

Ministry and Ordination

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The Lutheran Church of Australia has been engaged in discussion on whether women may be ordained into the office of the public ministry. This question, however, presupposes that there is agreement on two even more basic theological issues. It assumes that there is such an office of ministry, and that the rite of ordination places a person into that office.

The course of the debate before and after our General Convention in 2000 has shown that we do not all agree on these matters. In fact, we seem to have wider disagreements on the doctrine of ministry than on almost any other issue under discussion. Some of this may be the result of ignorance, as many of our members are not familiar with our traditional teaching on ministry and its Biblical foundations. But it is also true that some people who know it well are not convinced about our teaching on ministry. This lack of agreement on the doctrine of the public ministry has led to uncertainty, misunderstanding and a sense of frustration. So, for example, the arguments against the ordination of women are largely irrelevant and inconsequential if there is no divinely instituted office of ministry. On the other hand, many of the arguments for the ordination of women lose their force if the office of ministry is completely disconnected from the priesthood of believers. The time has therefore come for us to stand back a little from the debate and deal with these more fundamental questions first, before we attempt to reach some agreement on how to proceed with the ordination of women.

This paper is a tentative attempt to do just that. I am, of course, presenting my own analysis of the situation from my own perspective. My aim in doing this is to clarify what we are discussing, to ascertain where we agree, and to discover where we differ from each other, and why. It is meant to facilitate clearer communication and to stimulate more productive debate, debate which avoids false antitheses, simplistic categorisation, and unnecessary polarisation.

1. The meaning of ministry, office and ordination?

The debate on the ordination of women has at times been confused by our lack of clarity in the use of language and by the misunderstanding of certain key terms that we have traditionally used in our church. I shall therefore attempt to define these key terms to avoid miscommunication.

a. Ministry

The Greek word for this is *diakonia*. These days we tend to use the word ministry rather loosely for any kind of work in the church. It has become a virtual synonym for 'service'. Hence congregations claim that all their members are ministers. But that is not how the word has been used traditionally in our circles and in the church (Scaer). A minister was an authorised assistant, an intermediary, an agent employed to perform a task for another person, a steward who administers the property of his

employer (Collins; Donfried). A minister of Christ is therefore a person appointed by him to work with him and under his authority; a minister of the gospel administers Christ's gospel; the ministry of word and sacrament is their administration by duly authorised people. The word is therefore used to highlight the authority and responsibility of a person to act on behalf of the person who had appointed him. Thus, when we speak of pastors as ministers of Christ, we imply that he has appointed them as his agents, to speak his word and convey his sacraments to the people of God in the divine service. Other people may, of course, be ministers of Christ with different ministries in the same context or elsewhere.

b. Office

This rather cumbersome term, which has played such a decisive role in our tradition, is, without doubt, open to misunderstanding. When people hear it used, they think first of a place where business is transacted. It speaks of what we most dislike in business, in government, in education, and wherever we have to deal with officials who care little or nothing for us as people. Nevertheless, it is still a key term for us as Lutherans, for in our tradition it has not been used to depersonalise work but to empower people to serve others.

Unlike most other orthodox churches in Christendom who tend to speak about the 'order' of ministry with all its connotations of rank and status, we Lutherans have always spoken about the 'office' of ministry (Latin *officium*; German *Amt*). In fact, in his translation of the New Testament Luther chose the word *Amt*, "office," to translate the Greek word *diakonia*, 'ministry'. Traditionally, we have understood an office as a position of responsibility in a particular community. Through its leaders a community appoints a person to a position of leadership in it and authorises that person to serve in that position according to certain given terms of reference. An office is therefore a recognised position of leadership. Theologically speaking, we distinguish the offices that God has authorised and established through his word from those which have been created by human beings. Thus we claim that, while the office of the public ministry has been divinely instituted, the office of the papacy has been established by the church without explicit authorisation by Christ in the New Testament.

