

Office and Offices: Some Basic Lutheran Philology

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The theme of “The Office and Offices” brings to mind at once the rather uncomfortable realization that in discussing this topic contemporary North American Lutheranism is more often lost than found. Theological perfection is not yet close at hand.¹ This implies no malice towards theologians of whom I consider myself one, albeit an amateur. Even less is it an affront to Confessional Lutherans of whom again I am unreservedly one. But rather it comes as the conclusion of a rather extended period of observation of the various divisions, parties, and sects even within synodical boundaries all intending to defend the truth.

It is of no difficulty to find several examples of such division in the ranks of Confessional Lutherans. One of the longest standing divisions claims to distinguish between the “Missouri position” and the “Wisconsin position.” Attempts to characterize these have had the first defining “The Office” in terms of leading a local congregation and “Offices” as pieces of this “Office” given to others whereas the latter is said to define “The Office” (i.e. “public ministry”) in terms of a rather undefined group of “ministry functions” and the “Offices” as the concrete realities created when functions are given to individuals to administer. The differences perceived here contributed in this century to the rise of various smaller Lutheran bodies which lay claim either to the Wisconsin Synod tradition or to the tradition of Old Missouri. Whereas more recent investigations have attempted to show that in fact Walther and early Missouri does not fit in with what is often considered called “Old Missouri” at all. Further, in contemporary Missouri it is possible to identify various strands of thought. The prevalent one is identified by the attempts to speak of “The Office and Offices” in terms of “The Pastoral Office” and its “Functions.” This terminology implies some sort of existence of a “Pastoral Office” as distinct and

identifiable from its assigned “functions.” But what this means is generally unclear. Finally, with the increasing plague of Evangelicalism in our midst any coherent doctrine of the preaching office has been endangered by anti-clerical madness and lay fever. These have not as yet been isolated and appear to be spreading. So in answer to this some circles have turned inoculation with the Roman virus.

If not everyone agrees with the above characterizations, and surely they won't, at least most will grant at minimum that such divisions have existed for a long time and that by now matters have only become so confused that at times opponents can not even find each other in the fog and end up boxing the air or at other times actual opponents mistakenly find themselves on the same side. The terminology of “Office” has become so compressed from bearing various theological theories that even those who want to communicate about these matters find it difficult to do without immediately introducing everything that has gone before. Questions such as “What is ‘Office?’”, “What is ‘Public Ministry?’”, “What are other offices in the church?” which continue to be troublesome can prove very difficult to discuss without introducing a bias into the conversation. With the situation as such I would like to suggest a return to basics.² It seems appropriate to spend a moment, maybe two (for the less mature among us we can call it “quiet time”), in consideration of the basic concept of “office” involved in this matter. This approach is not a back to the Bible approach as such but assumes that we have inherited a Confessional language that expresses biblical truth and needs to be carefully considered and understood well especially in light of our own ecclesiastical separation from the Latin and German confessions. I have in mind first a brief investigation into the basic philology of “office” and “function” as used by Luther and the Confessions largely outside of the context of the *locus* here in contention. Secondly, I hope this basic equivalent to August two-a-days improve our “blocking” and “tackling” and bears fruit on the playing field helping inform our specific doctrinal difficulties.

The Basic Philology of “Office”

The first matter at hand is a consideration of the origin of the terminology of “office”. This word is used in the translations of our confessional documents to represent most importantly two words, the Latin

“*officium*” and the German “*Amt*”. Both of these appear in the private writings of Luther as well.

“*Officium*” in classical Latin was a rather broad word that could represent any kind of “service, attention etc. which a man renders to others whether from kindness or duty.” Thus it referred to something someone does. It could mean among other things: 1 - a duty, 2 - something “*to be expected of or belongs to a person or thing*”, 3 - a “trust, charge, business, administration, πρᾶξι” such as naval service, public service etc.³ In the middle ages, though, the word instead was used to represent persons (as employees of government), a territory of jurisdiction, or an ecclesiastical post such as presbyter or bishop.⁴ It is therefore important to note that in time the word appears to have changed its focus from something a person did to the person himself in relation to that something or even the place or post where it was done.

The German word “*Amt*” on the other hand derives from the Gallic word *ambactus* through a family of Celtic words which in some way related to their feudal state. The *ambacti* were the vassals who belonged to the ruling lord.⁵ Apparently the Germans derived the abstract “*Amt*” from this word which originally referred to the concrete person. The word “*Amt*” referred then to “an occupation to which the (subjugated) servant is bound by his lord.”⁶ This later broadened from feudal service (*Hofdienst*) to service rendered (*Dienstleistung*) in general. The word later came to include any standing obligation that might be given to someone, even to a free man, although the character of submissive service continued to be implied. The person with the power remained the superior of the one performing the “*Amt*”. Later yet the word came to indicate the public service rendered in relation to the state and soon ceased to imply compulsion and instead indicated an obligation assigned but also accepted by the servant (*Diener*). So finally the word “*Amt*” came to signify chiefly “1 - the obligations and functions assigned to someone and belonging to the position accepted by him”, or “2 - a public sphere of work assigned to someone in relation to the obligations and functions bound with it.”⁷ The first represents specific duties or work someone does while the second refers to phrases like “spiritual office”, “government office”, “to accept an office”, “to administer an office”, “to be in office” etc.⁸

