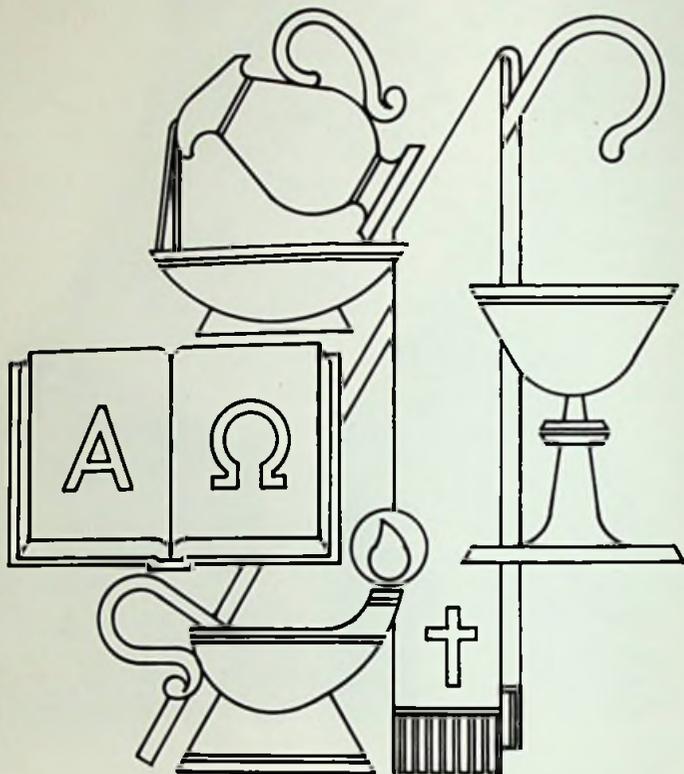


III. THESES ON THE OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC MINISTRY AND AUXILIARY OFFICES



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Although many points regarding the theology of the ministry have now been covered, a number of direct theses may be helpful in presenting the position of this document.

1. *The office of the public ministry in the church is distinct from the universal priesthood of believers and has its origin in the divine institution of the office.*

By reason of their baptism, all Christians receive the Holy Spirit and are constituted priests before God (Cf. 1 Peter 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; Rom. 12:1). They are not priests in the sense of making atoning sacrifices. God's people are His priests by His mandate and appointment as they present their bodies a living sacrifice for the extension of His kingdom. As priests they exercise the privilege of prayer not only for themselves but also for others.

The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is precious. It need not, however, confuse us regarding the doctrine of the public ministry. Not all Christians are eligible to hold the office of the *public* ministry nor should they be called to do so.

The term "the office of the public ministry" is used to differentiate the unique divinely established office of Word and sacrament from the service of all God's people in the priesthood of all believers.

The characteristics of the office of the public ministry are the following: (1) it is an office, conferred by God through a call of the church, which places a man under a special obligation for which he is accountable to God and to those who have called him; (2) it requires the performance of specific functions that carry out the mission of God and His church in the world. That is, it is a Gospel ministry, a ministry of Word and sacrament, although it includes concerns for the earthly welfare and needs of suffering humanity; (3) it is a public ministry, that is, it is carried out on behalf of the church, and those who hold it are accountable to the church.

The public ministry of the church is distinct from the universal priesthood of all believers and is not derived from it. It is derived from God's mandate. Believers exercise their priesthood privately in many ways. One way to do this is to join fellow Christians in calling a man to occupy the office of the public ministry in their midst. God created the office of the public ministry, and He fills that office through the call of a qualified man by the church. Other offices that assist in essential functions of the office of the public ministry are created by the church as the need arises. The functions of such offices, if they are truly auxiliary to the office of the public ministry, are mandated by God. Those who hold them by virtue of a call are doing services that are required by God in the extension of His kingdom. No one may arrogate to himself *any* of the public offices of the church (AC XIV).

Baptism makes all Christians members of the priesthood of believers. It does not make them public ministers of the church. The call of God, issued through the church, makes some of the priests holders of the office of the public ministry and thus responsible for all of its functions. The holder of such an office represents the church, but he does so as a representative of God. He is bound to the Word of God, and his response to the call of the church is to be bound to proclaim God's Word. That response completes his entry into the office.

