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CONTENTS

CORRESPONDENCE2

ARTICLES

Church & Ministry Part 1: Exegetical and Historical Treatment
By Jobst Schöne4

The Integrity of the Christological Character of the Office of the Ministry
By David P. Scaer15 ✓

Called & Ordained: Reflections on the New Testament View of the Office of the Ministry
By William Weinrich20

Forgiveness of Sins & Restoration to Office
By James A. Nestingen28

A Call for Manuscripts32

The Office of the Holy Ministry in the Life of the Church: A View from the Parish
By Roger D. Pittelko33 ✓

REVIEWS41

Review Essay: A Famine in Lutheranism

- The Goal of the Gospel: God's Purpose in Saving You.* By Philip M. Bickel and Robert L. Nordlie
- Evangelicalism and the Liturgical Movement and Their Effects on Lutheran Worship.* By Charles J. Evanson
- Why Catholics Can't Sing.* By Thomas Day
- Teaching God's Children His Teaching: A Guide for the Study of Luther's Catechism.* By Robert Kolb
- The Healing Presence: Spiritual Exercises for Healing, Wellness and Recovery.* By Thomas A. Droege
- Anatomy of a Merger: People, Dynamics, and Decisions that Shaped the ELCA.* By Edgar R. Trexler

LOGIA FORUM49

- If We Confess Our Sins . . . • Oreos • Tinker, Tinker • *certus sermo* • All the World's a Stage?
- Wheels within Wheels • Public Worship and Concord • Logomachy • Luther's *Hausandacht*
- Lay Celebration of the Sacrament of the Altar • To the Diaspora • Sexuality as *Aliquid in Homine*
- Change for Change's Sake • When the First Article Cannot Come First

The Integrity of the Christological Character of the Office of the Ministry

DAVID P. SCAER



This article deals with the question of how the person and work of Jesus Christ are related to the office of the ministry. If we are concerned about relating the office of the ministry to the concept of the universal priesthood of believers, we should be even more interested in relating it to Christology. I would like to make reference to two items which occurred in the last year.

Erling Teigen in *The Confessional Lutheran Research Society Newsletter* (No. 25, Advent 1991, 1-7; *Logia*, Vol. 1, No. 1:9-15) calls attention to how J. Schaller and August Pieper related the universal priesthood of believers to the ministry. Teigen analyzes Schaller's article, "The Origin and Development of the New Testament Ministry," which appeared first in German in 1911-1912 and again in 1917-1918 and now in English translation in *The Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* (Winter 1989). We should leave behind the discussion of whether this represents the historic Wisconsin position and face the reality that this comes as close as possible to presenting current Wisconsin Synod thinking on the issue. Schaller's thesis is that the ministry is inherent in the Gospel and thus the potential for the ministry is in the Gospel and may be derived from it. No distinction is made between St. Paul and the believer and a specific institution of the ministry cannot be detected in the words of Jesus (Teigen, *Logia*, p. 10). The same issue of *The Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* contains an English translation of an article by August Pieper published in July 1916 now under the title "Are There Legal Regulations in the New Testament?" August Pieper's assertions are the more amazing. For example: "Let us recognize that there is no divinely instituted and prescribed form of the ministry even for the administration of Word and Sacraments, that the Holy Spirit here works freely through Christians . . ." (Teigen, *Logia*, p. 12). Consistently August Pieper commends the Reformed for their doctrine of the ministry. Teigen opines that Francis Pieper's critique of Höfling (*Christian Dogmatics* III, 445) may have really been directed toward brother August. While Teigen calls attention to apparent antinomianism, this may only be a less than subtle introduction

into legalism, simply because the church as a political body determines who may do what in the church. Making political decisions (even those made by legally constituted bodies) on matters set forth in the Scriptures is legalism. The Wisconsin decision to ordain male parochial school teachers is the logical conclusion of the practice of permitting them to celebrate Holy Communion, which is ultimately derived from the theology of Schaller and August Pieper. I hesitate to raise the question of how Missouri could live with Wisconsin when division on such an important issue existed. Theoretically there can now be no valid reason for Wisconsin not to go ahead and ordain women, or at least give them supervision over the Holy Communion. If there are no mandates for the ministry, just how important are other mandates regulating an institution which is in fact no institution at all? The prohibition against women preachers would apply to an institution established not by God but by the church. The secondary regulation of prohibiting women preachers has divine force, but the primary institution does not. These questions are only raised with hesitancy, because inevitably we will be instructed how Schaller and August Pieper did not really represent the original Wisconsin position. In any event there is enough material for potential embarrassment on the part of Missouri. What we could not tolerate in Höfling, we tolerated in Wisconsin.