The second matter is to consider the usage of this terminology in its broadest context in Luther and the Confessions. It should be with these understandings of *Amt* and *officium* that we read our theological heritage and not with ideas drawn from the English word “office.”⁹ The idea of “office” finds use not only in texts discussing the public ministry of the church but even more frequently in texts speaking of Christian vocation. But an examination of texts of this type reveals that any theological use of the concept of “office” can not be separated from the accompanying concept of “*Beruf*” or call. In fact it is from the idea of “call” that the theological use of “office” must be understood. And this in fact appears to make sense because it corresponds with the basic meaning of “*Amt*” as an assigned obligation or duty.

An examination of Luther’s Genesis commentary is particularly enlightening in this regard since Luther returns to the theme of call and office repeatedly. In his comments on Genesis 22:3 where Abraham is setting out to sacrifice Isaac Luther notes that Abraham does not argue asking: “Why does God give this command?” He turns away from temptation saying: “I am sure that something better will happen than I am now seeing - not through my strength or that of my people but through the power of the command of God. Therefore I shall obey the Lord, who is giving me the command and is calling me (*Dominum iubentem et vocantem*).”¹⁰ Shortly thereafter Luther relates this line of thought to Genesis 22:19 where God has stopped Abraham from killing his son and has promised him that in his Seed all nations will be blessed. Then Abraham has leaves the altar with Isaac and returns to his servants who waited for them. Luther finds it

truly amazing that the very saintly patriarch returns from so sacred a place. If such a grand revelation about sacrificing a son were to come to us, and if that glorious promise - “In your Seed shall all nations be blessed” - were added - likewise the conversation and the presence, not of one angel but of the entire heavenly host - human devotion (*humana devotio*) would surely give the advice that this place would not only be held in reverence but should also be inhabited. Why, then, does Abraham not do this? ... The example of Abraham, who had most valid reasons for instituting something at this place, is something notable. He was called (*vocatus est*) from Beer-sheeba to Mt. Moriah by divine authority; he offered a very great and admirable sacrifice because he was ready to immolate his own son; and he heard the Word of God from heaven in fear and faith. Nevertheless, he undertakes nothing; nor does he call the people together to extol or honor the place. ... To his religious practice Abraham adds nothing over and above his calling (*ultra vocationem*). ... He thought: “I have done what I was obliged to do; I have sacrificed my son just as I was commanded to do. But God is not commanding (*Non autem mandat Deus*) me to set up a form of worship at this place. Hence I shall venture to do nothing.” Thus he refrains from every rash and bold action; he

abides in the fear of the Lord and waits for His call, ready to obey and to follow wherever God calls him (*expectat eius vocationem paratus obedire et sequi, quocumque eum vocaret Deus*).¹¹

These comments and many which are similar regarding Abraham's call out of his fatherland, Noah's obedience in building the ark etc. all show that in Luther's thought and terminology a divine command given to the patriarchs was considered a call from God. A *mandatum Dei* is a *vocatio* (call, *Beruf*). Abraham received a command; Abraham obeyed. And Luther states that the opposite of being called is to "venture" to do something without divine command. In actuality this sort of language is ubiquitous in Luther and is in no way limited to the patriarchs. For example in the Hauspostille when Luther comments on Jesus being led into the wilderness he states that "the Lord Jesus is led by the Spirit in the wilderness, that is, the Holy Ghost called him into the wilderness." The Evangelist reports this so that man ought guard against "his own devotion" since Christ himself did not head into the wilderness "out of his own devotion (*aus eigener Andacht*)" without the word of God. No one, says Luther, should attempt to serve God unless he is certain that God has bid him do it "either through His Word, or through men who have authority over us in God's place."

For whoever undertakes something without such a call, like the monks and nuns who have run into the monasteries, he in no way serves God by doing this but rather does this contrary to obedience to God. Therefore this example of Christ is to be considered well: that he did not run into the desert on his own volition but rather the Holy Spirit bid him to do it. And we should do the same and undertake nothing from our own devotion (*aus eigener Andacht*) but rather in everything we do we should be able to say and boast: This was done in obedience and (on account of) the command of God.¹²

Here Jesus' call corresponds to the Holy Spirit bidding him to a particular action. This example is to show us that our service to God should come from our own call or "*Befehl Gottes*" and not something we ourselves dream up (*aus eigener Andacht*).¹³ The monks and nuns, Luther's favorite victim when addressing this topic, do precisely this when they choose their own works they consider holy which however are not divinely commanded. From this definition of "call" one can see that calls are personal things.¹⁴ A "call" is the divine "command" which pertains to the individual. But one asks: "What if I do not have a call or command like Abraham? What if the Holy Spirit does not lead me into the wilderness?"

