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# The Lutheran Pastor and the Meaning of Authority

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If function defines being, then the work of the pastor accounts for the authority of the pastor, and we may begin with an inquiry: has the work of the pastor really undergone any noticeable change in matters of substance? Of course, there are typewriters now and telephone-answering machines, computers and cars, and all the complex audio-visual equipment, as well as airplane travel to conferences. But as for the more basic issues, could it not be argued that not all that much has changed—or the more things have changed, the more they have remained the same?

The main worship service of the week is still on Sunday morning, and a centrally significant portion of that service is the sermon. Somehow, time must be found to prepare that sermon. Moreover, the sermon must so communicate the word of God as both to inspire and to teach. Neither in the past generations nor now is it easy to offer inspiration and wisdom at regular intervals! This may be readily recognized from two key statements, printed 1898, in a book offering advice to preachers:

It was a happy touch of Lord Beaconsfield to describe an elderly man as in his anecdote, but it struck me when I had the pleasure of hearing you preach last Sunday that you had arrived at this stage somewhat prematurely and not very successfully.<sup>1</sup>

To a minister whose sermons last an hour: Dear Mr. Longwynde,—When you surveyed our church from the platform on the evening of your recognition meeting, you whispered in my ear that you wished the clock could be removed....<sup>2</sup>

Need more be said?!

Then there are also people in the church. Many of them are wonderful and some truly magnificent. Reinhold Niebuhr

reflected with insight on this human dimension: "You do get tired of human pettiness at times. But there is nevertheless something quite glorious about folks. That is particularly true when you find them bearing sorrow with real patience. Think of Mrs. — putting up with that drunkard of a husband for the sake of her children—and having such nice children. One can learn more from her quiet courage than from many a book."<sup>3</sup> The pastor's agenda consists of ministering to these people. Observed G.H. Gerberding, almost a century ago: "The minister, like the Saviour, is ever to have a heart for others' woe and is to be touched with a feeling of others' infirmities."<sup>4</sup> And the relevance of the insights from the past is not merely applicable in regard to overarching principles. G.H. Gerberding was prepared to offer some everyday advice which one still may find relevant—or at least enjoyable. Three brief quotations will need to suffice:

The Lutheran minister will certainly not make that sin which God's Word does not condemn. He cannot say that to drink a glass of wine or beer is a sin in itself. Neither will he, on the other hand, brand all involuntary abstinence as fanaticism.<sup>5</sup>

As to the use of *tobacco* we have no commandment. A generation ago it was considered quite the proper thing for ministers to use it, and it was rather the exception for one not to use it. But times, views, and customs change. It is not so now. We believe the time is fast approaching when it will be considered out of place for the minister to use it.... Let all pastors avoid chewing tobacco, which is certainly the most unbecoming and obnoxious use of all.<sup>6</sup>

As to *every-day-dress* of the pastor, tastes differ, and there is no law. There are those who wear and advocate the so-called clerical cut only. For those who like to be known and noticed everywhere as ministers, this dress is the thing.... On the other hand, a minister ought never to appear in gaudy, flashy, or dudish dress. The bright-colored necktie, the light-colored suit with the tan shoe, are not becoming as he goes in and out among his people. Exception, of course, can be made when he is out on his vacation. Then a light, negligée attire will not be out of place.<sup>7</sup>

Nor is it really new, or could be new, that the pastor, a person under God's authority, also has authority in virtue of being God's messenger and servant. Thus the pastor serves under authority and with authority. Both are genuine, supplied by grace and sustained in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Yet while there may be much truth in the above observations, we may do well to listen to the warning of Peter L.

Berger: "... one must not allow oneself to be trapped into a perspective in which there is nothing ever new seen in history—in which, in the last resort, no changes can be perceived."<sup>8</sup> Specifically, while on occasion there have been questions about the authority of the pastor in the past as well, today it has become a far more widely experienced concern. The pastors question their own authority, and the lay people question the authority of the pastors. Hence we must ask: what is the deepest cause of the problem, and what might be some of the more useful solutions?

## I

There was a time even in the not too distant past when in the minds of many to be a Lutheran pastor meant to occupy the one and only authentically pastoral office there was. However charitably one might have been inclined, in all candor it had to be admitted that all the others, parading around as pastors, only mimicked the true pastoral calling which they did not have and therefore could not fulfill. As ecumenical winds began to blow more strongly, the authenticity of the pastoral office of other denominations was no longer denied. Nevertheless, it was still asserted that "they certainly did not have the right kind of theology" or, perhaps, "had no theology at all".