An office is therefore a position of delegated authority with set duties and clear accountability. It empowers a person for a task and yet at the same time limits the power of the person. It gives a person freedom to act within certain fixed parameters. It situates leadership within a community, without delivering the leader to disempowerment by that community. A leader who holds an office in a community is therefore distinguished from other people who may influence a community by virtue of their status, gifts, wealth, celebrity, or knowledge, for that person has been authorised to act on behalf of it.

Thus the office of the public ministry is the position of leadership in the church under Christ as the head of the church. Those who serve in that office receive their position with its responsibilities and their authority from Christ through the church to lead the church. Their power does not derive from themselves and their abilities but from Christ and his word. They are therefore always dependant on him and ultimately accountable to him.

c. Ordination

People argue that the New Testament does not speak of ordination. That is true if we turn to the modern translations of the New Testament, because none of them uses the verb ‘ordain’ or the noun ‘ordination’ as a technical ritual term. Instead, they speak about ‘the laying on of hands’ (1 Tim 4:14; 5:22; 2 Tim 1:6). But it is not true if we turn to the King James Version where it is used quite deliberately and technically in Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:5. The English verb ‘ordain’ comes from a rather nondescript Latin word which means ‘to appoint’ a person to do a task. This Latin word was used in the early church to translate the Greek verb *cheirotonein*, ‘to stretch out a hand’. This word was used in the Greek city states for the election of a person communally in a public assembly by the raising of hands or by ballot. That may be the sense of the word in 2 Corinthians 8:19. But in Acts 14:23 it refers to the choice of presbyters by Paul and Barnabas, rather than by the congregations that they served. From its use in Acts 14:23 this rather general word became a technical ritual term in the early church, as is shown by the textual addition to Titus 1:9, the subscriptions to 2 Timothy and Titus, and its use in Didache 15:1 for the choice of bishops and deacons. It seems that the early church deliberately chose this secular term because it had no pagan religious connotations.

Even though the term ordination had by the time of Reformation acquired hierarchical connotations of order, rank, and status, it was not rejected by the Reformers but was used in two ways. On the one hand, it was used rather generally for the whole process of making a person a pastor, from the initial self presentation for service to the installation in a congregation. On the other hand, it was also used more narrowly for the liturgical act by which candidates were received, appointed, and commissioned as pastors. That is how the term is used in our confessions, and that is how it is used in this paper.

2. The Biblical foundations for the office of ministry

The *Augsburg Confession* claims that God himself has instituted the office of ministry (AC 5,1). This statement has foundational significance for us. It means first and foremost that the Holy Scriptures record how Christ has established this ministry by his word. That word provides the divine mandate for the ministry of the word; it gives a secure basis for it and its operation. It establishes the office and determines its function. That word also bestows the office on those who serve in it and empowers them in their work. So, in his discussion on the divine institution of the pastoral ministry, Thomas Winger claims:

Just as Lutherans speak of the ‘words of institution’ for baptism, absolution, and the Lord's Supper, so also it is in keeping with the way of the Confessions to speak of ‘words of institution’ for the pastoral office. It is in these passages that the office receives its mandate and promise. (39)

Christ's mandate gives pastors their task and the authority to perform that task in the church. Hence Melancthon asserts in the *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope* that ‘the authority of the ministry depends on the Word of God’ (Tr 10) and that the ministry of the gospel is not valid because of ‘any individual's authority but

because of the Word given by Christ' (Tr 26). The German translation adds this explanation of Christ's mandate and its importance for the ministers of the word:

The person adds nothing to his Word and the office commanded by Christ. No matter who it is who preaches and teaches, if there are hearts that hear and adhere to it, something will happen to them according as they hear and believe because Christ commanded such preaching and demanded that his promises be believed.

The context makes it quite clear that when Melancthon refers to the Word here, he is speaking about the word that institutes the ministry rather than the word that is preached by the preachers.

Secondly, the words of Christ do not just found the office of preaching; since they are the powerful, Spirit-filled, effectual words of God, they empower the office and those who serve in it so that they do the work of God in and through the office (Kliefoth). For God has created that office, like all offices, to offer and convey his gifts, his blessings, to people through it. Those who serve in it not only serve under the authority of Christ as agents of Christ, but they depend on the power of Christ's word and his Holy Spirit as they serve in it. The power for ministry therefore comes from the words of Christ that establish the office and are at work in it, just as the power of baptism comes from the word that institutes it and is used together with the water in it.