How do I receive a call?" Luther answers this question by identifying the source of God's commands as the word of God or those "men who have authority over us in God's place."¹⁵

Thus a "call of God" is, according to Luther, a divine command given to an individual. And such a command comes either directly from God as in the case of Abraham or mediately through the word of God and through people in authority. These ideas allow Luther to expand the meaning of the terminology further by referring not only to very specific commands considered thus far but also to the universal commands in God's Word applicable to every individual. For in the common orders (*den gemeinen Ständen*) of society and with the works of love no new specific command is required for it already exists in the Ten Commandments. "There our Lord God bids everyone to hear God's word, love God, call upon God, obey father and mother, not to murder, and not to commit adultery but rather be married. All of this is God's creation and command."¹⁶ Out of these universal commands of scripture flow the common orders of society in which each person can be sure of his place and what God has commanded him to do.¹⁷ This is his vocation; this is his calling.¹⁸ So Luther concludes that

Everyone should do what is commanded him and not do whatever is not commanded to him. And if everyone pays attention to his call he will have his hands full doing what is commanded so that he may not trouble himself with that which is not commanded him. And if there are no other commands still the Ten Commandments concern all men so that if he obeys these wherever they should be obeyed he will have enough to do.¹⁹

It is this understanding of a call of God that illuminates Luther's terminology of "office" (*Amt*). For Luther continuously relates the two together through the idea that one's "office" is the thing God bids us to do. For example, Christ, being sent by the Father, can be said to have an office. In one place Luther says that "his office is that he should teach."²⁰ In another place Luther says that after Christ ascended to heaven "his office is that he should make souls free and loose from the law, sin, and death."²¹ Thus "office" can become a synonym with "*Werk*" (work) or even "*Tun*" (a thing done). And as a thing commanded "office" can also be used in the plural to indicate various things commanded. So the Augsburg Confession says that without Christ human nature is too weak "to carry out commanded offices. (*befohlene Ämter auszurichten*)"²² In other places "*Amt*" is explicitly used as a synonym of "commanded

work” (*befohlenes Werk oder Tun*). So for Luther and the Confessions it is in the command of God that one receives his “offices or works” to perform. Thus, says Luther, when the monks claim that to live in the “common orders and offices” is nothing compared to their holy life they are making judgment without the word of God. But whoever has the word of God can be sure that in the Fourth Commandment God has commanded even such seeming small works as when a child goes to school and studies, a young girl spins and sews, or a servant girl cooks, washes, sweeps, carries the children, wipes their mouth, and bathes them. “Through his word God makes them holy works and he needs no chrism in addition.”²³ Luther’s concern is that we not dream up our own works with which to serve God. A holy work is not just any work but rather only that work which has been commanded and is performed in faith.

It should not be surprising then that “office” or “offices” can on the one hand refer to individual tasks commanded by God. This is particularly true of the Latin “*officium*” which could mean specific tasks or duties performed. We can refer to this as “office” in the narrow sense. On the other hand, the meaning of “office” reflects the second definition of “*Amt*” and the third of “*officium*” given earlier such that it indicates the sphere of work or operation of the person given such duty and obligations. This is especially true when Luther and the Confessions refer to the common orders of society and the general commands that govern them. This can be referred to as the “office” in the wide sense.

Often these senses of “office” are found mixed together requiring careful reading. For example the Apology states that Paul does not praise the works and labor (*die Werke und Arbeit*) of marriage in and of themselves but rather wants wives first to have faith and receive forgiveness.

Following this he gives consideration to the work of their office and call as wives (*des Werkes ihres weiblichen Amtes und Berufs*) just as in all Christians good works should follow out of faith so that each does something according to his calling (*Beruf*) so that he is of use to his neighbor. And just as these good works please God so also such works please God which a believing wife does according to her call. And such a wife will be saved who performs her office as wife according to her call in the order of marriage (*ihrem Beruf nach im ehelichen Stand ihr weiblich Amt tut*).²⁴

In the first part of this text the words “office” and “call” are synonyms indicating a “vocation” or “calling”, namely, the “wifely office” to which a woman may be called. This represents the use of “office” in the wide sense. But interestingly in the same text at the end the Latin reads: “*Ita mulieris*

officia placent Deo propter fidem, et salvatur mulier fidelis, quae in talibus officiis vocationis sua pie servit.” And so the Latin indicates she serves “in such offices of her calling” referring to the individual duties or functions a wife does within her “office” of being a wife. Thus in theory, if not in actual practice, one could speak of “offices” within one’s “office.” But one could never rightly speak of an “office” without or even separate from its “functions” because it is precisely these duties that give substance to “office” in the wider sense.

