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Testing the Boundaries: Windows to Lutheran Identity.

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Melanchthons Briefwechsel. Band 8. Regesten 8072-9301 (1557-1560). Bearbeitet von Heinz Scheible und Walter Thüringer.

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Melanchthons Briefwechsel. Band T2. Texte 255-520 (1523-1526). Bearbeitet von Richard Wetzel unter Mitwirkung von Helga Scheible. Lowell C. Green

Augustine Confessions: Books I-IV.

Edited by Gillian Clark John G. Nordling

Luther and the Priesthood of All Believers

Norman Nagel

Was there a “priesthood of all believers” before there was a Luther? Did he invent it, or did he name it? Did he ever in fact use this expression? Where does it come from? These are the sorts of questions this paper addresses.

1 Peter 2 has “a holy priesthood” and “a royal priesthood” within a rich collection of complementary terms. This priesthood is from the covenanting text, Exodus 19:5-6. The same priesthood is called both holy and royal. Only here is this said, and its only source is Exodus 19—בְּרִית. The Lord speaks, his people hear Moses’ voice (his voice), and they say back to him what he has said to them: homology, confession, *coram Deo*.

“You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” Kingdom is where a king is king—that can only be the Lord. Only because of him does what is going on here occur, and he does what he does with his words (הַדְּבָרִים, 19:6). Among those words are *גוי קדוש* in parallel with *כְּמַלְכֻת כְּהֹנִים*. Those referred to by “people” and “kingdom” are evidently the same. “Holy” and “priests” refer then to both, and so cannot be understood except in harmony with each other. Therefore, in 1 Peter 2 the priesthood is both holy and royal. Parallelism and construct then give us “holy people” and “priestly kingdom” as referenced to the Lord, or better from the Lord. He is the center of it all. “To me” says the Lord, “you shall be a priestly kingdom, a holy people.”¹

¹One may see T. Winger, “The Priesthood of All the Baptized: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation,” unpublished S.T.M. thesis, Concordia Seminary, 1992, 21-68; G. Schrenk, “ἱερατεύω,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel, translated and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 volumes (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 3:249-251 (hereafter abbreviated *TDNT*); J. Elliott (*The Elect and the Holy* [Leiden: Brill, 1966], 58) notes: “In light of its cultic *Sitz im Leben*, the statement eventually recorded in Ex. 19:6 signified basically the holy nation who worshiped JHWH alone and belonged

Priests are always in relationship with someone else. It is impossible to make oneself a priest, to be a priest all by oneself, or for one's own benefit. Here in 1 Peter the relationship is clearly with the Lord, and he is the one who gives and establishes the relationship: "You shall be to me a priestly kingdom and a holy people."

In talk of priests there are always two points. You cannot be a priest all by yourself. A priest is always toward some one else, toward a non-priest. In Exodus 19 it is clearly toward the Lord, for it is where he is king. Lose the king and you lose the kingdom; no priestly kingdom is possible unless directed toward the king, the Lord; his kingdom his people. What is priestly and what is holy derives only from the Lord; he is singular. Kingdom and people are collective plural. Plural not as anybody and everybody, but as those to whom he has spoken, making them his people "my own possession among all peoples." "You out of all peoples, you shall be my personal possession" (NJB), "a peculiar treasure unto me" (AV).

Other peoples outside the covenant are not priests, "not my people" (Hosea 1:9). There are only priests if there are also those who are not priests. If everybody is a priest, no one is a priest. "Universal priesthood" (*allgemeines Priestertum*), then, is self contradictory. In Exodus 19 all the children of Israel are called "a priestly kingdom." Non-Israelites are non-priests. "Israel is to have the special privilege of priests to "draw near" God, and is to do service for all of the world." Within the children of Israel there are also priests, who are distinct from the people (Exodus 19:24). The people are "a holy people" and among them are priests who are holy in a specifically distinct way (Exodus 19:22; 30:30; Leviticus 8; 10:3). That there are thus two is from the Lord, and that is inherent in his gift bestowing

exclusively to Him"; E. Kinder, "*Allgemeines Priestertum*" im Neuen Testament (Berlin: LVH, 1953), 7-11. For an account of the debate on the Baptismal character of 1 Peter one may see Elliott, 12, note 3; Winger, 108-116. For earlier usage see P. Dabin, *Le Sacerdoce Royal des Fidèles* (Paris: De Brouwer, 1950), and N. Brox, *Der erste Petrusbrief* (Zurich: Neukirchen, 1979), 108-110.

ways, contrary to which would be the swallowing up of one by the other, or the one being brought into subjection to the other.²

In Exodus 19, then, there is Moses; he does what is the Lord's doing: he holies the people (19:10, 14). The people are a holy people, and a priestly kingdom, outside of which there are all the other peoples who are non-priests. The priestly people are priestly *coram Deo*. Among them there are priests distinct from them, made so, consecrated, by the Lord. There is no individual priest who has not been made a priest by the Lord. Priests are only from the Lord toward the Lord. They are ordained according to his mandate and institution, and thereby are given what they are there for, and that is what they do toward the Lord on behalf of his people. They do toward his people only what the Lord does with them, as his instruments for the Means of Grace which make, restore, and keep them as his people, holy people, priestly kingdom, which, because it is priestly, is never individual or lateral.

