

## ***Church and Ministry***

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The Collected Papers of  
The 150th Anniversary Theological Convocation  
of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

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**SOLI DEO GLORIA**

IN COMMEMORATION OF  
THE 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF  
THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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### *Keynote Address*

#### **Challenges in Church and Ministry in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod**

A.L. Barry 1

### *Presentation I*

#### **God's Character and the Calling of God's People: Contextual Relations**

Dean Wenthe 25

Response by Jeffrey Gibbs 59

Response by Arleigh Lutz 68

### *Presentation II*

#### **The Office of the Pastoral Ministry: Scriptural and Confessional Considerations**

John Johnson 77

Response by Kurt Marquart 100

Response by William Diekelman 113

### *Presentation III*

#### **The Pastor: God's Servant for God's People**

James Kalthoff 123

Response by Leopoldo Heimann 163

Response by Diethardt Roth 168

Response by Richard Warneck 177

## CONTENTS

---

### *Presentation IV*

#### **Contemporary Issues Regarding the Universal Priesthood**

Raymond Hartwig	185
Response by Masao Shimodate	219
Response by Edward Kettner	225
Response by Cameron MacKenzie	233

#### **Commentators' Responses to the Convocation**

Paul Kofi Fynn	241
J.A.O. Preus III	246
Lance G. Steicke	253
George Wollenburg	261

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## FOREWORD

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IN COMMEMORATION OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—Missouri Synod's 150th Anniversary, the faculties of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, together with the district presidents and vice-presidents of our Synod and the Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations, attended a theological convocation devoted to the topic of the doctrines of Church and Ministry, specifically the doctrine of the Office of the Holy Ministry and the doctrine of the royal Priesthood of all Believers.

What made this event unique was the fact that it was scheduled shortly after the International Lutheran Council (ILC) met here in the United States. Thus, we were privileged to have as participants in our convocation the leaders of all of our partner churches around the world, as well as leaders from a number of other Lutheran churches who had gathered for the ILC meeting. Our partner churches were invited to send one theologian from their church body. Hence, the convocation took on a most welcome international flavor, as we were able to listen to the reaction of many of our friends from around the world to issues of concern to our church. Their participation in this conference was extremely beneficial to us and very much appreciated.

One of the most important goals of this convocation was that it not simply be an end in itself, that is, a convocation for the sake of having a convocation. Instead, the publication of the papers as a book, along with a study guide, was considered an essential aspect of this effort. I would like to encourage the pastors of our church to study these essays carefully and then to lead their congregations in a study and discussion of these important issues.

— Dr. A.L. Barry



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*Presentation I*

**GOD'S CHARACTER AND THE CALLING  
OF GOD'S PEOPLE: CONTEXTUAL RELATIONS**

Dr. Dean O. Wenthe, President  
Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana

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I WANT TO EXPRESS MY THANKS TO PRESIDENT BARRY for his keynote address. It sets the stage for a discussion that is in some respects perennial, but becomes particularly crucial when the prevailing culture so winsomely and compellingly catechizes the people of God, including the clergy, in categories that deconstruct central commitments of the Christian vision.

The people of God today face a very different set of challenges than the previous Christian generation. There is a growing consensus that the Christian community must more rigorously analyze and address its cultural setting.

T. S. Eliot was prophetic when he warned of a culture driven

by a compulsion to live in such a way that Christian behavior is only possible in a restricted number of situations. This is a very powerful force against Christianity; for behavior is as potent to affect belief, as belief to affect behavior.<sup>1</sup>

There is a need for clarity of vision and conviction that will witness to Christ and His Kingdom in our time. To place this in very practical terms, most in this assembly can recall a time when a

broad spectrum of people in North America had an idea—however rudimentary—of what a Christian pastor and Christian people were called to do. Nor is it ancient history to recall a time when abortion was illegal in civic society and divorce infrequent in the church. Though we can remember, it also now seems like a very distant world that there is little prospect of revisiting soon.

The task that is before us, I would propose, is much greater than providing a catena of quotations from Luther, Walther, or other teachers of the church—as important and necessary as such texts remain. Surely we are faced with the foundational question of how to live out the Christian vision as God's people.

If a previous era witnessed debates about the meaning of an authoritative Bible, the pressing question now is how it can exercise any meaningful authority over the community. In almost every Christian tradition the tension between its historic position and the surrounding culture grows ever more intense.

The contrast between the formal positions and the practice of churches becomes very sharp, while there seems to be no hermeneutical bridge by which Scripture can cross over to the present moment and form the actual lives of God's people in clear and evident patterns. In a fascinating collection of essays titled *Reclaiming the Bible for the Church*, the following point is made:

The image of "reclaiming the Bible" suggests that it has been forsaken or lost. Of course, that is not literally true. There are more Bibles than ever before, and in more languages, dialects, translations, and versions. What needs to be reclaimed for the church is the Bible as authoritative Scripture. There is a loss of confidence in the ability of the church to read the Bible through the eyes of its own faith and in light of its own exegetical and liturgical traditions.<sup>2</sup>

What faces us is a comprehensive task of catechesis in Christian thinking. A part of that calling is the need to provide the peo-

ple of God with critical, analytic tools to view and engage their surroundings in Christian categories.

In the United States, for example, native patriotism and legitimate gratitude for many blessings can obscure those forces within our society that directly challenge Christian life.

Stephen L. Carter's perceptive analysis—*The Culture of Disbelief*—has the subtitle “How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion.”<sup>3</sup> The second chapter of that book is titled “God as a Hobby.” It begins with this paragraph:

One good way to end a conversation—or start an argument—is to tell a group of well-educated professionals that you hold a political position (preferably a controversial one, such as being against abortion or pornography) because it is required by your understanding of God's will. In the unlikely event that anyone hangs around to talk with you about it, the chances are that you will be challenged on the ground that you are intent on imposing your religious beliefs on other people. And, in contemporary political and legal culture, nothing is worse.<sup>4</sup>

The view that religion is a very private affair and best kept that way is in the air we breath. The frequently noted rise of radical individualism and a loss of community is a challenge to secular as well as sacred traditions.<sup>5</sup>

From a philosophical perspective, Alasdair MacIntyre has perceptively argued that ethical discourse is vacated of its substance and persuasive power when an individualistic epistemology is in place:

This thought is likely to appear alien and even surprising from the standpoint of modern individualism. From the standpoint of individualism, I am what I myself choose to be. . . . The contrast with the narrative view of the self is clear. For the story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive

my identity. I am born with a past; and to try to cut myself off from that past, in the individualist mode, is to deform my present relationships.<sup>6</sup>

The implications for the people of God are clear. The Priesthood of All Believers is not simply an assembly of autonomous individuals who have come to the same place by virtue of their sovereign and private decisions. Rather, by God's grace and election, they have been grafted into a common history and participate in a unified reality that goes back to creation itself and forward to eternity. Their identity derives from and is embedded in the great narrative of God's actions in Israel and in Christ. We have our identity rooted in God's actions in the history of God's people.

Theologians from a spectrum of Christian confessions are increasingly critical of those forces that dissolve the basis of the church's community. Stanley Hauerwas challenges the standard way in which the biblical witness is "translated" by the modern academy at the conceptual rather than the linguistic level:

Such "translation" is often deemed necessary because of the texts' obscurity, cultural limits, and variety, but also because there seems to be no community in which the Scripture functions authoritatively. As a result we forget that the narratives of Scripture were not meant to describe our world—and thus in need of translation to adequately describe the "modern world"—but to change the world, including the one in which we now live. In the classic words of Eric Auerbach, Scripture is not meant "merely to make us forget our own reality for a few hours, it seeks to overcome our reality: we are to fit our own life into its world, feel ourselves to be elements in its structure of universal history. . . . Everything else that happens in the world can only be conceived as an element in this sequence; into it everything that is known about the world . . . must be fitted as an ingredient of the divine plan." I would add that Scripture creates more than a world; it shapes a community which is the bearer of that world.<sup>7</sup>

To be the “bearer of the biblical world” is the calling of God’s people. In our context, that calling immediately places each of God’s people in tension with sometimes subtle, but always powerful cultural forces.

My initial suggestion is that these cultural forces—more frequently than the embrace of a particular theological position on Church and Ministry—are at the root of the tensions frequently experienced between the Priesthood of All Believers and the Office of the Public Ministry.

Unless the people of God have a foundational sense of Scripture’s narrative—the history of Israel and the life of Jesus—that can be understood and appropriated in a manner that actually defines the church’s common life, discussion of office, vocation, and moral issues will not occur with satisfactory results.

