church (Chairman, Secretary, Elder, Sunday School teacher) are to exist. However, since God requires that also children be instructed in the Word, and since the pastor often is unable to perform all of these duties in proclaiming the Word, the congregation of its own free will, that these duties are attended to, appoints others to fulfil these

responsibilities. Since they also are performing various functions in the general command to proclaim the Word of God, whenever they are appointed to such a task by the Christian congregation, actually the Lord Himself is asking them to fulfil this job. It is a call coming from God. In this way they are performing various functions of the ministry of the Word established by Christ. But the Lord has not specially established these other various offices and the congregation is at liberty to appoint them as it sees fit. These are arranged according to good order and the welfare of the congregation.

The unique Office of the Holy Ministry has been commanded by the Lord and the Christian congregation is not at liberty to establish it whether it pleases or not but is divinely commanded to do so.

II.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS DOCTRINE TO THE CHRISTIAN PASTOR AND HIS CONGREGATION.

IS THE OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC MINISTRY NECESSARY?

While this Office of the Holy Ministry has been commanded by God, it is not absolutely necessary for salvation. It is the Word of God which is necessary to engender and build faith in the heart of a person. Since the Word of God is heard not only in the public preaching and teaching of a faithful pastor, but also through private reading, studying and proclamation by Christians, Christian faith may be built and maintained without the Office of the Ministry. Such may be the case where an individual Christian is unable to find an orthodox Christian congregation to join and thus a faithful orthodox Lutheran minister to perform the duties of a shepherd towards him, or where an orthodox Lutheran congregation is unable to find or train orthodox pastors to serve in their midst.

But these are exceptional cases and not the rule. The General rule is: WHERE CHRISTIANS IN A LOCALITY HAVE JOINED TOGETHER AND ORGANISED A LOCAL CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION, IT IS GOD'S COMMAND THAT THEY ESTABLISH THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTRY AND CALL A PASTOR OR PASTORS TO SERVE IN THEIR MIDST.

Thus this Office is abused and despised:

- i) when Christians do not regularly attend public worship services to hear the public preaching of God's Word, claiming that they can read the same Word at home;

Luther bluntly reproves this false idea when he states:

“Some smart wiseacres say: But we have books from which we can read it just as well as hear it from the preacher in the church. You read down the devil on your head, who is then controlling you. If our Lord God had known that the Ministry was superfluous (unnecessary, GLW), He certainly would have been so wise and sage not to have had Moses preach to you.... He would also in our day surely tell the preachers and pastors to stay at home.” (St. L. III: 1736).

- ii) where the pastors are negligent in their duties, are lazy and do not diligently prepare their sermons and perhaps offer the excuse that their flock can provide for their own spiritual needs since they all are able to read the Word;
- iii) when churches do not do their utmost to encourage young men to train for the Office of the Holy Ministry and provide for them the facilities to do so.

May we of the ELCR not be found guilty of such abuse and despoliation of the divinely instituted Office of the Ministry. “He that heareth you (preachers of God's pure Word, GLW), heareth Me,

and he that despiseth you, despiseth Me, and he that despiseth Me, despiseth Him that sent Me.” (Luke 10:16).

WHY IS THIS UPHOLDING OF THIS DOCTRINE SO IMPORTANT?

This question must be answered in relation to the CHRISTIAN PASTOR and also his CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION.

Dr. Pieper in his Essay “The Layman’s Movement and the Bible”, correctly explains this matter, portions of which Essay we quote:

“If the pastor is certain that his holy Office has been divinely instituted and that he himself has been called into it, not merely by honourable and judicious men, but by the Almighty God, he will be determined to regard and execute his holy office in accordance with this conviction.”

“a) In the first place, he will earnestly pray God to enable him to administer his office in accord with His Word....

“This feeling of insufficiency, the depressing realisation that of himself he is unfit to execute his noble office, is above all an occasion for distress to the faithful pastor. If a conscientious minister firmly believes that his office has been instituted by God Himself and has not simply developed from peculiar conditions within the church, and if he is convinced that it is God who has placed Him into this exalted calling, then he will beseech the divine Author and Founder of this office so much the more confidently to grant him, and preserve in him the ability which his office demands.

“b) In the second place, he will rejoice the more in God’s guardian care.... The pastor, who serves God in the Office of the Holy Ministry, which the Lord Himself has instituted and into which He has placed him, should be doubly certain of the unfailing guardianship of his Lord; for he is not only a sheep of Christ’s fold and a member of God’s household, but he is also a shepherd over the flock entrusted to his care and a steward of the mysteries of God, Titus 1:7; 1 Cor. 4:1. This knowledge must surely endue him with courage and strength to remain at his post, even if all others should forsake him.

“c) In the third place, a pastor’s assurance that his call is divine gives him boldness to carry on even when everything seems to turn against him. Practically every pastor must at some time or other contend with the disheartening thought that he is labouring in vain in his ministry. But if in such hours of spiritual depression he bears in mind that he holds his office not merely by human authority, but by God’s own ordinance and command, he will be impelled to commit the success of his labours to God, knowing that God in His own time will grant him the victory.

