

8-1-1948

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Recommended Citation

Craemerer, Richard R. (1948) "The Universal Priesthood and the Pastor," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 19, Article 49.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol19/iss1/49>

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Concordia Theological Monthly

Vol. XIX

AUGUST, 1948

No. 8

The Universal Priesthood and the Pastor

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I. DOCTRINAL DEFINITIONS

A. The Universal Priesthood. The centennial year of our Synod re-emphasized the doctrine of the royal priesthood. The Missouri Synod, and before it the Saxon settlement, regarded itself as a Church because of the universal priesthood. That principle was given a fresh statement in the Reformation, and is a particular heritage of the Lutheran Church. The growth of our Church and the routinizing of its ministry causes this principle to lose some of its vitality. One would expect the laity of the Church to be more energetic than the ministry in safeguarding this principle. Actually we need not expect this to be the case. It is the ministry itself which must take up the responsibility for preserving this principle, and through it for preserving the vitality of the Church as a whole.

1. *The Grace of God in Christ Jesus.* The royal priesthood is not a doctrine separate from the other great facts of the Christian religion, but it is a logical ingredient in our faith as a whole. The Christian faith is the recognition that the heavenly Father has re-established His life in man through Jesus Christ. He sent Him into the world to take upon Himself the burden of man's debt and to free man from the bondage of sin and death.¹

¹ 2 Cor. 5:17-21; Eph. 1:3-4, 7-8; 2:1-9.

2. God redeemed man to Himself, once and for all time, by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross. In itself that sacrifice leaves man still dead. In the hour of the first Good Friday, man did not change. It is the meaning of the redemption on the Cross, however, that God Himself, for His Son's sake, in love seeks the life and salvage, the peace and rescue of every human being. This He does through the means of grace. God in Christ bridged the gap between man and Himself; Christ is the Way. Christ, however, came into the world not only to construct that bridge, but to reveal God's plan and intention. He is the Word of God in which we see God at work and understand the love that God has for us.² But God's plans go further. The Father and the Son seek to bring to man the Spirit, who moves into the heart of man, changes and shapes his mind away from hostility and reluctance toward God to trust and acceptance. This Spirit works faith, the faith to make the redemption of Jesus Christ our very own.³ The channel by which the Spirit goes into man, however, is not left undefined. But God has given men the witness concerning Christ, in the Prophets of the Old Testament and in the accounts of Christ's work and in the message of Christ's Apostles. The Sacred Scriptures are the repository of this witness. In them and through them a man becomes wise unto salvation by faith in Christ Jesus.⁴ This witness, these Scriptures, deal with human words and language, but as those words take hold of the mind, they become the device by which the Spirit of God works the very grace which God worked through the redemption of Jesus Christ. The same process is carried out in the Sacrament of the body and blood of Jesus in the Lord's Supper⁵ and in the washing of Baptism, which is likewise for the remission of sins gained by Jesus Christ;⁶ it is in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

3. When the Holy Spirit, through Word and Sacrament, makes His way into the human heart, it is changed; it becomes a new mind.⁷ God Himself is reinstated in the life of man as

² John 1:1-18; Col. 1:12-22; Heb. 1:1-3.

³ 1 Cor. 1:21-25; 2:9-16.

⁴ 2 Cor. 5:19; Col. 1:23; 2 Tim. 3:14-17; 1 Pet. 1:22-25.

⁵ 1 Cor. 11:23-29.

⁶ Acts 2:38; Eph. 5:26.

⁷ Eph. 5:8-9; 2:10.

God originally designed. The meaning of this change is not over, however, when the believer accepts the forgiveness of his sins. Rather is that coming to faith but a beginning and a tool for greater and wider goals. The purpose of Christ's redemption and man's salvation is that man should love, that man should assume responsibility for man even as God has assumed responsibility for him.⁸ The believer lives not for himself; but he is put into the world and left in the world for the purpose of becoming a witness to Christ;⁹ his life is to bear the marks of Christ, to be risen in Christ, for the sake of the world around him, whose people are still in need of that rescue which he has already enjoyed. He is left in the world with the mandate to go and teach, to go and witness. Furthermore, the believer, through the redemption of Jesus Christ, becomes a kinsman with his fellow believer. Together with every fellow believer he constitutes the very body of Christ, of which Christ is the Head. He is bound together with ties of the Spirit, much stronger than ties of blood and earthly kinship, to every other believer.¹⁰ That fellowship is not simply a paper thing. But it is for a purpose. In the body of Christ the believer becomes responsible for the spiritual life also of the fellow believer. He is there to edify and to build up the brother. The graces of the Spirit, in teaching, fellowship, charity, forbearance, thoughtfulness, and considerateness, are all for the sake of helping him to reach out in love to his brother for his good.¹¹ Thus it is that the people of God, the body of Christ, constitute a royal priesthood.¹² The Old Testament priest made sacrifices which prefigured the redemption on the Cross. The New Testament priest no longer does that; that sacrifice is valid once and for all time. But the New Testament priest does offer up the sacrifice of praise to God continually; and with his brother he worships God.¹³ He Himself is the priest in that worship; he needs no intermediary, for Christ has wholly redeemed him to God; in fact not even Christ mediates his prayers to God, but he, a royal priest, lays his prayer before the heavenly Father, and the Spirit of God pleads for him with sighings which

⁸ John 13:16; 1 John 3.