An analogy might be helpful. My pitching wedge is my friend and faithful companion. To show it to someone who has never seen a golf course, however, immediately requires an explanation. Without knowledge of the “delightful” narrative of the game of golf, the pitching wedge cannot be understood. It might be mistaken for a hoe or a garden tool.

Similarly, as the knowledge of the whole witness of Scripture becomes remote or lost, the case for the pastor’s calling in relationship to God’s people with its mutual and complementary dimensions is very difficult to make. Texts lose their power to persuade when removed from the structures in which they are embedded.

Before one builds the conceptual rooms and walkways for Christian living as the people of God, the scriptural view of reality from Genesis to Revelation must be in place. It is this foundation that has been removed so that Christian discourse now seems to be little more than a matter of personal preference. Even in the church, the texts seem to lack the power to address and to persuade in a manner that is recognizable.

Diogenes Allen, a Professor of Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, relates this episode:

"Why should I go to church," someone once said to me, "when I have no religious needs?" I had the audacity to reply, "Because Christianity's true." That may seem foolhardy when we live in a pluralistic world with any number of different views of reality and apparently no rational means of telling which view is most likely to be true, and when it is said that all views are historically relative and mere reflections of social structures.<sup>8</sup>

Pastors and people are equally subject to these pressures.<sup>9</sup> Eugene Petersen, a Presbyterian clergyman, for example, has lamented the loss of pastoral identity among his peers:

What they do with their time under the guise of the Pastoral Ministry hasn't the remotest connection with what the church's pastors have done for most of twenty centuries. . . . They talk of images and statistics. They drop names. They discuss influence and status. Matters of God and the soul and the Scriptures are not grist for their mills.<sup>10</sup>

Peterson's claims are compelling when one compares much of the literature on being a pastor with classic portrayals such as those gathered in a book like Culbertson and Shippee's *The Pastor*.<sup>11</sup>

This confusion is also reflected in recent studies of theological education. If there is a lack of clarity on how the scriptural portraits assume concrete meaning for the life of the pastor, a variety of models are generated from the literature of leadership, therapy, and management.

It is encouraging that a man like David H. Kelsey, professor of Theology at Yale and no traditionalist, suggests that theological training should not give up its native tongue, namely, the priority of Scripture and the study of God in theological education.<sup>12</sup>

### Sacred Scripture as Foundational Definition of God's People

My second suggestion is that our classic Lutheran view of the Priesthood of all Believers in relationship to the Pastoral Office provides the scriptural substance and rich pastoral resources to address our current setting.<sup>13</sup> Chief among our assets is the confession and confidence that the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures speak to every epoch. That it is here and in no other narrative that God's people behold the face of Christ is a claim at the core of our Lutheran confession. If it is tempting to re-interpret the scriptural texts in one of the many and various ways that modernity and post-modernism have advanced, we recognize no fuller life in such a move. Rather we confess that full life that has been bestowed upon God's people with the "one, holy Christian and apostolic church."

So, in a cursory way, it is fitting to review the biblical story with respect to how its description of God's people is inextricably related to God's character as expressed in His words and actions. It is particularly important in our context to inquire of the texts as to how God's people could be recognized in public ways, *i.e.*, to identify those contours that were not a matter of private experience but necessary and corporate expressions of the people who were chosen as God's own.

Further, within this corporate identity, what visible marks are central to the community's identity? It is within this world of meaning—the biblical world—that worship, office, service, and solidarity with others make sense. More than sense, they can be seen for what they are—the very truth about who we are before the God who has disclosed Himself to us. Without this world, our claims can appear no more than private preference or pious platitude.

### Departure Point: God's Character—The Torah's Portrait

Sacred Scripture begins with the creative work of God. Our familiarity with Genesis 1 and 2 can obscure the radical and dis-

tinctive nature of its claims. The character of Yahweh-Elohim (Gen 2:4) stands in sharp contrast to the elaborate polytheism of the Ancient Near East.<sup>14</sup>

This portrait of God—One who is antecedent to and not identifiable with creation—constitutes a radical challenge to surrounding assumptions. A brief reading of an ancient text like the *Enuma Elish* in comparison shows that one is confronted with two different worlds. This portrait also challenges current cosmologies in which the real action and meaning of history are located in the evolutionary processes of the universe.

The remarkable position of man and woman is as distinctive as the portrayal of God in Genesis 1 and 2. God's self-address "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule. . . ." (Gen. 1:26) positions humanity as the culmination and apex of God's creative work. To be created "in God's image" (Gen. 1:27) entails life before and in communion with God and distinguishes man and woman from the rest of creation. The detailed account of God's direct involvement in the creation of man and woman (Genesis 2) underscores their natures as uniquely suited for relationship with Him.

The gift of life to man and woman is joined to freedom to enjoy all the gifts of creation (Gen. 2:16). Life with and before God requires only that the fruit of "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" not be eaten (Gen. 2:17).

The embrace of that knowledge in Genesis 3 constitutes a fracture of relationship with, and life in, God. The epoch of death now spreads as Adam hides in fear (Gen. 3:10), creation resists life (Gen. 3:17, 18), and blame is cast upon the other (Gen. 3:12, 13). This event is also the dissolution and death of human community through sin. Now there are people who are, tragically, not God's people. The first family and the first community of God have died through sin and face the prospect of eternal judgment.



The promise of the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15), the seed of Abram (Gen. 12:3), and the offspring of Judah (Gen. 49:10) point forward to a great reversal and restoration of community. Life will one day replace death (Is. 25:8), for God's agent will restore those who are in Him to communion with God and His community.

Hence, the Torah's portrayal of God's people is a record of those who confess Yahweh-Elohim as the only God in whom life and all of creation are restored. Abel's fitting worship over against the line of Seth, the evil state of all people over against God's grace upon Noah and family, the line of Shem over against the nations: From the fall, the Torah divides humanity on the basis of relationship to Yahweh's character. True community—the Priesthood of all Believers—exists only in Him.

With God's selection of Abram and the promise of blessing through His seed (Gen. 12:3), His people are defined precisely and concretely. It is in relationship to Abram's seed that relationship to God is restored: "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29).

The Torah describes Abram's seed—God's people—in more categories than promise. God chose His people without regard for their numbers or status.

The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath He swore to your forefathers that He brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt (Deut. 7:7-8).

If their numbers were not the occasion for Yahweh separating a people for Himself, this does not mean that they would be indistinguishable from the nations. God would reveal His character by calling His people to particular structures. These divinely ordered

marks, when faithfully observed, would be public displays and witnesses to the God whom Israel worshiped. These marks, from within the community, are rightly viewed as the means of God's gracious presence. They were not the incidental or accidental product of social and cultural forces, but the divinely stipulated expression of God's character, relationship, and presence.

From without, God's people could be recognized by a configuration of practices and institutions that revealed not simply their customs, but the character of the God they worshiped. Indeed, the prophetic literature of the Old Testament is a call not for the removal of these structures, but to integrity in the reception and use of the divinely given means, *i.e.*, authentic reflection of God's presence among them.

That there were such visible marks of God's people is significant. These institutions and practices were witnesses to God's character and entailed Israel's distinctive view of what it was to be God's people.

These "marks" are more than symbols, yet they function to convey all that is suggested in current literature by a cultural symbol. David Yeago provides a useful definition in a recent article:

A cultural symbol is a particularly dense locus of significance which brings into focus what is important to a particular cultural community with uncommon intensity and compactness, so that it proves a fruitful and suggestive reference-point for reflection on all sorts of questions of communal identity and purpose.<sup>15</sup>

The marks then of true Israel and the church—God's people—are, I would suggest, "the particularly dense *loci*" where we can engage and explore the community's identity and calling as the people of God, people chosen by God to be His very own, set apart by God from the rest of humanity in order to be a kingdom of priests before Him.

If these marks are reduced by some contemporary biblical scholarship to mere expressions of sociological and political forces, Sacred Scripture resists and challenges such a reading. As Jon D. Levenson, Albert A. List Professor of Jewish Studies at Harvard, writes:

Historical criticism has long posed a major challenge to people with biblical commitments, and for good reason. What I hope to have shown is that the reverse is also the case: the Bible poses a major challenge to people with historical-critical commitments.<sup>16</sup>

Levenson is right. The Bible challenges the reductionistic assumptions of every age! It will not permit to go unchallenged the view that human beings can be reduced to a moment of acquisition, or a moment of pleasure, or a moment of power. The Bible challenges people in every age to behold the true God who also calls, gathers, and enlightens a community to be His people.

