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## The Universal Priesthood of Believers with Luther's Comments

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THE universal priesthood of believers is the Christian Church on earth, the Communion of Saints, which Jesus Christ has redeemed, purchased, and won from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that it may be His own, live under Him, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, and which the Holy Ghost has called by the Gospel, enlightened with His gifts, sanctified and kept in the true faith. Thus Luther has taught us. Each Christian confesses that for himself. But what the Holy Ghost has done for each, He has done for all believers. Therefore we confess with Luther: "Even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith." Accordingly the universal priesthood of believers is not something new and strange, but something the children learn in school. In the Smalcald Articles Luther declares: "For, thank God, [today] a child seven years old knows what the Church is, namely, the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd. For the children pray thus: I believe in one holy [Catholic or] Christian Church" (*Concordia Triglotta*, p. 499). What constitutes the Church a universal priesthood are the rights and duties to which Christ, her High Priest, has called her. This includes her right to converse with God immediately, her claim to all the treasures of the Church, and the right and duty to administer these for the welfare of others. In

brief, the Holy Christian Church has the right and the duty to pray, to sacrifice, and to teach.

The infallible source of information regarding the universal priesthood of believers is God's Word, whose treasures no one has been better able to bring to light than Luther. Scripture reveals that there has always been such a priesthood. From the very beginning of the human race the believers have performed priestly works. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob—all of them sacrificed and called upon the name of the Lord. Thus, for example, we read: "Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba and called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God" (Gen. 21:33). And the following chapter relates how he sacrificed a ram in his son's stead. But no one ever prayed more fervently to God than he. "Wilt Thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" (Gen. 18:23) he pleaded, humbly confessing: "Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes" (v. 27). This was the man who "believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness" (15:6). Paul quotes these words to show that Abraham was justified by grace through faith (Romans 4)—Abraham, who is the father of us all! In Abraham we have, therefore, an example of an Old Testament member of the universal priesthood. It is obvious that the sacrifices of such priests as he were essentially thankofferings for the divine promise of the blessed Seed, for whom they hoped and whom they proclaimed, not only to the members of their own household, but also to strangers. Thus the patriarchs were priests in the true sense of the word. Peter calls Noah a preacher of righteousness (2 Pet. 2:5), and God Himself calls Abraham a prophet (Gen. 20:7).

Regarding Abraham's priesthood, Luther says in his exposition of Gen. 22:11:

If anyone would try to persuade the monks that Abraham was a priest and bishop, they would soon decry him as a heretic. For they describe a priest thus, that he is such a man as wears a long coat, has a shorn head, and reads or prays the canonical hours; beyond such a form they know of no priest. As if God had pleasure in such priests as can do nothing but howl in the church. Such are the devil's priests. Abraham, however, is a true priest, for he sacrifices not only sheep and other animals, but also his own son. And here it is described in which manner he sacrificed

him, namely, that he bound him and wanted to slay him like a beast. But that they do not consider, nor regard it highly, because Abraham had no tonsure on the head, had no chasuble nor greased fingers, but lets his beard grow and is a married man. But if he had had a whore and a whore's children, they would rather praise him. We, however, curse and damn them also in turn as idolatrous and devil's priests, and say that they are really true priests who believe the Word of God and offer thankofferings and for God's sake bear the cross which He lays on them; do not go along in long gowns, but in the gifts and the beautiful adornment of the Holy Ghost, as in faith, in patience, when death comes along, and in the hope wherein they wait for another and better life. (St. L., I:1521 f.)

Later God chose Israel to be His priestly people. "Ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation" (Ex. 19:6), He said. At the same time He set apart the tribe of Levi and particularly the house of Aaron to serve as the official ministers of that priesthood. They were to be the tutors and governors of the universal priesthood of God's people until the time appointed of the Father (Gal. 4:2-5). Regarding Ex. 19:5-6 Luther says in his exposition of Exodus:

