

The Development of Sacerdotalism of the Call

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In the past several years, there has been an emphasis to effect Spiritual Renewal and to produce a more active Priesthood of All Believers. This paper is intended to share some historical insight into the history of the Christian Church which has contributed to the somewhat complacent and lukeworm nature of the Priesthood of all believers within the Lutheran Church. Some of the material which is included in this paper may shed some light on the development of the Doctrine of Church and Ministry which has prevailed in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

In volume two of the Concordia Series The Abiding Word, Theodore Hoyer traces the development in the primitive church of the separate caste of the clergy, and shows how the papacy is, in part, a logical conclusion of the sequestering of ecclesiastical authority from the laity. "From the Epistle of Clement of Rome [95 AD] we infer the concept of apostolic succession and Clement's thought that orderly succession of bishops would prevent or deter division in the church.

"Ignatius of Antioch wrote and taught that the episcopacy is the means whereby order and unity were to be preserved. The trail is taken up by Irenaeus, who attributed to the bishops a certain gift of grace for the custody of truth, and mentions the idea of the succession from the apostles. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage attributes distinct sacerdotal functions to the bishops; they are priests representing Christ, the successors of the Apostles, the conservators of apostolic grace, and the authoritative interpreters of God's Word; without them the church would be without that grace and so would cease to exist." This idea - that the efficacy or power of preaching and of the sacraments did not come from the Word alone, but also from special powers of a special Christian caste - helped spawn the papacy, and the following decree of the Council of Trent: "If anyone says that there is not in the New Testament a visible and external priesthood; or that there is not any power of consecrating and offering the true body and blood of the Lord and of forgiving and retaining sins; but only an office and bare ministry of preaching the Gospel; ...let him be accursed. [Cannons and Decrees, Session 23, Chpt, 4 Canon I]

Enter Martin Luther and the Reformation.

In his evaluation of CFW Walther's Theses on the Church and its Ministry, Professor Lawrenz wrote: "The truth of the priesthood of

all believers had indeed been set forth with great clarity from Scripture by Luther and by the Lutheran Reformation. Luther had clearly testified that all authority in the church is originally vested in the believers. He had stressed that this authority was solely that of the Word which Christ has entrusted to all believers. In the practical administration of the affairs of the church, the truths of the priesthood of all believers and of the authority belonging to believers were never really implemented in the Lutheran church in Germany. Philip of Hesse had on one occasion drawn up a church order which meant to reflect these truths. Luther, however, advised against implementing it. He did not deem the German laity of the Lutheran Reformation to be ready for this.

"Luther turned instead to the Lutheran princes and to the Lutheran councils of the imperial cities to offer their services in the administration of the churches in their realms...They were enlisted because they had the best qualifications, the expertise and, above all, the deepest spiritual knowledge and understanding for such service...The distinction [between secular duties that rulers performed and the services rendered to the church] was soon forgotten, when, in the peace of Augsburg in 1555 the cuius regio, eius religio principle was established as imperial law. From then on secular rulers appointed church administrators to regulate church affairs, execute church discipline, and appoint pastors to the individual congregations."

In contrast to the public ministry and church administration under Rome or the early Lutheran state churches, the WELS, at its Fortieth Convention in 1969, adopted the Theses on the Church and Ministry, which are consonant with God's Word. Appropriate sections follow:

I. D. 4. The specific forms in which believers group themselves together for the fellowship and work of the church, the specific forms in which they arrange for the use of the means of grace in public worship, and the specific forms in which they establish the public ministry have not been prescribed by the Lord to His New Testament Church.

I. D. 4. a. It is the Holy Spirit who through the gift of the common faith leads the believers to establish the adequate and wholesome forms which fit every circumstance, situation, and need. (I Cor 3:21,

14:33,40) God in His Word merely bids them to gather (Heb 10:25), and through their faith God prompts them to do so.

II. A. Christ instituted one office in His Church - the ministry of the Gospel.

II. C. From the beginning of the Church there were men especially appointed to discharge publicly, in behalf of a group of Christians, the duties of this one ministry. (Acts 6:1-6, 13:1-3)

II. D. This public ministry is not generically different from that of the common priesthood of all Christians. It constitutes a special God-ordained way of practicing the one ministry of the Gospel.

II. D. 1. [Since] all Christians are ...equally entrusted with the same ministry of the Gospel (I Pet 2:9), no one may assume the functions of the public ministry except through a legitimate call....

II. D. 3. Christians are not all equally qualified to perform publicly the functions of the ministry...God gives to the church men qualified for the various forms of the work required.

Rom 12:4-8 Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in agreement with his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

I Cor 12:4-11, 28-31 There are different types of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another the ability to speak in different kinds of languages, and still to another the interpretation of tongues. All

these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each man, just as he determines....And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of languages. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in languages? Do all interpret? But eagerly desire the greater gifts.

I Pet 4:10-11 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various form. If anyone speaks, he should do this as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised.

II. D. 4. These gifts should be gratefully received AND DEVELOPED.

Eph 4:11-12 It was he (Christ) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God...

II. D. 6. There is, however, no direct word of institution for any particular form of the public ministry. The one public ministry of the Gospel may assume VARIOUS FORMS, as circumstances demand....In spite of the great diversity in the external form of the ministerial work, the ministry is essentially one.

Antithesis: We hold it to be untenable to say that the pastorate of the local congregation as a specific form of the public ministry is specifically instituted by the Lord in contrast to other forms of the public ministry.

The early church changed the - episkopos into - monopoitis. The overseer became the "only-doer." In Romanism only clergy had the mystical power to preach and consecrate the sacrament. In early Lutheranism only the imminently qualified were allowed to govern the church, and little thought was given to train and recruit the partially qualified and the unqualified masses and so, to enlarge the pool of qualified administrators and kingdom servants. The LCMS

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has inherited some of this pattern of thinking. In practice a certain ether of sacerdotalism permeates their circles.

Sacerdotalism is neither a distinct caste with mystical power such as the blatant ecclesiastical hierarchy of Rome, nor the caste of the state church bureaucracy that developed from Luther's bad judgement call, but rather, it is the Sacerdotalism of THE CALL. Sacerdotalism of THE CALL is the tendency to delegate all things spiritual, and the execution of all education, preaching or worship to the pastor and/or teacher, and the tendency to delegate all things related to operating the physical plant of the congregation to the laity. Sacerdotalism of THE CALL has no knowledge of the priesthood of all believers, and surmises that the great commission to make disciples of all nations is given only to called workers - those with formal training.

Sacerdotalism of THE CALL is reflected in the following types of comments and excuses for not engaging in priestly activities: "Preaching Christ is the pastor's job." "Door-to-door witnessing? That's what we called the pastor for." "Daily devotions? The kids get them at school." "As long as someone among us has "die reine Lehre", the pure teaching, I don't need to know it all." The pastor is more understood to be the spoon-feeder of a perpetually infantile flock (Heb 5:12) rather than its overseer, its teacher, its trainer.