

1.4
ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY

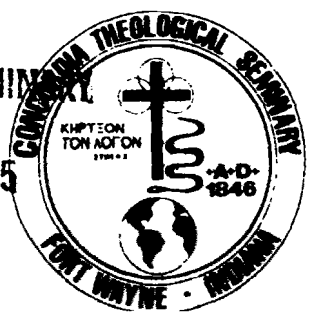
CTQ

Volume 47, Number 4

OCTOBER 1983

Announcement	289
Luther on the Ministry	Eugene F. Klug 293
Luther on Prayer	David P. Scaer 305
Homiletical Studies	317
Books Received	369
Indices to Volume 47 (1983)	
Author Index	371
Title Index	375
Subject Index	377
Scripture Index to Homiletical Studies	381

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
LIBRARY
FT. WAYNE, INDIANA 46825



Luther on the Ministry

Eugene F. Klug

“We have this ministry,” writes the Apostle Paul to the Corinthian congregation. (2 Cor. 4:1). He is speaking first of all of his office as apostle, chosen of the Lord; but he is enlisting their support in the conduct of the ministry in their midst. God has entrusted the means of grace, Word and Sacrament, to all believers as members of the royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). The mandate of Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:15 makes each Christian a witness for the Gospel to the world around him. The church is built and preserved through the ministry of the Word. God’s people, Luther reminds us, cannot be without God’s Word. The church owes its existence to the Word, not vice versa. “Wherever the Church is, there is the authority to administer the Gospel,” state the Lutheran Confessions (Tractate, 67). The world owes its continued existence to the unfinished task of the church in spreading that Word (Matt. 24:14).

However, there are not two ministries, as the above may seem to suggest. Christ establishes only one ministry for the building of His church through the Word. The mandate which places all believers under the responsibility to make disciples for the Lord is the ground upon which the public pastoral office stands. The term “ministry” thus has both a wide and a narrow sense. In the first sense it refers to the rights and duties in connection with the Gospel which belong by Christ’s ordering to the totality of the spiritual priesthood of believers, (1 Pet. 2:9; Matt. 18:17; John 20:23; 1 Cor. 3:21f.). Every Christian, young or old, man, woman, or child, possesses this ministry as a believing, baptized child of God, who by his faith is a member of Christ’s church and His royal priesthood, along with all the privileges and responsibilities that accompany that station.

In the second sense, however, ministry is used in a narrow and the proper and primary sense in Scripture to refer to the *office* of the public pastoral ministry to which a qualified man is called and for which he is chosen, by God’s will, through the Christian believers gathered at one place in a congregation. Though the rights and responsibilities of the spiritual priesthood are theirs, they are not each to administer the means of grace, Word and Sacraments, for themselves publicly, valid and efficacious though this might be; but they are to call a qualified man to do this in their name and stead. He does publicly, by the will of God, what

belongs to the ministry of the Word. His is an office specially designated by God, for the sake of the church on earth. (Acts 20:24; Rom. 15:16; 1 Cor 4:1). His is the special aptitude to teach and minister beyond the usual capacity of the believers in general (1 Tim. 3:2; 5:21; 2 Tim. 2:2). He has the special call of the Christian congregation to perform these duties of ministry in their stead (Acts 14:23; Eph. 4:11; Rom. 1:1). The church, or fellowship of believers, retains "the authority to call, elect, and ordain ministers," as the Lutheran Confessions state (Tractate, 67), and this authority is a gift "which no human authority can wrest from the Church."

The distinctive nature of the public pastoral office must not be lost, however, as the great prerogatives and duties of the general priesthood of believers are blazoned abroad. There is need for the latter to be done, as Luther showed, because of the Romanist presumption which localized these powers in the hands of the ecclesiastical hierarchy from pope on down through the ordained clergy. But Luther never lost sight of the fact that God had established the public pastoral office *through* the congregation's call and for its sake. Walther very properly emphasizes the same truth in his theses on the ministry, *Vom heiligen Predigtamt oder Pfarramt*.¹

Previous to the declaration of the authority which resides in God's people, the Tractate had shown convincingly that the pretension of papal power and primacy by divine right (*iure divino*) was totally groundless, having neither Scriptural warrant nor historical basis (cf. Tractate, 1-37). Nor should the consciences of the faithful be bound by the godless presumption of the papal office which required recognition of such authority as necessary for salvation (Tractate, 38-59). Since the authority of the keys ultimately and first of all belongs to the priesthood of believers, the Tractate concludes that "there are just reasons why we do not obey" and, therefore, "it is right also to restore this jurisdiction to godly pastors, and to see to it that it is legitimately exercised for the reformation of morals and the glory of God" (Tractate, 76).