“d) In the fourth place, a pastor will be preserved from disseminating human opinions and doctrines. At times he is tempted to mingle human speculations into his preaching of the Word.... But if he ever keeps in mind the fact that this office, both as to its origin and its commission, belongs entirely to God, he will clearly recognise the folly of urging anything but God’s Word alone in the administration of his holy office.

“e) In the fifth place, a pastor will be kept from slothfulness (Laziness, GLW).... If the pastor remembers that his office is a divine institution,.... his sluggishness and indolence will vanish before them as dew at the coming of the morning sun.

“f) In the sixth place, a pastor will be circumspect in his conduct. All Christians, according to God’s Word, should be careful as to how they walk in this present world;.... But a Christian pastor is in so much greater danger of giving offence

because his office brings him in contact with all sorts of people and all sorts of temptations. And, oh, how the world rejoices whenever a Christian minister falls!.... A minister therefore must be exceedingly careful with regard to his conduct.

“However the fact that a Christian minister holds his office and performs all its functions by virtue of God’s own institution and command is of paramount importance also for the CONGREGATION.

- “a) In the first place, if the members of a congregation keep in mind that God Himself has established the public ministry in their midst and has supplied them with a man of His own choice, they will regard him as the best man in the world for them even though he may be lacking certain gifts which other preachers in the vicinity possess. Dr. Walther used to say with regard to this matter, ‘The great importance of the fact that the congregation members should be assured of the divinity of their pastor’s call cannot be adequately expressed. If the hearers are convinced of this, they will gladly be satisfied even with a pastor whose gifts are rather limited, as long as he performs the duties of his office faithfully; hence they will not quit their church and run to hear more brilliant preachers, but their attitude will be this: Our pastor is the man whom God has given to us and through whose ministry He wants to lead us to heaven, so that under his pastoral care He will not permit us to lack anything that we need for our salvation!
- “b) In the second place, the knowledge of the fact that the public ministry is of divine origin and that the pastor whom they have has been given them by God will move all Christians to attend church regularly and also willingly to listen to the Word of God which their pastor brings to them in his private care of souls....
- “c) In the third place, if the public ministry is God’s ordinance, instituted for the welfare of the Church, then all Christians must ever see to it that it is preserved.” (What is Christianity and Other Essays, pp.130-135).

Young men with the right gifts and abilities should therefore be encouraged to offer themselves for the study of the Holy Ministry and facilities (seminaries, etc.) made available for the training of such men.

Since the pastor is occupying a position which God has established in the church, the members of the congregation are in duty bound to show him due honour and respect. Even though he may not fully possess the gifts and abilities which other older and more experienced pastors may have, they should not for this reason despise and think poorly of him. God regards this man the best to shepherd this flock and such people would then be despising and blaspheming the almighty Lord. But as long as their pastor, weak mortal though he may be, faithfully fulfils his duties and responsibilities, God requires of his members to look up to him, to give him their utmost help and co-operation and to regard him as a most precious gift of the Lord, a dispenser of the pure and saving truths of the Bible.

AUTHORITY OF MINISTRY

In so far as the pastor proclaims the pure Word, rightly divided to his hearers, all believers are in duty bound to obey their pastors as they obey God Himself, Heb. 13:17; Luke 10:16.

“However,” Dr. Mueller writes:

“as soon as they (the pastors, GLW) go beyond God’s Word and teach commandments of men, they have no authority at all, and their hearers must refuse them obedience for conscience’ sake, Matt. 23:8; Rom. 16:17.

“Adiaphora, that is, matters which are neither commanded nor forbidden by God’s Word, should not be adjudged by the minister, but by the entire congregation by common consent.” (Christian Dogmatics, p.578).

Thus, as Dr. Luther often points out, the Office of the Ministry is the supreme office in the Church, because it is divinely instituted and because of the Word of God which it teaches and applies. Just as the local congregation is the only divinely instituted and commanded body of Christians (Federations, Synods, young people’s Societies are of human arrangement), so the Office of the Holy Ministry is the only divinely instituted public office in the Christian Church. All auxiliary offices (Sunday School teacher, Elder, etc.,) though under the supervision and responsibility of the pastor of the congregation, are by human arrangement, appointed as the need requires.

CONCLUSION

Now that we have seen that Scripture clearly teaches that the Office of the Holy Ministry in the local congregation has been divinely instituted and commanded, what are we to say of such church bodies who erroneously claim that the pastoral ministry is simply an “historical development” of the Church, by human arrangement and merely on the same level as other offices in the Church (Elder, Sunday School teacher)?

Nothing less can be said of them than that they are casting aside the clear teaching of the Word of God, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men (Matt. 15:9) and thus orthodox Lutherans dare not have any Church fellowship with them (Rom.16:17-18).

May we of the ELCR stand by the principle of Luther: Scripture has spoken, I will obey, that principle which enabled Luther faithfully to fulfil the Lord’s work, and to restore the pure Word in those times of Popish darkness.

(All emphasis in quotations has been added, GLW.)

