

The Ministry of the Word

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The Ministry of the Word

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*That we may obtain this faith,
the ministry of teaching the gospel
and administering the sacraments
was instituted.*

Augsburg Confession V

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Preface

Four factors led to the writing of this book.

First, the doctrine of the ministry is an important and much debated doctrine. The church at large cannot function without a clear doctrine and practice of the ministry. Even a liberal church that is not too concerned about precise standards of doctrine must have some clear standard and practice concerning ministry, or chaos will result. When the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) was established, lengthy debate was needed to clarify and reconcile various views of ministry in its midst so that there would be some common standard for determining how the ministry of the church would be arranged. The doctrine of the ministry has proven to be very divisive to confessional Lutheranism in the United States and Europe, both in the mid-19th century and in the last decades of the 20th. The problem is not likely to disappear anytime in the near future. Certainly continued, careful study of this topic is needed.

The completion of the one-hundredth volume of the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* in 2003 prompted a review of the treatment of this doctrine in the *Quarterly*. This doctrine, with the possible exception of the doctrine of church fellowship, was the most discussed doctrine during the first century of this journal. To a considerable degree this book is built on the treatment of this topic in the *Quarterly*.

The completion of new dogmatics notes for Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in 2005 prompted a desire for companion volumes that could be used as supplements to these notes, which are in an outline rather than a narrative form.

Finally, serving on the WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations placed the author in circumstances that required a considerable amount of writing and discussion on this topic, especially also as it affects the confessional Lutheran churches of northern Europe.

This volume takes a compendium approach to the topic, with frequent quotations from the Scriptures, the confessions, and other Lutheran writ-

ings. The main concern of the author was not producing something new but giving an account of the treatment of this doctrine in the Wisconsin Synod in the last century and comparing this treatment with that of Luther, the confessions, and C. F. W. Walther. Many chapters follow rather closely the line of thought of previously published articles or papers by the author. If previously published works by other authors provide a substantial basis for a section, this is noted once at the beginning of the section and thereafter insights from this work are footnoted only when they are quoted. Contemporary writers whose works I have used significantly include Thomas Nass, David Valleskey, Joel Fredrich, and Jon Ladner. Entirely new material was composed only when there were perceived gaps in the discussion that needed to be bridged.

This volume takes a *loci* approach in which each subtopic receives a separate treatment. The aim was to let each chapter be an independent treatment that could be read on its own. This leads to a certain amount of repetition, since passages and quotations that pertain to more than one subtopic may appear several times in the volume. There is also frequent cross-referencing in the footnotes to more detailed treatments of a topic elsewhere in the volume. Hopefully this repetition will not prove tedious but will lead to some of the chief passages being absorbed by osmosis. *Repetitio est mater studiorum.*

The first time that an important resource occurs in the notes of a section, full bibliographic information is given. So for the most part, it should not be necessary to turn to the bibliographies to obtain this information. Providing full bibliographic information in the notes seemed to be necessary because the bibliographies at the end of the book are arranged by category, not purely alphabetically. Since part of the purpose of this volume is to give an account of the treatment of this topic in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* and WELS and to compare this treatment with that of Walther and of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), each viewpoint is given its own subsection of the bibliography. Bibliographic items of special value will be annotated and marked by an asterisk. I hope this method will be helpful rather than confusing.

In the notes, citations from Luther are from the American Edition of *Luther's Works* when possible. I have given references in some cases to a German edition. In a few cases I have simplified or modernized the English or the word order in the quotations. In some cases, I have not been able to verify the correct location of quotations that I found in secondary sources. I have sometimes retained these quotations but have noted that the reference

does not seem to be correct or the “quotation” seems to be a paraphrase of what is found there. There are undoubtedly other notes that have become blurred with the passage of time and recopying. I have discovered other references in secondary sources that were wrong and have corrected them where possible. I am sure that some remain and that I have created new ones.

Finally, this volume, which began as one book in the mind of the author, turned out to be two books. My intention when I began was to treat the topic only from Scripture, with limited reference to the confessions, without drawing in much material from the historical debates of the last two centuries. As the work progressed, it seemed advisable to give a brief account also of the historical debate in the Synodical Conference of North America from the perspective of a WELS observer and participant in the discussion during the final decades of the 20th century. Of the recent controversies over this topic in the churches of the former Synodical Conference, I have not dealt explicitly with the debate over ministry in the ELS, since the outcome of this discussion is still unclear at the time of writing. Most of the issues in this debate are, however, dealt with in the historical section of this book.

