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Potestas in Ecclesia, Potestas Episcoporum: Confessio Augustana XXVIII and the Life of the Church

Anssi Simojoki

There was in Finland in the 1960s lively discussion concerning the voice of the church. There was an expectation that a great number of social and ethical issues would be addressed with official ecclesiastical authority. The voice of the church should be clearly heard in a modern society. There was, however, no consensus as to where in the church this voice was to be sought and heard: whether with the Archbishop or the Bishops' Conference, whether with or without legitimization from the synodical plenum of the church. Neither was there any consensus as to what exactly the voice of the church was supposed to pronounce regarding various contemporary issues. There were various proposals of an ecumenical and democratic nature for locating this much-expected authoritative ecclesiastical voice. It was also the time when I, as a student of theology, in the full blossom of my youth, had no reservations, nor modesty, when I declared in an article, with vigor and simplicity: "If the church, so far, has no voice, we must get such a voice at once." After years of moderate liberal studies of theology, little did I know or understand the teachings that so plainly and clearly stand in our chief Lutheran confession, the Augsburg Confession, and its Apology, concerning the life of the church and life in the church. In retrospect, my sole, meagre consolation was the fact that I was by no means alone in this, even with such a statement of appalling ignorance.

The 1993 Lutheran-Anglican Porvoo Agreement, moreover, further exacerbates this issue and begs these questions: What is the episcopal office in the church? Is the office of the ministry in its constitution tripartite, as taught in Anglicanism, or not? Is the apostolic succession indispensable (*conditio sine qua non*) for the episcopal office? In which areas and to what extent is the life of the church dependent on the office of the bishops, and relatedly, is ordination administered by a rank and file pastor as valid as an episcopal ordination, or is it only the bishops who can ordain pastors in the church by divine right, *iure divino*? What constitutes

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a valid ministry of the word and the sacraments in the church, the call of a congregation or the hands of a bishop?¹

Article 28 of the Augsburg Confession (CA), however, treats the power and authority of the church, perhaps even giving us an answer. It teaches us: how to live in the church, what the voice of the church is, and finally, what the relationship of all of this is to normal worldly life and worldly authorities.

I. The Distinction Between the Regiments

First of all, the Augsburg Confession clearly defines the sphere of ecclesiastical authority, which is definitely distinguished and separated from all worldly authorities (CA XXVIII,12-19). The church as the church has no legitimate civil authority. The long history of ecclesiastical misuses of authority by Roman pontiffs and bishops in the civil realm necessitated the Lutheran reformers to formulate this issue in an unambiguous manner. The earthly political life is under the mandate of legitimate rulers, politicians, magistrates, and soldiers. The church has other important things to do.

The tremendously influential theologian of the twentieth century, the Swiss centenary theologian Karl Barth, has caused plenty of confusion in this area. There is a Barthian legacy of which we should rid ourselves and all theological discussion. Barth, under the influence of Ernst Troeltsch, introduced a completely misleading term into theology, *Zwei-Reiche-Lehre*,

¹ In Finland at least, the development is currently towards Anglicanism. The life of the church is becoming more and more dependent on the bishops. On the other hand, their true power and authority is very limited, and even more so in the Anglican Church. Politically, the media seems to favor this kind of episcopal development in the church, probably for the simple reason that the present bishops are 100 percent politically correct and always sing in unison: be it an ecclesiastical issue, a moral problem, a political triviality such as lamenting over the free economy called capitalism, or criticising the United States of America upon which they are pronouncing. Thus, the block of liberal and politically-correct bishops in the church enjoys unshaken media protection. We are witnessing the rise of a sort of liberal-high church and societal church controlled by the media. This secondarily established church is unconditionally fundamentalist in terms of administration, since it respects no divine word, no article of faith and no confession. Therefore, human statutes and bureaucratic processes have become authorities never to be disobeyed. This kind of neo-Erastian, secondarily established church with its episcopacy has also passed its heyday and is in the process of disintegration. Similarly, a century ago, the European nobility was rapidly leaving the stage's political influence and, instead, reappeared as fancy dress figures on operetta stages.

which has dominated theological and political discussion concerning Lutheranism and Lutheran social ethics. This misleading term revolves around his discussion of the two kingdoms in Lutheran theology. According to Barth and his successors, the doctrine of the two kingdoms, namely the confession that distinguishes between the worldly and the spiritual kingdoms, was the main reason that Lutherans failed to react against the Nazi regime in Germany from 1933 to 1945. This term, *Zwei-Reiche-Lehre*, which Barth introduced at a fairly early stage in 1922, grossly misses the point, however. The Lutheran Confessions nowhere speak about the kingdoms (*Reiche*) in this connection. Rather the term employed in respective connections is always *power* (*potestas, Gewalt*).²

