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## *Table of Contents*

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<b>The Trinity in the Bible.....</b>	<b>195</b>
Robert W. Jenson	
<b>Should a Layman Discharge the Duties of the Holy Ministry? .....</b>	<b>207</b>
William C. Weinrich	
<b>Center and Periphery in Lutheran Ecclesiology.....</b>	<b>231</b>
Charles J. Evanson	
<b>Martin Chemitz's Use of the Church Fathers in His Locus on Justification.....</b>	<b>271</b>
Carl C. Beckwith	
<b>Syncretism in the Theology of Georg Calixt, Abraham Calov and Johannes Musäus.....</b>	<b>291</b>
Benjamin T. G. Mayes	
<b>Johann Sebastian Bach as Lutheran Theologian.....</b>	<b>319</b>
David P. Scaer	
<b>Theological Observer.....</b>	<b>341</b>
Toward a More Accessible CTQ	
Delay of Infant Baptism in the Roman Catholic Church	

<b>Book Reviews.....</b>	<b>347</b>
<i>Baptism in the Reformed Tradition: an Historical and Practical Theology.</i>	
By John W. Riggs .....	David P. Scaer
<i>The Theology of the Cross for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Signposts for a</i>	
<i>Multicultural Witness. Edited by Albert L. Garcia and A.R.</i>	
Victor Raj.....	John T. Pless
<i>The Arts and Cultural Heritage of Martin Luther. Edited by Nils</i>	
Holger Peterson et al. ....	John T. Pless
<i>Fundamental Biblical Hebrew and Fundamental Biblical Aramaic. By</i>	
Andrew H. Bartelt and Andrew E. Steinmann.....	Chad L. Bird
<i>Intermediate Hebrew Grammar. By Andrew Steinmann..</i>	
Chad L. Bird	
<i>Counted Righteous in Christ. By John Piper.....</i>	
Peter C. Cage	
<i>The Contemporary Quest for Jesus. By N. T. Wright, Charles R. Schulz</i>	
<i>The Free Church and the Early Church: Bridging the Historical and</i>	
<i>Theological Divide. Edited by D. H. Williams.....</i>	
Paul G. Alms	
<i>Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition. By Andrew Purves</i>	
.....	James Busher
<i>Music for the Church: The Life and Work of Walter E. Buszin. By Kirby</i>	
L. Koriath .....	D. Richard Stuckwisch
<i>Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization.</i>	
By Alvin J. Schmidt.....	James Busher
<i>Participating in God: Creation and Trinity. By Samuel Powell</i>	
.....	Timothy Maschke
<i>Doing Right and Being Good: Catholic and Protestant Readings in</i>	
<i>Christian Ethics. Edited by David Oki Ahearn and Peter Gathje</i>	
.....	John T. Pless
<i>The Human Condition: Christian Perspectives through African Eyes.</i>	
By Joe M. Kapolyo .....	Saneta Maiko
<i>Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism.</i>	
By Philip Benedict.....	Cameron MacKenzie
<i>The New Faithful: Why Young Christians Are Embracing Christian</i>	
<i>Orthodoxy. By Colleen Carroll .....</i>	
Armand J. Boehme	
<b>Indices for Volume 68 .....</b>	<b>381</b>

# Center and Periphery in Lutheran Ecclesiology

Rev. Charles J. Evanson

## The Task

The subject is the center and periphery in Lutheran ecclesiology. First, we must comment concerning our terminology. Although the designations "center" and "periphery" have come into general usage in the English language—and doubtless the same may be said of such roughly equivalent terms as *Zentrum*, *Peripherie*, *omkrets*, *kraštas*, and the like—their use with reference to ecclesiology needs clear definition. It is the term "periphery" that is a bit bothersome. We will need to consider carefully what constitutes peripheral status and what it denotes. That is not in every case easy to determine. According to common English usage, what is peripheral is likely be considered marginal. In that case, to say that something is peripheral is to say that it is of little importance, negligible. But that is not the only possibility. In more precise usage, "periphery" describes the line which marks the limit of a circle or other body. What is peripheral stands on or near this line, either on the inner or the outer edge. What is within the line which marks the periphery stands in close connection with the center and is always to be considered with reference to it. What stands outside the line, is less closely connected with the center, and it is therefore of lesser or even little importance.

At the present time, the term "ecclesiology" is used to describe any model of church membership, structure, and strategy which may be planned or adopted at any time and on any basis, without reference to traditional or even

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scriptural norms. Almost anything said about the church or the churches these days is called an ecclesiology, at least in so far as it has to do with a strategy for ecclesiastical action of some sort. Every challenge which confronts the church comes to be answered with an appropriate ecclesiological statement and strategy. In modern terms it could be called: "What the church ought to be doing and how it ought to be doing it." There are church growth ecclesiologies, mission ecclesiologies, eucharistic ecclesiologies, and a host of others. In some cases these ecclesiologies are the product of renewed study of earlier periods and the churches' response to the challenges of those periods. Historical continuity and catholicity are significant factors in some ecclesiological models, while in others the call to follow the Bible is understood to carry with it the imperative of radical disassociation with existing structures and ecclesiologies.

The Lutheran confessors did not look upon their ecclesiology as an innovation, the result of a long period of theological development, or the result of new insights into the nature of the gospel and the doctrine of justification. They understood and confessed their ecclesiology to be that of the church catholic as it was drawn from the word of God. This ecclesiology came to be articulated in Luther's lectures and writings, and then more formally and officially in the Augsburg Confession and the other official Lutheran Confessions. Therein ecclesiology was understood to be drawn from the clear teachings of the Sacred Scriptures. Unlike the English and Continental Reformed theologians, the Lutherans concluded that the church in this world is not committed by dominical mandate to a particular form of church order. They found no scriptural support for the notion of a divinely instituted ministry apart from the priestly ministry of Christ Jesus and the public ministry that he instituted and committed to the church, the *ministerium ecclesiasticum* or *ministerium docendi evangelii et porrigendi sacramenta*. This ministry they understood to be exercised

first by the apostles and today by those who have been rightly called and set in order to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments. Ordination is the rite by which one whom the church believes the Lord to have called to this ministry is set in order. The rite consists in the laying-on of hands (χειροθεσία) and prayer by those charged with the authority to do so. The rite both commits the ministry to the ordinand and confirms him in it.

The *ministerium ecclesiasticum* is *jure divino*; instituted by God; the grades within it are understood to be of human origin, *jus humanum*.

Theologians of the churches of the Augsburg Confession have in every age produced important theological literature concerning ecclesiology. Much of it reflects the particular circumstances in which it was written and the differing ecclesiastical practices of particular Lutheran churches. The theologians could characterize even these divergent ecclesiastical practices as still standing within the spirit of the tradition of historical continuity and catholicity. Of course, this characterization is formed from a particular understanding of what historical continuity consists in, and to what καθ' ὁλὴν should be understood to refer. In the case of the Augsburg Confession, its signers and subscribers understood themselves to stand within the ecclesiological tradition of the western church even though they had disregarded specific provisions of the canon law with reference to church order. In fact, they claimed that it was their Roman opponents who have introduced novelties. This statement must be understood in terms of ecclesiology as well particular doctrines.

New situations and new problems brought the need for particular ecclesiological exposition. New models of church, put forth by Pietism, Rationalism, and the new understanding of the nature of the church that came with the advent of the new university-centered theology in Germany and elsewhere at the beginning of the nineteenth century, stimulated a re-appreciation and repristination of

the theology of the period of the classical dogmaticians. Concern also arose in of reaction to the increasing political and social unrest which became evident on the continent with the Prague Rebellion of 1848.

Other factors contributed to renewed interest in ecclesiology: among them, the establishment of the Prussian Union, the emergence of organized opposition to it, and the Lutheran emigration to North America and Australia. In the twentieth century the Faith and Order Movement, the establishment of the Lutheran World Convention and, later, the Lutheran World Federation were the occasion of fresh consideration of ecclesiology. Outside the Lutheran church, the establishment of the World Council of Churches, the new elucidation of a "Eucharistic Ecclesiology" in the Second Vatican Council, and the significant influence wielded by emigre Russian theologians called for consideration. The increasing involvement of Lutheran churches with other churches in ecumenical arrangements which call for partial or full fellowship, Eucharistic hospitality, and shared ministries also has had important ecclesiological ramifications. In order to maintain existing relationships among Lutheran churches, as well as to implement new arrangements with Anglican and Reformed churches, Lutherans seem to be trying to run in two or three different and even contradictory ecclesiological tracks at once.