This, then, is the *summa summarum* of this passage: He who has My Word and believes it, is a priest; if you are My people, you do believe that. He who has that faith is a king and lord over sin, death, devil, hell, and all misfortune; for faith alone makes you possessors of such blessings and glory. He who has faith, has all things, can do all things, overcomes all things (Rom. 8:37-38); nothing can harm him, neither temporal nor eternal, not even the gates of hell (Matt. 16:18). Accordingly, he who has God's Word is a priest. Hence to be a priest and king is nothing else than to have faith and the Holy Ghost, God's grace to preach to others, and to appear before God with all confidence as a child before its father. It seems a small thing to preach, pray, and plead in true faith, but before God it is a great, mighty thing that a man, a poor, miserable wormbag, should attain to such honor. Such honor He promises them if they keep His covenant. Over this spiritual kingdom and priesthood He, furthermore, established a temporal kingdom and priesthood, which Moses observes later. Here He speaks only of the spiritual priesthood and kingdom and of the people which kept such a covenant. To such, however, as were

unbelieving and did not obey His words, this passage did not apply, but they were under the temporal kingdom. Nevertheless God had at that time some who were, at one and the same time, subject to the spiritual and also to the temporal kingdom and priesthood. But when the Gospel came, He abolished the temporal priesthood, and a spiritual priesthood was proclaimed in all the world by the Apostles. So David was a spiritual and temporal king and was still subject to the temporal priesthood and was nevertheless a true spiritual priest, of which priesthood he wrote many beautiful Psalms. So every Christian is now a king unto himself and a priest unto others. The priesthood is higher than the kingdom, is spread more widely. For the priest uses the Word not only for himself, but for others; the faith, however, through which he becomes a king, he has for himself alone. (St. L., III:1016 f.)

Although the temporal priesthood of Levi and Aaron was only a shadow, prototype, and prophecy, we can, nevertheless, in a measure recognize the nature of the body, that is, of the spiritual priesthood in the New Testament. The primary duty of the priests of the tribe of Levi was to *sacrifice*. God said: "They shall be holy unto their God, and not profane the name of their God; for the offerings of the Lord made by fire, and the bread of their God, they do offer; therefore they shall be holy" (Lev. 21:6).

It was, moreover, a part of their official duty to instruct the people. Thus Moses blessed the children of Levi: "They shall teach Jacob Thy judgments, and Israel Thy Law; they shall put incense before Thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon Thine altar" (Deut. 33:10). Through Ezekiel God said of the priests: "They shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean" (44:23); and Malachi said: "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the Law at his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts" (2:7).

Finally, the priests, Aaron and his sons, were to bless the Children of Israel (Num. 6:23-27). Thus the Levitical priesthood also prayed, sacrificed, and taught.

The Levitical priesthood was restricted to the time of the Old Testament; but even then others, not necessarily of the tribe of Levi, already assumed some of the priestly functions, as in the

case of the Prophets, who, like the priests, taught the people and spoke in the name of the Lord. They also already in prophecy introduced the Messiah as the true High Priest, who by His knowledge should justify many (Is. 53:11). Through David the Messiah said: "My praise shall be of Thee in the great congregation" (Ps. 22:25). The Messiah was to be a true Priest, not only by sacrificing Himself on the altar of the Cross, but also by proclaiming "the acceptable year of the Lord" — the saving Gospel!

It is, therefore, not surprising that in the prophecy of the Old Testament also the universal priesthood of all believers already makes its appearance with the priesthood of the Messiah, the true High Priest. Thus the Lord promised the Lord who should be a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek: "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: Thou hast the dew of Thy youth" (Ps. 110:3). The children of this royal Priest should, like Him, be clothed in priestly garments, should be priests.

Commenting on the words of the 110th Psalm: "The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (v. 4), Luther, in his second exposition of this Psalm, says:

Much is to be said of this priesthood; for it is a very rich text, which contains the great chief parts of Christian doctrine, and there is nothing more comforting in all the Scripture than what is said of the priesthood of our dear Christ. This text is also extolled, beautifully and magnificently, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which is the true gloss and exposition of this Psalm and in this point a truly noble Epistle and therefore well worthy to be written with gold. (St. L., V:1008 f.)

To this peerless Priest of the New Testament spiritual children are promised (v. 3). Luther says:

How can that be, and whence come such children? Concerning this he says: "From the womb of the morning: Thou hast the dew of Thy youth." What is this, children born from the womb of the morning? [Luther translates this passage: "Your children will be born unto You like the dew of the dawn."] This must be a peculiar birth and a singular mother and children. Who has ever heard that children come from the dawn, and how does this rhyme with Christianity? And who, I pray, said such a thing to

this prophet? Indeed, who could have understood it if it had not been revealed by the Gospel, when even now, that it is fulfilled, so few understand it? But he chose this comparison therewith to illustrate and picture right lovely these spiritual things, namely, that in the case of this birth of the children of this kingdom (that is, of the Christians) it comes to pass as in that of the dear dew, which falls daily in the early morning of spring, and still no one can say how it is made, or whence it comes; nevertheless, it lies on the grass each morning. . . .