What would have defined the people of God among the nations? What will define them today? Were they then and are they now virtually indistinguishable from humanity as a whole?

To begin at the beginning, it is helpful to review Pentateuchal texts. The ease with which the Old Testament can be decanonized in practice exacts too great a price and weakens our capacity to speak scripturally.

Let us imagine a visiting Egyptian or a sojourning Mesopotamian who spends some time with Israel. What would they have seen that would make Israel distinctive among the nations?

### **Sacred Sacrifice and Shrine**

The elaborate system of sacrifice associated with the tabernacle would have witnessed to Israel's identity before a God whose character required contrition for sins, etc. (Leviticus 1-7). Indeed, Israel's claim that the God who created the heavens and the earth

and all things in them now dwells in a portable shrine would have been remarkable. If our sojourner were well-traveled, he would have beheld the far more impressive iconography and temples of Egypt and Mesopotamia.<sup>17</sup> If he were told that the God of Israel had superintended the construction of the tabernacle in all of its details, he would know how closely this “tent” was identified with the will and presence of God. Could the true God really care about such details as these?

Make the tabernacle with ten curtains of finely twisted linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, with cherubim worked into them by a skilled craftsman. All the curtains are to be the same size—twenty-eight cubits long and four cubits wide (Ex. 26:1-2).

Israel’s answer was “Yes!” The true God wanted the “blue, purple and scarlet yarn” and the curtains to be “twenty-eight cubits long.”

The additional claim that the glory of the true God resided uniquely here was central to the people’s confession of God’s character in defining their community:

Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34, 35).

### Sacred Personnel

The centrality of altars and priestly service was another mark of the community’s identity. The ancient world, to a much greater extent than our own, saw worship as inherent to a people’s nature. Our visitor would have beheld the divinely ordered sacrifices being made by a divinely chosen priestly line in a divinely ordered liturgical worship setting.

The Torah's structure does not place the Priesthood of all Believers (Ex. 19:5, 6) over against the office of Moses as prophet or the priesthood of Aaron and his sons (Leviticus 8 and 9). Rather, God's people are set apart from the whole earth (Ex. 19:5) and the priesthood of Aaron is set aside for the service of Yahweh and His people in worship. The golden calf episode in Exodus 32 and the subsequent history of Israel challenge any romanticized, egalitarian, or populist notions about the majority of the people. Similarly, the deaths of Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10 indicate that the priests were called to fidelity in their office. To abuse the Office was a serious and, in their case, capital offense.

People and priests were to reflect the holy character and will of Yahweh. The priest was not called to service at the expense of the people, but to service that would bestow God's blessings. The priest proclaimed the Lord's Word to His people. Roland de Vaux summarizes:

When the priest delivered an oracle, he was passing on an answer from God; when he gave an instruction, a torah, and later when he explained the Law, the Torah, he was passing on and interpreting teaching that came from God; when he took the blood and flesh of victims to the altar, or burned incense upon the altar, he was presenting to God the prayers and petitions of the faithful. In the first two roles he represented God before men, and in the third he represented men before God; but he is always an intermediary. What the Epistle to the Hebrews says of the high priest is true of every priest; "Every high priest who is taken from among men is appointed to intervene on behalf of men with God" (Heb. 5:1). The priest was a mediator, like the king and the prophet. But kings and prophets were mediators by reason of a personal charisma, because they were individually chosen by God; the priest was *ipso facto* a mediator, for the priesthood is an institution for mediation. This essential feature will reappear in the priesthood of the New Law, as a sharing in the priesthood of Christ the Mediator, Man and God, perfect victim and unique Priest.<sup>18</sup>

If the visitor were with Israel for more than a few days, the unique place of Moses as prophet and leader would have become clear (Num. 12:6–8; Deut. 18:14–22; 34:10–12). During a later period the central and defining role of David for the community's view of God would have been clear.

### Sacred Time

A visitor might also be struck by Israel's sacralizing of time. The observance of the Sabbath would undoubtedly be in the foreground, but the feasts of Israel—Passover, unleavened bread, first-fruits, day of atonement, sabbath and jubilee year—were public observances that defined the self-understanding of God's people as inextricably expressed in the character of the God they worshiped.

### Sacred Life

If our hypothetical visitor would have lingered with God's people for a time, he would have observed a variety of distinctive practices. Not only the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1–17), but the stipulations of the so-called "Book of the Covenant" (Ex. 20:22–23:19), the purity laws (Leviticus 11–15), dietary laws (e.g., Leviticus 17), etc., would have formed Israel.

The integration and coherence of the worship of God's people and the life of God's people is clear. The Book of the Covenant (Ex. 20:22–23:33) was received and affirmed by God's people in a worship context. The altar itself became an expression of the people's unity and responsibility before the God who had chosen them:

When Moses went and told the people all the Lord's words and laws, they responded with one voice, "Everything the Lord has said we will do." Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said. He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered

burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the Lord. Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey." Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words" (Ex. 24:3–8).

However inadequate their performance may have been at times, it was a life that was understood as ordered by the very God who had created them and called them together in Abram, Isaac, and Jacob.

Again, the point is that the Torah's portrayal does not regard these public expressions of community identity as accidental or incidental. The God who had graciously chosen this people now called them to these and no other expressions of His character. The scandal of particularity in these details is very close to the scandal of the cross, for they both reveal the character of the true God in structures that are an affront to human criteria.

### Sacred Space

If one moves beyond the Pentateuch, it should be noted how pivotal the place of the Holy Land is in God's relationship to His people. Of all the places in the world, God chose to locate His people and His presence in one specific area. Of all the places He could have chosen, He chose the land of Palestine, and none other.

So I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant. Now fear the Lord and serve Him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. (Joshua 24:13–14).

Christopher J. H. Wright has succinctly summarized the importance of the land in Israel's relationship to God:

The theology of the land with its twin themes of divine ownership and divine gift (and particularly the historical tradition associated with the latter) is inseparable from Israel's consciousness of their covenant relationship with Yahweh.<sup>19</sup>

Again God's people are defined by God's gifts. His gifts call them to live in the place that He has provided and in service to Him alone. In the midst of many other lands and very sophisticated cultures, God reveals His character in this particular place.

The identification of God's people with sacred space is also manifest in the centrality of the temple and the prominence of Zion. After the dedication of the temple, the Lord appears to Solomon and says:

I have heard the prayer and plea you have made before me; I have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting my Name there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there (1 Kings 9:3).

Similarly, the manner in which God chooses Zion and Jerusalem is central to the identity of God's people.

Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken, but endures forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds His people both now and forevermore (Psalm 125:1-2).

It is hard to overstate the centrality of worship to Israel's life and identity. It is at the heart of everything the people of God were about, the very nature of their existence was to proclaim the true God in their worship. Indeed, as Hans-Joachim Kraus has written:



The service of Yahweh, which God's people were chosen to perform, occupied a central position in the cult. The festivals were the high point of life, the source of all life and activity. Israel existed on the basis of the filled, meaningful time of the cultic gatherings.<sup>20</sup>

### Sacred Seed

At the very core of Israel's identity was the chosen family line. God fulfilled His promise to Abraham to give him many descendants. God chose the line of David to continue His gracious presence among His people (2 Sam. 7:8-12). It was to David's line that God's people were to look for the promised agent of deliverance (Is. 11:1-11; Jer. 23:5-8; Ez. 34:23-24; 37:24-28).

What is being advanced by this brief survey is that God's people were defined neither abstractly nor in terms of sheer interiority, but by concrete structures and practices that were revelatory of God's character in that He Himself had bestowed on them and called them to such a community. These "marks" of the community, if you will, were not negotiable, *i.e.*, one could not worship and live in other ways and simultaneously confess the Lord's character. The large corpus of prophetic literature makes this point clear. Isaiah, for example, begins his work with an indictment that challenges whether Yahweh is defining their community:

Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the Lord has spoken: "I reared children and brought them up, but they rebelled against me. The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand" (Is. 1:2-3; cf. Dt. 32:1).

Or, Hosea was called to name his son "Lo-Ammi" as a charge that God's people no longer saw the One who gave the gifts:

She (Israel) has not acknowledged that I was the One who gave her the grain, the new wine and oil, who lavished on her the silver and gold—which they used for Baal (Hos. 2:8).