On the basis of Article V in the Augsburg Confession Walther notes that the first and primary emphasis of the confessors was to stress the ministry of the Word, the Gospel, by which God builds His kingdom or church of believers.² At the same time there is implicit in this article the establishment of the parish pastorate, Walther also insists. Article V of the Augsburg Confession reads as follows:

That we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith, where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel . . .

That which is implicit here, namely, the pastoral office, is explicitly treated in Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession:

Of ecclesiastical order they teach that no one should publicly teach in the church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called.

Article XXVIII of the same Confession carefully articulates the power of the keys and specifies to whom they are given, stating that this power is exercised by one man or by several who have been called into the pastoral office. Thus, the ministry of the Word is the property of the general priesthood, but it is performed by God's careful ordering through the called ministers, who are called into parish pastorates through the instrumentality of the churches (AC XXVIII, 5ff.):

This power is exercised only by teaching or preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments, according to their calling, either to many or to individuals.

Self-evidently the Gospel ministry which is the possession and the duty of all believers is in a very unique way, ordered by God, the task that belongs to the special office which He has established in His church, the pastoral office.

Luther's odyssey from the stranglehold of the Romanist priesthood, subjugated under the papal hierarchy, to the glorious freedom of the pastoral office under God and under God's people, the royal priests, was an arduous one. It was not the case of a rebel arbitrarily and thoughtlessly throwing off a burdensome yoke; it was rather the valiant struggle of a pious soul casting off the bonds of a shameless human bondage and gladly taking upon his shoulders the servanthood of his Lord and Master Christ, who had given great gifts to His church, including not least the holy ministry. To the royal priests belonged the task of evangelizing the world, Matt. 28:19; theirs was the responsibility under God of establishing in orderly manner the parish pastorate in their midst.

"Because of faith and the Word," what is otherwise ordinary, and no greater accomplishment than that of the worldling, the task of the Christian champion, like Abraham (who also had gathered his laurels in battle), becomes a truly elevated one.³ Luther bears in mind that as a man of God Abraham was "appointed bishop and teacher by God's voice," prophet, priest,

and pastor in his house, "a distinguished servant of God, than whom the world has nothing more sublime."⁴ Nor was Abimelech any less so when he repented. God gets His preachers oftentimes right out of the midst of the masses, out of the royal priesthood of believers. "Today many say that they would embrace the Gospel if the kings themselves were to preach it, but that sensible people are repelled because most preachers are so wretched, poor, despised, and downright plebeian."⁵ This is an obvious dodge, Luther avers. The godless unbeliever will reject even the noblest of men, even an angel from heaven. Take a case in point, Luther suggests from current history. "Did not our most illustrious prince of sacred memory, John, Elector of Saxony, teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the year 1530 through his frank confession at the Diet of Augsburg in the presence of Emperor Charles and all the imperial estates, and not he alone but with him and after him many others?"⁶ Luther's point is that God's royal priesthood of believers have always contended and witnessed for the faith, even as "also John, Elector of Saxony, of sacred memory, confessed Christ with great courage before the entire world." This is often "the lot of those to whom God has entrusted the ministry of the Word."⁷ But in them "He nevertheless has His little church," "for God is not without a people."⁸

Abraham's place as a prophet of God was unique. This Luther recognizes. But he also underscores the points of similarity between Abraham and every royal priest or believer. To be sons or pupils of the prophets it is not necessary "that future events be revealed to us," Luther states. "For the office of a prophet," in the broad sense here intended by Luther, "it is enough that we understand Scripture and are able to teach others and also to help one another with prayers."⁹ These are the earmarks of a "prophet" in the sense which applies to every believer. "Therefore the name 'prophet' belongs equally to all Christians," Luther contends, "and he who denies this also denies that he has been baptized and has been instructed through the Word."¹⁰ The Christian today dare not labor under some kind of delusion that he is an Abraham or an Elijah; but the Christian certainly is one of God's true spokesmen because he has His Word and because His Spirit dwells in him through that Word. Luther could hardly have described the general priesthood of believers any more vividly, nor its task of ministry any more realistically.