So (he would say) it shall also come to pass in this kingdom, when children are born to Christ, the Lord; not in the natural manner out of flesh and blood, nor with the aid and assistance of men, nor in a manner which men can comprehend and understand; but it is a spiritual, heavenly birth, through the invisible, divine power of the Holy Ghost, which works in man through the Word and makes new, believing hearts. (St. L., V:999 f.)

But what does the Psalmist mean with "the beauties of holiness" (*heiligem Schmuck*) (v. 3)? Luther replies:

With these words he makes the people of this King (that is, His believing Christians) all priests, and speaks of a new and different species of priests or priesthood than the Levitical was, which alone had priestly honor and office with the Jews; pictures them, therefore, as such as stand in their priestly garments (as those priests had to have them in their office) magnificently and beautifully adorned for sacrifice and divine service. For these words, "beauties of holiness," according to the manner of Scripture mean nothing else than the beautiful priestly garments, as God says to Moses, Ex. 28:2: "Thou shalt make holy garments for Aaron, thy brother, for glory and for beauty," and elsewhere holy adornment [*heiliger Schmuck*] or ornament often stands for priestly garments. For God commanded thus, that the priests in their office and divine service had to be clothed not with common garments, but with precious, holy garments, which no one else was permitted to wear, as they are described Exodus 28. Such priestly office and adornment the prophet here applies to and interprets as pertaining to the Christians, or the people of the New Testament, and says that their divine service shall be a beautiful, glorious priesthood, as of those who always stand before God and bring only holy sacrifices. And praises them with the highest divine glory and honor. For there is no higher name and honor before God and men than to be a priest, which is

a person and office, which deals so truly with God and is nearest to God, and deals with purely divine matters. Such honor (I say) he here accords to all Christians, that they stand before God as the real priests, adorned preciously and beautifully, and serve Him with a true, holy, divine service. (St. L., V:995 f.)

Applying this term, "beauty of holiness," more precisely to the New Testament believers, Luther says:

What, then, are such "beauties of holiness" or priestly garments with which Christendom is adorned and is called His holy priesthood? Nothing else than the beautiful, divine, diverse gifts of the Holy Ghost, as St. Paul (Rom. 12:6; Eph. 4:7) and Peter (1 Pet. 2:9) say, which are given to Christendom for the purpose that thereby God may be known and praised, which, then, is done chiefly through the ministry of preaching the Gospel. For such gifts are to serve, says St. Paul (1 Cor. 12:7), for the common profit of Christendom, so that through our preaching, confession, etc., the people are brought to the knowledge of God, and He is thereby honored. For therefore we are God's ministers and are called priests that all our doing, doctrine, and life shall shine to the knowledge, glory, and praise of God, as Christ says Matt. 5:16, and St. Peter declares 1 Ep. 2:9: "Ye are the royal priesthood, the holy nation," etc., "that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (St. L., V:996.)

Turning now to the New Testament fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy, we find that Jesus applies Is. 61:1-2 to Himself. When the eyes of all them that were in the synagog at Nazareth were fastened on Him, Jesus, having read Is. 61:1-2, said: "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21). And all bare Him witness and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. However, the same people soon attempted to cast Him down from the brow of the hill whereon their city was built; but the time for His priestly sacrifice of Himself as the Lamb of God had not yet come.

Luther rightly calls the Epistle to the Hebrews the true gloss and exposition of Christ's high-priestly office. Nowhere is the contrast between the priesthood of Christ and that of the Old Testament brought out more clearly than in this Epistle when it says: "This Man, because He continueth ever, hath an unchange-



able priesthood. Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such an High Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for His own sins, and then for the people's: for this He did once, when He offered up Himself." (Heb. 7:24-27.)

Thus our High Priest has now also made all who believe in Him kings and priests before God; for He that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood "hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." (Rev. 1:5-6.)

