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The Office of the Ministry According to the Gospels and the Augsburg Confession

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J. A. O. Preus is reputed to have remarked that ministry issues among Lutherans will have to wait for heaven to be resolved. Up for discussion is regularizing lay celebration of the sacrament in both the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), where it is called lay presidency. Earlier related issues are women serving as public readers of the Scriptures and eucharistic assistants. Ordination of homosexuals in California not long ago led to an ELCA congregation's expulsion, but despite official policy such ordinations have taken place and may eventually be legalized.¹ This issue threatens schism in the ELCA and the Anglican communion. Ordination of women is a settled issue in the ELCA, but some, including women clergy, are dissatisfied with the arguments offered for it.² Since the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) sees schoolteachers sharing the same ministry as pastors, it began to ordain its male (why not female?) parochial school teachers, but has since rescinded the practice. The ministry issue has boiled up in the northern European churches when bishops refused ordination to those who oppose the ordination of women while also removing others for the same reason. This is front-page news.

This discussion of the ministry is divided into four parts with an appendix. Material in part one is taken over from an article arguing that CA V addresses the establishment of the office of the ministry and anticipates CA XIV, which speaks on how it is filled. Part two looks at the biblical arguments offered in the Augsburg Confession and the Treatise. A third part looks at the Gospels for specific mandates for the ministry not

¹ Martin Heineken, "Why the Ordinations Were Invalid," *Lutheran Forum* 24 (Pentecost 1990).

² "Open Letter: Turning Down 'Stirring Up,'" *Lutheran Forum* 24 (May 1990): 8-9. Here fourteen ELCA women pastors state in an open letter that they are dismayed that hardly any "scripturally sound, confessionally faithful, theological rationale in the defense of the ordination of women" has been found.

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necessarily cited in the Confessions. Creation of faith apart from the ministry in the Gospels is discussed in part four. An appendix looks at 1 Peter 5:1-2a.

I. The Ministry in the Augsburg Confession

The Augsburg Confession is arranged so that articles after CA XI explicate what precedes it. Melancthon's intentions are evident in their ordering of the articles. CA XIV on church order extends and depends on CA V in which the ministry is established and entrusted with the word and sacraments so that sinners can be justified (CA IV).³ CA XXVIII on the power of bishops and the Treatise (1536/7) elucidates these two articles on the ministry. Whereas the Augsburg Confession moves from the office of the ministry (CA V) to how this office is filled (CA XIV) and then to its tasks in the article on the bishops (CA XXVIII), the Treatise, which is the appendage to the Augsburg Confession, begins its argument from the opposite pole with the pope. He may be entitled to higher honor, but his authority is the same as any other bishop. In turn bishops have no more divine authority than pastors. Differences are *iure humano*. What is said of bishops in the Augsburg Confession (XXVIII, 8) in exercising the keys, the Treatise applies to pastors.⁴

II. The Biblical Basis for the Ministry in the Confessions

CA XXVIII cites John 20:21-23, Jesus' Easter eve appearance to the disciples, to demonstrate that bishops are authorized to administer the keys, which is defined as forgiving and retaining sins and also administering the sacraments. In giving them the Holy Spirit, Christ gave them the ministry. The passage again appears in the Treatise (Tr 9).⁵ 'In, with, and under' the apostolate, Christ also established the ministry. Later Lutheran theologians used Matthew 28:16-20.⁶ Melancthon may have preferred John 20 with its specific reference to the authority to remit and retain sins, which for Lutherans was the chief article. In the Treatise Melancthon uses Matthew 16:18 and John 21:17, pericopes where Jesus

³ Materials in CA through CA XXVIII explicates the first eleven. Thus the articles on the Sacraments (XIII) is built upon the articles on the church (VII; VIII), Baptism (IX), the Lord's Supper (X), and Confession and Repentance (IX; X).

⁴ John F. Brug, "The Meaning of *Predigtamt* in Augsburg Confession V," *Wisconsin Synod Quarterly* 103 (Winter 2006): 29-43. This essay is a classical presentation of the WELS functional view of the ministry. For example, "... the *Predigtamt* is the gospel" (31).

⁵ Chemnitz cited John 20 in the same way. *Examination of the Council of Trent*, tr. Fred Kramer (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), II:559.