Thirdly, Christ's mandate for ministry makes for certainty and confidence and boldness in a pastor. It means that those who serve faithfully according to that mandate can be sure that God is pleased with their work, for 'God is pleased only with services instituted by his Word and done in faith' (Apol 27, 70). They can therefore work wholeheartedly and energetically with a good conscience and defy Satan when he accuses them of unworthiness and failure. But that can only be the case if God has indeed instituted the office of the ministry and if pastors operate within their mandate.

As soon as we claim that Christ has instituted the office of ministry, people ask: 'Where, when, and with whom?' Some Lutherans claim that our teaching on ministry is not derived from any particular passages in the New Testament but is deduced from general theological principles. Others claim that the exalted Christ has instituted the ministry of the word either through the apostles or through prophets in the early church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. But that is not what the Lutheran Church has understood traditionally understood by divine institution. When the Lutheran Confessions speak of the divine institution of the public ministry they speak of its institution by Christ in his earthly ministry. They therefore refer to a number of foundational passages in the New Testament (Winger: 38-40).

Our Confessions appeal to the following five texts:

- John 20:21-23 in AC 28, 6-7; Tr 9, 23, 31
- Luke 10:16 in AC 28, 22; Apol 7/8, 28, 47
- Matthew 16:18-19 in Tr 22,25
- Matthew 28:19-20 in Tr 31
- John 21:17 in Tr 30

Of these John 20:21-23 is obviously the most significant (Scaer: 407-408). In it the risen Lord Jesus gives the mandate for ministry to the apostles and defines their ministry as the power of the keys. He establishes the office of the keys.

The early Lutheran rites for ordination and subsequent Lutheran rites appeal most commonly to Matthew 28:16-20 and John 20:20-23 as Christ's mandate for the office of ministry in the church. They assume that Jesus addresses the apostles in John 20:20-23, just as he does in Matthew 28:16-20. They also assume that Christ's promise to be with his eleven disciples until the close of the age in Matthew 28:20 implies that they are to pass on their commission to others after them. Thus Sasse echoes them when he claims that

this mandate did not cease to exist with the death of the apostles. According to Matthew 28:20, it continues until the end of time and is carried out by the bearers of the ministry in the church as the successors of the apostles and the representatives of the entire church (1943/4: 33).

Besides these two passages, our rite of ordination and the rite in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* also use 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 as the mandate for the administration of the Eucharist by pastors. This passage obviously echoes Luke 22:19-20. Its use is new for us, for our Lutheran rites have traditionally been wary of this passage because of its abuse by the Roman Catholics as a warrant for the performance of the Mass as a sacrifice for the living and the dead.

A fourth passage could, I think, also be adduced. That is Luke 22:24-30. It is regarded by some exegetes as Luke's account of the ordination of the apostles. Christ appoints them to 'reign' with him in his kingdom by 'presiding' with him at his table and judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Art Just has this to say about Luke 22:30:

This refers ... to the responsibility of shepherding and oversight in the new Israel, the church. This is the Lukan equivalent to Jesus giving Peter the keys to the kingdom in Matthew (16:9) and his bestowal of the office of the keys upon the disciples in John (20:22-23). (849)

Many modern scholars claim that in these passages Christ does not deal with the apostles as ministers of word and sacrament but only as representatives of the church. They therefore conclude that, even though Christ did institute word and sacrament, he did not institute the *ministry* of word and sacrament. Now it is true that the apostles do indeed represent the whole church. It is also true that Christ does give word and sacrament to the whole church through them. But at the same time the words of Jesus that institute word and sacrament for the apostles, also institute the ministry of word and sacrament in the church. Melancthon therefore concludes that

the church has God's command to appoint preachers and deacons. This is very comforting because we know that God wills to preach and work through men and those chosen by men. Thus it is good that we highly praise and honour this choice, especially against the devilish Anabaptists who despise and ridicule this choice, together with the preaching office and the physical word (German Apol 13, 12-13).