The ecclesiastical course of the larger Lutheran churches in recent decades reveals ecclesiological developments unencumbered by traditional Scriptural and confessional norms. In modern existentialist thought the church simply dissolves, leaving a voluntary assembly free to order its life as it pleases. To the romanticists, there has always been a special fondness for the notion of ecclesiastical validity built upon a supposed "historic" episcopate with an unbroken succession of consecrations, a view for which there is insufficient evidence. Lutheran churches which could claim

a continuity of consecrations with the medieval church did not until the most recent time attempt to build an ecclesiology on that basis. Existentialism, Romanticism, and Episcopal-ism do not provide a sufficient foundation to protect the reordering of both church and ministry on the basis of the demands of a culture that is thoroughly secularized and whose attachment to the church is at most historical and sentimental.

Even among those who self-consciously wish to identify themselves as Lutheran, sufficient interpretative differences even between so-called "conservative" and "confessionist" biblical scholars and theologians preclude the possibility that even those who wish to remain Lutherans will be able to come to a common mind on church and ministry. Thus, even where theology has not wholly given place to sociology and anthropology, the defense of particular forms of ecclesiastical polity serves as an *opinion iustitae* asserted to be the only defensible Lutheran ecclesiology. Among those who call themselves "confessionists" there are "episcopalians" and "congregationalists" who hold to traditional norms, as well as supporters of the ordination of women to the priesthood, and their elevation to episcopacy, as well as the ordination of men and women of "alternative sexual preference."

### The Basis of This Examination

We examine ecclesiology with special reference to its center and periphery. Lutherans have been more apt to distinguish between what is essential and what is non-essential, what is commanded—and therefore required—and what is *adiaphora*. Also employed are the categories of *esse/bene esse*, and even distinctions between what is absolutely necessary and what is necessary, but not absolutely. To study ecclesiology from the standpoint of center-periphery gives us an opportunity to consider familiar source material on the basis of different and unfamiliar criteria.

To say that a particular rite, tradition, or church practice is peripheral does not mean that we consider it a matter of indifference. Its status will be determined by where it stands with reference to the line that marks the periphery, whether inside or outside. Indeed, in so far as peripheral matters stand in essential, intimate connection with the center, they are of great significance. Their significance derives from that connection. That they are peripheral means that they are not of independent importance. They are not self-important. Their importance is determined by where they stand with reference to the center.

### Ecclesiology and Ecclesia

The term "ecclesiology" derives from the Greek ἐκκλησίᾳ *via* the Latin *ecclesia*, indicating that at the heart of Lutheran ecclesiology is the doctrine of the church. If ecclesiology is the circle, then the church, the creature of the gospel, is understood to stand at its center. What stands within the outer periphery, in close connection with the center, derives its significance from it, and is usually spoken of as essential. What stands outside the periphery, is still of some little importance in so far as it is considered with reference to the whole, is deemed non-essential. Indeed, if the needed connection with the whole and its center is obscured or lost, what stands outside the periphery may come to be regarded as undesirable or even detrimental.

We begin with the center, with the church herself. The term is one for which Martin Luther shows no fondness whatever. In his opinion it has been thoroughly corrupted, and its meaning has become unclear. It puts the people in mind of a building made of stones, he writes, or of the pope and the elaborate ecclesiastical with which he is surrounded, but no one thinks of the church as a community of people made holy by the work of Christ.



If the words, "I believe that there is a holy Christian people," had been used in the Children's Creed, all the misery connected with this meaningless and obscure word ["church"] might easily have been avoided. For the words "Christian holy people" would have brought with them, dearly and powerfully, the proper understanding and judgment of what is, and what is not, church. Whoever would have heard the words "Christian holy people" could have promptly concluded that the pope is no people, much less a holy Christian people. So too the bishops, priests, and monks are not holy, Christian people, for they do not believe in Christ, nor do they lead a holy life, but are rather the wicked and shameful people of the devil. He who does not truly believe in Christ is not Christian or a Christian. He who does not have the Holy Spirit against sin is not holy. Consequently, they cannot be "a Christian holy people," that is, *sancta et catholica ecclesia*.

But since we use this meaningless word "church" in the Children's Creed, the common man thinks of the stone house called a church, as painted by the artists; or, at best, they paint the apostles, disciples, and the mother of God, as on Pentecost, with the Holy Spirit hovering over them. This is still bearable; but they are the holy Christian people of a specific time, in this case, the beginning. *Ecclesia*, however, should mean the holy Christian people, not only of the days of the apostles, who are long since dead, but to the end of the world, so that there is always a holy Christian people on earth, in whom Christ lives, works, and rules, *per redemptionem*, "through grace and the remission of sin," and the Holy Spirit, *per vivificationem et sanctificationem*, "through daily purging of sin and renewal of life," so that we do not remain in sin but are enabled and obliged to lead a new life, abounding in all kinds of good works, as the Ten Commandments or the two tables of Moses' law command, and not in old, evil works. That is St. Paul's teaching. But the pope, with his followers, has applied

both the name and the image of the church to himself and to his vile, accursed mob, under the meaningless word *ecclesia*, "church," etc.<sup>1</sup>

Even today the word church is used in a wide variety of meanings, so it is necessary for us to make clear that ecclesiology has to do with the community of Christians, the body of Christ.<sup>2</sup> The classical expression of it is found in article VII of the Augsburg Confession:

Also they teach that one holy church is to continue forever. The church is the congregation of saints, in which the gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments are rightly administered.

And to the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says: One faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, etc. (Eph. 4:5-6).<sup>3</sup>

Because it is the purpose of Augustana VII to speak of where the holy Christian people are to be found, that "located-ness" is necessarily described in terms of sensory phenomena; the church may be known primarily in terms of what is heard in the congregation, and secondarily by what is seen. The teaching of the gospel enters the ear, not the eye or the nose, and with reference to holy baptism, holy

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<sup>1</sup>Martin Luther, "On the Councils and the Church" (1539), trans. Charles M. Jacobs, vol. 41 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Eric W. Gritsch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 144-45.

<sup>2</sup>*Oxford English Dictionary* lists no less than eighteen definitions under the heading "church."

<sup>3</sup>*Concordia, or, Book of Concord : the symbols of the Ev. Lutheran Church : with indexes and historical introductions*, trans. and ed. W.H.T. Dau and F. Bente. (St. Louis, Mo. : Concordia Pub. House, 1922), Augsburg Confession 7.1-4 (hereafter cited in notes as Triglott).

absolution, and the sacrament of body and blood of Christ, it is Christ's spoken word that makes them what they are. The sheep hear the voice of their Shepherd through the voice of him who has been set in order to speak with the voice of the Shepherd. "For, thank God, a seven year old child now knows what the church is, namely, the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd. For the children pray thus: I believe in one holy Christian church," writes Luther in the Smalcald Articles. What is seen may give the appearance of sanctity, but the eye is more easily misled than the ear: "...holiness does not consist in albs, tonsures, long gowns, and other of their ceremonies devised by them beyond Holy Scripture, but in the Word of God and true faith."<sup>4</sup>

### Christ and the Church

*Ubi Christus, ibi ecclesia.* The definition of the church begins with Christ, because it is his saving work that brings it to life, and according to his promise he is always in the midst of his believers, always giving freely and fully what he alone has earned and is able to give by virtue of his cross and passion. The progression is Christ→gospel→church.

