

# Priesthood and Office

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### 1 Introduction

“Priesthood and Office” is one of those perennial topics in the Lutheran Church. The discussion on the ministry has been a lively one in the Lutheran Church at least since the old structures of the state church system which served the Lutheran Church well for quite a while disappeared, i.e. for the German area since the end of the old order in consequence of the Napoleonic wars. For North American Lutherans, the discussion on the ministry was a classical question in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, and most likely also in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>1</sup>

Let us first say something in regard to nomenclature. Often the term “priesthood of all believers” is used, which has been lately attacked as a pietist term and concept, not a term Luther used.<sup>2</sup> Some prefer the term “priesthood of the baptized”, a term which, to my knowledge, is not found in Luther either. Harald Goertz in his monography on the topic prefers the term “General or Common Priesthood” and suggests, that the best term would be “general priesthood of the Christians”.<sup>3</sup> I do not think that the difference in nomenclature is really important. For Luther, there is no priesthood without baptism and faith, certainly a person baptized but not believing is not a priest, since being a priest and being a Christians are inseparable for him.<sup>4</sup> I will follow in this paper Goertz’s suggestion and use the term “priesthood of all Christians”.

Then the term “office”, which is even more controversial. “Office” is like “ministry” a rather generic term, additionally it is not even a specific Christian term. Also, both have several layers of meaning, at least both can mean the action done or an institution that is commissioned to do certain actions. To be clear, one has to modify either word. Then there is in English the term “office of the [holy] ministry”, a term that is neither biblical nor confessional, but popularized by Tappert’s translation of AC V. Some prefer “office”, maybe because it sounds more official or because “ministry” in the church can be almost any task in the church nowadays. The parallel in AC V of the German “Predigtamt” and “ministerium docendi evangelii et porrigendi sacramentorum” should make us aware that there is no real difference between “Amt” (office) and ministerium (ministry). Here again, the term is not decisive. Additionally, Luther

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<sup>1</sup> For a summary of the standard view of the Missouri-Synod, cf. L. W. Spitz, “The Universal Priesthood of Believers”, *The Abiding Word*, vol. I (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1946), 321-341. An excellent discussion is also found in Kurt Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance* Fort Wayne, Ind.: International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, c. 1990, 103-111.

<sup>2</sup> Timothy J. Wengert. “The Priesthood of all Believers and Other Pious Myths”, *Priesthood, Pastors, Bishops. Public Ministry for the Reformation & Today*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008, 1-16. Wengert is probably right that Luther never used the term “priesthood of all believers”, but the question from a systematic point of view is of course, did he believe that all believers were priests? Wengert seem to attack a certain understanding of “priesthood of all believers” that includes the redundancy of the office. In rejection such an understanding, I wholeheartedly agree with him.

<sup>3</sup> Harald Goertz. *Allgemeines Priestertum und ordiniertes Amt bei Luther*. Marburg: N. G. Elwert, 1997 [Marburger Theologische Studien; 46].

<sup>4</sup> “Thereby the Holy Spirit teaches us that ointments, consecrations, tonsures, chasubles, albs, chalices, masses, sermons, etc., do not make priests or give power. Rather, priesthood and power have to be there first, brought from baptism and common to all Christians through the faith which builds them upon Christ the true high priest, as St. Peter says here.” Luther, Martin: *Luther's Works*, Vol. 39 : *Church and Ministry I*. Philadelphia : Fortress Press, 1999, c1970, p. 236. “priesterschaft und macht muß tzuvor da seyn, auß der tauffe mitt bracht, alle Christen gemeyn durch den glawben“ (WA 8,253,26)

translated *diakonia* in 2 Cor 5:18 as “Amt”, thereby stressing the serving character of the “Amt” or the official character of the “ministry”. When I use the term “office” here, I mean the public office in the church or the pastoral office or the preaching office. The question of this presentation is therefore, how does the general priesthood, common to all Christians, and the office, exercised by only a few, relate to each other?

## 2 Priesthood

When we use the term “priesthood of all Christians”, we use term and a concept that came to special prominence in the time of the reformation. Even though the term “priest” is not used for the office in the New Testament, it became the defining term for the office in the pre-reformation church and with it a concept of the duty or essence of the office that sees it primarily as a sacrificial office. The priest is there to sacrifice the body and blood of Christ to God in the mass. The Council of Florence-Ferrara (1438-45) in its decree for the Armenians “Exsulate Deo”, 22 November 1439 stated:

*The sixth [sacrament] is the sacrament of order, whose matter is that, through whose handing over the order is conferred: thus the presbyterate is transferred through the giving of the cup with the wine and the paten with the bread; the diaconate through the giving of the book of the gospels; the subdiaconate through the handing over of the empty cup and the empty paten on top of it; and similarly concerning the others through the assigning of things pertaining to their service.*

*The form of the priest is such: “receive the power [potestas] to offer the sacrifice in the church for the living and the dead, in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>5</sup>*

This position was reaffirmed in the Council of Trent, in the Decree on the Sacrament of order, 15 July 1563. The first canon states:

*If someone should say, that in the New Testament there is no visible and external priesthood, or there is no power [potestas] to consecrate and offer the true body and blood, and to forgive and retain sins, but only such an office and mere ministry to preach the gospel, or that those who do not preach, are no priests at all: he be anathema.<sup>6</sup>*

Together with such an understanding about the function of the priesthood / office came the concept that the difference between those who were priests and those who were not was a special power and inherent quality in the office bearer that enabled him to sacrifice and to forgive sins.

Against such an understanding, Luther and the other reformers stated first, that the office of the New Testament is not an office of sacrifice, certainly not an office that sacrifices the body and blood of Christ to God to receive grace. Rather, the office is an office of giving out the gospel. Therefore, even though Luther sometimes can use the term “priest” to refer to a pastor, this term is not really appropriate to describe what the office is all about. In Germany, it soon fell out of favour, whereas in Sweden the term continued in use, though not with the understanding of the Romish church.

Secondly, Luther rejected the idea that the difference between those in the office and all Christians lies in a special grace, a quality in the soul. The difference is one of service, so that there is no such thing as an indelible character. If a person leaves the office, i.e. he no longer serves as a pastor, he does not have then still some special powers in him.

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<sup>5</sup> Heinrich Denzinger: Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum. Kompendium der Glaubensbekenntnisse und kirchlichen Lehrentscheidungen. 40<sup>th</sup> ed. Ed. by Peter Hünermann. Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 2005 (abbreviated DH), no. 1326

<sup>6</sup> DH 1771

Third, Luther rejected the idea as if the gospel was the property of a special class in the church that then hands it down. The concept of the priesthood of all Christians also includes that everything that is Christ's belongs to all Christians.

All of that is connected with Luther's view that all Christians are priests. But the concept of the priesthood does not solely depend on the passages in the New Testament that talk about Christians being priests, a metaphor used relatively rarely. Rather, it is based also on other passages, like Rom 12:1 which use the language of sacrifice for all Christians. Additionally, since priesthood of all Christians and the keys are combined, then passages like Mt 18:18-20 and 1 Cor 3:21-23 also become important for the discussion.

