

# Interim Ministry Resources

## Chapter 13 Identity

Faith and Ministry (13)

FAITH AND MINISTRY

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Submitted to the faculty of Luther Seminary  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Senior Certification Process

Luther Theological Seminary

St. Paul, Minnesota

September 11, 1978

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....1

I. God Reconciling the World Unto Himself.....2

    Creation, Fall, and the Will of God.....2-3

    Jesus Christ as the Reconciler.....4-5

    The Work of the Holy Spirit.....6-7

II. Participating in God's Mission.....8

III. Ministry of Word and Sacraments.....9

    The Incarnate Word.....10

    The Written Word.....11

    The Spoken Word.....12

        Preaching.....12

        Teaching.....13

        Counseling.....13

        Pastoral Conversation.....14

        A Prophetic Voice.....14

    Baptism.....15

    The Lord's Supper.....16

IV. Integrating the Personal and the Pastoral.....17

Footnotes.....i

List of Sources.....ii

## FAITH AND MINISTRY

This paper is an attempt to provide a theological framework for ministry. The task of theology is one of ordered reflection upon what God has done and is doing in this world. Theology exists, not as an end in itself, but for the sake of ministry. The function of the ordained ministry is twofold. This involves faithfully proclaiming the Gospel message in order that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, people will encounter the person of Jesus Christ. At the same time, this includes equipping the people of God to bear witness of this life in Christ. To be sure, theology and ministry are interrelated. Theological convictions inform the doing of ministry, and vice versa.

Several factors enter into the formulation of this theological framework. I have tried to remain true to what I see to be the message of the whole of scripture.<sup>1</sup> In this regard I have been guided by the Christian tradition which has shaped the message down through the years. In addition I am indebted particularly to the reformer, Martin Luther, to the Lutheran Confessions, and to the experience of the Lutheran church in Europe and America.<sup>2</sup> Then, too, attention to the total context, concern for a pastoral emphasis, and personal experience in the life of faith figure into the total picture.

The theme, which gives unity to the scope of this paper, is the fact of God's initiative to reconcile the world unto himself. Without God's prior and present action, there would be no community of faith, nor any need for theology and ministry. God calls forth people to respond in faith and to witness of his love. Out of this gathered people certain ones are given the task of the ordained ministry.

I. God Reconciling the World Unto Himself

Creation, Fall, and the Will of God

The Apostle's Creed begins with the confession, "I believe in God the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." The Bible begins with the account of creation, and the Bible as a whole witnesses to God as Creator. In order to see the full story of God working in the world, this paper also begins at the beginning. In Gen. 1, we see that God made us in his image with the freedom and the responsibility to use and to care for the earth. At the same time, as we see in Gen. 2, we are made different from God in that, at all times, we are subject to and reliant upon Him. In these two themes, we gain a clue as to who we are and what we are about. God is the source and origin of all humankind and of this world in which we live. This confers a special dignity and self-worth upon us to know that we are privileged to live in relationship to Him. At the same time, we are humbled to realize that we are totally dependent upon the gracious mercy of this God who created us.<sup>3</sup> It is necessary to insist on this goodness of God's creation and his continued involvement in the world. For, failing to do so often leads to an anthropocentric spiritualization and a concomitant de-emphasis on corporate life, social concern, and ecological well-being.

There is, of course, another side to the story of humankind. The writer of Gen. 3-4 gives a symbolical account of what we call the fall. Humans try to be like God and attempt to determine the difference between good and evil. All of us strive for equality

with God, and, in so doing, we lose our true humanity.<sup>4</sup> God means for us to be creatures in his order. Instead we try to become like the Creator. Because of this, the relationship between God and his people is broken. Where communion was intended, separation has resulted. We see that we do not love and serve God as we ought. We do not enjoy the wholesome fellowship which God meant for us. This disharmony permeates all of family and society life. Brother turns against brother, (Cain and Abel), and entire peoples are separated from each other, (Tower of Babel). All people suffer from the guilt that comes in knowing the estrangement from God and from each other, (Adam and Eve hiding themselves). This alienation from God, from each other, and from ourselves must be taken seriously. Otherwise the approach to ministry will be one of misguided naivete.

