

Consensus

Volume 20

Issue 1 *A Ministry Miscellany*

Article 2

5-1-1994

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Recommended Citation

Stortz, Martha Ellen (1994) "By the Laying on of Hands and by Prayer: An Analysis of Power in the Rite of Ordination," *Consensus*: Vol. 20 : Iss. 1 , Article 2.

Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol20/iss1/2>

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“By the Laying on of Hands and by Prayer”: An Analysis of Power in the Rite of Ordination

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Medieval pilgrims walked the labyrinth in the cathedral at Chartres in place of a journey to the Holy Land. It was safer than pilgrimage; it was also more certain. All paths led to the center. Theseus would have wandered for days in the maze on Crete, stumbling only onto paths that ended in empty corners; were it not for Ariadne's thread, he would have slain the Minotaur and starved without finding center or beginning or end. The difference between a labyrinth and a maze is this: in a maze, there are dead-ends and cul-de-sacs; in a labyrinth, all paths lead to the center.

Ministry: A Doctrinal Point of Entry

When Lutheran theologians have turned to discuss a doctrine of ministry, they have constructed elaborate dogmatic mazes. Some, thinking they have stumbled into a labyrinth, proclaim prematurely that they have arrived at the center: a central doctrine or passage in Luther or the Confessions toward which every path points. Others admit freely they are in a maze of polemical texts, written for and against various and sundry audiences. Yet, these argue, there are some threads of doctrine which, like Ariadne's, will lead one out of the maze of rhetoric and into the Reformer's key insights. Finally, a stolid few, unafraid of chaos, post a sign at the beginning of their inquiries: PERMANENT CONSTRUCTION ZONE/PROCEED WITH CAUTION. For this last craggy crew of scholars, the best that can be done is to document the divergences.

The problem is this: ministry, one of the most pressing issues to the Lutheran churches today, receives scant attention in the Confessions and at times contradictory emphases

in Luther himself. Edgar Carlson notes: "There is surprisingly little about the office of the ministry in the Confessions, and where they do treat of it, the discussion of the subject is almost always incidental to the main theme." The controversy which *was* at the heart of the Confessions, in his interpretation, is "the Word versus the ministry".¹ In Rome, he continues, the ministry presided over the Word; in Wittenberg, the Word presided over the ministry.

John Reumann concurs: "... the doctrine of ministry *cannot be called a major item* in Reformation controversy with Rome."² This relative inattention is compounded by the fact that church structure and organization of the office of the ministry were then and continue to be considered *adiaphora*. Moreover, the church and its ministries are always in the process of reforming, *semper reformanda*. Himself caught in this process of constant reform and revision, Luther reluctantly composed an order for ordination and then did not publish the one he composed.³ The resultant diversity of practices in diverse situations derived from the freedom of the Gospel. Everything, including ministry, followed from the Word of God. Everything, including ministry, was always in the process of reforming.⁴

The problem was that Luther and the Confessions did not often make clear the connections between the Word of God and the ordering of the ministry, and when they did, the connections were not univocal—often, even in the same treatise! Moreover, the process of reforming was entirely in God's hands, not in human heads. Luther's treatise *To the Christian Nobility* is the favorite source for two dominant and seemingly contradictory theories:⁵

1) The first, a delegation theory, holds that the Word of God creates the priesthood of all believers. To this priesthood is given the office of the ministry, which the priesthood of all believers then delegates to certain of its members for the sake of good order. From this perspective, the office of ordained ministry has its authority "from below", i.e., from the delegation of the universal priesthood.

2) The second, a divine institution theory, holds that the Word of God creates the office of the ordained ministry. This means that God has instituted the office for the mission of the church.

From this perspective, the office of ordained ministry has its authority “from above”, i.e., from the divine institution of God alone.

To study the history of these two theories on the office of ordained ministry is to study the history of Lutheranism itself. From the Reformation to the present theologians, historians, and scholars have differed greatly on which thread leads out of the maze. They have posited various relationships between the two, which exhaust the logical possibilities of relationships that may obtain between any two entities.

At times a relationship of *superordination/subordination* prevails, with one or the other position dominant. Lutheran orthodoxy tended to emphasize the theory of divine institution, buttressing it further with scriptural proof. Pietism pressed for the theory of delegation, subordinating the office of the ministry to the universal priesthood of all believers. Lutheranism on the continent of North America has been an at-times heated conversation between the two perspectives.⁶

Brian Gerrish posits a relationship of tension, or *mutual exclusion*, between the two theories, pointing to a single sentence in Luther’s treatise “On the Councils and the Church” which supports both. There Luther argues the need for pastors and preachers to minister “for the sake of, and in the name of, the Church, but still more [*viel mehr aber*] because of the institution of Christ.” Gerrish summons the German *viel mehr aber* to argue “a definite bias toward the idea of divine institution”.⁷ An acknowledged tension is resolved in favor of the divine institution theory.

