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Strangers at the Rail

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When I arrived at my parish seven years ago, I asked my elders about closed communion. They had never heard of it before. I explained that closed communion is taught by Scripture and has been the practice of the faithful church since the time of the apostles. They responded, "Well then, we should do that!" On paper our congregation went from open to closed communion in the course of a single elders' meeting. But in reality, closing the altar was a much longer and messier process, something every good pastor knows all too well.

Closed communion is much more than putting a statement in the bulletin. This is a necessary step, but the pastor cannot rely on the statement and think that his job is done. People don't read the communion statement. Or they do read it, and then they ignore it. Nor is it sufficient to make an announcement before communion. People don't listen to the announcement. Or they do listen, and then they decide that by virtue of their love for God and country they deserve to receive Holy Communion.

The real work of closed communion happens in conversations between the pastor and individuals. To that end the pastor needs to carve out at least a few minutes to greet visitors before each communion service. He should also train his elders and ushers to watch for visitors and direct them to speak to him. Ideally, the members of the congregation would also be taught to explain our communion practice to friends and family members when inviting them to church. But in spite of all these efforts, there will still be the occasional stranger who arrives late, avoids the ushers, misses the communion statement, and ends up kneeling at the altar rail. What then?

Pastors, as stewards of the Mysteries, you have a solemn duty to question such strangers at the rail. If you are unprepared or unwilling to do this, then no matter what your communion policy may say on paper, you are practicing open communion. You cannot fall back on your communion statement, saying, "I warned them. If strangers choose to commune, it's on them." To do so would be an abdication of your duty as a Seelsorger. It would be similarly irresponsible and dangerous for a preschool teacher to read a warning about peanut allergies to her new class before indiscriminately handing out Reese's peanut butter cups. The uncatechized are incapable of understanding the dangers of unworthy reception, just as children cannot be trusted to eat only what is good for them. God gives parents to children and pastors to sheep.

St. Paul writes, "For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." (1 Cor. 11:29 [KJV]) More than 50% of Christians in the United States belong to Sacramentarian bodies that do not discern or recognize the Body of Christ in the Supper. For this very reason

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Priesthood and Preaching Office: Eternal Or Not?

Rev. Andrew J. Preus

Years ago, I was asked this question. Are the Priesthood and Preaching Office eternal? The short answer is yes.

If we understand Priesthood as simply the inheritance of every Christian in which we enjoy eternal salvation, pleasing God and declaring the wonders of him who called us out of darkness and into his marvelous light (1 Pet 2:9), then yes, this is eternal. Priesthood doesn't refer to our job. It refers to what God has called us into through Christ. Hebrews 9 describes the work of Christ as our High Priest, giving himself as a sacrifice by his eternal Spirit, obtaining for us an eternal redemption, that we may obtain an eternal inheritance (Heb 9:11-15). In other words, Christ, our eternal Priest, has given us full access into this Priesthood. This is our eternal inheritance.

Moreover, if we understand the Preaching Office as simply the office of the gospel, by which Jesus promises to be with his church even to the very end of the age (Matt 28:20), then yes, it is eternal. Revelation 14:6 says this much when describing the great angel preaching an eternal gospel to the earth.

There we have it. These two things are eternal. The Priesthood is our eternal inheritance. The Preaching Office is God's eternal Word, which saves us who dwell on the earth. But now, we should examine more deeply the interplay between these two gifts of God.

Preaching Office

The Preaching Office is God's means of delivering the salvation won by Jesus to every sinner. It is established by Jesus when he sends out his disciples to preach and teach (Matt 28:18-21; Luke 10:16), forgive and retain sins (Matt 16:19; John 20:21-23), baptize (Matt 28:19; Mark 16:16), and administer his body and blood (Matt 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor 11:23-25). The Preaching Office is the means God uses to deliver salvation to poor sinners. These means are the preaching of the gospel and administrating of the sacraments, as well as the men whom God provides to do these things.

Certainly, the men are not everlasting. Their labors come to an end. But the Word is eternal. The office of preaching is eternal, because it is Christ's office. Yet while the men themselves are not eternal, God's promise through the prophet Ezekiel to provide shepherds to care for his people is an everlasting promise (Jer 3:15; 23:4). St. Paul describes the Apostles, prophets, evangelists, preachers and teachers as actual gifts to the church (Eph 4:12). And how are they gifts? They are gifts because God sent them to proclaim his

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Word. They are ministers through whom you believed, as St. Paul said (1 Cor 3:5).

