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Apostolicity and Ministry: A Lutheran View

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THE AUTHOR PRESENTS AN HISTORICAL SURVEY OF THE LUTHERAN VIEW OF THE ministry, with special emphasis on The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and concludes that the historic episcopate does not exist *jure divino*, and that fidelity to the apostolic Word is essential, not fidelity to apostolic succession.

Church and ministry have been of major concern in Lutheranism. With them the questions of apostolicity, apostolic succession, ordination, episcopacy, and the priesthood of believers have been linked. These questions will be examined cursorily from a historical point of view.

Martin Luther (1483—1546), even before his excommunication from the Roman communion, dealt with the question of the priesthood of the believers. The tract "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation" (1520) sets forth his teachings on that point.¹ Jerome Emser attacked Luther because of this. In his counterattack, "Answer to the Superchristian . . . Book of Goat Emser,"² Luther asserted

that the Fathers called the [Christians] the [real] priests; . . . One has to antagonize and insult the devil to make him produce one Scripture passage through which it can be proven that [the ordained clergy alone] are called priests [in Scripture]. . . .³

¹ *Luther's Works*, American Edition (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 44, 127—30. Cited as *LW*. *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Herman Böhlau, 1883 ff.), 6, 407—10. Cited as *WA*.

² *LW* 48, 265, n. 9.

³ Luther to Nicholas von Amsdorf, Wart-

Luther's exalted conviction of the priesthood of believers, however, did not cause him to diminish his regard for the priestly office. Shortly before he was ordained priest—the ordination took place 2 May 1507—he wrote to a friend that God "solely on the basis of his bounteous mercy" had called him (Luther) "into his supreme ministry."⁴ Thirty-six years later (1543) he had the same high regard for this holy office. In his Genesis lectures during that year he told his students:

When, for example, we teach the Gospel, baptize, call men to the ministry of the Word, and ordain ministers, we ourselves do not preach, we do not baptize, we do not ordain, but God is speaking through us. So it is called God's Word, God's sacrament, God's ministry, and it is rightly said: "God is speaking, God is baptizing" when He does it through ministers.⁵

Thus we are confronted with the two poles of Luther's teachings regarding the priesthood or the ministry. On the one hand he

burg, 15? July 1521, *LW* 48, 265; *WA*, *Br* 2, 361 f.

⁴ To John Braun, Erfurt, 22 April 1507, *LW* 48, 3; *WA*, *Br* 1, 10.

⁵ Ad Gen. 35:9—10. *LW* 6, 257; *WA* 44, 190.

makes the ordained ministry dependent on the priesthood of the believers—he has a genuine *Uebertragungslehre*.⁶ On the other hand he is certain that the ordained ministry or the priesthood is from God.⁷

In his letter to the Bohemians (1523) Luther emphasized the priesthood of believers and the right of the parishes to elect their priests.⁸ Luther repudiated the ideas of a sacerdotal “indelible character”⁹ and of apostolic succession.¹⁰ Papal ordi-

⁶ Hellmut Lieberg, *Amt und Ordination bei Luther und Melanchthon* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), pp. 69–103.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 104–32.

⁸ “Concerning the Ministry,” *LW* 40, 40: “Act in this way: first beseech God with prayers, both individually and in common. . . . When you have so prayed, have no doubt that he to whom you have prayed is faithful and will give what you ask. . . . Then call and come together freely. . . . Proceed in the name of the Lord to elect one or more whom you desire, and who appear to be worthy and able. Then let those who are leaders among you lay hands upon them, and certify and commend them to the people and the church and the community. In this way let them become your bishops, ministers, or pastors. Amen.” *WA* 12, 193–94.

⁹ *LW* 40, 24, 35; *WA* 12, 182, 190.

¹⁰ Luther does not here refer directly to apostolic succession. Conrad Bergendoff, the editor of the tract, remarks in his introduction that apostolic succession meant nothing to Luther. *LW* 40, x. Luther says, “We . . . are little concerned about usage or what the fathers have said or done in this matter.”

Ad Gen. 7:17–24 Luther said: “Accordingly, let us not be concerned about how great and powerful the pope is. He boasts that he is the church and stresses apostolic succession and his personal majesty. Let us look on the Word. If he embraces this, let us consider him to be the church; if he persecutes it, let us consider him to be the slave of Satan.” *LW* 2, 102; *WA* 42, 334–35.

Ad Gen. 21:12–13 Luther discounts the claims to apostolic succession made by the papists. *LW* 4, 28, 30, 33; *WA* 43, 155, 157, 159.

nations were not necessary. However, Luther held ordination in high esteem and regarded it as apostolic. Luther must be allowed to speak for himself:

Ordination indeed was first instituted on the authority of Scripture, and according to the example and decrees of the Apostle, in order to provide the people with ministers of the Word. The public ministry of the Word, I hold, by which the mysteries of God are made known, ought to be established by holy ordination as the highest and greatest of the functions of the church, on which the whole power of the church depends, since the church is nothing without the Word and everything in it exists by virtue of the Word alone.¹¹

Luther's emphasis on the Word in this treatise leads him to say that everything else depends on the teaching of the Word. “For we teach with the Word, we consecrate with the Word, we bind and absolve sins by the Word, we baptize with the Word, we judge all things by the Word.”¹² Preaching and teaching, sacrificing and praying, these are for Luther the functions of the priestly office. To be called a priest is to be given the most exalted, the most glorious title and name on earth.¹³ Preach-

Ad John 8:28 he wrote: “God does not care about your boast that you occupy the seats of the apostles, or even that you are in the Christian Church. No, His concern is that you hear the Son and believe in Him.” *LW* 23, 380; *WA* 33, 617.

On another occasion Luther remarked ad John 16:1–2: “. . . we concede—as we must—that so much of what they say is true: that the papacy has God's Word and the office of the apostles, and that we have received Holy Scripture, Baptism, the Sacraments, and the pulpit from them.” *LW* 24, 304; *WA* 46, 6.

¹¹ *LW* 40, 11; *WA* 12, 172–73.

¹² *LW* 40, 21; *WA* 12, 180.

¹³ Ad Ps. 110:4. *LW* 13, 315: “It has the highest honor next to the Divine Majesty.”

ing and teaching the Word is not only the greatest of offices, it is also an apostolic office.