Lowell C. Green posits a relationship of *development* between the two theories. In the heady days of early reform, Luther posits a clear preference for the delegation theory, emphasizing in his writings until 1525 the priesthood of all believers as the source of authority for the office of ordained ministry. Around 1525, however, and with peasants’ unrest and enthusiasts’ fervor, he shifts toward a preference for the divine institution of the office of ordained ministry.⁸

Finally, Robert H. Fischer, arguing against both Gerrish’s and Green’s interpretations, rejects relationships of *mutual exclusion* and *development* and himself posits a different relationship between the delegation and the divine institution theories: *both are related to a third*. That third party is God,

and Fischer elaborates: “The authority of the ordained minister is neither independent of the God-instituted church, nor derived from the humanly administered church, local or otherwise. God does his work through men, but he retains the sovereignty before which both the whole body of the church and its clergy must bow.”⁹ The dominant metaphor, then, is the triangle: both the universal priesthood and the clergy are related to *each other* through their relationship to the one God sovereign to *both*.

Superordination/subordination, mutual exclusion, development or displacement, two entities related to each other through their mutual relationship to a third: these options almost exhaust the logical possibilities of relating any two entities, including the delegation and the divine institution theories of the office of ordained ministry. When Lutherans turn to discuss the doctrine of ministry, they inevitably wander into the maze of logical possibilities, textual warrants, and scriptural arguments. Doctrinal discussions, so waged, take logic as their arbiter and attend to the rules established by that universe of discourse: coherence, consistency, and organization.

But I would like to suggest a different point of entry into the discussion of ministry in the Lutheran churches. Rather than starting from a doctrine, I propose we start with a rite. Rather than asking: what did Luther and the Confessions say about ministry? I propose instead the question: what do we say we are doing when we ordain? Rather than examining treatises and propositions, I propose that we examine rites and rubrics. Rather than raising the questions of coherence and consistency, I propose that we attend to questions of power.

At the outset, I need to distinguish between the rite as it is written and the rite as it is enacted.¹⁰ The enacted rite may well be quite different from what is actually written down. The performance allows for more nuance and complexity than the text. But for the sake of simplicity, and because this article too is a text, I will limit myself to the text of the rite found in the *Occasional Services Book* (1982), with attention to two of its Reformation antecedents.¹¹

Ministry: A Ritual Point of Entry¹²

Before entering the text of the rite in more detail, it is critical to lay bare two sets of assumptions: 1) our own assumptions

about the relationship between ritual and doctrine in general; and 2) our assumptions about ritual in particular.

First: what are our assumptions about the relationship between ritual and doctrine in general? Would we be expecting to find definitive ritual confirmation for either the delegation or the divine institution theory? Would we be expecting to find in the rite of ordination itself the thread of Ariadne which would lead us out of the maze of scholarly debate on the Lutheran doctrine of ministry? Ritual theorist David Kertzer cautions against a too-easy assumption that rituals are public translations of uniformly held private beliefs.¹³ Private beliefs may differ wildly. In the ritual of ordination under investigation, the private beliefs of the group witnessing and participating in the rite may run the gamut between the “from below” theory of delegation to the “from above” theory of divine institution—with several variants in between that not even the systematicians have dreamt up! Rather than homogenizing these various beliefs and interpretations, rituals create “solidarity without consensus”, presenting symbols and actions which may be variously interpreted. Ritual action is less a routinization of belief, than it is an arena for the enactment of a whole variety of beliefs.

We would do well to disabuse ourselves of the desire to find in the rite of ordination itself a clear ritual support for any one of the advanced scholarly arguments for the Lutheran doctrine of the ministry, whether “from below”, “from above”, or from any stray place in between.

Second: what are our assumptions about ritual in particular? A cursory review of ritual theory reveals some interesting and common commitments among sociologists and anthropologists writing on ritual. Peter L. Berger argues that the symbol systems embedded in ritual practice function as “shield against terror”.¹⁴ David Kertzer elaborates that “terror” as fear of chaos and argues that it is through ritual actions that “we confront the experiential chaos that envelops us and create order.”¹⁵ A recent book attempts to liberate ritual from its almost exclusive association with magical or religious rites and examine its presence in secular ceremonies as well. Editors Sally Falk Moore and Barbara Myerhoff acknowledge that the social life itself moves “somewhere between the imaginary extremes of absolute order, and absolute chaotic conflict and

anarchic improvisation.” Yet, they locate ritual in the ordering and structuring side of social life:

Every ceremony is par excellence a dramatic statement against indeterminacy in some field of human affairs. Through order, formality, and repetition it seeks to state that the cosmos and social world, or some particular small part of them are orderly and explicable and for the moment fixed.... Ritual is a declaration of form *against* indeterminacy....¹⁶

Victor Turner juxtaposes the structuring side of the social world with anti-structure, or *communitas*. Moreover, he defines the pilgrimage on which ritual embarks as always a journey from structure into anti-structure, or *communitas*, and back again: “... men are released from structure into communitas only to return to structure revitalized by their experience of communitas. What is certain is that no society can function adequately without this dialectic.”¹⁷ Here is a universal, totalizing theory of ritual (“no society can function adequately without this dialectic”) with structure as its goal. Mary Collins expresses the same with lapidary simplicity: “... ritual functions to master the chaotic and to disclose good order.”¹⁸

The values in these explanatory universes are clear: unity, order, structure, purity, indivisibility. Plurality, chaos, multivocality, heterogeneity are negative qualities—to be avoided at all costs. Blatant is the assumption that ritual begins and ends in the landscape of structure, with a brief foray into chaos. But what if chaos, plurality, polyphony could be entertained as positive values? What if we could admit and embrace the ambient chaos of our doctrines, our histories, our daily lives, beginning and ending our rituals in indeterminacy? I suspect the practice of ritual contains far more plurality, latent chaos, and even latent ambiguity than these thoughtful and above all orderly scholars can admit in their haste to participate in the rituals of academic explanation.

Moreover, the practice of ritual may even harbor elements of resistance and subversion, which are not even acknowledged in these explanations of ritual.¹⁹ After all, the explanation of ritual that emerges above begs the questions: *whose* idea of order? *whose* idea of structure? *whose* idea of unity?

I would like to suggest an understanding of ritual as symbolic behavior that is socially standardized and repetitive, but

that in its effect may not resolve conflict, but open up ambiguity. This means that the rite of ordination, so far from ignoring, or glossing over, or resolving tensions in various understandings of ministry, might simply present the ambiguity.

I suggest an understanding of ritual that in its effect may not order chaos, but present it quite openly—even embrace it.²⁰ This means that approaching the rite of ordination for a single and univocal expression of ministry would guarantee disappointment. Rather, there expressed is a polyphony of voices speaking various truths about ministry, probably fairly true to parish experience, but hard to press into the linear demands of a scholar's argument.

In sum, I suggest an understanding of ritual that attends to power relationships publicly communicated.²¹ With mention of the word "power", I turn to a word frequently used in discussions about authority and leadership—but little understood. An emerging literature on the subject begins to distinguish between various types of power: power-over, or the power of authority, domination, or coercion; power-within or charismatic power; and power-with, or coactive power.²²

The first form of power, power-over, is the power of domination or control, assuming a relationship of superordination or subordination between two or more parties. This kind of power has usually been interpreted as oppressive, but it is also the power upon which infants and young children depend, as they begin to grow in a new and uncharted world. It is the power exercised by institutions in and around which we conduct our lives. It can often constrain, but more often organizes and orchestrates complex social relationships. It is the power possessed by teachers whose mastery of a subject attracts to them students or the power possessed by doctors whose competence and reputation sends them patients. Finally, it is the power invested in a minister at ordination, particularly if participants interpret ministry as divinely instituted. Certainly, this kind of power can be used to abuse, to overwhelm, or to impress, but dismissing it on the basis of these very real abuses obscures its important role in our lives.

A second form of power is power-within, or charismatic power. This is the power of a prophet, a popular leader, or a gifted speaker, and it often operates outside institutional structures and sanctions. It is the power that was edited out of the

emerging institutions in the early church, as we see from various warnings against "false prophets" and "wandering teachers". It is the power of a Teresa of Avila and all those who "dream dreams" and "see visions" (Joel 2:28), necessitating close institutional surveillance in the form of numerous spiritual directors, who were delegated to discern from whence the visions and dreams came. It is the power of a Martin Luther who, through his rhetoric and his convictions, initiated much-sought reforms within the medieval church. It is the power originally invoked in the rite of ordination in the words of an ancient hymn: "*Veni Sancti Spiritus*" / "Come Holy Spirit".

But lest this power be too quickly embraced as antidote to the oppressions of coercive power, it must be acknowledged that charismatic power, too, has the potential to enslave. Its unique form of oppression is *impression*, in the guise of innocent devotees who turn their wills over to hypnotic and dominating leaders. Names like Adolph Hitler and Jim Jones illumine the dangers. Certainly, this form of power too has enormous destructive potential. But, used appropriately, it also has place in even the most mundane aspects of our lives.

