

The Public Reading of Scripture in the Divine Service

CTCR of LCC (2008)

Introduction

In June 2002 the Sixth Convention of Lutheran Church–Canada adopted resolution 02.1.04 which referred the question of the public reading of Scripture to the Commission on Theology and Church Relations for response and direction. Both the overture that served as a basis for the resolution and the resolution itself recognize that the church in recent years has not followed a consistent practice with regard to the public reading of Scripture in the Divine Service. In some congregations only the pastor reads the appointed lessons. In other congregations the pastor or one of the men in the congregation may read the lessons. In still other congregations anyone may read the lessons. It is because such confusion exists that the CTCR was asked to prepare this document.

Even though there is still no consistency or uniformity with regard to the public reading of Scripture in the congregations of Lutheran Church–Canada, this is not the first time that the CTCR has addressed this issue. In September of 1985 the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod published the document, “Women in the Church.” At the first regular convention of LCC (1990) this document was accepted along with all LCMS CTCR documents in the same sense in which it was originally received (Resolution 90:1.002). In addition to this, in January of 1999 the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of Lutheran Church–Canada published the document, “The Role of Women in the Church.” This document was adopted for reference and guidance at the fifth convention of LCC (1999). Although these documents did not deal extensively with this issue, they did address it briefly. However, since some confusion still exists regarding who may properly read the Word of God publicly in the Divine Service, and since the Synod in convention has asked the CTCR to study the issue, the CTCR has sought to provide an answer which is consistent with the teaching of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.

It must be stated at the outset that an answer to the question has already been given. In the document entitled “Women in the Church” the CTCR stated that “there are certain specific functions which should **not** be carried out by the laity (who may hold auxiliary offices) but which are to be exercised by the pastor. Among them are the following:

- 1) preaching in the services of the congregation
- 2) leading the formal public services of worship
- 3) the public administration of the sacraments
- 4) the public administration of the office of the keys.” (emphasis added)

That the above mentioned prohibitions (specifically the second) include the reading of Scripture in the Divine Service is made explicit when, in the same document, the CTCR states, “it is the opinion of the CTCR that the reading of the Scriptures is most properly the function of the pastoral office and should therefore not ordinarily be delegated to a lay person, woman or man.” Of course, one must recognize that there may be emergencies which arise when no pastor is present. When no pastor is present, the congregation must choose between not hearing the Word of God at all and taking the unusual step of requesting a layman to read. Obviously, it is preferable not to have to make such a choice, but when one is faced with such a dilemma, one may need to make such a decision. Emergencies, however, do not determine the

teaching or the practice of the church. Scripture and the Confessions do that, and ordinarily the pastor will officiate in the Divine Service.

In spite of what has been said, however, it is clear that the opinion of the CTCR has either been overlooked or not understood. It is the hope of the CTCR that this document will enable those who read it to understand the Biblical and Confessional teaching concerning this issue and to rejoice in the same. In an effort to expand upon what has been said before, this document will examine in detail 1 Timothy 4:13, which was the passage referred to in the overture submitted to the 2002 convention, and then examine that passage in the context of the Scriptural and Confessional doctrine of the Office of the Holy Ministry.

I Timothy 4:13

While on his way to Macedonia, Paul had urged Timothy to remain in Ephesus in order to “charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine.” Timothy was St. Paul’s associate. St. Paul calls him his brother, co-worker, and, at one point, perhaps even an apostle.¹ Whatever his exact title may have been, and these were perhaps not always the same titles we would use today, it is clear that he held an ecclesiastical office. The Office of the Ministry was committed to Timothy by the laying on of hands,² and he was charged with the responsibility of ordaining other pastors.³ Yet, although St. Timothy received his call mediately through the hands of men, he was nevertheless called by God. For in Acts 20:28 St. Paul says to all the elders of the church of Ephesus, “The Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood.” Furthermore, in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 St. Paul says, “God has given to **us** the ministry of reconciliation. . . .Therefore **we** are ambassadors in the name of Christ, with God appealing through us.” It is significant that he makes this statement in the plural because it refers back to the opening sentence of the Epistle which identifies Paul and Timothy as the senders. Thus, Paul and Timothy both hold this office. Clearly, since Timothy had been lawfully called and ordained through regular means through Paul and the presbytery, he had been called and sent by God himself.⁴

Notwithstanding the fact that Timothy was St. Paul’s co-worker and fellow minister of the Gospel, he was subordinate to the Apostle. He is St. Paul’s emissary and is frequently sent by him to various churches. That is also the situation in the First Epistle to St. Timothy. J. N. D. Kelly states that St. Timothy was an apostolic delegate in temporary charge of the church in Ephesus⁵ armed with plenipotentiary authority⁶. 1 Timothy represents him as presiding over the Ephesian congregation with the task of re-establishing “the sound tradition of Christian

¹ The First Letter to the Thessalonians is addressed to the church of the Thessalonians from Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy. 2 Thessalonians 2:6 reads, “nor did we seek glory from men, whether from you or from others, though we might have made demands as apostles.” Together with Paul, Silvanus and Timothy were co-founders of the church at Thessalonica.

² 1 Timothy 4:14 and 2 Timothy 1:6.

³ 2 Timothy 2:2.

⁴ Cf. Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia, 1989), II:700-701.

⁵ J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 2.