⁹ Luke 24; 2 Cor. 4:6 ff.

¹⁰ Eph. 2:13 ff.; 4:1-7.

¹¹ Ephesians 4; 1 Peter 4.

¹² 1 Pet. 2:1 ff.

¹³ Hebrews 10.

cannot be uttered.¹⁴ The Old Testament priest conveyed forgiveness of sins from God to the people. The Christian believer, by virtue of his faith in the Atonement, is assured of that forgiveness. Christ Himself is the great High Priest whose intercession still assures the forgiveness of his sins.¹⁵ But no human being stands between him and God in reaching for that forgiveness; for he is ever assured of the perfect love of God in Christ's redemption and has the perfect confidence that his every sin is forever forgiven.

B. The Ministry. The One Thing Needful in the life of the believer is that this presence of the Spirit of God and this hold on the grace of God continue.¹⁶ It is the plot of the Christian's life that this life in God be tested and strengthened by every possible means, so that it have its full strength and achieve its purpose also toward others.¹⁷ That is literally the life-and-death matter for the Christian that he retain this presence and power of God in Christ and exercise it for the life of others. This fact is so important because each Christian still has in him remnants of the sinful flesh, warring against the life of the Spirit within him and leaguings with the world in a conspiracy of death. The Kingdom of God, the One Thing Needful, becomes doubly, therefore, a matter of fear and trembling, the major concern of the Christian's life.¹⁸ To stimulate and implement this concern, God uses the ministry.

1. The Ministry of the Means of Grace. Every Christian is a royal priest. As such he has access to God through Christ, and has the tools for strengthening his hold on Christ, namely, the Word and the Sacrament. In the New Testament, however, God has set up a specific ministry of the means of grace. The purpose of this ministry is to feed the flock,¹⁹ that is, to supply the spiritual life of the Christian man with the one replenishing fuel, namely, the Gospel and the Sacrament. This work is co-ordinated with another task. The purpose of the Gospel and the spiritual life is to maintain touch with God, the hold on His very life in the soul; and hence to have continuous forgiveness of sins. Every royal priest has the

¹⁴ John 14:23 ff.; 15:16, 27; 16:23-28; Rom. 8:26-27.

¹⁵ 1 John 2.

¹⁶ Matt. 6:33; Luke 10:38 ff.

¹⁷ 1 Pet. 5:10.

¹⁸ Phil 2:1-16.

¹⁹ Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11-16.

business to express that forgiveness to his believing brother. The Savior in addition, however, systematizes that supply with the Office of the Keys:²⁰ the business not only of announcing grace in general, but of speaking forgiveness to the repentant believer in particular, and of withholding forgiveness expressly from him who expressly rejects it. These two functions, then, the teaching of the Word and the exercise of the keys, become the business of the ministry.²¹

2. *The Congregation and the Pastor.* The Apostles were put into their position by the Savior Himself. He gave them their work, namely, to save people through the Gospel of His redemption. He also prayed for those who would be saved through their word.²² The Apostles helped the first ministry to be organized in the Church. Some of the people whom they appointed were their professional helpers, traveling with them as their messengers and representatives (Timothy, Ephraim). Others they placed into specific localities in order to minister to groups of Christians in those areas.²³ Some of the Apostles themselves carried out the functions of the ministry to congregations (the Apostles in the first church at Jerusalem; St. John at Ephesus). Others served in a missionary capacity, laying the groundwork for congregations which later had their own ministers (St. Paul, St. Peter). Ministers are described in the Word of God by their task, that of feeding the flock to which they minister, of being an example to it, of guiding it, of building it up, of teaching it. Ministers are described as ministers, pastors, overseers. Always it is emphasized that they, too, stand in the relation to God in which every Christian stands; nowhere are they described as having prerogatives or dignities other than those of every Christian. The congregations are asked to undertake the responsibility of providing for the needs of their ministers.²⁴ The congregations are shown at the task of choosing their ministers, assisting them through specially qualified lay members of their group, or through professionally chosen and equipped individuals. The pastors, on the other hand, are shown at work in their dual capacity as servants of God and servants of the people.²⁵

²⁰ John 20:21 ff.

²³ Acts 20; Titus 1:7.

²¹ 1 Cor. 4:1; Heb. 13:7.

²⁴ 1 Tim. 5:17-18; Gal. 6:6-7; 1 Cor. 9:14.

²² John 17:20.

²⁵ Acts 2; 4; 6.

II. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS

A. *The Early Church.* The Early Church as we see it through the Epistles and the Book of Acts is highly conscious of itself as a royal priesthood. The entire congregation participated in the choosing of its pastors and servants.²⁶ The entire congregation worshiped in the fellowship of the Apostles from house to house.²⁷ The entire congregation prayed with unanimity and spontaneity in each crisis that came over it.²⁸ The entire congregation undertook the labors and responsibilities of love on behalf of one another. As rapidly as new groups became attached to the church, they followed this same pattern of organization. They also employed the same prerogatives of prayer and worship. The Holy Spirit swayed and stirred not merely the professional teachers of the church, but the members themselves,²⁹ and the preachers as they were members.