Inasmuch as the office of preaching the gospel is the greatest of all and certainly is apostolic, it becomes the foundation for all other functions, which are built upon it, such as the offices of teachers, prophets, governing [the church], speaking with tongues, the gifts of healing and helping.¹⁴

That office is dependent on the call. "One cannot hold an office without a commission or a call."¹⁵

He who has both office and Word is an excellent preacher indeed. . . . The first point demands that the preacher have an office, that he be certain of being called and delegated, and that everything he does be done in the interest of his office. I dare not preach without a call. I must not go to Leipzig or to Magdeburg for the purpose of preaching there, for I have neither call nor office to take me to those places. . . . But if our Lord God bade me go, then I would and should go. . . . Secondly, a preacher must be sure that he is teaching and preaching God's Word. . . . Both of these points must go together. . . . Unless he is called, it is not sufficient to have a talent; I must also be called, that is, I must be persuaded that God has

LW 40, 23: "To baptize is incomparably greater than to consecrate bread and wine, for it is the greatest office in the church—the proclamation of the Word of God. So when women baptize, they exercise the function of priesthood legitimately, and do it not as a private act, but as a part of the public ministry of the church which belongs only to the priesthood." WA 12, 181.

¹⁴ LW 40, 36; WA 12, 191.

¹⁵ "Infiltrating and Clandestine Preachers" (1532), LW 40, 386; WA 30 III, 521: "Ein ampt aber kan niemand haben ausser und on befehl odder beruff."

placed me here to preach. . . . The first requisite is the call. It would be better not to have been born than to undertake something without a call. . . . Secondly, it is necessary to have the Word of God.¹⁶

The call may be a *vocatio immediata* or a *vocatio mediata*; ordinarily it comes from the congregation.¹⁷ However, it may be issued also by bishops or ecclesiastical leaders. For Luther the title bishop is one that can be applied to any pastor or parish clergyman. "We are called bishops by apostolic rite, and that is what we are."¹⁸ In this connection Luther seems to equate the apostolate and episcopacy, speaking of an apostolic episcopacy.¹⁹ For Luther the office, the call, and the Word made for apostolicity, not a "chain of succession."

The teachings of Luther's co-worker Philip Melancthon (1497–1560) did not differ essentially from Luther's. Luther wrote the preface to Melancthon's "Instructions for the Visitors of Parish Pastors in Electoral Saxony." Luther there sees a continuity of function in the episcopal office, going back to Old Testament times.²⁰ In the "Instructions" Melancthon provided for superintendents (*superattendants*), but the brief, one-page directive refers neither to apostolicity nor apostolic succession. "He shall make sure that in these parishes [in the region assigned to him] there is correct Christian teaching, that the Word of God and the holy gospel

¹⁶ Ad John 7:16. LW 33, 227–38; WA 33, 358–61.

¹⁷ Lieberg, pp. 143–51.

¹⁸ Ad Titus 1:5. LW 29, 17; WA 25, 17.

¹⁹ LW 29, 16–17; WA 25, 16–17. See also Lieberg, pp. 152–59.

²⁰ LW 40, 269–73; WA 26, 195–201.

are truly and purely proclaimed, and that the holy sacraments according to the institution of Christ are provided to the blessing of the people."²¹ Ordination and its possible significance are not treated here.

Melanchthon also said nothing about the election of pastors in these articles or about the priesthood of believers. Three years before, in his reply to the Twelve Articles of the Peasants, Melanchthon had granted the right of congregations to call pastors.²² The priesthood of believers he had attested already in the *Loci* of 1521, where he wrote: "We are priests because we offer ourselves to God and because we importune forgiveness of our sins."²³

In propositions which he set up for a disputation at the University of Wittenberg Melanchthon spoke about the church and its catholicity. There really is only one catholic church, he argued. "The catholic church has the same ministry; it does not require likeness of tradition. Therefore wherever there is a catholic ministry [*catholicum ministerium*], there is part of the catholic church [*pars Ecclesiae catholicae*], even if traditions vary."²⁴ The strong emphasis on the ministry has apostolicity

as its basis and apostolicity is linked with pure doctrine.²⁵

Melanchthon maintained: "The power of the order embraces a right call and the divine command of teaching the Gospel, forgiving sins, and administering the sacraments."²⁶ Hence, Melanchthon valued ordination highly.²⁷ He wrote in the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*:

If ordination is interpreted in relation to the ministry of the Word, we have no objection to calling ordination a sacrament. The ministry of the Word has God's command and glorious promises: "The Gospel is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith" (Rom. 1:16), again, "My Word that goes forth from my mouth shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (Is. 55:11). If ordination is interpreted this way, we shall not object either to calling the laying on of hands a sacrament. The church has the command to appoint ministers; to this we must subscribe wholeheartedly, for we know that God approves this ministry and is present in it. It is good to extol the ministry of the Word with every possible kind of praise.²⁸

In the "Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope," also written by Melanchthon and officially adopted in Smalcald (1537) as a confession of faith, the statement is made that "the church espe-

²¹ *Corpus Reformatorum*, ed. K. G. Bretschneider and H. E. Bindseil (Halle, 1834 ff.), XXVI, 195—240. Cited as *CR*.

Emil Sehling, ed., *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des XVI. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig: O. R. Reisland, 1902), I, i, 142—74.

Robert Stupperich, *Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1951 ff.), I, 215—71. Cited as *St A*.

²² *St A*, I, 201—3.

²³ Wilhelm Pauck, *Melanchthon and Bucer in The Library of Christian Classics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), XIX, 147; *St A*, II, i, 157/24—25; Lieberg, pp. 259—67.

²⁴ *CR*, XII, 488—89, thesis 16 quoted.

²⁵ *CR*, XII, 488: "Est autem ministerium Ecclesiae catholicae, doctrina apostolica, tradita ipsis Apostolis, et propagata per sanctos patres." Lieberg, p. 258: "Das Amt ist für Melanchthon der Lebensnerv der Kirche, an dem alles hängt."

²⁶ *CR*, XII, 494.

²⁷ *CR*, VII, 740—43.