⁶ Kelly, 6.

teaching in the face of divisive heretical tendencies,” and to “organize the ministry and the daily life of the congregation on a proper basis.”⁷

It is in this context that St. Paul charges St. Timothy, “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of scripture, the preaching, and the teaching.” Here Paul specifies the tasks with which Timothy is to occupy himself during his sojourn in Ephesus. He will be engaged in the work which the apostle has assigned to him until the apostle himself arrives to take over the responsibility.

In the Second Letter to the Corinthians St. Paul catalogues his sufferings for the sake of the Gospel.⁸ Included in that list is his constant anxiety for the churches. He had good reason to be anxious. As he would prophesy in the sermon recorded in the twentieth chapter of the Book of Acts, “I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.” The church in Ephesus was in trouble for this very reason. The people were listening to teachers who taught a different doctrine, a doctrine of demons. They had departed from the apostolic Gospel. Paul, therefore, sent Timothy to this troubled church. His apostolic mission was to restore the apostolic teaching to the church. He carried with him an apostolic missive which guaranteed his authority in this matter. The issue is clearly dealt with in the opening sentence. “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope, to Timothy my true child in the faith.” Timothy speaks with the authority of the apostle, and the apostle is the mouth of God.

The heresy in Ephesus had to be dealt with, and Paul had the authority to do so. He was an apostle; and an apostle is one who has been sent by Jesus and who functions as a representative of Jesus.⁹ St. Paul was Christ’s “chosen instrument to carry [His] name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel.”¹⁰ He speaks “by command of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope.” Thus, since the apostle Paul bears the authority of the One who sent Him, the Ephesians must heed his word because it is the Word of Christ. Timothy, of course, is well aware of the apostle’s credentials. Since this letter would have been read publicly,¹¹ however, the opening sentence serves to undergird the authority of Timothy. The word of the apostle is not meant for Timothy’s ears alone. It is Christ’s Word for Christ’s church. And since the sheep hear the voice of their Shepherd, the true sheep will be known by their willingness to listen to His voice. Thus, Timothy is to devote himself to publicly reading that Word, preaching and teaching that Word. Only in this way can the church in Ephesus be restored. He will be the voice of God to the people of God until the apostle arrives. When Paul arrives, there will be no need for Timothy to speak in his stead. It is possible, however, that Paul may be delayed.¹² In the meantime, Timothy is to carry on with his divinely appointed

⁷ Kelly, 2.

⁸ 2 Corinthians 11:23-33.

⁹ H. Armin Moellering, *Concordia Commentary: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1970), 31.

¹⁰ Acts 9:15.

¹¹ 1 Timothy 6:21. St. Paul ends the letter with the words, “Grace be with you.” Since “you” is plural, it indicates that the letter was meant for the church, as well as Timothy.

¹² 1 Timothy 3:14-15.

duties. He must do what the elders are no longer fit to do because they teach a different doctrine.

The tasks to which Timothy must devote himself while he awaits the arrival of St. Paul are official duties¹³ of the public ministry of the Word. The vocable translated “devote yourself” is the Greek verb προσέχω (*prosecho*). This verb “signifies paying intimate attention to a thing or person, or occupying oneself with or devoting oneself to an action.”¹⁴ Walter Bauer’s *Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament* suggests “occupy oneself with, devote or apply oneself to” and lists 1 Timothy 4:13. It is significant that this is immediately followed by Hebrews 7:13 which is rendered “officiate at the altar.”¹⁵ This would suggest that προσέχω (*prosecho*), in this context, has the connotation of official duty. Thus, Paul is urging Timothy to occupy himself with the duties laid upon him in his ordination. The fact that these three items are each preceded by the definite article shows that they are all recognized items in the congregational meeting for worship.¹⁶ It should also be noted that one and the same verb governs all three nouns.

The first of the three activities at which Timothy is to officiate is ἀνάγνωσις (*anagnosis*). This is “public reading” in the divine service. Agreement on this is widespread,¹⁷ no doubt in part because this is the way it is defined in the standard New Testament Greek lexicon, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, which states, “The Christian Church also knew public reading,” and cites this passage.¹⁸ In 1 Timothy 4:13 and the other two New Testament passages in which the word occurs (Acts 13:15; 2 Corinthians 3:14)¹⁹, it refers to public reading in a religious gathering. The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* points out that “in Judaism it was used for the public reading of the OT.”²⁰ This was carried over to the church.

Initially, the reading would have been from the Old Testament, to which the writings of the New Testament were added as they became available.²¹

¹³ Moellering, 91.

¹⁴ Thomas M. Winger, “Orality as the Key to Understanding Apostolic Proclamation in the Epistles,” Th.D. Dissertation, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1997, 322.

¹⁵ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [BAGD], trans. by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2nd ed. By F. Wilbur Gingrich and Fredrick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 714, s.v. 1c.

¹⁶ Kelly, 105.

¹⁷ Walter Lock, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1924), 53; Kelly, 105; Moellering, 92; George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 207; William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (Nashville, Nelson, 2000), 261; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 253.

¹⁸ BAGD, 52-53.

¹⁹ These passages refer to the reading of the OT in the synagogue.

²⁰ Rudolph Bultmann, “ἀναγινώσκω, ἀνάγνωσις,” in Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [TDNT], trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 1:344. BAGD, TDNT, and Knight [207] cite an inscription from a synagogue in Jerusalem: συναγωγήν εἰς ἀνάγνωσιν νόμου, “synagogue for the public reading of the law.” [Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum, ed. J. J. E. Hondius, VIII, 170, l. 4.]