But God does not give up on his world and his people. The story of the Old Testament, (Gen. 12ff), is the witness of God choosing out a people in order to accomplish his purpose in this world. The people of Israel become the people of promise. Abraham receives the word of the Lord that Israel is to be a blessing to all nations, (Gen. 12:1-3). Moses is told that God will provide the deliverance of his people out of Egypt, (Ex. 3:7-8). Isaiah witnesses to the fact that the final act of reconciliation will be even more inclusive than the human race, (Is. 11:6,8-9). Jeremiah is given the promise that a new covenant will be established one day, (Jer. 31:31, 33-34). Throughout the slavery, in the wilderness, in the midst of enemy nations, and during the exile, the promise of God sustains his people. In his persistent will, God works to reconcile the world unto himself.

Jesus Christ as the Reconciler

The promise of God comes to fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ. Paul sums it up best when he writes, "In Christ, God was reconciling the world unto himself," (II Cor. 5:19). Into this world of lostness, God sends his own Son to provide for our salvation. Where we try to deny our humanity, attempt to escape death, and seek to be like God, Jesus takes upon himself the life of a man, goes all the way to the cross, and obeys the will of God. Where we make our own law and so present ourselves to God, Christ fulfills the law and so gives himself for us. This Jesus Christ encounters us with his life and work and, in so doing, brings us to a crisis. In him we are confronted with the tragedy of the human situation. We realize that we have broken away from God's original intention for us. Instead of loving and worshipping God, we rebel against him. Rather than caring for our neighbors, we manipulate them to our own ends. In contrast to serving as faithful stewards of God's earth, we exploit it for our own advantage. Even as Christ conveys this word of judgment, he also brings a word of grace. Because of him, we are brought into a new relationship with the one who made us. Death no longer has any power over us, for Christ himself has gone through death and conquered it. Guilt no longer enslaves us, because Christ grants forgiveness to us. Estrangement no longer keeps us in bondage, in that now God, through Christ, accepts us as his own.

This act of reconciliation makes possible a restored relationship with God, a renewed fellowship with other people, and a

sincere acceptance of ourselves. In other words, we are freed up to be the people God intended for us to be. This is the good news of the Gospel. Jesus Christ calls for us to acknowledge our dependence upon God and to worship him in spirit and in truth. All the commandments are summed up in the great commandment, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself," (Lk. 10:27). To do so is to admit our humanness. We are freed from the desire to be like God, (pride), and from the compulsion to impress him with our pious efforts, (legalism). Together with this the barriers between people are torn down. In Jesus Christ we experience a common bond which unites us together. Then, too, Jesus makes it possible for us to accept ourselves, even as God in Christ accepts us as his own. Pride and legalism penetrate the Christian experience, in pseudo-humility, in order to cause God's gracious gift to be refused. This temptation is overcome only by the power of the one who promised, "If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed," (Jn. 8:36). To be sure, all of the above reaches its complete fulfillment only in the end time. We look forward in hope to this coming reality.

Now, even as we are called into fellowship in Jesus Christ, we are sent out with the message of God's reconciling activity in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ said to his first disciples, "Even as the Father has sent me, so send I you," (Jn. 20:21). Jesus Christ, then, is the center of the Gospel and the originator of the church which bears that message.



The Work of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit makes present God's action in Jesus Christ to reconcile all people unto himself. Faith is a gift, given by the Holy Spirit, to trust in the one who gave his only Son for us. Faith is also a response, made possible by the Holy Spirit, to accept this work of God in Jesus Christ. For me the realization of faith, as a gift and as a response, has come in knowing and in believing that God has called me to be his own in baptism. In response to God's invitation, my parents brought me forward to the baptismal font, made an affirmation of faith on my behalf, and then raised me in the Christian faith by teaching me at home and by involving me in the church. Later on, I made my own affirmation of baptism, (confirmation), and, now, I continue to live consciously in my baptismal covenant. For others, being called back to their baptism would mean nothing, since they, like a majority of people in our country, are unchurched and unbaptized. Therefore, to take seriously the power of the Holy Spirit is to act upon the conviction that people can be changed from unfaith to faith. Whether the Spirit acts to nurture the faith implanted in baptism or to evoke a dramatic change in a person's orientation of life, it is still the Spirit who works to make faith possible. This brings about a sense of humility, in knowing that only the Spirit can bring about faith, and a sense of confidence, in trusting that the Spirit uses the Gospel to create faith.