The point to remember here is that the concept "priesthood of all Christians" is many layered and synthesizes different scriptural teachings. It is not simply a consequence of 1 Peter 2

### 3 The Biblical Base of the Priesthood of all Christians

#### 3.1 1 Peter 2

5 καὶ αὐτοὶ ὡς λίθοι ζῶντες οἰκοδομεῖσθε οἶκος πνευματικὸς εἰς ἱεράτευμα ἅγιον ἀνενέγκαι πνευματικὰς θυσίας εὐπροσδέκτους [τῷ] θεῷ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

9 ὑμεῖς δὲ γένος ἐκλεκτόν, βασιλῆιον ἱεράτευμα, ἔθνος ἅγιον, λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν, ὅπως τὰς ἀρετὰς ἐξαγγείλητε τοῦ ἐκ σκότους ὑμᾶς καλέσαντος εἰς τὸ θαυμαστὸν αὐτοῦ φῶς· 10 οἳ ποτε οὐ λαὸς νῦν δὲ λαὸς θεοῦ, οἱ οὐκ ἠλεημένοι νῦν δὲ ἐλεηθέντες.<sup>7</sup>

"5 You also, as living stones, are being built up as the spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ ...

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light ..." (NASB).

The classical passage about all Christians being priest in the New Testament is 1 Peter 2:5.9. . All Christians are not called priest (*hierais*), but rather a priesthood (*hierateuma*), in a quote that takes up Ex 19:6: "and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Thus, already Israel is as a collective a priestly people. Obviously this priesthood is different from the levitical priesthood. Its function is on the one side that Israel "is called to be the vehicle of the knowledge and salvation of God to the nations of the earth".<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, it also shows that all of Israel has the relationship to God that is normally attributed to priests.<sup>9</sup> The levitical priesthood ends with the end of the sacrificial cult and the end of the temple in Jerusalem. But the character of the people of God as a priestly people endures, as it was prophesied in Is 61:6: "But you will be called the priests of the Lord; you will be spoken of as ministers of our God. You will eat the wealth of nations."<sup>10</sup>

1 Peter 2:5. 9 are the only verses in the NT where *hierateuma* is used. There is a lengthy discussion on the meaning of this word in the commentaries. John Hall Elliott, former professor at St. Louis, then professor at the University of San Francisco, has since his dissertation advocated a corporate understanding of *hier-*

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<sup>7</sup> *The Greek New Testament*. 4th ed. Federal Republic of Germany : United Bible Societies, 1993, c1979.

<sup>8</sup> Thus Keil on Ex 19:6 (C. F. Keil, *The Pentateuch*, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2001, p.385). Similarly Childs (Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974, 367): "Israel as a people is also dedicated to God's service among the nations as priests function with a society."

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Martin Noth, *Das zweite Buch Mose*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959, 126 [ATD; 5].

<sup>10</sup> A. Pieper, *Jesajas II*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1919, to Is 61:6 (p.578): "Die Kirche des Neuen Bundes hat keinen besonderen äußerlichen Priesterstand mehr, sondern besteht aus lauter funktionierenden Priestern, die ohne weitere menschliche Vermittler selbständig vor Gott stehen und wahrhaftige, geistliche und gottgefällige Opfer darbringen ..."

*ateuma*. That is, he rejects the understanding that here every Christian is said to be a priest. Now mind please, that this does not mean that the New Testament does not call every Christian a priest. It does, in revelation. But Elliott rejects the translation of *hierateuma* as “priesthood”, rather he wants it to be translated as “body of priests” and makes the right observation, that a member of a group is not the same as the group (a colectivo ad distributivam non valet illatio).<sup>11</sup> Individual persons are member of the group “the people of the United States”, but no individual person is “the people of the United States”. Or, the reverse: The LCMS is made up of churches, pastors, and church workers, but the LCMS is neither a church nor a pastor nor a church worker, nor are any of these an LCMS.

For Elliott, the priestly sacrifices are therefore corporate, not individual. It “consists in the exercise of a holy life of obedience and well doing *coram Deo* and *pro hominibus*. ... This activity is basically a witness orientated toward the world and complements a second aspect of the community’s responsibility the proclamation of the word and salvation and mercy. No connection has been made in 1 P between this responsibility to the world and the inner-directed ministry discussed in 4:7-5:5. 2:4-10 speaks neither for nor against a particular ministry or office in the Church.”<sup>12</sup> As Elliott points out in his later commentary on 1 Peter: “This is not to question the clear biblical foundation for a theology of the *ministry* of all faithful, as Luther also stressed. That all baptized Christians are called to serve and minister to one another is a thought abundantly documented in the NT and evident in 1 Peter a well (4:8-11).”<sup>13</sup>

Elliott thus rejects the traditional understanding of the 1 Peter 2 as a *sedes doctrinae* for the priesthood of all believers. But is he right, even if we accept his corporate understanding of *hierateuma*? The stress of the passage is, as he observes, the corporate character of the church, not a statement of the individuals. But this can be played out too strongly. The elect people of God are elect as a group, but also as individuals. They are a holy people, but that does include that they are holy as individuals. So also, when they are as a community a *hierateuma*, there is something priestly about the individual. Such a conclusion becomes even more convincing, when 1 Peter is not taken in isolation, but is read canonically with other passages that attribute a priestly character to all Christians.<sup>14</sup>

Elliott remains strangely vague what then this priestly work is. If it is the holy life before God for men, would that include only what a congregation does corporately? And what exactly would that be in the first century? Hardly mission boards or soup kitchens! Is it only the corporate action in a worship service?<sup>15</sup> But in what way would that be a proclamation to the outside? Would it not suffice his criterion of the corporate nature of the priesthood of Christians that whatever they do, they do as such that are identified as Christians, that in that sense they are always acting as members of the church and because they are members of the church?

The spiritual sacrifices of 1 Peter 2:5 have to be understood, in my opinion, in connexion with Rom 12:1. They are the rational service of God, the sacrifice of one’s body, which is the worship of good works.<sup>16</sup> In

<sup>11</sup> John Hall Elliott, *The Elect and the Holy : an exegetical examination of I Peter 2:4-10 and the phrase "Basileion ierateuma"*, Leiden: Brill, 1966, 223.

<sup>12</sup> John Hall Elliott, *The Elect and the Holy*, 224.

<sup>13</sup> John Hall Elliot, *1 Peter. A New Translation and Commentary*, New York: Doubleday, 2000, 454

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Peter H. Davies, *The First Epistle to Peter*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990, 87, footnote 23, who references Best with whom he agrees, that this passage cannot be separated from its parallels in the OT and NT and that “the passage itself does not indicate whether the Christian is a priest himself or herself or simply part of a priestly community. To argue definitively for the latter, as Elliott does, is to go beyond the evidence.”

<sup>15</sup> Elliott does reject the interpretation that this means the participation in the priesthood of Christ and a participation in the sacrifice of the mass.

<sup>16</sup> “ἀνενέγκαι ... χριστοῦ. ‘To offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.’ Ἀναφέρειν is thus used, not in classical Greek, nor by St. Paul, but commonly in the LXX. (e.g. Gen. 13:2, 13, of the sacrifice of Isaac), by James (2:21), and in Heb. (7:27, 13:15). St. Peter does not define the sacrifices further than by saying that they are spiritual, as befits the spiritual house and the holy priesthood. The epithet πνευματικός distinguishes them from the offerings of the Law; they are not

this context is 1 Peter 1:15 important: the Christians are holy because they belong to the holy one, and this holiness is documented in their behaviour (*anastrophe*).

Additionally, 1 Peter 2:9 though has as a priestly function the proclaiming the virtues of the excellencies of God. *Exangello*, only used here in the NT, to proclaim outside (to the outside), brings something to the priesthood that often is not seen as a function of the priesthood: that the priesthood is not only directed towards God, that it is not only a mediation between God and man, and that has not only to do with sacrifices, but that it has to do with proclamation. Where does this thought come from? We saw already above that Ex 19:6 has the thought of Israel as a priestly people among the pagans and the mediator of salvific knowledge to the gentiles. It might be also that here a certain aspect of the levitical priesthood plays into this.