B. *The Catholic Church.* Early in the Apostolic Age a change began to emerge in the relation of pastor and people. The origins of this change were manifold. The number of professing church members increased, and with them the need for firmer organization and direction of the Church. Materialism and worldliness made it necessary to define church membership more accurately, and the Church sought for simple formulas of membership and discipline which it could enforce in order to keep its membership strong. The persecutions throughout the first three centuries caused large numbers of the original believers permanently or temporarily to repudiate their faith; and the Church sought for clear-cut and uniform means for defining who really belonged to the Church. Surrounded as it was by a society strongly governed by central authority, the Church, too, found it convenient to exalt the position of its teachers and leaders into one of direction and rule, beyond the original function of guidance and channeling of the means of grace.

1. *The Episcopacy.* This trend developed around the year 100 into a system of bishops. The word "bishop" was used not merely of the function of a pastor's overseeing the spiritual life of his people; but it was now used of the work

²⁶ Acts 1:15 ff.; 6:1 ff.

²⁷ Acts 2:42, 46.

²⁸ Acts 4:24 ff.

²⁹ Acts 10:44 ff.

of a pastor as he became overseer of lower orders of the clergy, such as deacons; or as he became overseer of other pastors as was the case in larger metropolitan areas where a number of congregations grew up side by side and where the older or abler pastor became the superior of the other pastors. By 110 A. D. the bishops were quoting the Scriptures in order to validate their authority over a congregation.

1. I then did my best as a man who was set on unity. But where there is division and anger, God does not dwell. The Lord, then, forgives all who repent if their repentance lead to the unity of God and the council of the bishop. I have faith in the grace of Jesus Christ, and He shall loose every bond from you. 2. But I beseech you to do nothing in facetiousness, but after the teaching of Christ. For I heard some men saying: "If I find it not in the charters in the Gospel, I do not believe," and when I said to them that it is in the Scriptures, they answered me: "That is exactly the question." But to me the charters are Jesus Christ, the inviolable charter is his Cross and death and resurrection, and the faith which is through Him; in these I desire to be justified by your prayers.³⁰

This authority extended over the defining of the creed which the candidates for Baptism and confirmation accepted, over the appointing and ordaining of pastors, and over cases of discipline. In effect, right in the lifetime of the oldest Apostles the Christian Church became a body governed and ruled by men who were set apart from others by rank and station, and in which they exercised human authority over people, consciences, and property.

2. *Sacerdotalism.* A further stimulus to this process was the sacerdotal principle, which early in the second century gained headway in the Church. This was the principle that the means of grace had their power, not simply because of the atonement of Christ, of which they were signs and signals, or because of the Holy Spirit, who wrought through them the effect on the heart of the hearer; but because of the character and office of the man who employed them. Thus pastors became priests. Furthermore, combined with the episcopal principle, the priesthood was a matter set apart from that of the individual believer in that it was conferred only by the laying on of hands of the bishop. This principle had a normal and natural origin, since the age was illiterate, the

³⁰ Ignatius, *Ep. to the Philad.*, VIII, 1, *Ap. F.*, I, 247. Lake ed., Loeb. Lib., New York, 1924.

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vast majority of churchgoers could not read or write, it was easy for undisciplined and ill-equipped ministers to claim a position of authority, and it was very necessary to hedge the office of the ministry about with the authority of the bishop. The result, however, was disastrous, for the Word was almost lost sight of as a power of the Spirit, and the Sacrament was turned into an agency of clerical prestige. The Sacrament itself rapidly was dominated by the doctrine of transubstantiation. For our purpose it is significant to notice that the ministry itself was set apart from the people. In the process of the Middle Ages the principle finally gained general acceptance that the Church was the body of the clergy, under the guidance of its bishops, and deferring to the chief bishop of Rome; the people were saved and made Christian only as they accepted the formulas of belief laid down by the bishops and as they submitted to the ministration of the clergy. The sacrament of penance and the doctrine of purgatory completed the bondage in which the people found themselves, but they also served to widen the breach between the clergy and the laity and effectively to make the priesthood of all believers inoperative.

C. The Reformation. The Lutheran Church likes to emphasize three principles as basic in the Christian religion: *Sola Gratia, Sola Fides, Sola Scriptura*. All three of these principles, however, practically express themselves in the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Several facts make this doctrine basic in the Reformation of Martin Luther. These facts were discerned by Luther's contemporaries and by his Lutheran successors to a varying degree.

1. **Luther.** Luther's Reformation was a revolt in first place against a false doctrine of peace with God. The Roman system had made the peace of God a gift only in a qualified sense. At every turn this gift was circumscribed and mediated by the priesthood; the priest funneled forgiveness, supervised penance, consecrated the sacrament, and scheduled the process toward the realization of God's grace after purgatory. Luther cut this all aside by stressing the completed work of the redemption of Christ, the completed righteousness of God in Christ imputed to the sinner, and the completed peace with God, in which the believer stands in the very moment of faith. The priesthood thereby gives way to a totally different

concept, the ministry. The minister is a priest only in the degree to which the believer is a priest. The minister is engaged by his fellow believers to provide, through Word and Sacrament, that continuing hold on the grace of God which is necessary for forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. In the exact sense, there is no distinction between minister and layman; the only difference is that the minister works for the layman; the difference is not one of rank or station (*Rang* or *Stand*) but of function and work (*Amt*). Luther:

1021. Eigentlich das rechte Priesteramt ist, das Evangelium predigen, welches ist nichts anderes denn eine oeffentlich, ingemein und allenthalben zu verkuendigen und zu geben, allen, die an ihn glauben. Und dies heisst das rechte Amt des neuen Testaments, solchen Befehl und Amt, von Christo gegeben, haben und fuehren, Vergebung der Suende zu verkuendigen; und also solch Priesteramt eigentlich Christo selbst zusteht, und gar von ihm herquillt und fliesst. . . . er selbst der Hohepriester ist, von dem dies Predigtamt allein hergeht, auch allein von ihm predigt, dass im neuen Testament kein Priestertum soll sein noch gelten, so ausser ihm, oder anders, denn von ihm predigt.

