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# Ministries Examined: Laity, Clergy, Women, and Bishops in a Time of Change

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"Ritual and Care for the Individual" deals with the function and use of ritual in situations of individual need and counselling. Topics treated include prayer as ritual, private blessing, private confession and absolution, rites of healing, rituals with the dying and grieving, ritual with the mentally impaired, and ritual with those who have psychological problems.

Her final chapter, "Ritual and Care for the World", discusses the use of ritual as it interfaces with the world outside the church, and ritual as a force in the world for justice and social change. After dealing with the tension between liturgical eschatology and liturgy's inherent conservatism, she presents some "radical" uses of liturgy which have potential for encouraging public change: the Maundy Thursday footwashing liturgy, liturgical preaching for justice, images of justice in holy communion and baptism, secular and public liturgies (such as Thanksgiving Day, Mother's Day, and Memorial Day), liturgical tensions within institutional chaplaincies, materials which enter into liturgy (bread, wine, church architecture and furnishing), the Prayer of the Church, and inclusive language.

Ramshaw has produced a well-written, readable, and useful book. She establishes her theological premises, and then offers numerous practical and timely applications of the usefulness of relating ritual functions to pastoral care. For those who know Willimon's *Worship as Pastoral Care*, but who hunger for more practical applications of his thesis, Ramshaw's book will come as a welcome gift. Although her Lutheran roots are obvious throughout, she also writes from an ecumenical perspective, dealing with problems of ministry which are recognized and arise across the spectrum of the main-line churches.

Any pastor who is concerned about overcoming the separation of worship from pastoral care, and who is looking for tools with which to reconcile these two functions of ministry, will find this book a welcome addition to the shelf, not only for its treatment of liminal situations such as divorce or stillbirth, but also for its discussions of the traditional rites such as holy communion, baptism and confirmation.

Donald Nevile  
Peace Lutheran Church

## Ministries Examined

John H. P. Reumann

Augsburg Publishing House, 1987

We are indebted to Augsburg for enclosing within one volume five important contributions by this veteran Lutheran pastor, New Testament scholar, and ecumenist to our search for a better understanding and a more faithful practice of ordained ministry in the Lutheran churches of North

America. Each of the five monographs was written "on assignment" and in this volume is accompanied by "Supplementary Comments" to bring the reader up to date on subsequent developments and bibliography. A closing chapter, freshly written for the book, deals with the Lima document of the World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM), and also provides an eye-witness account of the agonies and ecstasies experienced by the ALC, the LCA, and the AELC and their commissioners over ordained and other ministries on their way to the formation of the ELCA in 1988.

Chapter one consists of a piece familiar to many of us since it was first published in 1970 in *Eucharist and Ministry: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue IV*. In it Reumann provides a very useful and balanced survey of the Lutheran understanding of ministry, ordained and lay, from the Reformation era to the present. He wisely begins by sounding two notes of caution: 1) The reformers are much better at telling us what ordained ministry isn't (they had so many entrenched abuses to counter) than they are at telling us what it is; and 2) Their prior concern was to reestablish the authority of the Word for the sake of the Gospel. Nevertheless, he does as good a job as I've seen anywhere of tracing the twin themes of "universal priesthood" and "ordained ministry instituted by Christ" from their origins in Luther, to their expressions in the Confessions, through the vagaries of European and American Lutheran history as the pendulum swung back and forth, and into our present-day understandings in the context of our ecumenical dialogues. People who haven't traveled this path before have much to learn from the clear prose of this succinct treatment.

It is hard to imagine anyone who is just beginning to get into the discussion on the ordination of women, but if you are, chapter two of Reumann's book is for you. It's also for people who have nagging doubts related to basic issues of biblical exegesis. In an appeal to other churches that do not presently ordain women, he points to our favorable Lutheran experience of it and repeats Luther's clinching argument addressed to opponents of infant baptism: it works! (LC IV, 49 ff.) Written twenty years ago, the main article retains its value as a foundational piece, and the "Supplementary Comments" update us to 1987.