Of course, the man is distinct from the office. The office is eternal, since it is nothing more or less than the full and free gospel of Christ proclaimed and administered in Word and Sacrament. The man is flesh and blood, with a beginning and an end. He must, with John the Baptist, decrease while Christ and his gospel increase (John 3:30). John goes on to say that the one whom God sends speaks the Word of God, God giving the Spirit without measure to him (John 3:34). Luther explains that this is specifically in reference to Christ, but then he goes on to explain how Christ's ministry continues. Here he distinguishes between an immediate call, whereby God calls his prophets and apostles directly, and a mediate call, whereby God calls ministers through the church. He also then distinguishes between the ministry and the incumbent of the ministry:

This ministry will endure and is not to be replaced by any other. But the incumbents of this ministry do not remain; they die. This necessitates an ever-new supply of preachers, which calls for the employment of certain means. The ministry, that is, the Word of God, Baptism, and Holy Communion, came directly from Christ; but later Christ departed from this earth. Now a new way of sending was instituted, which works through man but is not of man. We were sent according to this method; according to it, we elect and send others, and we install them in their ministry to preach and to administer the Sacraments. This type of sending is also of God and commanded by God. Even though God resorts to our aid and to human agency, it is He Himself who sends laborers into His vineyard.

Therefore everyone must realize that he has to be sent. That is, he must know that he has been called; he dare not venture to sneak into the office furtively and without authorization. It must be done in the open. The sending is done through man, for example, when a city, a prince, or a congregation calls someone into office. But at the same time this person is sent by God.¹

God works through his church because he has given his church his Word. If he has given his church his Word then he has given his church his ministry. After all, this is essentially what his ministry is. It is his gospel, taught, administered, and handled as his flock is cared for. As Jesus says to Peter, "Feed my sheep." While the ministry is worked through man, it is not of man. It is of God.

Therefore, while we must distinguish between the man and the office, we can't conceive of the office without God placing a man in that office. At no time has God revealed this office to his church apart from officers to carry out the office. Jesus did not give an abstract ministry to his church only for them to decide which offices would carry it out. Jesus gave Apostles. So while there is certainly freedom and diversity in arrangements after the Apostles, the office remains that which Jesus gave to his Apostles. It is a full office, because it is a full promise. There is no such thing as a limited gospel. Therefore, there is no such thing as a limited ministry. If a man is charged with carrying out this ministry of Christ's Word, then he has the responsibility to carry out all of it. He might, for the sake of good order, concentrate on one specific focus. But the ministry as Christ instituted it remains concrete and full, and it is summed up by Christ in Matthew 28 as teaching all nations. He elaborates

by talking about baptism and the continual instruction in all of Christian doctrine. However, the essential part of the ministry is the teaching of God's Word to those whom God would call to himself (Acts 2:39).

When I was in seminary I heard a lot of talk about the functional view of the office and the ontological view of the office. Those with a so called functional view are wary of a sacerdotalism, which holds that the minister possesses in himself some character of office indwelling in himself. Those with a so called ontological view are wary of the formless, purely abstract view of the ministry, with a list of functions given for the church to decide how she will make this work. There is often a power struggle involved, especially when we start giving calls to day school teachers, Directors of Christian Education, and other offices instituted by the church. And of course, it has happened that a pastor's authority has been undermined by those who are not called and ordained into the ministry of Word and Sacrament, but hold some position in the church, which involves some arrangement of teaching. The pastor then loses control over what is taught in the school, what kinds of gatherings the youth attend, and other things, which give a headache to the pastor of the church.

But how do we respond to this power struggle? Is it by insisting that the pastor holds in himself some gift of the office? Is it in teaching that he personifies Christ to his congregation? If we did this then we would be mingling the preaching office with the priesthood. The priesthood is created by an ontological change in man. We are set apart, called out of darkness and into his marvelous light where we give sacrifices to God, pleasing to him. However, the preaching office is created by Christ's mandate that his Word be proclaimed and his Sacraments be administered according to his institution.