### The Culmination and Continuation of Israel's History in Christ

What does this survey contribute to an understanding of God's people in Christ? If it is true that Christ interprets His own life, death, and Resurrection by expounding the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms (Luke 24:44), it is also the case that the apostles describe Christ's community in the categories of Israel—now, of course, in the light of the coming of the messianic seed and His Kingdom. There is no utter and total discontinuity between God's people in the Old and the New Testament.

If the line of Abraham and David anchors christology against every docetic tendency, there is biblical value in viewing ecclesiology as grounded in Israel's history. The church is not a platonic community that supplants the rootedness in creation of God's people. Rather, as with Israel, God in Christ is gathering flesh and blood people to His name and real presence through the means that He has offered.

The real and visible character of the church is captured by C.F.W. Walther in his Thesis five:

Although the true church in the proper sense of the term is essentially invisible, its presence can nevertheless be definitely recognized, and its marks are indeed the pure preaching of God's Word and the administration of the Sacraments according to Christ's institution.<sup>21</sup>

In a context where the visible structures of Christ's church are viewed as utterly marginal and optional to the private relationship of the individual to Jesus, God's people are called to confess continuity with the gifts that constitute the community. They are the *people* of God, gathered by their Lord.

Put another way, the church is not a new community—unlike and over against faithful Israel—but in Christ is the continuation of the one community that has been defined by God's character over against the nations.

The structure of Peter's description of the church shows how the language of faithful Israel, in Christ, is also the definition of the church:

As you come to Him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to Him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone and the one who trusts in Him will never be put to shame." Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone," and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Peter 2:4–10).

The Gospels, Romans, the letter to the Hebrews, Revelation: the canonical witness to this continuity is ubiquitous. When one peruses the exegesis of the early Lutheran theologians, their sense of the oneness and coherence of the New Testament church with faithful Israel is striking. This passage from Martin Chemnitz's *Loci Theologici* illustrates how complete this identification was:

Above this mercy seat stood two cherubim with wings joined and facing one another. These signify the Ministry of teaching under both the old and the new covenants. The wings are touching one another and the faces looking at each other, signifying the consensus of teaching in both covenants. The message of the prophets and apostles is the same in regard to sin, the deliverance through Christ, eternal life, and finally the true knowledge of God and the true worship of Him. The whole ceremonial aspect of the ancient sacrifices

typified the one sacrifice of the Son of God who was made a victim for us, endured the wrath of God that was poured out upon Him as if He Himself had committed our sins. . . . Further, these cherubim instruct us that there is no church where the ministration of teaching the doctrine of the prophets and apostles is not present. . . . Although this service on our part is imperfect and far inferior to the government of the ungodly, yet we should know that it is pleasing to God and necessary for the human race and that it is marvelously defended and aided by God among the terrible torments of life. Thus it is full of genuine dignity, and when we think of the importance of this work of ours, we should be eager to adorn our activity with diligence, patience, and modesty; and in the face of all perils we should sustain ourselves with the promises, "Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age," Matt. 28:20, and "Upon this rock I will build My church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, Matt. 16:18."<sup>22</sup>

What then is the significance of seeing the church as the continuation in Christ of God's faithful Israel?

First, I would offer that it defines us as the community that arises from and is shaped by God's character. We, no less than Israel, have been called to a distinctive confession that there is "one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:5-6). This confession creates as sharp a tension for us as it did for Israel:

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts (Eph. 4:17-18).

If we read sacred Scripture as the revelation of God's character in the life of Israel and in the Incarnation of Christ, Israel is a concrete, fleshly, and observable community. While God alone might

know who is truly a member, there is no people of God apart from “the marks” that define the church and distinguish it as a faithful witness to God’s character. The Incarnation, life, death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus of Nazareth, son of Abram and son of David (Matt. 1:1) were concrete. The details of His life are as scandalous as the story of Israel. To assert that the God of all creation sent His Son to a remote portion of an empire unprecedented in its wealth to be born to an obscure Jewish maiden is to make a radical claim (1 Cor. 1:22–24).

It means also that the particular expressions of His story entail and impart character to the people who believe and act upon them. Our Lutheran conviction concerning the christocentricity of Scripture means that we will neither add to nor subtract from “the marks” He has given, namely, the prophetic and apostolic witness, the water of Holy Baptism, and the Eucharist.

Though these marks define us, they are more than Yeago’s cultural symbols. They are not historical artifacts or ancient data. They are the real presence of the true God who “call, gathers, and enlightens” people through such sacred means and no other. The incarnational and sacramental character of the church reflects the character of the true God. The people of God are more than a group of convention-goers who affirm the party’s platform. They are an expression of the one reality sacred Scripture describes, for they have been joined to the Christ in their Baptism, are nourished with His very body and blood, and are directed by His living voice (*viva vox Jesu*) in the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures. These definitions and marks do not exist in a fairyland. They cannot be abstracted into a meta-narrative that is either beyond history or locked in the shell of personal religious experience. Rather, they exist in flesh and blood people who have been joined to a resurrected Lord who was born to the Virgin Mary as Second Adam. We are not simply witnesses to, but participants in this one, true,

saving, and holy narrative, which is visible to the nations all about us—unless, of course, we are so acculturated that the nations see themselves when they look at us.

### **Lutheran Solidarity with the Biblical Witness**

If the radical Reformation and enthusiasts interiorized the essence of the faith and the Roman Catholic Church multiplied external requirements and structures, a profound and biblical insight of the Reformers was to locate God's character in those particularities and structures where Christ Himself was present. The Apology provides remarkable clarity in the following passage:

Yet the church is not only an association of external things and rites like other governments, but she is chiefly an association of faith and of the Holy Spirit in hearts, which however has external marks, so that she may be recognized, namely the pure teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments in agreement with the Gospel of Christ (Ap VII/VIII, 5).

This assumption explains why Luther and his followers could not regard the Sacraments as "extra" or "add-ons" to the Gospel. The Gospel itself was at stake in affirming Christ's presence in the Supper. To our peril, we view the Sacraments as mere "additions" to the Gospel. In his 1535 Galatians commentary, Luther writes:

For the sectarians who deny the bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper accuse us today of being quarrelsome, harsh, and intractable, because, as they say, we shatter love and harmony among the churches on account of the single doctrine about the Sacrament. They say we should not make so much of this little doctrine. . . . To this argument of theirs we reply with Paul: "A little leaven leavens the whole lump." In philosophy a tiny error in the beginning is very great at the end. Thus in theology a tiny error overthrows the whole teaching.<sup>23</sup>

The apparently impending action of the ELCA in declaring pulpit and altar fellowship with a variety of Christian traditions should alert us to the contemporary relevance of Luther's concern.

The people of God or Priesthood of All Believers recognizes that Christ established the Office of the Pastor as a "mark" of His church. As in the Old Testament, He is not simply a transmitter of data, but a set-aside, flesh-and-blood servant who is to guide God's people on their daily pilgrimages. This office, established by Christ, is of the "esse" of the church and is defined by the Good Shepherd's pastoral model.<sup>24</sup>

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away (1 Peter 5:2–4).

The Pastoral Office can be rightly understood only by knowing the narrative of sacred Scripture and its Christological center. To be Christ's servant and the servant of Christ's people does not mean to be servile. Faithfulness to Christ entails speaking His Word and administering the Sacraments, which He instituted, when they appear outmoded and impotent. Hence, the people of God rejoice in a faithful pastor they can trust to speak Christ's Word rather than that of another. His care for them and compassion underscore his commitment to Christ and Christ's flock. God's people will rightly see the crucial place of the undershepherd in their life before God. The portrayals of Western society that render a pastor utterly optional for the Christian life will also be seen as harmful and corrosive to God's people. Pastors are Christ's gifts to the church, which she receives with thanks, not with the view that they are unnecessary options for the church.

In a culture dominated by questions of control and power, both God's people and God's pastors are called and defined by a different Word—the Gospel. The “marks” and structures that attend the Gospel are not constrictive but servants of Christ.

Edmund Schlink describes the complementary nature of the Pastoral Office and the Priesthood of all Believers:

The Confessions do not permit us to place the Priesthood of all Believers as a divine institution over against the Public Ministry as a human institution. The idea of a transfer of the rights of the Priesthood of all Believers to the person of the pastor is foreign to the Confessions. The church does not transfer its office of preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments to individuals in its membership, but it fills this Office entrusted to it by God, it calls into this Office instituted by God. In this Office the pastor therefore acts in the name and at the direction of God and in the stead of Jesus Christ. He acts with authority not on the basis of an arrangement made by believers, but on the basis of the divine institution.<sup>25</sup>

It is this balanced and biblical structure that is present in Walther. For Höfling, the Ministry comes into existence by the transfer of the spiritual powers of the individual priests. For Walther, the Ministry is a divinely instituted and mandated office, which the Priesthood does not originate, but which it receives, ready-made, from God, and in turn confers on or transmits to the incumbent. Not the terms “transfer” or “confer” matter ultimately, but the question that does matter: What is transferred and conferred: individual powers, or a divine office?<sup>26</sup>

Our Lutheran Confessions are a rich resource for addressing the relationship between pastor and people. To understand and practice assumes on the part of the people of God and their pastors an openness to and rigor in appropriating “the marks” of the church as Christ established them.