A third and final form of power is power-with, coactive power or the power of friendship. This is the power of a grass-roots movement or a community organization, the power of the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, the nuclear freeze movement. It is the power of a treatise like *The Rule of St. Benedict*, which functioned to create a workable community among a group of people who probably had very little in common. It is the power Jesus signalled to that motley group he called his disciples, as he told them: "I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father" (John 15:15). It is the power exercised by a congregation to call its leaders, present in the rite of ordination and articulated in the understanding of ministry as a delegation of the priesthood of all believers.

Yet, lest coactive power be too easily embraced as the corrective to the abuses, now acknowledged, in both dominative and charismatic power, this form of power too has its abuses. Long a strategy of the feminist movement due to its belief that *any* exercise of power was the exercise of domination, the

coactive or consensual power many groups in fact practised led often to a personal, structureless politics, an inability to recognize very real differences that existed among women, and a terminal preoccupation with process, which thwarted any progress toward goals.²³ This final form of power too has the potential for disaster, but at its best and in its place, this form of power has the ability to empower and to focus the ministries of many.

As a ritual activity so understood, the rite of ordination may be an induction into the ambiguity surrounding Lutheran understandings of ministry, a kind of cautionary note on which to embark in ordained ministry. So far from opting for one or another of these various forms of power, the rite of ordination presents all three in a dynamic equilibrium, more like an Alexander Calder mobile, always in motion, each part delicately balanced against the weight of the whole, than the linear thrust of a logical argument.

Analysis of the Rite of Ordination

But to the text of the rite itself! Luther states quite strongly that "One is born to be a priest, one becomes a minister."²⁴ For him ordination is accomplished by the laying on of hands and by prayer.²⁵ It is worth repeating that he resisted composing an order for ordination and did not immediately publish the one he composed. Luther's *Table Talk* contains a brief account of an ordination at which he himself presided.²⁶ This account places the rite within the context of a Sunday worship service, probably located immediately after the sermon and before the communion. The setting and location both express a dynamic of coactive power, power-with. Ordaining in the context of common worship, rather than in a special assembly of other clerical colleagues, emphasizes the power of the community.

The structure of the rite is as follows:

Reading of scriptures: Acts 13:3; Acts 20:29; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:7-9

Prayer

Laying on of hands and the Lord's Prayer

Concluding prayer

Hymn: "Now Pray We all the Holy Ghost"

is actually a conglomerate of codices from Hamburg, Freiburg, and Wittenberg. The structure of this rite is slightly more elaborate than the previous one.

Examination of the candidate, which may take place on the day of ordination or the day prior

Hymn: "Veni Sancte Spiritus"/"Come Holy Spirit"

Collect of the Holy Spirit

Reading of scriptures: 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Acts 20:28-31

Admonition

Laying on of hands and the Lord's Prayer

Prayer, which "explains more fully the three parts of the Lord's Prayer"²⁷

Charge to the ordinand

Blessing

Hymn: "Now Let Us Pray to the Holy Ghost"

Consecration of the communion

At the core of both rites is the laying on of hands and prayer. It is important to note that the prayer prescribed for these early rites is not a special prayer, reserved for stewards of the mysteries; rather, it is the Lord's Prayer, the prayer which Christ gave to all people, that they might know "what and how to pray... both the way and the words".²⁸ Of this prayer, Luther writes elsewhere: "Thus there is no nobler prayer to be found on earth, for it has the excellent testimony that God loves to hear it."²⁹ The Lord's Prayer is a prayer of all the people, one which the head of the family should teach to the household. The use of this prayer in the setting of ordination emphasizes the power of the community, coactive power or power-with.

It is not clear from either of these orders *who* prayed the prayer: the ordainer or the entire congregation. But it is clear from the Large and Small Catechisms *whose* prayer this is: the Lord's Prayer belongs to the whole of Christendom. Finally, it is worth asking of the current rite of ordination: why is the Lord's Prayer nowhere to be found?³⁰

But ordination is accomplished by prayer *and* by the laying on of hands. In both rites, balancing this expression of the power of the community in prayer is the laying on of hands, and this was done by a clergyperson. In Reformation enactments of these early rites, that person was often Luther himself. However, in neither of these early rites does the commentary suggest that this action is open to the laity. In this simple

act of the laying on of hands, another kind of power is communicated: power-over, in this situation, an expression of the authority of the institution itself.

There is a final power present in both rites: charismatic power or power-within. Obviously, any candidate for the position has shown requisite gifts for ministry. These gifts of the candidate are specifically named in the second rite as part of the admonition. But a key emphasis in both rites is the naming and invoking of the source of these and all gifts: the Holy Spirit. The titles of the hymns suggested for the liturgy resonate with the Spirit's presence: "Now Pray We All the Holy Ghost", "Come Holy Spirit", and "Now Let us Pray to the Holy Ghost". Moreover, the second rite specifically names the collect of the Holy Spirit as the prayer of the day. It is critical to invoke and acknowledge the presence of the Spirit, source and sustainer of all gifts, in these rites of ordination. This emphasis points to charismatic power, power-within.