Instead, we must maintain that the ministry of the Word, the preaching office, the Word and Sacrament ministry, the pastoral office – whatever we call it – is functional first and foremost. It is a task, which Christ himself has promised to accomplish here on earth. This is the task of Christ, by his Spirit and Word, saving sinners and nurturing his church. It does us no good and every harm to say that it is not primarily functional. But what we need to maintain is that the office is an undivided function. In other words, the gospel is undivided. If this is the case, then those who hold this office, those who are sent to carry out this office, are sent to carry out all of it. Even if they concentrate on teaching or visiting the sick, they are charged with all of it. Listen to how Article 28 of the Augsburg Confession explains it. First, Melancthon grounds the task of the ministry entirely in Christ's command to his Apostles to preach, teach, and administer the sacraments. He calls this the power (*potestas*). He elaborates as follows:

[The] power (*potestas*) of the Keys, or the power of the bishops, according to the Gospel, is a power or commandment of God, to preach the Gospel, to remit and retain sins, and to administer Sacraments. 6] For with this commandment Christ sends forth His Apostles, John 20:21 sqq.: As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you. Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained. 7] Mark 16:15: Go preach the Gospel to every creature.

8] This power (*potestas*) is exercised only by teaching or preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments, according to

their calling either to many or to individuals. For thereby are granted, not bodily, but eternal things, as eternal righteousness, the Holy Ghost, eternal life. 9] These things cannot come but by the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments, as Paul says, Rom. 1:16: The Gospel is the power (potentia) of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth. (AC 28, 5-9)

Notice that this power of the ministry grants eternal things. It is identified simply as the gospel, which Paul describes in Romans 1:16 as the power of God unto salvation. Now, compare this use of power (potestas) to Melancthon's use of it in the Treatise on the Power [potestate] and Primacy of the Pope. Power is the main issue. In paragraph 31 Melancthon describes this spiritual power of the Apostles (potestatem spiritualem) as the command to teach the gospel (mandatum docendi evangelii), to announce the forgiveness of sins, to administer the Sacraments, and to excommunicate the godless by nothing but the Word. He distinguishes this power from the power of the sword and bodily force (Tr., 31).

This term power (potestas) identified in our Confessions corresponds to the power of the gospel described in Romans 1:16 (potentia; cf. virtus) – an eternal power – as well as the command of Christ to his ministers to preach this gospel and administer the sacraments. The Vulgate often translates ἐξουσία (right, authority) as potestas (e.g. Matt 7:29; 28:28; John 1:12). However, it usually translates δύναμις as virtus, a synonym for potentia (Rom 1:16; 1 Pet 1:5). The difference between ἐξουσία and δύναμις has to do with the location of the power. The command (ἐξουσία; potestas) is derived out of another substance (ex + ousia). The power or virtue (δύναμις; virtus; potentia) is something that is inherent in the thing itself, such as the gospel (e.g. Rom 1:16), or it is a manifestation of this power, such as the miraculous works of God (e.g. Matt 11:20). Any Christian can have power (virtus, potential) to varying degrees, according to God's gift, but the true power is the gospel, which we share in common. Meanwhile, the public charge of the ministry itself (potestas) is given to the ministers. Interestingly, the Greek term ἐξουσία is also translated as right, like the right to be called God's children (John 1:12). Here Jerome also translates this as potestas. Thus, there is a general charge, right, or call to every Christian to be God's children. Yet, Melancthon consistently uses the Latin potestas to refer to the public office of ministers.

So what about the right of the rest of the church? Here Melancthon consistently uses the term right (ius). In paragraphs 67 and 72 of the Treatise, Melancthon maintains that wherever the true church exists there is the right (ius) to elect and ordain ministers of the gospel. In fact, he begins paragraph 67 by plainly saying, "For wherever the church is there is the right (ius) to administer the gospel." The church as a whole exercises this right by electing and ordaining ministers.

This means that every Christian fully exercises and uses this right of the gospel by listening to Christ's ministers and judging them according to Sacred Scripture. Every Christian possesses the ministry by virtue of being baptized into Christ and possessing faith in Christ. Augsburg Confession Article 5 describes God's full and concrete use of the ministry, including ministers, by which God elicits faith in the hearts of men. Article 6 describes the new obedience of the Christian whereby he, whoever he is, utilizes this ministry fully in his life. When we talk about the fullness of the use of the ministry, there is no distinction between pastors and hearers. They both use it fully. The pastor fully uses it by doing his duty to

preach it. The Christian uses it fully by doing his duty to confess it and listen to it and insist that Christ's ministers be faithful to it. Article 7 (par. 2) of the Augsburg Confession then says: "For true unity of the church it is enough to agree (consentire) concerning the doctrine of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments."