Contrary to what the popular image of a levitical priest is, they are not only sacrificing animals, priest are also teaching torah.<sup>17</sup> In Dtn. 33:10, Moses blessing the tribes, he says of Levi: “They shall teach Thine ordinances to Jacob, And Thy law to Israel. They shall put incense before Thee, And whole burnt offerings on Thine altar.” In Hosea 4:6 we read: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.” Here the judgment of God comes on the priest because they have not done what is their office: to teach the people so that they know, and to teach the law of God.<sup>18</sup> Our passage could therefore allude to this function of the levitical priesthood.

### 3.2 Revelation

There are additional passages in Revelation where Christians are called priests (Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). Rev 1:6 and 5:10 paraphrase Ex 19:6a: “And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” (NASB). Rev 20:6 alludes also to Ex 19:6 in its description of the Christians as priest of God and Christ and rulers with Christ. They do not explicate what the priesthood entails, though. In the context of revelation the stress seems to be on the intercession of the Christian.<sup>19</sup>

### 3.3 Rom 12:1

(1) Παρακαλῶ οὖν ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, διὰ τῶν οἰκτιρμῶν τοῦ θεοῦ παραστήσαι τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν θυσίαν ζῶσαν ἁγίαν εὐάρεστον τῷ θεῷ, τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν ὑμῶν· <sup>2</sup>καὶ μὴ συσχηματίζεσθε τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ,

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shadows and symbols, but realities, such as spirit offers to spirit, and a holy priesthood to a holy God. It would, however, be pressing the word too far to regard it as excluding all connexion with material objects; for a gift of money is spoken of as a θυσία (Phil. 4:18; cf. Acts 10:4; Heb. 13:16). Purely spiritual acts of self-dedication, praise, faith, are also spoken of as sacrifices (Rom. 12:1; Phil. 2:17; Eph. 5:1, 2); and no doubt no sacrifice is πνευματική without the act of self surrender. Here, where the sacrifices are those of the community, it seems impossible so to restrict them as to make them merely another name for φιλαδελφία, or for the putting away of all malice or wickedness. The praise and prayers of the assembly of brethren are no doubt meant, but their gifts are not excluded.” (Bigg, Charles: *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*. Edinburgh : T&T Clark International, 1901, S. 129).

<sup>17</sup> Actually the person who brings the sacrificial animal is killing it (except for birds, cf. Lev 1:15). The priest only sprinkles the blood around the altar or pours it at the footing of the altar (Lev 1-3) and he burns the meat or the fat.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. also Jer 18:10. Another duty of the priest is the distinction between pure and impure, cf. Ez 44:23.

<sup>19</sup> Louis Brighton, though, in his commentary on revelation (p.142) emphasizes the connexion between intercession and proclamation: “The fact that his people fulfill their royal reign as priests suggests that the purpose of God’s kingdom on earth is an intercessory one. That is, through the proclamation of the redemptive victory of the Lamb, God’s royal priests on earth hold up before his heavenly throne the atonement or blood covering (ἱλαστήριον, Rom 3:25; Heb 9:5; ἱλασμός, 1 Jn 2:2; 4:10), as they point people through it to the mercy of God (see 1 Pet 2:5-9) ... *For the royal priesthood of God’s saints is an image, a living picture of the royal priesthood of Christ, a priesthood for the salvation of all people by his own blood and through the proclamation of the gospel* (cf. Heb 4:14-5:10; 9:11-28; 10:19-25).”

ἀλλὰ μεταμορφοῦσθε τῇ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοῦς εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν ὑμᾶς τί τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ εὐάρεστον καὶ τέλειον.<sup>20</sup>

(1) Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. (2) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (NASB)

Here Paul exhorts the Christians to present their bodies as a living sacrifice. This takes up priestly imagery, but also shows how priestly metaphors are transformed. The levitical priesthood sacrifices by killing animals or destroying inanimate offerings. The Christians sacrifice something that is alive and stays alive. The point of comparison is that the body of the Christian, and that means here of course not simply the material object, but also what the Christians do with their body, are given to God, they are no longer property of the Christians. “The Christians sacrifice their bodies by not regarding them as their property, but offering them to God, putting them into the service of God.”<sup>21</sup>

### 3.4 Mt 18:18-20

This is not a classical passage concerning the priesthood of all believers, but it needs to be touched upon here, because since the Reformation it is often used in the context of the debate on priesthood and ministry. The point the reformers make is that the keys, that is the power to forgive sins, and thus the gospel, are not given to subset of persons in the church, but rather to the church at large, so that they can be exercised by the smallest of Christian gatherings, which would be two or threere persons.<sup>22</sup> It is important to remember, that the power to forgive sins is the administration of the gospel, and thus there is no power reserved for a subset of Christians that is not shared by all Christians in the church because the gospel is the *only* thing the church has to say.<sup>23</sup> For Luther, this is not only a corporate power (owned by all, but exercised only by a few), but happens whenever one Christian says the gospel to another Christian.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *The Greek New Testament*. Federal Republic of Germany : United Bible Societies, 1997, c1982, S. Ro 12:1-2

<sup>21</sup> G. Stöckhardt, *Commentar über den Brief Pauli and die Römer*, St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1907, 557 (my translation)

<sup>22</sup> “Accordingly, the binding or loosing of which Jesus speaks in 18:18 is precisely the retaining or the forgiving of *sins*. When concerned and loving Christians reprove one of the greatest in their midst and that brother repents and again believes, his sins are loosed from him, released and forgiven. The word of forgiveness that the Christians speak together will be the earthly enactment and bestowal of what has already taken place in God’s own presence. In similar but sorrowful fashion, if the congregation finds that it must bind upon someone his or her sins and announce that the unrepentant sinner is no longer a Christian nor a member of the church, then that words that binds sins is a true word, fastening on earth what God has already done in heaven.” (Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Matthew 11:2-20:34*, St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 2010, 922).

<sup>23</sup> I am, of course, not denying that the church has to preach the law, too. But the law is not specific to the church. Additionally, the church’s power is the power of the gospel. The church is an association of faith in the hearts, not a corporation or a government. We encounter the power of the law e.g. in the government and in the orders of creation, in short, the law is encountered in all three estates. The gospel, though, is proper to the church.

<sup>24</sup> From Luther’s sermon on Mt. 18:18-20: “Here the Lord Christ extends this comfort further, but in such a way that it does not leave the community of Christians. For above he has said that one should scold and excommunicate the sin in the church, also preach forgiveness of sin, so that one may know what sin is. Now he [Jesus] says that he does not only want it in the church, but this right and freedom shall also have where two or three are gathered in his name, that they should proclaim to each other comfort and forgiveness of sins and tell each other. He pours over them more richly and puts for them forgiveness of sins in all corners, that one should not alone find forgiveness for sins in the congregation, but also at home, in the field, in the garden, whenever one comes to the other, there he shall have comfort and salvation. And this shall serve me that, when I am troubled and sad or find myself in affliction and weakness, that I lack something, whatever hour or time it may be, and one does not find at all time public preaching in the church, and then my brother or neighbor comes to me, then I should lament it to him who is my neighbor and ask him for comfort, and what he gives me as comfort and tells me, that shall be also a ‘yes’ with God in heaven. On the other hand, I too shall comfort the other and say: ‘Dear friend, dear brother, why don’t you let your trouble go? For it is not God’s will that suffering happens to you, God has let his Son die for you, not that you should be sad, but that you should be happy. Therefore be of good cheer and comforted, you will serve God thereby and do him a favor.’” And kneel down

#### 4 Priesthood of the Christians in the Confession

It has often been remarked that the priesthood of all Christians, though it is important and often used by Luther, does not have a prominent place in the confessions. 1 Peter 2 is quoted Apol. XXIV,26 as a proof

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and pray together the Lord's prayer, this is certainly answered in heaven, for Christ says: 'I am in the midst with them.' He does not say: I see it, I hear it, or I will come to them, but I am already there. When thus you comfort me and I comfort you, and we both do it to our betterment and salvation, then I should believe you and you should believe me, that God the heavenly father will give to us for what we ask, and what we lack. How could Christ pour over us more richly and provide for us better?