But where there is a holy, Christian church, there all the sacraments, Christ himself, and the Holy Spirit must be. Now if we are to be a holy Christian church and to possess the most important and necessary parts such as God's word, Christ, the Spirit, faith, prayer, baptism, the sacrament, the keys, the office of the ministry, etc., and should not also possess the humblest part, namely, the power and right to call some persons to the office of the ministry who administer to us the word, baptism, the sacrament, forgiveness, which in any case are available, and serve us through these, what kind of a church, I ask, would this be? What would happen to Christ's word when he says: "Where two or three are gathered in my

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<sup>4</sup>Smalcald Articles 7.1-4 (Triglott).

name, there am I in the midst of them" [Matt. 18:20]? And again: "If two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven" [Matt. 18:19]? If two or three possess such power, how much more an entire church.<sup>5</sup>

It is in the midst of his congregation that Christ offers what he has obtained for sinners by his cross, and in his congregation he offers it in the preaching of the gospel and in the distribution in his supper. Without such offering and giving in the church, there could be no hope for man, for he cannot appropriate Christ's merit by the strength of his own spiritual efforts, his ardent passion and the strength of our heartfelt devotion. Forgiveness and salvation depend on no unreliable basis. What Christ has obtained at such great price on the cross, he offers freely in preaching and in the sacrament. It is there alone that it is to be sought and found. So Luther says in "Against the Heavenly Prophets" (1524):

We treat of the forgiveness of sins in two ways. First, how it is achieved and won. Second, how it is distributed and given to us. Christ has achieved it on the cross, it is true. But he has not distributed or given it on the cross. he has not won it in the supper or sacrament. There he has distributed and given it through the word, as also in the gospel, where it is preached. He has won it once for all on the cross. But the distribution takes place continuously, before and after, from the beginning to the end of the world. For inasmuch as he had determined once to achieve it, it made no difference to him whether he distributed it before or after, through his word, as can easily be proved from Scripture.

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<sup>5</sup>Martin Luther, "The Private Mass and the Consecration of Priests" (1533), trans. Martin E. Lehmann, vol. 38 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Martin E. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 212 (hereafter cited in notes as LW).

...I will find in the sacrament or gospel the word which distributes, presents, offers, and gives to me that forgiveness which was won on the cross.<sup>6</sup>

### The Center of the Doctrine of the Church

At the heart the doctrine of the church is the teaching concerning the person and work of Christ. Articles III through VIII of the Augsburg Confession progress from the person of Christ (article III) to his saving work (justification) (article IV), sacramental ministry (article V), the fruits of faith (article VI), holy church and her constitution (articles VII & VIII). That order is not unexpected, for the church is the fruit of the application of his saving benefits, the *corpus Christi mysticum*, of which he is the ever-living Head. The mystical body is manifested where Christ is present in the *corpus Christi verum*.

Here no distinction is made between church, gathered congregation, diocese, and national or territorial church body. Where Christ is present by the work of the Holy Spirit in the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments, he is completely present. The local gathering around the pulpit and altar is the church, *σῶμα Χριστοῦ*, wholly and completely. There is no place here for a *pars-et-tota* ecclesiology, whereby the local, diocesan, or even national gathering is only partially or derivatively church, needing the authentication of association within the larger whole. Nor is the any or every gathering of individuals made to be church by the voluntary decision of the individual members of become a congregation or church. Nor is a particular parish communion, diocese, synod, or other jurisdictional unit define itself as "a member of the Body of Christ" or as "holding membership in the Body of Christ, according to the so-called "branch" theory which

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<sup>6</sup>Martin Luther, "Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments." (1525), trans. Conrad Bergendoff, vol. 40 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Conrad Bergendoff (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958), LW 40:213-14.

turns churches into "churchettes," which are incomplete in themselves and in essential need of outward association with the larger church, its form of ecclesiastical organization, and its spiritual leaders. The church is the bride of Christ, which he came to seek and call to himself and cleanse in preparation for final presentation, as the Apostle announces in the letter to the church at Ephesus (Eph. 5:25ff.). Here christology, eschatology, and ecclesiology all stand in closest connection.

### The Church and the Churches

The individual or local assembly does not live in isolation. Every assembly of believers among whom the gospel is preaching without additions or omissions that corrupt it and among whom the sacraments are in like manner administered as the Lord has given them is the church, is one church. All the assemblies together are altogether one church. Unrepentant heresy requires separation, and baseless schisms are to be deplored; they are by nature and definition divisive. The church, however, is not divided. She is one. Where the word is rightly taught and the sacraments rightly given there is to be fraternal recognition of community and mutual submission out of reverence for Christ. That the ἐκκλησίαι are also ἐκκλησία is not a human achievement brought about by skillful negotiations and administrative manipulations, or even agreement on and implementation of a Quadrilateral and historic episcopacy. It is about the unity of believers in ἐκκλησία and the oneness of the ἐκκλησίαι that Christ prays in his high-priestly prayer. That unity is to be found in the reconciling work that he has accomplished by his saving death and resurrection, offered in the proclamation of the one gospel of Christ. The right preaching of that gospel communicates this praying, suffering, dying, and rising Lord and Christ with all that he gives by word and sacrament; consequently those who hear and harken to that

gospel are one church, regardless of the limitations of time and space. The particular ἐκκλησία lacks no gift or power which a larger or more complete ἐκκλησία must exercise with or on her behalf. To each ἐκκλησία it is given both to proclaim and live by this gospel and to exercise the *potestas clavium* in conformity to the divine word. Each assembly has the authority to call its own pastor, however the responsibility for ordination is assumed by the minister who is authorized to ordain in all the churches, not by matter of divine right, but in token that there is one ministry of preaching and administering in the ἐκκλησία is attested and affirmed in all the ἐκκλησίαι.

### The Background of Augustana VII

Behind the definition of article VII of the Augsburg Confession is more than a decade and a half of Luther's careful thought concerning the nature of the church. As early as the "Lectures on the Psalms" of 1513-1515, Luther speaks of the church as indiscernible to human sight, but known only to faith.<sup>7</sup> He used this terminology long before the controversies of the opening years of the 1520s, though it was in the context of those controversies that he further developed his arguments. The church consists of believers, he declares, but it is not believers who form the substance of the church. Faith depends upon the word, which calls it to life and forever nourishes and sustains it. "The entire life and substance of the church is in the Word of God."<sup>8</sup> Werner

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<sup>7</sup>Gordon Rupp (*The Righteousness of God: Luther Studies* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1963], 317) credits Karl Holl with the insight that Luther's visible/invisible terminology is not the fruit of controversy with Rome, but is already evident in the early Psalms lectures. For example, "For Christ is concealed in the Church which is hidden from men but manifest to God"; "For the Church is invisible and is recognizable by faith alone."

<sup>8</sup>Martin Luther, "Ad Librum Eximii Magistri Nostri Magistri Ambrosii Catharini, Defensoris Silvestri Prieratis Acerrimi, Responsio Martini Lutheri." vol 7 of *D. Martin Luthers Werke: kritische*

Elert notes that, in a 1521 rejoinder to a Dominican antagonist, Luther employs terminology remarkably close to that used later in Augustana VII:

The gospel is the real organizing principle of the church. It begets the believers, gathers them, and combines them into a supra-individual unity. On the basis of this fundamental thought Luther, in his defense against Ambrosius Catherinus, develops a conception of the church which must be regarded as an exact anticipation of the seventh article of the Augsburg Confession (1521: 7,703-778). The church is built on the Rock Christ alone, With him it will remain in the Spirit (709, 25ff., 33). "It will remain perpetually" (*perpetuo mansura*), says the Augsburg Confession. It is the "communion of saints" (*communio sanctorum*) (712, 39)—"congregation of saints" (*congregatio sanctorum*) says the confession. Or the "holy congregation of the believers" (*sancta fidelium congregatio* (742, 34)—the "assembly of believers" (*Versammlung aller Glaubigen*). How can it be recognized? "For some visible sign must be given by which are to be gathered into one body for the purpose of hearing the Word of God" (*oportet enim aliquod visibile signum dari, quo congregemur in unum ad audiendum verbum dei*). Such signs are baptism, the bread, and, above all the gospel. "These are the three symbols, tokens, and marks of Christians.... For in these Christ wants us to be in agreement" (*Triae hanc sunt Christianorum symbola, tessare et characteres.... In his enim vult nos Christus concordare*) (729, 32ff.).<sup>9</sup>

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*Gesammtausgabe*. (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus, 1883- ), 721, line 12 (hereafter cited in notes as WA).

<sup>9</sup>Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism: The Theology and Philosophy of Life of Lutheranism Especially in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Walter A. Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 259-60.