In spite of, or perhaps because of, Luther's reluctance to publish a rite of ordination, by 1535 Elector John Frederick set forth a standard order for the examination, calling, and ordination of candidates, which has been elaborated and altered down to this day. In his *Commentary on the Occasional Services*, Philip H. Pfatteicher traces the history of the present rite and delineates its various parts:³¹

Presentation

Address

Examination

Prayers

Hymn: "Veni Creator Spiritus"/"Come Creator Spirit"

Thanksgiving with the laying on of hands

Giving of the stole

Exhortation: 1 Tim. 6:11-12, Acts 20:28, 1 Pet. 5:2-4, 1 Cor.

4:1-2

Blessing

Questions to the congregation

The peace

Offering

Here again, the three forms of power emerge. Unlike the Roman rite of ordination, this rite gives prominence to the congregation's role, strong evidence of a power that is embedded in the priesthood of all believers.³² It is important to stress

that clergy both participate in and serve this universal priesthood; thus, this power is a power they share with the congregation. The *presentation*, which opens the rite, is usually made by a layperson, and she testifies to the candidate's readiness in a string of verbs which suggests the role that the universal priesthood plays in the rite: preparing, examining, certifying, and calling this person to the office of ministry.³³

The *address* immediately following is spoken by the presiding minister and is three-fold in character. It emphasizes, not the special, clergy-only privileges which will fall to the new minister, but rather custody of those common actions which mark the corporate life of the universal priesthood: the forgiveness of sins, baptism, and the eucharist. Again, the focus is on the corporate life; the ritual gesture, one of coactive power.

Now attention turns to the candidate, as the presiding minister begins the *examination*. In addition to custody of the common actions definitive of the church, the minister is bound to four other sets of practices: recognition of the divine call to a ministry of Word and Sacrament; acceptance of the creeds and confessions; commitment to certain ways of living; and faithful witness in the world. These are questions appropriately posed by one who has her/himself had to make answer. Together, they express the collegial character of ordained ministry and the institutional quality of the rite. Particularly, the affirmation that "the Church's call is God's call" in the first question buttresses the argument that ministry is indeed a divine institution. These moments present a power-over that stems ultimately from God and is articulated throughout the church.

The *Prayers* that follow at this point are prayers of intercession. Ordinarily, this service would follow immediately after the sermon or the sermon hymn and lead immediately into the liturgy of the Eucharist. Again, the prayers are *for* the whole people of God and *from* the whole people of God. In actual structure, these prayers abridge the broad-ranging Prayer of the Church, asking special blessing from the people for all those in the office of the ministry and in particular the candidate before them, but also for the world, for all those who suffer, and for all the saints. The space for other intercessions opens this prayer to the whole people of God and invites concerns large, small, and entirely unrelated to the particular

occasion of ordination. The power expressed here points back to the gathered community and the whole people of God, an articulation of coactive power or power-with.

The following *hymn* invokes the source of all gifts, the Holy Spirit. As noted above, this infuses the service with a spirit of charismatic power, the indwelling power of the Spirit.

The central prayer of the rite is the *Thanksgiving*, which is spoken along with the *laying on of hands*. The prayer opens in conscious imitation of the Great Thanksgiving in the eucharistic service and the thanksgiving in the baptismal rite. Its words echo 1 Corinthians 12:4–11, which constellates a variety of gifts around the Giver. Each member of the body possesses her/his own unique gift, and all are “activated by one and the same Spirit”.³⁴ Again, the focus is on a shared power, power-with, inspired and activated by the indwelling Spirit, power-within. The gestures which accompany this prayer, however, are gestures open in the rubrics only to presiding minister and other ordained clergy, as they *lay hands* on the candidate. This is a clear indication of the power that accrues to that community within a community, a power over the larger community, exercised by a smaller community in faithful, Spirit-formed and Spirit-informed leadership.