It is most significant and instructive that Christ did not institute the office of the ministry as something that existed by itself. Rather, when he instituted this office, he also at the same time established the church, commissioned the apostles by his Holy Spirit as the ministers of his word in the church, and gave the sacraments as his gifts to the church. This indicates that none of these was ever meant to exist separately or apart from him. We can distinguish each one from the rest, but we must never abstract them from each other. They are all part of the same package.

3. Biblical foundations for the liturgical rite of ordination

There is general agreement that, while Christ appointed and commissioned the apostles as ministers of word and sacrament, he did not actually appoint and commission presbyters or pastors directly in the church, unless the commission of the seventy two in Luke 10:10-20 is meant to establish the office of preachers in the church (Scaer: 409). The apostles did, however, choose men to work with them and appointed them as pastors in the congregations of the early church.

The New Testament has a range of texts that show us how this occurred. These texts have been used in our orders in various ways. They can be divided into four functional categories.

- a. Some orders base the rite for the ordination of pastors on Christ's command to his disciples in Matthew 9:38, before he chose the twelve, that they were to ask 'the Lord of the harvest, to send out workers in his harvest field'. Hence the accent on prayer in all Lutheran orders.
- b. The second group consists of three prescriptive apostolic texts about the appointment of presbyters. The basic text is Paul's command in Titus 1:5 to Titus, a fellow pastor, to appoint 'elders' in every city as 'bishops' and 'stewards of God', according to the criteria set out in 1:6-9. Luther claims, in one of the drafts for his rite of ordination, that Paul thereby commands us to install priests in the cities (Smith: 105). Melanchthon alludes to this in his addition to AC XIV in the Variata: 'Just as Paul instructed Titus that he should appoint presbyters in the cities'. Luther also interprets Paul's command to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2 to entrust the apostolic tradition to those who were qualified to instruct others as an instruction to ordain them (Smith: 105). The third text is 1 Timothy 3:1-7, in which Paul instructs Timothy on the qualifications for bishops in the church. This is replaced in some orders by the parallel text in Titus 1:5-9. Both these were especially favoured by the reformers because they show that pastors are in fact bishops.
- c. The third group of texts describes the act of ordination in its liturgical context. In Acts 14:23 we read that Paul and Barnabas 'ordained' elders in the churches of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. They did this by 'committing' them to the Lord with prayer and fasting. This custom is amplified by Paul's reference to the ordination of Timothy in 1 Timothy 3:14 and in 2 Timothy 1:6-7. Timothy was ordained by Paul together with his fellow elders. Together they laid hands on him and prayed for his empowerment by the Holy Spirit, after a prophetic word had been spoken to him. These texts show us the

features of the rite of ordination in the apostolic era. But since they merely describe the rite, they were not used in Lutheran orders as readings.

- d. The last set of texts instructs the ordinand and the pastor about the nature of the office and its responsibilities. Thus Acts 20:28-31 was used to assure the ordinands that the Holy Spirit was appointing them as bishops in the church to feed the flock and guard it against false teachers. This was replaced in some orders by 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5 which charges the pastor to teach and preach God's word. Already in Luther's rite, 1 Peter 5:2-4 was used as a charge to the newly ordained pastors about their pastoral duties and their ultimate accountability to Christ as their head-pastor.

4. The difference between the office of ministry and the general priesthood

The Theses on the Office of the Ministry rightly assert that the office of the ministry exists only in the church (VI, 3,4). Pastors therefore do not stand over the church, or operate apart from the church, but are always, in every way, members of the church. They do not therefore cease to belong to the royal priesthood of Christ when they are ordained. The *Theses* also go on to claim that 'the office of the ministry is not identical with the spiritual priesthood of all believers in Christ' (VI, 4). But they do not explain how they differ.