Immediately behind Augustana VII (and VIII) stands article XII of the Schwabach Articles, drawn up in 1529 by Luther, Melanchthon, and others to concentrate and articulate Lutheran doctrine.

There may be no doubt that there is and abides on earth until the end of the world a holy Christian church, as Christ says, Matthew, the last chapter: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." This church is not other than the believers in Christ, who keep, believe and teach the articles and parts named above, and for this suffer persecution and martyrdom in the world; for where the gospel is preached and the sacraments used aright, is the holy Christian church, and it is not bound by laws and outward splendor, to place and time, to persons and ceremonies (author's translation).<sup>10</sup>

This definition is drawn in turn from Luther's more extended confession of the church in his "Confession Concerning Christ's Supper, 1528."

...I believe that there is one holy Christian church on earth, i.e., the community or number or assembly of all Christians in all the world, the one bride of Christ, and his spiritual body of which he is the only head. The bishops or priests are not her heads or lords or bridegrooms, but servants, friends, and—as the word

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<sup>10</sup>*Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*. 10th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 61-62, *Augsburg Confession* 7. (hereafter cited in notes as BK): "Daß kein Zweifel sei, es sei und bleibe auf Erden ein heilige christliche Kirch bis an der Welt Ende, wie Christus spricht Matth. am letzten: Siehe, ich bin bei euch bis an der Welt Ende. Solche Kirch ist nit ander dann die Glaubigen an Christo, welche obgenannte Artikel und Stuck halten, glauben und lehren und daruber verfolgt und gemartert werden in der Welt. Denn wo das Evangelion gepredigt wird und die Sakrament recht gebraucht, do ist die heilige christenliche Kirche, und sie ist nit Gesetzen und äußerlicher Pracht an Stätte und Zeit, an Person und Gebärde gebunden."

"bishop" implies—superintendents, guardians, or stewards.

The Christian church exists not only in the realm of the Roman Church or power, but in all the world, as the prophets foretold that the gospel of Christ would spread throughout the world, Psalm 2, Psalm 19. Thus this Christian church is physically dispersed among pope, Turks, Persians, Tartars, but spiritually gathered in one gospel and faith, under one head, i.e., Jesus Christ. For the papacy is assuredly the true realm of Anti-Christ, the real anti-Christian tyrant, who sits in the temple of God and rules with human commandments, as Christ in Matthew 24 and Paul in II Thessalonians 2 declare; although the Turk and all heresies, wherever they may be, are also included in this abomination which according to prophecy will stand in the holy peace, but are not to be compared to the papacy.

In this Christian church, wherever it exists, is to be found the forgiveness of sins, i.e., a kingdom of grace and of true pardon. For in it are found the gospel, baptism, and the sacrament of the altar, in which the forgiveness of sins is offered, obtained, and received. Moreover, Christ and his Spirit and God are there. Outside this Christian church there is no salvation or forgiveness of sins, but everlasting death and damnation; even though there may be a magnificent appearance of holiness and many good works, it is all in vain. But this forgiveness of sins is not to be expected only at one time, as in baptism, as the Novatians teach, but frequently, as often as one needs it, till death.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Martin Luther, "Confession Concerning Christ's Supper." (1528), trans. Robert H. Fischer, vol. 37 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Robert H. Fischer (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), LW 37:368.

*Notae Ecclesiae*—The Essential Marks of the Church

In Augustana VII, the church is taught, confessed, and defined, its duration is stated, and its outward marks are noted, although nowhere in the text are they described as outward marks or *notae*. She is an assembly or convocation of believers which has existed, exists at the present time, and will continue to exist for all time. This assembly is outwardly identifiable on the basis of what is heard in the assembly (i.e., the teaching or proclamation of the gospel of and about Jesus) and observable on the basis of the sacramental activity which goes on within the assembly (i.e., baptism and the sacrament of Christ's body and blood offered to communicants for forgiveness of sins, oneness with himself and the Father, and the foretaste of heaven). Baptism, the holy supper, and confession and absolution will be more thoroughly describe in articles IX-XII.

Where these marks are found, there the church is to be found, because there the person of Christ and the fruit of his saving work are made present by the Holy Spirit, working faith and gathering a faithful, believing people. The manifestation of the church is not prior to or independent of preaching and sacraments, as though they could be listed among a number of activities with which the church appropriately occupies herself. Nor can we posit that the church as institution authenticates and validates preaching and the sacrament. The presence of the church is tied to the marks of preaching and the sacraments by virtue of their dominical designation as the means of Christ's saving presence. The proclamation of Christ gathers the church, just as during his earthly ministry Christ gathered the people to himself by opening his mouth and speaking. *Ubi Christus, ibi ecclesia*. Christ does not go about without his church; where the Head is, there too are the members of the body.

The pure teaching of the gospel and the right administration of the sacraments are essential to the true oneness of the church, for they are constituent to that

oneness. As there is one Lord, proclaimed in the gospel as Son of God and Son of Man, so too there can be only one baptism, baptism into his death and there can be only one sacramental banquet, which is his very body and blood for forgiveness, life, and salvation. There cannot exist alongside them a gospel which proclaims a different Christ, some other baptism for some other purpose, and a supper that is something other than his body and blood for is given for some purpose other than eating and drinking. That these are described as "gnug" and "satis" does not mean that together their proper outward observance represents a minimum standard beyond which everything is permitted. The terms are rather to be understood as a confession that the preaching of the gospel and the right use of the sacraments do fully what God has given them to do—to bear witness to the church's oneness. God has given no other outward sign which does this, and those that men have instituted, described as ceremonies ("Ceremonien, von den Menschen eingesetzt," "ritus aut ceremonias ab hominibus institutes") have no such power, and therefore it is not necessary that they be kept uniformly in every place. Melancthon does not here specifically identify any such human ceremonies.

Generally included among human ceremonies and traditions is every instance in which there is no clear dominical institution. Thus, human traditions might include pious and commendable practices that have been handed down from one generation to another, even from the apostles themselves, which we continue to use. However, we must confess that they do not bear witness to the true unity of the body of Christ in the sense that the *notae ecclesiae* do so, nor is that their purpose. Thus, their uniform use in all places cannot be an absolute necessity. And, on the other hand, their disuse also cannot be uniformly required. The marks of the church stand at the center; human traditions stand outside the circle that marks the periphery of the

church. They gain some importance from their association with the church, but they are by no means essential.

### The Needs of the Church

Peripheral and yet essential are those things that define the church, In "Das eyne Christliche versammlung odder gemeine recht und macht habe, alle lere tzu urteylen und lerer zu beruffen, eyne und abzusetzen, Grund und ursach aus der schrift" (1523), Luther notes first what a Christian congregation is and where it can be found. It is recognized by the presence of a sure mark, the preaching of the pure gospel. For this reason, and since the soul of man requires it, when bishops and others refuse to provide for the ordination of preachers the right to do so must be taken from them and given to the community of Christians.

Thus we conclude that where there is a Christian congregation which has the gospel, not only does it have the right and power, but it is obligated by its responsibility for the salvation of the souls brought to Christ in baptism, to shun, flee, dismiss, and withdraw from the authority now exercised by the bishops, abbots, cloisters, foundations, and all such, since one sees clearly that they teach and lead contrary to God and his word. Therefore it is certain and sure and well-founded and one can depend on it that it is a divine right and necessary to the salvation of souls that such bishops, abbots, cloisters and whatever pertains to their rule be deposed or shunned.<sup>12</sup>

The congregation cannot continue without preachers/teachers. When and if ordained priests cannot

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<sup>12</sup>Cf. Martin Luther, "That A Christian Assembly Or Congregation Has The Right And Power To Judge All Teaching And To Call, Appoint, And Dismiss Teachers, Established And Proven By Scripture." (1523), trans. Eric W. and Ruth C. Gritsch, vol. 39 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Eric W. Gritsch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), LW 39:308-309.

otherwise be gotten, the congregation itself must call into the holy ministry capable men whom God has equipped and gifted for the office of teaching the gospel and administering the gospel sacraments. According to the usual order, the minister of ordination should be the bishop. Otherwise, the minister of ordination is to be one who already possesses the office of the ministry. The newly ordained then takes up ordering of others into the *ministerium ecclesiasticum*. A preacher so ordained may not only preach, but also baptize, celebrate mass, and assume the cure of souls.

