

What is Missing in the Augsburg Confession

BY

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What is Missing in the Augsburg Confession

The Augsburg Confession (*CA*) does not say everything that might have been said about Lutheran proclamation or teaching (*doctrina*) in the year 1530. The concluding postscript states:

Only those things have been recounted which seemed to need saying. This was done in order that it may be understood that nothing has been accepted among us, in teaching or ceremonies, that is contrary to Scripture or the church catholic. For it is manifest that we have most diligently been on guard so that no new and ungodly doctrines creep into our churches.¹

It adds, moreover, that:

If anything is found to be lacking in this confession, we are ready, God willing, to present more extensive information according to the Scriptures.²

It follows that all who subsequently embrace this confession as their own bear the responsibility to account for what is lacking in it or appears to be given short shrift in the confession as it exists in their own time. This, in part, is the task I will attempt to accomplish. While one might, undoubtedly, point to several deficiencies in the *CA*, I will confine myself, here, to only one of them.

Many times during my career as a professor I have asked a candidate, as he or she stood before the oral examination board, “What does the Augsburg Confession say about the universal priesthood?”— to which the most obvious response would be, “Nothing!” This fact might very well seem astonishing in view of the great significance the idea held for Luther. The mere fact, however, that the subject is not mentioned by name does not mean that its substance is not treated, perhaps under a different heading. This, of course, is precisely what has occurred.

¹The *Augsburg Confession (CA)*, Conclusion 5, in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (BC)*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, trans. Charles Arand, Eric Gritsch, Robert Kolb, William Russell, James Schaaf, † Jane Strohl, and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis 2000: Fortress Press), p. 105.

²*Ibid.*, 7 (*BC*, p 125).

Generally speaking, the subject of the universal priesthood or the priesthood of all believers is encompassed by the concept of justification itself. Justification does not only mean that sinners are set free *from* the guilt and punishment of sin, but that they are set free *to* appear before God with their service. The Latin text of Article 4 of the *CA* states this positive aspect first (. . . *cum credunt se in gratiam recipi et peccata remitti propter Christum . . .*).³ The German text, which places this positive aspect second, compensates by giving it fuller expression (. . . Gerechtigkeit und ewiges Leben geschenkt wird).⁴ The designation “*coram Deo*” (“vor Gott”)⁵ is of decisive significance. In it is hidden the Pauline theme of free “access” to God, which is the expression for true worship.⁶ “Access” ($B\Delta\equiv\Phi\forall(T(\leftarrow))$) is a cultic term which signifies “der ungehinderte Zugang zum Heiligtum als der Stätte der praesentia Dei.”⁷ Justification is a cultic-legal term. Thus the conception of justification as a *priestly* service is contained within it.

Where, then, in the *CA* might we have expected to find this connection between justification by faith and the universal priesthood clearly articulated? It would be in the articles on the church of course (Articles 7 and 8), for the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is part and parcel of the evangelical doctrine of the church. It is here, however, that we do *not* find what we seek. This is one of the greatest shortcomings of the *CA*. Article 7 states, as is well known, that the church is the *congregatio sanctorum*,⁸ an expression which is more clearly defined in Article 8 with the addition of *vere credentium*.⁹ The sentence “*Est autem ecclesia*

³ . . . when they believe *that they are received into grace* and that their sins are forgiven on account of Christ, . . . *CA4*, §2 (*BC*, p 41).

⁴ . . . righteousness and eternal life are given (*BC*, p. 40).

⁵ “before God”

⁶ Cf. Romans 5:1-2 “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him *we have obtained access* to this grace in which we stand...” Scripture citations are from the Revised Standard Version.

⁷ “unhindered access to the sanctuary as the place of God’s presence.” Ernst Käseman, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: 1980: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), p 133.

⁸ assembly of saints

⁹ those who truly believe

*congregatio sanctorum, in qua...*¹⁰ is not a definition of the church. The use of the word “autem” indicates that the sentence refers back to the previous phrase “*una sancta, perpetuo mansura ecclesia*.”¹¹ It is in the article’s first sentence that one finds the CA’s “definition” of the church if one is willing to use this essentially inadequate expression at all. The expression *una sancta ecclesia* refers to a historic and, all things considered, generally undefined quantity, that is, the people of God, elect and redeemed in Jesus Christ as witnessed in scripture and symbol (the Nicene Creed). *This* church, which stretches without interruption through history and into the future toward its consummation in the coming kingdom of God (*perpetua mansura*), is¹² now, as an assembly of saints, gathered around the pure proclamation of the gospel and the right administration of the sacraments. Thus it can be found by the one who seeks it.