²¹ St. Paul instructs the congregations to read the letters he has written to them in Colossians 4:16 and 1 Thessalonians 5:27; cf. Revelation 1:3.

The second duty to which Pastor Timothy must devote himself is παράκλησις (*paraklesis*) “exhortation.” Exhortation was “the exposition and application of the Scripture which followed its public reading, in other words the sermon.”²² The early church adopted the practice followed in the synagogue. There the Old Testament was read aloud, and the reading was followed by a “word of exhortation.” In Acts 13:15, where one may see this practice followed in the synagogue, the content of the “preaching” or “word of exhortation” which St. Paul delivers following the public reading of the Old Testament is that Jesus is the Saviour promised in the Old Testament and that those who believe in him receive the forgiveness of sins.²³

The third duty is teaching. “In 1 Timothy 4:11 the charge “to teach” is linked with παραγγέλλειν (*parangellein*)²⁴, and in 1 Timothy 6:2 with παρακάλειν (*parakalein*)²⁵, on both occasions as the privilege and responsibility of Timothy. In 2 Timothy 2:2 it is the task of those who have the necessary personal qualifications, though according to 1 Timothy 2:12 it is forbidden to women.”²⁶ Paul reminds Timothy that it is his responsibility to teach. That is why he sent him to Ephesus, and that is why he is to “devote himself to” or “officiate at” the teaching. However, his task does not end there. What Timothy has been taught by Paul he is to teach and entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others.²⁷ He does this by teaching them²⁸ and laying hands on them after they have been taught.²⁹ Timothy, like Titus, is to provide pastors for the congregations so that the message of salvation is handed on to others.³⁰

There can be no question that it is Timothy’s responsibility to teach because the Pastoral Epistles are filled with admonitions from Paul that Timothy himself teach and exhort rightly.³¹ That is why St. Paul instructs Timothy here to devote himself to the teaching. But one and the same verb applies to the other two nouns as well because they are also his responsibility as pastor to the Ephesians. Therefore, it is Pastor Timothy who must publicly read the Scriptures, preach, and teach, and he must do so until other pastors can be called and ordained to carry out these responsibilities.

Summary

St. Timothy was a called and ordained Minister of the Word. It is in this capacity, as one who occupies the Office of the Holy Ministry, that the Apostle Paul commands him to devote himself to the public reading of Scripture, the preaching, and the teaching. These are

²² Kelly, 105.

²³ Acts 13:23,38,39.

²⁴ *Parangellein* is to command.

²⁵ *Parakalein* is to urge or exhort.

²⁶ Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, “διδάσκειν,” TDNT, 2:147.

²⁷ 2 Timothy 2:2.

²⁸ 2 Timothy 2:2.

²⁹ 1 Timothy 5:22.

³⁰ 2 Timothy 2:2.

³¹ 1 Timothy 1:3, 18; 3:2; 4:6, 11, 14, 16; 5:1, 7, 20; 6:2, 17, 20 etc.

official duties to be carried out in the Divine Service before the congregation by one who holds the Office of the Ministry.

1 Timothy 4:13 in the Context of the Biblical and Confessional Understanding of the Office of the Ministry

The Office of the Ministry is a Divine Institution. The pastor acts in the stead and by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ because he has a command from Christ to do so. Apart from the mandate and institution of God he dare not presume to act as the hands and mouth of God.

Together with the one, holy, Christian, and apostolic church of all times, the Lutheran Church confesses that the Office of the Ministry is an office instituted by Christ which stands on the basis of the mandate given by Him. Our Lutheran Confessions refer to a number of passages in this connection.

The *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope* states,

Christ gave the apostles only spiritual power, that is, the command to preach the Gospel, proclaim forgiveness of sins, administer the sacraments, and excommunicate the godless without physical violence. He did not give them the power of the sword or the right to establish, take possession of, or transfer the kingdoms of the world. For Christ said, “Go therefore and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19, 20), and also, “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you” (John 20:21).³²

In this paragraph the Confessions cite two of the passages which refer to the institution of the Office of the Ministry. In Matthew 28 Jesus directed the eleven apostles³³ to meet Him on a mountain in Galilee where He gave them authority to baptize and to teach. In John 20:21ff. Jesus sent out His apostles with authority to forgive and retain sins. The latter will be familiar to most pastors and laymen as the chapter cited in the fifth chief part of the *Small Catechism* in the explanation of the Office of the Keys. To this passage our catechism adds the following,

I believe that when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command, in particular when they exclude openly unrepentant sinners from the Christian congregation and absolve those who repent of their sins and want to do better, this is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself.³⁴

³² *The Book of Concord*, translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 325:31. [Tappert]

³³ “Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.” (Matthew 28:16).

³⁴ *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1986), 27.

When the called ministers of Christ act according to the command of Christ (by virtue of the authority given them by the command of Christ) to retain the sins of unrepentant sinners or absolve the sins of repentant sinners, that action is valid and certain in heaven because the pastor speaks as he has been commanded to speak according to the institution of Christ, and thus he serves as the mouth of Christ. When he speaks the word of absolution according to the mandate and institution of Christ, he serves as Christ's instrument.