WA 47, 297,32-298,22: Alhier strecket der Herr Christus diesen Trost weitter aus, jedoch also, das ehr nicht gehe aus der gemeinschaft der Christen. Den droben hat ehr gesaget, das man in der kirchen die Sunde sol straffen und bannen und auch predigen vergebung der Sunden, auff das man wisse, was Sunde sej. Nun saget ehr, das ehre nicht allein in der kichen also haben wolle, sondern diess Recht und diese freiheit sollen auch haben, wo ihr zween oder drej in seinem namen versamlet wehren, das sie unter einander trost und vergebung der sunden verkundigen und zsprechen sollen. Überschuttet also seine Christen noch viel reichlicher und stecket ihnen mit Vergebung der Sunde alle winckel vol, auff das sie nicht allein in der Gemein vergebung der sunden finden sollen, sondern auch daheim im Hause, auff dem felde, im Garten, und wo nur einer zum andern kompt, da solle ehr trost und rettung haben, Und solle mir auch dar zu dienen, das, wen ich betrübt und traurig bin oder in trübsal und gebrechlichkeit stecke, das mir etwas mangelt, welche Stunde und Zeit es sein mag, und man nicht offentlich in der kirchen allezeit mag predigt finden, und und mein Bruder oder Nehester zu mir kompt, so sol ichs dem, der mir der neheste ist, klagen und ihnen umb Trost bitten, was ehr mir als dan für Trost gibt und zusaget, das soll bei Gott im Himmel auch Ja sein, Widerumb sol ich einen anders auch trösten und sagen: Lieber freund, lieber Bruder, worumb lessestu nicht dein Bekummernis? Ists doch nicht gottes wille, das dir ein einiges leid widerfahre. Gott hat seinen Sohn für dich sterben lassen, nicht das du trauren, sondern frolich sein mögest. Drumb biss guths muths und getrost, du wirst Gott daran einen Dienst und gefallen thun, und niddergekniet mit einander und ein vater unser gebetet, das is den gewisslich erhöhet im Himmel, dan Christus spricht: *Ich bin da mitten unter ihnen.* Er spricht nicht: Ich sehe es. Ich höre es, oder ich wil zu ihnen komen, sondern ich bin schon da. Wen also du mich und ich dich trösten, und thuns beide zu unser besserung und seligkeit, so sol ich dir und du mir glauben, das Gott der himelische Vater uns geben wolle, worumb wir bitten, und was uns mangelt. Wie kondte uns der Herr Christus reichlicher überschutten und besser versorgen?

"Those who are with the crowd of the Christian church, can experience richly, what the will of God is, and when you hear the preacher, then one hears God himself. Why do you need to crawl into a corner? The same way, when brothers comfort each other, that too is God's will and word. The whole world is full of comfort and all corners are stuck fully with revelation, and God talks to me from the pulpit, he talks to me through my neighbor, through my good friends and comrades, through my husband, through my wife, through my master, through my manservant, also father and mother etc. My word and your word be as powerful as when God himself had talked to us."

Ibid.,298,35-299,2: „Die jhenigen, so bei dem Hauffen der Christlichen kirchen sind, können reichlich erfahren, was Gottes wille sej, und wen man den Prediger horet, so horet man Gott selbst. Was bedarffstu es, das du in einem winckel kreichst? Item, so Bruder sich unter einander trösten das ist auch gottes wille und wort. Es ist die gantze welt vol trostes und alle Winckel vol offenbarung gesteckt, und redet Gott mit mir von der Cantzel, ehr redet mit mir durch meine nachbarn, durch meine gute freunde und gesellen, durch meinen Mann, durch mein Weib, durch meinen Herrn und durch meinen knecht, item vater und Mutter etc. Mein und dein wort sol sein also krefftig, als wens gott selbst zu uns geredet hette.“

"Oh, what more is it? They say, and blow of the glorious comfort of absolution in the public sermon. But Christians should not do that, but hold fast to the comfort, that one has at one's home, as when a brother or another pious Christian comes to you not for money or goods, but in the name of Christ and hears from you this comfort. Therefore it is not necessary, that to be comforted one runs to St. James [Santiago de Compostella], but when you have a frailty, then go to your pastor or to your neighbor, if you have one, and say: I have sadness. Then he shall comfort you and say: Christ wants to have joyous servants, and he has not died so that you walk around hanging your head, with a frown, but so that you give thanks. There you hear God talking himself with you."

Ibid., 299,7-19: Ej, was istst den mehr? sagen sie und schlagen also in windt den hehrlichen Trost des Lossprechens in der offentlichen Predigt. Aber das sollen Christen nicht thun, sondern fest halten uber dem Trost, den man bei sich im Hause hatt, als wen ein Bruder oder sonst frommer Christ nicht umb geldes und guths willen, sondern im namen Christi zu dir keme und horet von dir diesen Trost. Derhalben so istst nicht von nothen, das man nach dem Trost zu S. Jacob lauffe, sondern hastu gebrachen, so gehe hin zum Pfarherr oder zu deinem nehesten, so du einen hast, und sage: Ich hab traurigkeit. Da sol ehr ihnen dan trösten und sagen: Christus will froliche diener haben, und ehr ist drumb für dich nicht gestorben, das zu den kopff henge und die stirn runtzeln soltest, sonder Gott dancksagen mogest. Da hörestu dan Gott selbst mit dir reden."

text that the sacrifices in the church are spiritual sacrifices.<sup>25</sup> The most important and controversial passage is in the Treatise 69: “Finally, this is also confirmed by Peter’s statement ‘You are a royal priesthood’. These words refer to the true church, which, since it has alone the priesthood, certainly has the right to elect and ordain servants.”<sup>26</sup> Here the priesthood is not connected to spiritual sacrifices, but rather to the choosing and ordaining of pastors, a connexion that is not obvious. The context also shows that this quotation from 1 Peter 2 is the last in a row to prove the point that the church has the power to call, choose, and ordain servants. Melanchthon quotes also Eph 4:8.11 and Mt. 18:20. In this context we also find the famous story from Augustin about the two men shipwrecked.<sup>27</sup> Thus, Melanchthon connects here priesthood and office in way which we do not find in 1 Peter 2. To understand this passage, we have to go back to earlier writings of Melanchthon and especially Luther’s.

Already in his Loci of 1521 Melanchthon states that all Christians are allowed to teach, baptize, bless the table [of the Lord], since, according to Mt. 18, all have the keys.<sup>28</sup> Then he goes on and explains that all Christians are priest, for they all sacrifice their bodies and quotes 1 Peter 2. Melanchthon does not discuss the question who has the right to call in his Loci of 1521.

In Luther, we find, especially in his earlier days, an extensive use of the concept of the Christians as priests with a decidedly polemical intention.<sup>29</sup> First, against the Roman Catholic understanding of the ecclesiastical ministry as the special priesthood, Luther emphasizes that in the New Testament there is only one priesthood, shared by all Christians. To be a Christian and to be a priest is one and the same thing. The difference between those in the office and those not in it cannot therefore be described as one between priests and non-priests. Secondly, Luther does connect the priesthood with the administration of the means of grace. Because all Christians are priests, therefore they can administer the means of grace.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche. 5th ed. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963 [abbreviated as BSLK] 356,25-27. There also a discussion of spiritual sacrifices in the New Testament. Similar FC SD VI,22 (BSLK 968,48-969,1): our spiritual sacrifices are pleasing to God on account of faith.