Yet a priest in the primary sense is always individual. What he does is the doing of a specific service that he has been ordained to do. It is always possible to answer the questions: Who is doing it? What is it that is being done? For whom, in whose place, is it being done? And as something that happens it has a specific place and time.

But now "kingdom" and "people" are plural, identified as "priestly" and "holy," and so what is here said of priests is of priests in a secondary or transferred sense. Even so the plural is not a universal, but includes only those whom the Lord calls his priestly kingdom and his holy people.

Priests both in the primary sense and in the secondary sense are that only as the Lord has said and so made them. Both are *coram Deo*, and only if they be detached from him can there be

²M. Noth, *Exodus* (London: SCM, 1962), 157. One may also compare Isaiah 61:5-6; P. Schrieber, "Priests among Priests: The Office of the Ministry in Light of the Old Testament Priesthood," *Concordia Journal* 14 (July 1988): 215-228; J. Elliott, *I-II Peter* (Minneapolis: Augsburg 1982), 84-85.

any tension or rivalry between them. Each is what it is from the Lord, and that is not interchangeable. The one does not displace or subordinate the other.

“Priestly kingdom” speaks of priests then in the secondary or transferred sense. This is utterly clear in the New Testament, and so also in its quotation of Exodus 19:6. In the New Testament there is only one priest. All other talk of priests is in the secondary sense, but is never separated from the one and only priest. It is only from him—in connection with him—that there are those who are priests in the secondary sense.

Jesus Christ is the priest before God, he offers up the sacrifice of himself for our sake, in our place. He alone does that, and only his doing it makes it sure and unfractionably complete. As priest he does it for us, and in our place, before God. It counts for us; nothing may be added as necessary to what he had done. To suggest such a something deflects from him and denies that he alone, completely and surely, is our only Savior.

“There is no more sacrifice for sin.” By his priestly sacrifice we are priested not to offer sacrifices for our sins—he has done that—but to offer ourselves, no longer forfeited to death by our sins, but alive by the forgiveness that delivers us from the dominion of sin, death, the devil, and the Law. We are living sacrifices whose lives are poured out in sacrifice to him where he has put himself to receive the sacrifice of our lives, that is our neighbor in his need.

Thus we move from Exodus 19, through Matthew 25, to Romans 12. “What I urge you to comes by way of the mercies of God. Bring as your offering the sacrifice of your bodies, living, holy and acceptable to God. This is now clearly the way he would be worshiped” (λογικὴν λατρείαν, because the death of the final sacrifice for sin has been bloodily done for the last time). Romans 11 culminates in doxology and liturgical quotation of Scripture. The Lord is the one being addressed, and this is done with words he has given: homology *coram Deo*. But the apostle does not leave them there, thus joyfully

extolling God (who is in fact in no need of any gift from us, 11:35). The old sacrifices in which the victim was killed are now done and finished in Christ's once for all sacrifice. No more such shedding of blood; now the sacrifices do not die but are offered alive to live sacrificially. This is the way sacrifices are now arranged (*λογικὴν λατρείαν*), sacrifices in the secondary sense, by priests in the secondary sense, for the one and only priest in the primary sense has done the all availing sacrifice in the primary sense. Lose the primary priest and the secondary are also lost. Yet, because of the primary priest there are secondary priests. The worst thing that can happen, then, is infringement of the primary priest. It is for the sake of the primary priest that Dr. Luther extols the secondary priests.

It is this sequence and connection that Dr. Luther would confess, and we are bound to misunderstand and muddle things if we do it backwards, from secondary to primary. Worse yet would be to urge unmindfulness of the primary priest on the secondary priests (as if there could be any secondary priests apart from the primary one). The primary threat is to the primary priest. Luther recognized this threat in the notion that there were still priests in the primary sense still offering sacrifices atoning for sin in emulation, cooperation, representation, completion or addition to the sacrifice of the one and only such priest in the New Testament. What Dr. Luther says against the Roman priests is not to get rid of them in order to put "the priesthood of all believers" in their place. That would be to replace one piece of popery with another. What was wrong with popery was not that it was popery, but that it infringed the one and only atoning sacrifice for sin done by Christ alone, and so done once, for all, sure, complete. To suggest something other or more is to rob Christ of his having done it all. This is confessed and defended by a *satis est*.³ Not Christ plus something more, but Christ and what he alone has done and delivers in the preaching of the Gospel and the holy

³One may compare Apology XIII:8: *satis fuisse*. Herman Sasse's Letter 13, "Conversations with Rome," will appear shortly from CPH in *Essays on Christ and His Church*.

Sacraments according to the Gospel. He gives to us, we do not give to him: *beneficium* not *sacrificium*. The *sacrificium* of Romans 12, the living sacrifice is lived out, the apostles shows, in the way the members of a body are there for each other's good and support, even to the most commonplace concerns of our interconnected lives. So, in Romans 12 Paul speaks of the *paranesis* of the living sacrifice, but never uses the word "priest." In the New Testament, then, the only priest in the primary sense is Jesus, and for priests in the secondary sense we have to look carefully.