²⁸ *Apol. XIII*, Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), p. 212, 11—13.

cially possesses the right of vocation.²⁹ The right to ordain belongs not in the first instance to bishops, but to the churches. "For wherever the church exists, the right to administer the Gospel also exists. Wherefore it is necessary for the church to retain the right of calling, electing, and ordaining ministers."³⁰ Ordination administered by pastors, distinguishing between bishops and pastors, "is valid by divine right."³¹

The Augsburg Confession speaks of "The Power of the Bishops" or of "Ecclesiastical Power" in Article XXVIII. Temporal power is denied bishops; their power consists in preaching, teaching, exercising the office of the keys, and administering the sacraments. The spiritual and temporal powers are not to be "mingled or confused." The assertion is made that "bishops do not have power to institute or establish anything contrary to the Gospel."³² The Apology will allow true bishops their churchly authority, a statement which Luther repeated in the Smalcald Articles.³³ And Melancthon subscribed these self-same Smalcald Articles:

I, PHILIP MELANCHTHON, regard the

²⁹ Tappert, *Book of Concord*, p. 324, 24.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 331, 66—67. See also *ibid.*, p. 332, 72: "From all these facts it is evident that the church retains the right of electing and ordaining ministers. Wherefore, when the bishops are heretics or refuse to administer ordination, the churches are by divine right compelled to ordain pastors and ministers for themselves. And it is the wickedness and tyranny of the bishops that give occasion to schism and discord, for Paul commands that bishops who teach and defend impious doctrines and impious forms of worship should be regarded as anathema [Gal. 1:7-9]."

³¹ Ibid., p. 331, 65.

³² Ibid., pp. 81—94. The quotation is on p. 81, 34.

³³ Article X. Ibid., p. 314, 1.

above articles as right and Christian. However, concerning the pope I hold that, if he would allow the Gospel, we, too, may concede to him that superiority over bishops which he possesses by human right, making this concession for the sake of peace and general unity among the Christians who are now under him and who may be in the future.³⁴

The Lutheran Symbols have nothing to say about apostolic succession. The *Kirchenordnungen* of the 16th century likewise are silent on this topic.³⁵ Johann Brenz (1499—1570) emphasizes that priests have a twofold office: to preach the Word and to administer the Sacraments.³⁶ Nikolaus von Amsdorf (1483—1565) disclaimed the right of the Roman priests to boast of apostolic succession, "because they do not have the succession of the Word and teaching of Christ."³⁷

Among the Lutheran reformers of the 16th century Johann Bugenhagen (Pomeranus) (1485—1558) at least by his actions must be cited as the one man who distinctly repudiated apostolic succession. On 2 September 1537, the day the Danish *Ordinatio Ecclesiastica* was signed by King Christian III, Bugenhagen consecrated the

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 316—17.

³⁵ At any rate the indices of the 14 volumes of Sehling's *Kirchenordnungen* do not list the topic.

³⁶ "Ein Sermon an alle Christen von der Kirche, von ihrem Schlüssel und ihrer Gewalt, auch von dem Amt der Priester" (1523), *Reformatorsche Verkündigung und Lebensordnung*, ed. Robert Stupperich (Bremen: Carl Schönmann Verlag, 1963), p. 251.

³⁷ "Antwort, Glaube und Bekenntnis auf das schöne und liebliche Interim" (1548), *ibid.*, p. 194. Amsdorf adds to this statement, pp. 194 to 195: "Wenn sie sich aber der Sukzession des Wortes rühmen könnten, so wollten wir sie gern für ein Stück und Teil der christlichen Kirche halten."

seven new bishops of the Danish church. Bugenhagen had been ordained a priest in 1509, but he was not a bishop. "Thus on this occasion a breach was made in one part of the apostolic succession, the *successio personalis*."³⁸ The wording of the service is described as the "apostolic ministry" and in the laying on of hands the bishop is "set apart for the sacred office of bishop in the Church."³⁹ In the 16th century, at least, there was no question of validity of the episcopal office in Denmark.

In Sweden, however, efforts were made or circumstances made it possible to preserve the episcopal succession. Petrus Magni was consecrated as bishop of Västerås in Rome in 1524. In 1528 he consecrated three bishops. Then in 1531 Laurentius Petri was consecrated as archbishop.⁴⁰ The Swedish title was changed from bishop to *ordinarius* or *superintendent*.⁴¹ In 1554 Michael Agricola was consecrated as bishop of Turku (Finland) and Paulus Juusten as bishop of Viipuri (Finland). The 1571 *Kyrko-ordning* of Laurentius Petri provided for the election and ordination of bishops whose duty was to preach the Word and to see to it that the pastors did likewise. The consecration in 1575 of his successor, Laurentius Petri

Gothus, as archbishop, was carried out in such a way that the apostolic succession might be assured.⁴²

The Lutheran theologians of the 17th century generally had little to say about apostolic succession and had a relatively slight regard for ordination. The ministry they regarded as divinely instituted to which God calls men normally through the church. Ordination, required already in the ancient church, should not be omitted, but to them it was not absolutely necessary. For the sake of outward order the church may establish different ranks or grades, but "the essential rights of preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments are possessed by all alike."⁴³ John Gerhard (1582—1637) said that the mediate call to the ministry is based on apostolic authority.⁴⁴ He also said:

In our churches we retain the laying on of hands, and reject the anointing. We make use of the χειροθεσία, not as though it were a sacramental symbol, appointed by Christ Himself, and commanded to be employed in this rite, but we use this ceremony according to our freedom, both because it descends to us from the practice

³⁸ Svend Borregaard, "The Post-Reformation Developments of the Episcopacy in Denmark, Norway, and Iceland," *Episcopacy in the Lutheran Church? Studies in the Development and Definition of the Office of Church Leadership*, ed. Ivar Asheim and Victor R. Gold (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), p. 117.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 120.

⁴⁰ Martti Parvio, "The Post-Reformation Developments of the Episcopacy in Sweden, Finland, and the Baltic States," *ibid.*, pp. 125—27. Parvio, p. 127, states that when Laurentius Petri was installed, "Petrus Magni very likely was the consecrator."

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 127.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 128—29. Bishop Juusten of Finland participated, but scholars are not agreed that his participation was for the express purpose of insuring the apostolic succession.

