

The Augsburg Confession

Article 14

Order in the Church

Every Christian, by virtue of faith in Christ has a call. The apostle Paul wrote: ***“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified” (Romans 8:28-30).*** Because of this calling, every Christian is a priest before God and possesses the office of the ministry. ***“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).*** Every Christian should exercise this priesthood in their homes, with neighbors, and in the world as witnesses of Christ. We can and should confess Christ, teach, admonish, comfort, forgive, pray, and even baptize (in case of emergencies).

But there is also a distinction between the actions of an individual Christian and the called minister of a congregation. One is done privately (not on behalf of the church) and the other is done publicly (in the name of the church). The public ministry has been established by God for the purpose of proclaiming the Word of God for the salvation of souls. It also serves to keep order within the church.

Article XIV

The Augsburg Confession states: *It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call.*

A Divine Institution

The public ministry is not a human invention, but has been established by God for the building up of His Church here on earth. In his letter to the Ephesians Paul says that it is the exalted Christ who ***“gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some***

evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-12). When he spoke to the pastors of the churches in Ephesus, Paul said: **“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28).** Notice how the apostle reveals that this call to lead the flock comes from God - the Holy Spirit!

At the same time, this divine call comes through a group of believers - a congregation. One may not just assume for himself the position of pastor, but must receive a call to do so through that congregation. Consider the practice of the early church in the Book of Acts. In Acts 1 the congregation in Jerusalem “cast lots” to determine the replacement for Judas; in Acts 6 the congregation in Jerusalem “appointed” seven men as deacons to help the apostles; and in Acts 14 Paul and Barnabas “appointed” (literally “voted” v. 23) elders in the congregations that started up on their first missionary journey.

A good example of the call from God through a congregation is the opening verses of Paul’s first missionary journey in Acts 13: **“Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away” (Acts 13:1-3).**

Who May be Called into the Public Ministry?

While a congregation has the authority to call pastors and teachers to fill its specific need, it will want to be mindful of the qualifications given by God for those in the public ministry. **“This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil” (1 Timothy 3:1-7 - see also 2 Timothy 2:24-25 and Titus 1:5-9).**

It should be noted that women are not to serve in the office of the public ministry. Scripture states that the reason for this is because of God's established order at creation: ***“Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (1 Timothy 2:11-14 - see also 1 Corinthians 14:34-35).*** This is not a culturally conditioned custom of a specific time, but rather a continuing standard God set for the sake of order from the very beginning.

This is not to say that women may not serve in other capacities within the church. There are many ways in which women can and should use their gifts in the church which do not contradict this Scriptural principle.

Ordination

Ordination is mentioned in Scripture (1 Timothy 4:14; 5:22; 2 Timothy 1:6), but it is not commanded. We observe this as an Apostolic custom, not as a command of God. Because it is connected with the Word of God and prayer, ordination surely imparts divine blessing. But ordination does not bestow a special power on the one ordained which is not given to others in the church; nor does the efficacy of the means of grace depend on ordination, as the Romanists claimed. The Word of God is effective with or without the rite of ordination.

Not Superior

The offices of the Roman Catholic Church were, from the very beginning, about power. For them the congregation was at the bottom, above them were the priests, bishops, arch-bishops, and finally the pope (who was most powerful of all). With the teaching of the Priesthood of all believers, Luther turned all this upside down. The office of the ministry (the keys) comes from God, through the church. Pastors and teachers are not superior to the members of the church, rather, they receive their position from the members of the church. The ministry is not a difference of level or power, but of office. When called ministers deal with us by Christ's command - that is, when they teach, admonish, and comfort us with the Word of God, then we should receive their instruction, admonition, and comfort as though God spoke to us Himself.

Purpose and Power

The purpose of the office of the ministry is for the public administration of the means of grace for the purpose of saving souls. We have been given the Gospel (which is to be preached) and the sacraments (which are to be administered) in order to make disciples of Christ and teach them to observe what He has commanded (Matthew 28:19-20); to edify the church of God (Ephesians 4:12); and to save lost souls (1 Timothy 4:16).

The authority of the public ministry comes from God and the power is found in His holy Word alone, not in those who minister the Word!