To be eligible to be called to the office of the public ministry a man must be adjudged to have met God's requirements as listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

The church, availing itself of mature advice and guidance as it certifies men for the public ministry, performs the evaluation necessary to determine whether a man is in all respects suitable for the ministry of Word and sacraments.

2. *The office of the public ministry is grounded in the ministry of Christ and is an extension of the apostolate established by Him.*

The office of the public ministry of the church is rooted and grounded in the ministry of Christ. He was the Suffering Servant, the God-man, who not only taught about God's love but completely satisfied the demands of God's holy Law by vicariously living a perfect life and dying a sacrificial death for our transgressions of God's Law. His priestly, prophetic, and royal actions are the essential content and power of the ministry of the church. God not only provided salvation and declared the whole world just for the sake of Christ, but He also provided the means of grace and the ministry of the Word and sacrament "to offer and apply to us this treasure of salvation" (LC II, 38).

In the beginning our Lord appointed, trained, and sent out the apostles. In His love for the world, God arranged for the continuation of the apostolic ministry and message. The message of the apostles, learned by them directly from the Lord and taught to them by the Holy Spirit, was to remain the church's treasure.

The pastoral ministry is apostolic in terms of what it teaches but not in terms of an unbroken succession of ordaining bishops. Already in Acts 13 we read that Barnabas was set aside by the Holy Spirit working through the church in Antioch. Barnabas became an "apostle," though not one of "the twelve." He received his office mediately from God through the church in Antioch. "Overseers" or "shepherds" in the church were God's idea and remain so. In Acts 20:28 we see that the shepherding is to be performed by those who have been made bishops (*episkopoi*) by the Holy Spirit. The office was held by men chosen for this purpose (Ap XIV, 1). In Acts 20:17, for example, reference is made to *the* elders of the church, not merely to elders in a more general sense.

The office of Word and sacrament has been established by God as the

highest office in the church. Other rankings within that office or within other offices may be useful, but they are always by human authority (*de iure humano*). As Christ was the Father's obedient Suffering Servant, so His ministers are servants, even slaves, as St. Paul calls himself. No one is to seek office in the church for personal glory. A man may aspire to the office, but it is God who calls Him through the church. The church calls those who hold the office of the public ministry, and it calls those who stand beside the public ministers to labor in the Gospel mission of the church.

As a continuation of the ministry of Christ and as an extension of the apostolic ministry, the office of the public ministry is not optional for the church.¹¹

3. *The church establishes facilitating offices.*

Other offices in the church that facilitate the proclamation of the Word, the administration of the sacraments and administration of the Office of the Keys, though not mandated, appeared already in the apostolic church. To the extent that they strengthen the performance of the functions of the office of the public ministry, they, too, find their ground in the ministry of Christ. A Christian teacher, for instance, is not merely a Christian who teaches but a servant of Christ and the church who, at the call of the church, is helping the called pastor to fulfill his mandate to teach the Gospel.

To see the office of the public ministry as being grounded in the ministry of Christ, as continuing the ministry of the apostles, and as carrying with it all of the functions of the church's mission is to understand why The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, following the assessment of C. F. W. Walther, has termed it the "highest office."¹² The office of the public ministry is so broad that it can effectively employ the gifts of helpers in its performance. The

¹¹Cf. Walther's third thesis on the ministry in the Appendix.

¹²Cf. Walther's eighth thesis on the ministry in the Appendix.

In elaboration of this thesis, Walther states: "The highest office is the ministry of preaching, with which all other offices are simultaneously conferred. Therefore every other public office in the Church is merely a part of the office of the ministry, or an auxiliary office, which is attached to the ministry of preaching. . . . Accordingly, the offices of school-teachers who have to teach the Word of God in their schools . . . are all to be regarded as sacred offices of the Church, which exercise a part of the one office of the Church and are aids to the ministry of preaching" (*Walther and the Church*, p. 79).