The evangelical and scriptural justification for such a course of action is clear to Luther. John 6:45, Psalm 45:7, 2 Cor. 4:13, and Psalm 116:10 teach that where a Christian finds himself isolated and without Christian companions, he must himself take the work of preaching and teaching the gospel upon himself. If, however, other Christians are present, he should not arrogate to himself the office of preacher, but let the office be filled by those called and selected to serve.<sup>13</sup> Although this course of action gives the appearance of not heeding the existing spiritual authorities, the breach is only apparent. Bishops and abbots who do not fulfill their duty do not truly represent the apostles.

In "De Instituendis ministris Ecclesiae" (1523).<sup>14</sup> Luther is prepared to press his case further. Papal ordination is not to be desired even if available, since the Roman bishops act as though the priesthood were their own creation and subject in every respect to their regulation. Those whom they ordain are not ordained according to the purpose of Christ, for they are not ministers of gospel and sacrament but mere mass-priests. Ordination was first instituted on the

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<sup>13</sup>Luther, "That a Christian Assembly...", LW 39:311.

<sup>14</sup>Martin Luther, "Concerning the Ministry" (1523), trans. Conrad Bergendoff, vol. 40 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Conrad Bergendoff (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958), LW 40:3-44.

authority of the Scriptures, and it is to be held in honor as the highest of all church offices, since the whole church depends upon the preaching of the gospel. In addition, the papal ordination is to the office of offering Christ's body and blood as a sacrifice before God.

### Supportive *Notae Ecclesiae*—On the Councils and the Church

In addition to the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments, Luther speaks in his later writings of other marks or signs of the church in this world. In *On the Councils and the Church* (1539), Luther describes seven "principal possessions" by which the present of the holy Christian people can be seen or heard. First, they possess the holy word of God (which, however, is not found in all places in the same measure). Where that word is preached, believed, professed, and lived there can be no doubt that the *ecclesia sancta catholica* is present. Further, they have the sacrament of holy baptism, the sacrament of the altar, and the public exercise of the office of the keys (the proper use of Matthew 18:15-20), which Christ has given not to the pope but to the church. Fifth, among them ministers are called or consecrated (i.e., ministers are set in order to preach and administer the sacraments. We note among them the presence of bishops, pastors, or preachers who publicly and privately administer the four possessions already noted. Although this administration is the common possession of the whole church, it is entrusted to particular men with the approbation of all. They take the place of the apostles, evangelists, and prophets who went before them, and they will continue to do so, for the church shall abide until the end of the world. Luther notes that except in emergencies only men who have been adjudged to be competent and have been called are to exercise this office. Others are to receive baptism, absolution, and the sacrament and are to be called Christians, but they are not qualified to exercise the Office of Supervision. The sinfulness of the minister does not impair the word he proclaims or the sacramental gift

God offers men through his sacramental ministry. Recipients too may be sinners. The church, the people of God, has a particular way of dealing with sinners: it reproves them and makes them holy. Sixth, where one sees and hears the Our Father prayed and taught, or the Psalms or other spiritual songs are sung in accordance with the word of God and the true faith, together with the use and teaching of the *Symbolum Apostolicum*, the Ten Commandments, and the Catechism, there the church is present. Finally, the Christian people are outwardly known by their bearing of the holy cross and every form of misfortune, trial, and persecution from the world, the devil, and the flesh. All this they bear with humility and patience, as did their Lord.

Luther characterizes these seven "possessions" as "First Table" marks of the church, having to do with the first three of the Ten Commandments. There are also marks according to the "Second Table," such as the honoring of parents and superiors, the Christian nurturing of children, love toward the neighbor, personal chastity, self-control, sobriety, and gentleness, etc. None of these may be considered reliable signs of the presence of the church in the same sense as the so-called "first Table" possessions, for Jews and the heathen are often better known for their charitable work than are the Christians

The devil too has his own word and sacraments and his own bishops, which are a caricature of God's word, sacraments, and ministry. By means of them he intends to turn men from God's word, sacraments, and ministry to his own, which are far more impressive and attractive than God's. Some, however, are able to discern the emptiness of the devil's rites, and then mistakenly assume that God's sacraments and ministry are just as empty and can never be more than mere signs and marks of profession. However, the church's words, sacraments, and offices are not merely



outward signs; the Lord himself has instituted and ordained them, and through them the Holy Spirit is pleased to work .

### *Against Hans Wurst*

In "Against Hans Wurst" (1541), Luther again enumerates outward marks or proofs of the presence of the holy church. He responds to the question: "Where is the church?" in the face of the Roman assertion that their church is ancient and original, and that Luther and his followers have departed from it. He presents the following "proofs," which are framed polemically. First, we possess the same baptism as the church has had from the beginning; ours is not a new and different baptism from that of the ancient church, while Rome introduces new baptism, because the old one has lost its effect. Second, our sacrament of the altar is not different from that which was instituted by Christ himself and given to the church. Third, we have the same ancient keys which Christ gave to the church, and we use them in the same way as the ancient church used them. Fourth, it cannot be questioned that we have the office of preaching and the word of God and have added nothing to it:

We invent nothing new, but hold and remain true to the ancient word of God, as the ancient church had it. Therefore we are, together with the ancient church, the one true church, which teaches and believes the one word of God. So the papists once more slander Christ himself, the apostles, and all of Christendom when they call us innovators and heretics. For they find nothing in us but what belongs to the ancient church—that we are like it, and are one church with it.<sup>15</sup>

Fifth, we believe, confess, and sing the ancient *Symbolum Apostolicum*. Sixth, we have not invented a new Psalter and

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<sup>15</sup>Martin Luther, "Against Hanswurst" (1541), trans. W. P. Stephens and Eric W. Gritsch, vol. 41 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Eric W. Gritsch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), LW 41:196.

do not pray a different Our Father from that which has been prayed from ancient times. Seventh, like the ancient church, we hold temporal rulers and authorities in honor and do not require that they be subject to our lordship or kiss our feet, as the Pope requires. We live as obedient subjects and pray from those who are in authority over us. Eighth, as did the ancient church, so too we honor and uphold marriage for the procreation of children and the prevention of carnal uncleanness. We have been faithful to the ancient way, while the Pope and his party have not. We neither invented or devised the estate of marriage, and just as surely we do not forbid it. Ninth, we have experienced the same hardship and tribulation as our brothers and sisters in Christ in all the world. It is the pope and his cardinals and monks who condemn, damn, and murder us. Tenth, we have done no such things to our enemies. "But as Christ, the apostles, and the ancient church did, we endure, admonish, and pray for others. And, indeed, we do this publicly in church, in the litany and in sermons, just as Christ our Lord did and taught and as the ancient church also did, so that in this we all act according to the ancient practice of the ancient church."

Further, Rome has introduced satisfactions and indulgences, holy water as a new baptism. These are all signs of apostasy. Further signs that she is a new, heretical church which has replaced God's sacraments with man's include the introduction of pilgrimages and other work to obtain forgiveness, the withholding of the cup from the laity, and the doctrine of the sacrifice of the mass. These too are signs—in this case signs and marks of a new church which prefers man's works to God's works.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Martin Luther, "Against Hanswurst," *LW* 41:195-201.

### A Closer Look at the Supportive *Notae Ecclesiae*: The Place of Ordination and the Holy Ministry

The additional or supplementary marks or signs of the presence of the church in this world are essential as supportive of the central marks of the church. Luther begins at the center and moves outward from it. Preaching, holy baptism, holy absolution, and the sacrament of the altar are not dispensable. Therefore, neither the holy ministry, which has been instituted by Christ for the purpose of preaching and administration, nor the solemn conferral of the ministry is dispensable. The one holy, Christian church abides forever, and the chief outward marks of it, the pure teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments—according to Christ's institution—are both eschatological and eternal in a sense in which other marks are not. The discernible outward marks of God's activity gather the Christian community, directly minister the fruits of Christ's saving work in the community. In addition to this, they provide a foretaste of the final fulfillment in the life to come. Preaching points toward and finds its fulfillment in the endless theologies sung by the saints before the throne of God and the Lamb. The sacrament of the altar is the earnest of the heavenly supper and anticipates its fulfillment in the banquet of the Lamb in his kingdom which has no end. The baptized rejoice forever in the life-giving waters which flow through the heavenly Jerusalem whose streams make glad the city of God.