Office and Offices in the Church

It is this terminology of “call” and “office” that Luther and the Confessions use within their theology of the public ministry of the church. However, in this short space I will only be able to focus upon the use of the terminology of “office”. On the one hand “office” can occasionally refer to individual functions that are performed within the sphere of work that one has been given. For example, Luther denies that the Roman bishops act like true bishops because they “will neither preach nor teach, nor baptize, nor administer the Lord’s Supper, nor perform any work or office (*Werk oder Amt*) of the Church.”²⁵ Here “*Amt*” is a synonym of “*Werk*” and refers to individual duties which properly are the bishop’s to perform: to teach, baptize, commune etc.²⁶ Similarly, in another place Luther writes that this is “the simple meaning of the (Third) commandment: since holidays are observed anyhow, such observance should be devoted to hearing God’s Word, so that the special office of the day should be the ministry of the Word (*eigentlich Amt sei das Predigtamt*) for the young and the mass of poor people.”²⁷ Here “office” is specifically the single function of preaching or teaching the word as opposed to any other duties, such as administering the Lord’s Supper, that might be performed. And this particular office is designated by the important compound word “Predigtamt” which here refers to the individual function of preaching.

On the other hand, Luther and the Confessions often use “office” in the wide sense when teaching about “office” in the church. Here the word “office” refers to the sphere of activity (*Wirkungskreis*) in which the office holder performs the duties given him to perform. In this category falls the terms of concrete offices such as *Bischofsamt* (Office of the bishop), *Pfarramt* (parish office), or *Schullehreramt*

(School teacher's office).²⁸ For example, in the Apology we read that "the bishop's office is according to divine right: to preach the gospel, forgive sins, judge doctrine and reject that doctrine which is contrary to the gospel, and to exclude those from the congregation whose godlessness is obvious, not with human power but only through God's word."²⁹ In this way of speaking the bishop's "office" includes many different specific duties. And when they do not perform these duties "the bishops don't perform their office according to the gospel", as the German text of the Apology says. But again the Latin, which finds it easier to speak about individual functions, says literally that they do not "perform the offices (*episcoporum officia*) of bishops according to the gospel"³⁰

This use of the wide sense of "office" to speak of churchly posts can be expanded even further so as to add yet another tier or layer to the terminology of office. Thus arise words like *Kirchenamt* that include all actual concrete offices held by individuals in the church. This in fact ties into Luther's idea of the general orders (*Stände*) of the world and is equivalent to one of the orders, namely, the public life of the church in all its facets.³¹ So Luther says:

The estate (*Stand*) I am thinking of is rather one which has the office of preaching and the service of the word and sacraments and which imparts the Spirit and salvation, blessings that can not be attained by any amount of pomp and pageantry. It includes the work of pastors, teachers, preachers, lectors, priests (whom men call chaplains), sacristans (*Küster*), schoolmasters, and whatever other work belongs to these offices and persons. This estate the Scriptures highly exalt and praise."³²

So we have observed how the singular "office" can be used to designate everything from a singular function (*Verrichtung*) to the estate containing all the concrete offices in the church (*Stand*). This is all fine and good. But many of the questions causing difficulties in our midst concern how to relate the realities designated by these various uses of "office". In fact the theme of "Office and Offices" implies that this is in fact the main problem needing to be addressed. So we must now turn directly into the wind.

Relation of Office and Offices

It turns out that it is the grand evangelical principle of Luther and the Confessions that ties together all the various realities within the church designated as "office". This evangelical principle bases the existence of the church and everything in it upon the foundation of the gospel of Jesus Christ and its

proclamation. The word of God is the holy of holies and “whatever hour God’s word is taught, preached, heard, read or meditated upon, there the person, day, and work are sanctified thereby, now because of the external work, but because of the word.”³³ All authority of the church, its sacraments, its offices, and everything else that belongs to the church finds its purpose and authority in the Gospel. Even the law of God is proclaimed only in order to prepare for the coming of the Gospel. And it is only in light of this principle that the Luther and the Confessions can be understood when they speak of the offices of the church and their relation to one another.

Luther in fact speaks directly to the question of how the various duties in the church relate to one another. It is the above principle that drives him to say that many functions exist in the church, namely, to preach, to baptize, to administer the eucharist, to bind and loose sins and many others, “but the first and foremost of all on which everything else depends, is the teaching of the word of God. For we teach with the Word, we consecrate with the Word, we bind and absolve sins by the Word, we baptize with the Word, we sacrifice with the Word, we judge all things by the Word.”³⁴ Here Luther does not use the term “office” as he did above but clearly he is speaking of functions in the church or “offices” in the narrow sense. This opinion of Luther is repeated in an oft misused passage from the Apology where we read that

among the adversaries, in many regions, during the entire year no sermons are delivered, except in Lent. Here they ought to cry out and justly make grievous complaint; for this means at one blow to overthrow completely all worship. For of all acts of worship (*Gottesdienst*) that is the greatest, most holy, most necessary, and highest, which God has required as the highest in the First and Second Commandment, namely, to preach the word of God. For the office of preaching (*Predigtamt*) is the highest office (*höchste Amt*) in the church. Now, if this worship is omitted, how can there be knowledge of God, the doctrine of Christ, or the Gospel?³⁵

