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Extracongregational Communion Services

By FREDERICK H. PRALLE

The Church¹ exists in the world to glorify God by bringing the Gospel and the sacraments to the world and thereby keeping Christians in saving faith. The people of the Christian community are also to live their faith in actions of love toward one another and those outside the fellowship of the Christian community. The Church is, therefore, in the world but not of this world.

The ministry is part of the corporate action of the body of Christ, the Church. In the Church, the Father, Christ and the Holy Spirit are accomplishing the work of salvation. Upon the Church's call a minister performs various functions of the body of Christ. These "functions are God-given; the roles of officers are a matter of institutional life."²

Davis summarizes his study of the ministry in the New Testament by saying about the ordained minister:

It is the whole Church that actually does through them what it belongs to the Church to do. . . . A function of the Church is laid on the ordained, and the Church performs it, Christ performs it, through them. The function is not transferred from the Church to him so that it

ceases to be the Church's function and becomes his private function. He performs the function as a *diakonia*, a service; he does not possess it as a right or a privilege.³

Luther points out that the functions of the "royal priesthood,"⁴ which means all the Christians and not a certain class in the Church,⁵ are seven. They are: "to teach, to preach and proclaim the Word of God, to baptize, to consecrate or administer the Eucharist, to bind and loose sins, to pray for others, to sacrifice, and to judge of all doctrine and spirits."⁶ All of these are done by, in, and with the Word of God.

The Bohemians, to whom Luther wrote the words quoted above, were sending their candidates each year to Italy to purchase papal ordination. In place of this, Luther recommended that since all Christians are in the priesthood of believers "in equal degree,"⁷ they first should pray to God, then "call and come together freely. . . . Proceed in the name of the Lord to elect one or more whom you desire and who appear to be worthy and able. Then let those who are leaders among you lay hands upon them, and certify and commend them to the people and the church or com-

¹ In the text of this article (but not necessarily in the quotations) "Church" with a capital "C" is the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of the Creeds; "church" with a small "c" is a denomination or church body; and "congregation" is the local parish.

² Henry Grady Davis, "The Ministry in the New Testament," *The Chicago Lutheran Theological Seminary Record*, LVII, No. 3 (July 1952), p. 23.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁴ 1 Peter 2:9.

⁵ Davis, pp. 9-14.

⁶ Martin Luther, "Concerning the Ministry," *Luther's Works* Vol. 40, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), p. 21.

⁷ *Ibid.*

munity. In this way let them become your bishops, ministers, or pastors."⁸

C. F. W. Walther agrees to all this. He says, "The holy ministry, or the pastoral office, is an office distinct from the priestly office, which belongs to all believers."⁹ The ministers are called "in God's Word not only servants and stewards of God but also servants and stewards of the church, or congregation, and are thus represented as persons who administer, not their own but the rights, authorities, possessions, treasures, and offices of the Church, hence are acting, not only in the name of Christ but also in the name and in the place of His bride, the Church of the believers."¹⁰

Walther also stresses that "it is likewise the congregation or Church of Christ . . . by which, namely, by its election, call, and commission, the ministry of preaching, which publicly administers the office of the keys and all priestly offices in the congregation, is conferred on certain persons qualified for the same."¹¹

Francis Pieper emphasizes the role of the congregation when he writes:

The proper answer to the question whether it is the *universal* or the *local* church that is entrusted with the right of calling ministers, is that Christ clearly ascribes "the keys of the kingdom," and, consequently, the right to appoint ministers, to the *local*

church. For it is the local church which Christ addresses when He says: "Whatever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. . . ." "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them," Matt. 18:20.¹²

In his dogmatics Pieper says, "The ministry . . . presupposes Christian congregations. Only a congregation can establish the public ministry."¹³

A fitting summary for this section on the ministry is a sentence from the 1938 statement on the call to the ministry accepted by the United Lutheran Church in America. "We, therefore, conceive of the call to the gospel ministry as the inclusive invitation of the triune God, the Church and the congregation, or authorized agency of the Church, to a member of the Church to feed the flock of God through teaching the Word and administering the sacraments."¹⁴

Therefore it is to the Church that the office of the ministry has been given.¹⁵ A group of Christians exercising this right in a parish or a congregation delegates the office to those qualified in its midst. It is the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments which cre-

¹² Francis Pieper, "The Synodical Conference," *The Distinctive Doctrines and Usage of the General Bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States*, 4th ed. (Philadelphia, 1914), p. 141.

¹³ *Christliche Dogmatik* (St. Louis, 1920), III, 502 and 515. The English translation: *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis, 1953), III, 439 and 451.

¹⁴ *Minutes of the Eleventh Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America*, Oct. 5—12, 1938, p. 67.