Peter, addressing the strangers scattered about, "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:2), declares: "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (2:5), and in contrast with the disobedient unbelievers, he tells them: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (v.9). This is the golden text for the doctrine of the universal priesthood of all believers. God has chosen all the elect before the earth was founded to be one communion, separate from all other generations of the earth. This chosen generation has both a priestly and a royal character, the latter resulting from the former. The believers, who as priests have access to God, rule with Christ over sin, death, and devil. With their prayers they can also change the course of mundane affairs. Their priestly and royal dignity is still hidden, but it will be revealed with the consummation of the kingdom of God, when the great, completed host of the elect, united with the host of the holy angels, will stand before the throne of God and of the Lamb and worship, and will rule with Christ and triumph in all eternity. (Cf. Stoeckhardt, *Kommentar ueber den Ersten Brief Petri*, p.96.)

This holy priesthood and holy nation, God's elect, made holy by

the Holy Ghost by the Word and faith, are sanctified and renewed from day to day. Christ's royal priests are to let their light shine before men, that men may see their good works and glorify the Father in heaven (Matt. 5:16). God's holy nation is His own peculiar people, whom He will protect and preserve, kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet. 1:5). God's holy priesthood is an active priesthood; God's priests should, by word and deed, show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into His marvelous light. They should tell others that God is holy and abhors sin, but also that He is gracious and would save all men, as He has saved them.

As a holy priesthood the believers have free access to the throne of God with their prayers and may bring unto God as an acceptable sacrifice their own sanctified lives and the praise of God with their lips. Assured of the remission of their sins and iniquities through Christ, they have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus (Heb. 10:19). And with grateful hearts they heed Paul's admonition: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). The Epistle to the Hebrews exhorts: "By Him [Christ], therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name" (13:15).

As the priests of God, who at all times have free access to His throne, they hold title to all possessions which Christ, their High Priest, has entrusted to His Church, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "Therefore let no man glory in men; for all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. 3:21-23). Such privileged people, however, must, on the other hand, always remain mindful that priests are also ministers, whose duty it is to make disciples by baptizing in the name of the Triune God and to teach them whatsoever Christ has commanded them, as in the presence of Christ, and even so unto the end of the world (Matt. 28:19-20).

Luther, in his exposition of the First Epistle of Peter, makes the following comment on 1 Pet. 2:9:

There He gives the Christians a just title, and has taken the statement from Deut. 7:6, where He says to the Jews: "For thou art an holy people unto the Lord, thy God: the Lord, thy God, hath chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth." There you see whereof St. Peter is speaking. As I have said before, so I still say that one should get used to speaking of priests as the Scripture is accustomed to do. Let no one mind whom the people call priests, let everyone call them what they please, but you stay with God's pure Word; what it calls priests, that you also call priests. We will tolerate it all right that those call themselves priests whom the bishops and the Pope consecrate and that they call themselves what they please, as long as they do not call themselves "God's priests"; for they cannot adduce one word from Scripture for themselves regarding it. But when they come along with this passage, that it speaks of them, so answer thus, as I taught above, and ask them to whom St. Peter is here speaking. They will come to shame. For it is truly clear and obvious enough, that He is speaking to the whole communion, to all Christians, when He says: Ye are a chosen generation and holy nation; for so He previously has spoken of no one, save of those who are built upon the Rock and believe. Hence must follow that whosoever does not believe is no priest. . . . Therefore I wish very much that this word "priest" were as common as we are called Christians; for it is all *one* thing—priests, baptized, Christians. As now I should not tolerate it that the besmeared and shorn alone would be called *Christians* and baptized, so little should I tolerate it that they alone would be priests. Still they have applied this to themselves alone. So they have also called the Church what the Pope includes within his pointed hats. But Scripture turns it around. Therefore mark this well so that you may know to make a difference, how God calls priests and how they call themselves priests. For so we must again make it come to pass that this little word "priests" becomes as common as the little word "Christians." . . . Therefore when Peter here says: "Ye are the royal priesthood," it is as much as if he said: Ye are Christians. If now you would know what kind of title and what power and price Christians have, you see it here, that they are kings and priests and the chosen nation. (St. L., IX:1022 ff.)