The next part of the rite, *the giving of the stole*, the *exhortation*, and the *blessing*, is a conversation among the holders of the office. The stole is given as a sign of the work attending that office; the *exhortation* consists of a series of biblical passages—interestingly, none of them from the Gospels!—which attach to the office. The first, 1 Timothy 6:11–12, is an imperative toward the virtues of faith: righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness. The second, Acts 20:28, describes the guardianship which *both* the pastor *and* the people have of the church. The duty is not one that the pastor does on behalf of the people, but rather one that falls to both parties. The third, 1 Peter 5:2–4, details how the ordained minister should exercise the power and authority vested in her/him: “not by constraint, but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock.” In fact, these particular exhortations are important curbs to any exercise of power-over. In this setting, these words both acknowledge the very real presence of this kind of power in the office and caution against its abuse. The fourth,

1 Corinthians 4:1-2, depicts the ordained ministry as one of servanthship and stewardship and depicts the ordained minister as one who is trustworthy. The final exhortation comes neither from scripture nor Luther's early rites; it is, however, simple good sense and a prescription for potential pastoral burn-out. This last petition probably ought to be recited daily in every pastor's study, in particular the last sentence: "And be of good courage, for God has called you, and your labor in the Lord is not in vain." The words contain both comfort and challenge. Even as the discouragements of ministry are here laid bare, so is the rather severe reminder that not *all* labor in the office may be labor "in the Lord".

The *blessing* which follows, a paraphrase of Hebrews 13:20-21, again is a reminder of the sources of all powers, "the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus", and Jesus Christ, identified here as "the great shepherd" not of all shepherds, as has been the obvious imagery of the prior exhortations, but as "the great shepherd of the sheep". Any tendencies toward clerical smugness in a section of the rite which consists of a conversation among clergy are hereby undercut by reference to the shepherd, before whom all of us are mere "sheep".

The final part of the rite, the *questions to the congregation* and the *sharing of the peace*, moves power again from the collegium of ministers into the body of believers gathered for witness and support. They are asked explicitly to receive the candidate as a servant of Christ, and they are asked for their ongoing prayers. With affirmative responses to these two questions, the minister is then acclaimed as having "Christ's authority to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments, serving God's people." Those espousing a divine institution theory of ministry might leap on the acclamation as ritual support for their side. Yet, the acclamation is contexted in a series of questions and affirmations on the part of the congregation, without which the minister could not be acclaimed. The balance of powers, between the power-over of "Christ's authority" and the ritual exhortations posed by clergy to clergy and the power-with of the congregational affirmations, is important in the whole choreography of the rite itself.

Conclusion

If we focus on a doctrinal explanation of Lutheran ministry, we find ourselves in a maze of competing interpretations, each one pushing in a different direction as the only way out of a hermeneutical morass. One scholar argues for a divine institution theory of ministry; another, for a delegation of ministry from the priesthood of all believers; a third, for a tension between the two theories; a fourth creatively posits that the two are related only when they are related to a third, nothing less than the Word of God itself. All cite cogent and persuasive evidence from the annals of the Reformation.

If we focus instead on a ritual expression of Lutheran ministry, we find ourselves looking at vectors of power—or, better, vectors of powers. Rather than arguing for a single doctrinal explanation of Lutheran ministry and presenting a single vector of power, the rite of ordination calls for a far more nuanced and ambiguous understanding of the office. The text of the rite is a delicate choreography of various forms of power. Now there is the power-over of “Christ’s authority” and the gestures of laying on hands, which is enacted by others who share it. At other points in the rite, however, there is the coactive and consensual power, power-with, of a congregation, as it presents for ordination a candidate whom it attests has been “prepared, examined, certified, and called” to ministry, as it affirms its support and on-going prayer for the candidate, and as it names its responsibility along with the minister for guardianship of the Word of God itself. Finally, there is the charismatic power, power-within, of nothing less than the Spirit of God, source of all gifts, whose participation is invoked in prayer and hymn and whose indwelling presence is necessary for the on-going work of the church.

No single power dominates. Rather, like a Calder mobile, each arm of power balances the others in a single aesthetic work. Without the dynamic equilibrium between the various parts the piece would cease all movement; with it, however, the piece is always moving. Perhaps a mobile is a good cipher for parish life: constructed with a creative tension among the various parts that keeps everything in constant motion!

The rite of ordination is instruction in each of these forms of power and induction into the tension that exists among them,

necessary to the on-going movement and delight of the whole. Rather like the Trinity itself... and that's not a bad analogy for ministry in the least.³⁵