The fact that it is *God* who acts in the one holy church’s coming into being among us is the source of both its unity and its holiness. What means does God use, however, when he gathers his one holy church in our midst here and now—and when and where does he do it? These questions are addressed by the subordinate sentences. The means God uses in this assembly are the gospel preached in its purity and the sacraments rightly administered, i.e., baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and confession. When and where God permits these means to take effect is only said implicitly, not explicitly.

The proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments occur in *public*. So states Article 14, whose concern is the necessity of a proper (*rite*)¹³ call to the service of the gospel and the sacraments. *De ordine ecclesiastico* (GT: Kirchenregiment) *docent, quod*

¹⁰[Moreover, (*autem*)] The church is the assembly of saints in which . . .

¹¹One holy church [which] will remain forever.

¹²In the Latin, all the weight is carried by the little predicate verb *est* (is) which links the undefined quantity, *una sancta ecclesia*, to the present concrete reality, *ecclesia congregatio sanctorum . . .*, so that, as Prenter states, “it can be found.” Translator.

¹³The Tappert edition (1959) of the *BC* translates the Latin word “*rite*” with the word “regularly” which can be interpreted in the technical-legal sense of “canonical” as in “by rule of canon law.” In Danish, “rite” becomes “gyldigt” which carries the relatively more commonplace meaning of “genuine” or “valid.” In the Kolb-Wengert edition (2000) of the *BC*, “*rite*” is translated with the word “properly” which is less susceptible to misinterpretation in the technical-legal sense and more congruent with Prenter’s sense of the term in Danish. The word “proper” or “properly” therefore seems to be a marked improvement and is used throughout this translation. Translator.

*nemo debeat in ecclesia publice docere aut sacramenta administrare nisi rite vocatus.*¹⁴ In the congregation gathered for worship (*in ecclesia*), no one ought publicly to preach or administer the sacraments unless called properly to do so. It is only in the gathered local congregation (this is what the expression *in ecclesia*, “in the church,” means) that the gospel is announced to us and the sacraments given (literally “handed”)¹⁵ to us. The saying, “Only at the font and at the table do we hear God’s word for us” is in this context truly something to reflect upon. In other words, this means that the phrase, “*ecclesia, congregatio sanctorum, in qua*”¹⁶ calls forth the image of God’s one, holy people (here in *this* place, where *we* live) gathered to engage in that service which by being justified we have been set free to engage in. That service is this: to extend the gospel and the sacraments ever further to new people who gather and dwell with God’s one holy people.

As this image comes into focus, it always reveals an encounter between two entities or, perhaps better, two movements that mark a polarity inherent in the concept of the church itself as God’s people. The image is of God coming to his elect people, encountering them with his word in gospel and sacrament, and the people coming to their God, who is present in his word, encountering him by their faith in the word. It is in this polarity that the church is real *for us*; it is in this polarity that the one holy church is present *with us*—now, here, where we live, as event, *the church happens*. Apart from this polarity, however, the true church is not present for apart from this polarity God does not come near *to us*, and apart from this polarity *we* do not come to God. A mere “church-like entity” in which no true fellowship takes place between God and his elect people (his folk) is not the true church. It is not the *una sancta ecclesia*¹⁷ which the scriptures and the creeds (symbols) proclaim.

From the above, stated by way of introduction to the subject of justification by faith, it follows that this polarity is the central nerve in the evangelical teaching about the sinner’s justification before God (*coram Deo*) by faith alone (*sola fide*). If the issue is simply the polarity between the word of God and faith in the event of justification, then the *CA* lacks

¹⁴Concerning church order (GT: Church government) they teach that no one should teach publicly in the church or administer the sacraments unless *properly* called.

¹⁵The Danish word is “rækkes.”

¹⁶the church is the assembly of saints *in which*

¹⁷one holy church

nothing. I prefer the word “polarity” here to the frequently used word “correlation” because the issue here is the *event* of justification rather than its mere *concept*. If the issue however, is to extend this insight to our understanding of the coming to us of the one holy church, so that social dimension of justification comes into focus (i.e., that no one is justified by faith for the sake of Christ apart from the fellowship of those who now and in the past and in the future hear and believe the same promise, all the way back to the old covenant and forward to the consummation in the kingdom of God), then there is something missing in the *CA*. The universal priesthood is missing—in Articles 7 and 8.