Here is the key to the power struggle. The power is the ministry. That is, the power is the gospel. It is Christ's command to certain men to preach, teach, and administer his sacraments. Every Christian has a right to this power. So the only thing that is necessary is that Christians agree. If day school teachers agree that their pastors should teach and admonish according to the Word of God, then it is not necessary that we come up with a ceremony to show that pastors are above the teachers. Of course their office is above all other offices, because it is the office of the gospel. If all agree on this then that is all that is necessary.

But how can we agree? We must humble ourselves before the Scriptures, the only source and norm of our teaching (SD, Source and Norm, 3). And we must acknowledge that God has placed men into this office of teaching the Scriptures in their truth and purity. Then we will find an abundance of freedom to utilize the gifts of every Christian, according to his station in life, to promote this ministry. This is what it means to be a royal priesthood. In fact, this is Melancthon's argument for why the church has the right to have her own ministers. He cites 1 Peter 2:9, "You are a royal priesthood." Melancthon continues, "These words pertain to the true Church, which certainly has the right to elect and ordain ministers since it alone has the priesthood."

Here we might ask if Melancthon is using "priesthood" in the colloquial sense, referring to the ministry of the word, or if he is using it as referring to the inheritance and status of every Christian. It appears that he is conflating the two. And quite appropriately so! After all, the ministry is the gift of God to his church. Earlier in the Treatise, Melancthon cites 1 Corinthians 3:21-22, "All things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas," in order to argue that no minister – not Peter, not anyone – assumes dominions or superiority beyond the church (Tr., 11). Here he makes the statement, which has caused debate on the proper translation. He says in the German that the church is more than the minister (die Kirche mehr sie den die Diener.). His Latin version can be translated as saying that the church is above the ministers (ecclesiam esse supra ministros). The Latin term supra can be taken in measure or number, meaning "beyond" or "more." It doesn't necessarily imply that the church has authority over the ministers.

However, the distinction is irrelevant when we understand the flow from Article 5, 6, and 7 of the Augsburg Confession. Again, the ministers are given by God to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments so that we may obtain such faith (AC 5). Conversely, the church, in her new obedience, utilizes this ministry, each in his daily life (AC 6). Finally, the church agrees on this doctrine of the gospel and administration of the sacraments (AC 7). As long as the church is defined by her agreement on the power of the gospel – the authority and command to preach nothing but the Word – then it doesn't really matter whether we say that the church is beyond the ministers or over the ministers. She is beyond or more than the ministers in so far as the church is not only ministers, but also all Christians. She is over the ministers as far as her confession is concerned. Her confession, which flows from the preaching of God's Word from her ministers, also conversely informs the

preaching and teaching of her ministers. When my members recite with me the Nicene Creed right before I preach, they are telling me that this is the standard, drawn from God's Holy Scriptures, by which they expect me to preach. I must submit to their confession. This is because it does not come from them, but from God's Holy Word. And I am bound to preach nothing but the Word of God.² This is what it means for the church to possess the priesthood. As priests they possess a confession by which they live their lives in their various stations. And conversely they possess the ministry by which they receive true faith in God who justifies them for Christ's sake and forgives all of their sins.

Before we move on to discuss the Priesthood, let us examine one more question. If the ministry belongs to every Christian just as the Scriptures belong to every Christian, then why do we even need ministers? Are not the Scriptures clear? Francis Pieper describes the ministry as God's gift, which affirms the clarity of Scripture. Responding to the objection that if the Scriptures are clear then the ministry of men is unnecessary, Pieper explains:

One does not exclude the other. The public ministry is not superfluous, because it is a divine ordinance, and Scripture is, according to its own statements, clear, as has been shown above. And this clarity is furthermore evident from the fact that Christians are able to judge on the basis of Scripture whether pastors are true or false prophets, whether they depart from the Word of the Apostles or continue in it (Matt. 7:15; Rom. 16:17). But the divine institution of the ministry alongside the clear Scriptures shows us how earnestly God is concerned about our salvation. He is so much concerned about it that He, so to say, went out of his way for it. Every one of us can come to faith and persevere to faith only by means of Scripture (John 5:39). But in order that no man fail to reach his life's goal, God, in addition, has appointed watchmen who are officially to watch over our souls with doctrine, admonition, reproof, and consolation from Scripture and with Scripture (Heb. 13:17; Ezek. 3:18).³