The Book of Concord reflects this state of affairs in the fact that 1 Peter 2:9 appears only once. The Tractate cites it to undergird the fact that Christians may not be deprived of having pastors because of the pope's unwillingness to allow anyone except those ordained to offer the sacrifice of the Mass. Melancthon argued the pope may not locate the making of pastors and bishops solely in himself. The *sacerdotium* (*Priestertum*, namely, what ministers are put into) has been given to the Church, and with that the fact that the Church should elect and ordain ministers.⁴ Worst of all is the notion that papal priests infringe upon the one, primary priest, and, therefore, his one sacrifice for sin. What Christ there achieved alone, he gives out only as gift, which is what he does with his Means of Grace. Papal priests were failing to be servants – the dispensers of the Means of Grace. Pastors, of whom Christians may not be deprived, are located in the Means of Grace, which take place in the liturgy. 1 Peter is precisely that sort of text, as we have seen in the way it appears, quoting the *קִרְיִית* passage of Exodus 19.

Let us now turn to passages from Luther and see whether he was in line with the Scriptures or not. But now, what passages in Luther? The selection may be controlled by what we want Luther to end up saying. Less risky then to let someone else

⁴Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, 69-72, in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, translated by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 331-332 (hereafter abbreviated as Tappert).

make the selection, and better still if that selection is made by some one not so intent on making sure that Luther comes out right. No one better, then, than an honest Roman Catholic scholar, Wolfgang Stein, who knows the language from inside.⁵ Eck and Trent respond to the same passage.⁶ Even without such credentials most would agree that the first major passage to be engaged is in the *Babylonian Captivity* of 1520 when the pent up waters burst forth. Here things are said more clearly and carefully in Latin for the clergy and the learned. Two months earlier *To the Christian Nobility* had appeared in more popular German, and had suffered misunderstanding. The sequence is the German *To the Christian Nobility*, the Latin *Babylonian Captivity*, and then Luther's defense against their misunderstandings, particularly his *Answer to the Hyperchristian, Hyperspiritual and Hyperlearned Book by Goat Emser* (1521), his *Retractions* (1521), and *Against Henry King of England* (1522). By following Luther all the way through this sequence we may let him be his own interpreter, and this may help us identify any misunderstandings we may have had.

First, the primary relevant passage in the *Babylonian Captivity* reads:

How then if they are forced to admit that we are all equally priests, as many of us as are baptized, and by this way we truly are; while to them is committed only the Ministry (*ministerium Predigtamt*) and consented to by us (*nostro consensu*)? If they recognize this they would know that they have no right to exercise power over us (*ius imperii*, in what has not been committed to them) except insofar as we may have granted it to them, for thus it says in

⁵W. Stein, *Das kirchliche Amt bei Luther* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1974), 85.

⁶W. Gussmann, *Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte des Augsburgerischen Glaubensbekenntnis* (Cassel: Pilardy, 1930), 2:134. Session 23, Cap. 4. DS1767. Luther never did say *promiscue* (one may see note 9 and 18). *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* edited by Norman P. Tanner, 2 volumes (Washington: Sheed and Ward; Georgetown University Press, 1990), 2:743.

1 Peter 2, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a priestly kingdom." In this way we are all priests, as many of us as are Christians. There are indeed priests whom we call ministers. They are chosen from among us, and who do everything in our name. That is a priesthood which is nothing else than the Ministry. Thus 1 Corinthians 4:1: "No one should regard us as anything else than ministers of Christ and dispensers of the mysteries of God."⁷

1 Corinthians 4 speaks of the apostolic ministry. We know the names of those in this apostolic ministry: Paul, Apollos, Cephas, Timothy, Sosthenes. They are in the "we" of 1 Corinthians 3:9, while the "you" are the Christians in the Church of God at Corinth. They are the ones to whom the gifts have so bountifully been given. For gifts to happen there is the one who gives, and the one to whom the gift is given. One cannot give oneself a gift. Gifts come from outside – *externum verbum*. These two points are there in the passage from the *Babylonian Captivity*. It appears in the section on *Ordo* (and by this Luther refers to the Roman doctrine) and also to the *ordo ecclesiasticus* of Augsburg Confession XIV and *ministerium ecclesiasticum* of Augsburg Confession V. Thus Luther speaks of papal priests, of priests as ministers (as the Apostle speaks of them), and also, distinct from these two, of priests as those baptized. In the usage of Luther and the Confessions the Latin *ministerium* is the German *Predigtamt*, and in English the Holy Ministry. Here and there you may find it as a *διακονία*, as in the New Testament where there are *διακονίαι* distinguishable from the *διακονία* of the apostolic ministry.