A strictly literal reading of the text of the *CA* makes it possible to construct the following picture of the “Lutheran” view of the church. This view, in fact, has indeed often been considered the *genuine* Lutheran view. The church is a “creation” of the gospel. Therefore, as the assembly of saints, i.e., those who truly believe, it cannot be the active subject of the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. The active subject must be a standing *institution* that exists over the congregation as a believing community—the ecclesiastical office of the ministry. As such it is obvious that this office cannot be a creation of the gospel in the same way as the believing community. Where, then, does this office come from? In the period of Lutheran orthodoxy with its “princely church government,” the answer was self-evident. The Christian prince provides it. He does this, of course, as *praecipium membrum ecclesiae* (the foremost member of the church), but he does not do it as the holder of an ecclesiastical office, regardless of whether one designates him *summus episcopus* (superintendent [literally “highest overseer”]) or not. According to the *CA*’s understanding of what a bishop is, in any case, he is most certainly *not episcopus*. In certain theories of church law, moreover, it is stressed that the one who holds the reins of secular government has jurisdiction with respect to *jus circa sacra*¹⁸ not *jus in sacra*.¹⁹ This conception, however, which has roots in the Reformation itself, paves the way, through an institutionalistic understanding of the office, for the state church ethos of a later period which lives on in the modern Danish conception of the folk church.

If one compares this view of church and office, which one might call a “high church” view (in a 19th century understanding of the term as opposed to a 20th century understanding),

¹⁸law *about* the sacred

¹⁹law *in* the sacred

with a “good Lutheran’s” (which is not the same as being uncritical!) like Grundtvig’s, it is immediately apparent that what is missing in the *CA*, with respect to how it speaks of the church, here holds center stage, namely, the spiritual people of God. The word of God which creates faith in human beings does not come through an institutional office whose origin and activity is in principle independent of “the congregation” (i.e., its lay members, which it virtually must see as objects over which to exercise influence). Rather, the word of God and faith are joined together, becoming one in the congregation, so that the word of God is never found apart from the congregation and the congregation is never apart from the word of God. For this reason the office of word and sacraments lives in and with the people of God as one of the manifestations of its corporate life.

When Grundtvig speaks of the marks of the church, they become marks of life in Christ (the Christ-life): confession, proclamation, and thanksgiving. In this three-fold character of the Christ-life the two poles of the church’s existence, the word sent from God and the faith of the human heart in the word, sent back to God, so to speak, from whence it came, are held together. In between confession and thanksgiving, spoken from the mouth of the congregation, stands proclamation, spoken to the congregation from God through the called pastor or another witness who has been sent. Proclamation, however, belongs also to the congregation as subject no less than confession and thanksgiving, despite the fact that it is an individual sent with a word from God to the congregation who gives it voice. In proclamation the congregation stands also as subject, not merely as a mass of objects to be influenced. Herein lies the significance of the fact that the one who is sent with the gospel comes from the congregation. Thus proclamation, in the very same manner as confession and thanksgiving, is also the *unified*, audible, living testimony of the Lord and his congregation—to use a familiar Grundtvigian manner of speaking.

Obviously this view of office and church as being one in the universal priesthood excludes neither the divine institution of the office nor the office holder’s call and commission as being in the final analysis God’s call and commission. No one may speak God’s word on his behalf without being called and sent by God.

Fire-tongues of zeal, yet words of weal
Grant them, Anointer and Sender!²⁰

O hear our prayer, extend your hand.

²⁰ Tunger af ild og dog praediken mild,
 Giv dem, du salver og sender,
 Grundtvigs Samlede Værker I, 260, 2

Endow them with Truth your Spirit's band.
Send them to preach as from above,
Your peace, your faith, your hope, your love.²¹

What *is* excluded, on the other hand, is the distinction between the Church (with a capital “C”) as saving institution (i.e., an official sacramental establishment, upheld finally by the power of the state) on the one hand, and the congregation (i.e., the worshiping assembly minus the clergy) as the mere “target group” of the saving institution on the other. Throughout Grundtvig’s thinking about the church, just as in the Bible and the creeds, the church is the congregation and the congregation is the church, God’s elect spiritual people under the Lordship of Christ.