To sum up this section, the ministry – including the ministers who carry it out – is given to the church with the Scriptures. They are not extra biblical gifts, but per biblical gifts, so to speak. It is not outside of the Scriptures that God gives us ministers, but through the Scriptures. The Scriptures, after all, are the very ministry of the prophets and apostles, the very ministry of Christ. So it follows that he gives ministers of these Scriptures, centered on Christ's work to save sinners, to his church. We shall now discuss how the church, carrying out her priesthood, uses this eternal ministry.

Priesthood

Not every Christian is in the ministry. That is to say, not every Christian has been called to carry this ministry out. Augsburg Confession Article 14 makes this clear: "No one should preach, teach, or administer the sacraments unless he is rightly called." Paul says in Romans 10:15, "How shall they preach unless they are sent?" Not every Christian is a minister. But every Christian is a priest. God says this already to the children of Israel (Exodus 19:6), "You shall be to me a kingdom of priests (mamlacheth chohanim)." This passage is not used in the Lutheran Confessions, but as we have already discussed, the Treatise uses 1 Peter 2:9, "You are a royal priesthood" to prove that the whole church has the right to have ministers of the gospel.

But what does this mean that Christians are a priesthood? The priesthood of the Old Testament was dominated by the theme of

giving sacrifices. But instead of jumping from the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament to the Christians as priests, we need to see how Christ fulfills this office. The Epistle to the Hebrews describes Jesus as the Apostle and High Priest of our confession (Heb 3:1). He is both the Apostle, sent by God to proclaim the good news, as well as the High Priest, sent by God to give his life as a sacrifice for sin. The writer to the Hebrews proceeds by describing Jesus as faithful. This is the one requirement of the minister of Christ and steward of his mysteries, namely, that he be found faithful (1 Cor 4:2).

However, what dominates is his office of priest. A priest is a priest by faith. A minister is a minister by God's mandate. The priesthood proceeds from pure faith and therefore strives to be faithful in the purity and holiness to which he has been called. Jesus was faithful by commending himself to the Father as he gave his life as a sacrifice. He thereby made eternal intercession for sinners. On the cross he prayed to God to forgive his enemies (Luke 23:34). So as Hebrews says (Heb 7:25), "He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them."

Christ is our priest first by suffering for us, and second by leaving us an example. St. Peter describes this after describing our call as priests. Our call is to suffer. So Peter continues (1 Peter 2:21 ff):

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

First, he is our vicar, vicariously suffering on our behalf. This is how he saves us. Second, he is our example, giving us concrete encouragement in our lives as priests. Both acts – redemption as well as example – are priestly acts. Then St. Peter continues to describe this priestly act of Christ:

²² "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth";

²³ who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; ²⁴ who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. ²⁵ For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Pastor and Bishop of your souls.

Notice the interplay between the suffering priest and the Pastor and Bishop. His obedience in our place as well as our obedience under his example, are his priestly acts. It should be noted that Luther identified the example of Christ as exactly the same thing as the Christian's cross in his daily life.⁴ The Lutheran Dogmatician, Matthias Hafenerfer, treats the cross in the life of the Christian as the continuation of Christ's High Priestly act.⁵ We can glean from this that the Christian's cross – identical with Christ's example – is not merely the Christian's autonomous obedience in response to what Christ did, but Christ's continued care for the Christian by instructing him with his concrete example, especially in suffering. And how does Christ do this? Hafenerfer points out that it is through the means of grace.⁶ It is through the ministry! As our Pastor and Bishop, Jesus cares for us by his Word. This is the good work which St. Paul says a man pursues if he desires such office (1 Tim 3:1). Through this good work of the ministry – Christ's ministry – the priesthood is strengthened.

Christ is the High Priest of our confession. This shows that the Christian's priesthood is in his confession. When he does his duty in this life he is making a confession of his inheritance. This is an

eternal confession and an eternal inheritance.