⁶ Chemnitz, *Examination*, II:468, 680, 695. The Lutheran Confessions use this passage for their position on Baptism especially infants but not for the ministry.

speaks to Peter to “show that the keys were entrusted equally to all the apostles and that all the apostles were commissioned in like manner” (Tr 22–23). Matthew 18:19–20 shows that Jesus “grants the power of the keys principally and without mediation to the whole church” (Tr 24). Twice it is said that words spoken to Peter apply to all the apostles (Tr 22–23). Melancthon identifies the rock in Matthew 16:18 on which the church is built as “the ministry of that confession” (Tr 25).⁷

Passages cited by Melancthon for the ministry are spoken by Jesus both before and after the resurrection and in different places, an issue scholars have addressed. J. A. T. Robinson follows C. H. Dodd in seeing a parallel between the commissioning of the apostles in John 20:21–23 (Jerusalem) and the commission to Peter in Matthew 16:23–24 (near Galilee) and not 28:16–20 (Galilee).⁸ Raymond E. Brown recognizes a parallel between John 20 and both Matthean citations, the one to Peter and then all the apostles, both in or near Galilee.⁹ It is hardly incidental that Matthew and John alone, who are among the original Twelve, and not Mark and Luke, have commissioning of the apostles to show that Jesus intended the ministry for them. As will be seen, Luke expands the ministry to include others. A few exegetical observations may be helpful. First, though John places the post-resurrection commissioning of the apostles in Jerusalem (20:21–23), and not Galilee as does Matthew, the special commissioning of Peter takes place in Galilee (John 21:15–19). This corresponds to Matthew’s commissioning of Peter in Caesarea Philippi (16:23–24), an area bordering Galilee. Both the pre-Easter commissioning of Peter in Matthew 16:23–24 and his post-resurrection commissioning in John 21:15–19 are done within the company of the other apostles, as the Treatise points out. Second, in Matthew 28 the apostles are entrusted with making disciples by teaching and baptizing, which establishes the church. John focuses on how the disciples who have been given the Spirit shall remit sins, thus establishing and confirming the church. Third, John’s explicit reference to forgive sins is implied in Matthew’s command to baptize, since for him baptism involves confession of sins and repentance (3:1–6).¹⁰ Fourth, apostolic

⁷ Melancthon cites Ephesians 4:11 to classify ministers as “apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers.” In the New Testament context the word *apostles* is the usual term for missionaries and *prophets* for preachers (Matt 10:41). Pastors may be resident clergy and teachers those entrusted with the *didache*, that is the teaching or the doctrine.

⁸ J. A. T. Robinson, *The Priority of John*, ed. J. F. Coakley (Oak Park, IL: Meyerstone Books, 1987), 316–317.

⁹ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII–XXI*, Anchor Bible 29a (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1987), 1040–1042.

¹⁰ Matt 3:6, “And they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.”

commissioning in both Matthew and John involves trinitarian revelations. Matthew's ecclesiastical (liturgical) "Father-Son-Holy Spirit" (28:19) is replaced by John's conception of God in action whereby the Son ascends to his Father and gives the Spirit.¹¹ A complete doctrine of the Trinity must incorporate both realities of what God is in himself (the ontological Trinity; Matthew) and of how he relates to the world (the economic Trinity; John). Fifth, the discrepancy between Matthew's eleven disciples (28:16) and John's ten disciples is resolved by the appearance to Thomas, which raises the apostolic cadre to eleven (John 20:26-28). Both evangelists see the Twelve (Eleven) as a unique witnesses to the resurrection entrusted with Jesus' teachings. Sixth, whereas the Matthean citation obligates the Eleven to speak all the words of Jesus, the Johannine citation designates the apostles as those given the Holy Spirit and, thus, represent Christ in forgiving and remitting sins as he represented his Father.¹²

Though Melanchthon does not use Matthew 28:16-20 to establish the ministry, note well the Latin edition of CA XVIII. After citing John 20, a favorite citation for discussing the ministry, he adds Mark 16:15, "Go and preach the gospel to the whole creation." Putting aside the issues of the authenticity of the longer ending, it is similar to Matthew 28:19, as Raymond Brown notes, and in my opinion is dependent upon it.¹³ Both the disputed ending of Mark and Matthew 28:16 limit the audience addressed by Jesus to the Eleven. This apostolic ministry according to CA XVIII belongs to the bishops and, as mentioned, according to the Treatise, it is assigned to the ministers who speak in the stead of Christ in remitting sins. This Melanchthon demonstrates by citing Luke 10:16, another favorite citation for him in (Ap VII, 28, 47).¹⁴ In the first citation, Melanchthon says in preaching and administering the sacraments "[ministers] represent the person of Christ" and "offer them in the stead and place of Christ." A second use of Luke 10:16 shows that evil men can be ministers because they represent Christ and not themselves. Again, now for a third time, Luke 10:16 is used to demonstrate that a minister's absolution is Christ's