The Word of God is never an idle thing in a Christian's life like some bowl of soggy Rice Crispies that just lies there with no "snap, crackle, or pop." It not only has the power to bring a

person to faith, says Luther, but also “it will remind you to think about calling upon and praising God” with your life, and “it will make you a priest and prophet of God, one whose sacrifices will be most pleasing to God because His eyes have regard for faith.”¹¹ Princes or peasants, the Word’s transforming energy is there for each one, and thus Isaac and Abimelech were men in whom the Word had worked its miracle and made them men of God who “were baptized in the Holy Spirit.”¹² Luther sees a remarkable convergence and confluence of God’s purposes in bringing His Word into the lives of His people, according to which earthly and physical blessings or stations in life must serve the spiritual ends or blessings in their lives, be they parents, teachers, ministers, or whatever. “He has created the ministry of the whole creation” in order that His kingdom might come.¹³

What Luther has in mind is not just the general testimony of the natural realm concerning God’s being and rule, but specifically the things that happen through His Word, His special revelation and means of grace. As a result “those things which the saints speak should be regarded as being spoken by God Himself.”¹⁴ True, “when we teach the Gospel, baptize, call men to the ministry of the Word, and ordain ministers, we ourselves do not preach, we do not baptize, we do not ordain, but God is speaking through us.” In one breath and with sweeping stroke Luther herewith accounts for ministry which all Christians have under God and then also the specific office of the public ministry to which the preaching of the Word and administering of the sacraments are entrusted. “So it is called God’s Word, God’s sacrament, God’s ministry, and it is rightly said: ‘God is speaking, God is baptizing’ when He does it through ministers, since indeed all things are attributed to God which holy men have spoken.”¹⁵ Luther recognizes that “even though we were all called” by our faith and Baptism to confess God to those with whom we have to do, yet “we cannot all preach,” for that office belongs to those whom the congregation selects and “who are called in this way to proclaim the Word of God.” So, while “in Baptism we all receive the chrism and the priestly garb,” we leave the task of public preaching to others, who have been called for this special office by the royal priests, or Christian members of the congregation.¹⁶

Side by side with these truths is the parallel truth of “that common and spiritual priesthood by which we all sacrifice ourselves mystically” (Rom. 12:1) day by day in our Christian faith and life.¹⁷ Only unbelief could cause a man to forfeit such great gifts, as Cain did.¹⁸ A Christian is called to be faithful in his ministry as a child of God who is ruled by His Word, for “God

appoints me leader against the gates of hell (Matt. 16:18), against the raging of the whole world.”¹⁹ It is on the basis of this verse that papal pretension was wrongfully built; “but by this very statement Christ wants Peter to be a confessor and minister of the Word, not a tyrant who would burden consciences with human traditions; and thus, though “they say that Abraham was a layman,” he likewise was one of God’s Ministers, because he had God’s Word, believed it, and taught it.”²⁰

It is in the nature of the keys that faith should receive the promised forgiveness which they extend, since Christ “moves every Christian heart to faith so that when a man is absolved by the priest he may be sure that he is absolved by God.”²¹ Thus the keys are what God made them, not what the church supposedly has made them; and they are “the common property of all Christians,” even the lowliest.²² This is so because of the general calling to faith which gives Christians their status before God.²³ Of this fact the apostle Paul reminds Timothy, reminding him that his undergirding for his special ministry as a shepherd in God’s church is his “faith and the fruit of the Gospel” by which he has laid hold on eternal life.²⁴ It is not wrong to assert that every Christian, man, woman, and child, has the prerogatives which faith brings, the treasures of the keys, to hold and to administer. “Even a woman can baptize (in an emergency), and it is an uncontested fact that the person “who teaches and baptizes is a greater prophet than Jacob or Moses,” Luther states.²⁵ Yea, “even a child can absolve and can transfer from the kingdom of the devil into the kingdom of God by no other means than the Word.”²⁶

It is especially in his treatise “Concerning the Ministry” of 1523 that Luther presses this great truth home. We are Christ’s brethren “only because of the new birth,” and not by tonsures, long robes, and the like; nor by the “episcopal ordinations” under the aegis of the papal hierarchy; nor by any other externals. The fact is that true priests before God are those by “birth,” that is, by regeneration, by Baptism. And this makes the ministry of the Word something which “is common to all Christians,” and this “highest office in the church” thus “belongs to all who are Christians, not only by right but by command.” Luther goes on to lay to rest the fictions of priestly powers belonging to the episcopally ordained clergy which made them into a kind of “miracle-working caste” in connection with the mass, the keys, penance, prayers, and judgment of doctrine. Luther does not minimize the pastoral office itself and “the right and command to commit such office to a minister by vote of the congregation,” but

he contends eloquently for the Scriptural truth that its powers inhere first of all in the royal priesthood of believers whose duty it is under God to see to administering of Word and Sacrament and to call qualified men into the preaching office. Christians may dismiss from their minds any concern as to whether they can be a true church of God or not, because they lack, or seem to lack, the episcopal authority claimed by the papalists. It is a thorough-going fiction, Luther reminds tender consciences, urging them to “take one’s stand as on a rock” on this matter of the general priesthood and its lofty God-given prerogatives, duties, and responsibilities.²⁷