So how does the pastor carry out this priestly duty? He is, after all, a Christian, and as such a fellow priest in God's kingdom. He does so by praying for the people (1 Tim 2:1 ff.) and by being an example to the flock. St. Paul admonishes young Timothy (1 Tim 4:12), "Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity." This is a priestly act. It is not the ministry as such, but rather the priestly example of a Christian who has been called into the ministry. He is to be an example to believers first in word. This is his confession. Here we find that preaching, which is by divine mandate, entails a confession, which proceeds from the faith created by such preaching. Next, it is in conduct. He, like any other Christian, has a duty. His duty just happens to be to carry out the preaching office. But he does so in conduct, not dissimilar to how Christ conducted himself. This involves suffering for the words he speaks. He is to be an example in love. Love delights in the truth and bears all things (1 Cor 13). He bears with the people whom God has given him to serve. He is to be an example in spirit, bearing any internal afflictions, which vex his spirit. He is an example in faith, because he actually believes and trusts in the ministry of the Word, which Christ has given. And finally, he is an example in purity, because he is a pure and holy priest, just like all the saints, set apart for God's purpose.

As Christ is a Pastor and Bishop, so do his under-pastors and under-bishops give a priestly example even as they teach the saving and eternal Word of God. And such example endures as much as the Word they preach. This is because such example flows out of the Word. So as the ministry of the Word is eternal, the priesthood is eternal.

And on what basis does the minister do his duty? He does so on the basis of Christ's priestly act of obedience whereby he made full satisfaction for sins. As a minister, he proclaims this satisfactory obedience and death of Christ for all sinners. As a priest, he confesses it, because he believes it.

So it is for every priest. Every priest confesses Christ. And this is how the ministry continues even in their lives.

The ministry is not controlled by man. Acts 19 bears witness to this. Some Jewish exorcists tried to exercise an evil spirit. They invoked the name of Jesus whom Paul proclaimed. The evil spirit said, "Jesus I know and Paul I know, but who are you?" Then it seized them. This bore witness to the ministry of Christ, that it was much greater than any man who assumed to take it for himself. And what was the result?

This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.¹⁸ And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds.¹⁹ Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. (Acts 19:17-19).

The result was faith and confession. This bore fruit of repentance. Such is the act of the priests of God. But then what does Luke record (Acts 19:20)? "So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed." The ministry grew. The ministry of Christ, carried out by real men, such as Paul, grew. It grew precisely in this way, that those who believed it confessed it.

The ministry advances through the priesthood. The ministry of

Christ, used by God through unworthy ministers, spreads through the confession of those who hear. As much as God fully entrusted it to Paul and his other ministers, it is fully embraced by those who are made priests, set apart by faith in the Word. By faith they make it fully their own. And it spreads.

So with this Word of Christ's ministry, the priests make sacrifices to God. They are pleasing to God. It is a living and eternal Word. They therefore make living and eternal sacrifices. These are not sacrifices of propitiation, turning away the guilt or punishment of sin. Instead, they are sacrifices of thanksgiving. Paul admonishes the Christians in Rome (Rom 12:1-2),

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Their service to God is the renewal of their minds. This is why Paul calls it their reasonable service. The term he uses is λογικόν, a word used only one other time in the New Testament by St. Peter when he says (1 Pet 2:2), "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby." This is therefore service or worship proceeding from the Word of God. It proceeds from a renewed conscience, not from some human reason, but from the sound mind of the Spirit of God. As St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:16, "We have the mind of Christ." This is the result of Christ's high priestly act of giving himself for our sins. The writer to the Hebrews says that the blood of Christ, by which he offered himself to God through the eternal Spirit, has cleansed our conscience from dead works to serving the living God (Heb 9:14).

Our acts as priests are living sacrifices because they proceed from faith, which is obtained through the preaching of the gospel and administration of the sacraments. As the Apology of the Augsburg Confession puts it, we are righteous on account of Christ, and our works please God on account of faith (Ap. IV (III), 241). It is on account of Christ's ministry that we are righteous through faith. It is on account of that faith that our works are pleasing, priestly sacrifices before God. So when our earthly labors are done, the ministry of Christ remains. And just as those who lead many to righteousness through such preaching will shine like the sun, as Daniel foretells (Daniel 12:3), so will every Christian enjoy the fruit, which God was pleased to sow and reap in them through their days of pilgrimage. The priesthood will enjoy the perfection won for them by Christ's high priestly act, who, as the writer to the Hebrews says (Heb 10:14), "by one offering has perfected forever those who are being sanctified."