congregation is blessed when it places at the side of its pastor faithful and capable teachers, for instance, who enhance his administration of the office of the public ministry. The validity of their office derives not from the person of the pastor but from the Christ-grounded nature of the office of public ministry. Their office is a public office and an office of ministry, although it is not the office of the public ministry of Word and sacrament, that is, the pastoral office. Perhaps a better term than "auxiliary" might be found. The thought needs to be stressed not only that the teaching office in the church is auxiliary to the pastoral ministry but rather auxiliary to the *pastoral ministry*. It is grounded not merely in the priesthood of believers but, through the office of the public ministry, in the ministry of Christ and the apostles. The fact that not all appreciate this does not change its tremendous theological significance for all who labor in the church. To ground the auxiliary offices of the church in a vague and unembodied "ministry in general" is no gain for anyone. To see them flow from the specific office that is amply attested and exemplified in the New Testament and strongly championed in the Lutheran Confessions is a higher view of the auxiliary offices than that which would seek an independent grounding separate from the office of the public ministry of Word and sacrament.

In recent years there has been a tendency to refer to all fulltime workers in the church as "professional workers." That term may have its uses for certain legal explanations, but it misses the power and beauty of the Scriptural doctrine of the ministry. Even auxiliary offices appear more churchly if we say they are serving the office of the public ministry rather than functioning professionally. For in serving in a ministry that is auxiliary to the pastoral ministry one is serving the ministry of Jesus Christ and is engaged in the only kind of human efforts that will survive the end of time. The holder of an auxiliary office may rejoice to say, "I am in the ministry" with a very specific meaning. He or she holds an office that is not only the priesthood of believers (which all Christians hold) nor the office of the public ministry. It is a ministry that has its own validity.

4. *The church may rank those who hold various offices, but the distinctions within the offices are by human authority.*

Every position in the church is one of service, of Christ-exaltation and self-abasement. However, it is useful for the church to arrange for various rankings and orders of supervision also among its pastors, teachers, and others. The distinction between pastors and holders of auxiliary offices is not merely a human distinction. It is not a ranking but a distinction of offices. Within the various offices (e.g., pastorate, teaching office) rankings may be made by human authority. There may, for example, be "senior pastors" and "assistant pastors," or principals and teachers. The nomenclature adopted by the church from time to time may indicate such rankings. Uniformity of terminology is highly desirable.

Rankings that are made by human right should be made for the sake of the work and not merely to elevate individuals. The fact that some members of the church are called by God to be "overseers" does not make them a special caste. Moreover, it must be noted that where there is oversight, there is also submission. However, in the New Testament "submisison" is not a term indicating inferiority. The Greek word *hypotagee* refers to order and not to inferiority.

5. *The call from and by God through the church is essential for entry into the pastoral ministry or its auxiliary offices.*

In order to clarify what is meant by a call we define it as follows:

A person is "called" when he or she is summoned by the church to the office of Word and sacrament or to an office auxiliary to it on a full-time permanent basis and by education, by certification, and by solemn and public act (e.g., ordination or commissioning) is brought into a unique relationship with the church from which he or she has unique authority and through which he or she is authorized to perform functions of that office of the church into which he or she has been ordained or commissioned, at a specific post for the length of time which is ordinarily continuing and indefinite, but which in certain cases and under certain special circumstances may be a specified period of time, which is evidenced by the individual's name being placed on and retained on one of the official rosters of the Synod.¹³

It is God's call mediated through the church (as a single congregation or a group of congregations) as it is guided in prayer and by the Holy Spirit that makes a man "overseer" in the church. All who serve in the pastoral ministry or its auxiliary offices must be called by the church.

The use of the word "call" should be limited. To be sure, even those who teach Sunday school or hold other such offices in the congregation must not arrogate such functions or offices to themselves. They must await the assignment of the congregation in some form and cooperate in the supervisor-supervised aspect of the ministry. While such an assignment might logically be termed a "call," such usage blurs the uniqueness of the office of the public ministry and its facilitating offices.