This ministry is what Luther refers to in his quotation of 1 Corinthians 4, which supplies the characterization of priests "whom we call ministers." They may not claim to be more than ministers of Christ; they may not as such go beyond what has been committed to them: the *ministerium*, the *Predigtamt*, the Office of the Holy Ministry. It is precisely the way in which

⁷*De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae praeludium*, WA 6:564.6-14; LW 36:112-113.

the pope's priests have been going beyond this, and exercising there an *imperium* that Luther identifies and denounces (for the sake of those who may not thus be tyrannized or their salvation be put in jeopardy). *Imperium* equals power and is the way of the pope and his priests who, for the sake of their *imperium*, neglect the very things committed to a minister/priest. *Imperium* displaces *beneficium*. *Imperium* goes with *sacrificium*—working God with working people. With *imperium* you have those who exercise power and those upon whom power is exercised. In the Church *imperium* produces top people and bottom people. That is not Christ's way, Luther cries out. "Let us rather listen to Paul that we may learn Jesus Christ and him crucified."⁸ As his, as baptized, we are in bondage to no man. As baptized we are all called priests, as it says in 1 Peter 2:9, which says nothing of *ministerium*, *Predigtamt*, the Office of the Holy Ministry. Luther has been denouncing those who depart this Office, who fail to do what this Office is there to do (preach, dispense, give out, the mysteries of God), and instead have been doing other things invented by men and useful for their *imperium* in tyrannizing the baptized. What lies outside their office, in the unmandated realm of human decision, they have nothing more than what the baptized may grant them, and what we thus grant them they do in our name.

Emser criticized Luther's exposition of 1 Peter 2:9, claiming that it obliterated the distinction between the clergy and the laity. Luther flatly denied this, and maintained that 1 Peter says nothing of the consecrated priesthood: "I did not say that all Christians are churchly priests."⁹ Emser found two kinds of priests in 1 Peter 2:9—inward and consecrated. Luther replied that it speaks of neither of these, but only of all Christians as priests. Later on ministers came to be called priests. "The priestly estate" had other better names and Luther runs

⁸ WA 6:562.12; LW 36:109.

⁹ *Auf das überchristlich, übergeistlich und überkünstlich Buch Bocks Emser's zu Liepzig Antwort*, WA 7:629.17; LW 39:153. Luther puts *ecclesiasticum* into German as *kirchlich*.

through them in Latin, German and some Greek. What is important is what they are put there for: "the Gospel and the Sacraments."¹⁰ God gives his gifts through ministers – it is for their being given out that the clergy are there. Gifts and Gospel involve two points: there are those who give out the gifts, and those to whom the gifts are given. If those who have been put there to give out the gifts do not give out the gifts, they have forsaken the Office which is the Lord's located instrument for his giving out his gifts. If instead of their giving out of the gifts they move to exercising *imperium*, they are guilty of sacerdotalistic tyranny, which Luther denounces and from which he proclaims the freedom of Christians.

Let us get on then, rejoicing in this freedom, the freedom of the laity from sacerdotal tyranny, the freedom of the baptized that is theirs to rejoice in as priests, as a priestly kingdom, whose king is none other than he into whose name they were baptized. You may read 1 Peter as instruction for the baptized. Luther did not invent the identification of the New Testament priests, in the secondary or transferred sense, as the baptized. It is already there in 1 Peter. That is where the Christian life goes on, baptismal level, body level, incarnational level, Means of Grace level, Calvary level. There is no higher, more spiritual, more inward level, as both the sacerdotalists and Pietists assert (Emser's inner and Spener's *Geistliches Priestertum*, which replaces Luther's "the baptized" with "the believers"). There is no "two-level" Church, with clergy above and laity below, or laity above (who hires and fires) and clergy below, or two churches, one visible and the other invisible. There are no levels – only where our Lord has put himself there for us (*dir da*) to give out his saving, enlivening gifts as he has ordained the Means of Grace to do, and put the *Predigtamt* there for the giving out of his gifts surely and locatedly in the Means of Grace (*instrumenta prima, instrumentum secundum*).

¹⁰ WA 7:630.10; 631.30; LW39:154-155.

We may prefer to speak with 1 Peter and Luther of the priesthood of the baptized, rather than the priesthood of all believers, for Holy Baptism is what the Lord does.¹¹ Any starting point other than the Lord and where he is at giving out his gifts with the Means of Grace leads to uncertainty.¹² That is what Luther will have none of in the passage we are considering. We have a Means of Grace doctrine of the Office of the Holy Ministry, and a Means of Grace doctrine of the priestly kingdom, the holy people. Thus connected to and from the Lord they are clear and sure. To get them wrong we would have to disconnect them from him.

It is a *coram Deo* text using the words he has given in order to extol him “who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” He is not the direct object of the extolling (ἐξαγγείλητε) but his marvelous works. This echoes the fact that mankind is dealt with mediately, “born again by the living and abiding Word of God,” saved by water (3:21). “Dealt with mediately,” that is by the Means of Grace, by which human beings are baptized and because of which they rejoice before God, extolling his wonderful deeds and singing praises to him. Thus are they priests—the royal priesthood—who belong to and serve the king.

There is no doubt with whom, toward whom these priests are related, and what is going on there between the Lord and them. Are they related in any other direction as priests? Do they represent God to his people, or his people to God? Is their being priests toward other priests, or to non-priests? Such questions look for answers beyond what the text says. It is a *coram Deo* text, quoting from the Lord’s יְרֵיךְ by which he makes for himself a people, all of whom are as priests before him, doing homology of his words. As *coram Deo* text it is a liturgical text from the treasury of the words of the living and abiding Lord. It is in an apostolic letter and as such is read in the liturgy, and as such is canonical.

¹¹Large Catechism, 4:10, Tappert, 437.

¹²We must note, however, that the “advantage” of that uncertainty is that we may then find some space to insert our inventions.