Preached gospel and the sacraments stand at the center and remain there as marks established and commanded by Christ and furnished with his promises. Agreement concerning these marks or outward signs is essential; other marks apart from these are not essential to the unity of the church ("...dann dies is gnug zu wahrer Einigkeit;" "ad veram unitatem ecclesiae satis est"), agreement as to their form is not required, because it is not necessary that traditions and ceremonies instituted by men be everywhere the same. Preaching and the sacraments are not counted

among such traditions and ceremonies, given their dominical institution and the gifts imparted through them.

Other marks or *notae* are essential to the life of the church in this present world, but in the end of days they will pass away. Augustana article V confesses that the "Ministerium docendi Evangelii et porrigendi Sacramenta," i.e., the apostolic, sacramental ministry, was instituted so that man might obtain through the preached word and the sacraments the faith that justifies, and that thereby the Holy Spirit might produce faith according to God's purposes in those who hear the gospel. These stand at the center. They are never merely Christian activities with which the congregation or community is provided with an opportunity to identify itself as a social organization. Still less are they religious rites by which the community "actualizes" or "concretizes" herself. The church does not go away between its outward assemblies; she abides forever, but apart from the *notae* the church is not manifested

The episcopal and priestly ministries are not in themselves a manifestation of the church. The ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments, together with the calling and setting of men in order within this ministry in the church, both of which Luther identifies as marks of the church in this world, exists for the sake of the gospel. They will come to an end with the passing away of this present world. So too, the ever-present cross, which Christ calls his disciples to carry and which weighs so heavily on the true church in this world, will finally be lifted, along with the sufferings of Christians. Further, these are not in themselves means by which the merit of Christ's passion and death are offered to his people. The ministry exists for the sake of the gospel and the sacraments, and ordination exists for the sake of the ministry. In this sense it is not improper to speak of them as peripheral to the church and gospel, within the circle.

### The Nature of the Supportive Marks of the Church

What is peripheral is not necessarily dispensable. Luther and the Lutheran Confessions take both the ministry and ordination to be essential. They are essential periphery. They are peripheral, but they stand within the circle of which church, gospel, and Christ are the center. They are in no sense *adiaphora*. The particular canonical form of a rite or ceremony may be an *adiaphoron*, although the rite itself is needful because of its close connection with the center. The *Smalcald Articles* provide us with an example:

If the bishops would be true bishops, and would devote themselves to the church and the gospel, it might be granted to them for the sake of love and unity, but not from necessity, to ordain and confirm us and our preachers; omitting, however, all comedies and spectacular display of unchristian parade and pomp. But because they neither are, nor wish to be, true bishops, but worldly lords and princes, who will neither preach, nor teach, nor baptize, nor administer the Lord's Supper, nor perform any work or office of the church, and, moreover, persecute and condemn those who discharge these functions, having been called to do so, the church ought not on their account to be deprived of ministers.

Therefore, as the ancient examples of the church and the fathers teach us, we ourselves will and ought to ordain suitable persons to this office; and, even according to their own laws, they have not the right to forbid or prevent us. For their laws say that those ordained even by heretics should be regarded as ordained and remain so, as St. Jerome writes of the church at Alexandria, that at first it was governed in common by priests and preachers, without bishops.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article X, 11-3 (*Triglott*).

### The Place of the Ministry

What is peripheral is what is not in itself of the substance of the church, the community of the holy Christian people. The church is an article of faith. She is known only by her marks, and she cannot be discerned on the basis of supposed evidences of antiquity or sanctity, or a traditional or even biblically sanctioned form of ecclesiastical order and polity. Here the primary organ of discernment is the ear of man into which the word of God is spoken, for it is the spoken word of the preacher that gathers the church around itself, and it is the word that makes baptism and the sacrament of Christ's body and blood and speaks the word of absolution. God's word is never apart from God's Spirit; both together do what God intends. The preacher or celebrant whose mouth God employs speaks a word and administers a sacrament to which he personally adds nothing, but he stands in the closest possible connection with the Lord who makes use of him. "Every minister should glory in this, that he is an instrument of God through which God teaches, and he ought out to doubt that he is teaching the Word of God."<sup>18</sup> What Melancthon says in *Apologetica* VII/VIII with specific reference to the ministry of unworthy men surely applies also to those who are not unworthy: "For they do not represent their own persons, but the person of Christ, because of the church's call, as Christ testifies (Luke 10:16), 'He who hears you hears me.' When they offer the Word of God or the sacraments, they do so in Christ's place and stead."<sup>19</sup> So too, Luther's description of the true, Evangelical

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<sup>18</sup>Martin Luther, "Lectures on Titus," trans. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 29 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Walter A. Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), LW 29:3.

<sup>19</sup>*Apol.* VII/VIII, 28: "...quia repraesentant Christi personam propter vocationem ecclesiae, non repraesentant proprias personas, ut testatur Christus: Qui vos audit, me audit. Cum verbum Christi, cum sacramenta porrigunt, Christi vice et loco porrigunt" (BK, 240).

Mass in *On the Private Mass and the Consecration of Priests* (1532):

Here everything is done, first of all, according to the ordinance and command of Christ, so that it is offered and given to the church under both kinds on the basis of the words of Christ: "Take, eat, this is my body," etc., and "Do this in remembrance of me." The pastor does not receive it only for himself, as the pope's sacrilege does. He also does not sacrifice it to God for our sins and all kinds of needs, as the pope's sacrilege does. He does not give it to us and he also does not sell it to us as a good work to reconcile God, as the pope's sacrilege does, having made such a blasphemous commercial affair of it; rather, he administers it to us for the comfort and strengthening of our faith. In this way Christ is made known and preached. Here there can be no avarice or idolatry. Here we surely have the intention of Christ and of the church. Here we do not have to be concerned whether the pastor is speaking the words secretly or whether he also is effecting conversion or whether he, too, believes, for we hear the words of institution publicly and say them along with him in our hearts. And the institution of Christ (not our action or the chrism) effects a change or gives us the body and blood of Christ. If the pastor does not believe or doubts, we do believe. If he blunders in speaking the words or becomes confused and forgets whether he has spoken the words, we indeed are there, listen to them, cling to them, and are sure that they have been spoken. For this reason we cannot be deceived, and because the ordinance and true faith are present, it must be certain that we are receiving the true body and blood of Christ. God be praised and thanked, that I have lived to see the true Christian mass and the pure Christian usage of the holy sacrament.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Martin Luther, "The Private Mass and the Consecration of Priests," LW 38:208.

### The Holy Ministry and Ordination

The holy ministry stands within the periphery as necessary for the teaching the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It derives its status from its close connection with them. And men must be set in place in this holy ministry in a fitting manner. According to Apology XII, 11-12, if ordination is interpreted correctly, i.e., in relation to this ministry of the word, there will be no objection to calling the rite of laying-on of hands a sacrament. The church has the mandate to institute ministers, knowing that God approves and is present in it. Further, according to Augustana XIV.