My first teaching position, starting in the late fifties, was at Duke University Divinity School, a Methodist institution. I did not count the Lutheran comments, but their number was legion: "A good thing that you are finally teaching those Methodists some theology!" When in the early seventies I taught at Fordham University, a Jesuit institution, there were no longer any solicitous Lutheran concerns that I might be corrupted by Catholic theology, or explicit wishes that I would finally teach those Jesuits some theology. The age of ecumenicity was finally upon us! We recognized that there were many other authentic Christians in addition to Lutherans! This paradigm shift has not been easy for us, as we now need to amend our *Book of Concord*! In the important document, edited by Paul C. Empie and others, *Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VI*, we read and rejoice: "Thus we recommend to our churches:... that they

officially declare that the Lutheran commitment to the Confessions does not involve the assertion that the pope or the papacy in our day is the antichrist; in this way our churches would publicly affirm that antipapal polemics should be replaced by an attitude of respect and love..."<sup>9</sup>

But if Lutherans are viewing Roman Catholics and presumably others "in respect and love" and ourselves no longer as Christians par excellence, and the Lutheran pastor as not the only true pastor, then we, Lutheran pastors, are in effect doing what any other pastor of any other respectable denomination might be doing. Although we carry our inherited name and call ourselves Lutherans, ours is a distinction without a difference. All of us, by whatever brand name, are essentially only generic brand pastors. Our "extra" edge is gone. Observes Peter L. Berger:

... modernity has plunged religion into a very specific crisis, characterized by secularity, to be sure, but characterized more importantly by pluralism. In a pluralistic situation, for reasons that are readily visible to historical and social-scientific observation, the authority of all religious traditions tends to be undermined.<sup>10</sup>

Namely, elaborates Berger:

... the institutional pluralization that makes modernity affects not only human actions, but also human consciousness: Modern man finds himself confronted not only by multiple options of possible courses of action but also by multiple options of possible ways of thinking about the world.<sup>11</sup>

Consequently, traditional definitions of religious authority, although still insightful, may be quickly recognized as limited. Namely, according to Bernard Lonergan, S.J., "Authority is legitimate power."<sup>12</sup> And Paul M. Harrison explains: "First, 'power' as it will be used here signifies the ability of a person or group of persons to determine the actions of others without regard for their needs or desires. 'Authority,' on the other hand, indicates a right to exercise power."<sup>13</sup> What is clearly missing for a pluralistic situation is the key which legitimatizes the exercise of power. This recognition becomes essential in a free society, since we may choose to leave and select another one of the multiple "legitimate" authorities.

In such a situation appeals have been made to cultural precedent as the norm. Thus Richard Flacks explains: "Power



exercised in terms of culturally validated rights to govern, control, or lead is usually called *authority*. To exercise authority is to exercise *legitimate power*.”<sup>14</sup> Thomas A. Langford proceeds similarly: “Authority represents the commanding sanction for a say of life.”<sup>15</sup> Yet, obviously, neither culture, however distinguished, nor custom, however widely adhered to, do in and of themselves clarify the truth-question. While the ecumenical age may assume that the truth is being sought in dialogue and with convergence among the larger Christian denominations, the observation is not all-inclusive as there is no unfailing assurance of success. It has been even found necessary for the basically very generous Vatican II pronouncement on ecumenicity to draw distinctive perimeters, and to include as well as to exclude.<sup>16</sup>

I believe that for the discovery of the legitimate authority a false lead is occasionally suggested by way of a distinction between authoritarian and non-authoritarian personalities. Undeniably, there is a remarkable difference between these two personality types. The authoritarian recognizes other persons as either “above” or “under” rather than “alongside with”. Jack Dominionian characterizes further: “Authority is treated and encouraged to be omnipotent, which places an impossible burden on it in trying to fulfil this role, or people show this childlike respect toward authority figures before their faces and behave differently out of sight.”<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Erich Fromm may be correct that “Luther as a person was a typical representative of the ‘authoritarian character’.”<sup>18</sup> Moreover, it may be even true that Lutherans in Germany have tended to inherit this flaw. Perhaps Richard Harries is right:

... what happened in Germany in the 1930s still serves as a terrible warning. Within Lutheran thought there is a consistent emphasis on the authority of the state and the necessity of obedience to it. St. Paul’s words in Romans 13 hold a central place. Many people now believe that this emphasis created a soil in which it is possible for the noxious weed of Nazism to flourish much more rapidly than would otherwise have been the case.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, it is often the case that non-authoritarian personalities are better able to cooperate in ecumenical situations. An authoritarian personality may not be able to accept the concept of distinctiveness without superiority or inferiority. Nevertheless, in the last analysis it must be observed that by being non-authoritarian, open to dialogue, and convergent, we do not necessarily attest the truth of our own historic distinctiveness

of being Lutheran or necessarily obtain a method for proceeding to truth!

Hence, understandably and even appropriately, there has been much conservative reaction against a vacuous openness without content and direction. If we do not know where to proceed, we may as well remain where we have always been! What then may serve as an effective way to build the truth of the authority which is our religious modality of existence?

Here let me begin with a story, recalling a familiar experience. Without being qualified members, many pastors will have accompanied their timid parishioners to an ordinary meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. Was it not theologically intriguing how the members of Alcoholics Anonymous—before telling their tragic stories of bondage to alcohol—introduced themselves by their first names and stated so bluntly and unmistakably: "I am an alcoholic"? As the stories meandered in reminiscing, and went on to describe in some painful detail the hurts, the failures, the dashed hopes, at times even the utter degradation, it became rather clear that these dreadfully traumatic events now belonged to the past. Otherwise, even in front of accepting people, such awesome calamities could not have been reported. Also, without a doubt, the various narrators were completely sober. Yet their confession "I am an alcoholic" was not a slip of the tongue. They intended to put their witness in the present tense. The longer we listened, the better we understood why this "I am" in the present tense was an absolute necessity. On the one hand, there is, so it is being publicly confessed, a still unsatisfied thirst and longing for alcohol. Alcoholism is not only a past act, now belonging to history, but also a disease which continues to afflict at the present moment. For this reason the present-tense statement cannot be dispensed with. Then, on the other hand, we observe the intensity with which the members of Alcoholics Anonymous listen to and receive the confession. The group accepts the statement and thereby also the person who does the speaking. And through the sincere admission that one *is* an alcoholic, the confessed alcoholic is free from the bondage to alcohol! It is not an unconditional freedom which will continue automatically. For many years to come, the confession of being an alcoholic will need to be repeated in order to live in sobriety—since the longing for alcohol will continue, and will therefore always offer the threat of a relapse.

Lutheran observers of an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting do not need to be told that what they have seen is the dynamic of their own central doctrine. Curiously enough, although the wheel does not need to be re-invented, the doctrine of justification by grace through faith seems to have made many journeys to the ecclesial lost-and-found department. Traditionally, the new finders have not hurried to acknowledge the former owners. Thus Luther did not give credit to the insights of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas; nor is the Lutheran label attached to Alcoholics Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous, and many other groups.

Of course, the acknowledgement of structural similarities does not overlook material differences, yet may serve to underscore the observation that in Lutheran understanding of Christianity there is present a dialectical relationship between doctrine and life. The truth of the doctrine of justification can be stated abstractly, and may be derived, with precision, from the Bible. At the same time, its experiential side does not rest merely on an individual appropriation through the choice of a subjective preference. The member of Alcoholics Anonymous frequents the meetings of the organization because there is objective evidence that sobriety can be maintained in this manner. The church member who confesses belief in justification by grace through faith looks for agreement with other church members not merely on the exegetical and doctrinal level, but also in the joyously shared event of salvation. In this way it may be recognized that justification, the gracious and unmerited acceptance of the sinner by God through Jesus Christ, is also at the same time a community-forming experience. The individual, born anew, is not delivered into the solitude of his or her own religious experience, but into the church, that is, into a shared perception of the truth of the Gospel. Acceptance as an idea *and* experience is brought to the individual-to-be-justified through the Gospel message and the ministry of the church. In this way justification is a contextual experience within a framework of relationships. Like love itself, justification requires reciprocity, and would perish in isolation. At the same time, justification is an experience with the power of God to redeem through Jesus Christ. In the recognition of the gracious legitimacy of this power, the awareness of God's authority over our existence has come to light.