For the most part, I have tried to keep this historical material to a minimum in the scriptural study that forms the basis of the first 11 chapters. Historical material, whether apologetic or polemical, is withheld until the last chapter, chapter 12, which deals with contrasts and comparisons. This follows the practice of the Lutheran dogmaticians, who treat antitheses at the end of the discussion, after the scriptural study has been completed. I have arranged this rather long section as one chapter to make two points: (1) I regard it as an appendix of secondary importance in comparison with the scriptural studies that precede it; (2) all of its sections are just tentative beginnings that could be expanded into chapters of a longer book. This historical section is more a suggestion of topics for further research than a definitive study. I hope this introduction will lead students of history to delve more deeply into the 19th-century sources, especially *Lehre und Wehre* and *Der Lutheraner*. Even though I do not call them “chapters,” the subdivisions, as indicated in the table of contents and the formatting, should enable the reader to navigate this chapter relatively easily.

I sometimes use contemporary terms like WELS, LCMS, and *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* in reference to all phases of the discussion, even when those terms are anachronistic. Articles from the *Quarterly*, for example, may be listed under *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, even though this periodical was called *Theologische Quartalschrift* until 1960.

The names of German authors are something of a problem, since in the sources used in this study they appear both in unlauded and ununlauded forms (Höfling and Hoefling) and in German and English variants (Franz and Francis). In bibliographic references, German authors are often listed only by last name and initials, and the same person's name may appear with one, two, or three initials. If there is a standardized format for well-known figures, I have tended to harmonize to that, but I have retained the variants at times, especially in quotations from other sources. In most cases I have referred to untranslated items by their German and Latin titles but have used the English titles and referred to the English editions for those works that have been translated. Some of Luther's works are known by multiple English titles.

In the case of online editions without page numbers, researchers should be able to locate quotations by using the search function.

Though the study concludes with an examination of history, my main goal was to encourage readers to make a careful examination of the primary data in Scripture and to evaluate their own statements and terminology in light of that data. Early in the 20th century, J. P. Koehler suggested guidelines and procedures for the restudy of the doctrine of the ministry. In these guidelines he warns against a theological inertia that is content to rest on repeating past formulations without returning to examine the basis of those formulations in Scripture.

The inertia of which I am speaking shows itself in a lack of readiness again and again to treat theological-scholarly matters or practical matters theoretically and fundamentally without preconceived notions. This is necessary if we are to watch and criticize ourselves. For in the course of time, circumstances change and our views also change. For example, words and expressions change their meaning. And if we do not again and again rethink in detail the most important theological matters and our way of presenting them, it can happen that all of this can become mere empty form without spirit or life. As we practice such self-criticism, we shall find that the divine truths which we draw out of Scripture indeed always remain the same, but that the manner in which we defend them, yes, even how we present them is not always totally correct. Here we can and must continue to learn.¹

In this study we will try to follow Koehler's advice to return *ad fontes*.

¹ "The Importance of the Historical Disciplines," *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. 3 (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House), p 434,435.

Introduction

Where We Begin

For almost all of us, our starting point with ministry was not with talking about it, writing about it, or arguing about it. We began by experiencing it. My first experience with ministry was on March 4, 1945, when a strange man whom I had never met poured water on me and spoke words to me and about me and over me in a language I did not yet understand and to which I could not respond. This happened with my father 6,000 miles away in a great and terrible war, having never seen me. My mother had the hope, but no certainty, that the man she loved, her son's father, would return home again. This encounter with ministry happened in the middle of the California desert, in a church I do not remember, 2,000 miles away from our family home, in a synod I have never belonged to. I do not remember any of this, but I have a piece of paper in my desk that says it happened.

This paper says that John Frederick Brug was baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost on the fourth day of March, 1945, at Grace Lutheran Church in Needles, California, by Pastor Ronald R. Ross. Though I remember none of it, this encounter with ministry still shapes who I am 62 years later. It was my first experience of the truth of the ministry: "That we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and sacraments as instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, who works faith where and when it pleases God, namely, that God, not for our own merits but for Christ's sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake" (AC V).