Luther, on the other hand, is not canonical, but he has been put into the Holy Ministry, the ministry of the Lord's living and abiding words, the ministry of the Gospel (the *Predigtamt*). There is no Baptism without a baptizer, no sermon without a preacher, and if a preacher refuses to preach he gives up being a preacher. Thus Luther exposes and castigates the papal priests who do not preach. But that is not yet the heart of the matter. The heart of the matter is that the Lord would have himself his own people in his own way. *The Babylonian Captivity* speaks of the Office of the Word and of Baptism. It is to this that the Lord ordains priests ("not papal priests but Christian priests"), according to Mark 16:15 and Matthew 28:19. The office preaches and baptizes. Luther says here *sacerdotum* not *sacerdos*.¹³ The Office does it, not the man—reference to the man may prompt uncertainty. When our Lord gives out his gifts he does it in a way that is clearly his, and so quite sure. Papal priests referenced away from the Means of Grace prompt uncertainty or even denial of the gifts being given out. Baptism has prominence here because it is by Baptism that priests are made. By way of the Means of Grace his saving gifts are given. For their service the Lord instituted the *officium praedicandi*, the *Predigtamt* (Augsburg Confession V). Luther concludes that the papal priests refused the *Predigtamt* and with that rejected the gifts, faith, and Gospel. Instead they served their *imperium*, and worst of all put works in place of gifts, *sacrificium* instead of *beneficium* (as the *Babylonian Captivity* puts it). We are bound to get it wrong if we miss this point. What is at stake is that there is no other Savior than Jesus, that he has done all for our salvation, and all that he has done is given us freely as nothing but gift in the way that it is clearly nothing but gift. It is for the sake of the Means of Grace that ministers are there, not for their own

¹³ WA 6:563.17; 564.28; LW39:111-113. WA 6:530. 27-29: "Therefore beware of making any distinction in Baptism by ascribing something external to man, and something internal to God. Ascribe both only to God, and accept the person of the one conferring it as nothing other than the vicarious instrument of God" One may compare 561.33; LW36:62, 109; Apology 7:28: "Vice et loco Christi."

sake or in their own place, but for giving out the words, the name and water, the body and the blood. For this reason Christians may not be robbed of the *Predigtamt* (as the Tractate says in quoting 1 Peter 2:9).

We can now leave behind the papal priesthood, with Luther's criticism of it as his high watermark use of the priesthood of the baptized in the early 1520s, and may turn to what else may be said of the baptized as a priestly kingdom and a holy people. This may not be constricted by disconnecting it from what is said along with it, all the other names for the same thing, with each adding its own extolling *proprium*: a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people; living stones, holy priesthood, newborn babes, ransomed by the precious blood of Christ, sprinkled with his blood, exiles of the diaspora. Nor may it be constricted by being isolated out of its context, and pressed into service as a foundation for some doctrine of the Office of the Holy Ministry.

What is to be said of those to whom the gifts have been given, and are being given, those in the liturgy hearing the apostolic words? There, where the apostolic words are being heard, is the apostolic Church of which we confess ourselves to be members every Sunday in the Nicene Creed. What is to be said of all Christians as priests, or better the baptized as priests?

We are given no direct help by the New Testament or the Confessions. Revelation mentions priests and kings, but they are liturgically engaged and utterly *coram Deo*. "Cannot they be somehow related to each other as well, and further to others, to non-priests, to the not baptized? Shouldn't they go out and spread the good news?" Of course they should, but is that something said in our text? The so-called *Living Bible* simply puts that in. Instead of translating it says, "all this so that you may show others how God called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." Some of this rides along when ἐξαγγείλητε is given as "proclaim," which is not really something one does toward the Lord (although possible

perhaps even for the English word as homology). Liturgical texts are best translated liturgically, in accord with that from whence they come: Isaiah 43:21 and then Psalm 102:18, 56:10.¹⁴

How the gifts given by the Means of Grace in the liturgy flow on enlivening, energizing, and shaping the lives of Christians is not so much the point here as is the way of their being priests. Scripture does not do it; the Confessions do not do it; Luther does not do it. Jesus does — not by talking about priests, but by putting himself where he would receive the living sacrifice of our lives, our neighbor in his need. What is done here is done toward the Lord, a sacrifice offered to him by every one whom he has baptized and so made one of his priests. To offer to one's neighbor such a sacrifice — the cup of water, food for the hungry, clothing for the naked, care for the sick, a visit to the lonely or in prison — is to offer it to the Lord (Matthew 25:34-45).