1037. Denn ob wir wohl alle Priester sind, so koennen und sollen wir doch darum nicht alle predigen oder lehren und regieren; doch muss man aus dem ganzen Haufen etliche aussondern und waehlen, denen solches Amt befohlen werde. Und wer solches fuehrt, der ist nun nicht des Amts halben ein Priester (wie die andern alle sind), sondern ein Diener der andern aller. Und wenn er nicht mehr predigen und dienen kann oder will, so tritt er wieder in den gemeinen Haufen, befiehlt das Amt einem andern, und ist nichts anderes, denn ein jeglicher gemeiner Christ. 1038. Siehe, also muss man das Predigtamt oder Dienstantm scheiden von dem gemeinen Priesterstande aller getauften Christen. Denn solch Amt ist nicht mehr denn ein oeffentlicher Dienst, so etwan einem befohlen wird von der ganzen Gemeinde, welche alle zugleich Priester sind. . . .

So wir aber Christen worden sin durch diesen Priester und sein Priesteramt, und in der Taufe durch den Glauben ihm eingeleibt, so kriegen wir auch das Recht und Macht, das Wort, so wir von ihm haben, zu lehren und zu bekennen vor jedermann, ein jeglicher nach seinem Beruf und Stande. Denn ob wir wohl nicht alle im oeffentlichen Amt und Beruf sind, so soll und mag doch ein jeglicher Christ seinen Naechsten lehren, unterrichten, vermahnen, troesten, strafen durch Gottes Wort, wann und wo jemand das bedarf; als, Vater und Mutter ihre Kinder und Gesinde, ein Bruder, Nachbar, Buerger oder Bauer den andern.³¹

³¹ St. L. V:1021; 1037, 1038 to Ps. 110:4 from 1538 (preached). Further operations of the royal priesthood are sacrifice of our lives and goods, prayer, Luther says.

2. *The Lutheran Church.* Luther's doctrine of the royal priesthood maintained itself in the Church which took his name, in principle. In practice, the principle did not remain intact. The masses in the German states were products of centuries of formal worship. They understood the principles of the Reformation but imperfectly, and the reformers knew this. The Church of the Middle Ages had been not only a spiritual institution, but an agency for the administration of justice and morals. When the Roman hierarchy gave way, the German princes and councilors undertook the management of the Church; and the Church became an agent, not only for the Gospel, but also for areas of morals and restraint which in theory pertained to the State. The Lutheran pastor was the agent for the public administration of Word and Sacrament, and the shepherd of the believers. In practice, he was in addition an agent of the government, exerting its penalties, exercising its prestige, and standing before the community as its chief citizen, elevated above it by rank and authority as well as function. In the administration of the Church, furthermore, the Christian congregation was subordinate to government as far as choice of clergy, support of Word and Sacrament, and freedom of worship were concerned. These circumstances conspired to write into the history of German Lutheran thought a distinction between clergy and laity exalting not merely the *Pfarrer*, but also the *Prediger*.

3. *The Reformed Church.* In principle, the priesthood of all believers was recognized also by Zwingli and Calvin. The Reformed churches, furthermore, flourished to a greater degree in the cities than did their Lutheran contemporaries, and hence absorbed some of their nascent democratic spirit. In practice, however, the mode of government of the Genevan congregation was aristocratic rather than democratic. The distinction was not, indeed, between clergy and laity, although the clergy achieved great prestige also there through powers of censorship and moral supervision; but the contrast was between the people and the ruling elders. The Presbyterian form of church government was validated not merely on grounds of expediency, but from Scripture.

4. *Dissenting Groups.* Almost all of the non-Catholic groups, also outside of the Lutheran and Reformed, stressed the doctrine of the royal priesthood. The revolt against the

sacerdotal principle pervaded all Protestant movements. The dissenting groups, like the Anabaptists, actually succeeded better than the established churches in maintaining the principle also in practice. The Lutheran and the Reformed clergy, in the process of the century, usually became attached to an established agency of church government. The dissenting groups accordingly had to provide for their ministers through direct support and by a direct process of call. The result was a much greater movement of lay preaching and ministry among the dissenting groups and a much closer relation between the people and their professional pastors. Since, however, the dissenting groups were the objects of sharp doctrinal controversy and downright persecution by the government, the standard Lutheran and Reformed bodies developed an even sharper criticism and reaction against the principle of the ministry obtaining among the dissenters. Actually, this situation contributed to a decline in the doctrine of the royal priesthood. The situation parallels that in the early Church, when the bishops validated their position from Scripture—a false doctrine—in order to preserve their churches from the false doctrine of the Gnostics or Manicheans. The function in Church and State of the established ministry, furthermore, unhappily involved a popular reaction on the part of many people who did not actually understand the worth of Gospel and Sacrament at all. The Lutheran and the Reformed ministers in time had prestige, not because of the Gospel, but because of their position. The dissenting preachers suffered from want of prestige, not because of lack of the Gospel, but because of government opposition.