I am sure my mother was happy to find a pastor of her faith there in a backwater town in the Mojave Desert, but the result would not have been any different if she had been there alone and had followed the directions she had recently learned from the catechism: in case of emergency when no pastor is available, pour water over the child and say, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." The promise and the power would have been the same. "That we may obtain

this faith, the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted.”

Most of you, I suspect, came into contact with ministry in a way that was essentially the same, though the circumstances may have been different. We have continued to experience ministry through the years from parents, grandparents, Christian teachers, pastors, and professors, and from Christian friends. Though born in sin and as enemies of God, most of us cannot remember a time we did not have “this faith.” We are like the first-year Sunday school student who expressed her amazement at all the stories she was learning: “I did not know Jesus did all those things. I only knew he loved me.” No matter how much more we have learned and experienced about ministry since our baptism, the essence of ministry has remained the same and is quite simple: “That we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted.” I hope that when this study has ended, we will end where we began: experiencing and practicing and cherishing this ministry.

Where We Must Go

Sadly, in a sinful world and in an imperfect church, simple things do not always stay so simple. No other doctrine has caused more struggle, debate, and conflict for the Lutheran church in the United States than the doctrine of the ministry. This struggle has run through all parts of the American Lutheran church from the earliest days until the present. In *The Doctrine of the Church in American Lutheranism*, Conrad Bergendoff begins the chapter on ministry with these words:

In no area of doctrine has the Lutheran church in America had greater difficulty than in the matter of ministry. All the varied experiences, traditions, and adjustments provide rich material for a study of this subject. (p 19)

Much of this struggle was caused by the new religious, social, and political conditions that Lutheran immigrants faced in the United States. Lutherans who had moved away from or who had fled from state churches in Europe no longer had the government to determine the forms of the ministry or church polity for them. They had both the need and the opportunity to establish new forms. They enjoyed the free exercise of religion guaranteed by the constitution of their new homeland, but they were also cut off from state support and from the income derived from taxation imposed by territorial churches. They found themselves surrounded by competing sects and by many different forms of church government. They

were plagued by a lack of qualified, faithful pastors and had to develop defenses against unfit pastors and pretenders who often foisted themselves upon unsuspecting congregations. Lay members of the congregations sometimes used their new freedom to assert their rights in the church more aggressively. On top of all these things there were the sharp conflicts that arose between various leaders and groups of the confessional Lutherans who were streaming into the country.

Lutherans in the United States had struggled with the doctrine of the church and ministry since colonial times, but more urgent questions concerning the church and its ministry arose within Synodical Conference churches, the Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod, beginning in the middle of the 19th century. These questions have played an important role in our intersynodical history and in our identity as churches. These debates continued throughout the 20th century and remain unresolved.²

More recent writers have also frequently noted the hazards of dealing with this topic, which has become so complex:

Presenting an essay on the ministry at this time has its risks. Like a latecomer to a long and complicated conversation, the essayist may step on toes without realizing or intending it. He may naively use a turn of phrase which says more than he wants to say, at least in the minds of those who know books and articles he has never studied. He may laboriously reinvent the wheel, or he may take for granted points that deserve a closer look.

The conversation on the ministry is centuries old, and the amount of literature produced in the last one hundred fifty years alone is daunting. The ministry was a matter of keen interest among Lutherans in the nineteenth century.³ Professional New Testament scholars took up the issue intensively in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth.⁴ The early part of the century saw some intensive study of the issue within the Wisconsin Synod as well.⁵ Questions about the ministry continued

² These two points will be discussed in more detail in chapter 12.

³ There is a valuable survey by Holsten Fagerberg, *Bekennntnis, Kirche und Amt in der deutschen konfessionellen Theologie des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Uppsala, Sweden: Lundequistska, 1952). Notes 3-5 are from the original quotation.

⁴ Olof Linton surveys about 50 years of scholarship in *Das Problem der Urkirche in der neueren Forschung: eine kritische Darstellung* (Uppsala, Sweden: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1932).