What is confessed in the Small Catechism's Table of Duties (better *Haustafel*), and in the whole Doctrine of Vocation, is

¹⁴What we have here is hymnic festal song — vertical — hearing his voice, and speaking his words back to him, *coram Deo*. Julius Schniewind, “ἀναγγέλλω,” *TDNT*, 1:63, note 22; L. Goppelt *Der Erste Petrusbrief* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Rupprecht, 1978), 151-152. J. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 100: “Again, however, as at 5, it is hard not to overhear a eucharistic note in the words. In the early 2nd cent. we know that the eucharist was understood primarily as a sacrifice of praise and reached its climax in a prayer (Justin, *I Apol.* lxv. 3; lxvii. 5; *Dial.* xli. I; Hippolytus, *Trad. apost.* iv.) giving glory and thanks to God for His goodness in creating us, in sending His Son, in redeeming us, etc. — in short proclaiming His mighty deeds. It is entirely likely that in the 1st cent. too, when Christians met together for the breaking of bread, such a recital featured prominently in the memorial they made of Christ; and the regular use of proclaim (*exaggellein*) in the LXX with the sense of cultic proclamation, or the rehearsal in adoring language of God's righteousness and praises, suggests that this is at any rate part of what is covered by the verb here.” 1 Peter 2:9 is quoted shortly before the *verba Domini* in the Liturgy of St. Basil, which we have in “the oldest complete liturgy in existence” (*Prayers of the Eucharist*, edited by R. Jasper and G. Cuming [New York: Pueblo, 1987], 118 and 114); Gerhard, 219; A. Schlatter, “*Der neue Gottesdienst*”: *Petrus und Paulus nach dem ersten Petrusbrief* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verinsbuchhandlung, 1937), 92-102.

done without mention of priests. Yet it is priestly as toward the Lord—priestly because of the sacrifice of the lives of the baptized to the Lord as they serve their neighbor in his need, there where the Lord puts himself to receive our service.

While Luther rejoiced in his primary application of “the royal priesthood, the priestly kingdom” as a defense against the papal priesthood, we need to enquire further after its positive application. We have already been pointed to their *coram Deo* liturgical vitality, and also the Romans 12 “living sacrifice,” love in the service of the neighbor, where Christ locates himself to receive this sacrifice (and so to the Doctrine of Vocation).

In *To the Christian Nobility*, Dr. Luther links Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and 1 Peter 2 and says that there are not higher and lower Christians but only differences of office and work (*des ampts odder werks halben*). He is appealing to the laity; the priests have not been doing what is really theirs to do. For this purpose he writes in German. He appeals to the *Christian Nobility* as to those baptized. As baptized they all are gifted of the Holy Spirit, as is every member of Christ’s body, the Church.¹⁵ “Spiritual” may not then be said only of the clergy. Luther clarifies the usage. *Ein Geistlicher* is a clergyman, who belongs to what was called *die geystlichkeit*, or *geystlichs stand*. If “spiritual” comes from the Holy Spirit and Holy Baptism, then all the baptized are “Spiritual,” and in the same way they are priests. Luther here speaks both of the laity as priests, and of the clergy as priests. The clergy are there for the giving out of “the Word of God and the Sacraments, which is their work and office.”¹⁶ The laity are there for receiving the gifts and living them out in their callings. Whatever their calling as laity, that calling neither makes them a lower level of Christian, nor inferior in their service to God below the clergy. Their calling is their priestly service to God

¹⁵ *Tractatus de libertate Christiana*, WA 6:408.28-35; LW44:129-130.

¹⁶ WA 6:409. 3; LW44:130. *An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation von des christlichen standes*, WA 7:58. 21 has 1 Corinthians 4:1 again. LW31:356.

as they serve their neighbors in their calling. "Just as all members of the body serve one another."¹⁷

All Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them except that of the office (*des ampts halben*) as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12 that we are all one body, yet every member has its own work by which it serves the others. This is because we all have one Baptism, one Gospel, one faith, and are all Christians alike; for the Baptism, Gospel and faith alone make us spiritual and a Christian people.¹⁸

All this is delivered by 1 Corinthians 12; thereupon 1 Peter 2:9 and Revelation 5:9-10 are called on for support. 1 Peter 2:9 appears only once more a few paragraphs later in combination, as we observed above, with Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. What matters is how Christ has it with his body. "There is one head and he has one body."¹⁹

There are evidently three things. Two and three are always at odds with one. Two and three are never at odds with each other. First there is the papal priesthood, secondly the ministry, and thirdly "the royal priesthood, the priestly kingdom." This third item is always a powerful defense against the papal priesthood, and accords perfectly with the way the Lord deals with his people through the Means of Grace through which he bestows his gifts. This is clear from the fact that the ministers are there as his instruments, the servants of the Means of Grace, ordained to "the Office of the Word and of Baptism," according to the mandate of our Lord in Matthew 28 and Mark 16, not there for their own sake. They are ministers of Christ and of his people, who as "royal priesthood and priestly kingdom" may not be brought into bondage by displacement of their King by insertion of what men do, which brings in works, merit, power, tyranny, and thus obscures or denies that Christ is priest alone; his sacrifice

¹⁷ WA 6:409.10; LW 44:130.

¹⁸ WA 6:407.13-19; LW 44:127.