⁴³ Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs, 3d ed., rev., 1899, reprint (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, n. d. [1961]), pp. 605—6. Schmid has summarized the teachings of Lutheran theologians of the 16th and 17th centuries and then substantiates his summary by quotations from these theologians.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 607. His references are: Acts 14:23; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6; 2:2; 1 Tim. 3:2; Rom. 15:18; 1 Tim. 5:21; Acts 20:28; Col. 4:17.

of the Apostolic Church (Acts 6:6; 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22; 2 Tim. 1:6) . . . and because it affords useful admonitions.⁴⁵

And in this connection his definition of heresy is illuminating: "A heresy is any private opinion, which any one selects for his reception in preference to a Christian doctrine and the Catholic faith, and obstinately defends."⁴⁶

In contrast to the concerns which the German theologians showed in the question of apostolicity we can point to the work of a Danish savant, Hans Vandal. In 1675 his work *De antistitum ecclesiae evangelicae orthodoxae legitima vocatione et ordinatione*,⁴⁷ he defined apostolic succession as consisting of *successio personalis*, *localis*, and *doctrinalis*. The first of these consisted in the laying on of hands according to apostolic usage by a bishop or someone commissioned to do so by the church. The second consists in an unbroken line of bishops, rightly called and of orthodox stripe, in a given diocese. The third consists of the succession of teaching in accord with the three Ecumenical Creeds and the Augsburg Confession.⁴⁸ Vandal's treatise on several counts must be regarded as a particularly significant treatment of the subject of apostolicity and apostolic succession.

Turning to Lutheranism in America we find, in the main, the same points of view as found in the 16th and 17th centuries. Nor would we anticipate that they would differ greatly, since the Symbols of the church and the teachings of the "fathers"

of these two centuries were generally held in high esteem.

The first Lutheran ordination in North America was the ordination of Justus Falckner on 24 November 1703. The ordination was performed by Andrew Rudman, Erich Bjorck, or Bioerck, and Andrew Sandel. Rudman was an ordained priest of the Lutheran Church in Sweden, but it was not until a year later that he was granted the position of superintendent. Bjorck and Sandel, too, had been ordained in Sweden.⁴⁹ We do not know what rite was used. According to the Episcopalian rector of Old Swedes' Church, J. C. Clay:

This ordination by presbyters, instead of a bishop, was the best their situation, or the circumstances in which they were placed, enabled them to obtain. A sister church wanted a pastor, and they had to decide between letting them go unsupplied, or giving them one with defective orders; or perhaps, they thought such orders would do for the Dutch.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, the validity of Falckner's ordination was generally recognized.⁵¹

The "patriarch of American Lutheranism," Henry Melchior Muhlenberg (1711 to 1787), founded the Pennsylvania Min-

⁴⁹ Abdel Ross Wentz, "The Ordination Certificate of Justus Falckner," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*, XLI, 2 (May 1968), 65 to 86; Harry J. Kreider, "Justus Falckner," *ibid.*, XXVII, 2 (July 1954), 86—94.

⁵⁰ Quoted by Conrad Bergendoff, *The Doctrine of the Church in American Lutheranism* (Philadelphia: Board of Publication of the United Lutheran Church in America, n. d., reprint of 1956), pp. 20—21, from *Annals of the Swedes on the Delaware* (Philadelphia, 1835), p. 86n.

⁵¹ Theodore G. Tappert, "Lutheran Ecclesiastical Government in the United States of America," *Episcopacy in the Lutheran Church?*, *op. cit.*, p. 163 and p. 243.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 610.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 615.

⁴⁷ Borregaard, p. 238, n. 11. I have not seen the work itself.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 121—22.

isterium in 1748. The 1781 constitution provided for ordination by the president of the Ministerium, administered in open convention.⁵² Muhlenberg held no brief for episcopal succession. His letter to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (6 August 1779) relative to the ordination of Mr. John Wade, an Episcopalian, advised that in the emergency of the war Mr. Wade could be placed on probationary status and then ordained. His letter reads (in part):

3) If the aforesaid chief Points are settled, so that no variance and Division arise, and a good harmony subsists between the Minister and Congregation, the further Examination and Ordination may be easily obtained, if not by a Bishop, yet by a regular Protestant Ministry, which is the nearest related to your episcopal Church. For it is my humble Opinion, that in the present critical Junctures an Examination and Ordination of a regular Protestant Ministry may do as an episcopal one. And since there is as yet no Episcopal Jurisdiction established by Law in the independent States of North America, why should Congregations be left destitute of the necessary Means of Salvation, be neglected and destroyed, only for want of an Episcopal Ordination? which is but a piece of pious Cerimony, a form of Godliness empty of Power, and may be of Service, where it is established by Law, tho it does not appertain to the essential parts of the holy Function itself. In the primitive Christian Church the Ambassadors and Ministers of Christ could impart extraordinary Gifts of the Holy Ghost unto believing Candidates, by prayers and laying their hands upon them, but this Prerogative is not continued, and we may controvert for ever about apostolical and Episcopal Succession, Ex-

perience shews too plain, that neither Episcopal, nor Ministerial or Presbyterial Ordination doth infuse any natural and supernatural Gifts or Qualities, otherwise we should not find so many counterfeited Ministers, refined Hypocrites, and grievous Wolves in the Christian Church on Earth, instead of true and faithful Shepherds. All Christian Protestant Congregations, which enjoy the blessed Liberty of Conscience, should be cautious and careful in chusing and calling Ministers, and follow the Rule of the holy apostle Paul in his 1 Ep: to Timothy: 3:1-13 — especially the 10 v.: . . . , — v. 9: . . . Matth. 9:37, 38: . . .⁵³

The letter deserves to be quoted *in extenso* not only because it is interesting *per se*, but also because it fairly well summarizes the teachings of Lutherans in the United States in the colonial period.

In the subsequent period of American history the great wave of immigrants especially from Germany and the Scandinavian countries brought with it problems of church and ministry, although the question of apostolicity did not loom large. True, these groups reacted to the system of licensing ministers, most generally insisting on ordination to establish a valid ministry.⁵⁴ One of the most vocal voices

⁵³ *The Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert and John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: The Evangelical Lutheran Ministerium of Pennsylvania and Adjacent States and the Muhlenberg Press, 1958), III, 255—56. Tappert quotes this letter in a very brief form in "Lutheran Ecclesiastical Government," p. 164.