This statement is affirmed in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession. Melancthon writes, "They do not represent their own persons but the person of Christ, because of the church's call, as Christ testifies (Luke 10:16), 'He who hears you hears me.' When they offer the Word of Christ or the sacraments, they do so in Christ's place and stead. Christ's statement teaches us this in order that we may not be offended by the unworthiness of ministers."³⁵

This passage directs us to Luke 10:16 which is another passage frequently applied to the Office of the Ministry. It is a solemn reminder that Christ has called men to speak in His place. Thus, when they give out the Word of God as they have been called to do, those who hear them, hear Christ. They speak *vice et loco Christi* (in Christ's place and stead). The Confessions say that they do not represent their own persons; rather, they represent the person of Christ on account of the call of the church.

This teaching is echoed elsewhere in Scripture. In Romans 10:14 St. Paul asks, "How are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent?" God has sent men in His place as His messengers to speak His Word. But they speak for Him in His place only if they have been called to do so, only if they have been sent by God. This is not something one may arrogate to oneself. One may not presume to exercise the Office of the Ministry and publicly undertake the tasks given to the office bearer without a call from God. Inasmuch as God wants all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, He has made provision for the delivery of that saving message. In order that we might obtain that salvation which is found in Christ alone, God has sent out men to preach His Word and administer His sacraments. But God does not work promiscuously. He achieves His ends through the means He has instituted. He works through earthly, creaturely means. He calls men to be his hands and mouth to give out His word and offer his sacraments.³⁶ But He attaches his promise to work in this way to those He has called. And he requires Christians to listen to those whom He has called when they speak in His stead, but expects them to flee from those who do not have such a call.

Martin Chemnitz, co-author of the Formula of Concord, as well as preserver and defender of the faith of the church of the Augsburg Confession, explained,

With regard to the call, it is certain from the Word of God that no one should be heeded in the church who has not been lawfully [*legitime*] called, whether this takes place

³⁵ Ap. VII, 28. Tappert, 173. Quia repraesentant Christi personam propter vocationem ecclesiae, non repraesentant proprias personas, ut testatur Christus: Qui vos audit, me audit. Cum verbum Christi, cum sacramenta porrigunt, Christi vice et loco porrigunt. Id docet nos illa vox Christi, ne indignitate ministrorum offendamur. *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (Goetingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1930, 1991), 240. [BSLK]

³⁶ *Ibid.*

immediately or mediately. For Paul clearly says in Romans 10:15 that they cannot preach (that is, lawfully, even though in fact they try it) ‘who have not been sent,’ cf. Jer.23:21. In fact, the church must not and cannot with profit hear those who do not have the testimonies of a lawful call. For the words of Paul are clear, Rom. 10:14-15: How can they hear, so that by hearing the faith which justifies and saves is conceived, if they do not have a preacher who has been sent?³⁷

Chemnitz goes on to explain that even a man who has learned and understands Christian doctrine, and who is also a gifted teacher, must wait for a lawful call through which God would declare whether, when, and where He desires to use his service in His church. If a call does not come, he must not seek to force his way in, but await the good and gracious will of God.³⁸

In the course of this discussion, Chemnitz distinguishes between the priesthood of all believers and the office of the ministry. In response to the contention that the work of the Old Testament priests was to teach, Chemnitz replies that the New Testament expressly states that God does not give the gift of explaining the scriptures to everyone, but gives different gifts to various people for the benefit of the church. In addition, he maintains that St. Peter has explained that the work of the priests who are described in 1 Peter is “to offer up spiritual sacrifices.” Thus, although all Christians are priests, they should not all “carry out the function of the ministry promiscuously, without a particular call.” They are to offer up the spiritual sacrifices that are described in Romans 12:1 and Hebrews 13:15-16.³⁹

Chemnitz further distinguishes between a general call, given to the heads of households by individual command, and a particular call to the Office of the Ministry. Citing Ephesians 5:19, 1 Thessalonians 4:18, and Romans 10:9 he acknowledges that all Christians are to “speak among themselves about the Word of God,” “comfort one another with the Word of God,” and “confess the Gospel.” However, there is no command given to all Christians in general to “administer those things which pertain to the public ministry of the Word and the sacraments.”⁴⁰

Thus far Chemnitz has dealt with the law. He goes on to say, however, that God has not chosen to work this way merely for the sake of order. His words are worth repeating.

One must not think that this is done...for the sake of order. [It is done] because God Himself deals with us in the church through the ministry as through the ordinary means and instrument. For it is He Himself that speaks, exhorts, absolves, baptizes, etc. in the ministry and through the ministry....It is therefore absolutely necessary that the

³⁷ Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici* II:698.

³⁸ Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici* II:698.

³⁹ Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici* II:698.

⁴⁰ Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici* II:698. To this and the above paragraph one may compare the statement made by Luther. “It is true that all Christians are priests, but they are not all pastors. Over and above that he is a Christian and priest, he must also have an office and field of work (*Kirchspiel*) that has been committed to his charge.” WA 31, I:211. 17-19 (“Exposition of Psalm 82,” 1530) = AE 13:65.

minister as well as the church have sure proofs that God wants to use this very person for this His ordinary means and instrument, namely the ministry.⁴¹

If it is true that God wants to use a man as His instrument, then that man will want to be certain that he is truly His instrument. The call brings such certainty. For it is then not one's own doing. The church testifies to the fact that this man has been put in this place to do these things. He adds that one who has been legitimately called can apply the promises of God to himself. But "the real heart of the ministry,"⁴² says Chemnitz, is that "God wants to be present in it with His Spirit, grace, and gifts and to work effectively through it. But Paul says, Romans 10:15, 'How shall they who are not sent preach' (namely in such a way that faith is engendered by hearing)."⁴³

The importance of the call cannot be underestimated. Romans 10:14-15 teaches that one cannot preach the gospel with God's blessing without a divine call, as Chemnitz takes pains to emphasize. If God has not sent the preacher, he cannot count on God's blessings in his self-appointed tasks. Luther makes this point as well. Commenting on Acts 13:1ff. in a sermon preached in 1524, Luther remarked, "No one ought to act on God's behalf unless he is called and ordained by God...I preach in that name, because I have been ordained for this."⁴⁴ Likewise, Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession states that "nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call."