Now such an understanding of justification as the very foundation of being a Christian is ultimately Luther's cornerstone for pastoral authority. The historical setting, well known to all Lutherans, is clear enough. Luther had openly rejected the Roman Catholic hierarchical understanding of authority. That is to say, Luther's reforming ventures really began with the realization that since the ultimate authority belonged to Christ, all ecclesial authority was derived from grace—and since grace is given gratis, i.e. freely, no one has more of grace than another. Rather, precisely because we are justified as sinners, we start with zero authority! Christian authority begins only with grace, that is to say, first of all with baptism. In 1520 Luther wrote: "... all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them except that of office...we are all consecrated priests through baptism."<sup>20</sup> The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers was, without any doubt, next to justification, a foundational doctrine of Lutheran theology.

At the same time, in order to be operative, authority had to be somehow narrowed; if everyone exercised an equal authority, only chaos would result. Consequently, while Luther "vehemently rejected any hierarchical distinctions among Christian believers,... he assumed that a social hierarchy was natural and necessary."<sup>21</sup> At best, this allowed Luther to appeal for assistance to the local prince as a kind of an emergency bishop<sup>22</sup> in regulating the ecclesial affairs which were no longer directed from Rome. At worst, it led Luther to accept the social status quo, including serfdom.<sup>23</sup> In regard to the doctrine of the ministry there are some notable differences between Luther's earlier and later views. Carl E. Braaten sums up Luther's initial position well:

The minister is the one who has been delegated by the group to perform certain functions in behalf of all. This doctrine is called the "transference theory," from the German *Uebertragungslehre*. It makes the office a function of the congregation. Today it is called the "functionalist" view of the ministry....The problem with this view is that it can make no clear distinction between the office of the ministry and the priesthood of all believers.<sup>24</sup>

Subsequently Luther enlarged his view by placing a greater emphasis on the pastor's office.

I hope, indeed, that believers, those who want to be called Christians, know very well that the spiritual estate [*der geistliche Stand*]

has been established and instituted by God, not with gold or silver but with the precious blood and bitter death of his only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ (I Pt. 1:18-19). From his wounds indeed flow the sacraments. He paid dearly that men might everywhere have this office of preaching, baptizing, loosing, binding, giving the sacrament, comforting, warning and exhorting with God's word, and whatever else belongs to the pastoral office (*A Sermon on Keeping Children in School*, 1530).

One may well assume that Luther had connected functionalism with permanency. Without returning to a fully Roman Catholic view of ordination as receiving an indelible mark and the status of being a priest forever, Lutheran practice has in some ways approached such a perspective.<sup>25</sup> One example may suffice. A consistent functionalist view would need to regard a retired pastor as a layman and a former pastor; but this simply is not the way Lutherans understand the status of their retired pastors, who are regarded as clergypersons, and not as laypersons.

In other words, the authority of the pastor in a Lutheran understanding is strongly anchored on grace. Initially it is the grace of baptism that introduces a person into the priesthood of all believers. Subsequently it is the grace of the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ which validates the distinct calling of the pastor. And here we must underscore: as with the so-called "recovered alcoholic", so also with all "recovered sinners": we rest in the security of divine acceptance in no other way than through the open confession that we are addicted to the insatiable urge to sin!

We shall want to note that the Lutheran perspective builds the doctrine on justification rather than on sanctification, as is at times stated by several other denominations. Hence we cannot state that ordination as such upgrades our status. In the last analysis we therefore also want to say that the authority of the pastor is clearly a delegated authority. Its source is none other than Jesus Christ Himself. Now in an ecumenical age we will not want to think that ours is the only correct way of understanding the doctrine of the ministry and the authority which proceeds from it.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, in respecting the views of others we celebrate the gifts of grace and insight which have been given to us, Lutherans. Namely to us, deeply sin-conscious people, the open confession of our eternal insecurity

is the only safe route to our eternal security, as the admission of our unworthiness the only chance to obtain the divine gift of strength and salvation!

