

## Distinguendum Est<sup>1</sup>

### Observe Proper Distinctions.

[*Explanation Concerning The Title:* There is an ancient Latin proverb which states: *Qui beni distinguit beni docet*. This means: *He who makes the proper distinctions will prove to be the best teacher*. For example, Holy Scripture clearly distinguishes between the use of the word “Church” in referring to the invisible Church, the one holy Christian Church (Eph.1: 22,23; 5:23-27) and the use of the word “Church” to refer to a visible congregation, as it appears before the eyes of men, consisting of a group of people gathered around the Word of God, claiming to be Christians, but among whom are also unbelievers (Acts 5:1-11; 15:3,22). It is called a Church because of the true Christians who are members of the congregation.

Not only is this a Biblical distinction and therefore we must also make this distinction, but by observing this distinction we are kept from error. Whoever falsely teaches that their visible church body is the only saving Church, not only departs from Scripture, but teaches salvation by the “good” work of joining that particular church body. Whoever denies the doctrine of the divinely instituted local congregation, sets up a hierarchy or papacy of some form, robs the lay people of their God-ordained rights according to the Office of the Keys and destroys the right relationship between the pastor and his congregation.

Hence Pieper’s address on making careful and proper distinctions is of vital importance in the teaching of Biblical doctrine and in the rejection of error. Hence we have given this address the title: “OBSERVE PROPER DISTINCTIONS”. Ed.]

Students of Concordia!

People have been and are finding fault with Lutheran teachers and also with us that we use too many divisions and distinctions in teaching theology. How are we to view this rebuke (censure)? It must be admitted that distinctions also can be excessive. There are unnecessary distinctions, distinctions which rather promote confusion than further the knowledge of divine Truth, which lies revealed before us so clearly in Holy Scripture. On the other hand, experience proves that for the most part it is the enemies of divine Truth who reveal a great dislike (aversion) for distinctions. They wish to hide their erroneous thoughts under general, empty talk. They prefer vague generalities to necessary distinctions. Someone has correctly called the ‘*dealing in generalities*’ the greedy thing that devours Truth.

Let us ask *Holy Scripture* in regard to the matter of making distinctions! From beginning to end the Holy Scriptures inculcate *the necessity* of making distinctions. The Scriptures admonish us indeed not to omit the making of distinctions, but carefully and diligently to be skilled in using them. The Scriptures admonish us in the words of the Apostle *John*: “**Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world**” (1 John 4:1). In the words of *Christ* the Scriptures admonish: “**Beware of false prophets!**” (Matt 7:15) and: “**Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees!**” (Matt 16:6). The Scriptures admonish in the words of the Apostle *Paul*: “**Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them**” (Rom 16:17). The *norm* (standard) according to which we should make distinctions is the doctrine which we have learnt from the Apostles, as the

---

<sup>1</sup> Address for the beginning of the Student Year 1928-29). *Lehre und Wehre* 1928 pages 289-292, Vol 74.)

commendation is made of the congregation at Jerusalem: “**And they continued stedfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine**” (Acts 2:42).

And this is said concerning *every Christian* and they have made that their duty. No Christian who has let himself be led astray by false prophets will be able to excuse himself on the last day before the Judge of the world with these words: ‘You have not sufficiently warned me against false prophets.’ Also *the following* excuse will not be accepted: “Lord, I have not had someone who can correctly explain Your Word at hand (available).” Christ has indeed not directed us Christians to the interpreter of His Word (to the one who interprets His Word), but to His word itself. “**If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free**” (John 8:31,32), make you free also from false interpreters of Scripture. Moreover, Christ has so arranged Holy Scripture that the entire Christian doctrine is revealed in such Scripture passages which do not even require interpretation, to which *access is open to the learned and unlearned*, as the old teachers, also Luther, Chemnitz, and others, remind us.

Nevertheless, great danger of the Christian being led astray by false prophets remains. In the **first place**, the great danger lies before us in regard to the nature of and manner in which false prophets act (appear) in the church. The danger would be less if false teachers would announce themselves openly, as such as they are, if, eg, they would say: “Beware you Christians, false prophets are now coming!” Instead of this they come, as Christ instructs us, **in sheep’s clothing**. They conduct themselves outwardly as true teachers. They also constantly talk about Scripture. The situation becomes dangerous, as Luther often reminds us, when the devil also sneaks into the Scriptures in order to lead Christians away from the Scriptures by distorting and misquoting the Scriptures. The devil followed this method in the temptation of Christ.