III. CURRENT PROBLEMS

Our Lutheran Church in America is the product of many factors. It inherits attitudes and points of view, habits of thinking and ways of action, from the European homeland and from a century of living in the New World. That means that we may expect it to incorporate some of the reaction and decay from the original principle of the priesthood of all believers in the Apostolic Church or in Luther's Reformation. However, our Church is vastly blessed by the privilege and right of reviewing itself; it is bound by only one rule, the rule of the Word of God. If it can succeed in recognizing its

shortcomings, there is no human agency which can refuse it the right to improve and to restore the original ideal. Particularly our clergy are in a crucial position. Humanly speaking, they hold the key to the thinking of the Church on the doctrine of the royal priesthood. The people do not advance beyond their pastors in thinking. This doubles the responsibility of the pastors; for if they hold back, because of habits of thought or hidden reluctance, the people are still not beyond them, and the Church suffers. The doctrine of the royal priesthood is not merely an earmark of an ideal Church, but it is the safeguard for the vitality of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in people. Where people and pastors neglect this doctrine, the "Church" does not necessarily decay — it may flourish as an institution; but the Church ceases to be the Church, and people cease to draw on God in Christ for their spiritual life and energies. Hence it behooves our ministry to review not only the doctrine of the royal priesthood, but the extent to which it is actually practiced, and to summon resources for making it really work.

A. *Difficulties.* The obstacles for realizing the ideal of the royal priesthood, today as in the past, lie in the domain of the flesh. On paper the doctrine is easy to define. The faith of the Lutheran Christian also today rejoices in its truth and embraces it gladly. In the practical experience of the Church, however, the principle remains difficult to carry out. That is true because of situations which are not necessarily spiritual at all, but which lie on the surface and in the tangibles of the Church. In our own Church these difficulties are for the most part the result of numerical growth. As more and more people gather in the administration of the Church, it becomes almost inevitable that levels should emerge in administration and prestige. Strenuously the founding fathers of our country labored to write democracy into the charter of our institutions; but government by edict and bureau, and the shrugging off of individual responsibility, nevertheless have overtaken our country politically. Spiritually a similar process threatens, the moment the size of a Church complicates its activity.

1. *Administration.* Basically, the Kingdom of God is God at work in man. This Kingdom extends itself over people through the Spirit of God at work in the means of grace. As

people gather together in a group, however, and seek the conveniences of places of worship and of teaching, a series of activities enter the scene which parallel and begin to obscure the primitive sharing of the Gospel. These activities deal with plant and property — the raising of money, the building and maintaining of buildings, the training and engaging of staff, the advertising of the work of the church to the public. This activity of Christians is intensified when many simple congregations join with one another synodically in a still more complex and wholesale task of building and maintaining property, raising money, recruiting and training and engaging workers, and informing the constituency of the tasks. The primitive Gospel works like a leaven; each man hands it on to the next. The parallel tasks of administration, however, involve one person, or few persons, guiding many, counseling many, directing many. This situation was especially apparent in the beginnings of our own Church in America, where frequently full-fledged congregations emerged in the New World, adrift in a strange land, forced to rely upon clerical leadership not only for the primitive Gospel, but for material management. Under those circumstances, many varieties of relationship between pastor and people emerged. In Missouri the initial attempt was hierarchical and almost episcopal; then a reaction swept in which emphasized the royal priesthood and achieved a pure congregationalism. The Grabau movement accentuated the authority of the pastor, in spheres both of teaching and administration, and validated it on Scriptural grounds. The other congregations of German Lutherans in America fluctuated between the two extremes. The Saint Louis congregation made its anti-episcopal misgivings felt in the first constitution of the Missouri Synod. In the course of years, however, under the dominating personality of Dr. Walther, the St. Louis congregation reverted to a more typical German deference to the prestige and judgment of its pastor. Under the stress of the huge numbers of German speaking people emigrating to America and the very sudden increase in membership of the Missouri Synod, the leadership of the pastor frequently achieved exaggerated dimensions. There was not time to indoctrinate adequately or to review the spiritual attitudes and insight of people prior to their communing at Missouri Synod altars. The pastor on his part,

therefore, felt obligated to assert redoubled authority over doctrine and morals; and the people were trained through the generations from 1860 to 1900 to defer to the doctrine and to the administrative judgments of their pastors. They were not trained to review the doctrine like the Bereans; they were not habituated to share in the administration of their churches. The result was heightened by the meager supply—and sometimes the meager training—of the pastors themselves. The result was frequently that the doctrine of the royal priesthood was preached and praised, but not realized. The pastor became a channel or sound system through which God reached the people, rather than a workman who coupled the people directly to God. This is not said in complaint or in criticism of the many congregations and pastors to whom it applies, but simply to indicate the difficulties through which also our own Church has had to come in realizing this doctrine. Furthermore, the trend toward a stronger central authority in Synod, which was to be expected with increase in size, has set in. The motives for this trend are not wrong, and the form which it takes is not wrong. But the effort is under way to obligate members of Synod to the resolutions of Synod on the basis of membership in Synod; the alternative is to leave Synod. The 1947 convention sought improvement by this formula:

1.09 RELATION OF SYNOD TO ITS MEMBERS

Substitute for 1.09 b: b. Synod expects every member congregation to respect its resolutions and to consider them of binding force if they are in accordance with the Word of God and if they appear expedient as far as the condition of the congregation is concerned. Synod, being an advisory body, recognizes the right of the congregation to be the judge of the expediency of the resolution as applied to its local condition. However, in exercising such judgment, a congregation must not act arbitrarily, but in accordance with the principles of Christian love and charity.³²

In the course of years the contrasts between clergy and laity have been intensified also by the development of the profession of the American clergy. American church work, particularly with the shift to the city, emphasized administration not only on the supervisory or episcopal level, but also on the parochial level. Congregations thought of themselves

³² *Proceedings of 40th Regular Convention., C. P. H., 1947, p. 425, 1.09.*

as hiring pastors, not merely for the public preaching and teaching of the Word and the administration of the Office of the Keys, but for a variety of tasks and activities of financial, secretarial, and promotional character. Church work for the layman in the course of time became simply the contributing and gathering of funds for the hiring of professional workers. It may be an oversimplification, but one not too far beyond actual truth, to say that a distinction emerged in our Church between clergy and laity in that church work was that which clergymen did and which laymen paid for. It is significant to note that organized lay movements in our Church frequently concerned themselves chiefly with fund raising. It is also interesting to note that much of the unprinted controversy between pastors and teachers as to the nature of their office concerned a rank in which supposedly both stood above the layman. Thus the processes at work in the very history of the Missouri Synod and within its group tended to emphasize contrast between clergy and laity and to obscure the priesthood of the believer.

2. *The Power Age.* Our Church is influenced not only by factors from within, but also from outside. The past hundred years will be noteworthy in history as a time in Western civilization accentuating tangible power at the expense of intangible ideas. Previous instances of such a development have been the Roman Empire, and the Italian city-state. The current movement has been fostered by the industrial revolution and the capitalistic culture which has paralleled it. Particularly America has been a prey of this movement. During most of its history it has been the victim of ruthless exploitation of natural resources and the accent on capital wealth. In its current phase America suffers under the fear that natural resources will run out and seeks to stem the tide by a power economy and politics. The Church has not been immune to this climate of thought. It is significant that the Roman Catholic Church has made its most signal advance in America, not only in its own denomination, but in the prestige which it enjoys in the eyes of Protestantism. The Catholic Church has expressed itself with authority and unity on every problem of current life. Disjointed Protestantism views this show of authority with admiration and seeks for the means of equaling it. The ecumenical movement is in part fostered

by the desire to present a united front of Protestantism which will outthrust the vigor of the Roman Catholic Church in national and international economy and politics. Curiously, however, this phase of the ecumenical movement does not aim so much at a unity of the people; if it did, the royal priesthood might come into its own. But it aims at a unity of authority; it seeks to make the heads of the Church speak with the weight of the entire Church behind them. In that sense it capitulates to the power complex of our time, which economically and politically fosters dictatorships.

The shift from the intangible ideas to tangible force always accompanies institutions which are in a state of decay. This decay is not necessarily marked by poverty or smallness, but normally by the opposite, wealth and numbers. Our Church, too, in common with the institutions of American life, faces the threat of decay. The march of generations has sent those people to heaven for whom the life of God in Christ Jesus was the absorbing value, and has nurtured generations for which the institutions, the heritage of plant and administration, is the significant thing. Under such circumstances the administration becomes more significant than the life of God. As men face the needs of the time in moral judgments and in the recruiting of resources for the goals of the Church, the primary significance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ becomes a thing to say and to advertise; but the motive for the work becomes the thrust and force of administrative pressure. The royal priesthood flourishes only in people who are directly in touch with God. The moment that their religious life has significance simply because of what people say or urge, a difference emerges between the people themselves and those who administrate or urge them.

Politically and socially our time seems to be setting itself for some vast conflict. The revolution in which it has been engaged for many years, namely, the turning of the tide of physical property from the privileged classes to the masses, seems about to climax in a death struggle involving nations, civilizations, and religions. The Christian Church, facing this battle, tends to imagine that it can save itself only as it adopts organization and takes sides in philosophy. Pessimistic thinkers ask whether, as has been the case in the sixth or in the sixteenth century, the outward forms of the Christian

Church have perhaps not served their usefulness for a cycle of the world's history and are to be replaced by new and primitive forms of Christian society. The priesthood of all believers remains the touchstone of this process and the key to this question. If the Christian Church is going to forsake that principle in order to maintain itself in the struggle of our times, we may expect God to rule that the sacrifice has been too great and that the battle was thus surrendered before it was joined. If our Church, and particularly our clergy, are to do their part in maintaining the will of God for His people, they may well seek to resist the forces of decay and refresh the powers of the life of God in the individual members of their Church. That means a revival of the royal priesthood of every believer.