Pastors have such a call. Even though they are called mediately through the church, and not directly as the apostles were, their call is no less divine. This may be seen, for example, in Acts 20 when St. Paul preached a sermon to the Ephesian elders gathered in Miletus in the course of which he made the following exhortation. "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God which he obtained with His own blood." (20:28) St. Paul encouraged the elders⁴⁵ by reminding them that the Holy Spirit had made them overseers. The charge to care for the church of God came from God himself. St. Peter confirmed this when he said to the pastors in the diaspora, "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 the flock of God that is your charge." (1 Peter 5:1) Both St. Peter and the elders have been given charge of the flock of God, though they differ from one another in that the apostle is not limited to a specific place as is the pastor.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Martin Chemnitz, *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments: An Enchiridion*, trans. Luther Poellet (St. Louis: Concordia, 1981), 29. Cf. Chemnitz, *Loci* II:699. Chemnitz deals with the same material in both the *Loci Theologici* and the *Enchiridion*.

⁴² Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, II:699.

⁴³ Chemnitz, *Enchiridion*, 29-30.

⁴⁴ Nemo in causa Dei agere debet, nisi sit vocatus et ordinatus a Deo...Ego praedico in eo nomine, quia ordinatus ad hoc. WA 17, I, 508.10-11; 509.16-17.

⁴⁵ The word "elder" is a translation of the Greek word πρεσβύτερος from which we obtain the English word "priest." An "overseer" is in Greek an ἐπίσκοπος which is sometimes rendered "bishop," as in the King James Version of the Bible. These words are used interchangeably in Acts 20:17 and 20:28. An "elder" is what we would today call a "pastor."

⁴⁶ Cf. Chemnitz's *Loci Theologici*, II:700.

Likewise, Ephesians 4:11ff. indicates that the Son of God has given pastors to the church along with apostles and prophets.

The Confessions also indicate that the ministry of the apostles, bishops, and pastors is the ministry of the one Gospel. In the Smalcald Articles Luther writes,

Consequently the church cannot be better governed and maintained than by having all of us live under one head, Christ, and by having all the bishops equal in office (however they may differ in gifts) and diligently joined together in unity of doctrine, faith, sacraments, prayer, works of love, etc. So St. Jerome writes that the priests of Alexandria governed the churches together and in common. The apostles did the same, and after them all the bishops throughout Christendom.⁴⁷

In the above quotation, Luther indicates that the bishops are the successors of the apostles. Likewise Article 28, 5-7 of the *Augsburg Confession* understands the ministry of the apostles and bishops as one. However, that ministry is the ministry of the Gospel, “the power and command of God to preach the Gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer and distribute the sacraments.” *The Treatise* (60) makes the point that this is the same power that is given to pastors. Thus, “By the confession of all, even of our adversaries, it is evident that this power belongs by divine right to all who preside over the churches, whether they are called pastors, presbyters, or bishops. Accordingly Jerome teaches clearly that in the apostolic letters all who preside over the churches are both bishops and presbyters.”⁴⁸ Later Melancthon adds “the distinction between the grades of bishop and presbyter (or pastor) is by human authority.”⁴⁹

The conclusion that one may draw from this has been stated by Dr. David Scaer. “The office of the ministry is included in the institution of the apostolic office and not derived from the *una sancta* or simply another form of it. This ministry perpetuates the function of the apostolic office of remitting sins through gospel preaching.”⁵⁰

To remit sins, proclaim the gospel, and administer the sacraments is the key to understanding the Office of the Ministry. This is the true heart of the Office of the Ministry. For the Office of the Ministry exists for no other purpose than to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments. The pastor is there to deliver the forgiveness of sins through the means of grace that God has given to be given out through his instrument, the pastor.

The Public Reading of Scripture, The Office of the Ministry, and the Law

The Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions teach that God instituted the Office of the Ministry so that called and ordained men might serve as His instruments to teach the gospel and administer the sacraments. His purpose in doing so was to offer the world the

⁴⁷ SA II, 4, 9. Tappert 300.

⁴⁸ Tr 61. Tappert 330.

⁴⁹ Tr.63. Tappert 331.

⁵⁰ Scaer, David. “Augustana V and the Doctrine of the Ministry.” *Lutheran Quarterly* 6 (1992): 407.

forgiveness of sins and bring men to faith in the God who has forgiven them by grace through faith for Christ's sake. The divine Word and the holy sacraments are the means by which God gives the Holy Spirit who works faith, when and where He pleases, in those who hear the Word and receive the sacraments. And it is in light of the fact that pastors are responsible for the public proclamation of the Word and the public administration of the sacraments that one must examine 1 Timothy 4:13. As stated above, St. Paul directs Pastor Timothy to "attend to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching, and to teaching." This is not something that St. Paul directs Timothy to do on his own authority; rather, as the Apostle of Christ Jesus he reminds Timothy of his vocational obligation. He reminds him of what God Himself has entrusted to him as a called and ordained servant of the Word. These are not to be done publicly by anyone unless he has been called by God to do so. For as St. Paul says, "How can men preach unless they are sent?" Preaching and teaching are not to be done publicly without a call and mandate from God to do so, and St. Paul includes the public reading of scripture with preaching and teaching.