Before we can answer that question, we need to establish the nature of the spiritual priesthood of believers in Christ. As holy priests all Christians have equal access to the presence of the Triune God. As priests with the privilege of access to God's heavenly presence they perform two functions. On the one hand, they offer true sacrifices of themselves to God in Christ with their bodies and offerings, their prayers and praises. These are offered both for themselves and other people. They therefore represent the world and the people of the world sacrificially before God in the divine service. On the other hand, they represent God to the people of the world, communally in their corporate witness, and personally in their vocation. As holy priests they bring God's love and peace and blessing to those who, unlike them, do not yet have access by faith to God's gracious presence. The spiritual priesthood therefore straddles heaven and earth. It brings the needs of other people to God and it brings God's blessing back to them.

There are three complementary ways of distinguishing the ministry of the word from the priesthood of the faithful. The first, which is implied in our *Theses of Agreement* (VI, 4), holds that, even though the keys are given corporately to the whole church and each congregation, Christ exercises the keys publicly in the divine service through those who are ordained ministers of his word. Luther and the reformers therefore always distinguished the office of the keys from the keys themselves. According to the *Augsburg Confession* (28, 5,21), the office of the keys involves the preaching of law and gospel, absolving and retaining sin, baptising and withholding baptism, granting and withholding Christ's body and blood, judging right doctrine and condemning false doctrine, excluding people from the congregation and readmitting them into communicant fellowship in it. It is exercised most clearly by admitting

people to the Lord's table and by excluding them from it. No individual member of the priesthood may perform these tasks in the church without proper authorisation. Likewise, a pastor may not perform these tasks apart from the priesthood and the church.

The second way of distinguishing the ministry of the word from the role of the priesthood is also implied in the *Theses of Agreement* which assert: 'the spiritual functions of the Apostolate are continued only in the ministry of the Word and Sacraments' (VI, 6). This tantalizing reference is all too brief and unqualified. It is, after all, quite obvious that the role of the apostles as eyewitnesses to the risen Lord Jesus is not continued in this ministry. We may, however, infer what is meant from scriptural and confessional passages which are cited in support of it. According to the *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope* (10) in its German text, 'the office of the ministry derives from the general call of the apostles'. Here Melancthon refers to John 20:20 which he had quoted in the previous paragraph. The authority of both apostles and pastors depends on that word of God. Like the apostles, all bishops (and pastors!) are to act corporately and collegially under Christ and together with him (SA II, IV, 9). It is, furthermore, 'a divine tradition and apostolic usage' that bishops (and pastors!) are elected in the presence of neighbouring bishops and ordained by them with the laying on of hands (Tr 13-15). Like the apostles, pastors receive their ministry from the risen Lord (Col 4:17), even if it is conferred on them by other pastors (Acts 14:23). Like the apostles, pastors are 'leaders' (Heb 13:17) whom Christ has appointed to 'preside' and 'rule' in his church (1 Tim 5:17; FC SD, 10, 10). Together with the apostles, they are 'elders' who exercise oversight over God's flock (1 Peter 5:1). Like the apostles, they are to preach God's word (Acts 6:2,4), teach sound doctrine (1 Tim 3:2; 5:17; Tit 1:9; FC SD, 10), and shepherd God's flock (Acts 20:28). Sasse therefore maintains, 'The preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments is not the activity of the general priesthood but the performance of a mandate given to the apostles, and through them, to the entire church' (1943/44: 33).

The office of ministry may also be distinguished from the priesthood in a third way by virtue of its location in the divine service, for in ministry, as in real estate, location makes all the difference. The Augsburg Confession maintains that pastors have been called to teach God's word and administer the sacraments publicly in the assembly of the saints (AC 14; Strelan: 20). They perform that role in the divine service. So, while pastors are responsible for the 'sacramental' aspects of the divine service, by which the Triune God comes to the faithful and graciously enacts the gospel for them, the priesthood is responsible for the 'sacrificial' aspects of the divine service. Sacrificially, pastors stand together with the congregation before God, even when they lead it in confession, prayer, praise, and offering. Sacramentally, they offer and convey the gifts of God from God to the congregation. More correctly, God does this through them as his mouthpiece and his hands. However, outside the church as the liturgical assembly of the saints, at home and in the world, the role of pastors does not differ theologically from the role of the priesthood.