All power belongs to the omnipotent God, whose power and authority is given to Christ, Pantocrator (Matt 28:18). Thus, all kinds of autonomy, *Eigengesetzlichkeit*, in exercising power in this world, is excluded at the outset because all power belongs to God. Consequently, all the potentates of this world are fully answerable to him.³

God employs two different instruments in exercising his omnipotence: the worldly authorities and the church. The former is the rule of his left hand, the latter of his right hand. The church has no short-cut authority to cross the boundary of these two ways by which God rules and to interfere with worldly power. There is one area, though, where these two realms touch each other. This is the function of God's law in society. It is the calling of the church to teach the Ten Commandments in their three functions. Society and its authorities must be taught the first, outward use of the Ten Commandments, otherwise God's good institutions – marriage, family and temporal rule – may be corrupted creating ethical chaos in society. Ironically, and sadly, it was the church that had in the past caused such corruption and chaos in both church and society by establishing human traditions and decrees as if they were divinely instituted and,

² Bernhard Lohse, *Luthers Theologie in ihrer historischen Entwicklung und in ihrem systematischen Zusammenhang* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1995), 172, 334–335.

³ Ahti Hakamies, "Eigengesetzlichkeit" der natürlichen Ordnungen als Grundproblem der neueren Lutherdeutung: *Studien zur Geschichte und Problematik der Zwei-Reiche-Lehre Luthers*, *Untersuchungen zur Kirchengeschichte* (Witten: Luther-Verlag, 1971); and Martin Honecker, *Eigengesetzlichkeit*, *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (RGG) 4 Band 2 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1999), 1131–1133. It is a liberal tradition from Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch, later adapted by Karl Holl and Helmut Thielicke against Karl Barth's christocracy. Negatively, autonomy separates God and his revelation from history; positively it takes into account the differentiation of spheres in society.

consequently, necessary for man's salvation. The reader of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession cannot miss Philipp Melancthon's vigorous tenor in condemning, article by article, the erroneous teachings of the past concerning justification and ecclesiastical authority. It was the sheer misuse of ecclesiastical authority that had caused all the abominations in God's temple and in society – misuses that the Lutheran Reformation was vigorously opposing, condemning and correcting. As I mentioned above, the law must be taught in society according to its first, outward use, not solely by its second, spiritual use. Good temporal rule is always in harmony with the outward use of the Ten Commandments. The spiritual use of the law takes place in the realm of the church. Just as the Reformation rehabilitated marriage and family life after a millennium of Babylonian Captivity, it likewise reinstated to worldly authorities and normal civil life their God-given glory. For this reason, the Augsburg Confession included article 16 into its first part on faith and doctrine.⁴

Even with these simple and very basic facts of the Lutheran Confessions, we still find ourselves amid a hair-raising theological mess. First, Karl Barth taught his contemporaries to read the Bible and newspapers in order to find out God's will. Barth's situational ethics, which stemmed from his actualistic theology, acknowledged no continuity in time and history at the point of contact between God's word (*senkrecht von oben*) and the world. For this reason, the kind of teaching that would present God's eternal will as being the same always and everywhere was excluded at the outset. In new situations, therefore, God's word can mean different things. Thus, men's own political instincts, put together with some biblical principles, became virtually man's compass in social ethics. Barth's monistic and truly Reformed thinking against the Lutheran distinction between the law and the gospel made the distinction between the two modes of divine rule quite incomprehensible to him.⁵

Second, the history of twentieth-century theology is basically the story of a deteriorating Bible crisis. Any authoritative biblical passage can be made suspicious in regard to its authenticity and present-day relevance. How can one expect bishops and theologians to teach the Ten Commandments clearly before the society, when they themselves have all too often been

⁴ Werner Elert, *The Christian Ethos*, tr. Carl J. Schindler (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 101-131, and Lohse, *Luthers Theologie*, 336-340.