Even as the Holy Spirit calls all people to trust and belief, he gathers his own into the community of faith. Within this body, the Spirit makes possible worship and fellowship, mission and

service. In worship we are united to thank and praise the God who is our source of life. The Spirit brings us together in the name of Jesus Christ in order to declare the saving work of him who lived and died for all people so that this might be a reality for all who participate. The Spirit also comes to us through other people. In this way we enjoy the fellowship of other believers in the community of faith. Within this fellowship we are supported and strengthened, even as we sustain and uphold each other. The Lord's Supper is the sign of unity in our worship and fellowship, as Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, has promised to meet us. The Spirit not only draws us together in worship and fellowship, but also sends us out in mission and service. In mission the Spirit uses the sent people in order to continue the reconciling activity of God in Jesus Christ. Like the Israel of old, the new Israel is charged with being a blessing to all people. All of the above leads to conscientious and compassionate service in this world. God's people are called to be a part of the affairs of our day by graciously responding to the needs and concerns of others.

The Holy Spirit is not bound to the community of faith in order to accomplish the mission of reconciliation. The Spirit is at work to bring wholeness and justice to all of life. This comes as a statement of faith. Even as Job and the writer of the Psalms could confess God at work in creation only after seeing his saving acts in the Exodus, so, too, I can confess the work of the Spirit in <sup>new</sup>the<sup>v</sup> creation only after knowing the saving work of Jesus Christ.

## II. Participating in God's Mission

The Old Testament writers tell of how God called the people of Israel to remember their unique purpose in this world and to live in accordance with his design for them. The New Testament writers tell of how Jesus Christ summoned men and women to follow him and to carry out the work he began. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the words of these biblical writers come alive for us today. We are called to participate in God's mission of reconciliation within our world today.

Two marks, gratefulness/graciousness and vocation, characterize the Christian experience in this involvement.<sup>5</sup> God could have chosen angels to do his work for him. Instead he has elected to work through men and women, even though we are unworthy of his selection and undeserving of his trust. Our only proper response is one of gratefulness to the God who uses us in spite of ourselves. Together with this, graciousness permeates the life informed by the Spirit. God is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness," (Ex. 34:6). The people of Israel confessed this as a result of their experience with the Lord God, and the witness of Jesus confirmed it. Just as graciousness distinguishes the relationship of God with his people, this same graciousness pervades the presence of God's people under the influence of the Spirit. Vocation goes hand in hand with gratefulness/graciousness. Life in the Christian experience is lived within a larger scheme and plan for this world. The God who created the world is working to ~~make it new~~, and, in doing this, is calling upon his people to look beyond themselves in order to participate in God's mission in this world.

### III. Ministry of Word and Sacraments

In the explanation to the third article of the Apostle's Creed, Luther says that "...he (Holy Spirit) calls, gather, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it united with Jesus Christ in the one true faith," (Small Catechism). Even as Jesus Christ is the center of our faith and the originator of the church, the Holy Spirit is the one who brings people to faith in Jesus Christ and unites all, to worship and fellowship, mission and service, in his name. As an integral part of the church, certain ones are set aside in order to carry out a public witness to this one who has reconciled us unto himself. This does not exclude the people from their right and duty to participate in the mission of the church, but includes all in carrying on the work in cooperation with the pastors. The individual congregation is given the right to make the final call. For, the called pastor is charged with the ministry to the congregation and to the community. This is not an office of the church, but a responsibility within the church.