These texts apply the evangelical principle directly to the office or function of preaching and teaching the Word of God and give it first place in the church. But Luther directly applies this to the concrete offices within the church. And he concludes that

if the office of teaching the Word (*Amt des Worts*) is entrusted to anyone, then everything accomplished by the Word in the church is entrusted, that is, the office of baptizing, consecrating, binding, loosing, praying, and judging doctrine. Inasmuch as the office of preaching the gospel is the greatest of all and certainly built upon it, it becomes the foundation for all other functions (*Aemtern*), which are built upon it such as the offices of teachers, prophets, governing, speaking with tongues, the gifts of healing and helping, as Paul directs in 1 Cor. 12:28.³⁶

Thus for Luther whoever “has the office of preaching (*Predigtamt*) given to him has the highest office in Christendom given to him.”³⁷ Clearly, for Luther the ranking of the function of preaching as the highest of all duties in the church at the same time makes the preacher’s office the highest concrete office in the church. Further the office of preaching comes as a unit; one has it whole or not. All other concrete offices have authority and function based upon the office of preaching. Thus for Luther and the Confessions “*Predigtamt*” while describing the chief function was also the most evangelical and descriptive of titles for the highest concrete public office. This evangelical principle allows “*Predigtamt*” to transcend the layers or senses of “office” and becomes the element that ties them together in the vertical dimension. Thus all the concrete offices in the wide sense whether “pastors or presbyters or bishops” gain their theological standing not from the ranking and hierarchy within the church (which is by human rite) but from this chief evangelical function given them. They all have the same call; they are all equal by divine rite.³⁸ Whether bishop, pastor, preacher, or assistant pastor, all of them are “sent alike to the the *Predigtamt*.”³⁹ For they all receive the “command to teach the Gospel. (*mandatum docendi evangelii*)”⁴⁰

This sort of unity found in the preaching office allows for a wide range of speaking that often mixes the “wide” and “narrow” senses of office. At times this chief office which is restricted to no one concrete manifestation is designated by its component functions. So the Apology says “office is according to divine right: to preach the gospel, forgive sins, judge doctrine and reject that doctrine which is contrary to the gospel, and to exclude those from the congregation whose godlessness is obvious, not with human power but only through God’s word.”⁴¹ And yet it remains in unity as the “office of bishop”. Likewise the Tractate on the Power and Primacy of the Pope says that “the gospel assigns to those who preside over churches the command to teach the Gospel, to remit sins, to administer the Sacraments” etc.⁴² Yet it remains a unity assigned to particular concrete manifestations. It is even possible for Luther to use *Predigtamt* to designate the highest level of “office”, that is, the *Stand* of the church with all its concrete offices.⁴³

Thus it should be noted that this evangelical definition has no absolute or legalistic reference to a local congregation, only to preaching to those who hear. On the other hand Luther never considered the *Schullehrer* or similar people, who deal in part with the word and teach children but are not approved and called to preach and teach in the church at large, to have been given the office of preaching in the proper sense. But this brings us to the divine institution and call which pertains to the ministry and this is going too broad afield. But it should be pointed out again that as demonstrated earlier “office” should always be considered in relation to the corresponding call of God. However, here lack of space hinders us from approaching theological perfection.

The forgoing has attempted to lay a basic foundation for understanding the at times confusing terminology of office and offices in our Lutheran theological heritage. It certainly has not answered all the ongoing questions or even approached many of them. But the basis I believe is sound and should provide a firm foothold for evaluating at least parts of existing theological models of the public ministry. We can only hope that as the world continues all around us to deceive and destroy much of what claims the Christian name that perhaps we might experience enough of the Spirit of truth and humility that some day clarity and agreement will come upon us and we will be able once again to experience true Lutheran union, the dream of our forefathers.

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¹ Of course the good Professor Marquart has poignantly relieved us of this burden with his insightful comments in *The Church*, 70-72. There is in fact a distinction between Orthodoxy and perfect theology.

² Things like blocking, tackling etc. We Cornhuskers of Nebraska relate best to such football analogies and especially to the idea of basics (I-back right, I-back left, fullback up the middle ...)

³ Leverett, 598. Interestingly *ᾠδὴ* (1. a doing, a mode of acting, a deal. 2. a thing to be done, business) appears in Rom. 12:4 which the KJV translates as “office” where we would undoubtedly no longer use it. “For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office.”

⁴ *Lexicon Latinitatis Medii Aevi*, 634. Interestingly it was also used to designate the *office liturgique* as in *officium divinum*, *officium ecclesiasticum*.

⁵ “eorum ... ut quisque est genere copiosiusque amplissimus, ita plurimos ambactos clientesque habet.” *Bellum Gall.* 6.15. Quoted in Götze, 73.

⁶ Götze, 73.

⁷ Sanders, 29f.

⁸ Ein Amt bekleiden, bedienen, verwalten, übernehmen; einen in ein Amt einsetzen, ihm ein Amt übertragen, geben; einen vom Amt absetzen etc.