¹¹ John 20:17, 22 "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God. . . . And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'"

¹² This ministry is from the Holy Spirit and parallels Paul's admonition to Timothy to stir up within himself the gift given him through the laying on of Paul's hands. This gift is identified as the "spirit of power and love and self-control" (2 Tim 1:6, 7), which 'spirit' is none other than the Holy Spirit. Chemnitz uses this passage plus v. 14 and 2 Cor 3:5-6 to show that ministry of the gospel was also one of the Spirit. *Examination*, II:40.

¹³ Brown, *John XIII-XXI*, 1040-1042.

¹⁴ Latin: "*quia ministri funguntur vice Christi, non representant suam personam.*" German: "*denn sie reichens an Christus statt und nicht fuer ihre Person.*"

(12:40). Melanchthon's use of Luke 10:16 to show that Christ instituted the ministry and that the occupants of this office speak in the name of Christ to those who listen (CA XXVIII, 20) is pure genius (CA XXVIII, 22). Like Matthew, Luke speaks of the sending of the Twelve elsewhere (6:12–16), as does Mark (3:13–19). So the sending of the seventy is not substituted for the sending of the Twelve, but exists along side it (10:1–20). The third evangelist may be challenging notions current then that only the Twelve (Matt: Eleven) spoke for Christ. The seventy are sent directly by Christ, not by the Twelve, and thus accountable to him—the position of the Augsburg Confession, the Apology, and the Treatise.¹⁵ Melanchthon's interpretation obviates the support or need for a historic apostolic succession for the ministry. Unique to the Twelve (Eleven) was their role as witnesses to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection,¹⁶ and as the authenticators of his teachings (Matt 10:2–4; Mark 3:14–19; Luke 6:13–9); however, the seventy share in the preaching which, like that of the original Twelve, will be the standard for the world judgment.¹⁷ Though Melanchthon uses the sending of the seventy to establish the ministry, the majority of his arguments for the ministry are taken from the pre- and post-Easter calls of the apostles.

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:5–9 lists the witnesses of the resurrection in the context of those known to be ministers. "And that [Jesus] appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." The Corinthians knew Peter, the Twelve, James, and Paul as ministers. The apostles are those sent out by churches to establish other churches. Just who are the 500 is not easily resolved. Like the seventy they could be those chosen by Jesus as ministers but who were not included among the Twelve.

¹⁶ Peter claims to be a witness of Christ's suffering (1 Pet 5:1) and of the transfiguration (2 Pet 1:16–18). Even if Second Peter is not authentic, it preserves the tradition that Peter was an eyewitness of that event.

¹⁷ There are no parallels in the other Gospels to Luke 10:1–12 and the seventy are not identified, though later Hippolytus nominated each of them; see *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 325*, 10 vols., ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 5:254–255. This is, however, strikingly similar but not identical to the commission of the Twelve not only in Luke (9:1–6) but in Matthew (10:5–15) and Mark (6:7–13). Chemnitz explains how ministers forgive sins without God abdicating this authority to do so: "Now this power of forgiving sin must not be understood to have been given to the priests in such a way that God had renounced it for Himself and had simply transferred it to the priests, with the result that in absolution it is not God Himself but the priest who remits sins." *Examination*, II:559.

ministers now exercise Christ's office in proclaiming forgiveness in his place, but in such a way that it remains his.¹⁸