We need to determine how the role of the public ministry differs from the role of the priesthood. It would be good to reach some consensus on this matter, because this confusion not only clouds the debate on the ordination of women but in many ways creates problems for the life and mission of our church. If we can clearly distinguish them from each other, we will be able to promote the maximum involvement of all our members, male and female, in the mission of God and at the same time free our pastors to be real spiritual leaders.

5. The function of the rite of ordination?

I do not intend to develop a full theology of ordination here but to focus on our tradition of ordination and its theological significance. First we need to clear up two common misunderstandings of our tradition. The first arises from a misreading of what AC 14 means by a call when it asserts: ‘Nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call’. While many modern Lutherans understand the call legally as a letter with an offer of appointment from a congregation or the church, Luther and the reformers understood the call theologically as the whole process by which Christ, through his church, appointed and commissioned candidates as pastors in the church. Luther, in fact, equates the call with ‘true consecration and ordination to the office of the ministry’ (LW 38: 211). For him the rite of ordination was therefore an important part of the call to be pastor. It enacted the call. In fact, Luther defines ordination as ‘calling to and entrusting with the office of the ministry’ (LW 38: 197). So, when AC 14 insists that pastors must be ‘rightly called’ (Latin: *rite vocatus*), it does not refer to their possession of a letter of call from a congregation; it declares that they must be both ‘regularly called’ by the church and ‘ritually called’ through the rite of ordination.

The second misunderstanding comes from the assumption that, when the *Treatise* maintains that ordination with the laying on of hands was nothing but the confirmation of a pastor's election (Tr 70), and when our *Theses* maintain that ordination ratifies and publicly acknowledges the call of a pastor (TA: VI, 8), ordination is understood legally as a public announcement and official notification without any ritual and theological significance. Our *Theses*, in fact, contradict that interpretation. They argue that ordination is a ‘solemn ecclesiastical rite’ which performs three important theological functions: the reception of the pastor as a gift from Christ to the church, the declaration of the pastor as a minister of the new covenant, the invocation and bestowal of the Lord's blessing on the pastor with the laying on of hands.

We Lutherans have historically understood ordination as a liturgical act by which the Triune God calls, empowers, and commissions the ordinand as a minister of the gospel (Heubach). John 20:21-23 is a key text in this teaching. It shows that all three persons of the Trinity are involved in this act of ordination. The Father sends the Son who in turn sends out the eleven disciples as his apostles to forgive and retain sin. The Son breathes on the disciples and empowers them to do the work of the Father by the gift of the

Holy Spirit. The disciples, and all ministers of the gospel after them, are therefore commissioned by the Triune God.

This trinitarian understanding of ordination is confirmed by other texts in the New Testament. God the Father ‘appoints’ pastors as teachers (1 Cor 12:28), ‘gives’ them the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18), ‘gives’ them the Holy Spirit (1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6-7; cf. 2 Cor 3:6), and ‘sends’ them out to gather in his harvest (Matt 9:38). Through the apostolic tradition the Son hands on the ministry to the pastor who ‘receives’ it as a gift from him, even as he ‘gives’ the pastor as a gift to the church (Eph 4:11). So when Paul and Barnabas ordain elders in Acts 14:23, they ‘commit’ them to the Lord. A pastor is therefore ‘a minister of Christ Jesus’ (Col 4:12), Christ’s ambassador (2 Cor 5:20). The Holy Spirit ‘appoints’ pastors as bishops in the church to shepherd God’s flock (Acts 20:28).