Concerning Church Order they teach that no one should publicly teach in the church or administer the sacraments unless he be regularly called.<sup>21</sup>

Questions may remain concerning the precise meaning of such terms as *offentlich lehren*, *publice docere*, *ordentlich Beruf*, and *rite vocatus*. The authors of the Pontifical Confutation understand that the terms are used to refer to traditional Ordination practices:

When, in the fourteenth article, they confess that no one ought to administer in the church the word of God and the sacraments unless he be rightly called, it ought to be understood that he is rightly called who is called in accordance with the form of law and the ecclesiastical ordinances and decrees hitherto observed everywhere in the Christian world, and not according to a Jeroboitic (cf. 1 Kings 12:20) call, or a tumult or any other irregular intrusion of the people. Aaron was not thus called. Therefore in this sense the Confession is received; nevertheless, they should be admonished to persevere

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<sup>21</sup>Augsburg Confession, XIV (Triglott).



therein, and to admit in their realms no one either as pastor or as preacher unless he be rightly called."<sup>22</sup>

Nothing is mentioned in Article XIV about the manner by which those to be set in order are called to the ministry, but ordination/confirmation is identified as the specific act or acts by which this is to be done. By virtue of its connection with the ministry, this rite stands within the periphery. Further, were the bishops willing to faithfully discharge their office and act for the benefit of the church and the gospel, then the usual canonical form of ordination too would stand within the circle. However, they neglect the office conferred upon them and are not only unwilling to ordain those who wish to proclaim the gospel and administer the sacraments properly, they also cast them out and persecute them. Under these circumstances, ordination can and should be conferred without the bishops. Ordination stands within the periphery so long as it is a proper ordering to the ministerial office which Christ has given to his church, and episcopal ordination according to the ancient pattern and the canons also stands within the periphery when and if it retains its connection with the center. Under the terms of the situation described in Smalcald Articles, III, X, the connection between the episcopal office and the center has been severed, and an alternative to it is found by making priests the ministers of ordination. The ministry is important for the sake of the gospel and the sacraments; ordination is important for the sake of this ministry; whatever importance may be assigned to episcopal ordination has derivative significance. The later dogmaticians equate bishops and superintendents as church officials charged with the responsibility of ordination. At the same time, they recognize no essential distinction between

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<sup>22</sup>J. Michael Reu, ed., "The Confutatio Pontificia," in *The Augsburg Confession: A Collection of Sources* (Chicago, Ill.: Wartburg Publishing House, 1930), 357.

them and others in the public ministry.<sup>23</sup> Thus the special office of bishops is peripheral to the office of the ministry itself. It is derived from it and represents a particular instance of it.<sup>24</sup>

Ordination itself is not to be omitted excepting in most exceptional circumstances; both order in the church and the example of the ancient church require it. It is not to be denied that in it "the gifts of the Holy Spirit which are necessary for the discharge of the duties of the ministry of the church are conferred and increased."<sup>25</sup> No provision is made for the temporary conferral of the ministry upon men who are called to be "lay-ministers" or to serve in

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<sup>23</sup>"...we commit ordination to the bishops or superintendents alone, who are called bishops, not only with respect to the flock intrusted to them, or their hearers, but also with respect to other preachers, viz., presbyters and deacons, the oversight of whom has been intrusted to them; yet meanwhile, we do not recognize any such distinction between bishops and presbyters, as though the former alone, according to a divine right and the appointment of the Lord, have a right to ordain preachers, from which the rest of the presbyters have been excluded in such a manner that they cannot administer the rite of ordination even when necessity demands, as when bishops are not present or are neglecting their duty; but we say that, according to an ecclesiastical custom, introduced for the sake of good order, the power of ordaining has been left to the bishops, although from their presbyters have not been purely or absolutely excluded." Johann Gerhard, *Loci Theologici*, ed. Eduard Preuss (Berolini: Gust. Schlawitz, 1867), 6:106. Locus 21, Section 12, Paragraph 154 as cited in Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Verified from the Original Sources*, trans. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1889), 610.

<sup>24</sup>Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology :Its Historical and Systematic Development*, Roy A. Harrisville, trans. and ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 296.

<sup>25</sup>Gerhard separates the grace of ordination from the grace of reconciliation. The conferral is ascribed to the prayers of the church and presbytery. Johann Gerhard, *Loci Theologici*, 6:112. Locus 21, Section 12, Paragraph 165.

specialized "Church Growth" ministries or of deacons and vicars authorized to preach and administer the sacraments in one or more places for a specified period of time, but without the requisite period of theological and spiritual formation, and the regular call of the church and ordination.

Among the *adiaphora* can be enumerated such things as the church's yearly calendar, the setting of particular times for divine service, the church building and all its furnishings, including the altar, pulpit, font, candlesticks and candles, bells, priestly vestments, etc. Luther includes here such practices that have a natural, good effect, as when we teach our children to say grace at the table and other pious practices. Specific provisions for such practices are not laid upon the church as divine commandments which need to be fulfilled in a particular manner. Such usages differ from place to place. Indeed, on occasion the church had done without specific provisions with regard to when and where divine service was to be held, and with respect to the regulation of ecclesiastical vesture. They are among those things which we do not need to do without. They are usages and ceremonies that have no power to hallow a man in soul or body, and yet they may be considered outwardly necessary, useful, suitable and good to use. With regard to them one should be governed by reason and concern for others not set about to introduce disruptive novelties.

Lutheran departure from the usual form of law, ecclesiastical ordinances and decrees in the matter of Ordination did not come early. It was not until May 14, 1525, candidate Georg Rörer of Wittenberg was ordained in the first ordering into the ministry of an Evangelical/Lutheran candidate not previously ordained according to the traditional pattern by a Roman bishop. This ordination was by no means a precipitous act. Luther had laid his groundwork slowly and carefully. In his treatise "Auff das ubirchristlich, ubirgeystlich und ubirkunstlich buch Bocks Emszers zu Leypczick Antwortt D.M.L. Darunn

auch Murnarrs geselln gedacht wird" (1521),<sup>26</sup> he had inquired into the nature—real and hypothesized—of episcopal authority and jurisdiction and the relation of the sacramental priesthood to the universal priesthood of believers. The priest who celebrates the mass and consecrates the bread is the messenger and servant of the whole church, the common priesthood which all in the church possess.<sup>27</sup> Such a priest ministers and serves on the basis of his call, and no one is to undertake the office without a call, except under extraordinary, emergency conditions.<sup>28</sup> In "Wider den falsch genantten geystlichen stand des Babst und her bischoffen" (1522).<sup>29</sup> Luther had reacted against his condemnation and excommunication by calling the ministry of the Roman pope and his bishops into question. He contended that they do not hold and exercise their office according to the requirements or example of the New Testament episcopacy.<sup>30</sup> The consideration of the action by which men are rightly set in order in the holy ministry occupied Luther throughout his life, and it is a continuing subject of discussion among Lutherans down to the present day.

Already in the sub-apostolic era, the presence of factionalism in congregations, along with the increased presence of Gnosticism, Montanism, and a variety of

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<sup>26</sup>WA 7:621-688.

<sup>27</sup>Martin Luther, "Answer to the Hyperchristian, Hyperspiritual, and Hyperlearned Book by Goat Emser in Leipzig—Including Some Thoughts Regarding His Companion, the Fool Murner." (1521), trans. Eric W. and Ruth C. Gritsch, vol. 39 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Eric W. Gritsch, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), LW 39:156-63.

<sup>28</sup>Martin Luther, "Answer to the Hyperchristian, Hyperspiritual, and Hyperlearned Book...", LW 39:174.

<sup>29</sup>WA 10<sup>11</sup>:105-158.

<sup>30</sup>Martin Luther, "Against the Spiritual Estate of the Pope and the Bishops Falsely So Called" (1522), trans. Eric W. and Ruth C. Gritsch, vol. 39 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Eric W. Gritsch, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), LW 39:278-80.

heretical movements, made clear the need for regularity and proper order in the apostolic ministry. Irenaeus of Lyons writes that those bishops should be heard to whom the care of the churches had been committed – those who hold to the same doctrine of salvation (*Adv. Haer.*, 5:20). He had earlier stated that the apostles themselves had instituted these bishops to succeed them (3:3). No heretic could rightly present any apostolic credentials, Tertullian notes; only in apostolic churches would the voice of the apostles truly be heard (*De Praescr.* 32:36). When this approach was not able to carry the weight laid on it, Augustine of Hippo, in his anti-Donatist writings, provided a formulation of the doctrine a intention and a distinction between valid and invalid ministries, with valid or invalid sacraments issuing from them.

If ordination and ministry are run straight from Augustine's anthropocentric definitions, problems are not solved; they multiply. The unity of calling-ordaining-sending is broken, and the unity of the act of ordination dissolves, so that questions that admit to no conclusive solutions now appear concerning what constitutes a valid ordination, a valid ministry, valid sacraments, and at what point in the rite the conditions for validity are satisfied. Without prior theological agreement between the opposing parties assertions about the validity or invalidity of ordinations in which the minister of ordination is a minister to whom the right has simply been delegated, to say nothing of the status of so-called "lay-ministries" and the ordination of women, the assertions will be ignored.