I bring up this issue simply to demonstrate that our attention is continually focused on how a proper understanding of the ministry is related to the universal priesthood, a procedure which is incidental to the Lutheran Confessions and not known in the Augsburg Confession, the Apology, the Smalcald Articles, or the Formula. The confessions simply do not have a protracted discussion on the issue, but we are forever adjusting the two issues of the universal priesthood and the ministry. The New Testament does not place the two issues together. It is like being fitted with eyeglasses, with the optometrist flipping lenses until we get the perfect vision. As long as we use the ministry and the universal priesthood to inform each other, which is not peculiar to Wisconsin, we may be doomed to flipping lenses for a proper focus. But I am suggesting here that we move back a step and relate the question of ministry to Christology. This brings up the second item.

During the panel discussion at a symposium at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, a discussion broke out on

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the relationship of God to language and the ministry. Leonard Klein of *Lutheran Forum* insists on the traditional masculine language for God, but at the same time does not oppose women's ordination, though he admits he can find no support for it in Scripture or tradition. From my point of view he is guilty of a contradiction. The God who must be represented as Father and Son must also be represented by a male clergy. The inconsistency exists for me and not for Klein, since for him all references to God including Father and Son are metaphorical. I was informed that such thought predominates at the Yale Divinity School where he obtained his theological education. These are terms which God has chosen, presumably out of free

This ministry is Christological not only because it proclaims Christ as its chief and ultimate function, but because those who possess this office stand in Christ's stead. This is the view of the Apology. The ministers preaching the Gospel are hardly saints speaking to themselves, but their voice is Christ's voice speaking to saints. From this concrete reality of being Christ's representatives, the ministers proclaim the one whom they represent.

choice, and not because he is Father and Son. Klein, if I understand him correctly, does not make a connection between the incarnation and the male clergy or, negatively stated, the prohibition of women in that office. Whereas Schaller and August Pieper approach the office of the ministry as present in the general or ordinary preaching of the Gospel and thus potentially present in all Christians (their peculiar understanding of the general priesthood), Klein derives it from Baptism, but in a way which for me is not spelled out clearly (just what about Baptism entitles a person, male and female of course, to become a minister in the New Testament sense of the word?). Still the lines of Wisconsin's and Klein's arguments are the same. The ministry is derived from below and not from above. But this, of course, is Schleiermacher's position.

What I find striking is the hesitancy or the embarrassment of deriving the ministry from our understanding of God as Father, Son, and Spirit, and the incarnation. Somehow when this approach is taken, such epithets as Romanist, Catholic, high church (you can supply the others) abound. It would seem that the connections between the ministry and the incarnation and God would be welcomed. But they are not. In offering this approach, we do not claim to offer the last word. Still we should be willing to take a look at it. Certainly it is not only allowed, but suggested by the Augsburg Confession in which

ministry follows the articles on God, original sin, Christ, and justification. What is offered here is only preliminary and quite elementary.

Consistently in the New Testament, terms which apply to Jesus, such as a "shepherd" or "pastor" and "bishop," are also applied to the clergy. These same words, along with "elder" or "presbyter," are used of the apostles. They are not used of Christians in general. This should immediately alert us to the idea that ministry is derived from above and not from below. In Hebrews Jesus is called the "Great Shepherd" and 1 Peter calls Jesus "Shepherd" and "Bishop of our Souls" (2:25). 1 Peter 5:1-4 calls the pastors "shepherds" and Christ the "Head Shepherd." Peter identifies himself as a "witness" of Christ's sufferings, i.e., an "apostle," but also as a "presbyter," sharing an office with the other pastors. The pastoral office (*ministerium, Predigtamt*) is both Christological and apostolic. We have always recognized this, but seem to be afraid to develop the implications of the former.

Whoever claims this office has it only as he shares in Christ's office. This is a sharing that goes beyond justifying faith. There is never an autonomous or independent claim to this office or its functions. This office comes out from Christ as Christ comes out of the Father: "For as the Father has sent me so send I you" (Jn 20:21). The God from whom Jesus comes and by whom he is authorized is the Great Shepherd of Israel. Thus with our argument we have taken the office of the ministry from ourselves back to the apostles, Christ, and God himself.