⁵ J. P. Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod* (St. Cloud, MN: Sentinel Publishing Co. for the Protestant Conference, 1981), p 230-239. The early decades of the Wisconsin Synod's seminary publication,

to receive attention thereafter, but it seems that in recent years the study of the ministry has gone back into high gear. The ministry is a hot issue in many denominations, particularly among Lutherans, and the WELS shares in that surge of interest.⁶

Aware of the dangers of using the voluminous writings of Luther, Walther, and others selectively and of the additional pitfalls caused by the changing meanings of words and by the difficulty of communication across language barriers, we will focus on getting back to the vocabulary and concepts of Scripture and then, as a secondary issue, on evaluating all subsequent testimony in the light of Scripture. We begin our study by examining the vocabulary of Scripture concerning ministry.

Theologische Quartalschrift (now *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*), contain numerous contributions on the subject. Many of these appear in translation in the *WELS Ministry Compendium* (Milwaukee: WELS Parish Services, 1992). These articles and subsequent additions are summarized in the Fall 2003 issue of the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*.

⁶ Joel Fredrich, "The Divine Institution of Gospel Ministry," p 1. Essay presented to the Chippewa Valley/Wisconsin River Valley Pastoral Conference, October 18, 1994. Unpublished essay.

PART ONE

The Biblical Doctrine

1. The Term “Ministry”

Our Method: Back to the Bible

One of the first steps in every theological discussion should be to define terms. Very often conflicting parties are speaking past each other because they are using the same terms with different meanings, or they fail to recognize that it is very common in any language that a given term may be used in a variety of meanings. This has been a significant problem in the debates about ministry in American Lutheranism. The problem is compounded by the linguistic change since the days of Luther and the confessors and by problems of translation from language to language. A necessary first step in the discussion is to go back to Scripture and to examine Scripture’s terminology for ministry. Then we can adjust our vocabulary to agree with Scripture, rather than try to fit the data of Scripture into our vocabulary.

Christ instituted one office in his church, the ministry of the gospel. Another way of saying this is that Christ assigned one task to his church: the office of preaching the gospel. This one task, or function, given to the church is to preach the Word and to administer the sacraments.

Mark 16:15: He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”

Matthew 28:18-20: Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Matthew 26:26-28: While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.” Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

John 20:21-23: Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

Acts 1:8: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

1 Peter 2:9: You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

The church may carry out other activities that support the work of preaching the gospel, but all of these are secondary to its one unique task—to preach the gospel.

This work may be called an “office,” a “ministry,” a “service,” or an “administration.” In this context, these four words have the same meaning. In biblical usage, the word “ministry” is a synonym of “service.” Like “service,” the word “ministry” can refer to a wide variety of functions and offices, both secular and spiritual. The NIV makes it difficult to recognize this wide range of usage of *διακονία* (*diakonia*), the main Greek word for “ministry,” because of the variety of translations that the NIV uses for this word and for the other words based on the same Greek stem. The King James Version (KJV), on the other hand, was quite consistent in translating *διακονία* and its cousins as “ministry.”¹ As a result, it was relatively easy for readers of the KJV to form a correct understanding of the biblical term “ministry” and its various usages.

What is the proper use of the terms “minister” and “ministry” for us today? This has been quite a problem for English speakers because the meaning of the words “minister” and “ministry” in everyday language has narrowed considerably since the time of the King James Bible of 1611. During the more than three hundred years in which the KJV was the standard Bible of the English-speaking world, devoted Bible readers remained aware of the wide range of uses for the word “ministry,” since they saw it on display in the King James. The English word “minister,” like its Latin parent,

¹ The KJV translates *diakonia* with a form of “ministry” 26 times and a form of “service” 4 times. Other translations are “administration,” “office,” and “relief.”

The NIV translates *diakonia* as “ministry” 14 times and a form of “service” 14 times. Other translations are “distribution,” “help,” “office,” “mission,” “preparations,” “task,” and “work.”

The KJV translates *diakonos* as “minister” 20 times, “deacon” 3 times, and “servant” 7 times.

The NIV translates *diakonos* as “minister” 4 times, “deacon” 3 times, and “servant” 20 times.

was originally a synonym of the word “servant.” At the time of the King James translation, the word “minister” could refer to servants of every sort. Gradually, however, in everyday use “minister” came to be used almost entirely as a technical term for two types of service. English dictionaries usually list “clergyman” or “pastor” as the number one meaning of “minister.” The other main meaning of “minister” is a government official such as the prime minister of England.