<sup>26</sup> Postremo hoc etiam confirmat sententia Petri: ‘Vos estis regale sacerdotium,’ quae verba ad veram ecclesiam pertinent, quae, cum sola habeat sacerdotium, certe habet jus eligendi et ordinandi ministros.” (BSLK 491,36-40).

<sup>27</sup> Tract. 66-68 (BSLK 491,1-35).

<sup>28</sup> Loci 1521 (ed. Poehlmann), Loc 8,120, p. 360.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. the famous passages from “To the Christian Nobility” (1520) (AE 44,128): “The pope or bishop anoints, shaves heads, ordains, consecrates, and prescribes garb different from that of the laity, but he can never make a man into a Christian or into a spiritual man by so doing. He might well make a man into a hypocrite or a humbug and blockhead, but never a Christian or a spiritual man. As far as that goes, we are all consecrated priests through baptism, as St. Peter says in I Peter 2[:9], ‘You are a royal priesthood and a priestly realm.’ The Apocalypse says, ‘Thou hast made us to be priests and kings by thy blood’ [Rev. 5:9–10]. The consecration by pope or bishop would never make a priest, and if we had no higher consecration than that which pope or bishop gives, no one could say mass or preach a sermon or give absolution. Therefore, when a bishop consecrates it is nothing else than that in the place and stead of the whole community, all of whom have like power, he takes a person and charges him to exercise this power on behalf of the others. It is like ten brothers, all king’s sons and equal heirs, choosing one of themselves to rule the inheritance in the interests of all. In one sense they are all kings and of equal power, and yet one of them is charged with the responsibility of ruling. To put it still more dearly: suppose a group of earnest Christian laymen were taken prisoner and set down in a desert without an episcopally ordained priest among them. And suppose they were to come to a common mind there and then in the desert and elect one of their number, whether he were married<sup>17</sup> or not, and charge him to baptize, say mass, pronounce absolution, and preach the gospel. Such a man would be as truly a priest as though he had been ordained by all the bishops and popes in the world. That is why in cases of necessity anyone can baptize and give absolution. This would be impossible if we were not all priests. Through canon law<sup>18</sup> the Romanists have almost destroyed and made unknown the wondrous grace and authority of baptism and justification. In times gone by Christians used to choose their bishops and priests in this way from among their own number, and they were confirmed in their office by the other bishops without all the fuss that goes on nowadays. St. Augustine, Ambrose, and Cyprian each became [a bishop in this way].”

<sup>30</sup> This is not just the young Luther. Thus Luther in a sermon on John 20:19ff from 1540: “But Christ has established a comforting and blessed kingdom on earth, when he says: ‘As the father has sent me, thus I am sending you,’ there he has consecrated *us all to priests*, that one should proclaim the forgiveness of sins to the other.” (WA 49,150,8-11; my translation, my emphasis).



Third, this does not mean that there is no divinely established office. The office is necessary in a congregation and only a person who is duly called is to preach and administer the sacraments in a congregation. Fourth, the keys are given to the church, not to group in the church.<sup>31</sup>

*It follows from this argument that there is no true, basic difference between laymen and priests, princes and bishops, between religious and secular, except for the sake of office and work, but not for the sake of status. They are all of the spiritual estate, all are truly priests, bishops, and popes. But they do not all have the same work to do. Just as all priests and monks do not have the same work. This is the teaching of St. Paul in Romans 12[:4–5] and I Corinthians 12[:12] and in I Peter 2[:9], as I have said above, namely, that we are all one body of Christ the Head, and all members one of another. Christ does not have two different bodies, one temporal, the other spiritual. There is but one Head and one body.*

*Therefore, just as those who are now called “spiritual,” that is, priests, bishops, or popes, are neither different from other Christians nor superior to them, except that they are charged with the administration of the word of God and the sacraments, which is their work and office, so it is with the temporal authorities. They bear the sword and rod in their hand to punish the wicked and protect the good. A cobbler, a smith, a peasant – each has the work and office of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops. Further, everyone must benefit and serve every other by means of his own work or office so that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, just as all the members of the body serve one another [I Cor. 12:14–26].* 32

What this means is that for the confessions priesthood and the keys are connected. Therefore, that what is common to all (namely the keys) can only be publicly administrated with the consent of all. That is the theological reason why all Christians are involved in the election of pastors. And, as the example shows, in emergency situation every Christian can administer baptism and absolve because he (or she!) belongs to the order of priesthood. What Melancthon does not explore is, in what way the Christian saying the gospel in his or her station of life is connected with the priesthood and thus with the keys. This is, even though not explicitly stated, historically and systematically the background of Luther’s remark on the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren in the Smalcald Articles (SA III,4). What I have not done here, since I am sure that the other presenters have or will deal at length with it, is the teachings on the confessions on the divine institution of the office.

## **4.1 In Walther**

### **4.1.1 Church and Ministry**

Walther’s “Church and Ministry” or “Church and Office” is not only a classical statement of his theology, but also has been affirmed by the Synod in convention twice as the position of the LCMS. Walther’s claim is not to give his opinion, but as the German title says, to present “The Voice of our Church on the question of Church and Ministry / Office.” This is the reason why the book consists mostly out of quotations, because Walther wants to give what the Lutheran Church historically has taught. What follows is, for time’s sake, only a cursory overview.

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<sup>31</sup> From the House Postil, a sermon on the feast of Peter and Paul, 1544: “The keys of the kingdom of heaven are nothing but that one forgives the sins of those who believe in Christ and receive the gospel and desire the forgiveness of sins and thus unlock heaven to them, which is otherwise locked, when sins are not forgiven. On the other hand to those who do not believe in Christ and do not receive the gospel, but continue in sin without improvement, to those their sin shall not be forgiven, but heaven shall be locked. Such a treasure has the church, that is: the crowd or assembly that confesses with Peter that Jesus is the Christ and the son of the living God.” (WA 52,682,29-37).

<sup>32</sup> Luther, Martin: *Luther's Works, Vol. 44 : The Christian in Society I*. Philadelphia : Fortress Press, 1999, c1966, p. 129

Thesis IV “On the Church” states that the keys are given to the true church consisting of believers and saints, and that the church therefore has all heavenly goods, rights, powers, etc.<sup>33</sup>

Thesis I “on the sacred preaching office or pastoral office”: “The sacred preaching office or pastoral office is a different office from the priestly office, which all believers have.” Proofs from Scripture: 1 Cor 12:29; Rom 10:15; James 3:1.<sup>34</sup>

Thesis II affirms the divine institution of the preaching office. Scriptural proof:

- from prophecy Ps 68:12 and other texts
- from the call of the apostles to the teaching office
- from passages where those who were called mediately are referred to as called by God.
- from passages where the apostles call themselves coworkers of those who are mediately called.

Thesis IV states that the preaching office is not a holier state, like the levitical priesthood, but an office of service.<sup>35</sup>

Thesis VI states that the preaching office is conferred by the congregation as the proprietor of ecclesiastical power or the keys, through a call.<sup>36</sup>

Thesis VII states that the preaching office is the conferred power to exercise the rights of the spiritual priesthood in the public office on account of the community.<sup>37</sup>

Walther thus affirms both: all Christians, since they have the keys, have everything that the Lord has given to his church, but not all Christians are to exercise the keys in public. Rather, the office is established by God. One comes into the office by action of the church. The famous “Uebertragungslehre” (doctrine of conferral/transferral) does not mean that the office is simply derived from the priesthood and not from an independent mandate of Christ.