Our Lutheran Confessions speak of the ordained ministry as a ministry of word and sacraments.<sup>6</sup> Constant references are made to a ministry of word and sacraments by theologians, pastors and lay people alike. The letter of call is a call to a ministry of word and sacraments. Throughout my two years of seminary and during my year of internship, I have been working on coming to grips with what all this means. In what follows, then, I spell out what I see this ministry to be within the larger context of the mission of God reconciling the world unto himself and of God's people participating in his mission.

The Incarnate Word

In talking about the ministry of the word, I must first speak of the Incarnate Word. This Incarnate Word is him of whom John writes in the fourth Gospel, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us," (Jn. 1:14). The birth of Jesus Christ, his life and ministry, death and resurrection are central to the life of the Christian community. This one born to Mary was a person like us. At eight days he was presented to the Lord by his parents, Joseph and Mary. Little is known of his growing up, with the exception of his discussing with the teachers in the temple at the age of 12. When Jesus was 30, he was baptized by John the Baptist. At this time a voice from heaven came saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," (Matt. 3:17). Jesus was also tempted in every respect, as we are, but in all of it refused to yield to the temptations and, thereby, remained steadfast to God his Father.

Jesus declared his ministry when he spoke at his home synagogue,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has appointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (Lk. 4:18-19)

Wherever he went, he made people new. Many took offense at him so much so that they plotted to arrest him and to kill him. Even by nailing him to a cross, though, Jesus could not be done away with. For, even at the darkest hour, the centurion was led to confess what the church down through the ages has proclaimed, "Truly this was the Son of God," (Matt. 27:54). God put his stamp of approval on all that Christ had done by raising him from the dead. This Jesus Christ, who lived and died for us, continues his saving work in our day through the Holy Spirit

### The Written Word

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth by his word. Through the history of Israel, God continued to speak to his people through the mouthpieces of priests, prophets and kings. In Jesus Christ, God sent his Living Word to men in order to reveal himself more clearly and to provide salvation for his people. The Bible, then, mediates this message of God's activities through the centuries in order to reconcile the world unto himself. The scriptures are more than just a recording of events, though. Just as the individual portions of the Bible were written to a specific people at a specific time, so, too, these words are addressed to modern humanity in our historical context. The scriptures are filled with the power to accomplish the original purpose of bringing about faith in the reader. In this way, then, God continues the work of making a new creation by the power of his word.

The Bible is central to our Christian faith and to our church life. In preaching and teaching, study and devotions, and worship life, the scriptures stand as the basis of authority. The creative power of the Gospel message, within the Bible, gives sincerity and conviction to all we do.

Two common errors must be avoided in the use of scripture. For one, trying to prove the inerrancy of the Bible detracts from the proclaiming of the whole biblical message. Literalism causes one to concentrate on the defending of scriptures, rather than on testifying of the Gospel. For another, what amounts to worship of the Bible also hinders one from truly seeing the Word of God in Jesus Christ. Bibliolatry amounts to misplacing one's faith.

The Spoken Word

Jesus Christ comes to us as the Incarnate Word sent from God. The written word contains the Gospel message of God, through Jesus Christ, reconciling the world unto himself. The spoken word continues this chain link in witnessing to the Christ spoken of in the scriptures. In this way, the Living Word becomes incarnate in the life and witness of the Christian church. Since the time of the Reformation, Lutherans traditionally have referred to this as the preached word.<sup>7</sup> For that time, the ordained ministry was primarily concerned with the public proclamation. In this time, though, I think the concept of the spoken word can be expanded to include preaching, teaching, counseling, pastoral conversation, and a prophetic voice. I believe this gives a more wholistic framework for the ministry of the word. Furthermore, I hope to show how each has a good biblical, theological, and ecclesiastical basis.

As the reformers insisted upon, preaching is central to the work of the ordained ministry. Within the worship life of the congregation, the scriptures are used as the text upon which the sermon is based so that the message of God's saving work is proclaimed. In the faithful preaching, the message centers on God's action to bring us into fellowship with himself. Preaching requires a sensitive awareness to the entire context so that the message is not spoken in a vacuum. In preaching the biblical story becomes our story. It permeates all of existence and re-orientates the listener. What has been done in history is done again and again as the Holy Spirit works to bring about the response of faith.