In recent years, in everyday usage, the English word “minister” has most often meant “pastor.” Many English speakers have forgotten the full meaning of the word. The English and Latin words “ministry” and “minister” were originally used to translate the Greek words *diakoneo*, *diakonia*, and *diakonos*. In the Bible the use of these three words is not limited only to the service rendered by men whose work corresponded to that of our pastors. The biblical words for minister and ministry also refer to other kinds of service, including waiting on tables. It would be best that our usage of terms for “ministry” conforms as closely as possible to the biblical pattern.

To help us establish guidelines for our use of the terms “minister” and “ministry,” we now examine the wide range of uses of these terms in the New Testament, and we will sort the passages into categories. Sometimes we will find that a given passage does not fit neatly into one category and that the assignment of certain passages to a category is debatable. In spite of occasional ambiguity, the overall patterns are very clear.

The passages that follow are quoted from the NIV, and the “ministry” words (*diakonia*, *diakoneo*, and *diakonos*) are italicized. This enables the reader to see both the wide range of uses for the term “ministry” in the New Testament and the NIV’s inconsistent practice in translating these terms. Though these terms could be translated as “ministry” in nearly every case, the NIV hides the wide range of the term behind a variety of translations.

Categories of Biblical Usage

Secular Ministry

Sometimes the biblical words for “ministry” refer to service in the ordinary sense of the word, namely, service in secular things, service that meets physical needs, such as waiting on tables.

Matthew 22:13: “Then the king told the *attendants*, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

John 2:5: His mother said to the *servants*, “Do whatever he tells you.” A special example of this usage is the application of the term “minister” to the government. The government serves as God’s minister of the law when it executes criminals.

Romans 13:4: He is God’s *servant* to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s *servant*, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.

Many of the passages that deal with the service or ministry performed by Christians also fall into the category of “table service.” These are included in the lists below.

Christian Ministry **The Ministry of Christ**

Christ is called a minister, and his work is called ministry. The example Jesus sets as a minister is our model, whether we are full-time, called public ministers of the Word or members of the priesthood of believers who minister privately.

Romans 15:8: Christ has become a *servant* of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs.

Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45: “The Son of Man did not come *to be served*, but *to serve*, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

John 12:26: “Whoever *serves* me must follow me; and where I am, my *servant* also will be. My Father will honor the one who *serves* me.”

Matthew 20:26; Mark 10:43: “Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your *servant*.”

Matthew 23:11: “The greatest among you will be your *servant*.”

Mark 9:35: Jesus called the Twelve and said, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the *servant* of all.”

Luke 22:26,27: “But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who *serves*. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who *serves*? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who *serves*.”

Notice that in the last examples the ministers of the Word, including Jesus, are compared to ministers of tables. The point of comparison is humble, willing service to others.

The Ministry of Angels

The ministry of the angels includes both delivering the Word and other forms of service, such as rescue or judgment.

Hebrews 1:14: Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to *serve* those who will inherit salvation? [The Greek has a noun, “for service,” not a verb. The Greek word translated as “ministering” is a form of *leitourgikos*.]

Matthew 4:11: The devil left him, and angels came and *attended* him.

Mark 1:13: He was with the wild animals, and angels *attended* him.

The angels are God’s ministers who do his bidding in heaven and on earth. In serving God, they also serve his people. Though the angels serve us, they are not at our command.

The Ministry of Christians in General

Many of the statements about the ministry of Christians are too general to be placed into specific categories of ministry of the Word or of other kinds of ministry that support the ministry of the Word.

1 Peter 4:10,11: Each one should use whatever gift he has received to *serve* others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms [διακονοῦντες ὡς καλοὶ οἰκονόμοι]. . . . If anyone *serves*, he should do it with the strength God provides.

Romans 12:7: If it is *servicing*, let him *serve*; if it is teaching, let him teach.

1 Corinthians 16:15: The household of Stephanas . . . have devoted themselves to the *service* of the saints.

Ephesians 4:12: [Pastors and teachers] prepare God’s people for works of *service*, so that the body of Christ may be built up.

Revelation 2:19: “I know your deeds, your love and faith, your *service* and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.”

Christians are given a diversity of gifts and a diversity of ministries.

1 Corinthians 12:4,5: There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of *service*, but the same Lord.

The most important ministry is ministering with the gospel.