### The “*Esse*” and “*Bene Esse*” of the People of God

If God’s people are defined by God’s character as revealed exclusively in His chosen means, are there structures that serve the Gospel beyond those that are of the very essence of the church, *i.e.*, can anything be said about the implications for the people of God who are born baptismally, fed by the Lord’s own Supper, guided by His Word, and shepherded by His pastors, in how they conduct their common walk?

It is here that I would suggest our real work lies. How can structures and practices be articulated that are for the well-being (the “*bene esse*”) of the church? A classic example is that of worship on Sunday. On the one hand, the church does not want to make indifferent things into divine obligation. On the other hand, it recognizes the value of those things that serve the Gospel. Our Lutheran Confessions state clearly: “Some argue that the observance of the Lord’s Day is not indeed of divine obligation, but is as it were of divine obligation. . .” (AC XXVIII, 63).

The Large Catechism at the same time comments:

Since from ancient times Sunday has been appointed for this purpose, we should not change it. In this way a common order will prevail and no one will create disorder by unnecessary innovation (LC I, 85).

If the distinction is held up clearly for God’s people that the “*esse*” and “*bene esse*” of the church are very different matters, could they benefit catechetically by structures that would serve the biblical portrait of reality?

In a postmodern age, is there a way to counter the radical individualism and reductionistic view of Christ that renders Him exclusively in personal and private terms? Our biblical, creedal, and confessional convictions invite reflection on strategies that are both faithful and convincing.

### Sacred Worship

If we recover the scriptural focus on God's people as those who are joined to Christ by Baptism, fed by Him at His table, and guided by faithful exposition of His Word, worship becomes central to what God's people are called to do corporately. For example, if the communicant views his action not simply as reception of private forgiveness, but as a pilgrimage with his brothers and sisters back to the upper room where the Lord chose Passover as the moment to institute His Supper and as a participation in the life of God through the very body and blood of Christ that are offered—would this not be a fuller appropriation of the scriptural witness concerning the Sacrament?

In the current discussion on worship, has adequate reflection occurred about the relationship between form and content in ritual? Has our catechesis failed to inform the people of God about the theological basis for the distinctives of Christian worship?

An interesting example is Walther's response to the charge that the Missouri Synod was Roman Catholic because its pastors chanted. His answer in *Der Lutheraner* of 1853 is striking:

Whenever the Divine Service once again follows the old Evangelical-Lutheran agendas (or church books) it seems that many raise a great cry that it is "Roman Catholic": "Roman Catholic" when the pastor chants "The Lord be with you" and the congregation responds by chanting "and with thy spirit"; "Roman Catholic" when the pastor chants the collect and the blessing and the people respond with a chanted "Amen." . . . Those who cry out should remember that the Roman Catholic Church possesses every beautiful song of the old orthodox Church. The chants and antiphons and responses were brought into the church long before the false teachings of Rome crept in. This Christian Church since the beginning, even in the Old Testament, has derived great joy from chanting. . . . For more than 1700 years orthodox Christians have participated joyfully in the Divine Service. Should we, today, carry on by saying that

such joyful participation is “Roman Catholic”? God forbid! Therefore, as we continue to hold and to restore our wonderful Divine Services in places where they have been forgotten, let us boldly confess that our worship forms do not unite us with the modern sects or with the Church of Rome; rather, they join us to the one, holy Christian Church that is as old as the world and is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.<sup>27</sup>

Walther’s clear concern for the catholicity of Lutheran worship practice over against the sects as well as Roman Catholicism is noteworthy for the current debate.

### Sacred Personnel

Is there benefit for the church in a fresh exposition of the centrality of the Pastoral Office and the high calling of the Priesthood of all Believers in biblical categories?

Might the Priesthood of all Believers and its pastors benefit from a conscious critique of surrounding models of community? For example, many organizations in which the people of God function from day to day are driven by questions of who has the largest slice of the “power-pie.” When such thinking, or the administrative and leadership models on which it is based, begin to shape the minds of people and pastors, there is a loss of biblical vocation and identity.

Similarly, the biblical witness challenges the egalitarian and populist notions that define community apart from the character of God, and the means and structures He has called into being, the Word and Sacraments along with the Office of the Ministry He has given to the church. The church is not merely a collection of like-minded individuals doing as they please. The fact that Lutherans have never sided with the view that a majority are free to do as they wish is shown by Martin Chemnitz’s reply to the question of whether the Anabaptists have the Ministry:

But do the Anabaptists do right, who entrust the whole right of calling to the common multitude (which they take the word *ekklesia* to mean) with the Ministry and pious magistrate excluded? By no means. For the church in each place is called, and is, the whole body embracing under Christ, the Head, all the members of that place. Eph. 4:15-16; 1 Co 12:12-14, 27. Therefore as the call belongs not only to the Ministry nor only to the magistrate, so also is it not to be made subject to the mere will and whim of the common multitude. . . .<sup>28</sup>

Might the church also be marvelously served by placing those apostolic texts that stress the solidarity and oneness of God's people in the foreground? When our very thought processes are captive to individualistic assumptions, should not passages like Rom. 6:3-6, 1 Cor. 12:13, and Gal. 3:27-28 be freshly expounded? Holy Baptism, described in each of these passages, provides a biblical and sacramental resource for defining the Priesthood of all Believers as the Body of Christ. Just as Israel was constituted a community through circumcision, so the church is through Baptism.

A baptismal grace valid for a whole community as such, namely, the people of Israel who pass through the Red Sea, is presupposed also in 1 Cor. 10:1ff, a passage that ought to be much more carefully observed in the discussion of child Baptism. It is here quite plain that the act of grace, which is regarded as the type of Baptism, concerns the covenant God made with the whole people. In this connection, reference must be made to the continuity between that covenant God concluded with Abraham on behalf of His people and the covenant of the Church which, as the Body of Christ, that is, of the 'one' (Gal. 3:16), brings that covenant to fulfillment.<sup>29</sup>

Similarly, a renewed appreciation for the Lord's Supper as a public expression of the oneness of the Priesthood of all Believers would provide a biblical response to the assumption that the life of

faith is a private journey in that one may or may not join the church at the Lord's Table.

For the *koinonia* that according to the New Testament exists among the saints, the believers, finds its strongest expression in the fellowship of those who, gathered around the Lord's Table, receive His body and blood.<sup>30</sup>

### Sacred Space

Is there benefit in recovering the concept of sanctuary—sacred space—where God repeatedly comes to us in His Means of Grace? If God's people would view the nave of their sanctuary as the ship in which they are passing through this world, where their life began in Baptism, where they will one day be given the church's "farewell" in worship that celebrates their life in Christ, would not the Gospel and God's people be well served?

### Sacred Time

Is there benefit in a fresh exposition of the liturgical year so that God's people define their days as a rehearsal of the life of Christ and His church?

### Sacred Life

Would the people of God and their pastors be well served by a new appropriation of classical Christian casuistry? To read C.F.W. Walther's *Pastoral Theology*, for example, is to illumine how he envisioned his position on Church and Ministry to be lived out in the daily life of the church. As one reads Walther's *Pastoral Theology* he cannot help but be impressed by the deep churchly piety formed by Word and Sacrament that animates his reflections. In the same way, would the language of virtue and character, so rich in classic Christian devotional texts, be a tremendous resource for the life of sanctification?

### Conclusion

In a culture that seeks to define its people without reference to a God whose character and actions can be known, this paper is a first and modest effort to explore whether the greatest threat to the people of God and the Priesthood of all Believers is not an assault on the necessity and centrality of its own “marks”—those “particularly dense loci of significance” without which the church cannot be the church. The radical individualism and interiorizing of the life of the church at the expense of Israel’s history, the Incarnation of Christ, and the Means of Grace have exacted a great price. Cut off from the flesh and blood of Israel and of Christ, the individual easily fills even biblical phrases with culturally generated content. So also, in defining the relationship of the Priesthood of all Believers to the pastoral office, both the people of God and the pastors of God’s people are called to leave the reductionistic and individualistic assumptions of every decaying age and enter the true and fleshly narrative of sacred Scripture where the gift of life is bestowed in Christ.