It is not only in Grundtvig, “the good Lutheran,” however, that we find this way of speaking about the church. When Luther speaks of the marks of the church in “On the Councils and the Church” 1539, he does so more fully than in “On the Papacy in Rome” 1520. In 1520 he names, as Melancthon does in the *Apology* 7, §§ 5 and 26, only two: gospel and sacraments.

Not Rome or this or that place, but baptism, the sacrament, and the gospel are the signs by which the existence of the church in the world can be noticed externally. Whenever there is baptism and the gospel no one should doubt that presence of saints—even if they were only children in the cradle.²²

In 1539 it is not only the gospel and sacraments in themselves that are marks of the church but included together with them (never without them!) are their reception by the faithful. This comes out strongly in the almost Grundtvigian sounding passage about the gospel as a mark of the church.

Now, wherever you hear or see this word *preached, believed, and lived*, do not doubt that the true *ecclesia sancta catholica*, “a Christian holy people” must be there, . . . for God’s word cannot be without God’s people, and conversely, God’s people cannot be without God’s word. ²³

²¹ O hør vor Bøn og ræk dem Haand
Udrust dem med din Sandheds-Aand
Til Prædikanter vor din Fred,
din Tro, dit Haab din Kiærlighed.
Ibid, III, 236,3

²² WA 6, 301, 3-6 (“Die zeichenn, da bey mann eusserlich mercken kan, wo die selb kirch in der welt ist, sein die tauff, sacrament und das Evangelium, unnd nit Rom, diss oder der ort. Dan wo die tauff und das Evangelium ist, da sol niemant zweyffeln, es sein heyiligen da, und soltens gleich eytel kind in der wigen sein” LW 39:75).

²³ WA 50, 629, 28-35 (“Wo du nu solch wort hörest odder sihest predigen, *gleuben, bekennen und darnach thun*, da habe kein zweivel, da gewislich daselbs sein mus ein rechte Ecclesia sancta Catholica, ein Christlich heilig volck... Denne Gotts wort kan nicht on Gottes Volck sein, widerumb

In the Treatise the other marks of the church, baptism, the Lord's Supper, the keys (confession), the office of the ministry, prayer, and the cross are dealt with in just the same way. The congregation's reception and use of the means of grace is an indispensable aspect of the marks of the church.

In the older Luther's discussion about the *notae ecclesiae* (marks of the church) the universal priesthood stands in the center. That is not the case in Melanchthon's Apology to Article 7.

However, the church is not only an association of external ties and rites like other civic organizations, but it is principally an association of faith and the Holy Spirit in the hearts of persons. It nevertheless has its external marks so that it can be recognized, namely, the pure teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments in harmony with the gospel of Christ²⁴

Nor indeed are we dreaming about some platonic republic, as some have slanderously alleged. Instead, we teach that this church truly exists, consisting of true believing and righteous people scattered throughout the entire world. And we add its marks: the pure teaching of the gospel and the sacraments.²⁵

If we read Article 7 as Melanchthon has interpreted it, there is no place for the universal priesthood as a mark of the church. The church (*ecclesia*) is confined to the invisible domain of the heart and sundered from the church as a sociological entity (*societas externam verum ac rituum*)²⁶. This purely spiritual and as such untraceable society of faith does, nevertheless, have certain—the word *tamen* (however) carries great weight here—external and empirical characteristics (*notae*), namely, the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. These lines of thought were developed further out of necessity in the national

Gottes Volck kan nicht on Gottes wort sein..." LW 41:150). Emphasis is Prenter's.

²⁴ *Apology of the Augsburg Confession (Ap) 7, 5 ("At ecclesia non est tantum societas externarum rerum ac rituum sicut aliae politiae, sed principaliter est societas fidei at spiritus sancti in cordibus, quae tamen habet externas notas, ut agnoscitur possit, videlicet puram evangelii doctrinam et administrationem sacramentorum consentaneam evangelio Christi" BC p. 174).*

²⁵ *Ap 7, 20 ("Neque vero somniamus nos Platoniam civitatem, ut quidam impie cavillantur, sed dicimus existere hanc ecclesiam, videlicet vere credentes ac iustos sparsos per totum orbem. Et addimus notas: puram doctrinam evangelii et sacramenta" BC, p. 177).*

²⁶ an association of external ties and rites

Lutheran churches under princely rule, which learned to distinguish between the invisible church (the association of faith in men's hearts) and the visible church (the national church inclusive of all its citizens). The latter could be ruled by the prince and his ministers, not the former.