This authorized sending of the apostles deals not with personal piety, but is a public, officially authorized sending, empowered by the Holy Spirit, so that the apostles who are sent speak not merely of what is in them but to the higher reality of the crucified and risen Lord. Only after they have observed his wounds and are convinced of his resurrection are they sent. Mention can be made here that Jesus is authorized to speak only that which the Father has authorized. Not only is this an exegetical conclusion, but it is a necessary dogmatic correlation of our understanding of the Trinity. Augustana xxviii sees in the Johannine citation establishing the apostolate the mandate for the office of the ministry. Our concern here is not establishing the apostolic character of the ministry, on which we all agree, but its Christological origin and character. This ministry is Christological not only because it proclaims Christ as its chief and ultimate function, but because those who possess this office stand in Christ's stead. This is the view of the Apology. The ministers preaching the Gospel are hardly saints speaking to themselves, but their voice is Christ's voice speaking to saints. From this concrete reality of being Christ's representatives, the ministers proclaim the one whom they represent. The similarities between John 20:21-23 and Matthew 28:16-20 are easily recognizable. In both cases the audience is limited to the apostles, and in both cases the disciples become Jesus' authorized representatives. Their authority is from Jesus to be responsible to him, not from the church. This responsibility to Jesus shows that their primary relationship is to him from which their relationship to the church is dependent. This demarcation between clergy and people is a common New Testament theme. Paul speaks to the elders or bishops at Ephesus

(Acts 20). Peter singles out the elders or the pastors as those who share with him the responsibility for the church which is identified as the flock of God (1 Pt 5:1-2). What the ministry is and what it does is not determined by us or by councils or popes or assemblies or congregations, but by Jesus and the New Testament. With this view of ministry, a modern job description from a congregation or board seems alien to the New Testament. We belong to the ministry originating in Jesus and exercised by him and his apostles. We should concern ourselves not about obtaining an apostolic succession from the Anglicans as our friends in the ELCA desire, but we should commit ourselves to a Christological succession as his representatives. Still, in this succession we are only faint silhouettes and disappearing shadows, mere images of him who alone is the Bishop of our Souls and who gave his life for the sheep.

A variety of opinions about the ministry has arisen in the church. Beginning at least with Pietism and formulated by Schleiermacher, the opinion was offered that the ministry resided in the congregation as the personal possession of each member of the community. Even today the universal priesthood has degenerated into individualism with each person making a contribution to the whole. This has no support in the New Testament where the church is a heavenly reality coming down from above, bringing assemblies into communion with it. Human beings may establish ecclesiastical corporations, but they do not establish the church mentioned in the New Testament and affirmed by the creeds. This community, as envisioned by Schleiermacher and later Höfling, designated certain persons to carry out certain public functions in behalf of all. This transference was called an *Übertragung* because something which was the common possession of all, not only collectively,

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but also individually, was exercised by one person. For Schleiermacher the matter was only one of order, so the individual member could exercise his or her gifts or ministry in the most efficient and effective way possible. He even conceded that a church would not forfeit its credentials, if the members agreed to have a common sharing among themselves without a designated leader. With Schleiermacher's roots in the Pietism of his father and his own university education among the Enlightenment rationalists, he was hardly original in his think-

ing, but he has to this day set the tone for the majority of Protestantism to which our own Lutheran Church has not been immune. The question is not simply that we agree to have a ministry for the sake of order. If order is the last word, then the Law has replaced the Gospel as God's last proclamation to the church, and we have hardly gone beyond Schleiermacher, though we would be a bit more liturgical. Such a view is not antinomian but legalistic.

Contrasting the Lutheran view (that the pastor stands in Christ's stead) with Schleiermacher's view (that ministry is no more than public representation of the community's common possession) hardly exhausts other options. Zwingli, enamored by the culture and learning of the Renaissance humanism of Erasmus, saw the minister as the most highly educated person in the religious community. Calvin, with moral discipline as the third mark of the church, was consistent in seeing the minister as the moral disciplinarian of the religious community. Perhaps you have seen this style or model of ministry. In the image of Schleiermacher, the ministers are the spiritual leaders stirring up spiritual gifts. In the image of Zwingli the clergy humbly drop Latin, Greek, and Hebrew pearls to the less informed parishioners, or show their breadth of reading by dropping names of famous authors from the heights of their pulpits. Or, in the image of Calvin, they help people search out private sins so that the congregation can be a morally unleavened lump. Where the leaven won't unleaven itself, Calvin is willing and ready to slice the leavened loaf for excommunicated sandwiches. Rome traditionally sees its clergy as Christ's representatives in sacrificing him in the mass as he once sacrificed himself. The ministry does require sacrifice, not that we sacrifice Christ, but we pray that God would sacrifice us with Christ (Vatican II may say something else). Paul sees his ministry not simply in terms of legally mandated authority, but in the sense of suffering with and being sacrificed with Christ. What happened to the teacher will happen to the student. This is Christ's own promise to the twelve. The success- and statistics-orientated ministries of neo-evangelicals sweep this aspect of ministry under the carpet.