⁵⁴ Bergendoff, pp. 22—23, quotes a resolution of the Pennsylvania Ministerium in 1814: "That according to the testimony of the Bible and the history of the Church, a written authority is equally as valid as the imposition of hands, that our ministerial arrangement is not in opposition to the principles of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and that, therefore, licensed

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 163.

on this question was the Rev. J. A. A. Grabau of the so-called Buffalo Synod. In his *Hirtenbrief* (1840) he taught that Christ Himself instituted ordination and that only ordained pastors may administer the Holy Eucharist.⁵⁵ In his views he was vigorously opposed by the men of Missouri (not yet the Missouri Synod), who took issue with him in a letter dated 3 July 1843, composed by Gotthold Heinrich Löber and assented to by Karl Friedrich Gruber and Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther.⁵⁶ Among the errors with which Grabau charged these men were their belief that ordination is a human institution and that the congregation transfers the office to the pastor.⁵⁷ A rebuttal, which contained 17 theses, was made on 15 January 1845; the questions did not pertain to episcopacy or apostolicity, but revolved around those of the priesthood of believers and the divine office of the ministry.⁵⁸ They did not deny that ordination was of the *bene esse* of the ministry, but they

denied that it belonged to its *esse*. They granted that a man should have a correct call, the *rite vocatus* of Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession, but they did not grant that a person might be ordained if he had no call.⁵⁹

These men of Missouri dreaded Grabauism because they had been burned by Stephanism. Martin Stephan (1777 to 1846) was the leader of the group of immigrants from Saxony that settled in St. Louis and Perry County, Mo. In 1837 before leaving Germany these emigrants made direct references to Stephen as bishop.⁶⁰ On 14 January 1839, when entering the Gulf of Mexico on the good ship *Olbers*, they invested Stephan with the title Bishop and granted him wide powers.⁶¹ The document of investiture said:

Accordingly, you [Martin Stephan] have already for a long time occupied the position of a bishop and performed episcopal functions among us. . . . We have been instructed by you in many things, and from this instruction a binding conviction has resulted in us that an episcopal form of polity, in accord with the Word of God, with the Old Apostolic Church, and with our Symbolical Writings is indispensable.

It also speaks of the office of bishop as "being bestowed upon you by God."⁶² On 16 February 1839 in the pledge of sub-

candidates can perform all *Actus Ministerialis* with a good conscience."

⁵⁵ *Der Hirtenbrief des Herrn Pastors Grabau zu Buffalo vom Jahre 1840, Nebst den zwischen ihm und mehreren lutherischen Pastoren gewechselten Schriften: Der Oeffentlichkeit übergeben also eine Protestation gegen Geltendmachung hierarchischen Grundsätze innerhalb der lutherischen Kirche* (New York: H. Luddig & Co., 1849), pp. 11—15.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 20—36.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 55—56.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 64—88; see pp. 78—79 for the theses. In addition to Löber, Gruber, and Walther, the document was signed by Ernst Gerhard Wilhelm Keyl. See also *ibid.*, p. 58.

Carl S. Mundinger, *Government in the Missouri Synod: The Genesis of Decentralized Government in the Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), has surprisingly little to say about this controversy. See his note 7 on pp. 165—66.

⁵⁹ Grabau made Article XIV the most important article of the Augsburg Confession. *Hirtenbrief*, pp. 11—12.

⁶⁰ Walter O. Forster, *Zion on the Mississippi, The Settlement of the Saxon Lutherans in Missouri 1839—1841* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), p. 172.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 289; the entire document is given on pp. 288—90.

jection to Stephan the signers expressed their concern for the "pure, Apostolic Lutheran faith"⁶³ and they resolved

to live, suffer, and die under the episcopal method of church polity, with the introduction of which among us a beginning has already been made and which, when established according to the Word of God, has been used by the Apostolic Church, has been recognized by the true Church of all times, has been retained by the Lutheran Church of Sweden until this very day, and is in accord with the Symbolical Writings of the Lutheran Church.⁶⁴

The confirmation of Stephan's investiture on 24 February maintains that the welfare of the immigrants "can be attained only in the manner of the early Christian Church, with a well-ordained episcopal form of polity."⁶⁵

That the Missouri immigrants did not keep their resolve "to live, suffer, and die under the episcopal method of church polity" has been made evident in the references to their controversy with Grabau. The most detailed rebuttal of Grabauism (and by inference also of Stephanism) was made by C. F. W. Walther in his *Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt* (1852).⁶⁶ Walther pre-

sents 10 theses, buttressed in each case with proof from the Word of God, the testimony of the Symbols of the church, and the witness of the writings of Lutheran theologians of the 16th and 17th centuries. Occasionally comments are interspersed, but usually the quotations are presented like pearls strung together on a strand. Once he comments, "The church has taught the same thing in all ages."⁶⁷ Once in a footnote he amplifies Luther by stating that Luther did not have in mind the indelible character of the priesthood.⁶⁸ Apostolicity and apostolic succession are not his concerns. He dismisses ordination by bishops as unnecessary, but grants its apostolic origins.⁶⁹ It is a useful custom, but the validity of the call does not depend on ordination.⁷⁰ Walther believed that the ministry was derived from the priesthood of the believers⁷¹ and therefore advocated a strong independence for the local congregation.⁷²

valuable because it brings the Latin and Greek original quotations in footnotes.

Bergendoff, pp. 31—32, cites the 10 theses. They can be found in English also in *Walther and the Church*, ed. Wm. Dallmann, W. H. T. Dau, and Th. Engelder (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938), pp. 55—86. An unpublished English translation of the entire work was made by John Theodore Mueller.

C. F. W. Walther, *Amerikanisch-Lutherische Pastoraltheologie* (5th ed.; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1906), p. 65, calls ordination "allein eine apostolisch-kirchliche Ordnung" and an adiaphoron.

⁶⁷ *Kirche und Amt*, p. 13: "Dasselbe hat die Kirche zu allen Zeiten gelehrt."

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 289—93.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 311—14.

⁷¹ Walther, *Pastoraltheologie*, pp. 30 f.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 32—34. Such independence was denied, e. g., by G. P. E. Huschke. See Jobst Schoene, *Kirche und Kirchenregiment im Wer-*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 293.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 294; the entire document is given on pp. 293—96.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 299; the entire document is given on pp. 299—300. See also Munding, pp. 71 to 72, n. 72, for the investiture of and submission to Stephan.