III. The Ministry in the Gospels

Melanchthon cites the Gospels to anchor the ministry in the life of Jesus at specific times and places. After his resurrection Jesus was not a Gnostic teaching esoteric things learned beyond the grave but explicated what he taught before his death found in summary form at the end of the Gospels, for example, Matthew 28:16–20. Things taught before his death were interpreted in light of his resurrection (Luke 24:44). What Jesus did before his death was not recorded merely for the sake of having a historical account but also to shape and form the life of the church.¹⁹ Thus, Melanchthon applied Luke 10 to the ministry.²⁰ Melanchthon cited the pre- and post-Easter commissioning of the Peter and the apostles.²¹ The pre-Easter commissioning of Peter, Andrew, James, and John to be fishers of men at the beginning of Jesus' ministry (Matt 4:18–22; Mark 1:16–20) also belongs to the content of the post-Easter commissioning of the Eleven (28:16–20). [This matches the commissioning of Peter after the resurrection in John 21:1–11 where the once fisherman and now fisher of men agrees to provide for Jesus' sheep, an event which seems to be reflected in 1 Peter 1:21].²² Attention should also be given to Matthew's second discourse (9:35–11:1), which is folded into the commissioning of the apostles in

¹⁸ Chemnitz condemns the Novatians, "who taught that reconciliation and remission of sins are to be sought and expected apart from the ministry of the Gospel." By ministry Chemnitz refers not to functions common to all, but to the pastors, as he goes on to say that, "None of the men on our side denies that power to remit and retain sins was given to the ministers of the church by Christ." *Examination*, II:559. Chemnitz also cites Luke 10:1.

¹⁹ John 2: 22 "When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken."

²⁰ For example baptism and the Lord's Supper were instituted in one way or another before Jesus' death but were given additional meaning by his resurrection. The complete trinitarian revelation came only after the resurrection, though the Spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism to which God's voice, i.e., the Father's, gave his approval. Almost inexplicably Matthew has the Johannine thunderbolt that what the Father and the Son know of each other is given by revelation to believers (11:27). A trinitarian expansion with the inclusion of the Spirit comes only at the Gospel's end (28:19).

²¹ In Mark 16:6–7, like Matthew 28:7, the women are instructed by the angel to tell the disciples that the commissioning will happen in Galilee, but the commissioning itself is not recorded. Like John 2, Peter is singled out: "But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you." Matthew has Jesus repeating the message of the angel and no mention of Peter.

²² "For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls."

28:16–20. In the second discourse the disciples are described not as fishers of men, but those entrusted with scattered sheep (cf. again 1 Pet 1:21) and a harvest to be gathered (9:36–38). They are to preach the message of John the Baptist and Jesus that the kingdom of the heavens is near (10:7), instructed what to take with them and deserving of fair wages (10:9–11). For what they preach they will be persecuted, but in the hour of persecution the Holy Spirit will speak through them (10:16–20). Refusing to confess Christ releases him from confessing them before his Father (10:32–33). Judgment will come on those who do not accept their message (10:13–15). Those who do will share in the apostles' rewards. In the second discourse Matthew has interwoven pre- and post-Easter circumstances. Only after the resurrection would the disciples, now as apostles, be taken before kings and governors (10:18). Confessing Christ would be required of all (10:32–33). Matthew 28:16–20, commonly called the Great Commission, is not an isolated imperative, but embodies everything previous in this gospel, including what is said about the ministry in the second discourse.²³

IV. The Creation of Faith

The right, or should we say, the obligation for all believers to proclaim the gospel is extrinsic to the universal or general priesthood (1 Pet 2:9). Matthew, which is the most systematically ordered gospel and the one with institutions of Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the ministry, provides examples of people believing without direct contact with Jesus or the disciples. Some, indeed all of them, have exemplary faith. I bring this matter up in response to the allegation that some hold that only a word spoken by a minister can convert. Those who believe without an official deputation are the magi, the centurions, the Canaanite woman, those who bring children to Jesus, and Pilate's wife. Most amazing are the magi. Much of what motivated their journey to search for the Jewish king will remain unknown, but it seems that they interpreted a unique celestial event in light of Numbers 24:17 about a star rising from Jacob and concluded that the messianic figure had come. They know the Pentateuch including 2 Samuel but not the prophets because they have no knowledge of Bethlehem. Unlike the Palm Sunday crowds who can acknowledge Jesus as no more than the Son of David (Matt 21:9, 15), the magi actually recognize him as God (Matt 2:2, 11). The healing of the centurion's servant (son) is recorded in Matthew 8:5–13, but Luke provides the additional information that the centurion did not actually converse with Jesus (7:1–10). We are not told how he heard about Jesus, but it was not face to face.

²³ For more see my *Discourses in Matthew* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004), 265–286.