In treating the subject how one should elect and install ministers of the Church, Luther says:

I pray you, who indeed are those called out of darkness into His marvelous light? Is it only the shorn and anointed larvae? Or is it not all the Christians? Peter, however, not only gives them the *right*, but also the *command*, "that they should show forth the praises of God," which, forsooth, is nothing else than to preach God's Word. Let them now come on who invent two kinds of priesthood: one spiritual and universal; the other a particular and external priesthood: and maintain that St. Peter is here speaking of the spiritual priesthood. What, then, is the office of their particular and external priesthood? Is it not "to show forth the praises of God"? But Peter here gives this command to the spiritual and universal priesthood. Although they, these blasphemers, have another external priesthood, whereby they show forth, not the praises of God, but of the Pope and their own godless conduct. Otherwise, even as no other showing forth in the ministry of the Word is found than this only one of the praises of God, which is equally common to all Christians, so also no other priesthood is found than the spiritual, which is common also to all Christians and which Peter has here described. (St. L., X:1572 to 1573.)

In his refutation of Emser's error, Luther says:

Tell me, can anyone be so dull, not to understand to whom St. Peter is here speaking? Or must the sayings of the Fathers here come forth and interpret, where he names the people and the congregation so clearly and still calls them all a "royal priesthood," commands them to preach the deeds of God, who has called them? If now this is also said of the Emser priesthood, as our Emser teaches, we are certainly all such priests. Let him interpret priests as he will, all Christians are still such priests through this passage. If then we all must preach, these bald pates must remain silent, because they have another, their own priesthood, before all Christians. In this wise also the two passages, one Rev. 5:9-10: "Thou hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood and hast made us unto our God kings and priests," and the other Rev. 20:6: "On such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ," are both said of the entire Church and to be understood as the words without any gloss demand. And there is not another passage in the New Testament which speaks of priests than these three; the others all call Emser's priests not priests, but ministers, overseers, and elders. Wherewith the Holy

Ghost teaches us that not oil, consecrations, tonsures, chasubles, albs, chalice, mass, sermon, etc., make priests and give power, but the priesthood and power must be there first, brought along out of Baptism, common to all Christians through faith, which builds them upon Christ, the true High Priest, as St. Peter here says. But to administer such power and execute it does not behoove everyone, but whosoever is called by the congregation or by him who has the congregation's command and will; he then does such work in the stead and person of the congregation and of the common authority. Hence it is not true that there is more than a single, plain priesthood in the Church; and the bald pates are not called priests in accord with Scripture, as Emser lies. The name is common to us all with all of its power, right, and what belongs to it, which these robbers and God-stealers would like to wrest from us and claim for themselves alone. But as they called themselves the Church and we recovered that prey from them, so they have made themselves priests, which has now also been taken from them. But the tonsures we will let them have, that they may be tonsure-bearers, since they never want to bear God's Word, but only pervert it. — What would it help if Emser now cited thousands of the Fathers' sayings which all unanimously called his crowd priests? There would still be no Scripture, but only the word of men who have erred, but still were not stiff-necked like these bald pates. But St. Peter's words are God's words, they do not let any other than the one common priesthood exist. (St. L., XVIII:1360 ff.)

To Luther this was a matter of the greatest importance, therefore he speaks of it again and again. Thus he says in the same writing:

For a priest, first of all, is not made in the New Testament, but must be born; is not consecrated, but created. But is born not by the birth of the flesh, but by that of the Spirit, by water and Spirit in the washing of regeneration. Hence indeed all Christians together are priests, and all priests are Christians. And let it be a damned saying if one would say a priest were something else than a Christian; for such is said without God's Word, only on the basis of human doctrine, of tradition, or of the large number of those who hold it thus; of which three, if one sets up one, whichever one will, as an article of faith, it is blasphemy and an abomination, as I have said elsewhere. (St. L., X:1570.)

In a sermon on Rom. 12:1-6 he says:

Here I let everyone seek and make a difference between the externally visible priesthood and this internal, spiritual priesthood. The former only a few have usurped for themselves and in small part; the latter, however, is common to all Christians. The former has been dug up and called so by men without God's Word; the latter is founded without men's trifling by the Word of God. The former is smeared on the skin with material oil; the latter is anointed internally within the heart with the Holy Ghost. The former praises and lauds its own works and merits; the latter preaches and praises God's grace and His honor. The former leaves the body with its lusts unsacrificed, yes, pastures and nourishes the flesh with its lusts; the latter, however, kills and sacrifices the body with its lusts. The former permits to be sacrificed to itself money, goods, honor, idleness, good days and all the lust on earth; the latter lets all this be taken away from it and the opposite be rendered. The former with abominable perversion sacrifices Christ again; the latter is satisfied that Christ was sacrificed once, and sacrifices itself with Him and in Him in the same and similar sacrifice. And *summa*, these two priest-hoods rhyme like Christ and Barabbas, like light and darkness, like God and world. For as little as Christ became a Priest through smear-oil and tonsures, just so little also is this priest-hood given to anyone by smearing and shearing; nevertheless Christ is Priest with all His Christians, Ps. 110:4: "Thou art a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." This priesthood does not let itself be made or ordered. Here is no manufactured priest; he must be born priest and as heir bring it along from birth. But I mean the new birth, of water and Spirit; there all Christians become such priests, the highest Priest's children and joint heirs. (St. L., XII:315.)