The reverence with which the Lutheran confessors approached the Word of God is evident in their serious and solemn concern for the Office of the Ministry. Not only did they subscribe the statement that only one who had been called may publicly minister in the church, but Chemnitz stressed, on the basis of Romans 10:14-15 and Jeremiah 27:14-15, that one who had not been called could not profitably serve.⁵¹

The Lutheran reformers had not overlooked the fact that the prophets and the apostles "earnestly emphasized the prerogatives of their call at the beginning of their writings."⁵² You must be able to prove that you have the authority to do what you are doing. If you cannot do it, you cannot do it. If you cannot prove that you have been authorized by God to serve in that capacity, you cannot do it. You cannot undertake what you have not been given, called, and sent to do. If you are asked about your call, and who has commanded you to do this, you must be able to prove that you have been authorized by God.⁵³ "By what authority do you do this?" is not an empty question in the kingdom of God. What God has commanded and instituted is no human plaything,⁵⁴ and we show that we fear and love God when we faithfully receive his Word and teachings.

⁵¹ Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, 698. Luther makes the same point. "Ja, viele duerfen auch wohl herausfahren und sagen: Was duerfen wir mehr der Pfarrer und Prediger, koennen wir doch selbst daheime lesen? Gehen also sicher dahin und lesen es daheime auch nicht. Oder wo sie es schon daheime lesen, so ist es doch nicht so fruchtbar, noch so kraeftig, als kraeftig das Wort ist durch die oeffentlich Predigt und den Mund des Predigers, den Gott dazu berufen und geordnet hat, dass er dir's predigen und sagen soll." (Hauspost. D. VIII. P. Tr. T. XIII. P. 1816-17.) J. Baier, *Compendium Theologiae Positivae*, edited by C. F. W. Walther (St. Louis: Concordia Verlag., 1879), Vol. IIIb, 684.

"Indeed, many may doubtless even burst out and say: Why do we need a pastor or preacher anymore? For all that, can't we just read ourselves at home? So they go confidently and don't even read it at home. Or, where they do indeed read it at home, then it is not so fruitful nor so powerful as the Word is powerful through the public sermon and the mouth of the preacher whom God has called and ordered for that so that he should preach it to you and say it to you."

⁵² Chemnitz, *Enchiridion*, 28.

⁵³ AE 40:384.

⁵⁴ LC IV, 6.

Luther stated that no one ought to act on behalf of God unless he is called and ordained by God.⁵⁵ We have seen that the pastor acts as the hands and mouth of God. He serves and speaks *vice et loco Christi*. Jesus Himself said, “He who hears you hears Me.” As Melancthon stated in the Apology, “they do not represent their own persons but the person of Christ, because of the church’s call, as Christ testifies (Luke 10:16), ‘He who hears you hears Me.’ When they offer the Word or sacraments, they do so in Christ’s place and stead.” The pastor acts on the basis of the call and command of Christ. He has been called to do this. The layman cannot say that he has been called to speak in the place of Christ. When the pastor speaks, he represents Christ. When the pastor speaks or reads, the one Christ has chosen to be his mouth speaks His Word. When the layman speaks, he represents himself. The pastor acts on the basis of the call and command of Christ. The layman acts without a call and without the command of Christ. The command of Christ brings with it confidence and certainty. Without a command from Christ, there is only confusion and uncertainty. The fact that the CTCR was asked to address the issue is evidence of that fact. There is no need to question whether the pastor should publicly read the scriptures because he has been called to do that.

It is a serious matter to speak in the place of Christ and speak His Word to the people of God. Some of the passages appointed to be read are severe. Only one who is supported by the office he has been given, confident in the command and call of God, can read such passages without qualms or pangs of conscience. Dr. Norman Nagel, Graduate Professor of Systematic Theology at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, put it this way.

“Who is sufficient for these things?” asks the apostle (2 Cor. 2:16). Only one who speaks as the Lord speaks. When the Lord speaks through his called and ordained mouthpiece, his words are to one the savor of death unto death, and to the other the savor of life unto life. When this causes you to tremble, the only answer which holds to the question, “Why are you doing this?” is: “The Lord put me here to say this, to do this.” All other ground is sinking sand. That the Lord put you there is attested by the fact that you were put there according to the mandate and institution of the Lord.⁵⁶

It cannot be denied that the public reading of the Word of God is teaching. “In fact, we could say that the one reading the Scripture lessons is bringing the purest form of teaching before the assembly.”⁵⁷ The Word teaches doctrine. If it teaches, it is God to man, and the pastor has been called to serve as His representative and speak in that capacity. Moreover, all of our pastors, by virtue of their confessional subscription, have agreed that “nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call.” (AC XIV)

These are serious matters. “No one dares to speak as the Lord speaking unless the Lord has clearly (*rite vocatus*) put him there to do that.”⁵⁸ Since we shall have to appear before the judgement seat of God and give account for what we have done, it is incumbent upon pastors

⁵⁵ See above note 44.