In his great commission, Jesus told his disciples:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age. (Matt. 28:19-20)

Christ himself has stressed the importance of teaching and has given the authority for carrying out this task. Teaching is concerned with knowledge, faith, and life. An understanding of God's actions through the years to call people to himself is necessary. This, in turn, must lead to faith. Teaching should be done in such a way that faith is created where there is none, strengthened where faltering, and increased when shallow. In the same way, faith needs to be related to life so that it becomes evident how faith makes a difference in life. Throughout all of this, the pastoral relationship is crucial in sharing a living witness of the faith.

According to the New Testament witness, Jesus went about preaching, teaching, and healing the sick, (Matt. 9:35). This healing ministry can be carried on today through counseling relationships with those who are burdened. Jesus' critics felt that he spent too much time with the downcast. But he responded by telling them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick," (Mk. 2:17). A good counseling relationship can be an instrument of God's healing and growth as the pastor and the person struggle together, with the help of the Spirit, in order to overcome the alienation from self, from others, and from God. As grace is made incarnate in the pastoral relationship, people are enabled to love God, their neighbors, and themselves more fully. In this personal encounter, the Gospel is communicated in terms that are understandable to human experience.<sup>8</sup>



Much of Christ's ministry took place as he went about conversing with people. Whether it be the woman at the well, Zacheus in his home, or the rich young man along the way, Jesus met people in their own station and place of life. During the Reformation, Luther spoke of the "mutual converstain and consolation of the brethren" for the priesthood of believers to strengthen and uphold each other in the faith.<sup>9</sup> In our day pastoral conversation is the term used to refer to this being a pastor to people in all situations of life. In a structured way, this takes place in home and hospital calling. In an unstructured way, this takes place in the entering into genuine dialogue, whether it be after services on Sunday or on the street corner during the week. The motivation for this ministry is an active care and concern for people in all facets of life. This is an existential involvement with others, under the working of the Holy Spirit, in trusting that he will accomplish his ongoing reconciling activity.

The last area of the ministry of the word is a prophetic voice. I believe there is a strong biblical warrant and a pressing societal need for this ministry. Amos, in the Old Testament, preached against the social injustice, repulsive immorality, and shallow piety of his day. Jesus, in the New Testament, spoke out against the hypocrisy of professing to worship God, while caring little for one's neighbors. Christ said to his followers, "You are the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13), and told them to "Let your lights shine before men" (Matt. 5:16). The pastoral ministry can lead the church in making its witness by raising the moral, ethical, and spiritual questions. False gods must be pointed out as unworthy of worship,

### Baptism

The call to the ordained ministry in the Lutheran Church is, not only to a ministry of the word, but also to a ministry of the sacraments. The first of the two sacraments is that of baptism. Within the Lutheran Church we are committed to the practice of infant baptism. In infant baptism, the child is received into the community of faith and into the family of the heavenly Father. Baptism also signifies what God has done for us, in Jesus Christ, to give the gift of faith, to grant deliverance from the power of sin and death, and to bestow eternal salvation upon us. Through all this we see what Jesus meant when he said, "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, (Jn. 15:16). In baptism the pastor is the instrument in the hands of God, who is at work to bring people unto himself. The ministry of the sacrament does not stop with the baptismal rite. The parents and sponsors must be reminded of their responsibilities to bring up the child in the faith, and the child must be taught to trust and to love God.

Baptism is, not only an initiation into God's people, but also a basic commissioning into the ministry of Christ.<sup>10</sup> The apostle Paul writes, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body," (I Cor. 12:13). He goes on to say that, in this one body, all are given a diversity of gifts, (I Cor. 12:14-31). These gifts are meant to be used both in ministry to each other within the faith community and in service to the world. This understanding of baptism helps to correct the mistaken notion that pastors are expected to do the ministry for the church. All of us are called through baptism to participate in the ministry of the church.