Conclusion

While the ministers and priests must sow their bodies in corruption, St. Paul promises that we will be raised incorruptible (1 Cor 15:42). It was my goal in this paper to show how the priesthood and the ministry or preaching office are complementary. When we understand that the priesthood has to do with our duty here on earth, then we can better understand how the minister relates to his fellow priests, his fellow Christians. He is there to preach and teach according to Christ's mandate. And as a result of that ministry, which he first received not when he was charged to carry it out, but when he received it through faith in his baptism, he lives among the Christians as an example to the flock, bearing with

them in love, making intercession for them, confessing with them, and making his aim with them to please God (2 Cor 5:9).

Ministers find great comfort in the example of other ministers. Naturally, this is true, since they share the same yoke and duties. But it would do us well to learn from the example of our parishioners. When we understand that an example is a priestly act, we can find great comfort and encouragement in the example of those who gladly hear and learn what God has given us to preach. After all, this is what St. Paul tells us to do as ministers (1 Tim 4:16): “Take heed to the teaching.” St. Paul also tells Timothy to treat all older men as fathers, older women as mothers, and young women as sisters (1 Tim 5:1-2). As a pastor you exercise authority as a father would his household (1 Tim 3:4-5). This is why God calls men, and not women, into this duty (1 Tim 2:12 ff.). But as fellow priests, you both give an example as well as learn from the example of other Christians who do their duty as priests under the same gracious ministry.

Unlike the ministry, there is an order among the priests. The ministry is the office of the gospel, which is the highest authority. It is the authority of Christ our Savior through the gospel and sacraments. So it is impossible for it to have ranks, since Christ has put all things under his feet (1 Pet 3:22). But the priesthood deals with daily life and order. There are varieties of callings among the priests, who are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28). And with daily life and order there must be peace, tranquility, and agreement. This is why the old Lutheran Dogmaticians described the call to the ministry as necessary because of Christ’s mandate, but the ordina-

tion into the ministry is necessary because of order (1 Cor 14).⁷ This order is no mere pragmatism, which appeals only to what works. It is based on God’s order in creation and the truth of his Word in Christ. Wives submit to their husbands as to the Lord (Eph 5:22). Their priestly order in submitting to their husbands, according to God’s creation, is based on the ministry of their Lord. In other words, they do their ordered duty through faith. In the same way, husbands love their wives as Christ love the church, recognizing that they are coheirs with their wives because of Christ who gave himself for them both (Eph 5:25 ff; 1 Pet 3:7). Servants obey their masters, knowing that they are serving the Lord who saved them by his gracious ministry (Col 3:23).

So when the church ordains ministers, both hearers and preachers are involved. While all Christians have the right to call, regardless of their age or sex, the order among the priests is carried out in the exercise of that right.⁸ In other words, every Christian, in so far as he or she possesses the ministry of the gospel through faith, has every right to call a minister. But of course not every Christian will be involved in the exercise of calling ministers. This is why it is missing the point when people argue, for example, that women have no voice if they aren’t voting. How we decide who votes has everything to do with the order in the Christian life, informed especially by God’s order in creation (1 Cor 14; 1 Tim 2). This is the how the priesthood operates. But the ministry is held and possessed in full by every Christian regardless of rank, sex, or duty. This means that the Christian, as a priest in God’s Kingdom, has every right to insist that his or her minister is preaching the truth,



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whether or not he or she serves on an official board or committee.

Order is agreement. And what is the agreement on? As Augsburg Confession Article 7 says, the agreement is on the doctrine of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. The order (rite), which is linked to the call (vocatus) in Article 14 of the Augsburg Confession, corresponds to the agreement, which is linked to the doctrine of the gospel in Article 7 of the Augsburg Confession. Doctrine of the gospel in Article 7 of the Augsburg Confession describes call in Article 14, by which God sends certain men to preach his truth. Order (rite) and agreement pertain to the priesthood. Doctrine and call (vocatus) pertain to the preaching office. They both are linked as much as doctrine is linked with practice, as much as the divine nature of Christ is united to the human nature of Christ.