⁹ Webster says the primary meaning of “office” in English is: “1 A: a special duty, charge, or position conferred by an exercise of governmental authority and for a public purpose: a position of authority to exercise a public function and to receive whatever emoluments may belong to it; b: a position of responsibility or some degree of executive authority.” And these definitions are what most often come to mind. But this is not the general meaning of *Amt* and *officium* we have observed. Webster informs us that there is a meaning of the word “office” which is: “4A: something that one ought to do or must do: an assigned or assumed duty, task, or role.” And this is much closer to the root meaning of our terms of interest.

Interestingly, Walther was aware of a disagreement even among German Lutherans of the word “*Amt*.” In 1861 Walther reproduced an article from the *Erlanger Zeitschrift* entitled “Bemerkungen über das Amt.” This article is said to be “*wertvolles*” (valuable) by Walther in his introduction to the article. And in it the author basically studies the word “*Amt*” and its usage. He concludes: “I hope that these comments on language will convince the kind reader or strengthen him in his conviction that great caution is necessary in coming to conclusions concerning the doctrine of the Lutheran church on the ministry as found in the Confessions when looking at individual texts of our Lutheran symbols in which the words “*Amt* (office)”, “*Predigtamt* (preaching office)”, and “*Schlüsselamt* (office of the keys)” etc. are found. And, I will add, (I hope it will convince him) that the **presumption** must be that where the word “office” occurs in such texts that this is being used in the **simple** sense of a “commissioned work” (aufgetragenen Thuns) without any other **additional meanings** because this alone is the **essential** idea of office in the use of the German language as we have proven above.” Emphasis by Walther. *Lehre und Wehre* 7 (1861): 295f.

¹⁰ AE 4, 102-114. (WA 43, 212ff).

¹¹ AE 4, 178-180. (WA 43, 264f).

¹² SL XIII, 246f. “Nun steht hier, der HErr JESus sei vom Geist in die Wüste geführt, das ist, der Heilige Geist habe ihn in die Wüste gerufen. Solches hat der Evangelist insonderheit wollen melden, daß man sich hüte vor eigener Andacht; sintemal Christus selbst nicht aus eigener Andacht noch Vornehmen in die Wüste gegangen und da mit dem Teufel gerungen hat; wie viele thun, und mancherlei vornehmen, ohne GOTTes Wort, aus eigener Andacht. Aber es soll keineswegs sein. Niemand soll nichts anfangen noch irgend hinlaufen, GOTT zu dienen, er wisse denn gewiß, daß GOTT ihm solches geheißen habe, entweder durch sein Wort, oder durch Menschen, die an GOTTes Statt über uns Macht haben. Denn wer ohne solchen Beruf etwas vornimmt, wie Mönche und Nonnen in dem Klöster gelaufen sind, der thut nicht allein GOTT keinen Dienst, sondern thut wider den Gehorsam GOTTes. Darum ist uns die Exampel Christi wohl zu bedenken, daß er nicht von sich selbst ist in die Wüste gelaufen, sondern der Heilige Geist hat ihn geheißen; auf daß wir dergleichen auch thun, und nichts aus eigener Andacht vornehmen; sondern in allem, das wir thun, rühmen und sagen können: Es geschehe im Gehorsam und Befehl GOTTes.”

¹³ Thus again in Genesis, Luther returns to comment on Abraham’s obedience:

True obedience is not to do what you yourself choose or what you impose upon yourself, but what the Lord has commanded you through His Word (*quod Dominus per verbum suum te iusserit*). This definition is drawn from this very passage of Moses when he states about Abraham (Gen. 12:4): “So Abraham went, as the Lord had told him.” Here you have obedience defined after the manner of the dialecticians, as something that requires the Word of God. Therefore when God is not speaking but is keeping silence, there can be no obedience. Moreover, it is not enough that God speaks; but it is necessary that He speaks to you. Thus the Word of God came to Abraham that he should sacrifice his son. It was, therefore, true and praiseworthy obedience that Abraham wanted to carry out this command; but it was directed to him. But the fact that the descendants of Abraham wanted to imitate this same action was not obedience, even though the work was the same. For they had not been commanded to do this, as Abraham had been commanded (*erat iussus*). Similarly, the young man in the Gospel is told to sell everything and to follow Christ (Mark 10:21), and it would have been a most admirable work of obedience if he had obeyed. The monks boast that they are doing the same thing, and they regard this as a true praise of obedience; but it is not obedience, because Christ did not give them this command (*non ipsis hoc mandatum dedit Christus*). Careful note should be taken of this description: “Abraham went, as the Lord had told him.” The Lord, it says, has spoken and He has told Abraham that he should go out. Therefore this going out was a most sacred work, an obedience that was most pleasing to God. AE 2, 271 (WA 42, 455).

¹⁴ AAC 27.50.