⁶⁶ I have used the fourth edition, published in 1894 in Zwickau in Saxony. The subtitle of the work reads, "Von der deutschen evang.-luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten als ein Zeugnis ihres Glaubens, zur Abwehr der Angriffe des Herr P. Grabau in Buffalo, N. Y., vorgelegt." The fourth edition contains the prefaces of the previous editions and is especially

Walther had differences of opinion on the nature of the ministry also with Wilhelm Loehe (1808—1872). Those differences cannot occupy us now. Rather we must ask what Loehe held regarding apostolic succession. He rejected it. He writes:

We acknowledge loudly and clearly the episcopacy which is based on the Holy Scriptures — the episcopacy which is identical with the presbytery — and we do not see how any congregation can be properly shepherded if it does not have this sort of episcopacy. But where is there a single syllable in the Holy Scriptures which can justly be used as proof for episcopal government, episcopal succession, or Roman primacy?⁷³

Loehe was not at all in agreement with the arrangements made between Prussia and England (1841) about the bishopric in Jerusalem.⁷⁴ He rejected the succession of places and persons, but spoke eloquently about the succession of doctrine.

Doctrine never dies, and wherever it goes there is the true church, the true bishops, the true priests. Where it is not present any other kind of succession is an empty grave of the prophets, an empty vessel, a vessel filled with mould and rotteness [Matt. 23:25-28]. If we have only this succession of doctrine we shall not lack the power and vitality to prove even before the eyes of man, that a church is there. This is the succession for which we must strive, and then we shall lack *nothing*, least of all the orderly calling of minis-

ters, the laying on of hands, prayer, and the blessing and gifts of the Holy Spirit for those in holy office.⁷⁵

Loehe pleads that "everything depends on the Word; we cannot do without it." He is willing to give up everything for the sake of the Word. "It is more than episcopacy, more than succession—it is the source of all good things and the death of all vanities. Lord, keep us steadfast in thy Word!"⁷⁶

Episcopacy did not develop in the Iowa Synod, the spiritual heirs of Loehe in America. Among other immigrant Lutheran groups in this country the questions of lay preaching and the authority of the clergy were prominent. In "The Old Constitution" for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America or the Eilsen Synod (1846 and 1850) the divine nature of the teaching office was acknowledged. However, "teachers or preachers" were placed on trial for a year before a permanent call was given them. "With popish authority and also the common ministerial garb we henceforth have nothing to do, since there is no proof in the New Testament that Jesus and his disciples have used or enjoined it."⁷⁷ There is no need to ask such a group about episcopal succession.

Much more in line with Lutheran principles was the statement of the Constitution for the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America or the Norwegian Synod (1853): "This church ac-

ken und Denken Georg Phillip Eduard Huschkes (Berlin and Hamburg: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1969), p. 251.

⁷³ Wilhelm Loehe, *Three Books About the Church*, trans. James L. Schaaf, Seminar editions (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), p. 136.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 137 and p. 137, n. 36.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 139. Italics in the original.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 140.

⁷⁷ E. Clifford Nelson and Eugene L. Fevold, *The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian Americans: A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1960), I, 338—39 (Appendix A).

knowledges no one as pastor unless he has been rightfully examined, regularly called, and officially ordained to the pastoral office."⁷⁸ However, as we have seen, Walther would not have added the last phrase. He did not fault the Norwegian Synod for its position on the necessity of ordination. He did support it in the controversy on lay preaching. This controversy brought forth from Herman A. Preus (1825 to 1894) the statement in 1867 which seems to minimize the importance of ordination:

We do not attach much importance to whether Elling [Eielsen] was ordained or not; the principal thing to us is that he is a false teacher and the founder of an erroristic sect.⁷⁹

The seven theses adopted by the Norwegian Synod in 1862 said nothing about ordination, but emphasized the call, while allowing for lay activities (preaching and administration of the sacraments) in case of need — Walther's contribution. The principles adopted in 1912 by the synods which in 1917 formed the Norwegian Lutheran Church were in line with the 1862 theses.⁸⁰ And again little concern pro or con for questions of apostolic succession and episcopacy is apparent. Ulrich Vilhelm Koren (1826—1910), long-time president of the Norwegian Synod, in his essay on "The Right Principles of Church Government" (1899) sees the tension be-

tween the teaching that the ministers of the Word are set into their office by God and that the office also belongs to the congregation. He resolves the tension by distinguishing between lordship and service. But he makes only a brief reference to apostolicity by mentioning "how the apostles and their successors shall regard their work."⁸¹

Among the Scandinavian immigrants the Swedish and Finnish newcomers made no particular brief for episcopacy. The Swedish immigrants of the 19th century generally were in opposition to the state church in the homeland. The Augustana Synod (1860) made no provision for bishops. In time, according to Bergendoff, "the Swedish Augustana Synod regained a doctrine of the ministry not far different from that of the Scandinavian state church, giving little room to the laity in the government of the church."⁸² Among the Finnish Lutheran immigrants the followers of Lars Laestadius organized the Apostolic Lutheran Church, which emphasized the spiritual priesthood of believers, regarding this as more important than the pastorate.⁸³

In the period between 1870 and 1900 a few voices were heard in America asking

⁸¹ Translated in *Faith of Our Fathers*, ed. George O. Lillegard (Mankato, Minn.: Lutheran Synod Book Co., 1953), pp. 115—38; see especially pp. 123—29; the quoted phrase, p. 125.

⁸² *Doctrine of the Church in American Lutheranism*, p. 25. See also Tappert in *Episcopacy in the Lutheran Church?*, pp. 172—73, and Conrad Bergendoff, "Augustana's Idea of the Church," *Augustana Seminary Review*, VII, 2 (1955), 15—19.

⁸³ Bergendoff, *Doctrine of the Church in American Lutheranism*, p. 26, with reference to Uuras Saarnivaara, *The History of the Laestadian or Apostolic-Lutheran Movement in America*. I have not seen this work by Saarnivaara.

⁷⁸ Ibid., I, 344 (Appendix B). This paragraph (3) according to paragraphs 15, p. 345, was "permanently unalterable and not subject to reconsideration."

⁷⁹ S. C. Ylvisaker, ed., *Grace for Grace: Brief History of the Norwegian Synod* (Mankato, Minn.: Lutheran Synod Book Co., 1943), pp. 137—38.