The people of God, the Priesthood of all Believers by God’s grace, defined by the church’s marks, will then be a light to the nations. The centrality of confession and contrition in the church’s life will attest that its life is yet under the cross rather than triumphant. At the same time, God’s people will be recognized through lives that are formed by Christ’s presence. Integrity in their daily vocations, heroism in keeping their marriage vows, their nurture of children and care of the elderly, their life of charity, etc.: these will bespeak a people who are “in Christ” and “bearers” of the biblical world.

The “marks” of that world—the church’s definition in Word and Sacrament—will sustain and unite them in Christ and in a life that reflects His holy and saving presence. St. Paul writes to the Colossians:

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him (Col. 3:12-17).

### Notes

1. T. S. Eliot, "The Idea of a Christian Society," in *Christianity and Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. 1949), 24.
2. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *Reclaiming the Bible for the Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), x.
3. Stephen Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 3.
4. Ibid., 23.
5. See Robert H. Bork, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996).
6. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 205.
7. Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 55.
8. Diogenes Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989), 1. How pluralism influences Western religiosity and "Christianity" merits more attention.
9. A detailed and challenging treatment of all religion as a "social construction of reality" is Peter L. Berger's *The Sacred Canopy* (New York: Anchor, 1967).

10. Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), 1-2.

11. Philip L. Culbertson and Arthur Bradford Shippee, eds., *The Pastor* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

12. David H. Kelsey, *To Understand God Truly. What's Theological About a Theological School* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992). See also, Thomas C. Oden's *Requiem* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

13. The crucial role of sacred Scripture in defining a community's identity is recognized by a spectrum of notable scholars. J. Blenkinsopp, *Prophecy and Canon* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1977); Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); James A. Sanders, *Canon and Community* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

14. James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).

15. David S. Yeago, "Messiah's People: The Culture of the Church in the Midst of the Nations," *Pro Ecclesia* 6 (Spring 1997), 158.

16. Jon D. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament and Historical Criticism* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), 126.

17. Othmar Keel, *Symbolism of the Biblical World* (New York: Crossroad, 1985); James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts in Pictures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954)

18. Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Vol. 2: Religious Institutions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 357.

19. Christopher J. H. Wright, *God's People in God's Land* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 23. The importance of the land in Israel's understanding of God has recently received major scholarly attention. Cf. Walter Brueggemann, *The Land. Overtures to Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977); and W. D.



Davies, *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

20. Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, trans. Keith Crim (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 101. Also, Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1985).

21. C.F.W. Walther, *Walther on the Church*, ed. August R. Suelflow (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), 34.

22. Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, trans. J.A.O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989), 2:658.

23. Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians* (1535), AE 27: 36–39.

24. C.F.W. Walther's Thesis two underscores the divine institution of the Pastoral Office: "The Ministry of the Word or Pastoral Office is not a human institution, but an office that God Himself has established." Among other arguments, Walther stresses Christ's origin of the Office in the call of the apostles: "In the second place, the divine institution of the Holy Ministry is evident from the call of the holy apostles into the Ministry of the Word by the Son of God (Matt. 10; 28:18–20; Luke 9:1–10; Mark 16:15; John 20:21–23; 21:15–17). *Walther on the Church*, 75.

25. Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. Paul F. Koehnke and H. J. A. Boumann. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), 245.

26. Kurt E. Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance* (Waverly, Iowa: The International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, 1990), 114–115.

27. C.F.W. Walther, *Der Lutheraner*, July 19, 1853 (Vol. 9, No. 24), 163.

28. Martin Chemnitz, *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments: An Enchiridion*, ed. and trans. Luther Poellet (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), 34.

29. Oscar Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament*, trans.

J.K.S. Reid (London: SCM Press, 1950), 45. The corporate and Christological dimensions of Holy Baptism are described also in Edmund Schlink's *The Doctrine of Baptism*, trans. Herbert J.A. Boumann (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 72–82.

30. Hermann Sasse, *We Confess the Sacraments*, trans. Norman Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1985), 143.

## RESPONSE TO PRESENTATION I

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I AM HONORED TO BE HERE, AND TO OFFER to the paper by my teacher, colleague and friend a response with a two-part structure. First, I have a question and two possible clarifications to offer. Second, I would like to offer my own support to what I understand as the basic thesis of the paper, namely, that even before we can talk about the Priesthood of all Believers, we must reestablish—or perhaps establish—the categories in which we think and teach and preach to the people of God as the “holy nation, the royal priesthood.” In that sense, my impression is that a subtitle of Dr. Wente’s paper could very well have been, “prolegomena to the Priesthood of all Believers.”

### What Do the “Marks” of the Old Testament Narrative Say About the Character of God?

I have to confess that the paper left unanswered the basic question suggested by the title, namely, the specific connection between God’s character and marks by which God’s people are known. The paper does state clearly, on the one hand, that the Old Testament narrative of God and His people shows His character that requires “contrition for sins.” But on the other hand, no further specific connections are offered, and questions remain. To frame questions

in the terms of the paper: what specifically is known about God's character from the fact that God Himself attended to the details of the tabernacle's construction, or that God Himself established for Israel sacred time of Sabbath and festival? The paper mentions the "scandal of particularity" and the "scandal of the cross," but does not flesh out the significance. Is it that God is One who "incarnates" Himself and works through earthly means? With this I would certainly agree, but I found myself uncertain as to the paper's intention. What is known about Israel's God from the fact that there were sacred personnel? In what way(s) does this transfer into the ongoing story of God's dealing with His people in Christ? This is my first and large question, suggesting the need for further exploration and reflection.

There is a need to qualify at all times the difference between New Testament "marks" of the church and that office that exists to offer up those life-giving "marks."

Though the Pastoral Office exists by God's institution and is for the purpose of preaching the Gospel, the Gospel is not confined to the Pastoral Office nor to the activities of the pastor, for God's people also carry His Word written on their foreheads and their hands and they speak of it when they are sitting in their houses and when they are walking in the way. I wish always to distinguish here, yet without separating. So, for instance, the paper rightly comments that

Our Lutheran conviction concerning the christocentricity of Scripture means that we will neither add to nor subtract from "the marks" He has given, namely, the prophetic and apostolic witness, the water of Holy Baptism, and the Eucharist.

The author cites the Apology (VII/VIII,5) and its remarkable clarity regarding "the pure teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments in agreement with the Gospel of Christ."

Yet I could have wished for a different expression when Dr. Wenthe writes:

The people of God or Priesthood of All Believers recognizes that Christ established the Office of Pastor as a “mark” of His church. As in the Old Testament, he is not simply a transmitter of data, but a set-aside, flesh-and-blood servant, who is to guide God’s people on their daily pilgrimages.

The Pastoral Office is a “mark,” to be sure, in that God has given it for the blessing of His priests and that it is a non-negotiable item. But it is not a mark in the same way that the Means of Grace are. The Office of the Ministry exists to point not to itself, but to point to Christ, whereas the “marks” of the church in themselves give what Christ offers.<sup>1</sup> To be sure, the Pastoral Office can never be separated from the “marks of the church.” It belongs in the same breath, if you will. But I think it is important to distinguish between the “marks” of the church, and the “means to the marks,” if I can be permitted a singularly inelegant phrase.

The difficulty of “how much continuity” exists between Old Testament “non-negotiables” and New Testament “non-negotiables.” The problem: To what extent can we say, “Just as the Old Testament narrative, so also in our lives as New Testament priestly people of God?”

When speaking of the “non-negotiables” of sacred worship, here we stand on firmest ground. Just as God ordained for Israel means of atonement and forgiveness and hope, all in light of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, so also God ordained for His people the Means of Grace, entrusted to the pastor to administer faithfully. To speak of worship is to speak of the Means of Grace. To think “Lutheranly” and biblically about worship is to think first of what God in mercy gives to His people and does for His people when they gather around the gifts He has given.