¹⁵ Ruben Josefson, "The Ministry as an Office in the Church," *This Is the Church*, ed. Anders Nygren (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1952), p. 278.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt*. Vierte Auflage (Zwickau, 1894), S. 174. Also see Wm. Dallmann, W. H. T. Dau, and Th. Engelder, ed. *Walther and the Church* (St. Louis, 1938), p. 71. Cited hereafter as *Walther and the Church*.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 136 (*Walther and the Church*, pp. 77 and 78).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 245 (*Walther and the Church*, p. 75).

ates the Church and at the same time locates the Church in a church. The holy ministry, the *Predigtamt* of Article V of the Augsburg Confession, exists for this.

HOLY COMMUNION SERVICES OUTSIDE A CONGREGATION

Before a discussion on the advisability or nonadvisability of having Holy Communion service beyond the immediate confines of a congregation or the usual setting of its house of worship is begun, several points need to be reviewed.

First of all, a church or a congregation does not have the authority to proclaim the Word and administer the sacraments merely because it is an organized group. Rather it is a gift of God, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, that the Church is present among men at all. By the Holy Spirit, through the means of grace, the Church, the body of Christ, is present wherever Christians are gathered in His name and at His command around the Word and the sacraments. It is not confined to a particular place.

Second, as soon as members of the Church, gathered in a congregation, begin to function, they establish a mode of procedure in securing someone to exercise the holy ministry for them. The manner itself in which they do so does not guarantee the presence of the Church. It is rather the Word and the sacraments, preached and administered by the called and ordained minister, which are the evidence of the presence of the Church.

Third, Lutherans understand that according to Article XIII of the Augsburg Confession the sacraments are signs which not only mark the presence of believers, but are primarily "intended to awaken and

confirm faith in those who use them. . . . "For this reason they require faith, and they are rightly used when they are received in faith and for the purpose of strengthening faith."¹⁰

In view of these considerations there may well be different approaches to the problem of having Holy Communion services outside the local congregation, such as are held at conventions, retreats, and conferences of auxiliaries of a church at large and of a local congregation. Also included are such services conducted for the students and the faculty members of the colleges and seminaries of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

The question has arisen because sincere Christians wish to attend Holy Communion more often and desire to express their unity of faith with others one in the faith with them. In 1961 it was stated that in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod "until ten years ago no District convention or triennial delegate convention (of the synod) incorporated a Communion service for all attending."¹⁷ The first such service at a triennial delegate convention was held in St. Paul, Minn., June 22, 1956, the delegates being guests of Trinity First Lutheran Church, Minneapolis.¹⁸

¹⁰ Theodore G. Tappert (editor and translator) et al., *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), p. 36. Hereafter referred to as T.

¹⁷ Walter F. Wolbrecht, "The Sacrament of Thanksgiving in Church Life and Practice," a paper delivered June 16, 1961, and duplicated at the golden anniversary convention of the English District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, Ill., June 13—16, 1961.

¹⁸ *Proceedings of the Forty-third Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, St. Paul, Minn., June 20—29, 1956, p. v.

Since delegates at the conventions, retreats, conferences, and members of student bodies and faculties of the Synod are members in good standing in their congregations, there is no problem of church discipline. Under present practices disorderly conduct is not likely to arise if proper safeguards can be taken to prevent its occurrence. If a case of church discipline developed, it would be referred to the congregation of the person or persons involved. Nevertheless the problem of proper supervision remains. The members and leaders of a church do not want the sacrament to be misused or the practice of Holy Communion outside the congregation to lead to abuses.

Therefore some hold that such services should not be held. It is asserted that "the congregation is the guardian of the means of grace and that only those who are called or especially delegated by the congregation have any right to administer the Office of the Keys publicly."¹⁹

Another writer asserts:

Since we have local congregations, the rule ought to be followed that communicants receive the Supper in their own churches. This statement does not rest on a divine directive, but rather on the general principle of order in the churches; hence exceptions can occur. Let me point out also that there is no justification for mass Communion at conventions and gatherings.²⁰

This view rests on the demand for decency and order. This principle of decency and order is regarded by some in The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod as the de-

termining factor when such services are held. Krause goes on, "When Communion is celebrated in our synods and in our conferences, it is administered by the local congregations through their called pastors."²¹

Conventions, conferences, retreats, colleges, and seminaries may ask a congregation to sponsor such a service or they may have a pastor from a local congregation consecrate the elements in the Lord's Supper and participate in the Communion service. At times the responsibility of the congregation in such an arrangement may become rather tenuous.