Finally, our brief outline of the Lutheran doctrine of the ministry must be completed by turning our attention to a significant personal ingredient, that is, our courage to believe. Here we may note first of all by way of a systematic comment that the doctrine of faith has both its subjective and its objective sides: the faith by which we believe or the act of faith (*fides quae creditur*) on the one hand, and the doctrinal content of faith which we believe (*fides qua creditur*).<sup>27</sup> Ideally both dimensions of our faith are sustained in a balance. In the course of history, however, it sometimes has occurred that the balance has been lost. Then we either overstate the significance of the experience, or we center most of our attention on the doctrinal content of the faith. One of the great pastoral challenges is to maintain this needed equilibrium, and to avoid a one-sided interpretation of the basis of authority. This meant, according to Luther, that, first of all, the element of risk was always a basic ingredient in the pastor's faith and authority. Luther wrote: "... we must leap from the safe shore of life into this abyss without seeing or feeling a sure footing under us. We must leap, as it were, at random, merely trusting to God's supporting and saving hand."<sup>28</sup> In such a perspective the subjective and experiential side of faith is not easily obtained. The paradigm of a "leap" suggests that here experience belongs to the future, and is embraced by hope rather than a simple possession. Seen in this way, the ultimate possibility of a risk in faith depends on the gift of the Holy Spirit: "... the Holy Spirit must be present with us as the Paraclete, who encourages the heart so that we overcome joyfully, allow God to use our ministry; and are not at all frightened by the fear of death or sin..."<sup>29</sup> Whatever else therefore may be said about the pastoral authority, it must not ever excise the authentic insecurity—which is the only way to a secure exercise of authority in the pastoral office!

At the same time, as there is real leaping, so also there is some landing with insight and understanding. In faith there is obtained some specific grasp of the truth of God's word and how it relates to life's numerous problems. There is authentic understanding which the believer gains from a victorious life under the cross of Christ. Hence it is in order to record that

doctrines are not cold, rationalistic constructs made of dead bones, but careful accounts of the footprints of those believers who have trod in obedience to God's grace and call. Perhaps it may be useful to compare the Christian faith to both a tall sail and a heavy keel. As the mighty winds of the Holy Spirit supply power and courage to prophecy concerning the new visions of unknown shores, the very same Spirit also sustains and steadies the believers, so that they may grow in accord with the believers of all ages. Therefore at best the pastor is both a prophet<sup>30</sup> and a teacher, whose authority, as it rests on grace, is an exercise in leaping and landing—sometimes on the other shore, and sometimes over the ears in shallow mud.

## II

Having looked at the authority of the pastoral office from within, and that in the perspective of Lutheran theology, we must now attempt to look out into the world. Then we may begin with the generalization that in the Western world all authorities have suffered a remarkable loss of esteem. This loss is greater than is sometimes assumed, and is already taken for granted in many circles. Richard Flacks has observed:

In the West, we have become used to viewing those in authority with profound suspicion; we expect them to lie regularly, to be substantially ignorant of the needs and feelings of ordinary men, to be largely incapable of solving fundamental problems, and to articulate platitudes rather than insights concerning the human condition. In other words, in the fully developed industrial societies, legitimacy of authority is based on very minimal expectations of competence and legality and is highly tenuous. In these societies, social trust is quite low.<sup>31</sup>

While the loss of esteem of various authorities may in a certain sense be lamented, particularly so if connected with the loss of moral integrity,<sup>32</sup> a sense of alarm may be an over-reaction. Expounds Jack Dominian:

This diminution of automatic respect for authority is a particular source of distress to authoritarian figures. Eminent people from all these professions pontificate about this loss of respect towards authority as if it is the greatest tragedy that can happen in society. Very often they have little conscious awareness that it is their own emotional immaturity which demands figures of authority that provide a sense of security as the source of ultimate wisdom, power and protection in order to safeguard them and the rest of society.<sup>33</sup>



Yet while over-reaction is not called for, some awareness of the changed situation is very much in order. Peter M. Blau has noted:

The secularization of the world that spells its disenchantment is indicated by the large amount of time we spend in making a living and getting ahead, and the little time we spend in contemplation and religious activities. Compare the low prestige of the moneylenders and the high prestige of priests in the former eras with the different positions of bankers and preachers today.<sup>34</sup>

On the one hand this is certainly an asset. Exultation of the clerical status can result in establishing a distance from the laity. The overly-dignified clergy person with great authority may have built a wall around the self that hinders friendship and understanding! This is surely not a recent insight; it was written almost a century ago:

The sense of [belonging to the clerical class] creates a subtle, invisible barrier between ordinary people and the parson. They stand mentally aloof from you. They use reserve. They are hardly ever quite natural. They treat you, half unconsciously, like a creature of a different order from themselves. They behave as though there were no exceptions to the old epigram which has divided humanity into three sexes—men, women, and parsons.<sup>35</sup>