B. *Some Solutions.* During the past hundred years our Synod has not presented a uniformly unpleasant picture concerning the priesthood of the believer. Particularly in the individual parish, out on the battle line, and particularly in the parish aware of its coming to grips with unchristian society, a salutary attitude toward the royal priesthood has prevailed. It is often said that the smaller and younger churches have distinguished themselves in this respect. This is probably not true; the contrast is not between smaller and larger, or between younger and older, but between those on the one hand in which the Word of God has empowered a living and working faith, and others in which church work became simply the support of the congregation. The entire program of improvement was imperiled for a time in the shift from the European to the American language. In the period of change, religion became a matter of thought and speech foreign to that of the community, and the pastor frequently spoke in a language divorced from the main current of thought and life. As the Church comes to equilibrium in the process of change, it conquers some of these difficulties. Any suggestions which we offer for remedying current problems and vitalizing the royal priesthood are, therefore, by way of observation of existing practice as well as reaction to our own shortcomings.

1. *The Functional Ministry.* As pastors view the problem of the royal priesthood, they obviously can make contributions only in two areas. The one is that they keep themselves from developing a cleavage between clergy and laity; the other,

that they enable their people to take over the responsibilities and privileges of the royal priesthood more abundantly.

Pastors will do much in the right direction if they succeed in re-establishing Luther's ideal of community between pastors and people in station, and distinction only in office or function. That process is under way. Probably every pastor, from time to time, makes adjustments in his own thinking and in his work toward that end. The work of the minister is to maintain the individual with God through Christ. For that purpose he has one tool, the fact of Christ's atonement. His purpose for the individual, however, is as varied as the individual's life is varied; and the techniques with which the pastor carries out his purpose are as varied as the avenues by which the pastor can reach the individual's mind and heart. The pastor thus must continually revive in his mind the attitude of being a helper of the individual for maintaining his hold on God. The pastor stands by with every means of insight, courtesy, and kindness in helping the individual to overcome the handicaps of the flesh and the world and the devil for his spiritual life. The pastor to that end sets up every contact between the individual and himself, and every tie of affection and good will, which he possibly can. The common people heard Jesus gladly because He spoke as one having authority.³³ That authority did not lie merely in the show of right or the asseveration of truth; the scribes and Pharisees had that abundantly. But His authority was rather the power by which He freed His hearers from every handicap for listening to Him and from the ills which beset them; "authority" actually means as much as freedom. The activities of the pastor, therefore, become a vast series of minute and varied operations in which he is constantly at work keeping people with God, enlarging the life of Christ in their hearts.³⁴

The pastor will do well to recognize what prevents him

³³ Matt. 7:28-29.

³⁴ Luther, XII: 483, *Hauspostille*, on Joh. 19:25-37: "Wo es nun in der Kirche recht zugeht, sollen die, so das Predigtamt fuehren, ein Mutterherz gegen die Kirche haben. Denn wo solches Herz nicht da ist, wird man faul und verdrossen, und sonderlich wird man zum Leiden unwillig; wie der Herr sehr fein anzeigt, Joh. 21. . . . Wo nun das Mutterherz, die grosse Liebe, nicht da ist und die Prediger treibt, da wird der Schaefflein uebel gewartet."

from carrying out this function. It will seldom be the case that the pastor consciously seeks to exalt his station into one of authority and thus disrupts his place in the priesthood of all believers or builds an artificial distinction between clergy and laity. When that happens, it is usually due to a difficulty of an emergency nature. A pastor may find himself unable to meet the needs of people in certain unexpected or unaccustomed areas of their lives; this may happen in youth work, in a shifting population, or in a controversy occasioning clash of judgment. Uncertain of his ground, the pastor may seek to enhance his position by a show of authority or demand for recognition. If he does not succeed, he has wrecked the ties of usefulness with his people. If he does succeed, he may retain a usefulness, but he has also destroyed the common level with his people, and violated in their minds the attitude which they should have about themselves. Such cases, however, are, if unpleasant and unhappy, at least rare and abnormal.³⁵

More trying and more common, however, is the situation in which the pastor assumes a difference in rank because of the tasks to which he is assigned. As he becomes the executive secretary of the church's business, the accent develops on an executive authority rather than on the function of maintaining the life in Christ. Here it becomes especially important that the pastor reserve time in the total complex of his activities for the essential work with the individual. We have frequently said in our literature that the pastor should continue to have time for personal study and preparation of his sermons. We should say with increasing emphasis that the pastor should have time for work with the individual. In larger communities and congregations his time for personal consultations must continue to be inviolate. The people must know that there are hours when they can find their pastor, and that he will have the leisure to listen to their need, and the interest in that need. The pastor's activity in his or-

³⁵ Luther, XII:410. *Epistelpostille* to 2 Cor. 11:19 to 12:9; eds. begin 1525: "Die Summa dieser Epistel, dass an einem Prediger oder Lehrer kein schaedlicher noch giftiger Laster ist denn eitele Ehre. . . . 411 Alle anderen Laster sind traeglicher in einem Prediger, wiewohl keines gut ist. . . . Denn das Predigtamt ist geordnet, dass es allein Gottes Ehre suche und meine mit ganzem Herzen."