Since the disciples did not want to have anything to do with the Canaanite woman, it seems that neither they nor Jesus had directly preached to her. She is held up as a great believer, because she understood that in the discourse on bread and the falling crumbs Jesus was speaking about himself and not table manners (Matt 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30). This the disciples could not figure out, though they had participated in the miraculous feeding as distributors of the bread. Children are brought to Jesus by others (19:13, 14). Pilate's wife, who because of a dream, asks her husband to let nothing stand between him and Jesus (27:19). Like Joseph, the magi, and the Genesis Joseph, she is favored by God with a dream. She may have known of Jesus, but in the dream she learns that he is "the Righteous One," the same confession made by Luke's centurion (23:47).²⁴ The clue on how these came to faith is provided in Matthew 4:23: "The hearing (rumor) of him went throughout all Syria." The cross centurion hears Jesus, but he is not specifically addressed by him. People to whom the gospel was not proclaimed in a formal way or for whom it was not first intended heard it and believed. Though the Twelve and the Seventy are authorized as Jesus' ministers, faith is created in unexpected ways, often in spite of those given the obligation.

Appendix: "In, With, and Among"

A major presentation at the LCMS convocation held in Phoenix in August 2006 on how a congregation governs itself centered on the significance of Exodus 19:6 which 1 Peter 2:9 cites, a historically foundational passage for the universal priesthood. Another citation in this epistle shows how congregations and ministers relate to one another. "So I exhort the *elders among you*, as a *fellow elder* and a *witness of the sufferings of Christ* as well as a *partaker in the glory that is to be revealed*. Tend (shepherd) the flock of God [KJV: which is *among you* (omitted in RSV)] that is your charge." (5:1-2a). Both the vocabulary and grammar are significant.

Πρεσβυτέρους οὖν *ἐν ὑμῖν* παρακαλῶ ὁ *συμπρεσβύτερος* καὶ *μάρτυς* τῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ παθημάτων, ὁ καὶ τῆς μελλούσης ἀποκαλύψεσθαι δόξης *κοινωνός ποιμάνετε* τὸ *ἐν ὑμῖν ποιμνιον τοῦ θεοῦ*.

This passage is addressed to the elders (*πρεσβύτεροι*) a term carried over from the Greek into Latin version of the Treatise where it used together with pastors of ministers (49). It is used of John and Peter (Tr. 62). With the

²⁴ English translations offer the word *innocent* in place of *righteous* or *just*. There is no other place in this Gospel where the Greek word means merely innocent. Matthew intends that Pilate's wife is among those Gentiles who recognize Jesus for who he really is, a reality that eludes the Jews.

first use of the phrase “among you,” Peter’s words to the elders are intended to be heard by all the members of congregations, as are the Pastoral Epistles. By calling himself a συμπρεσβύτερος, he shares a ministry with other elders, that is, pastors, but as an apostle he reserves for himself the title of a “witness of the sufferings of Christ.” Elders (ministers) are a distinct group but their place is among and not above or beneath the congregations.²⁵ In the first case of the “among you,” the pastors are among the people and in the second case the people are among the pastors. So pastors are among and not above or beneath the congregations. Apart from his apostleship and ministry, Peter shares with all the letter’s recipients a common glory. Similarly Melancthon separates a minister’s office from his faith. Apart from the question of an earlier or later dating of the gospels, Judas remains listed among the apostles and at the same time defined by his betrayal of Jesus (Matt 13:55; Mark 3:19; Luke 6:16 [traitor]; John 6:71; 12:4; 13:2, 21–26). These are warnings to the earliest Christians that even those who preached the gospel to them could fall from the salvation for which God had chosen them to proclaim. The office is not dependent upon the faith of those who hold it. A final note: 1 Peter is addressed not to individual churches but “to the elect in the diaspora” in northwest Asia Minor (1 Pet 1:1).²⁶ From this one could argue for the WELS position that all members within one fellowship constitute the church. Christians in these congregations constituted a fellowship or church among themselves.

²⁵ Peter uses the word *elder* and not *pastor*, but this concept is implied in their feeding “the flock of God,” a back reference to Christ’s commission to Peter to feed his lambs and sheep (John 21:15–17). God in the phrase “the flock of God” refers to the church as belonging to Jesus. See 2:25: “For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.”

²⁶ See Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew*, 147.