*Luther*: “The devil takes great pleasure in lying and deceiving as St Paul says in 2 Cor 11 that he appears as an angel of light.” (SL XL, 545).

The great danger in the **second place**, which lies before us is that Christians are not as diligent as they ought to be in following the warning of Christ: “**Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord**” (Col 3:16). Through this *laxity* in the use of Scripture the capability of Christians to distinguish the false prophets from true is diminished.

But, oh, the great love and faithfulness of our Saviour! In order that the Christian when he is tempted in times of peril, does not fall, Christ out of great grace and mercy and in loving concern for the salvation of the Christian has even done something *special*. He has instituted an Office which is to continue in the Church until the last day. Into this Office men are to be called who have been *especially trained and skilled* in the teaching of Christian doctrine and in being able to distinguish between true and false doctrine, and who with this ability brought about in them by the Holy Spirit, constantly *stand watch* in regard to this Office, so that Christians remain in the one true faith and not be seduced into error. This is the *Public Office of the Ministry* which has been instituted by Christ, as distinct from the Office of the Ministry which has been commanded of all Christians as spiritual priests.

The Scriptures give us an exact description concerning the Office of the Public Ministry. The holy apostle and his assistants went out into the world by divine command to proclaim the Gospel to the world, just as in our time our messengers are sent to go out into the world by God’s command by the Church, especially to the heathen world. But wherever at the time of the apostles through missionary work, Christian congregations had arisen, there the apostle, and at his command also his assistants, provided (Titus 1:5) for them, that in these established congregations, congregation for congregation, city for city, they would see to it that “**elders**” or “**bishops**” were appointed, that is, pastors, men trained in teaching doctrine and defending the

truth “capable of teaching” and “capable of defending.” Titus 1:5 reads, “ **For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee.**”

They were to be experts in their profession in nurturing the congregation of God with God’s Word (1 Tim 3:1,5; Titus 1:9), experts also in their profession to stop the mouths of all false teachers (Titus 1:10,11). 1 Tim. 3:1,5 reads, “**This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)**” Titus 1:9 reads, “**Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.**” Titus 1:10, 11 states, “**For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake.**”

So also our missionaries who have been trained for the Office of the Public Ministry, as soon as congregations have been established by their service, enter upon the positions of local pastors, as Luther also reminds us (SL III, 723). That is the Office of the Public Ministry in the Christian congregation.

Students of Concordia! This is the Office for which you are preparing in our Concordia. You are not here preparing yourselves for the position of a congregational member, nor are you preparing for the office we usually call “elders” (deacons) whose establishment like the establishment of other helping offices for the spread of the Word has been left to Christian liberty and wisdom. No! You are here preparing yourselves for the Office of the Public Ministry which has been instituted by Christ for the Church for all time, of whose function the Apostle Paul reminds the pastors of Ephesus with the words, “**Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood**” (Acts 20:28).

From this now fully follows an admonition to you concerning yourselves, Students of Concordia. It is the admonition that in your studies you not merely employ some diligence, but great, very great diligence. For the carrying out of the Office of the Public Ministry, the half dark and half light of a morning or evening twilight is not satisfactory, but for the carrying out of this Office it is required that you be completely *bright (light)*. Without expressing it figuratively you must by God’s grace take the entire Christian doctrine in all its parts from the Scriptures themselves. From this Light from which you are illumined and by which your eyes are made clear sighted, you are then also capable of recognising false prophets with certainty, even under much sheep’s clothing. In this way you are capable, with you expertly — of teaching and distinguishing — to serve the congregation effectively for their salvation, also to perform the service which Christ has intended by the institution of the Office of the Public Ministry.

For this reason St Paul in 1 Tim 3 calls the Office of the Public Ministry an excellent work, the good work  $\kappa\alpha\tau\`{\epsilon}\xi\omicron\chi\eta\nu$  [kat` exocheen] (in the highest sense of the term), and may our prayer on this present day at the beginning of a new student year be as follows: “Come, Holy Spirit, come, Thou Giver of every gift, come and enter anew with us in our Concordia! May courage, steadfastness and understanding fill all teachers and students by Thine divine power and influence in order that the Office of the Public Ministry continues to be correctly carried out to the honour of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and for the salvation of many souls. Amen.”