But what about sacred personnel? The people of God are still “sacred,” set apart by God’s mercy and for His purposes. The New Testament emphasis is upon the Great High Priest and His once-for-all sacrifice. When we speak of New Testament correspondence to “sacred Levitical or Aaronic personnel,” we must speak carefully, while noting the similarities and differences that exist now that Christ’s priestly work is done, fulfilling the Old Testament priestly cultus. In this regard, the article by Dr. Paul Schreiber, “Priests Among Priests: The Office of the Ministry in Light of the Old Testament Priesthood” offers an excellent example of this kind of theologizing.<sup>4</sup>

Concerning sacred space we may speak, but only in a secondary sense. For Christ Jesus Himself is the very temple and presence of God, tenting among us, and wherever Christ is through His appointed means, there is sacred space. Can we show an appropriate reverence for the nave of the church building in which Christ comes to His people again and again? Of course. But that same awe is appropriate in the hospital ICU, when the pastor brings the body and blood of the Lord into the midst of the technological tangle of wires and sensors and tubes. One might further suggest a close correspondence between reverence for the Old Testament sanctuary and reverence for the human fellowship of the believers themselves wherever they are gathered, for we are God’s house of living stones, builded for His habitation. If we treated one another with such respect as befits the temple of God, a lot of church meetings might proceed along different lines.

Concerning sacred time, we also may speak only in a secondary sense. Christ is our Sabbath rest, and the church year is a helpful tool that adorns the Gospel but is not necessary to it. It serves the purposes of the Gospel and serves them well and should continue to serve. But this particular way of expressing the sacredness of time is not of the essence of the Gospel itself.

### Recapturing Biblical Categories

So far my questions, clarifications, qualifications. Let me register now my utter and complete agreement with the basic thesis of Dr. Wenthe's paper as I understand it, namely, that we must recapture and re-communicate the categories of the biblical narrative as it finds its fulfillment in Christ, in order even to speak about the Priesthood of all Believers. For the true Israel of God is the people who are called and gathered as the sons and daughters of Abraham, to whom and for whom God's ancient promises have come true and who look for the fulfillment of the prophetic hope when Messiah comes again in glory. And because all of God's promises find their "yes" in Christ and we are in Him, the biblical story is our story; we have been caught up into it and to live out our calling we must think in biblical terms.

Who are the priests of God? A people chosen from all the nations, for the whole earth is Yahweh's (Ex. 19:6). We have not volunteered. We have not qualified ourselves for status as God's priests. With a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, God freed His people of old, and in the new exodus of the Christ we were liberated, for Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed for us.

God determined that we would enter that covenant relationship when we were circumcised with the circumcision made without hands—when we were baptized into Christ. We crossed the Jordan water in Baptism's water, and entered into the promised land. That marks the priests of God. This is how God does it. How great is the need to explain and teach this baptismal identity—not with catch phrases or pat answers, but with clear meaning and joyful illustration! Perhaps we who are pastors among and to the priests may lead the way. God grant each of His pastors to possess by grace a personal piety that lays claim each day by faith to what is true because we were baptized into Christ's death and Resurrection.

Who are the priests of God? Those who are marked off from those around them—by God's Word.

And now, O Israel, give heed to the statutes and ordinances which I teach you and do them; that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land which the Lord, the God of your fathers, gives you. You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it; that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you. . . . Keep them and do them; for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as Yahweh our God is to us, whenever we call upon Him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day? (Deut. 4:1-2, 6-8 RSV)

It is not the word of the culture, or of the media, or of the people around us that identifies us as God's priests. It is the Word of the Lord, "the Word that is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is, the Word of faith that we preach) because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom. 10:8-9).

Who are the priests of God? Those whom God has led into a pilgrimage in the desert places until they reach their final home. Until then, He feeds His people as ever He has done—with the bread of heaven, even Jesus our Lord, who came and fed the crowds in Galilee at Passover-tide and called upon the people to believe in Him. This bread of heaven continues to come to us, God's priestly people, as He comes to us in the bread and wine of His Supper, nourishing us with a true foretaste of the feast to come.

And what are the priests of God to do? The paper to which I am responding did not speak of that, so perhaps I may. If God's people can turn away from worldly categories and hold fast to their



blessed calling into the ongoing biblical narrative—what are the priests to do? The classic passage is, of course, 1 Peter 2. Their purpose is to proclaim the excellencies of the God who has called them from darkness into marvelous light. “To proclaim His excellencies.” This expression is used only here in the Greek New Testament. In the canonical Greek Septuagint, it is found in the Psalter seven times as a translation for the Hebrew word that means, “to recount, relate.” God’s royal priests are to recount His praises.

Questions remain. To whom? How? Is there a limit to the audience? No, the proclamation will go out to anyone who will listen. And how are they to proclaim God’s mighty deeds of compassion and salvation? Judging from the context of 1 Peter, there certainly will be an explicitly verbal element to it: “to give a defense to everyone who inquires of you about the hope that is within you” (1 Peter 3:15). God desires that His priests speak of the hope that is within them, to their friends, families, co-workers, proclaiming the saving Gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and through their lives of service to others, bearing testimony to their hope in Christ.

Yet even the 1 Peter 3 passage is in the context of Christian behavior, of Christians maintaining a Christ-like attitude and deportment in the face of unjust suffering. The priests of God proclaim His excellencies also through their obedient lives of loving others, or returning evil with good, to the glory of the God who called them in Christ. The obvious passage here is Rom. 12:1–2, where, as priests who have been shown the mercies of God, we present our entire being, our bodies as living sacrifices, and each of us according to the particular gift and calling that God gives, so that none of us may think more highly of himself than he ought to think—a perennial problem with us sinners. And if the background of Matt. 5:14 is indeed the oracles of Isaiah 2 and 60 concerning the New Jerusalem to which the Gentiles will stream, then Matt. 5:14–16 is also important:

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket; rather, they put it on a lampstand and it illumines everyone in the house. In this way let your light shine before men—O priests of God—so that they may see your good works and glorify your father who is in heaven (my translation).

Priests of God are to offer sacrifices—their whole bodies, given in the knowledge of and the submission to the good and pleasing and acceptable will of God. Priests of God are to proclaim, in their deeds and their words, the wondrous things that God has done. If this is so, then it is clear that there is only one thing that can bring this miracle to pass among God's priests: the Gospel.

And where can the priests look, to find examples of good works of patient love and compassion and humble service? God wants them to find in their pastors such "examples" of good works (1 Peter 5:3). Where can the priests go to receive and hear and be filled with Gospel truth? The men God has given to His priests to speak good news and strengthen weak hearts and to rouse God's people to speak as they have opportunity and to fight the fight of faith and cast off the sin that so easily entangles, and to run with endurance the race set before them? God has given pastors—from among, and to His priests—to serve them and make them strong by pointing them to the sacred places where God has guaranteed He will forgive and strengthen. For God has made for Himself a royal priesthood, even a holy people. And only God can keep them, and cause them, through Jesus Christ, to offer up the sacrifices of praise and obedience that are acceptable in His sight, and that cause men to give glory to His name.

### Notes

1. Again, on page 26, our essayist writes of the structures that are of "the very essence of the church, *i.e.*, can anything be said

about the implications for the people of God who are born baptismally, fed by the Lord's own Supper, guided by His Word, and shepherded by His pastors. . . ." Rather than items in sequence, I would have stated it in a different way.

2. Paul Schreiber, "Priests Among Priests: The Office of the Ministry in Light of the Old Testament Priesthood," *Concordia Journal* 14 (July 1988): 215-33.

## RESPONSE TO PRESENTATION I

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DR. WENTHE CERTAINLY HAS GIVEN US much to think about in his paper. I thank him for that. I would also like to thank Dr. Barry—I think!—for inviting me to offer a response to this paper.

The present tension within the Synod on the issue of Church and Ministry has two parts. One is the failure of the Priesthood to understand and honor the Pastoral Office and the one who holds it. The other is the failure of some pastors to accept the Office and to conduct it in agreement with the teachings of the Missouri Synod.

It is not my assignment to deal with the problem pastors. Concerning the problem priests, however, I have two suggestions to lay on the table for our consideration and discussion. I hope that these suggestions help us along in our prayerful consideration of these important issues.

First, in his paper Dr. Wenthe writes,

Unless the people of God have a foundational sense of Scripture's narrative—the history of Israel and the life of Jesus—that can be understood and appropriated in a manner that actually defines the church's common life, discussion of office, vocation, and moral issues will not occur with satisfactory results.

I agree. But it strikes me that something even more fundamental is required. The people of God, that is, those holding the office of priest, need a knowledge of and faith in the true God. I submit that we no longer live in a time or culture in which this can be assumed.