¹⁹ WA 6:408.35; LW 44:130.

alone atones for all sin. There is no more the offering of any sacrifice for sin toward God – *beneficium* not *sacrificium*. And yet, in a secondary and transferred sense, there is *sacrificium* produced by the *beneficium*. The Holy Spirit is alive and at work through his gifts in every Christian, who then “offers Spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” Christians are both the temple and the royal priesthood and the sacrifice: all of them, all of their lives, bodily (Romans 12). What follows there, as in 1 Peter 2, is *Haustafel* – *paranesis* – which recognizes, indeed rejoices in, the diversity of the way the same gifts, which are given by the Spirit as confessed in the Third Article, work out in the particularity of each Christian life. Here there is no bondage of “all men are equal.” Each is unique.²⁰

“The royal priesthood, the priestly kingdom” is bulwark against the loss of Christ wrought by the papal priest. Priests in the secondary and transferred sense are born of Baptism. By what they are given by Baptism they are priests in this sense. This is how the *paranesis* goes in 1 Peter. What Luther extolls and delivers from Baptism is more than comes under “royal priesthood.” It comes first from the dominical mandate and institution and the apostolic instruction. For the Christian life he does not speak much of Christians as priests, and when he finds something priestly in a parenetic text such as Romans 12, he is prone to sling it against the pope. Nevertheless it is from this passage that he expounds the Christian life as a living sacrifice done in the living service of the neighbor. But this is not to be found in the *Babylonian Captivity*; it is not targeted in that direction.

In Luther, then, the dominant thrust of the royal priesthood comes in the early 1520s as a defense against the pope and his displacement of Christ. He also attacked the Enthusiasts’ displacement of Christ. Eck heard of Luther’s talking about all the baptized as priests and understood it as indicating that for

²⁰As always we may not stop short of the Christ point; each doctrine is worth what it confesses of him. Only if we stop short of him can we get stuck at the point of “the pope or the papal priest is not the boss here, the priesthood of all believers is.”

Luther a layman might act as if he were a priest. For this reason Article XIV was added to the Augsburg Confession. That does not happen among us; that is not what Luther was saying when he spoke of the royal priesthood as he makes quite clear in his *Retraction* of 1521.

In all my writings I never wished to say more, indeed only so much, that all Christians are priests, although not all of them are ordained (*geweiht*) by bishops, and so not all preach, celebrate Mass or exercise the priestly Office unless they were ordained to it (*vorordnet*) and called. That is all I intended to say, and so let that be that.²¹

The royal priesthood does not appear much in Melanchthon.²² After 1530 the problem was not so much the papal priests, but having enough evangelical ministers, and these we find confessed in Articles V, XIV, and XXVIII of the Augsburg Confession, as well as in the Apology and the Tractate.

In contrast, the Copenhagen Articles of 1530, which were proposed but not adopted, derived the ministry from the universal priesthood.²³ Winkler has demonstrated that it was

²¹*Ein widerspruch D. Luthers seines Irrthums, erzwungen durch den allerhochgelehrtesten Priester Gottes, herrn hieronymo Emser, Viarion zu Meissen, WA 8:250.31-35; LW 39:233. See note 6 above and Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche, 10. Aufl. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1986), 69, note 1.*

²²Herrlinger, *Die Theologie Melanchthons* (Gotha: Perthes, 1879), 269-70. No distinction is made between inner and outer Word (one may compare Emser). *Against the Mass* in 1521 (then *verschwindend selten*): "Omnes enim sacerdotes sumus. Dagegen rechnet Melanchthon in den Verhandlungen des Augsburger Reichstags von 1530 zu den 'gehässigen und unnöthigen Artikeln, davon man in den Schulen zu disputiren pflegt, welche nicht in den Vergleichsversuchen brauchen verhandelt zu werden, die Frage: ob die Christen alle Priester sind'" (2:183). H. Lieberg, *Amt und Ordination bei Luther und Melanchthon* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1962), 259-267; W. Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 342.

²³N. K. Andersen, *Confessio Hafniensis* (Copenhagen: Gads, 1954), 334-363. S. Lefeldt has noted ("Denmark" in *The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church* edited by Julius Bodensieck, three volumes [Minneapolis: Augsburg,

in the Reformed diaspora congregations where John a Lasco's influence was strong that the use of the universal priesthood as persuasive in matters of ministry and polity prevailed. Only with Spener, however, did what he called *geistliches Priestertum* come into tension with the Doctrine of the Office of the Holy Ministry as confessed in the Book of Concord. But that is a later development.²⁴ It may be instructive, however, to identify which passages were then selected out of Luther for this purpose. They are in fact the anti-papal ones of the early 1520s, which are then used to control what Luther said later. That they come from the early 1520s' anti-papal writings is not surprising in the light of what we observed above. Luther's principal use of "the royal priesthood, the priestly kingdom" was against papal displacement, not only of the ministry instituted by Christ, but more profoundly of the displacement of Christ as the one and only priest.

We shall now test this understanding of Luther against some related sermons during this period, although the pulpit usually lags behind the (that is to say, he did not rush into the pulpit with his latest insight).

In conclusion, then, let us go to St. Mary's Church for the afternoon homilies through the latter half of 1522. We have looked at some things in Dr. Luther's address *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation, in the Babylonian Captivity* to the clergy and the educated, and in his response to

1965]: 1:680) that the *Confessio Hafniensis* was "more humanist than Lutheran."