On the other hand, the pastor needs to seek acceptance and respect for the message of the Gospel. In a pluralistic world of innumerable claims and counterclaims it is not surprising that a pastor wishes to be heard and the Gospel of Jesus Christ accepted! A certain measure of authority is not a personal vanity but a necessity in our calling. Just what we desire to have, or parenthetically, what our generation has lost in regard to authority, is not readily stated. Hence a comparison, supplied by Stanley Hauerwas, may be quite helpful:

There can be no doubt that physicians individually and as members of an elite profession continue to command *de facto* authority. For example, it has been one of my duties to teach seminarians who have no experience and little conception for the past power and authority of the clergy. Most assume they are entering a devalued profession in which any authority they may attain depends largely on their personal characteristics. To help them understand the authority of the clergy as role and office, I call their attention to how they regard their physicians. By revealing their willingness to accept direction from their physicians even when they often know little about the basis of such advice, I try to give them a sense of how people once looked to clergymen for direction.<sup>36</sup>

While concurring with the observation by Hauerwas, I also observe that pastors have not been the only losers. Parents,

school teachers, professors, officers in the military service, and politicians might very well complain along with Rodney Dangerfield that they get no respect! Ours happens to be a very disrespectful age, which, reacting against authoritarian structures and personalities, has been harvesting the bitter fruits of all too permissive upbringing and education.

Yet we do not live in a world where the ministry has lost all authority. Within a professional framework pastors have a definite role to play, and hence a certain measure of authority to exercise. The constitution of each congregation spells out with a measure of clarity what is the authority of the pastor within that congregation. If the pastor plays this role well and works as a successful administrator, the pastor will have a definite measure of authority. In a study by Milo Brekke and others I find this insightful observation:

The tone of voice in which some pastors pronounce the word *administration* makes it sound like a profanity. The tone identifies it as representing all that the speaker abhors, avoids, puts off, and hopes will some day fall off the bottom of the pastoral priority list. Our study presents evidence that younger pastors hold this view more strongly than older pastors, and seminary students more strongly still. Perhaps it takes years of experience with administration for its true nature to become clear. When that takes place, pastors no longer see administration as a task divorced from the real work of ministry, but germane to it; somewhere along the road pastors realize that the word carries ministry within it: *ad-ministra-tion*.<sup>37</sup>

Now administration, significant as it really is, nevertheless is only one of several significant professional skills. Thomas A. Kadel has recently edited several interviews with noted North American Lutheran church leaders who have reflected on the interface between professionalism and authority. Thus Dr. James R. Crumley, Jr. has noted:

In recent years there has come a new emphasis on professionalism in the ministry. . . . By this "we have meant more than that you have to be well-trained and effective—you also have a right to plan out what your life will be, what your career will be. At many points this professionalism almost cuts clear across the older idea of calling."

Invariably, as the congregations became familiar with the concept of professionalism, they drew their own significant conclusions: "The idea of professionalism also meant that higher expectations were set for pastors by congregation."<sup>38</sup> Dr. David W. Preus, president of the American Lutheran Church, spoke similarly of the increasing expectations regarding the pastor's professional competence: "It is even more important that the

pastor be an everlasting learner. He will have to work at his continuing education because of the rapidity of change.”<sup>39</sup> As pastors meet these new expectations with continued success, it can be assumed that their professional authority will rise. The secular world respects the professionally highly competent pastor even when not sharing the goals of his or her ministry. No doubt, this level of success in the world can be appreciated in the church as well. Similarly, insofar as Lutheran pastors exhibit professional competence, they can count on acceptance and respect in ecumenical circles. And surely it is a positive and worthwhile accomplishment that there are more of the generic brand pastors in existence who can by their professional skills enhance the authority of the entire profession.