In a recent essay titled "The Catholic Luther," David Yeago argues that, prior to 1518, the question driving Luther's theological work was not "How can I get a gracious God?" but "Where can I find the real God?" He writes, "All the evidence in the texts suggests that it was the threat of idolatry, not a craving for assurance of forgiveness, that troubled Luther's conscience."<sup>1</sup>

As evidence of this, Yeago quotes this passage from Luther's lectures on Romans (1515–1516):

By the same steps people even today arrive at a spiritual and more subtle idolatry, which is now quite common, by which God is worshiped, not as He is, but as He is imagined and reckoned to be. For ingratitude and love of vanity . . . violently blind people, so that they are incorrigible, and unable to believe otherwise than that they are acting splendidly and pleasing God. And in this way they form a God favorable to themselves, even though He really is not so. And so they more truly worship their fantasy than the true God, whom they believe to be like that fantasy.<sup>2</sup>

This sort of subtle idolatry is a grave temptation for Christians in every age and culture. And in every age and culture, some of God's covenant people, some of His royal priests, have succumbed. I believe that this kind of idolatry is a special threat in our day.

The primary place where our understanding of God is shaped and sustained is in the liturgy of the church. It is here as we gather around Word and Table week after week that our faith in God and our knowledge of God is nourished and sustained. It is here that our covenant relationship is exercised and, in part, lived out.

It is precisely here that our culture intrudes. The current debate within our Synod about worship and liturgy is much more, I would suggest, than simply a debate about orders of service. It is finally and ultimately an issue about idolatry.

It was O. P. Kretzmann who once wrote, "Our faith, to maintain its balance, must see the plan of God in two's. . . . The weakness of the manger and the power of the angels. . . . The shame of the cross and the glory of the tomb. . . . The loneliness of the garden and the fellowship of the saints."<sup>3</sup>

The liturgy of the church, at its best, combines these two elements in an appropriate balance and focuses our attention on the true God. Aiden Kavanagh describes it well:

In the Incarnation of His Son the living God has been pleased to weld us into Himself and fill us with His Spirit, which is a consolation. But that in doing so He never becomes subordinate to us is fearsome. There is nothing unusual about a deity being fearsome. Deities are well known for this quality. Nor is there anything unusual about a deity consoling its devotees. But there does seem to be something unusual about the way in which the God of Jesus Christ is fearsome with such tenderness, consoling with such towering justice. The perfect icon of this is painted by the Christian Bible three times: in the accounts of Jesus' birth, His Transfiguration, and His death and Resurrection. The perfect enactment of this is the liturgy of Christians. For when they come to their liturgy, Christians approach not just a text, a proposition, a doctrine, an option, or a chance to grab the brass ring of grace or passing moral uplift. In their liturgy, Christians disport themselves warily with the One for whom their universe is but a snap of the finger. They have the impertinence to play with the One who did not hesitate to yield up His holy Son into our bloodstained hands. This is the One at whose table we sit by grace and pardon.<sup>4</sup>

When the balance that Kretzmann described is lost or distorted and when the Divine Service becomes something other than

what Kavanagh describes, then the subtle idolatry Luther feared emerges. And when it appears, it affects how those called to be royal priests view themselves. It also affects how they think about Church and Ministry, about office and vocation. And the effect is not good.

My second suggestion is this. In his paper Dr. Wenthe writes that our classic Lutheran view of the Priesthood of all Believers in relationship to the Pastoral Office provides the scriptural substance and rich pastoral resources to address our current setting (8). Again, I agree. But in addition to the helpful scriptural substance concerning God's character that he assembled, it might also be helpful for our purposes to take a closer look at Exodus 19 and 1 Peter 2 where the Priesthood of all Believers is most clearly taught. These portions of Scripture, since they do clearly teach these truths, must be our starting points for any discussion of these issues.

The Exodus passage reads:

And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel" (Ex. 19:3-6 RSV).

And Peter writes:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were no people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Peter 2:9-10 RSV).

The first thing that strikes me is that God's declaration concerning the Priesthood is given in connection with and as part of His covenant with Israel. I know of no place in Scripture where God commits Himself to deal graciously with people apart from His covenant—either the one established with Abraham and expanded under Moses or the one mediated by Jesus Christ.

If this is so, it amounts to a comprehensive repudiation of the radical individualism that is so strong in our culture. It is a decisive rejection of what I call "lone wolf" Christianity, the idea that I can be a Christian apart from the church. Because, if I can be a Christian apart from the church, the Pastoral Office exists simply as a resource to serve me as I have need. To this way of thinking—which is quite common among the members of our congregations—the pastor is like the operator of the neighborhood service station. I go to him only when my car needs gas or repairs. In the same way I go to the pastor only when I need spiritual refreshment or counsel or some pastoral service like a wedding or a funeral.

The second thing that strikes me in both passages is that the phrases "kingdom of priests" and "royal priesthood" are closely connected to the phrase "holy nation." God's covenant people, His royal priests, are to see themselves as set apart from the culture that surrounds them and separated for a single-hearted loyalty to God, the Lord of the covenant.

It is precisely at this point that a serious breakdown takes place today in many congregations. There is a sad loss of this sense of being "set apart" from the culture that surrounds us. This loss, among other things, has a direct impact on how the Office of the Public Ministry is viewed and honored in the congregation. Norms and standards from the prevailing culture rather than from the Word of God are used to evaluate the pastor and his ministry and thus there result unbiblical expectations of ministers and understandings of their duties and responsibilities as God's servants.



Permit me to give one example. Some years ago, workshops were conducted throughout the Synod by Donald Abdon. His intentions undoubtedly were good, but the results in many places have been otherwise. Following Abdon's advice, new constitutions were adopted by a number of congregations in which the church council was replaced by a board of directors, the office of chairman by the position of executive director, and the ancient office of elder by something called the board of lay ministry. Whatever the original intent, this change of structure introduced a cultural business model into the life of the church. This model implies that we are not "set apart" from the surrounding culture but are, in fact, a part of it. Among other things this has resulted in a significant change in attitude and understanding of the Pastoral Office. In my experience this is particularly true in those congregations where lay leadership is provided by men and women who work at jobs in middle management.

The third thing that strikes me is Peter's description of believers as the people of God. Peter uses the phrase to emphasize the special relationship that exists between God and His royal priests. In the words of Exodus 19, "you shall be my own possession among all peoples" (v. 5 RSV). To emphasize this same relationship, Paul uses the phrase "Body of Christ." To the Corinthians he writes: "Now you are the Body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Cor. 12:27 RSV). He also uses the phrase "Body of Christ" to emphasize the kind of relationship believers are to have with each other, and by extension, with their pastors. To the Romans he writes ". . . so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (Rom. 12:5, RSV).

Here again our culture intrudes into proper Biblical understandings of these issues. What it would have us understand by membership and what many of our people understand is almost the reverse of what Paul means.

C. S. Lewis put it this way:

The very word membership is of Christian origin, but it has been taken over by the world and emptied of all meaning. . . . I am afraid that when we describe a man as "a member of the Church" we usually mean nothing Pauline; we mean only that he is a unit—that he is one more specimen of some kind of things as X and Y and Z. . . . True membership . . . may be seen in the structure of a family. The grandfather, the parents, the grown-up son, the child, the dog, and the cat are true members. . . . They are not interchangeable. Each person is almost a species in himself. The mother is not simply a different person from the daughter; she is a different kind of person. The grown-up brother is not simply one unit in the class children; he is a separate estate of the realm. The father and the grandfather are almost as different as the cat and the dog. If you subtract any one member, you have not simply reduced the family in number; you have inflicted an injury on its structure.<sup>5</sup>

This understanding of membership is hard to find in our congregations. Its lack, among other things, significantly affects the way the Pastoral Office is regarded and honored in the congregation by the priests of God. In place of an attitude of encouragement and support, one often finds an attitude of criticism and judgment.

In this brief response, I have attempted to lay some additional items on the table for us to consider as we address the tensions that have arisen among us.

In his paper, Dr. Wenthe wrote: "What faces us is a comprehensive task of catechesis in Christian thinking." I agree, and it is no small task. But if the tensions are to be resolved, the problem priests will need such comprehensive instruction from the Word of God. I suspect the task of helping problem pastors will be equally challenging. May God grant us grace and the help of His Holy Spirit as we address this assignment!

Notes

1. David Yeago, "The Catholic Luther" in *The Catholicity of the Reformation*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 17.
2. Quoted in Yeago, 19 (WA 56:179).
3. O.P. Kretzmann, *Hosanna in the Whirlwind* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1969), 9.
4. Aiden Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1984), 119–20.
5. C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, rev. and expanded ed. (New York: Collier Books, 1980), 110–11.