All Christians are priests, and that without any difference in station, sex, or age. Among the strangers whom Peter addresses there are servants (2:18) and masters (Eph. 6:9), male and female (3:1, 7), young and old (5:5). In brief, he that is a Christian is also a royal priest: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). In his *Letter to Duke Albrecht of Prussia Regarding the Pope and His Power*, Article 3, Luther comments:

Every child, lying in the cradle, has just as great a claim on Christ, on faith, Spirit, and all other things pertaining to the Church as holy Peter himself and all Apostles have. For we all have the same faith, the same Spirit, the same life, the same salvation, and the same God. (St. L., XIX:734.)

In his exposition of 1 Peter, Luther says:

If you want to look at the Christians, you must not see any difference and must not say: That is a man or a woman, a servant or a master, old or young, as Paul says Gal. 3:28. It is all one thing and purely spiritual people. Therefore they are altogether priests, may proclaim God's Word; only that women should not speak in the churches, but should let the men preach on account of the commandment that they should be subject to their husbands, as St. Paul teaches 1 Cor. 14:34. Such order God permits to remain, but makes *no* difference regarding power. If, however, there were no men present, but only women, as in nunneries, there one might also promote a woman among them, who would preach. (St. L., IX:1014 f.)

Finally, not only the particularly holy or well indoctrinated belong to this royal priesthood, for Peter addresses such as are in need of the admonition: "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings" (1 Pet. 2:1). Such are priests as repent of their sins in daily repentance and in faith in their Savior Jesus Christ seek forgiveness. Saving faith makes the penitent sinner a priest. In his "Sermon of the New Testament, That Is, of the Holy Mass," Luther says:

Behold, all these, wherever they may be, are true priests and conduct a really true mass, obtain therewith also what they intend. For faith must do it all. It alone is the true priestly office and, moreover, does not let anyone else be it. Therefore all Christian men are priests, all Christian women priestesses, be they young or old, master or servant, mistress or maid, learned or unlearned. Here is no difference, unless faith be unequal. Again, all who do not have such faith, but presume to make much of the Mass as a sacrifice, and to perform their office unto God, these are dunces, observe Mass outwardly, do not know themselves what they are doing, and may not please God. For "without faith it is impossible to please Him [God]," as St. Paul says Heb. 11:6. (St. L., XIX:1058.)

Luther's interpretation of the universal priesthood of believers is in harmony with that of the Lutheran Confessions, where, however, this subject is chiefly treated under the term "Church." The Apology, referring to Hebrews 5, shows that the Levitical priesthood was an image of the priesthood of Christ (Art. XXIV, "Of the Mass"; *Triglotta*, p. 403), and that the priesthood of the New Testament is an office through which the Holy Spirit ministers (*ibid.*, p. 405). In the article of the power and jurisdiction of bishops, the Smalcald Articles state: "Here belong the statements of Christ which testify that the keys have been given to the Church, and not merely to certain persons, Matt. 18:20: '*Where two or three are gathered together in My name,*' etc.

"Lastly, the statement of Peter also confirms this, 1 Ep. 2:9: '*Ye are a royal priesthood.*' These words pertain to the true Church, which certainly has the right to elect and ordain ministers, since it alone has the priesthood." (*Ibid.*, pp. 523, 525.)

*Summa summarum*, all Christians are members of the universal priesthood of believers, and whatever is said of the rights and duties of the latter pertains to all of them. That is the teaching of Scripture, and so the Lutheran Confessions declare on the basis of Scripture. The doctrine of the universal priesthood of believers is a corollary of the doctrine of justification by faith. That accounts for its important position in Luther's theology and in the doctrine of the Church which bears his name.

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