For us, the ministry is, and always remains, a flesh and blood matter, since it is intimately connected with the incarnation and the atonement. Jesus was really and essentially, not incidentally, a minister or a pastor, not only in leading his sheep, but laying down his life for them. The ministry emanates from atonement. It is not a doctrinal abstraction or a conclusion. It exists "in, with and under" the church, but it can never be confused with the church. John is not alone in speaking of Jesus as Shepherd, since Matthew speaks of the people being scattered as sheep having no shepherd, referring to Zechariah, that the shepherd shall be killed and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered (26:31). Here Christ's office as pastor and his atonement are joined together. In his tripartite commission to Peter to feed the lambs and the sheep, it was clear that Jesus understands his disciples as shepherds over his flock, and the Lucan Paul sees the elders at Ephesus in the same light (Acts 20:28).

We should not be offended if Jesus can at one and the same time be the Lamb of God and the Shepherd of Israel. We

should also not be startled that we can look at ourselves in the terms of Isaiah (53:6) and Matthew (9:36) and see ourselves in our private lives as sheep who have gone astray or as sheep scattered abroad. As sheep and shepherds we are called to sacrifice ourselves. The flock that was scattered at the death of their shepherd was clearly the twelve, but these same sheep were designated by Jesus as shepherds of the flock. If we are to take seriously the words of Jesus, they, like him, would be destined to martyrdom—a strange concept in a world where individual Christians are encouraged to exercise and build up their ministries with spiritual gifts, and the clergy often look upon their ministries as opportunities for success. Since our ministry is only Christ's, the words "effective" and "successful" can have no place in our vocabulary.

The minister lives a dual life. On the one hand, he cannot go beyond seeing himself as part of the flock for which Christ died. On the other hand, he has no choice but to identify himself with the same Christ in his office of the ministry. This feeling of moral inadequacy and spiritual dependency on Jesus can never excuse us from surrendering or walking away from being "shepherds," "bishops," "ministers of God," and God's own "co-workers," if we want to speak in New Testament terms.

Baptism makes people sheep and Christians. It does not make them shepherds and ministers. The clergy are held accountable in a way that lay persons are not. Only a few may become teachers because of the severity of the accountability. Harsh judgment is promised to the false teacher. To the pastors are given the responsibility for Christ's people and his teaching. At least this is the opinion of the author of 1 Peter when he says that those whom he calls his fellow elders should feed the flock of God. There is no suggestion that the flock feeds itself. In fact when the flock attempts to do this, it wanders into sectarian fields to feed on hallucinating grass which traumatize the poor sheep into thinking that they are shepherds.

We speak first of a Christological ministry and only secondarily

of an apostolic one. The ELCA is lusting after the Anglicans in order to become infected by hand contact with the virus of its apostolic succession, which even the Church of Rome sees only as an artificial reaction to dead bacteria. It is a case of false pregnancy in a sterile womb. In coveting apostolic succession, we are desiring only half a loaf. If we celebrate Holy Communion with angels and archangels and the whole host of heaven, we certainly stand in our pulpits first with Peter and James and John and then with James the brother of our Lord and Paul and the writer of the Hebrews and Cyril of Jerusalem and Ignatius and Athanasius and Luther, Melancthon, and Chemnitz, and Walther and Löhe and Pieper and with all our fathers. If we stand with these men in a wondrous succession, we do not stand in their places. We stand only in the place of Christ who has designated us to be ministers of the Gospel.

Because it is derived from the incarnation, the ministry is not a divine abstraction but a flesh and blood reality. If that office existed in the body derived from the pure Virgin—even our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory in the church forever—so it exists in our chipped and cracked and sometimes unpliant clay vessels. The same Spirit by whom the Lord was conceived was breathed upon the ministry through the apostles. Just as the Word makes Baptism efficacious and not water; and just as Body of Christ makes the Sacrament and not bread; so also the Word of Christ—and not our bodies, souls, and voices—makes the ministry. Without water there is no Baptism and without bread there is no Sacrament, and so too, without men designated by God there is no ministry.

Pray that the Lord of the Harvest would send workers into the harvest. Jesus saw his prayer answered in the apostles. Paul saw that prayer answered in Timothy, Titus, Silas, Luke, Mark, Onesimus. We see that prayer answered in the students at our seminaries. In every Christian there is a little Christ. But there is not in every Christian a little pastor or minister crawling to come out. Ours is that responsibility. LOGIA