What belongs to all believers, however, is not to be done publicly by all, lest there be confusion in the churches. The public pastoral office exists by God’s own design and purpose; it must not be omitted or made optional. “Christians are all priests,” it is true; “all have a priesthood, but they do not all have the priestly function.”²⁸ These comments are drawn from Luther’s *scholia*, or commentary, on St. Paul’s Epistle to Titus (1527). It is with Titus’ office in mind that Luther states: “Although all can teach and exhort, nevertheless one ought to do so, and the others ought to listen, so that they do not speak at the same time.” The apostle is very carefully instructing Titus concerning the pastoral office, Luther notes, as Paul states: “You have seen me ordain several elders in each city. Do the same thing. Moreover, I do not want you to ordain just anyone indiscriminately. Ordination was not performed as our bishops do it, but the elders gathered and performed it by the laying on of hands.”²⁹

In his commentary on the First Epistle of Peter (1522) Luther reinforces the same teaching, calling attention to the fact that “those who are now called priests would all be laymen like the others,” should they lack the divine call into their office from the Christian congregation.³⁰ In the same context Luther underscores that — while in other respects no distinctions are to be observed between Christians, whether male or female, young or old, in accord with Galatians 3:28 — yet for the pastoral office “one person must be chosen,” and that person a qualified man, not a woman, for a “woman should not speak in the congregation,” as St. Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 14:34. The only exception which Luther sees as possible would occur “if only women were present and no men, as in nunneries,” in which case “one of the women might be authorized to preach.”³¹

So “the order must be preserved intact so that we do not teach in a confused manner,” states Luther in his commentary on the

prophet Isaiah; and, moreover, Luther is frank to retain his high esteem for the called pastor by stating: "I would rather hear him who has been sent, and I will hear him, than preach myself, unless I were sent myself."³² He could hardly have stated his position on the office of the called pastor more forcefully and clearly. Such called pastors are certainly "reservoirs of the church" in whom "alone is kept the Word of God"; and the preached Word of God is a mighty force against Satan's assaults.³³ Luther very firmly upholds the position that the administration of the Lord's Supper should be done by the called pastors, not by every housefather, for that would "in the long run do much harm causing divisions and creating sects." He counters the plea that under tyrannical superiors it might then be impossible to receive the Sacrament, with the reminder that each man "can be saved through believing the Word," even if he cannot partake of the Lord's Supper.³⁴

Perhaps the classic passage, above all others, on the relationship between Christ and His church with a view to the ministry which He has entrusted to it comes in Luther's commentary on Psalm 110 (1535). First of all, Luther notes that Christ, the Word, the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament, is the preacher *par excellence*.³⁵ He notes, however, how God "confers this honor," that is, of proclaiming His saving Word, "upon all Christians."³⁶ Now, of course, Christ is no longer on earth personally preaching His Word, but He has purposed to do so "through the apostles and their successors," an office which He bestowed upon preachers through His general priesthood of believers, all of whom are priests and holy by their Baptism, by faith in His Word. This office is, then, "the common property of all Christians." They select presbyters, or bishops, or pastors, from those who are qualified, "the best, the most mature men, well-trying, learned, fit, and experienced . . . for the sake of the office," much like qualified men are selected for other offices. Thus, for example, one does not become a citizen by being elected burgomaster or judge, but one is elected to the office because one already possesses citizenship and is deemed especially qualified by one's fellow citizens.³⁷ "To take another illustration," Luther says, "a wife, the mistress of a house, does not become a woman by taking a husband. If she were not a woman already, the act of matrimony would never make a housewife out of her. No, she brings her female nature into matrimony, and then she receives the keys to the house."³⁸ "This is the way it is in Christendom, too," avers Luther, and then he goes on at length to say:

Out of the multitude of Christians some must be selected

who shall lead the others by viture of the special gifts and aptitude which God gives them for the office. Thus St. Paul writes (Eph. 4:11-12): “And His gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipment of the saints” (this means those who are already Christians and baptized priests), “for the work of the ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ” (that is, the Christian congregation or church).