This, however, inevitably resulted in the church of the saints in the assembly of true believers becoming the very "Platonic republic" one hoped to avoid, stripping, so to speak, its identifying marks from it and laying them in the hands of the "external" church, i.e., the hands of the princely church government. How is one to avoid this splitting of the church into a "visible church," which includes all inhabitants of the kingdom as its members (ultimately [with certain acknowledged exceptions] regardless of whether they are "true believers" or not), and a church of true believers who in return are so invisible (because, of course, no one can plumb the depths of the heart to see whether faith is hiding there or not) that in this world they can accomplish nothing? Indeed, it is inevitable unless one is set free from the tyranny of the medieval corpus Christianum (Christendom) with its presupposition that "in a country, as such, all are Christian, as such" (Søren Kierkegaard).

We live now in a era of transition, in which the assumptions of the dying era (e.g., that there is such a thing as a "Christian people") linger on in the lyrics of folk church ideology, while the harsh reality is that there is less and less validation for these assumptions. The percentage of those who have been baptized as infants and as such constitute the folk church's real support among the people is slowly, but steadily, declining. In this time of transition between a hastily crumbling corpus Christianum and a totally secularized society without any ties to Christian traditions, it is becoming more and more evident how fatal it is that the Danish evangelical-Lutheran church's chief confessional writing priesthood in its testimony on the church has nothing to say about the universal priesthood, i.e., that the confessing, proclaiming, and thanks-giving congregation falls outside its ecclesiology. The unhappy consequence of this lack is that it can all too easily slide into the "knee jerk" anti-pietism of the mentality of the state church, for which every emphasis on the believing congregation wherever the gospel reaches as the genuine manifestation of the universal church is instantly labeled as a pietistic betrayal of the gospel.

Every state, moreover (not only the totalitarian, but even the democratic-parliamentarian), has an innate desire to be totalitarian and finds itself in hidden conflict with the demand of the word of God for total allegiance. This hidden conflict can easily break into open conflict when the opportunity presents itself, i.e., when the interests of the one in power demand

it. In such a situation a “church” which is merely a state-supported institution without a universal priesthood as its living expression (to again use Grundtvig’s language) is helpless. Therefore it is high time that the universal priesthood find its rightful place in the care-taking of the office of the ministry, i.e., the call and ordination into the service of gospel and sacrament.

I shall not develop this subject in complete detail here. In my book on the office of the ministry I attempted to demonstrate how “pastors” and “people,” clergy and laity, collaborate in the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments from beginning to end. Proclaiming the gospel and administering the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper is never something that the office holder can “perform” alone without the participation of the people, not even the preparation of a single sermon.²⁷ Also, in my critical comments on the new proposed ordination rites for pastors and bishops, I have sought to show how impossible it is to allow the call to the office of the ministry to be purely an act of the state while ordination is reduced to a mere ceremony which, in the final analysis, becomes an unnecessary rubber-stamping (corroboration) of the purely secular (or, if you will, purely political) call which has already been completed.

The rest of this article will be devoted to what is meant (and what is not meant) by saying that the universal priesthood is included in and attains a central place in the understanding of the office of the ministry and the call/ordination into it.

First in general: the universal priesthood has nothing to do with a declaration of independence of the laity from and over against the clergy. It does not mean that we all hold the *office* of word and sacrament together (*en masse*). The universal priesthood is not a form of “ecclesiastical democracy.”

As stated in the beginning of this account, with respect to the CA we must understand the universal priesthood as part and parcel of justification by faith alone. If the event of justification is a polar union of the word from God going out to human beings with the gospel’s message of acquittal from all guilt in Christ, and human beings’ trust in the word of God which appears before God in the acquitted sinner’s offering of prayer, thanksgiving, proclamation, and works of love (and the event of justification is understood precisely in this way in the CA; that fact is attested not only in the text of Articles 4 and 5, but also 6 and 20), *then the universal priesthood is simply the collective expression of the believing people’s standing before God in the event of justification/salvation which is contained in, and is the purpose behind, all Christian worship.*

²⁷For the preacher always has the hearers in mind while preparing his sermon.

The believing people, elected, upheld, and sustained by the word of God alone, which comes to the people and apart from which there is no folk, lives in this complete receptivity before God, not in a dumb, unfeeling, and inactive passivity (in that case faith would be a “dead” or “painted” faith, as Luther says, and not the living, restless, active thing which according to his Preface to Romans, it is), but in an activity which is the *living expression* (in Grundtvig’s understanding) of faith’s receiving everything from God and total dependence on God. And this “activity” of faith is precisely prayer, confessing, giving thanks, spontaneous proclamation, and willing acts of love.