### The Lord's Supper

The ministry of the sacraments is a ministry of baptism and of the Lord's Supper. In the Lord's Supper we follow Christ's command:

Take eat, this is my body which is given for you; this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup after supper, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins; this do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. (Words of Institution)

At the original meal, Jesus gathered his disciples together and promised his continued presence to them. From this they could know that he gave himself for them, and that his presence united them in their ongoing fellowship. The promise of Christ continues to us today. In the Lord's Supper, Christ gives himself, his body and blood, with the bread and wine. In the eating and drinking of these common materials and in the saying and hearing of Christ's words, we are assured that Christ is in our midst drawing us to himself.

The Lord's Supper is also a sacrament of renewal. Here Christ grants the benefits of baptism to us. His body and blood are given and shed "for the remission of sins." Even as Christ defeated the power of sin and death on the cross, so, too, in the giving of himself in this sacrament, he makes possible this victory for us. Also, Christ assures us in this sacrament that he will always be with us, even unto the end of the age, when he will provide eternal salvation. In the meantime, he strengthens us through the eating and drinking for a common solidarity in witness and service within this world. The ministry<sup>of</sup> Christ becomes the ministry of his disciples and now becomes the ministry of the church. Through his presence in this meal, he supports and sustains us for this task.

#### IV. Integrating the Personal and the Pastoral

In baptism I am called to be a child of God and a disciple of Jesus Christ. This gives me a sense of identity. Just as I have been born into a human family through God-given parents, I also have been brought into God's family through baptism. This, in turn, gives me a sense of purpose in life. God has called me, through Jesus Christ, to participate in his mission of reconciliation in the world. This identity and purpose defines who I am as a person.<sup>11</sup>

In response to God's love for me, I can reach out to others. God, in his mercy, has provided the gift of marriage in order to live in the closest possible companionship with another person. This Christian marital relation is modeled upon Christ's love for the church. Even as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it, husband and wife care for each other and give themselves to each other. I feel privileged to be married to Robbi Rudiger-Bolstad. As people of God and as a married couple, we are preparing for the ordained ministry.

Service in the ordained ministry flows out of the baptismal covenant and the marriage relationship. Because of God's love, shown to me in baptism and in marriage, I can respond in love by working in his service. The counsel of Christian people, the inner conviction of myself, and the personal experience in ministry has persuaded me to go into the ministry. Members of my home parish urged me to consider the ordained ministry. Through college others encouraged me to enter the seminary. During the year of internship, people of the parish spoke appreciatively of my work and told me to continue. Throughout seminary and internship, I have felt a sense

above,

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>In this regard I found Gustaf Wingren in The Living Word (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), esp. chapter 3, to be helpful.

<sup>2</sup>By the Lutheran Confessions, I mean all that is contained within The Book of Concord, Theodore G. Tappert, ed., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959). This includes The Three Chief Symbols, The Augsburg Confession, Apology of the Augsburg Confession, The Smalcald Articles, Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, The Small Catechism, The Large Catechism, and Formula of Concord.

<sup>3</sup>In this paragraph I am indebted to Marc Kolden, "Christian Faith and Ministry: Some Theological Convictions" (St. Paul: Luther Theological Seminary Review, Spring of 1978), p. 25.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 25-26.

<sup>5</sup>Paul W. Pruyser, The Minister as Diagnostician (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), pp. 69-71, 76-78.

<sup>6</sup>Article V, (The Office of the Ministry). See Theodore G. Tappert, ed., The Book of Concord (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 31.

<sup>7</sup>See Article VII, (The Church), p. 32, "The Power and Jurisdiction of Bishops" in Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, pp. 330. Book of Concord.

<sup>8</sup>Howard Clinebell, Basic Types of Pastoral Counseling (New York: Abingdon Press, 1966), pp. 45-48.

<sup>9</sup>Smalcald Articles Part III, Article IV. Book of Concord, p. 310.

<sup>10</sup>Peter L. Kjesth, "Baptism as Ordination." Dialog (Vol. 8: Summer, 1969), pp. 177-182.

<sup>11</sup>This matter of integration was raised first for me in this way by Dr. Lee Griffin in his 526 Pastoral Counseling class during my middler year. I was able to work at it more during the following summer of clinical pastoral education and during the year of internship.

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