

The Priesthood of the Baptised (or All Believers)

Luther's writings do not reveal any difference between his earlier career or later career in what he wrote about the priesthood of all believers, but there are changes of emphasis or accent, particularly after the trouble caused by the Anabaptists and after the Peasants' War. The subject-indexes of the *Book of Concord* are remarkably lean in comparison with Luther's use of the priesthood of all believers. It is true that all the baptised constitute a royal body of priests (1 Pet 2:9). However, although they "declare, or extol, the wonderful deeds of [God], who has called [them] out of darkness into His marvellous light," this privilege should not be interpreted to mean that all are authorised or qualified to preach or administer the sacraments publicly or officially in the church. Lay consecration should not be derived from this principle except in genuine emergencies. There is in fact no explicit connection in Scripture between the priesthood of all believers and the office of the ministry. Walther also said that they are distinct (*Theses on the Ministry, I-II*). Nevertheless, it is correct to say that, when a congregation calls a man to be its pastor, it transmits the office to him through a divine call, and that the church then acts normally, officially, and publicly through its ministry. "The church retains the right to elect and ordain ministers" (Treatise, 72). Nevertheless, the salient point ought to be that the office of the ministry is derived from the apostolic office and rests on God's call or sending, rather than that it is a kind of extension of the universal priesthood of all believers (Statement of Faith, p. 54). It is Scriptural to say that the pastor is the servant of the congregation, but also to say that the pastor is the servant of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor 4:1; 2 Cor 4:5).

1 Peter 2:9 is the only passage in the New Testament that explains the priesthood of the baptised, even briefly. It applies Exodus 19:5-6 to the New Testament fulfilment. The primary focus was not on duties of God's people to one another. "You will be to Me a kingdom of priests" (Compare Revelation 1:5: "To Him who... has made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father"). In the New Testament, there is only one priest in the primary sense. Luther used 1 Peter 2:9 chiefly to oppose the Roman doctrine that the essence of the priesthood was offering Christ in the Mass. In the *Babylonian Captivity*, Luther could still sometimes use the word "priests" in the sense of "ministers," but in relation to 1 Corinthians 4:1. They might not claim to be *more* than servants of Christ, in going beyond the ministry, the office of preaching, which had been committed to them. Papal priests might not infringe on the one sacrifice for sin by the one, primary Priest (LW 36:112-133). In Luther's writings of the early 1520s the dominant thrust of the royal priesthood was as a defence against the Pope's displacement of Christ.

After 1530, the problem for the Reformers was not so much the papal priests, but having enough evangelical ministers, and these are treated in the articles V, XIV, and XXVIII of the *Augsburg Confession*, and well as in the *Apology* and the *Treatise*.

The *Book of Concord* also reflects Luther's use of 1 Peter 2:9. In the Treatise (69-72) the *Book of Concord* makes its only quotation of it, to support the fact that Christians may not be deprived of having pastors because of the Pope's unwillingness to allow anyone except those ordained by Catholic bishops to offer the sacrifice of the Mass. Melancthon argued that the Pope might not locate the making of pastors and bishops solely in himself. The laity was free from such sacerdotal

tyranny. The keys had been given to the church, and the church alone had the right of electing and ordaining ministers. Clearly, however, the Treatise did not advocate preaching and administration of the Sacraments by laymen on the basis of 1 Peter 2:9. That God's chosen people, His royal priesthood, His holy nation, His own special people, declare the wonderful deeds of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvellous light does not authorise them all to preach the Gospel publicly or administer the Sacraments. The passage says nothing either of the Office of the Keys or of the Office of the Holy Ministry.