⁵ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. I, Part One, tr. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), 111-120: The Bible becomes God's word *in actu*. See also Michael Beintker, *Barth Karl*, RGG 4, Band 1 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1998), 1138-1141.

agents of the biblical crisis? Further, the strong legacy of the Lundensian School of Theology has made the use of the Ten Commandments in Scandinavia suspicious, to say the least. The only accepted role of the law is the spiritual use in disclosing and judging one's sins. Otherwise, there is no fixed, perpetual divine code to be taught and followed. The only logical conclusion from this is a flexible situation ethics advocated by the Lundensian School.⁶

Liberation theology and all similar kinds of political theology are basically monistic theologies. Therefore, they cannot acknowledge the distinction between the law and the gospel, nor any distinction between the realms of the church and society. They, therefore, ultimately succumb to the same pitfalls as Islam only in a different direction.

If the church follows the various paths of theological monism, it cannot be content with its particular calling to preach the gospel as well as administer the keys of heaven and the holy sacraments. They are too immaterial compared with the self-chosen role of being some sort of supreme arbiter in society and in the world. Yet, the pope of Rome or the archbishop of Canterbury, for example, have no particular illumination in judging matters of war and peace that raise their opinions above the considerations of political and military professionals.⁷

However, where the Ten Commandments are being trampled down by worldly authorities in society, thus provoking ethical chaos, it is the calling of the church to challenge the authorities and to give its testimony to the truth, even at the price of persecution and suffering. This kind of bold witness took place here and there in Hitler's Third Reich, even amid the most merciless state terror. Communist regimes were far more successful in silencing the churches. Theological confrontation by appealing to God's law is, however, absolutely alien to the modern, politically-correct church leadership. To demonstrate this, we need only to remind ourselves of the

⁶ Gustaf Wingren, *Luther On Vocation*, tr. C. C. Rasmussen (Evansville, IN: Ballast Press, 1999), 199-212. Instead of the Decalogue, which has no positive function, Wingren operates with the undefined term, *God's Command*. Lauri Haikola, *Usus Legis*, 2nd Impression (Helsinki: Helsingin yliopiston monistuspalvelu, 1981). Haikola follows the legacy of Wingren. Herbert Olsson, *Schöpfung, Vernunft und Gesetz in Luthers Theologie*, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Studia Doctrinae Christianae Upsaliensis, 10 (Uppsala: 1971), 80. See also Barth's and Wingren's sharp criticism by Karl-Manfred Olsson, *Kristendom Demokrati Arbete* (Borås: LT, 1965), 51-74. Barth and Wingren fail to answer epistemological questions; therefore, their ethics bear the marks of arbitrariness.

⁷ Olsson, *Kristendom Demokrati Arbete*, 86-89.

flood of divorces, abortions, the teaching of adultery to entire generations in public schools and, of late, the vigorous promotion of homosexuality by European governments and legislators, compared with extremely cautious or non-existent reactions from various episcopal sees, not to mention open advocacy and promotion in the church of morals and values that are openly contrary to the word of God.

The strong emphasis in the Augsburg Confession, and likewise in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, on the distinction between the secular and ecclesiastical spheres of authority was not the result of any kind of social or ethical escapism in the ranks of the Reformers. On the contrary, the past confusion of these authorities had placed tremendous burdens on Christian consciences. The time had come to free Christians from the yoke of assumed ecclesiastical authority. Christians could, at last, live in this world with a good conscience and, simultaneously, live by God's gifts of eternal salvation through the gospel. The right distinction between the worldly and ecclesiastical authorities is the best protection for the freedom of a Christian.

II. The Office of Ministry in the Life of the Church

Ecclesiastical power or authority has several connotations in the Augsburg Confession. According to the Latin text, Article 28 treats "The Power of the Church" (*De Potestas Ecclesiastica*). This power, that is, this authority is, in particular, the administration of the keys—confession and absolution. The German text of the Augsburg Confession, however, speaks of "The Power of Bishops" (*Von der Bischöfe Gewalt*). This ecclesiastical or episcopal authority in the church is the authority to preach the word of God and to administer the holy sacraments and the keys (CA XXVIII,5–6). Thus, episcopal power in the church is directly connected to the doctrine of justification: "So that we may obtain this [justifying] faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted" (CA V). It is no wonder at all that the German text explicitly uses the titles of bishops and pastors synonymously ("bishops or pastors" CA XXVIII,53). The same is stated in the Latin text: ". . . bishops (that is, to those to whom the ministry of the Word and sacraments has been committed)" (CA XXVIII,21). Later in 1537, Melancthon's *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope* carried on the discussion of ecclesiastical power. Here, unambiguous biblical arguments and authoritative patristic testimonies confirm that there is no substantial difference between bishops, presbyters or pastors by divine right (*iure divino*). Even Jerome

taught that the distinctions of degree between bishop and presbyter or pastor are established by human authority (*iure humano*; Tr 60–82).