Does anybody want to know how the title "bishop" was restored to North American Lutheranism, and why? Read chapter three, Reumann's interpretive piece that helped the 1980 LCA Convention to accept the title with understanding. The chapter raises a few points we need to ponder and elaborate:

<sup>1</sup> Lutherans are not bound to anyone else's definition of what a bishop is and does, not even European Lutheran versions of the office. By seeking to be true to Scriptural and Confessional principles of pastoral service to the Gospel and the church, we can strengthen our own church and make a helpful contribution to the current ecumenical ferment over how best to exercise *episcopate*.

<sup>2</sup> "A profound awareness of the realities of history has always marked Lutheran attitudes toward church order and governance," says Reumann (150). I would say rather "a profound awareness of everyone *else's*

historical realities and a profound ignorance of their own" have shaped Lutheran attitudes until very recently. My own modest effort to do something about that ignorance had an embarrassingly self-revelatory effect on far too many people (*Too Good To Miss* [Foothills Lutheran Press, 1977] 56-72). For Lutherans today a clear and humble self-understanding is crucial to our ability to be faithful to the Spirit's leading in ecumenical dialogues and endeavors, and in the life of our own growing church.

- 3 Lutherans need to keep asking how bishops can better serve the church in the spirit of Article 28 of the Augsburg Confession. What is a reasonable sized congregation for a pastoral bishop? Is the pastoral relationship enhanced or degraded by periodic re-elections? If the bishop's role is essentially pastoral (i.e., Word and Sacrament), where is his/her pulpit and altar? Reumann indicates that such issues have not yet been seriously addressed by North American Lutheranism as a whole. Indeed, the name change from president to bishop has brought them into sharp focus for the first time for most of us.

The "Teaching Office" (*magisterium*) of the church according to the New Testament and the basis for "authority" in the exercise of ministry address our attention in chapter four. Reumann's paper is a response to a much longer work by Joseph A. Fitzmyer. As he sifts through the New Testament data we have Reumann at his best. A keen analysis of *kérygma* and *didaché* leads him to conclude that "any teaching office works from the gospel as its norm" and "the gospel stands as norm over... data and influences from the contemporary sciences and from reason, nature, church traditions, and past practices [when] the church needs to speak [on] topics such as modern problems in social ethics" (172). Agreed, but we'd better be sure that the Gospel we use as norm on the basis of this New Testament insight is indeed the New Testament Gospel of power for salvation to all who believe (Romans 1:16), with all the implications Paul draws from that in Romans 8, etc. Theological sloganeering is no substitute for the Gospel in action with power to save.

A concern: somewhere between the exercise of *magisterium* by the Holy Office in Rome and attempts to exercise it by majority vote in a general assembly we need to recover a process that honours "the primacy of the gospel"; "the privileged authority of Scripture"; the responsibility for teaching shared by all members; and the work of the Spirit through Scripture, tradition and the apostolic ministry (cf. 181)—all viewed by the Lutheran-Catholic U.S. Dialogue (1978) as essential components of such a process. Reflections on how the ELCIC 1989 Saskatoon convention did and did not arrive at our "Interim Statement on Abortion" raises the issue afresh for us and challenges us to design a new and more adequate process. Reading Reumann moved me to commit some ideas to paper on this matter.

The final chapter is useful background material for gaining an understanding of the proposals to the ELCIC from its "Task Force on the Forms of Ministry" which has recently completed its assignment. This is essentially

the same assignment the ELCA gave its task force until 1994 to complete at a cost of \$1.2 million or so. Reumann provides substantial insight into BEM's understanding of the ministry of *bishops* and *pastors*, but is too close to the debates in the American merger process to throw much light on the confusion they generated around *diaconal* ministries. Those debates resulted in a stand-off, with entrenched views unable to yield new insights. I hope that the American process will be able to move ahead in a calmer environment. A member of their new Task Force, of which Reumann is the chair, on seeing the results of the work of our Task Force, said he hoped the ELCA could come up with something just as good, but he was doubtful. We'll all need some time to rethink our understanding of the biblical precedent for how apostolic ministry may be ordered in the light of circumstances to serve better the needs of the whole church and its witness in the world.

Most of the material in this book is pretty basic. But many people, both lay and ordained, need a good clear basic discussion like this.

The narrative bibliography at the end of most chapters will provide all the guidance the reader needs to explore any of these issues in greater depth.

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