Notes

- 1 Edgar Carlson, "The Doctrine of the Ministry in the Confessions," *Lutheran Quarterly*, 15/2 (May 1963) 119–120. Carlson, acknowledging the risk of oversimplification, observes: "In Rome the word was an instrument through which the ministry functioned; in Luther the ministry was instrumental to the Word" (120).
- 2 John Reumann, "Ordained Minister and Layman in Lutheranism," in *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue IV: Eucharist and Ministry* (New York: USA National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation, 1970) 228. This article was also published as the first chapter, "The Ministries of the Ordained and of the Lay in Lutheranism," in Reumann's *Ministries Examined: Laity, Clergy, Women, and Bishops in a Time of Change* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987) 25–77.
- 3 See Ulrich S. Leupold's introduction to Luther's rite, "The Ordination of Ministers of the Word (1539)," in *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press: 1963) 53:122-123 [afterwards referred to as LW].
- 4 Reumann notes that, not only the church, but also the ministry, was always in the process of reform: "The ministry of sinning saints must be ever reformed; *semper reformanda* applies more so here than almost anywhere else in Christendom." See his supplementary comments to his 1970 article cited above in his book *Ministries Examined*, 64–77, especially 77.
- 5 Noted drily by Brian A. Gerrish, "Priesthood and Ministry in the Theology of Luther," *Church History*, 34 (1965) 415. Gerrish delineates these two theories, designating them "from below" (the delegation from the priesthood of all believers) and "from above" (the divine institution).
- 6 John Reumann chronicles this history in his article "Ordained Minister and Layman in Lutheranism," especially 242–263.
- 7 Gerrish, "Priesthood and Ministry," 414.
- 8 Lowell C. Green, "Change in Luther's Doctrine of the Ministry," *Lutheran Quarterly*, 18/2 (May 1966) 173–183. But see Robert H. Fischer's vigorous arguments against Green's interpretation in his article "Another Look at Luther's Doctrine of the Ministry," *Lutheran Quarterly*, 18/3 (August 1966) especially 260–267.
- 9 Fischer, "Another Look," 271. Exclusive language his.
- 10 I thank the Rev. Donna Seamone for pointing out this distinction and reminding me that the actual enactment of a rite might be quite different from the guiding text. Dr. Michael Aune suggested that the enactment of rites, recorded and analyzed on videotape, would tell a great deal more about transactions of power. This kind of research has not yet been done on Lutheran rites, but begs for investigation.

- 11 *The Occasional Services* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982). For a similar analysis of the *text* of a rite, see Mary Collins, OSB, *Worship: Renewal to Practice* (Washington, DC: The Pastoral Press, 1987) especially ch. 9, "The Public Language of Ministry". She is particularly interested in examining the phenomenon of status orientation in the rites, but notes how language establishes relationships within community: "... the liturgical texts themselves will raise the human question of ordering and community, and the function of language in the process of ordering" (137). Collins further regards the rite of ordination as a "rite of passage" in both its structure and function, a fascinating notion which lies, unhappily, beyond the scope of this article.
- 12 I adopt Ron Grimes' distinction between "ritual" and "rite", and use "ritual" as the general category within which specific "rites" fall. See his *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in its Practice, Essays on its Theory* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1990) ch. 1.
- 13 Kertzer felicitously describes the commonality that ritual creates as "solidarity without consensus". See his discussion of the relationship between ritual and belief in *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) 67-69. For a more colorful demonstration of vastly different interpretations of a single rite, see Michael Taussig's narration of the various histories surrounding the Virgin of Caloto, or the Nina Maria, in the Andean foothills of Colombia, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987) 188-208. Alongside the "official history" are various other histories of the image, and Taussig comments: "In complete contradiction of the official history, the most common oral version, held by blacks, whites, and Indians alike, holds that the Spaniards robbed the image from the Indians and that it is a quintessentially Indian icon. This encompasses several different accounts with different political implications" (195).
- 14 Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1967) 22.
- 15 Kertzer, *Ritual*, 4.
- 16 Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff (eds.), *Secular Ritual* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1977) 3, 17. Emphasis theirs.
- 17 Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969) 129. Exclusive language his.
- 18 Mary Collins, OSB, *Worship: Renewal to Practice* (Washington, DC: The Pastoral Press, 1987) 171.
- 19 Kertzer's judgment that ritual has a "creative potential" but a decidedly "conservative bias", has less to do with actual practices of rituals, than with the fact that Kertzer in observing them always expects to find order and, if not consensus, then at least solidarity (Kertzer, *Ritual*, 12). He is not looking for, and therefore does not see, what Michael Taussig

calls “the predominance of the left hand of anarchy”. See Taussig, *Shamanism*, 442. Taussig’s work with rites of healing among shamans in the Colombian rainforests cannot assume Turner’s neat paradigms, because he is working with peasants, people whose lives begin and end in chaos and for whom the only hand of healing is “the left hand of anarchy”—and certainly not *someone else’s* idea of order.