Anyone who reads the Bible can observe how St. Paul freely employs various ecclesiastical titles for the same group of ordained men from Ephesus in his farewell address at Miletus: they are in the very same passage called bishops, presbyters and leaders chosen and installed in the church by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:17–38).

How very far, then, from the teachings of the Augsburg Confession are Thomas Cranmer's words in the Anglican Ordinal: "It is evident unto all men who diligently reading Holy Scriptures and ancient Authors that from the Apostles' times there have been these orders of Ministers in Christ's Church: Bishops, Priests and Deacons . . ."⁸

Historical rather than doctrinal modes of episcopacy dominate even Nordic discussions, not only those concerning the Porvoo Agreement but also those preoccupied with emergency ordinations, which have indeed become and are becoming more and more necessary in order to preserve the Lutheran Church and pure Lutheran doctrine in the Northern Europe. In fact, every pastor in charge of a congregation is the true bishop of that flock of Christ. His authority by divine right (*iure divino*) is by no means less than that of one bearing the title bishop: to preach the word of God, to administer the keys and the holy sacraments. In emergency cases, part of this episcopal power is given even to a layperson who, when proclaiming the emergency absolution, becomes the minister or pastor to another (Tr 67). The arrangements concerning ordination of new pastors are matters of human right among the ordained clergy (*iure humano*). The mode of ordination is a matter of good order, not some kind of divine statute that is solely the concern of a certain higher class of the ordained clergy. The Anglican concept of *episcopate*, the supposed necessity of having a ministry of oversight among the clergy as a biblical, divine ordinance, conquered Scandinavian Lutheranism already in certain quarters of the high church movement and recently via Porvoo. Therefore, it is important to understand and acknowledge that all ordinations in the Lutheran Church by ordained pastors, on behalf of the church, are legitimate episcopal ordinations. In post-Porvoo and post-Joint Declaration Lutheranism it is important—indeed, it is a matter of *status confessionis*—to maintain the unity of the ordained ministry by divine right (*iure divino*).

⁸ Church of England, *The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1910), 292.

What the Lutheran Confessions focus on are the gifts of God in Christ given to his church according to the testimony of St. Paul in Ephesians 4:8, 11, 12 and the freedom of the church and of Christians to receive these gifts without any human interference, hurdles, or complications. This is why also the Augsburg Confession (CA VIII), after defining the church as the assembly of saints and those who truly believe, even though mixed with hypocrites and evil people, strongly defends the validity of the sacraments even when administered by evil men: "Both the sacraments and the Word are efficacious because of the ordinance and command of Christ, even when offered by evil men" (CA VIII,2). The focus is here on ordinary Christians who must be in the position to receive God's life-giving gifts, even though the church is unable to safeguard the integrity of its clergy. As long as the command of Christ is formally valid, Christians can with a good conscience behold the divine gift administered to them even by an evil and corrupt ministry.

The situation in traditional Lutheran churches has, in this respect, dramatically changed in recent years and decades as the ordination of women has been cultivated by human authority in open contradiction to the biblical witnesses. For the sake of the church's life, the life-giving ministry of the word, the keys, and the sacraments must be freely available to all Christians. It should never be an object of political play and interference.⁹ Where human impediments are constructed against scripturally legitimate calls in the church, the church—which is so according to CA VIII—has the right (*iure divino*) to provide its members with ordained pastors.

III. What is Necessary and Sufficient?

The acceptance of the Porvoo Agreement in 1993 changes the doctrine of the ministry in those churches that have signed it. A considerable aspect of Christian freedom has been sacrificed and unnecessary human traditions established in order to satisfy all participants. Even neutral or good human traditions per se are changed for the worse when they begin to rule in the church without the mandate of the Holy Scriptures. Such rulers have the tendency, sooner or later, to become tyrants, oppressing the biblical faith and the Christian's evangelical freedom.

⁹ Such was the case during the Reformation in Bohemia and Saxony and even today in many traditional Lutheran churches in Germany and Scandinavia with historical state-church backgrounds.