¹⁵ This would of course tie into the entire idea of the masks of God (*larvae Dei*). For, as Luther would say, God loves to work from behind masks in order to test our faith, that is, to find out if we will believe him and obey him even when he speaks from the mouth of another person, and that all may be orderly and proper. Thus for example,

¹⁶ St. L. XIII, 247 “Mit den gemeinen Ständen und Werken der Liebe bedarf es keines neuen Befehls; denn solches ist bereits in den Zehen Geboten befohlen. Da heißt unser HERR GOTT einen jeden, daß er GOTTES Wort hören, GOTT lieben, GOTT anrufen soll, Vater und Mutter gehorsam sein, niemand tödten, nicht Unzucht treiben, sondern ehelich werden soll. Solches alles ist GOTTES Geschöpf und Befehl; derhalben darf man da nicht fragen nach dem Heiligen Geist, daß er dich oder mich sonderlich berufe, und heiße ehelich werden, Vather und Mutter sein usw. Solcher Befehl ist zufor da.”

¹⁷ Hauspostille, St. L. XIII, 2216. “Das ist eine nöthige Lehre, da sehr viel an gelegen ist, daß wir unsern Beruf in GOTTES Wort fassen, und ein jeder deß gewiß soll sein, daß alles, was er thut und läßt, in GOTTES Namen und aus GOTTES Befehl gethan und gelassen sei.” In translation: “This is a necessary doctrine on which much depends, that we take hold of our call in God’s word. Everyone should be certain that everything that he does or leaves undone he does or leaves undone in God’s name and at God’s command.”

¹⁸ So Luther on Genesis 17:9: “*Magna igitur sapientia est, cum homo facit, quod Deus praecipit, et non habita ratione aliorum, quid faciant, ipse vocationi serio servit, sed profeto pauci hoc faciunt.*” WA 42, 639 (SL. 1, 1071) In translation: “Therefore it is indeed great wisdom when a man does what God has commanded him and does not pay attention to others nor asks what they are doing but rather pays attention only to himself and his call.” LW 3, 128.

¹⁹ “Auslegungen über den Evangelisten Johannes” St. L. 8, 874. All of these ideas are reproduced by Melancthon in Article 27.50 of the Apology to which comments on the young man Christ bid to sell all his possessions. The Apology understands this as a call:

“Vollkommenheit steht in diesem Stück, da Christus spricht: “Folge mir nach!” Und darin steht eines jeden Christen Vollkommenheit, daß er Christo folge, ein jeder nach seinem Beruf (*in vocatione*); und sind doch die Berufe (*vocationes*) ungleich; ... Darum, obschon jener Jünglin berufen ist, daß er verkaufen sollte, betrifft sein Beruf nicht andere, wie Davids Beruf, daß er König werden sollte, nicht alle betrifft, Abrahams Beruf, daß er seinen Sohn opfern sollte, betrifft nicht andere. Also sind die Berufe ungleich; aber der Gehorsam soll gleich sein, und darin steht Vollkommenheit, so ich in meinem Beruf gehorsam bin, nicht so ich mich eines fremden Berufs annehme, da ich nicht Befehl oder Gottes Gebot davon habe.”

²⁰ Auslegungen über die Psalmen, St. L. V, 123f. “In order to say much with few words: here the entire law is set aside and the office of Christ is described most correctly that he will not use the sword or establish a new worldly kingdom but that he will be a teacher who will instruct men concerning an unheard of yet eternal decree of God. ... Our King, concerning whom the Holy Spirit here prophesies, was ordained and made King by God the eternal Father that he might teach. All at the same time he is Priest, Teacher, and Theologian that he might teach and instruct his people concerning God and rull only their consciences. Christ leaves behind these things of the kings of the world and says to his people: ‘With you it is not so.’ For his kingdom is in words and his office is that he should teach.”

²¹ Auslegungen über die Psalmen, St. L. V, 1347. “So ist nun Christus gen Himmel gefahren, sitzt zur rechten Hand GOTTes, und sein Amt ist, daß er die Seelen frei und los mache vom Gesetz, Sünde und Tod.”

²² “For outside of faith and outside of Christ human nature and ability is far to weak to do good works, to call upon God, to have patience in sufferings, to love one’s neighbor, to act upon commanded offices, to be obedient or to avoid evil lusts.” AC 20.37.

²³ Hauspostille, St. L. XIII, 2218f. “Darum ists nichts mit den Mönchen und mit ihrem Dreck, daß sie vorgeben und sagen: In gemeinen Ständen und Aemtern leben und seinem Beruf folgen, das ist nichts aber in ein Kloster gehen und ein Mönch werden, das ist etwas. Sie gedenken also: O das sind gemeine Werke, welche auch die Heiden thun; darum ists nichts sonderliches vor GOTT. So urtheilen sie von den Aemtern und Werken, ohne und außer GOTTes Wort. Wer aber GOTTes Wort hat, der spricht also: Wahr ists, so man es dem Werk nach rechnen will, ists ein sehr gering Ding, daß ein Knäblein in die Schule geht und Studirt, ein Mägdlein spinnt und näht, eine Dienstmagd im Hause kocht, spült, kehrt, Kinder umträgt, wischt, badet. Denn solches thun die Heiden und Unchristen auch. Aber sie thun es ohne GOTTes Wort, das ist, sie thun es nicht im Glauben, glauben nicht, daß GOTT ein Dienst und Gehorsam mit solchen Werken geschehe, und wissen seinen befehl nicht. Ein Sohn aber, Tochter und Magd, so Christen sind, wissen aus dem vierten Gebgot, daß GOTT solche Werke gebietet und haben will.