⁵⁶ “Externum Verbum: Testing Augustana V on the Doctrine of the Holy Ministry.” VI, 3, 1997, page 30.

⁵⁷ Lanier, Leslie, “On the Public Reading of Scripture.” Logia, VI, 3, 1997, page 35 referring to *Women Speaking in the Church*, the Opinion of the Exegetical Department of Concordia Theological Seminary, October 4, 1982.

⁵⁸ Nagel, *ibid.*, p. 30.

to have compassion on the people of God and not allow them to intrude themselves, or be intruded by the pastor, into the pastor's call without command of God.

The Public Reading of Scripture, the Office of the Ministry, and the Gospel

When our Lord Jesus once saw that His disciples had misunderstood the nature of His ministry and theirs, He opened their eyes with the Gospel, and let them see that what He offered was far greater than anything they were striving for. He said, "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, namely⁵⁹, to give His life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). Jesus served you by dying and rising for our forgiveness. That is the nature of our Saviour. But the forgiveness of sins would do you no good if it remained on the cross. So the Lord distributes that forgiveness to you through the means of grace,⁶⁰ and He uses pastors as His instruments to deliver that forgiveness. The pastors are there to serve the people with the forgiveness of sins. Thus the people of God are on the receiving end of God's mercy. They are given to. In the Sunday Divine Service God serves the forgiveness of sins, and His people respond with praise and thanksgiving for the gifts received. In Holy Absolution the pastor speaks God's word of forgiveness into your ears. He forgives you as a called and ordained servant of the word. By virtue of his office he is able to forgive you all your sins in the stead and by the command of the Lord Jesus Christ⁶¹ because our Lord has put him there to do that.⁶² In Holy Baptism the pastor acts as the mouth and hands of God to apply to you the water which has been joined to the Word and wash away your sins.⁶³ In the Lord's Supper He serves you the very body and blood of Christ for your forgiveness. And in the sermon and the readings he brings God's Word to you as God's mouth for you in that place. "He who hears you hears Me." He speaks and preaches and teaches as Christ has commanded him to do--for you.

This is a gospel centred understanding of the Divine Service and the Office of the Ministry which is fitting in the church of the Augsburg Confession whose fifth article says,

In order that we may receive this faith, the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and the sacraments as through instruments the Holy Spirit is given, who works faith, when and where it is pleasing to God, in those who hear the gospel, namely, that God, not on account of our merits, but on account of Christ, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace on account of Christ. Galatians 3[:14b]: "So that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

They condemn the Anabaptists and others who think that the Holy Spirit comes to human beings without the external Word through their own preparations and works.

⁵⁹ The καί is expegetical.

⁶⁰ See *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986) 205, Question 249. "Christ has indeed won full forgiveness and salvation for the whole human race with His perfect life, suffering, death, and resurrection. He distributes this same forgiveness in Baptism. (Baptism is a means of grace.)"

⁶¹ *The Lutheran Hymnal* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), 16.

⁶² AC XIV.

⁶³ "To be baptized in God's name is to be baptized not by men but by God Himself. Although it is performed by the man's hand, it is nevertheless truly God's own doing" (LC IV, 10).

The forgiveness of sins comes to us from outside of us, just as our salvation did. Christ won our salvation without any assistance from us. It was completely His doing. Likewise, the gospel of the forgiveness of sins comes to us from outside. It is the “external word” of the gospel. “In short, whatever God effects in us he does through such external ordinances.”⁶⁴ Likewise He comes to us in the Divine Service in such an external fashion: Word and sacrament delivered by the hands and mouth of His instrument, the pastor.

God comes to us through these means to work faith in our hearts. There are then “those who hear the gospel” and “those who preach the gospel.” This is the church. For the church is “the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments administered according to the gospel.”⁶⁵ If the gospel is to be heard and the sacraments received someone must be giving them out. Thus Chemnitz speaks of the church as made up of those who teach and those who hear.⁶⁶ This is a gospel centred insight.

It is vitally important to understand the connection between the salvation that comes to us outside of us from God as a free gift, His continued service to us in delivering that salvation to us through the means of grace, and His use of pastors as His servants to deliver the forgiveness of sins to His people. When that is lost, the gospel is lost.

Matching salvation’s achievement as none of our doing but only Christ’s, is salvation’s delivery, which is none of our doing but from outside ourselves as gift of the Holy Spirit through the “external word of the gospel.’ That the words are external coming to us from outside, is inherent in the fact that they are gospel: “the external word of the gospel.”⁶⁷

Neither our salvation nor our reception of the forgiveness of sins is our doing. Both come to us from the outside as gift. We are simply on the receiving end of God’s gracious giving.

This understanding is jeopardized when we seek to depart from the gracious way in which God has chosen to deal with us.

This happens, for example, when the so-called priesthood of all believers is put into the *Predigtamt*.⁶⁸ The believers are indeed there in Article V. They are “those who hear the gospel.” They can’t be hearing it unless it is coming to them from outside, unless the *externum verbum*⁶⁹ is being preached to them. But the mouth and the ears are not in the same head. There is the mouth that has been put there in the *Predigtamt*, and there are the ears of “those who hear the gospel.” They have the *externum verbum* that comes to them from outside themselves, that is, it comes in the way of a gift, that is, gospel.

⁶⁴ LC, IV, 30.

⁶⁵ AC 7.

⁶⁶ Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, II:698.