Whenever the term "call" is used it should be followed by the office designation. To say "I have a call" may be meaningless, while "I have a call to

¹³The term "church" as here used means the congregation or other unit of the church, as well as the Synod itself, and also other congregations and portions of the Synod that are part of the confessional fellowship.

be a teacher of the church" has meaning. The term "call" should be used for those who have specifically been equipped to perform certain ecclesiastical functions and have made a commitment to dedicate their lives to that service unless or until God directs them to other callings. The term "call" should not be used where such commitment is lacking, and those who serve the church other than under a call should be referred to simply as "lay workers." Furthermore, in a synodical form of church fellowship and congregational interdependence, those who are "called" must be under the supervision of the *whole church*. Thus, they differ from Sunday school teachers, for example, who are chosen and assigned by and are accountable to a single congregation.

Some congregations issue "contracts" to some teachers and "calls" to others. While there may be reasons for making these distinctions, there is no justification for issuing contracts to women teachers and calls to men teachers. Both men and women who have been certified by the church may be and ordinarily should be solemnly called. While contracts may be issued for some temporary service, teachers should be called with prayer and with the assurance that the church is summoning them to assist the pastoral ministry of Word and sacrament.

Since both a person who has a call to a certain office and a "lay worker" have a contract (which may be written or verbal), it is inaccurate to distinguish between them by referring to the one who does not have a call as "having a contract." In both cases, of course, the contract between the person and the congregation or other agency of the church, and all other factors of that relationship, should be clearly expressed.

We stress the fact that ordination is the declaration of the whole confessional fellowship. In the end, a single congregation or an agency representing larger segments of the church does issue the call. Nevertheless, in a synod of congregations bound by a common confession and loyalty, good order demands that admission into the pastoral office or into its closely allied auxiliary offices is not the act of a single congregation or agency. Various ways can be found to establish this approval of the whole church. Presently the certification of suitability for the ministry by the faculty members who have taught the candidates and the assigning of first calls by the Council of Presidents is workable and does express the transparochial nature of the ministry.

This transparochial nature of the office of the public ministry and its auxiliary offices is important because a person called to one congregation is recognized by the whole church and, by virtue of ordination or commissioning, is eligible to be called by other segments of the church. Since ordination is a public statement of the whole church body, one cannot say that it *must* take place in the location of the calling congregation. However, separation of the rite of ordination from the place of service is seldom advisable. It is fitting that the calling agency of the church should be involved

in the ordination. The same holds true for induction into auxiliary offices.

Confusion and chaos result when congregations or agencies act unilaterally in deciding who may fill the office of the public ministry or the auxiliary offices. For this reason in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod the Council of Presidents is assigned the duty of the placing of candidates who have been approved by the faculties. In the case of subsequent calls, the District president or his representative advise the congregations or agencies, and calls may be extended only to certified candidates or persons who are on the official rosters of the Synod. For a congregation wilfully to ignore or ride roughshod over the concern of the rest of the church in establishing its ministry is a sin against the brotherhood and may even be a schismatic act in that it ignores the transparochial aspect of the “regularly called” (AC XIV).

This concern for the involvement of the whole church in the calling and placing of its servants is evidenced by the fact that the church maintains an extensive system of higher education to prepare its pastors, teachers, and other leaders.

6. *Not only a local congregation but also larger structures of the church may legitimately extend valid calls upon proper delegation.*

The right of a congregation to call its pastors and teachers is not questioned. Some do question the right of agencies such as Districts or boards and commissions of the Synod or even the whole Synod itself to issue calls. For this reason some take refuge in obtaining a second call as “assistant” in a congregation, feeling that such a call, although it involves few or no duties, is valid, while a call from an agency is not. The legitimacy of such a “second” call is questionable.¹⁴

The very existence of the Synod indicates that the church must do some of its work jointly. The Synod is not an alien organization. It is the whole confessional fellowship of congregations. In this case, by common agreement, certain offices are filled by the Synod or its commissions through authority delegated from the congregations. Agencies of any kind should first assure themselves that the right to call has been properly delegated to them by the church. In some cases this is done by regulations in the bylaws that are agreed upon in convention. Moreover, agency calls should contain clear descriptions to indicate that the call is of such a nature that the candidate may assure himself that the call is truly within the scope of the office of the public ministry or the appropriate auxiliary office.

Some offices in the church cannot be defined with absolute clarity merely by referring to their titles. The call itself should demonstrate why it is a “call” and not merely an office of employment as a lay worker in the church.

¹⁴Cf. John H. C. Fritz, *Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1945), pp. 39—40.