#### 4.1.2 Other writings

Here we are taking only a few glimpses at other writings of Walther. I am indebted here to John Drickamer’s dissertation that gives a good selection of primary sources both in German and English.

Walther emphasizes in his sermons the responsibility of the priesthood of all Christians. It is not so much a question of rights, rather it is a question of duty. The Christian cannot escape the spiritual responsibility he has for his neighbour:

*My dear ones, if we meet a person lying helpless in physical misery, wounded and beaten, we consider it our duty to get to work and not first to wait for the regular physician. We bind up his wounds and take him to a place where he can be cared for. We consider ourselves called to this task through the call of Christian love. So if a Christian finds a person wounded in his soul, and if he can do something to help, then he should also not think, ‘What does that concern me? The spiritual physician, the preacher, can come and help him.’ No, O Christians, here you have the call of*

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<sup>33</sup> C. F. W. Walther, *Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt*. 3 ed. Erlangen: Verlag von Andreas Deichert, 1875, 29ff. Proof from Scripture: Mt 16,15-19; Mt 18,18; Jn 20:22,23; Jn 3:28,29: the church as the bride of Christ has everything the groom has. 1 Cor 3:21-23: Everything is yours; 1 Peter 2:8. The equivalent passages in the English translations (e.g. C. F. W. Walther, *Church and Office*, St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 2012) are easily found, therefore I do not cross-reference them.

<sup>34</sup> C. F. W. Walther, *Die Stimme ...*, 174ff.

<sup>35</sup> C. F. W. Walther, *Die Stimme ...*, 221.

<sup>36</sup> C. F. W. Walther, *Die Stimme ...*, 315.

<sup>37</sup> C. F. W. Walther, *Die Stimme ...*, 342.

*love, which you have also received. Yes, even if the priest and Levite pass the needy person by, you should prove yourself, as a merciful Samaritan, all the more zealous.*<sup>38</sup>

This does not mean that the distinction between priesthood and office is erased. Certain tasks are given to the pastor, not to every Christian. But the distinction is not the question of ability or validity:

*Granted, except for a case of necessity, no layman should take over the official acts of a called pastor, but not because a layman as such is not capable and his official acts would be invalid and powerless, but only for this reason that he not confuse the church by disturbing the order which God has made in His church.*<sup>39</sup>

Since the pastor is the one who is called to preach and teach publicly, Walther was opposed to conventicles where laypeople assume duties that are not theirs. There is a distinction between witnessing to one's neighbour and teaching in the church. Walther was, nevertheless open to auxiliary offices in the church. But whoever teaches publicly in a congregation does so by the authority and under the supervision of the pastor, who is called to teach publicly:

*In order that the Word of God may richly and rightly dwell in a congregation it is finally necessary that the congregation shall tolerate no division by conventicles, that is by meetings for doctrinal instruction or prayer conducted by persons not called and beyond the supervision of the divinely instituted public ministry.*<sup>40</sup>

Walther emphasizes again and again in his sermons that the office is by divine right:

*From this we indeed see that, according to the Word of God, Christ has certainly instituted in His church an office which not all Christians should hold. For the apostle writes explicitly that Christ has not only made all, but only 'some', to be apostles, prophets and evangelist, that is, apostles' assistants, but has also not made all, but only 'some' to be pastors and teachers, that is mediately called preachers of a local congregation.*<sup>41</sup>

*The preaching office is not simply a beneficial human ordinance. It is not an institution perhaps like that of the teacher in the schools or of the master workman in the workshops, which someone hit upon because he perceived how necessary and useful it would be to be instructed also in religion. No, the preaching office has a higher origin. This office is a holy, divine office. For God Almighty has instituted it and chosen it as the normal means through which He desires to lead people to salvation.*<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> C. F. W. Walther, Gnadenjahr, St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1891, 440, translated in John Martin Drickamer (The Doctrine of the Church in the Writings of Dr. C. F. W. Walther. Th.D. Thesis Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1978), 250-51. "No one should say, 'But I am no pastor, no teacher, no preacher. Let him teach, admonish, comfort, convert and bring to Christ. But I will stay in my vocation. No, my Christian. You have been baptized and through holy baptism you have already been called and anointed a priest of God. Through holy baptism every Christian is consecrated, ordained and installed in the office of teaching, admonishing, comforting and rebuking his neighbour. Through holy baptism every Christian has received not only the power, the full authority, and the right, but also the obligation, under penalty of losing divine grace, himself to watch, care, and help that other may also be enlightened and brought to Christ, the Bishop of their souls.'" (C. F. W. Walther, Gnadenjahr, 438, translated in Drickamer, *ibid.*, 256-257).

<sup>39</sup> C. F. W. Walther, Amerikanisch-lutherische Epistel-Postille, St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, [1882] 65, translated in Drickamer, *ibid.*, 252..

<sup>40</sup> C. F. W. Walther, The Form of a Christian Congregation, St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 2005 [c. 1961] p. 91 (§ 25). As an anecdote on the side it may be said here that there was a serious discussion in the old Missouri Synod if a lay man should publicly pray in a church assembly (like a voter's meeting, e.g.). There were those who thought that this was already an overstepping into the duties of the pastor.

<sup>41</sup> Walther, Brosamen, 421, translated in Drickamer, *ibid.*, 265.

<sup>42</sup> Walther, Amerikanisch-lutherische Epistel-Postille, St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, [1882] 360, translated in Drickamer, *ibid.*, 267 (translation modified).

### 4.1.3 Summary

We see in Walther both: a strong emphasis on the priesthood of all Christians and its duties and a firm confession of the divinely instituted office. Against some Lutherans of his time, he saw the difference between the office and the priesthood not in a difference of powers in regard to the gospel, but a difference in duties assigned.<sup>43</sup>

## 5 A Systematic Evaluation and some Practical Implications

### 5.1 Systematic Evaluation

Let us first state what is relatively uncontroversial: all Christians are priests and are called to perform spiritual sacrifices. They do this collectively as the church, but also individually in their daily life when they offer up the *logike latreia*, i.e. when they live a Christian life, a life of good works, of love towards their neighbour, when they patiently endure sufferings imposed on them because they are Christians.

It becomes more controversial when we go beyond this and ask what the relationship between priesthood and office is and what the relationship between priesthood and word and sacrament is.

What we see here is that there is no neat division in the sense: only the pastor *can* do *these things*. The distinction between priesthood and office is not one of ability or power. Such a distinction was made in mediaeval and contemporary Roman Catholic theology, where the priest has a special ability the layperson is missing that enables the priest to offer the sacrifice of the mass and administer especially the sacrament of penance / reconciliation.

Let me say a few words here to the pair “ontological versus functional view of the ministry”. I think that this is a very bad pairing, since these are not true opposites. I ask your pardon right away for what follows, because it is somewhat pedantic. “Ontological” means pertaining to ontology, i.e. the doctrine of being. Ontology asks the question what kinds of beings there are. To ask “what kind of being is the office” is to ask the ontological question. If one answers e.g. “The office is a class of certain actions performed repeatedly by a person”, one has given an answer to the kind of being the office is and therefore has made an ontological statement while *expressing a functional view of the ministry*. “Function” is an ontological category (namely habitual or repetitive action). Therefore the opposition functional vs. ontological makes no sense. Ontological vs. epistemological or aesthetic or ethical view of the office might be true alternatives, but not ontological and functional. So, the best thing is to forget this terminology. The difference between Roman Catholic and Lutheran view of the ministry is not ontological vs. functional, but the answer to the question if the ministry consists (at least in part) in a specific quality that inheres in the soul of the office-bearer and enables him to do certain things. The difference is not ontological vs. functional, it is inherent quality vs. service to others.