²⁴E. Winkler, *Die Gemeinde und ihr Amt* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1973), 11, 14: Spener does not speak of *allgemeines Priestertum*. The priesthood of which he speaks is not all Christians, but only those who are believers anointed with the Holy Spirit. It "is the right which our Saviour purchased for all men, and for which he anoints the believers with His Holy Spirit to serve God and their neighbor" (Philip Spener, *The Spiritual Priesthood* [Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1917], 15). Spener also claims that "all Christians have been called to spiritual offices, and are not only authorized, but, if they wish to be real Christians, they are in duty bound to fulfill them." We may wonder about Winkler's "damals" when he says, "Die Vollmacht des Amtes wurde damals auch in der Missouri-Synode vom Priestertum aller Gläubigen abgeleitet."

misunderstandings. Beginning in May *Prediger* Luther (he was not the *Pfarrer*) was preaching his way through 1 Peter.²⁵ The *Invocavit* sermons were in March. He extols 1 Peter as "the genuine and pure Gospel." What he says of the holy priesthood and the royal priesthood we have heard already, although here perhaps not with quite the same care and precision as in the Latin of the *Babylonian Captivity* and his defenses against misunderstandings. He is not writing for the Christian nobility, or for the clergy and the learned, or his opponents; he is preaching to the people.

There is a good deal against the usurpations and delinquencies of the papal priests. He begins his comment on the holy priesthood with the Augustinian distinction between outer and bodily priesthood, the external Church, contrasted with the inner, here called spiritual (little "s"), and thus spiritual priesthood (this goes with Augustinian lower leveling of the Old Testament). Then there are the clergy, who are called priests, and the other Christians, the laity. There is no other way of being a Christian than being built upon the Rock.²⁶

Luther preaches to the laity of St. Mary's as priests. The first thing about a priest is that he is that before God. "We are all priests before God as we are Christians." Priests are those who may draw near to God (*du darffst fur Gott tretten*). Distinct from those priests are the ones God has put there "to preach in the congregation and give out the Sacraments." No one may do that unless he is such a priest.²⁷ Talk of priests begins best with Christ.

Now Christ is the high priest, none higher than he, anointed by God himself. What is more he sacrificed his own body for us; there is no higher priest's office than that. Along with that he on the cross prayed for us. Thirdly he

²⁵M. Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521-1532*, translated by J. L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 58.

²⁶*Grund und visach aller Artikel D. Martin Luthers, so durch römische Bulle unrechlich verdammt sind*, WA 12:306.26; 307.23; LW30:52-53.

²⁷WA 12:317.4-26; LW30:63.

has proclaimed the Gospel and taught all men to know God and himself. These three offices he has also given to us all. So then since he is a priest and we are his brothers, so then all Christians have the power and command, which they must do, to preach, to draw near to God, pray for one another and offer themselves as sacrifice to God. Nevertheless, no one may undertake to preach the Word of God or speak the promise (*zusagen*) unless he is a priest.²⁸

For all his saying how good it would be to stop calling the clergy priests, he continues to do so. In this passage Christ is priest in three ways: he sacrificed his body for us, on the cross he also prayed for us, and he proclaimed the Gospel that all men might know God and himself. These three are given to all Christians since they are his brothers, who are to do likewise. Exhorting to this Luther gives the three in reverse order. Telling the Gospel, drawing near to God and praying for others, and offering themselves as sacrifices to God. Then he qualifies the foregoing to say that only priests preach the Word of God and give out the promises (which inhere in the Sacraments). So there is Christ the priest, all baptized Christians who are priests, and the priests who do what they have been put there to do.

In preaching of Christians as priests, as those set upon the Rock, as living stones, the Spirit's temple offering Spirit prompted sacrifices, holy priesthood, chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, God's own people – what is priestly is first *coram Deo*, the privilege of drawing near to God as those new born, sprinkled with the blood of Christ, praising him for all his marvelous saving works. The terms are collective. Such priests are not inward by themselves. They, born again, offer God their praises together. They pray both with and for one another. What is theirs before God, what is

²⁸ WA 12:307.27; 308.8; LW 30:53-54. *Zusagen* refers to Sacraments for which it is constitutive. WA 6:572.10-12; LW36:124. B. Lohse, "Von Luther bis zum Konkordienbuch," *Handbuch der Dogmen- und Theologiegeschichte*, edited by C. Andresen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1980), 2:27. Apology 13:3.

given them there cannot be held to one's individual self without destruction. Its vitality flows on and out into each one's calling, where in serving one's neighbor one is offering God the unbloody, the living sacrifice of his life. Liturgy into living: the priesthood of the baptized. So Luther priests the people of St. Mary's Church on into their lives. Faith receives from the Lord; love gives to the neighbor.

But it all starts with priest Christ, because of whom we may draw near to God, ransomed not with gold or silver but with his precious covenanting blood sprinkled on us, with the living and abiding Word of God. Gifts thus received are extolled in the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, sacrifice prompted by the Spirit, that rings on then in our lives as those gifts are alive with the Spirit prompting there also "sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Read all about it in the Old Testament, it is just the way he has always been having himself a people, including you "exiles of the diaspora."²⁹

²⁹Psalm 137. *Lutheran Worship History and Practice* edited by F. Precht (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 294. G. Besch, "Amt und allgemeines Priestertum in den Kirchen der Diaspora," in *Vom Amt des Laien in Kirche und Theologie*, edited by H. Schröder and G. Müller (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1982), 306: "Auf deutschem Boden hat dann besonders der Pietismus das allgemeine Priestertum zu praktizieren versucht...In seinen *Pia desideria* von 1675 ist einer seiner (Spener's) wichtigsten Reformvorschläge die Aufrichtung (sic!) des "geistlichen Priestertums."