The question of the so-called apostolic succession, namely the historical chain of the laying on of hands in episcopal ordinations, is one such tradition. First of all, there is no evident necessity, no clear condition in the Holy Scriptures to establish and maintain such a tradition. The attempts to prove the necessity of this kind of tradition must follow a very tortuous way and yet end up nowhere. When such a tradition, however, is made into a condition for the fullness of the office of the ministry in the church, the integrity of the divine ordinance and command is in grave jeopardy. It belongs to the same category as church art, bells, incense, paraments, the number of candles on various Sundays, shoe polish, and all such vestry props, which are needed neither in the pulpit when the gospel is preached nor at the altar when the body and blood of our Lord is distributed.¹⁰

The Augsburg Confession deals a blow to the exquisite concept of the apostolic succession by its complete silence on the matter, on the one hand, and by speaking of the proper call to the ministry in CA XIV, on the other. *Rite vocatus* in CA XIV does not pertain to a specific rite such as the laying on of hands. It refers, instead, to a regular call by a proper public authority in the church. Thus, it is the call that is the constituent act in the ordination to the office of the ministry. The role of a bishop and the episcopal laying on of hands is merely to confirm (*comprobatio*) the proper call.

These words (of Peter: “You are a royal priesthood”) apply to the true church, which, since it alone possesses the priesthood, certainly has the right of choosing and ordaining ministers. The most common practice of the church also testifies to this, for in times past the people chose pastors and bishops. Then the bishop of either that church or a neighbouring one came and confirmed the candidate by the laying on of hands. Ordination was nothing other than such a confirmation. Later, new ceremonies were added. (Tr 69–71)

¹⁰ It may be of some interest to know that it is this very question of the apostolic succession that has become divisive in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania. Bishops ordained within the apostolic succession are not permitted to lay their hands on a bishop to be ordained and installed in a diocese that does not approve the tradition. Thus, for example, the presiding bishop may lead the ceremony but he must abstain from laying his hands on the new bishop who will serve his diocese opposed to the apostolic succession. Sometimes, though, a visiting bishop who possesses the apostolic succession spoils this purity by laying his hands on even those who oppose this tradition. Such offenses to their understanding are usually met only with silence.

It is true that even Melanchthon was prepared to call ordination with laying on of hands a sacrament in the Apology, provided that no misunderstanding would arise concerning the nature of the rite.

But if ordination is understood with reference to the ministry of the Word, we have no objection to calling ordination a sacrament. For the ministry of the Word has the command of God and has magnificent promises If ordination is understood in this way, we will not object to calling the laying on of hands a sacrament. For the church has the mandate to appoint ministers, which ought to please us greatly because we know that God approves this ministry and is present in it. Indeed, it is worthwhile to extol the ministry of the Word with every possible kind of praise against fanatics who imagine that the Holy Spirit is not given through the Word but is given on account of certain preparations of their own. (Ap XIII,11-13)

While the laying on of hands is at the center of this passage from the Apology concerning the number and use of sacraments; this does not, in any respect, necessarily contradict the preponderance of the call.

Whereas, contemporary Lutheranism is witnessing a recession of the pure doctrine; traditions, on the other hand, are amassing in profusion. For this reason, the question of what is necessary and sufficient in the church is of extreme importance. The Old Adam is prone to traditions. The Antichrist dwells on pomp and circumstance. Bells and whistles, so to speak, can be used with joy and happiness when the doctrine of justification is clear and the advocates of a robust ceremony clearly teach and believe that all these reverent and sometimes amusing vestry props belong only in the category of adiaphora. If any doubt is cast on Christian freedom, we find ourselves *in statu confessionis* to witness to the biblical evangelical truth, which alone can set us free.

IV. The Mandate and the Limit: The Word of God

In recent church controversies concerning either the office of the ministry or various moral issues, bishops like to stress the importance of unity. A Protestant version of Roman curialism is also increasing, a tendency I have earlier called administrative fundamentalism: human statutes and bureaucratic processes have become authorities never to be disobeyed. We may go back to the book of Jeremiah in which the religious leadership and false prophets chanted their favorite slogan: "This the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord" (Jer 7:4.) The prophet, for his part, had the word of God, the word alone.

The word of God is, in the first instance, the Bible; there is no question about this in the Lutheran Confessions.¹¹ Wherever the Bible speaks, other authorities must give way in silence. Article 28 of the Augsburg Confession is an excellent example of this. The adversaries who wrote the Confutation of the Augsburg Confession claimed and boasted that the church has authority to change even the Decalogue by abandoning the Sabbath and choosing Sunday as the Christian holy day (CA XXVIII,33). The confession states clearly: "Scripture, not the church abrogated the Sabbath" (CA XXVIII,59).