For although we are all priests, this does not mean that all of us can preach, teach, and rule. Certain ones of the multitude must be selected and separated for such an office. And he who has such an office is not a priest because of his office but a servant of all the others, who are priests. When he is no longer able to preach and serve, or if he no longer wants to do so, he once more becomes a part of the common multitude of Christians. His office is conveyed to someone else, and he becomes a Christian like any other.

This is the way to distinguish between the office of preaching, or the ministry, and the general priesthood of all baptized Christians. The preaching office is no more than a public service which happens to be conferred upon someone by the entire congregation, all the members of which are priests.³⁹

What Luther here details at some length is nicely illustrated in one of his letters. The Reformation glow had barely begun to spread itself when, in a letter to his friend George Spalatin (September 9, 1521), Luther shared the following comments:

I really wish Philip [i.e., Melanchthon] would also preach to the people somewhere in the city on festival days after dinner to provide a substitute for the drinking and gambling. This could become a custom which would introduce freedom and restore the form and manners of the early church. For if we have broken all laws of men and cast off their yokes, what difference would it make to us that Philip is not anointed or tonsured but married? Nevertheless, he is truly a priest and actually does the work of a priest, unless it is not the office of a priest to teach the Word of God. In that case Christ Himself would not be a priest.⁴⁰

No demeaning of the pastoral office is intended, only a setting of the office in the right relation to the priesthood of believers, when Luther states that “this is the way to distinguish between the office of preaching, or the ministry, and the general priesthood of all baptized Christians”⁴¹ — namely, the latter is primary and

gives the needed platform on which the other, the parish pastorate, rests. To Luther it is inconceivable that the latter should exist without the other; but where the priesthood of believers is, there it is necessary also for a suitable, qualified man to be selected by them for the public ministering of the Word and Sacraments. Accordingly, Luther states: "The preaching office is no more than public service which happens to be conferred upon someone by the entire congregation, all the members of which are priests."⁴² The ministry in the wide sense, then, and the ministry in the narrow and usual sense, referring to the pastoral office, are both seen as vital in God's ordering of things for His Church.

FOOTNOTES

1. C.F.W. Walther, *Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt*, fourth edition (Zwickau, 1894).
2. Walther, p. 194.
3. *LW* 3, 322; *WA* 43, 106.
4. *LW* 3, 338; *WA* 43, 117.
5. *LW* 3, 340; *WA* 43, 119.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *LW* 3, 343; *WA* 43, 122.
8. *LW* 3, 345; *WA* 43, 123.
9. *LW* 3, 364; *WA* 43, 136.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *LW* 5, 5; *WA* 43, 432.
12. *LW* 5, 84; *WA* 43, 487.
13. *LW* 6, 258; *WA* 44, 191.
14. *LW* 6, 257; *WA* 44, 190.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *LW* 22, 479; *WA* 47, 189.
17. *LW* 9, 124; *WA* 14, 645.
18. *LW* 1, 299; *WA* 42, 220.
19. *LW* 5, 130; *WA* 43, 517.
20. *LW* 4, 141; *WA* 43, 237.
21. *LW* 32, 42; *WA* 7, 366.
22. *LW* 32, 51f; *WA* 7, 382.
23. *LW* 28, 46f; *WA* 12, 132.
24. *LW* 28, 374; *WA* 26, 113.
25. *LW* 8, 309; *WA* 44, 806.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *LW* 40, 18-43 *passim*; *WA* 12, 178-196.
28. *LW* 29, 16; *WA* 25, 16.
29. *LW* 29, 17; *WA* 25, 17.
30. *LW* 30, 55; *WA* 12, 309.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *LW* 17, 13; *WA* 31², 270.
33. *LW* 18, 401; *WA* 13, 686.
34. Margaret A. Currie, *The Letters of Martin Luther* (London, 1908), p. 336.
35. *LW* 13, 270; *WA* 41, 129.
36. *LW* 13, 294; *WA* 41, 153f.

37. *LW* 13, 331; *WA* 41, 208.

38. *Ibid.*

39. *LW* 13, 332, cf. also *LW* 39, 312ff.; 13, 65; *WA* 41, 209f.; 11, 413ff.; 31¹, 211.

40. *LW* 48, 308; *WA* Br 2, 387ff.

41. *LW* 13, 332, *WA* 41, 210.

42. *Ibid.*