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 137—42; Nelson and Fevold, I, 164—69.

for the introduction of bishops.⁸⁴ Among those opposing this move was that of Henry E. Jacobs (1844—1932), a close student of 16th-century England, who argued for the *successio doctrinalis*. Apostolicity consisted in teaching "the same old doctrines" which the apostles taught. He denied "any Apostolic succession of bishops," finding an outward succession to be an Old Testament, not a New Testament idea.⁸⁵

The thought of episcopacy, nevertheless, has persisted in American Lutheranism. True, it was rejected in 1930 when Archbishop Nathan Söderblom presented a bishop's cross to President G. A. Brandegee of the Augustana Synod in a resolution that stated, "We do not hereby adopt any episcopal insignia for the incumbent of the President's office."⁸⁶ A study such as *Episcopacy in the Lutheran Church?* (1970) demonstrates the persistency of the idea.

Since 1930 a high-church movement has developed in Sweden which has emphasized continuity with the apostolic church.⁸⁷ Much earlier the Tractarians noted that the Church of Sweden had preserved apostolic succession. The Lambeth Conference of 1888 decided to make "earnest efforts

... to establish more friendly relations between the Scandinavian and Anglican churches . . ." ⁸⁸ Resolutions were passed in the Lambeth Conference of 1897 and again in 1908 looking forward to closer ties between the two communions.⁸⁹ Then in 1920 the report of a commission was accepted which recognized the historic episcopate in the Church of Sweden and provided for intercommunion.⁹⁰ The Swedish bishops drew up their answer in 1922. It cited several paragraphs from their 1911 report as follows:

3. No particular organization of the Church and of its ministry is instituted *iure divino*, not even the order and discipline and state of things recorded in the New Testament, because the Holy Scriptures, the *norma normans* of the faith of the Church, are no law, but indicate for the New Covenant the great principle of Christian freedom, unweariedly asserted by St. Paul against every form of legal religion, and applied with fresh strength and clearness by Luther, but instituted by our Savior Himself, as, for instance, when in taking farewell of His disciples, He did not regulate their future work by *a priori* rules and institutions, but directed them to the guidance of the Paraclete, the Holy Ghost.

4. The object of any organization and of the whole ministry being included in the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments — according to the fifth article of the Augustana. God has instituted *ministerium docendi evangelii et porrigendi sacramenta* — our Church cannot recognize any essential dif-

⁸⁴ See Tappert in *Episcopacy*, p. 173.

⁸⁵ *The Doctrine of the Ministry as Taught by the Dogmaticians of the Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Book Store, 1874), pp. 6—7; idem, *A Summary of the Christian Faith* (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publication House, 1905), pp. 377, 412, 420.

⁸⁶ Tappert in *Episcopacy in the Lutheran Church?*, p. 174.

⁸⁷ Carl Henrik Lyttkens, "Altar Fellowship in the Scandinavian Churches," *Church in Fellowship: Pulpit and Altar Fellowship Among Lutherans*, ed. Vilmos Vajta (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), p. 156.

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 160—64; "Documents on Church and Altar Fellowship in the Scandinavian Churches," *ibid.*, p. 179, document 3.

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 179—80, documents 4 and 5.

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 180—81, document 6.

ference, *de iure divino*, of aim and authority between the two or three Orders into which the ministry of grace may have been divided, *iure humano*, for the benefit and convenience of the Church.

5. The value of every organization of the *ministerium ecclesiasticum*, and of the Church in general, is only to be judged by its fitness and ability to become a pure vessel for the supernatural contents, and a perfect channel for the way of Divine Revelation unto mankind.

6. That doctrine in no wise makes our Church indifferent to the organization and forms of ministry which the cravings and experiences of the Christian community have produced under the guidance of the Spirit in the course of history. We do not only regard the peculiar forms and traditions of our Church with the reverence due to a venerable legacy from the past, but we realize in them a blessing from the God of history accorded to us.⁹¹

They go on to stress that agreement in the content of the message of salvation and the meaning of the Eucharist are of greater importance than a particular conception of the ministry. Two points were to them decisive, "the recognition of Scripture as *norma normans* both with regard to life and doctrine, and the building of our salvation on God's grace alone received by faith."⁹² These emphases are accented as the "prophetic and apostolic message" which has sprung out of the revelation of God Himself.⁹³

The answer of the Church of Finland was similar to that of the Church of

Sweden. In fact the statement quoted above is cited in part by Archbishop Kaila. He wrote (in part):

I must point out that we cannot in principle look upon the historical episcopacy, on which the Anglican Church lays such great stress, as a *conditio sine qua non* for a valid ministry, without abandoning our fundamental doctrinal basis. . . . The Church of Finland appreciates this historical episcopacy very highly as a singularly valuable form of Church supervision and as an outward sign of Church unity through the ages as is clearly seen also from her own history; but she differs from the standpoint represented by many Anglican churchmen . . . according to which the historical episcopacy is necessary for an ordered ministry. We see in the historical episcopacy an order "not divinely instituted, but divinely used and blessed," and the authority of it, strengthened by a long history from the early Church until the present age, full of God's merciful guidance, should not be shaken.⁹⁴

Bishop Hans Lilje put it more bluntly in 1957 when he wrote that "the notion that the historical form of the Church is guaranteed by unbroken continuity in the episcopal office is heresy in the Lutheran Church."⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 202—3, document 25; see pp. 202—4. The letter is dated 9 March 1936.

⁹⁵ Tappert in *Episcopacy in the Lutheran Church?*, p. 172, quoting Lilje's essay in Carl E. Lund-Quist, ed., *Lutheran Churches of the World* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1957), p. 9.

Hermann Mulert, *Bischöfe für das evangelische Deutschland* (Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1921), rejects the episcopate and says, p. 40: "Wenn wir für die evangelische Kirche das Bischofsamt in einem Sinne wieder aufrichten, der dem reformatorischen Grundsatz widerstreitet, dass auf reli-

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 183; see pp. 181—88 for the entire document 7, dated 22 April 1922.

⁹² Ibid., p. 184.

⁹³ Ibid., pp. 184—85, for the elaboration of their testimony to *sola Scriptura* and *sola gratia*.