The word of God is the sole source of authority and ecclesiastical power in the church. The word is the true mandate of the church, of its ministers and of all Christians. At the same time, this mandate is also the clear boundary and limit in the church.

However, when they teach or establish anything contrary to the gospel, churches have a command from God that prohibits obedience. Matthew 7[:15]: "Beware of false prophets." Galatians 1[:8]: "If . . . an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed!" 2 Corinthians 13[:8, 10]: "For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth," and, "Using the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down." . . . Augustine also says in the letter against Petilian that one should not agree with catholic bishops if they perchance should err and hold anything contrary to the canonical Scriptures of God. (CA XXVIII,23-28)

The mandate of all ecclesiastical power is therefore the word of God, and this same word also serves as its boundary and limit.¹²

¹¹ As opposed to Barth's notion of the Bible continually becoming God's Word *in actu*; see footnote 4.

¹² It has for a long time been fashionable to call faithfulness to the biblical word by derogatory names and adjectives. Personally, I remember the theological objection of the archbishop emeritus of Finland, John Vikström in the 1980s. He compared faith in the word of God to the trinitarian heresies of the early church: We poor confessional Lutherans may be guilty of having elevated the Bible to a position of faith and adoration equal to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. What else is this but a trinitarian heresy? One might imagine how difficult it was to react politely to such an appalling *theologoumenon*! What is the correct, diplomatic answer to a man of acclaim who claims that he, finally, has invented a *perpetuum mobile*? Recently, the current archbishop, the Most Reverend Jukka Paarma, claimed in an interview that the reactionaries in the church, believing in the Bible, claim to be omniscient like God (Magazine "Apu" August

We can rightly grasp the centrality of the word by bearing in mind that this very word of the Holy Scriptures is christological and trinitarian, as well. According to the promise of Jesus in John 14, this word brings the Holy Spirit to us, and the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, brings Christ himself to us, and Christ, the Son, brings the Father. Thus, by the power of the word, the Holy Trinity dwells with us and in us. The church can, therefore, exist by the power of the word and it is Jesus Christ who himself is this word of God. According to St. Paul in Ephesians 2, he is the cornerstone, on which the prophetic and apostolic foundations of the church are laid. The mystery of the church is that she is both the body of Christ and his bride. According to his own promise, Christ is truly present in his church (Matt 18:20; 28:20). In the sacraments, he even enters into a bodily union with his people. Therefore, his word is not a distant echo from past times. It is rather the living voice of the Lord who is truly present. For this reason, the idea that the church is in need of a visible head to be Christ's vicar on earth is in every respect an anomaly. A vicar is required to stand in the place of someone who is currently absent. This is Martin Luther's strong christological argument against the claims of the Roman pontiff in the Smalcald Articles (SA II,4). The church never requires a visible head because its real head, Jesus Christ, is truly present in his church. This head speaks his word through the ordained ministry. Therefore, the ministers are not his vicars but his representatives according to his own word: "Whoever listens to you listens to me" (Luke 10:16).

We do not want to hear what they command or forbid in the name of the church, because, God be praised, a seven-year old child knows what the church is: holy believers and "the little sheep who hear the voice of their shepherd." This is why children pray in this way, "I believe in one holy Christian church." This holiness does not consist of surplices, tonsures, long alb, or other ceremonies of theirs that they have invented over and above the Holy Scriptures. Its holiness exists in the Word of God and true faith. (SA III,12)

Through his word preached, taught, and confessed, the present Christ uses his power (*potestas ecclesiastica*) to create, maintain, and protect his own life in the church. This is his scepter prophesied in Psalm 110:2: "The Lord

2003)! Indeed, we know what God causes us to know in his word, not more, not less! But we are not omniscient, quite the contrary. Since I know nothing by my own reason and understanding, I am fully dependent on the word of the living God who has created the heavens and the earth, and who has also given me my body, my soul, my senses, and my reason.

will extend your mighty scepter from Zion; you will rule in the midst of your enemies."

V. Conclusion

I began by relating the call of a young theology student of yesteryear, myself, for the voice of the church in society. Yet the church does not need to make a voice for itself. Rather, it needs simply to remember the voice of her Lord, which never changes: "Thus says the Lord." The almighty God spoke through the prophets and the apostles, and so he speaks in the Scriptures. This is the testimony of all Scripture and of all true confession. "Holy Father, sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth" (John 17:17).