In the end, however, a further word must be said in regard to specifically Lutheran dimension of pastoral authority. Here we may begin with a brief reference to Paul Tillich’s creative formulation of the so-called “Protestant principle”.<sup>40</sup> According to this principle nothing divine should be attributed to anything finite. Hence it expresses one of the cardinal concerns of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. Applied to the understanding of the pastoral office, it underscores the divine calling through grace, hence proclaims that the authority of the pastor rests on Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord. The paradigm for pastoral authority is therefore clearly recorded in Philippians 2:5-7: “Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” In this perspective of grace, no significant place is left for human accomplishment and professional expertise—regardless whether we are speaking about sanctification, certification, or doctoration! In other words the less projection is made of the pastor’s own self, and the more effectively there occurs the proclamation of Jesus Christ, the greater will be the authority of the pastor. The specifically Lutheran accent will find expression in our concern to integrate into the doctrine of the ministry the salvific dialectic of *simul iustus et peccator*! This is no easy accomplishment in any age, and may be far more readily recorded as a goal than an achievement.

Stating the same insight negatively, we may note that there was a time when successful politicians and military people



were decorated with large-sized medals and such impressively-sounding titles as Privy councillor or *Geheimrat*. Today polished pomposity is no longer in style, least of all in the pastoral office. Such has been the case on the North American shores for some time. Already G.H. Gerberding was prepared to state:

We by no means favor a stiff, formal, funereal deportment. The pastor who is too solemn to enjoy a hearty laugh, who has no sense of humor in his soul, who cannot appreciate the ludicrous and funny things of life, who frowns on a good story or joke, who says by his whole demeanor: "Stand aside, for I am holier than thou," will never have the respect and confidence of the community. There are pastors who are so cold and austere that the children will hide from them, and young people will shun them.

At the same time, Professor Gerberding was also prepared to say: "And yet, if we were compelled to choose between the overly solemn and frigid type, on the one hand, and the clerical clown, on the other, we should prefer for former."<sup>41</sup> We can be grateful that today pomposity has been out of style for a long time, especially in the pastoral office. The theological reason for this gratitude is clear: we remain forgiven only while we continue to confess our need for forgiveness. Hence we do not have anything of grace that we have not received; therefore we look at humility as a necessity. Now I shall suggest that real pastoral humility is not a studied posture but the result of an authentic awareness that Jesus Christ is the sole foundation of our existence and salvation. I will then claim that in this process which brings the message and with it, through grace, the reality of Jesus Christ into the world, the authority of the pastor is established in a recognizably Lutheran formulation and, at best, experience as well! In other words, the pastoral office has reached its full height when it begins to approximate the function of a window made of clear glass which merely facilitates the observation of what is outside. When through the life and the ministry of the pastor Jesus Christ is encountered, then the authority of the pastor is established beyond any doubt. Then, of course, there is no need to debate and to measure the authority of the pastor: in the presence of Christ true believers hasten to adoration and service!

Indeed, in all Christian life the final measure of success is the redemptive encounter with Jesus Christ. An excellent sermon is not necessarily the one from which we remember purple passages and quote striking illustrations. An excellent sermon



has called our attention to Jesus Christ with such intensity that we have forgotten the style, the colour of the preacher's robe, and the manner of his or her delivery. Such is also the final standard for evaluating liturgy: not how historically accurate or how well "done", but rather whether in the doing of this liturgy Jesus Christ became personally present in the midst of the worshipping community. Pastoral counselling, administration, friendship, *and*, once more, the exercise of authority are merely means to one and the same end—the redemptive encounter with Jesus the Christ.

Whenever the means of grace are imagined to contain a redemptive power in and of themselves, we are dealing with magic and not with the sacraments. Where the sermon displays the preacher, we do not have a pastor but an actor. Similarly, where pastoral authority does not serve as a witness to Jesus Christ, we have an authoritarian system at work—perhaps efficient, benevolent, and profound, but with a misplaced accent on the self instead of celebrating Christ. But since, according to the Lutheran understanding, the doctrine of the ministry is built upon justification, the authentic exercise of the ministry is a witness to Christ as the author of all grace and authority.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> John Watson, Marcus Dods, T.C. Edwards, et al., *The Clerical Life: A Series of Letters to Ministers* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1898) 19.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid. 48.
- <sup>3</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic*, 1929 (rpr. New York: Meridian Books, 1957) 46.
- <sup>4</sup> G.H. Gerberding, *The Lutheran Pastor* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1902) 55.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid. 147.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid. 148–149.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid. 152–153.
- <sup>8</sup> Peter L. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1979) 4.
- <sup>9</sup> Paul C. Empie, T. Astin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess, eds., *Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue, VI* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978) 68.
- <sup>10</sup> Berger, *The Heretical Imperative*, p.x.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid. 17.