Luther and the Lutherans frequently state their preference for the continuation of the office of the bishop as a matter of traditional practice as long as it is recognized as *jus humanum* and is exercised in accordance with its central purposes of teaching, directing, and serving. Although in certain cases selected individuals from the community were invited to participate, ordination did not become a strictly congregational act carried out without the laying-on of hands and prayer by one or more ministers of the church. In

place of bishops, the Germans and their spiritual descendants overseas got superintendents and church presidents, who served as administrators and inspectors. The reintroduction of episcopal titles does not appear to have brought with it any deep reappraisal of the office. The Scandinavians kept the title. Johannes Bugenhagen was at least partially successful in fulfilling the purpose for which he was sent to Copenhagen in that traditional episcopal order was maintained there, although those who succeeded the papal bishops had not previously been consecrated as bishops. In any case, the new bishops stood in apostolic succession in the sense that was important to the Lutherans: apostolic doctrine, faith, and practice were maintained through the ministry of those set in order to proclaim the gospel and administer the sacraments in the churches. In this case, episcopal ministry stands within the periphery because of its connection with the center. Outside the circle is the notion of a succession of consecrations from the time of the apostles, for which there is no compelling historical evidence.

Outside the high-church movement, Scandinavian bishops, like their German cousins, seem to have understood their office in terms of the function of superintendence. The decision of the Swedish Church Order of 1571 with reference to church order stands within the Reformation tradition, both in its statement that the laying-on of hands goes back to the apostles and its recognition that the separation between bishops and priests is not apostolic in origin. It maintains episcopal ordination within the periphery by commending its wholesome effects and its use by the Holy Spirit for the good of the church.

Contemporary Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox studies have given careful attention to the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch, who instructs the congregation gathered around the ministers and bishop: "...let us reverence the ministers as Jesus Christ, and so also the bishop, holding the place of the

Father, and the presbyters as God's Council, the Council of the Apostles" (*Ad Trallianos* 3:1; cf. *Ad Symr.* 8:1-2). Nicholas Afanasieff sees the Fathers as a witness to a "Eucharistic Ecclesiology" based upon his understanding of the structure of the primitive church as "spiritual" rather than "institutional." He relies much on Rudolf Sohm's *Kirchenrecht*.<sup>31</sup> John Meyendorff uses this ecclesiology as the basis of "Church and Ministry."<sup>32</sup> This "Eucharistic Ecclesiology" resulted in major reformulation of ecclesiology in Vatican II.<sup>33</sup> Major problems remain. This new approach bears some similarity to the ecclesiology of the Lutheran reformers. However, it is unable to assert

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<sup>31</sup>Nicolas Afanassieff, "The Church that Presides in Love," in *The Primacy of Peter*, ed. John Meyendorff (London: Faith Press, 1963), 57-110.

<sup>32</sup>John Meyendorff, *Catholicity of the Church: Church and Ministry for an Orthodox-Lutheran Dialogue* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983), 49-64.

<sup>33</sup>Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "The Ecclesiology Of Vatican II" *L'Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in English* (23 January 2002): 5: "What do we mean today by 'Eucharistic ecclesiology'?... The first point is that Jesus' Last Supper could be defined as the event that founded the Church. Jesus gave His followers this Liturgy of Death and Resurrection and at the same time He gave them the Feast of Life. In the Last Supper he repeats the covenant of Sinai—or rather what at Sinai was a simple sign or prototype, that becomes now a complete reality: the communion in blood and life between God and man. Clearly the Last Supper anticipates the Cross and the Resurrection and presupposes them, otherwise it would be an empty gesture. This is why the Fathers of the Church could use a beautiful image and say that the Church was born from the pierced side of the Lord, from which flowed blood and water. When I state that the Last Supper is the beginning of the Church, I am actually saying the same thing, from another point of view. This formula means that the Eucharist binds all men together, and not just with one another, but with Christ; in this way it makes them 'Church.' At the same time the formula describes the fundamental constitution of the Church: the Church exists in Eucharistic communities. The Church's Mass is her constitution, because the Church is, in essence, a Mass (sent out: 'missa'), a service of God, and therefore a service of man and a service for the transformation of the world."

strongly the relationship between center and periphery, since the New Testament is *apriori* ruled out as an adequate basis for a theology of order and office, but it should be noted that this approach avoids many of the problems of an institutional ecclesiology, questions of "validity" and legitimacy of succession.

### Final Observations

Order and polity are by no means matters of indifference. For Lutheran ecclesiology, Christ stands at the center, as always he must. He is the word made flesh. Where Christ is, there is his word and Spirit, as always—always together. By means of the word of and about the Christ, the Spirit gathers the church, the קהל יהוה, the ἐκκλησία, the σῶμα Χριστοῦ, which he is never without, the *communio sanctorum*, the communion of those made holy by preaching and the sacraments.

Christ, Spirit, church go together, and therefore stand together at the center. Everything else is peripheral to these: holy ministry and the ordination by which men are set in order within that ministry. In a derivative and supportive sense, ministry and ordination are marks of the church, for they have been given to the church by the church's Lord for the sake of the gospel, its proclamation and its administration in the sacraments. The giving of it is described in Matthew 28 and its parallels. It is given first to the apostles, Christ's designated ἀποστόλοι<sup>34</sup> who, in addition to the ministry of making disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching, are given this special office by which they are enabled to do works normally predicated only to God, so

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<sup>34</sup>Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, "ἀπόστολος," "ψευδαπόστολος," and "ἀποστολή" in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 1:407-44.



that they not only heal the sick and cast out demons, but also raise the dead and speak words to which God has uniquely bound himself, as described in the Acts of the Apostles. This special endowment is not passed on to succeeding generations in the apostolic ministry. It is here that the designation "Apostolic Succession" has any significance in Lutheran ecclesiology. Those who stand in succession carry on the work which Christ describes as μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη (Matt. 28:19). This mandate Christ has given to the community, which the pure prophetic and apostolic word, proclaimed by those called and set in order in the apostolic ministry, gathers around him.

Admission to this public ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments comes through the call of God, mediated by the church, and the solemn rite of ordination. As the ministry must stand in the service of the word for the sake of the church's life and growth, so ordination must stand in the service of this ministry. It exists for the sake of the ministry in the church, that the church, the body of Christ and his body mystical might be known among men on the basis of the *notae ecclesiae*.

Those called to ordain ministers act on behalf of the community of believers. They are themselves ministers of the word (*Divini Verbi Ministri*) called by a variety of titles to serve episcopal functions in the churches. Articles XIV and XXVIII show preference for both the episcopal title and the provisions for oversight which the canons envision. Nowhere is continuity of consecrations seen as integral to this. In any case, Rome would not consider complete any form of *episcopate* that does not include submission to the "Apostolic See." In any case the form of election and succession is a subsidiary matter which stands on the outer periphery of ecclesiology.

Although the church may institute grades of function within it, the church's only ministry is the ministry which her Lord has given her—the *Ministerium Ecclesiasticum* is the ministry of teaching the gospel purely and administering

the sacraments as Christ have given them to be administered, delivered first to the apostles for the church to continue in every age until the parousia. It is by this ministry that the fruit of Christ's redemptive work comes to and among men.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>It is apparently the derivative status of the holy ministry that some dogmaticians have sought to articulate the distinction between center and periphery by asserting that the ministry is necessary to the church, but not *absolutely* necessary. Minimalists may use such statements to work great mischief, contrary to the intentions of those who formulated the distinction. Luther, with those who subscribe the Augsburg Confession and the other confessional writings, clearly affirms that the holy ministry is necessary for the church and that admission to it is through the rite of ordination, including the laying-on of hands and prayer by the church's designated representative. Other ordination ceremonies may be employed, so long as they are neither inappropriate or unduly ostentatious. Under no circumstances should ordination be sought or received from the Pope or his bishops, for they are unfaithful to the ecclesiastical offices which they hold, introduce novelties to the catholic faith, make unscriptural and unnatural demands upon candidates, and proscribe the proper exercise of the office of the public ministry.