The characterization of this activity of faith as priestly is rooted in the biblical conception of the priesthood at whose center is the true High Priest, Jesus Christ. It is the privilege and right of the priest freely to appear before God (which is precisely the privilege and right of the justified sinner). It is the priest’s service before God to present the peoples’ offering. Since Christ is the heavenly high priest, the only offering left for the believing people of God on earth to bring is their thanks.²⁸ And it is precisely thanks which is the driving power behind the believing people of God’s service before God. This is not especially clear in the CA. Still, Article 20 states that “the one who knows that he has a gracious God and knows that God cares for him calls (invocat) upon him.”²⁹ And later it says that by faith the Holy Spirit is received and hearts are renewed and filled with “new affections” so they can give birth to good works.³⁰

As previously mentioned, however, this suppression of the believing peoples’ priestly service in the articles on the church (7 and 8) is a deficiency in the CA. This deficiency makes it unclear how the office of the ministry and the congregation are related to one another. We have seen that this lack of clarity opened the door for an institutionalistic view of the office with its state-church tendencies. Moreover, it is just this lack of clarity which contributes to the eventual tensions and conflicts which are inevitable when the last vestiges of a bygone state-church ethos—inserted into a more recent folk church ideology—force us to face with a heightened awareness the essential difference between the congregation of Jesus Christ, the believing people of God, on the one hand, and a state supported, national church of the civil establishment on the other.

²⁸Hebrews 13:15. Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

²⁹CA 20, 24

³⁰CA 20, 29

How would the relationship between office and congregation take shape if the *CA* were interpreted in such a way that a place were found for the missing perspective of the priesthood of God's people?

I will give but a short answer here and refer those who seek more detail to what I have previously written about the subject in "Kirkens Embede"³¹ (esp. §6) and in the treatise "Haushalter über Gottes Geheimnisse: Kirchliches Amt und Ordination aus lutherischer Sicht."³²

The crucial point is the acknowledgment of the indissoluble polarity between the word of God which comes to human beings and faith which clings to God in all expressions of its life. Nothing in the Christian worship service is exempt from this polarity. The first of these two movements occurs in the proclamation of the gospel and in the administration of the sacraments. It receives its liturgical-canonical [legal?] expression in the fact that these functions of worship are placed in the hands of a specific office set apart to perform them. Because it is God's word and his means of grace, the office is instituted by him (Article 5) and requires a proper call in order to be performed (Article 14). The *CA* itself says nothing concerning what is implied by the term "*rite vocatus*" ("proper call"). But, that it is God who does the calling and not a human being (whether the calling agency be a prince or a congregational democracy makes no difference) follows from the fact that the office is instituted by God through the sending of the apostles.³³ Thus the call is understood as an act of worship and like all other acts of worship is part of the tension between the word which comes from God and the thanks which is directed toward God. Furthermore, the call must be consummated in the ordination service if the universal priesthood is not to be completely excluded from it. The notion that a man or woman could be called "to the holy office of being a pastor and preacher" *apart from* being ordained according to apostolic custom with prayer and the laying on of hands, by the monarch alone or purely by ministerial appointment, is a notion which is completely incompatible with the *CA*'s understanding of the office of the ministry. How then do the functions of the office holder (the

³¹"The Office of the Ministry"

³²"Stewards of the Mysteries of God: The Office of the Ministry and Ordination from a Lutheran Perspective"

³³CA 28, 5-6. However, they believe that, according to the Gospel the power of keys or the power of bishops is the power of God's mandate to preach the gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer the sacraments. For Christ sent out the apostles with this command [John 20:21-23]: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.... Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained. And Mark 16[15]: "Go and proclaim the good news to the whole creation...." *BC*, p. 93.

ordinator) and those of the people who are present (the congregation) come together in the ordination service itself? The ordinator (in the Danish folk church this is normally the bishop) has the role of proclaimer of the gospel. Like the baptismal act, the act of commissioning is, by virtue of the instituting word, i.e., God's command and promise, a concrete proclamation of the gospel. In the Pastoral Epistles, whose testimony is indispensable to an evangelical ordination service, it is clear that Paul extends his work as an apostle, as a proclaimer of the gospel, further by commissioning Timothy as proclaimer, presumably ordaining him with prayer and the laying on of hands.³⁴ In this act of proclamation the ordinator (the bishop) acts on behalf of God with respect to the congregation. On the other hand, however, the congregation also acts and does so in the *very same act* of proclamation; otherwise the polarity is dissolved.