Neither does the difference consist in this that the priesthood is only directed to God, but not to the neighbour. Already 1 Peter 2:9 talks about a proclamation of the *aretai* (virtues) of God as a function of the priesthood, something that is directed to those outside of the congregation. Since the priesthood and the possession of the keys are seen together in the Treatise, this implies now also that the priesthood has a function in the congregation. Because all are priests, therefore the *church* has the right to call and appoint pastors. Melancthon is of course here excluding the Roman Catholic teaching that the bishops have the sole right to appoint and elect pastors.

But Melancthon’s taking together the keys and the priesthood of all believers in the Treatise has wider consequences. The keys, which are given to the church and thus the church has the right to elect and or-

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<sup>43</sup> Loehe e.g. said that a layman cannot give forgiveness of sins to another layman, he can only comfort him. My question is: what comfort does the Christian have besides the forgiveness of sins (Siegfried Hebart: Wilhelm Löhes Lehre von der Kirche, ihrem Amt und Regiment, Neuendettelsau: Freimund Verlag, 1939,275)?

dain pastors, implies also that in the case of necessity one Christian can absolve the other and thus become his pastor.<sup>44</sup> Since the keys are not given to certain group in the church, every Christian can exercise the keys in the sense of the forgiving of sins and should do so when called upon by the situation.

Thus the idea that the keys and therefore word and sacrament are somehow the possession of a group in the church, for example that Christ gives the keys solely to the apostles who have solely the power or right to forgive, preach, administer the sacraments, and then somehow transfer this power or right to a circumscribed group in the church, is incompatible with the view of the Treatise. The gospel is not the property of a group in the church, neither is the handing out of the gospel the exclusive domain of a group in the church. This is also obvious in the Smalcald Articles, when in the article on the gospel Luther mentions as one way the gospel is administered the mutual consolation and conversation of the brethren. The gospel is not restricted to the pastor.<sup>45</sup>

This does not, on the other hand, mean that every Christian is a pastor. There are those who are called to publicly preach and administer the sacraments, and these are only a few among the many members of the congregation, or, as the development in the church has gone, mostly there is one.<sup>46</sup> Others do not have this call, and therefore they neither have the duty nor the authority to stand in front of the congregation and preach and administer the sacraments. Practically, that means that it is not the calling of the priesthood to absolve, baptize, or celebrate the Lord's Supper except in extreme situations. In regard to the Lord's Supper, most Lutherans have rejected that there ever is an extreme situation justifying an administration of it outside of the office.<sup>47</sup> If Christians want to do these things, then they are to be called to this office according to the order of the church. The whole concept of "lay ministry" suffers from a confusion of what the priesthood is and what the office is. Priests are to serve in their station, but their station is not to serve as a pastor. If the church thinks that it needs more pastors, then it should do what is necessary to remedy the situation: educate men, and, if necessary, subsidize their service. What education is needed etc., is something that has to be answered in light of the duties of the office. It is also not fair to "licensed lay ministers" or "licensed deacons" to ask them to be in effect pastors without due authorization by the church and without adequate training.

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<sup>44</sup> Treatise, 67-68 (BSLK 491,3-30).

<sup>45</sup> Implied in this is, of course, that since it is not confessional, it is not biblical. Cf. also from the Sermon at the dedication of the castle church at Torgau, 1544: "For when I preach, when we come together as a congregation, this is not my word or my doing; but is done for the sake of all of you and for the sake of the whole church. It is only that it is necessary that there be one who speaks and is the spokesman by the commission and consent of the others, who, by reason of the fact that they listen to the preaching, all accept and confess the Word and thus also teach others. Thus, when a child is baptized, this is done not only by the pastor, but also the sponsors, who are witnesses, indeed, the whole church. For baptism, just like the Word and Christ himself, is the common possession of all Christians. So also they all pray and sing and give thanks together; here there is nothing that one possesses or does for himself alone; but what each one has also belongs to the other." Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 51: Sermons I, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999, c1959, p. 343.

<sup>46</sup> We should not forget that in Acts there seem to have been not some kind of monarchical pastorate but a college of presbyters / bishops that shepherded the congregation. Loehe wanted to revive this in the congregations in the U.S.A.

<sup>47</sup> One argument used was the distinction between what is necessary for salvation and what is not. Since the Lord's Supper is not necessary for salvation, there can be no necessity to administer it outside of the office. Cf. Luther in his letter to the Bohemians (1523): "These atrocious and cruel conditions ought in all justice compel us, with one accord, to rid all Bohemia of these monsters. Clearly if misfortune and need are so great that they can secure ministers in no other way [than by subterfuge], I would confidently advise that you have no ministers at all. For it would be safer and more wholesome for the father of the household to read the gospel and, since the universal custom and use allows it to the laity, to baptize those who are born in his home, and so to govern himself and his according to the doctrine of Christ, even if throughout life they did not dare or could not receive the Eucharist. *For the Eucharist is not so necessary that salvation depends on it.* The gospel and baptism are sufficient, since faith alone justifies and love alone lives rightly." (Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 40: Church and Ministry II, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999, c1958, p.9, emphasis added). WA 12,171,13-23. Walther discusses this question in his *Pastoral Theology* (C. F. W. Walther, *Walther's Pastorate* that is American Lutheran Pastoral Theology. New Haven, Mo.: Lutheran News, 1995, 134-139).

## 5.2 Practical Implications

In regard to the priesthood, the first implication is of course that every Christian ought to exercise his or her priesthood. This means that all Christians offer spiritual sacrifices in doing good works, suffering patiently, and proclaiming the excellencies of God in their station of life.

As Luther put it in his sermon at Torgau: “Rather we are all priests, as is written in I Pet. 2 [:9]; so that all of us should proclaim God’s Word and works at every time and in every place, and persons from all ranks, races, and stations may be specially called to the ministry, if they have the grace and the understanding of the Scriptures to teach others.”<sup>48</sup> It is the duty of parents to teach their children the faith, it is the duty of any Christian to bear witness to Christ in his daily life.<sup>49</sup>

It is not only the right of the priesthood of all Christians to call and establish the pastoral office among them, it is also their duty. That implies obviously that they are involved in the life of the congregation, that implies also that they contribute so that the pastor has a living wage, that the external needs of a congregation in regard to building etc. are taken care of.<sup>50</sup> This applies also to the missionary endeavours of the church.<sup>51</sup>

The duty of a Christian is also to evaluate doctrine. The alternative is to trust that either an ecclesiastical magisterium with inbuilt infallibility or some experts (e.g. professors at a seminary) are solely competent to judge doctrine and that the common Christians simply have to follow their lead. The former is impossible, since there is no infallible church organization, the latter is of rather difficult when the experts don’t agree, as was brought to memory at the commemoration of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the walk out. Obviously such judging of doctrine also requires a certain degree of knowledge, but there is no principal spiritual incompetence of the non-ordained to judge doctrine.<sup>52</sup>

It also means that every Christian is ready and willing to administer emergency baptism if necessary. I assume that this is part of the instruction in confirmation class. Though this is most likely a rare scenario, it is nevertheless necessary for every Christian to know that he or she can be called upon by the situation to administer baptism.

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<sup>48</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 51, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, c. 1959, 335.