Gott macht durch sein Wort heilige Werke draus, und bedarf keine Chresams dazu. Denn das Wort ist der rechte Chresam, daß GOTT sagt durch den heiligen Paulum: “Ihr Kinder, seid gehrosam euern Eltern in dem HERN”; item: “Ihr Knechte, seid gehorsam euern leiblichen Herren mit Furcht und Zittern, in Einfältigkeit eures Herzens.” Eph. 6:1-5. Ohne solche Worte sind es schlechte gemeine Werke, so auch die Heiden thun. Aber durch solch Wort und Glauben werden die schlechten Werke (welche die Heiden ebensowohl thun) heilig und GOTT angenehm. Die zwei Stücke, GOTTes Wort und Glaube, machen die Werke angenehm.”

²⁴ AAC 23.32. “Denn die Werke und Arbeit im Ehestande für sich selbst ohne den Glauben werden hier allein nicht gelobt. So will er nun vor allen Dingen, daß sie Gottes Word haben und gläubig seien, durch welchen Glauben (wie er denn allenthalben sagt) sie empfangen Vergebung der Sünden und Gott versöhnt werden. Danach gedenkt er des Werkes ihres weiblichen Amtes und Berufs, gleichwie in allen Christen aus dem Glauben sollen gute Werke folgen, daß ein jeder nach seinem Beruf etwas tue, damit er seinem Nächsten nütz werde; und wie dieselben guten Werke Gott gefallen, also gefallen auch Gott solche Werke, die ein gläubig Weib tut ihrem Beruf nach; und ein solch Weib wird selig, die also ihrem Beruf nach im ehelichen Stand ihr weiblich Amt tut.”

²⁵ “Nun sie (die Roman Bischöfe) aber nicht recht Bischöfe sind oder auch nicht sein wollen, sondern weltliche Heren und Fürsten, die weder predigen noch lehren noch taufen noch kommunizieren, noch einiges Werk oder Amt der Kirche treiben wollen, dazu diejenigen, die solch Amt berufen treiben, verfolgen und verdammen, so muß dennoch um ihretwillen die Kirche nicht ohne Diener bleiben.” SA III, 10, 1-3.

²⁶ So Sanders lists another meaning of “Amt” as “individual ecclesiastical office-functions (einzelne kirchliche Amtsverrichtungen)”, 29. Thus we also see *Amt* is used as a synonym of *opus* and *munus* in Latin.

²⁷ LC 86.

²⁸ It is particularly the German with its flexible ability to form compound nouns that leads most often to terms like this.

²⁹ AC 28.20. “Derhalben ist das bischöfliche Amt nach göttlichen Rechten: das Evangelium predigen, Sünden vergeben, Lehre urteilen und die Lehre, so dem Evangelio entgegen, verwerfen und die Gottlosen, deren gottlos Wesen offenbar ist, aus christlichen Gemeinde ausschließen, ohne menschliche Gewalt, sondern allein durch Gottes Wort.”

³⁰ AAC 28.12. “non faciunt episcoporum officia iuxta euangelium.”

³¹ “This life is profitably divided into three orders: (1) life in the home; (2) life in the state; (3) life in the church. To whatever order you belong - whether you are a husband, an officer of the state, or a teacher of the church - look about you, and see whether you have done full justice to your calling and there is no need of asking to be pardoned for negligence, dissatisfaction, or impatience.” AE 3, 217.

³² AE 46, 220f.

³³ LC 91.

³⁴ “Das erste aber und das allerhöchste, daran alle anderen haften und hangen, ist lehren das Wort Gottes. Denn mit dem Wort lehren wir, segnen, binden und entbinden, taufen, opfern, richten und urtheilen alles.” SL 10,1572 (LW 40,21).

³⁵ AC 15.44. This text is from the German translation of the Apology. That the Triglotta translates this as “the ministry is the highest office in the Church” is misleading and demonstrates a bias in presenting this text.

³⁶ SL 10, 1592.

³⁷ LW 39, 313f. (SL 10, 1548f.)

³⁸ Tractate 61ff.

³⁹ Tractate 9. German text. The applicability of this text to this context is witnessed by Tractate 10 (the German Text): “We have a certain doctrine that the preaching office (*Predigtamt*) originates from the general call of the apostles.”

⁴⁰ Tractate 60f.

⁴¹ AC 28.20.

⁴² Tractate 60.

⁴³ Again a much misunderstood text: “All who are engaged in the clerical office or ministry of the Word are in a holy, proper, good, and God-pleasing order and estate, such as those who preach administer sacraments, supervise the common chest, sextons and messengers or servants who serve such persons. thes are engaged in works which are altogether holy in God’s sight.” LW 37,364.