First, the congregation participates in the act by which the ordinator functions as proclaimer of the word. The proclaimer of the word does not come to the congregation from above, but, as God's emissary to the congregation, stands in its midst, indeed is himself a member of the very people of God to whom he is sent. To speak in a Grundtvigian manner, the proclamation itself together with confessing and giving thanks is a living sign of the Christ-life. The proclaimer speaks the word from God, bound to his text, which is the biblical testimony. This is clearly demonstrated in the liturgy of the ordination service as well. However, in speaking God's word he is also bound to the confession of the congregation to which he has been sent. The congregation is not to listen to one single syllable of what comes out of the preacher's mouth without "testing the spirits" against its confession.³⁵ Thus it dares to be the adversary of any and all tendencies toward episcopal totalitarianism.

Second, the congregation participates in the commissioning as the active subject of faith's service of giving thanks for what it has received. Specifically, what does this mean? It means that the congregation (i.e., the lay people) contributes everything which in the worship service belongs to the giving of thanks. First and foremost it contributes its own body, whose eyes, ears, and hands are the minimum prerequisite for these acts which make this a Christian

³⁴ 1 Timothy 6:1. Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 2 Timothy 2:1-2. You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

³⁵ 1 John 4:1-3. Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of antichrist, of which you heard that it was coming, and now is in the world already.

worship service rather than a “private mass.” Moreover, it is essential that the present congregation not come merely to “watch” the bishop perform and to see what he does with his cope and his cross, but to participate in the act, and in fact, to make it possible.

Next, it is the congregation that presents the ordinand(s). This is a perspective which, to put it mildly, runs strongly counter to that of the modern folk church ordination. Here is one of the moments in the ordination service which cuts through all the ecclesiastical solemnity. What an utterly different perspective the pastor’s work (not pastoral *role!*) would be given if the candidates for the office of pastor were seen as the congregation’s thank-offering rather than some youngster looking for a “job” at whom the congregational council is entitled to take “pot shots” with all kinds of trick questions. The ordaining congregation, which preferably ought to come from congregations other than the one in which the ordinand will serve, therefore, has a truly exceptional position. It, after all, has “chosen” this pastor—or has it?

The method by which the selection is made is not essential. It is not at all necessary that it be modeled after a democratic election. In a more or less state church polity in which the office of pastor is at the same time the position of a public official, there must, of course, be legally regulated procedures for the appointment of individuals to such established offices. These procedures, however, cannot ensure that a genuine selection by the *church* has been made any more than they, as “wordly” as they may be, can in and of themselves hinder such a selection. A genuine selection by the *church* has its basis in the prior willingness of the *congregation* to receive as its pastor one who, after being properly examined, is found suitable for pastoral service, and its willingness to meet that one with the full openness and confidence that the *office* (!) demands. A genuine selection of a pastor has nothing to do with a “voting in” of the one who happens to please the majority of those who “have clout” in the local congregation. Only, in fact, if it has become clear that a congregation has virtually a deep seated distrust in the soundness of the pastor’s doctrine (not dislike of him personally, or disagreement with his “opinions”), does it become the congregation’s duty to refuse to accept him, that is, not to consummate the selection.

In addition, the congregation presents its prayer and thank-offerings as it does in every worship service. Whether it prays in unison, or it is the pastor, bishop, or sacristan who says the prayers while the congregation simply owns them with its “Amen,” is irrelevant. The prayers are and remain the congregation’s. In the hymn of praise the participation of the congregation is more immediate. Above all, however, it gives thanks as it goes to the Lord’s Supper, which is an essential part of the ordination (not only of pastors but even of bishops!). On the other hand, the

representatives of the laity do not take part in the laying on of hands together with the bishop and all the pastors present (not only four of them). The same applies to the giving of the right hand of fellowship. Of course the congregation participates in these actions as well insofar as the bishop and the pastors represent the congregation. The *liturgical* significance of these acts, however, is found in their expression of the unique bond of fellowship that is established by the task of proclamation.