<sup>49</sup> “But after we have become Christians through this Priest and His priestly office, incorporated in Him by Baptism through faith, then each one, according to his calling and position, obtains the right and the power of teaching and confessing before others this Word which we have obtained from Him. Even though not everybody has the public office and calling, every Christian has the right and the duty to teach, instruct, admonish, comfort, and rebuke his neighbor with the Word of God at every opportunity and whenever necessary. For example, father and mother should do this for their children and household; a brother, neighbor, citizen, or peasant for the other. Certainly one Christian may instruct and admonish another ignorant or weak Christian concerning the Ten Commandments, the Creed, or the Lord’s Prayer. And he who receives such instruction is also under obligation to accept it as God’s Word and publicly to confess it.” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 13: *Selected Psalms II*. Saint Louis, Mo: Concordia Publishing House, 1999, c1956, p.333.

<sup>50</sup> In regard to “living wage”: I leave it to economists to calculate what this would look like in general and what the dollar amount would be in different areas of the country. 1 Tim 5:18 and 6:8 apply.

<sup>51</sup> Since preaching and evangelizing are also acts of God’s war against the kingdom of Satan, it might not be inappropriate to quote Cicero’s saying: *nervos belli, pecuniam infinitam* [the sinews of war are in infinite supply of money].

<sup>52</sup> On a very practical level, laypeople *are forced* to judge doctrine, because in the situation of the U.S.A. they have to decide to which church they go. Unlike the traditional state church system, they are not coerced to be members of a church and they have several options nowadays. To judge doctrine is more than to be involved in theological debates in a church. “Besides, if we are all priests, as was said above, and all have one faith, one gospel, one sacrament, why should we not also have the power to test and judge what is right or wrong in matters of faith? What becomes of Paul’s words in I Corinthians 2[:15], ‘A spiritual man judges all things, yet he is judged by no one’? And II Corinthians 4[:13], ‘We all have one spirit of faith’? Why, then, should not we perceive what is consistent with faith and what is not, just as well as an unbelieving pope does?” (Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 44, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, c. 1966, 135).

The priesthood of all Christians implies also that Christians can and ought to comfort each other with the gospel. We are talking here not about some special program in a congregation, but about the normal social intercourse among Christians that need not be devoid of the gospel.

The priesthood of all Christians does not mean that every Christian is a pastor. If a priest wants to publicly preach and administer the sacraments, then he has to be called by the church into the public office to do that. The proliferation of lay ministry programs is problematic, to say the least, because it blurs the distinction between the priesthood of all Christians and the pastoral office. There can be auxiliary offices, for sure, but these offices have their authority not because of the priesthood, but from the public office whom they are helping. Lay ministry also damages the proper understanding of the office, because now the pastoral office is defined not by call and ordination to serve a congregation with word and sacrament, but rather because of certain educational qualifications, a certain category of rostered status within The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, Inc. or the like.

There is, therefore, the possibility of a conflict between office and priesthood in Lutheranism because the delineation of both is not one of spiritual ability or power or possession of the means of grace or the like. The delineation is rather that of office and sphere of responsibility. The pastor is called to preach and administer the sacraments to the congregation. No layman is called to do that, it is not his responsibility, nor does he have the right to assume the duties of the office without proper authorization.<sup>53</sup> This structure is not just one of convenience or of human right (*de iure humano*), but rather by divine right (*de iure divino*), since the office of pastor has been instituted by Christ. As Luther put it in his sermons on Psalm 110:

*Every Christian has and practices such priestly works. But above these activities is the communal office of public teaching. For this preachers and pastors are necessary. This office cannot be attended to by all the members of a congregation. Neither is it fitting that each household do its own baptizing and celebrating of the Sacrament. Hence it is necessary to select and ordain those who can preach and teach, who study the Scriptures, and who are able to defend them. They deal with the Sacraments by the authority of the congregation, so that it is possible to know who is baptized and everything is done in an orderly fashion. If everyone were to preach to his neighbor or if they did things for one another without orderly procedure, it would take a long time indeed to establish a congregation. Such functions, however, do not pertain to the priesthood as such but belong to the public office which is performed in behalf of all those who are priests, that is, Christians.<sup>54</sup>*

The office is an office of service, it is an office that does certain things – and insofar is the “functional” view true. But of course the office is not just a bundle of functions that can be randomly assigned. There is, to be sure, also the aspect that the pastor is put in a certain relationship to the congregation, as the one who is responsible for their spiritual welfare, so that the pastoral office is exercised in the mandates of the

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. Luther’s letter to Lorenz Kastner and others, 11<sup>th</sup> February 1536 (WA.BR 7,365-367) on the question if they should, in a situation where there was no Lutheran service in town, celebrate the Lord’s Supper at home: “Let yourself not be talked into that every householder may give the sacrament in his house! For I may teach at home, but I am not a public preacher thereby, if I am not publicly called. Thus also St. Paul talks about the sacrament 1 Cor 11: we shall gather, and not each one make a supper for himself. Therefore it does not wash: The sacrament is made through God’s word, therefore may I do it in the house. For it is not God’s order nor command, but he wants that the sacrament is administered through the public office. For the sacrament is instituted as a public confession, as Christ says: ‘This do in remembrance of me’, which is, as St. Paul says, ‘Proclaim and confess Christ’s death.’” (WA.BR 7,366,36-47). But mark here that Luther’s rationale against administration outside of the office is not because only the office has the secret power to confect the sacrament, but because of the public nature of the sacrament.

<sup>54</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 13 : Selected Psalms II, Saint Louis, Mo. : Concordia Publishing House, 1999, c1956, p. 334.

Lord. Thus individual acts do not exhaust what it means to be pastor to a congregation, rather there is an enduring relation between pastor and congregation, a relation that is unique to the office.<sup>55</sup>

## 6 Conclusion

Let me conclude with some words from Dr. Marquart:

*Priesthood and ministry each have their own sphere and orientation. Competition between them is as pathological as conflict between lungs or feet and the rest of the body. ... In sum, priestly sacrifice and evangelical-sacramental ministry are governed in principle by the most perfect symbiotic harmony. Conflicts arise solely from that wicked self-seeking with which we defile both priesthood and the ministry and all other good and precious gifts of God.*<sup>56</sup>

Or, to say it even shorter with the couplet at the end of the table of duties in the Small Catechism:

Let each his lesson learn with care, And all the household well shall fare.

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<sup>55</sup> One is a pastor (shepherd) of a congregation (flock). A pastor without a congregation is an anomaly and the uncertainty in many quarters of the Lutheran Church what to make out of this is telling. It would be much easier if we believed in something like a *character indelebilis*. Then, once called and ordained, one would be a pastor forever. But, of course, one is not. A deposed pastor is not a pastor neither is somebody a pastor who leaves the ministry to pursue another career. As Luther put it in his sermons on Ps 110: “For although we are all priests, this does not mean that all of us can preach, teach, and rule. Certain ones of the multitude must be selected and separated for such an office. And he who has such an office is not a priest because of his office but a servant of all the others, who are priests. *When he is no longer able to preach and serve, or if he no longer wants to do so, he once more becomes a part of the common multitude of Christians. His office is conveyed to someone else, and he becomes a Christian like any other.*” (Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 13: *Selected Psalms II*, Saint Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1999, c1956, p. 332; emphasis added). It becomes much more difficult with somebody who is in between calls, so to speak, since here the person, though not serving as a pastor, is seeking and willing to serve. It is also more difficult with people who have temporary calls like intentional interim pastors, district presidents (as district presidents), pastors staffing district and national offices, professors of theology without tenure etc. and pastors who are called to positions where their duties are manifold and important to the church, but do not consist in the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments.

<sup>56</sup> Kurt Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance* Fort Wayne, Ind.: International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, c. 1990, 107-108.