⁶⁷ Nagel, 27.

⁶⁸ Preaching office.

⁶⁹ External word.

There is no one here giving himself or herself gifts. What you give yourself is not a gift, it is not in the way of the *externum verbum*, it is not in the way of the gospel. Lose the *externum verbum* and you lose the gospel.⁷⁰

“The mouth and ears are not in the same head.” When the ears and mouth are in different heads then, it comes to us in the way of gift, in the way of the gospel, in the way God has ordered it. When we are running in the way of the gospel, then we rejoice to be on the receiving end of God’s gifts and have His servant put His Word in our ears, for this is one way in which we receive the forgiveness of sins, “and where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.”

Conclusion

The question of the public reading of Scripture in the Divine Service was addressed by the LCMS CTCR in 1985. In the document entitled “Women in the Church” the CTCR stated that “there are certain specific functions which should not be carried out by the laity...but which are to be exercised only by the pastor.” The public reading of the Scriptures was included among those functions. “It is the opinion of the CTCR that the reading of the Scriptures is most properly the function of the pastoral office and should therefore not ordinarily be delegated to a lay person, woman or man.”

This statement is in harmony with the apostolic Word given in 1 Timothy 4:13. St. Paul instructed Timothy to officiate at the public reading of Scripture, the preaching, and the teaching. This was his responsibility as one who had been called and ordained, and who had had such responsibilities laid upon him at his ordination.

It is the pastor’s responsibility to speak “in the place of Christ.” He serves as God’s instrument, as the mouth of God, and our Lord himself says, “He who hears you hears Me.” If he has qualms about this, he may assure himself that he has the command of God to do so, and his call and ordination are evidence of this fact.

One who has no call has no such certainty. If he undertakes the duties and responsibilities of a pastor, he does so without the command of God. On the basis of the warning given in Romans 10:14-15, the Lutheran Church has counselled that one should not expect God to bless the actions of those who work without a call or command from God. Thus Luther stated, “no one ought to act on God’s behalf unless he is called and ordained by God,” and our Lutheran Confessions teach that “nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call.” What God has commanded and instituted is no human plaything, and anyone who would undertake public responsibilities in Christ’s church must be able to show that he has the authority to do so. When everyone does what is right in his own eyes, there is confusion and disorder in the church of the God who wants all things done decently and in order.

When the pastor is asked why he is doing what he is doing, he can answer with confidence that the Lord has put him there to do that. What the pastor has been put there to do

⁷⁰ Nagel, 28.

is offer the Word and sacraments of God to the people of God for their forgiveness. He takes his cue from Jesus who came not to be served, but to serve, and whose service culminated in His death on the cross for our forgiveness. It is all about the forgiveness of sins. It is the gospel at work; for the pastor is there to bring to the people the forgiveness that was won on the cross. He is the servant of Christ, the ambassador of Christ, and the messenger of Christ for the people of Christ. And when he reads the appointed lessons, the man who has been put there to speak the word of God speaks the word of God to the people of God. The messenger of Christ is there to deliver the message he has been sent to deliver, and that message is predominately the forgiveness of sins.

The voice of the Lord is heard in the Church, and the people of God respond. The Word that creates faith also brings forth the fruits of faith, not the least of which is thanksgiving. With songs of thanksgiving our mouths declare His praise. Hymns, anthems, and songs of praise are offered in response to our Lord's gracious giving. And where the Word of God resounds so too does the "Amen" of faith.

What is born and nurtured in the Divine Service fills the lives of Christians so that they "speak among themselves about the Word of God," "comfort one another with the Word of God," and "confess the Gospel" as they fulfill their vocations. This Word, then, reaches others and the number of the faithful is increased.

The church that calls itself the "evangelical" Lutheran Church should never forget that the church is not merely a place where people get together to do things. It is a place where Christ comes to us to deliver the forgiveness of sins. Thus, the Divine Service is not there simply to encourage the people to do their part, or to lure people to attend by virtue of their participation and involvement. It exists to distribute the forgiveness of sins to the people of God.

The Office of the Ministry, instituted to do the work of God, is at work in the Divine Service when the pastor who bears the office speaks the Word of God and gives out the sacraments of God, which are the means through which faith is created and strengthened. He is there for nothing else, but there is nothing else greater than the forgiveness of sins. Since he has been put there to speak God's Word into the ears of the faithful, it is good, right, and salutary that He should read the very Word of God to the ears that are hungry to hear it. This is his office, and when Jesus says, "He who hears you hears Me, and he who rejects you rejects Me, and He who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me," He affirms that He is the mouth of the Father, and the called and ordained minister is the mouth of Christ. Thus, in the Divine Service, the mouth of God speaks the Word of God to the people of God. God has ordered it in this way, and faith receives with thanksgiving the order God has instituted.

In conclusion, lest anyone misunderstand, the point is not only who may not do this, but also what is the benefit of the pastor doing this. The point is that our Lord has ordered things in such a way that when the called and ordained Minister of Christ speaks, he speaks in the place and stead of Christ. Moreover, he speaks for our benefit. To hear him speak is to hear Christ speak, and we hear Christ speak to our eternal benefit. It may appear to be an ordinary event. Yet it is not the same as reading the newspaper or an announcement in the bulletin. It is the living Word of God delivered through the mouth of Christ, the Life of the world.

Something holy is taking place. Our Lord speaks. His Word delivers forgiveness, and faith is born from that Word.