In addition, the question can be raised, whether a congregation or its pastor has the right of jurisdiction to authorize a Holy Communion service for Christians who are not members of that congregation.²² Neither a pastor nor a congregation, it is also asserted, holds the Word and the sacraments as some kind of monopoly "to dispense, hoard, or ration." Every Christian congregation "is answerable to Christ if it gives the Communion where it should not be given. It is equally answerable to Him if it denies it where it should be given. The Communion may be given or denied only on clear and certain grounds, and they must be reasons of faith, not merely of polity or custom."²³

Over against the late medieval hierarchical view of the Church Luther, in the tract *Concerning the Ministry*, argues:

²¹ Ibid.

²² See "Corporate Communion," *Minutes of the Twelfth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America*, Omaha, Nebr., Oct. 9—16, 1940, p. 62. Hereafter referred to as *Minutes*.

²³ *Minutes*, 1954, p. 1021, *passim*.

¹⁹ Ottomar O. Krueger, "The Lord's Supper," *The Abiding Word* (St. Louis, 1960), III, 461.

²⁰ A. E. Krause, "The Proper Use of the Sacrament of Holy Communion," *ibid.*, p. 521.

It would be safer and more wholesome for the father of the household to read the gospel and, since the universal custom and use allows it to the laity, to baptize those who are born in his home, and so to govern himself and his according to the doctrine of Christ, even if throughout life they did not dare or could not receive the Eucharist. For the Eucharist is not so necessary that salvation depends on it. The gospel and baptism are sufficient, since faith alone justifies and love alone lives rightly.²⁴

Luther adds that even if several more homes would do this or even cities without a minister for Holy Communion, "Christ without a doubt would be in their midst and would own them as His church."²⁵

In another place Luther states in answer to the question whether a father might conduct the sacrament in his home:

But the sacrament is a public profession of faith and should have public ministers, because it is written, as Christ says, one should do it to His remembrance, that is, as St. Paul says, to show or preach the Lord's death till He comes. He also says, one should come together and strongly rebukes those in particular, when each wanted for himself to use the Lord's Supper, though not forbidden. But each one is commanded above all to teach God's Word to his house, as well as himself, and one cannot baptize oneself.²⁶

While Luther is against the practice of the Lord's Supper in the home and stresses the public aspect of the sacrament, the Communion services we are discussing are

²⁴ *Luther's Works*, Vol. 40 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), p. 9.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 9 and 10.

²⁶ *Luthers Werke*, Jenenser Ausgabe, Tom. VII, F. 339. u. A. 275 in M. Conrad Porta, *Pastorale Lutheri* (Nordlingen, 1842), p. 423.

public and not private, and need not be contrary to good order and the edifying of the body of Christ.

Another view is that an ordained pastor, upon request from a group of Christians like those mentioned above, may conduct a Communion service for them. This approach is based on Art. XIV of the Augsburg Confession. It reads, "It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the Church without a regular call."²⁷ The Apology adds, "We like the old division of power into the power of the order and the power of jurisdiction. Therefore a bishop has the power of the order, namely, the ministry of Word and sacraments."²⁸

This approach recognizes that the Church is present in the groups under study. Men holding the office of the ministry generally are present. Because Christians honestly desire the sacrament, the service is held as a public worship service by a called and ordained minister. However, the power of jurisdiction would also have to be recognized. A pastor would not be able arbitrarily, for example, to conduct Holy Communion services in another congregation except upon a proper invitation from the congregation to do so.

CHURCH POLITY AND EXTRA COMMUNION SERVICE

It would appear that having Holy Communion services outside a congregation is a problem which may be solved in Christian liberty. In doing so it would have to be recognized that the Church is present where

²⁷ *AC* XIV; T. 36.

²⁸ *Ap* XXVIII 13; T. 283.

the Word and the sacraments are. Not wishing to be arbitrary about withholding the sacrament nor wishing to be loose in practicing good order, a congregation might well decide how these Communion services outside the regular parochial worship are to be authorized. The pastor may be given this authority from his congregation for the auxiliaries of the congregation.²⁰

A church may request the local congregations to give the permission for such ser-

²⁰ *Minutes*, 1940, pp. 62 and 63. Cf. Henry Grady Davis, "Communion Outside the Parish," *The Chicago Lutheran Theological Seminary Record*, LIX, No. 3 (July 1954), pp. 16—21.

vices to its various auxiliary groups and educational institutions.

The congregations of a church may resolve to give this authority for its auxiliaries and educational institutions to its officers.

Whatever decision or action is taken, it should be done in conformity with the purposes of the Church and of the Lord's Supper. At the same time the decision would in love be mindful of the desire for forgiveness of sins, the strengthening of the faith, and the fellowship of the unity of the Church as the body of Christ through Communion services also outside the parish.

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