The Triune God does not ordain pastors immediately by calling them, as prophets were called, through the Holy Spirit or some charismatic experience. Rather God ordains pastors through the church (Apol 13, 12; SA III, X, 3; Tr 66,67,69,72; Sasse 1986: 79-81) and its leaders (Tr 62,64, 65). Consequently the rite of ordination has always been performed in our church by a pastor together with other representative pastors in a representative congregation as part of the divine service. In fact, the act of ordination has normally been performed by a bishop or regional superintendent, a president or his deputy, since candidates are ordained by the whole church for ministry in the whole church, rather than a single congregation (Sasse 1943/44: 29-30). Ordination is therefore an ecumenical event.

Luther’s rite of ordination for the church in Wittenberg quite deliberately involved the congregation in its enactment. The role of the church was highlighted in two ways. On the one hand, the location of the rite was shifted from its medieval location before the reading of the gospel and made part of the offertory after the sermon. There the presentation of the candidates was associated with the offerings of the people and the prayers of the church. On the other hand, at the beginning of the rite the whole congregation was called to pray to God to send out labourers into his harvest and to empower both the candidates and the ministry of all pastors with the Holy Spirit. This prayer was made by the congregation and the choir as both the candidates and pastors knelt together before the altar. Then when the rite was over, the whole congregation sang ‘O Holy Ghost’ (LHS 118) for all the pastors of the church.

Theologically speaking, the Lutheran rite of ordination consists of three interlocking elements: the proclamation of the word, the laying on of hands with prayer, and the commissioning of the ordained. The scriptural readings, however, are foundational for the whole rite. They not only provide God’s warrant for the ministry of the word and for the appointment of people as ministers of the word, but, since these readings are the Spirit-filled, inspired word of God, they actually call, empower, and commission candidates for the ministry. The rite enacts these readings. What God has ordained in his word is enacted performatively in the rite, for in it God’s word is used to ordain, empower and commission the pastor (Kliefoth). Through his word and those

who are ministers of his word, Christ appoints and sends out ordained men to be ministers of the word. Through the prayer of ordination and the act of ordination God enacts his mandate for ministry. Through this rite God confers the ministry of the new covenant on the candidates and empowers them to serve in that ministry by the power of the Holy Spirit. Through the charge and the benediction God sends out the ministers of the word to work in his name and with his word in the church and on his mission to the world. They are therefore ordained by the word of God and prayer.

Luther is quite happy to speak about ordination as an act of consecration. In his rite from 1535 he reminds the ordinands of Paul's statement in 1 Timothy 4:4,5: 'everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received in thanksgiving, for then it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer'. He then addresses the candidates with these words:

You are not only good creatures, sanctified by the Word and the sacrament of baptism, but in a second sanctification you have also been called to the holy and divine ministry, so that many others may be sanctified and reconciled to the Lord through your word and deed (LW 53:124, n.4; Smith: 103).

Thus, even though he categorically rejected the Catholic understanding of ordination as consecration by a bishop with holy anointing oil, he, nevertheless, still regarded ordination as an act of consecration by the use of God's holy word in proclamation and prayer. The most holy word of God consecrated the pastor for the holy ministry. In that ministry the pastor in turn used the holy things of God to consecrate the holy people of God for their priestly service.

6. Conclusion

I would like to end this discussion paper on a personal note. I have gained three important insights in my research for this paper. The first is that no matter how we regard the public ministry, we run into difficulty if we forget about the real presence of the risen Lord Jesus in the church. The keys to the Father's presence belong to Jesus and Jesus only. He has not handed them over to Pope or pastors or the church to be used apart from him and to represent him in his absence. Rather he himself wields the keys publicly in the divine service through the ministers of word and sacrament, just as he works together with all the faithful in their priestly service of his heavenly Father. The second is the discovery that Christ not only commissions pastors with his powerful word at their ordination; he continues to empower them daily in their work as pastors by that same Spirit-giving word. The third is that Luther's emphasis on prayer for the Holy Spirit in the rite of ordination has as its corollary that pastors can only fulfil their ministry by the power of the Holy Spirit and the prayer of the church for their empowerment by the Holy Spirit. Apart from the Holy Spirit neither the pastorate nor the priesthood of the faithful can do the work of God. Like the apostles in Acts 6:4, all pastors are therefore called to 'devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word'.

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