So as the ministry is eternal, because it is nothing short of God’s eternal gospel, so is the priesthood eternal, since the divinity of the gospel communicates fully to it. Without confusing the ministry and the priesthood, nor dividing them into independent, Nestorian classes, we find that the two are perfectly united in one gift of God. When we think of the priesthood, we should think of Psalm 133, “Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity. It is like precious oil on the head, running down the beard, on the beard of Aaron.” And as we enjoy this priestly concord of Aaron, we should also think of the end of this Psalm when we consider the ministry, mandated, commanded, and promised by our Lord Jesus Christ: “For there the Lord commanded the blessing – Life forevermore.”

¹ AE 22:482.

² I commend to you a paper by my father, Rev. Rolf Preus, on “Confessing and Preaching,” presented at the Concordia Catechetical Symposium last year in Sussex, WI. He makes this exact point, and I stole it from him. You can find it on his website, christforus.org. #arrogance.

³ Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, I:322-23.

⁴ AE 30:117–118.

⁵ Matthias Hafener, *Loci Theologici* (Tubingen: Georgii Gruppenbachii, 1600), 402ff.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 402.

⁷ David Hollaz, *Examen*, 1338.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 1329.

Behold, how good it is
 When brothers dwell united.
 Our God claims what is His
 When we are thus invited.
 His Word and Spirit give
 The life His Christians live,
 The love that covers sin,
 [And peace to rule within.
 The precious oil of God
 Is His own Spirit dwelling
 Upon our heads so flawed.
 Yet, all our sins expelling,
 He claims us as His own
 And gives to hearts that groan
 True faith and hope and love.
 We’re born from Him above.
 This oil of Christ our Lord
 Runs down our heads confirming
 That though we bear the sword
 Of trials fierce and burning,
 By Him we bear our cares

Together as His heirs.
 Baptized into His name
 We share the testing flame.

Yet we will share the dew
 Of Jesus’ holy mountain
 Where God’s own mercies new
 Will be a living fountain
 Descending on the strife
 Of children, man, and wife
 To put away the flame
 Of sin and ills and shame.
 For there our Lord commands
 That death must end forever.
 Our true confession stands
 Above the foe’s endeavor
 To sow suspicion’s lies,
 Which kill our heav’nly prize.
 As brothers we shall land
 As God’s own blessed band.

Strangers at the rail

Continued from page 1

they are not able to understand the danger of unworthy reception. How can plain bread cause spiritual harm? It can’t. Not perceiving the Body, they cannot examine themselves (see 1 Cor. 11:28). Therefore, this responsibility falls squarely upon the pastor.

A pastor once told me that he would rather commune strangers than embarrass them at the rail. I replied that embarrassment is preferable to damnation. Of course, I have no desire to embarrass people, but, sure as hell, I will do that before I hand out damnation.

I learned how to question people at the rail by observing my field work supervisor, the Rev. David Petersen. When a stranger presented himself for communion, Petersen asked him quietly, “Are you LCMS?” The man looked confused. He asked again, “Are you Lutheran?” The man responded that he was a Christian. Then Petersen asked, “May I give you a blessing?” I don’t recall if the man was happy or angry to receive a blessing—I’ve since seen people storm out before the service was over—but regardless of the outcome, Petersen was a faithful steward, and the man was kept from eating and drinking to his own spiritual harm.

There was wisdom in Petersen’s questions. First, he asked if the man was LCMS. Ideally, the pastor would have time to discuss all the aspects of the faith with those who commune at his altar. But there is nothing ideal about questioning a stranger at the rail. Being LCMS serves as shorthand for sharing our confession of faith. When it was clear that the man had never heard of the LCMS, Petersen asked if he was Lutheran. This question was more for the sake of explanation. Of course, the man was not a Lutheran if he knew nothing of the LCMS. But at least he could understand the second question. The third question frames the pastor’s stewardship at the rail in a positive way: “May I give you a blessing?” It’s hard to decline that, even though the stranger may go away angry and refuse to talk after the service. Being angry is better than being condemned.

Practicing closed communion is hard, messy, and generally thankless work. But the faithful pastor must be more concerned with the account he will one day give of his stewardship than the hurt feelings of those who come unprepared to the altar. We mourn the sad divisions that prevent every member of the church from communing together. But until our Lord restores His fractured body, we must not shirk our duty to properly fence the altar. And this duty includes being willing to examine strangers at the rail. Pastors, if this has not been your practice until now, then man up and make it so today.

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Eternal Or Not?**

Strangers at the Rail

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