- 12 Frederick J. Adelman, S.J., ed., *Authority* (Chestnut Hill, MA: Boston College and The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974) 24.
- 13 Paul M. Harrison, *Authority and Power in the Free Church Tradition: A Social Case Study of the American Baptist Convention* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959) 4.
- 14 Richard Flacks, *Conformity, Resistance, and Self-Determination: The Individual and Authority* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973) 5.
- 15 "Authority and Faith: A Theological Reflection", *Religion in Life*, 42, 3 (Autumn 1973) 376.
- 16 "Decree of Ecumenism", in Walter M. Abbott, S.J., ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Guild Press, 1966) 341-366.
- 17 Jack Dominian, *Authority: A Christian Interpretation of the Psychological Evolution of Authority* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1976) 41.
- 18 Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York and Toronto: Rinehart and Company, Inc., 1941) 66, cf. 82-83.
- 19 R. Baine Harris, ed., with a bibliography by Richard T. DeGeorge, *Authority: A Philosophical Analysis* (University, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1976) 1-2; Gordon Rupp, *Martin Luther: Hitler's Cause—Or Cure? In Reply to Peter F. Wiener* (London: Lutterworth, 1945).
- 20 "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation," *Luther's Works* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House and Philadelphia: Fortress [formerly Muhlenberg] Press, 1955-1986) 44:127.
- 21 Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1960) 164.
- 22 *Notbischof*. Cf. *The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965) 1:311; Ivar Asheim and Victor R. Gould, eds., *Episcopacy in the Lutheran Church?* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970).
- 23 Cf. fn. 21 above.
- 24 Carl E. Braaten, *The Apostolic Imperative: Nature and Aim of the Church's Mission and Ministry* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985) 140; cf. *LW* 31:356, 366-367; 41:358-359; 39:155-156.
- 25 *Ibid.* 141. Cf. Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. by Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966) 323-329; cf. *LW* 46:188-189.
- 26 Hans L. Martensen and George A. Lindbeck, eds., *Roman Catholic /Lutheran Joint Commission, The Ministry in the Church* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1982).
- 27 Empie, *Teaching Authority and Infallibility*, 47.
- 28 *Luther's Works*, 19:66.

- 29 *Luther's Works*, 20:36; cf. Egil Grislis, ed., *The Theology of Martin Luther: Five Contemporary Canadian Interpretations* (Winfield, B.C.: Wood Lake Books, 1985) 112-113. Without the experiential verification through the ongoing life of the church, the paradigm of leaping may indeed suggest a certain arbitrariness, and hence fail to supply any indication in which direction to leap. Cf. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative*, 83. For the probable history of the concept of leap, cf. Robert Clyde Johnson, *Authority in Protestant Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1959) 92.
- 30 At the same time, it is wise to keep in mind the warning to avoid an all too facile use of the term prophet, cf. Leonard Swidler and Piet F. Fransen, eds., *Authority in the Church and the Schillebeeckx Case* (New York: Crossroads, 1982) 72-73.
- 31 Richard Flacks, *Conformity, Resistance, and Self-Determination*, 9.
- 32 Cf. the 25 May 1987 issue of *Time* magazine, devoted to the issue "What Ever Happened to Ethics: Assaulted by sleaze, scandals and hypocrisy, America searches for its moral bearings."
- 33 Jack Dominian, *Authority*, 77.
- 34 *Bureaucracy in Modern Society* (New York: Random House, 1967) 15.
- 35 John Watson *et al.*, 134-135.
- 36 Stanley Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence: Theological Reflections on Medicine, the Mentally Handicapped, and the Church* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986) 40.
- 37 Milo L. Brekke, Merton P. Strommen, Dorothy L. Williams, *Ten Faces of Ministry: Perspectives on Pastoral and Congregational Effectiveness Based on a Survey of 5000 Lutherans* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1979) 131.
- 38 Thomas A. Kadel, ed., *Growth in Ministry* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980) 3.
- 39 *Ibid.* 6.
- 40 Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948) 161-181.
- 41 G.H. Gerberding, *The Lutheran Pastor* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1902) 142-143. We may nevertheless want to ask whether any occasions which parallel choosing between "a rock and a hard place" are really situations of choice? After all, both pomposity and clownishness direct undue attention to the human individual and thereby neglect the Christocentric *sola gratia* witness.