In that same year a Missouri Synod churchman and theologian wrote:

Who stands in the apostolic succession? The answer cannot be divorced from the apostolic Word. The apostles in their Word are intent upon creating men in their own image: "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1; cf. Acts 20:18-35; 26:29). The church which gives its ear to the apostolic Word and gives its heart to the Lord, who in that apostolic Word calls for the heart; the church which becomes "apostolic" in obedient mimesis under that Word; the church which awaits the coming of the Lord in joyously energetic hope and in holy fear—that church stands in the apostolic succession in a sense and in a reality which no unbrokenly successive imposition of palms on pates can guarantee.⁹⁶

Jerald C. Brauer has reduced the investigations of nine scholars on episcopacy in Lutheranism to the bald statement: "The only point at which all Lutheran Churches agree on the question of Church polity is that one could not argue for the historic episcopacy."⁹⁷ That the question of the historic episcopacy has been more widely

discussed in Lutheran circles within the past two decades must be admitted. In the discussions, however, it is becoming clear that one cannot argue effectively for or against the historical episcopacy on theological grounds. Brauer finds that the dialog between Anglicans (Roman Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox) and Lutherans on this question of church polity "must be in the area of interpretation and involve the well-being or *bene esse* of the Christian community."⁹⁸ He examines the various arguments brought forth and can reach no valid conclusions. He would therefore redefine the *bene esse* of the church in the totally new situation in which the churches find themselves in contemporary church history.

In light of this fact *bene esse* ought to be redefined. "That they all might be one" is both a theological and a pragmatic statement. It is theological insofar as it involves the eternal search for Christians to become one under their head, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is pragmatic in that the scandal of separatedness brings confusion and derision to the Church in the midst of this world."⁹⁹

Since two thirds of all Christians live under a historic episcopacy, he finds the burden of rejecting the historic episcopacy resting heavily on those who do not have it:

Just as those not in the historic episcopate must consider entering it for the well-being of the Church, so those already in the historic episcopate must consider permitting their brethren to enter it on different grounds than those held by them. They too are called upon to do this for the

giösem Gebiet nur Gottes—, nicht Menschenherrschaft gelten soll, dann hat Luther uns umsonst gelebt. Dann dürfen wir den 31. Oktober nicht mehr mit guten Gewissen feiern."

⁹⁶ Martin H. Franzmann, "The Apostolate: Its Enduring Significance in the Apostolic Word," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, XXVIII, 3 (March 1957), 196—97; see pp. 174—97 for the entire essay. This is the only treatment known to me of this subject in Missouri Synod literature. The Committee on Church and Ministry of the School for Graduate Studies of Concordia Seminary, active from 1962 to 1968, did not deal with apostolicity or apostolic succession.

⁹⁷ "Afterward," *Episcopacy in the Lutheran Church?*, p. 197. See pp. 197—211 for the entire essay.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

well-being of the Church — "that they might all be one."¹⁰⁰

The conclusions which the representatives of the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs and the U.S.A. National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation reached on Eucharist and Ministry may have something to say to the representatives of the Protestant Episcopal Church and the Lutheran Council in the U. S. A. In their "Common Observations on Eucharistic Ministry" they stated:

We agreed that the basic reality of the apostolic Ministry can be preserved amid variations in structure and implementation, in rites of ordination and in theological explanation. As we learn more of the complex history of the Ministry, we begin to grasp the ways in which this gift of God to his church is able to assimilate valuable elements from different ages and cultures without losing its authentic apostolic character. In this context we find that the present moment speaks persuasively to us, urging both the renewal of what is basic in our apostolic heritage as well as openness to the variants that our Christian witness to the world requires. In presenting these common observations on the eucharistic Ministry we are aware of the difficulties implied therein for both of our traditions.¹⁰¹

In the formal reflections of the Lutheran theologians the recommendation is made:

As Lutherans, we joyfully witness that in theological dialogue with our Roman Catholic partners we have again seen clearly a fidelity to the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments

which confirms our historic conviction that the Roman Catholic church is an authentic church of our Lord Jesus Christ. For this reason we recommend to those who have appointed us that through appropriate channels the participating Lutheran churches be urged to declare formally their judgment that the ordained Ministers of the Roman Catholic church are engaged in a valid Ministry of the gospel, announcing the gospel of Christ and administering the sacraments of faith as their chief responsibilities, and that the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ are truly present in their celebrations of the sacraments of the altar.¹⁰²

The formal reflections of the Roman Catholic participants concluded:

As Roman Catholic theologians, we acknowledge in the spirit of Vatican II that the Lutheran communities with which we have been in dialogue are truly Christian churches, possessing the elements of holiness and truth that mark them as organs of grace and salvation. Furthermore, in our study we have found serious defects in the arguments customarily used against the validity of the eucharistic Ministry of the Lutheran churches. In fact, we see no persuasive reason to deny the possibility of the Roman Catholic church recognizing the validity of this Ministry. Accordingly we ask the authorities of the Roman Catholic church whether the ecumenical urgency flowing from Christ's will for unity may not dictate that the Roman Catholic church recognize the validity of the Lutheran Ministry and, correspondingly, the presence of the body and blood of Christ in the eucharistic celebrations of the Lutheran churches.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 210—11.

¹⁰¹ *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue IV: Eucharist and Ministry*, p. 15.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 22; printed in bold type throughout. Footnote omitted.

¹⁰³ Ibid., pp. 31—32; printed in bold type throughout. Footnotes omitted.

These representatives express a caveat. They affirm the traditional Roman Catholic doctrine of episcopal ordination and the threefold ministry. Realistically, however, they add:

We would rejoice if episcopacy in apostolic succession, functioning as the effective sign of church unity, were acceptable to all; but we envisage a practical and immediate solution in a *de facto* situation where episcopacy is not yet seen in that light.¹⁰⁴

What conclusions can we make after this brief, quotation-ridden, historical survey? From a Lutheran point of view we would say:

1. The historic episcopate is not *iure divino*.

2. Fidelity to the apostolic Word is essential, not fidelity to apostolic succession.

3. A recognition of the validity of the Lutheran ministry by the Episcopalian (Anglican) Church and by the Lutheran Churches of the validity of the orders of the Episcopalian (Anglican) Church could contribute to the well-being of the church, the people of God.

4. Ordination by properly commissioned officials ought not to be omitted.

5. The royal priesthood of all believers should be maintained as an important teaching for the people of God.

St. Louis, Mo.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 33.