- 20 See Michael Taussig’s interpretation of *yage* nights in the Putumayo highlands of Colombia. Replicating in his prose the chaos of these healing rituals, Taussig writes “the *yage* nights pose awkwardness of fit, breaking-up and scrambling, the allegorical rather than the symbolist mode, the predominance of the left hand of anarchy—as in Artaud’s notion of theater of cruelty with its poetic language of the senses, language that breaks open the conventions of language and the signifying function of signs through its chaotic mingling of danger and humor, ‘liberating signs,’ Artaud said, in a disorder that brings us ever closer to chaos.” See Taussig, *Shamanism*, 442.
- 21 “Ritual is employed to communicate power relations not just among the political elite, but between the powerful and the powerless as well.” Kertzer, *Ritual*, 31.
- 22 The typology is derived from Starhawk, *Truth or Dare: Encounters with Power, Authority, and Mystery* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987) 9ff. Yet Starhawk follows the lead of many feminists, dismissing power-over as always oppressive and entirely immoral. She embraces power-within and power-with as liberatory forms of power, yet ignores their own potential for misuse and abuse. For an analysis of both uses and abuses of these three forms of power, see my *PastorPower* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993) ch. 1–2. Another excellent text on the use of power in ministry is Karen Lebacqz’s book, *Professional Ethics: Power and Paradox* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985).
- 23 The phenomenon is chronicled in the introduction to Nancy Hartsock’s *Money, Sex, and Power* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1983) 2. Hartsock puts it succinctly: “Feminist avoidance of exercising power took a variety of forms in the early 1970s. Most typically, it resulted in the adoption of a kind of personal, structureless politics; a widespread opposition to leadership; an insistence on working collectively; and an emphasis on process, often to the exclusion of getting things done” (1–2).
- 24 LW 40:18.
- 25 It is difficult to appreciate the significance of this gesture of the laying on of hands, without rummaging through its historical practices. As Mary Collins shows nicely in her study of the development of status orientation in Roman rites of ordination, gestures with *the hands* conferred rank and status. In her description of the fifth century Western document *Statuta Antiqua Ecclesiae*, which catalogued ceremonial aspects of various rites, note the recurrence of the noun “hand” and the verb “to hand”, note *whose* hands are being discussed, and finally,

- note *what is borne* in the hands: "The hands of one bishop and many presbyters are fitting for the empowerment of a new presbyter; for a deacon, the hands of one bishop only. The sub-deacon received no such spiritual empowerment from episcopal hands. Instead, the bishop and the archdeacon hand over to his care cup and plate and oil and water cruets for the offering. The bishop instructs an acolyte but hands nothing over; the archdeacon hands him lamp and oil. The bishop only hands the exorcist the manual or exorcism; but he gives him authority to lay his own hands on the possessed. The bishop hands the lector the book; he hands the doorkeeper the keys to the church building. A presbyter empowers the psalmist with a word of command to bring song and life into harmony." Mary Collins, *Worship*, 164.
- 26 LW 53:123, ft. 1; WA, TR5, 112, No. 5376; and John W. Doberstein (tran.), *Minister's Prayer Book* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959) 211–212.
- 27 See this expanded prayer, LW 53:126.
- 28 See Luther's explanation of the Lord's Prayer in "The Large Catechism," in Theodore G. Tappert (ed.), *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959) 420.
- 29 Ibid. 423.
- 30 The Lord's Prayer is spoken at the end of the Great Thanksgiving; presumably, there is no desire to repeat it here.
- 31 Philip H. Pfatteicher, *Commentary on the Occasional Services* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983) 176–181, 200–201.
- 32 "The congregation has no role in the Roman Catholic rite," notes Philip H. Pfatteicher, *Commentary*, 181. The point is illustrated more graphically in Mary Collins' treatment of the Roman rite. She notes the "paradox" in the rite of two role models: the elevated status of the levitical high priest and the inferior status of a servant. Her analysis focuses on the former, and her study of "status orientation in the language of ministry" is about the *elevated* status of the priest. See her essay, "The Public Language of Ministry," *Worship*, 137, 139.
- 33 The Rev. Donna Seamone again called attention to the disparity between the rite written (the text of the rite) and the rite enacted. The *text* assumes that the rite will be conducted in the context of congregational worship; the rite of ordination, however, is often enacted at synodical assemblies, in which case, the presenter would be the secretary of the synod, usually a pastor, and not a layperson. How do the various *contexts* in which this rite is enacted change the negotiations of power therein?
- 34 1 Corinthians 12:11. In juxtaposition to this image of a wild array of gifts clustered around the central activating Spirit, like spokes around a wheel, is another image in the same chapter of Paul's letter. Here Paul orders the gifts, creating a hierarchy of ministries: "And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of

leadership, various kinds of tongues" (1 Corinthians 12:28). Scripture appears no more univocal than Luther or the Confessions... but perhaps calls for a similar kind of balance.

35 I would like to thank my colleagues, the Rev. Donna Seamone and Dr. Michael B. Aune, for both a careful reading and constructive critique of an earlier draft of this piece.