ganizations must be one which reinforces in the people's thinking the fact that he is the specialist in their individual needs and problems, and must remind them to bring those needs to the pastor for those solutions which involve the life of the Spirit. The Apostles who were the pastors of the first church in Jerusalem set the proper pace when they asked for help in executive areas of the church's business, and demanded priority for the tasks involving the teaching of the Word of God and the conducting of the prayers of the people. Even where the pastor operates with group teaching, as in preaching, Bible classes, membership classes, he will do well to maintain in his own mind the desire to reach the individual. Only as his preaching is in effect the sitting down with each individual in the audience will it be persuasive. Only as his teaching is in effect the meeting of the individual's questions, the stimulating of the individual's interests, and the leading of the individual into the greater life in Christ, can it be called teaching. As the pastor achieves these objectives, however, he is implementing and reinforcing the universal priesthood. Thus he carries out a ministry which does not establish a difference in rank, but which carries out the fullness of function of the servant and pastor. His work thus becomes more arduous, but it achieves its true place in the Church.³⁶

2. *The Functional Church.* In our age our people will always be ready to relax the universal priesthood. Our power age emphasizes organization, leadership, dictation. Our materialistic age emphasizes the purchasing of services rendered by others. Our people will always be ready therefore to shrink their spiritual life into a simple series of processes in which they buy exemption from penalties for sins and engage religious professionals to take their place as workers for

³⁶ Luther, XIII: 1204. *Hauspostille*, Mark 10: 35-45: "Das heisst dem Predigtamt nicht allein die weltliche Macht und Gewalt genommen, sondern auch das aufgelegt, dass es durchaus nur ein Dienstamt sein soll, da man nichts von hat denn Muehe und Arbeit, und danach allen Undank, ja wohl auch alles Unglueck. . . . Die Apostel haben mehr Befehls denn die Bischoefe; die Bischoefe und Pfarrherren mehr denn andere gemeine Lehrer und Prediger oder ihre Diener und Diakonen. Solche unterschiedene Aemter will unser lieber Herr Christus alle gleich machen mit diesem Befehl, dass niemand derselben zu seiner eigenen Ehre oder Nutzen brauchen, sondern allein damit andern Leuten dienen und Muehe und Arbeit davon haben soll."

God. Clergymen, discerning the signs of the time, need to throw themselves against this tendency with everything at their disposal. They can make the beginning with their manner, their demeanor. They can make clear by their humbleness, but also by their own industriousness, that the Christian religion is a matter of faith in the individual and that they are bent on working for the other person to maintain that faith in him. As voting members of their congregations they can pool their judgments for what they are worth with the others, humbly and kindly defer to the will of the majority, and never insist on their way because they are the preacher. Where God's Word had directive for action, they will share its insights and exalt its meaning. Never, however, will they seek to make their way the right one by cloaking it in the garb of a Scriptural vocabulary or of pastoral prestige. This means some very hard thinking on the pastor's part. In the heat of give and take, in the rub of many minds, it is not always easy for them to understand and to recognize where good thinking ends and prejudice or the desire to have one's way begins. Above all they shall have to work hard on this easy rationalization: "I must maintain the dignity of the ministerial office." They maintain that dignity, not by getting their way without exception in voters' meetings, but simply and always by putting the Spirit of God into human hearts through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. To fail in this clear thinking not only draws a trail of heartache over the minutes of many a voters' meeting, but it robs people of the great contribution of Lutheranism to their practical life and the polity of their Church, namely, the fact of the royal priesthood. It leads them to assume that the pastor's significance is that of dictating policy. When they assume that, then the pastor loses his value in their minds as nurturer of spiritual life; they cease to take in his supply of the Spirit of God through the means of grace. Certainly this does not imply that the pastor should withdraw from the management of the church's business or should never take a position in matters of judgment. His example, his readiness to undertake such judgments, his swiftness to yield to the will of the majority where it is a matter of judgment only, will be a shining demonstration to his people of how Christians live in unity together. But at the same time it will be an invitation to draw richly

from the source of supply for practical living which is the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Sacrament of His blood, of which the pastor is steward.⁸⁷

In his program of preaching and teaching the pastor can do much to implement and exalt the royal priesthood. He can make the doctrine clear. This he must do through the standard devices at his disposal. He must unravel the figurative language of the concept and present it to his people in as literal truth as possible: that every believer because of the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ is utterly at peace with God and draws directly upon the life and Spirit of God; that every believer can grow in this life through his own direct hold of faith on the atonement of Jesus Christ, reinforced by Word and Sacrament.

As the pastor says this in words, however, he must add the factor of teaching which is the "teaching to observe." He must make clear that the royal priesthood is not only a piece of information to carry in the mind, it is a program of living which involves the life and experience of the believer. He must help the believer to recognize that the believer's life of prayer, the solution of his personal problems, his reach out to the brother in family and congregation and community, all stem from this personal relation to God through Christ which makes him a royal priest. He must seek to guide the members of the church, young and old, through a series of activities and experiences in which they put this relation to God into practical use. The pastor must be available to his people in assisting them step by step in this process, consulting with them on lags or gains, and working with them as a helper in achieving results.

⁸⁷ Luther, XIII:2402, 17 pt. *Hauspostille*, from 1533 on sitting in the upper room: "Darum obenan sitzen, Ehre oder Gewalt haben, Doktor oder Fuerst sein, ist nicht boese; aber sich selbst eindringen ist boese, wenn man nicht Gott und das Werk, sondern seine eigene Ehre und Nutz darin sucht, dass es allein meinem schaedlichen Herzen dienen soll. Ein Prediger soll nicht allein Ehre haben, sondern auch arbeiten und die Ehre verdienen; wie Petrus, Paulus und andere getan haben, sonst ist kein Glueck bei der Ehre."