Ministering With the Word Ministry of the Word in the Abstract

In 2 Corinthians the term “ministry” sometimes refers to the message that is given to the church, the law and the gospel. The law is called the ministry that brought death and the ministry that condemns. The gospel is called the ministry of the Spirit, the ministry that brings righteousness, and the ministry of reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 3:7-9: Now if the *ministry that brought death*, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the *ministry of the Spirit* be even more glorious? If the *ministry that condemns* men is glorious, how much more glorious is the *ministry that brings righteousness!*

2 Corinthians 4:1: Since through God’s mercy we have *this ministry*, we do not lose heart.

2 Corinthians 5:18,19: All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the *ministry of reconciliation*: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.

2 Corinthians 6:3: We put no stumbling block in anyone’s path, so that our *ministry* will not be discredited.

In 2 Corinthians 4:1 and 5:18 the term “ministry” still seems to refer to the gospel rather than to Paul’s apostolic office. In 2 Corinthians 5:18 the “ministry of reconciliation” is an announcement of the gospel, “God was reconciling the world to himself.” It is not the title of an office held by Paul alone. In 2 Corinthians 6:3, on the other hand, “ministry” seems to refer more to the apostolic office and to Paul’s stewardship of it. There are many examples of this functional usage also in the next section.²

Ministry of the Word in the Concrete by Public Ministers of the Word

In Scripture, “ministry” also refers to a concrete office or position filled by men, but in some of these cases “ministry of the Word” still retains traces of the abstract meaning, that is, it refers more to an activity than to a specific office or position. Note that in the the following passage the “ministry of the word” is parallel to prayer, which is an activity, not an office.

² Ministry in the abstract will be discussed in more detail in the discussion of Augsburg Confession V in the last chapter of this book.

Acts 6:4: “[We] will give our attention to prayer and *the ministry of the word.*”

At other times “ministry” refers to an office, to a calling, or to a limited assignment given to a called minister of the Word. This is the most common usage.

The Ministry of Apostles and Prophets Activity and Office

Both the task assigned to the apostles and the special office held by the apostles are called “ministry.”

1 Peter 1:12: It was revealed to [the prophets] that they were not *servicing* themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you.

Acts 1:17,25: “[Judas] was one of our number and shared in this *ministry.* . . . this apostolic *ministry,* which Judas left to go where he belongs.”

Romans 11:13: Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my *ministry.*

Acts 20:24: I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the *task* the Lord Jesus has given me—the *task* of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.

Note that the NIV understands “ministry” in Acts 20:24 as a task or assignment, not as a position (correctly so, in my opinion). In the passage that follows, “ministry” would better be translated as “ministering” or “activity of ministry.” In the Greek it is a participle that describes an activity, not an office.

2 Corinthians 3:3: You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our *ministry,* written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

The Apostles as Servants of the Word

The apostles are frequently called ministers, or servants, of the Word.

Ephesians 3:7: I became a *servant* of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power.

Colossians 1:23: This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a *servant.*

Colossians 1:25: I have become its *servant* by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness.

The Apostles' Service of the Word

The apostles' activity is often called ministry of the Word. Activity they do in support of the ministry of the Word is also called ministry.

2 Corinthians 11:8: I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to *serve* you. [The Greek has a noun.]

1 Timothy 1:12: I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his *service*.

Acts 21:19: Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his *ministry*.

Acts 12:25: When Barnabas and Saul had finished their *mission*, they returned from Jerusalem.

In the last passage the specific ministry was not to preach the gospel, but it was to deliver a gift that flowed from the ministry of the gospel.

The Ministry of the Helpers of the Apostles

The apostles shared the ministry of the Word with many other ministers, many of whom had been appointed by them.

1 Corinthians 3:5: What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only *servants*, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task.

2 Corinthians 3:6: He has made us competent as *ministers* of a new covenant.

2 Corinthians 6:4: As *servants* of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses.

Acts 19:22: He sent two of his *helpers*, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia. [The form here is a participle.]

1 Timothy 4:6: If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good *minister* of Christ Jesus.

2 Timothy 4:5: But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your *ministry*.

Ephesians 6:21: Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful *servant* in the Lord, will tell you everything.

Colossians 4:7: [Tychicus] is a dear brother, a faithful *minister* and fellow servant in the Lord.