Together with the call, the examination of the ordinand is also put in the hands of the office of proclamation, and like the call it also extends behind the ordination ceremony itself as one of its prerequisites. In it the ordinator, the bishop, establishes his solidarity with the ordinand in the performance of the service of proclamation itself. The bishop's ordination of other servants of the word is itself a service of the word. Only thus does it have any meaning. Indeed, the standard of proclamation he sets for his ordinands must be the same as the standard set for himself. The examination is also the backdrop for his work as *ἐπίσκοπος* (overseer), the one who supervises the pastors' teaching and their administration of the sacraments. The people also participate in the task of overseeing the proclamation because the bishop represents the congregation here as well. This comes through in the bishop's "collation" ("kollats"),³⁶ the letter of presentation by which he or she sends the pastor to the congregation he or she is to serve and requests that it receive and acknowledge him or her as its rightful pastor.

All of these aspects of the call procedure are brought together as a whole in the ordination service, during which, through prayer and the laying on of hands, the congregation (i.e., bishop, pastors, and lay people) entrust ("offer up") to God those who have been set apart for the pastoral calling in the hope that God now, in answer to their prayers, would anoint and send them as his servants. Since the word and the sacraments are God's institution,³⁷ it stands to reason that God's calling of servants to the office would be consummated according to the apostolic custom in the ordination with prayer and the laying on of hands. The other features which form a part of the act of calling lead up to the ordination and obtain their meaning from it. The designation *rite vocatus* (properly called), as far as this divinely instituted office is

³⁶"Before a priest (pastor) can enter into his living, he must have '*collation*,' i.e., a formal letter of presentation, whereby the bishop of the diocese, hands over the ecclesiastical office to an ordained person. This letter of presentation is read at the service." Rev. W. Westergaard Madsen (Bishop of Copenhagen), "The Danish National Church," in *The Danish Church*, ed. Poul Hartling, trans. Sigurd Mammen, (Det Danske Selskab [The Danish Institute]: Copenhagen, Denmark, 1964), p. 92.

³⁷The German text of CA 5 reads: "hat *Gott* das Predigamt eingesetzt..." (...*God* instituted the office of the ministry... BC, Tappert, p. 31). Prenter's emphasis.

concerned, can apply only to the one that *God* anoints and sends.

The liturgical ritual which surrounds the call to the office has its basis in the apostolic act of commissioning whereby the holders of the office, both clergy and laity, come together in the consummation of the encounter between the word of God and faith, becoming one in the event of worship, that is, the event of justification. According to this ritual it is clear that it is the congregation alone, i.e., clergy and laity acting as one, that consummates the call to the office of the ministry.

When God's congregation in a particular place exists under a folk church polity so that its servants are also ministers of the state, then the hidden tension between loyalty to the Lord of the church and loyalty to the authority of the state is a permanent reality. Avoiding this tension breaking out into open conflict depends on two things: the state's willingness to respect and represent the right of the church to be master in its own house and the congregation's faithfulness to its own Lord (i.e., its obedience to the word with which it is sent and its faithfulness to the institution of the sacraments it has been given to administer). When the state's respect for the church's freedom and the church's faithfulness to its own commission are in place, the relationship between church and state can develop for the most part without friction. Of course short lived and limited conflicts will always turn up when pastors or bishops realize that they are bound to appeal to their ordination as their rightful call over against all political attempts at encroachment through threats of dismissal or other sanctions.³⁸ When the state's control over the church becomes *total*, however, then the true battle for the church (*kirkekampf*) has begun. The German and the Norwegian church battles of the 20th century have demonstrated how crucial it is for congregations and pastors to be clear about where their rightful (rite) call comes from—to which they must hold fast, no matter what the cost (and the cost can be the highest possible cost), when the power of the state undertakes to abolish it.

The appeal to scripture and the confession as the norm for the church's doctrine and life, which the state (even as a matter of law) is obligated to respect as long as it remains legitimate and has not yet become totalitarian, is the Church's very foundation. The question, therefore, whether the confession sheds any light on the meaning of the universal priesthood is no

³⁸Such conflicts, of course are not limited to churches that live under state or folk church polities. They break out whenever a church body claims that its governing structure (e.g. its constitution or church-wide assemblies) takes precedence over the pledge faithfully to conform one's teaching and practice to scripture and confession, which is the centerpiece of every Lutheran pastor's ordination vow. The present confessional crisis within the ELCA is a case in point. Translator.

insignificant matter. Could such a vital principle really be missing in the *CA*?