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Priesthood, Pastors, Bishops: Public Ministry for the Reformation & Today.
By Timothy J. Wengert. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008. ix +
141 pp.

We are all priests, but we are not all ministers, that is, preachers or pastors. It is one of the theses of Wengert's book (and the one to which for reasons of space I shall restrict myself) that this conviction was upheld by Martin Luther from the beginning to the end of his activity as Reformer. Wengert is completely right at this point. He is equally right in stating that Luther did not advocate an *Übertragunglehre*, a concept according to which the ordained ministry is simply a derivation of the priesthood of all believers. Luther contended this just as little as he maintained the opposite. Consequently ecclesiological concepts and ecclesial practices based on the equation of the priesthood of all believers and ministry or the derivation of the one from the other cannot claim to be in accordance with the Lutheran Reformation.

But that is as far as the approval can go. For, unfortunately, the manner in which the author substantiates and develops his thesis is not convincing. What makes the reader uneasy from the start is his continuous mixing up of historical analysis and haughty ecclesio-political comments. There is hardly a page without bashing selfish congregations (gangs, 17) not respecting their dutiful ministers, or power-hungry pastors disobeying their devoted bishops (whom Wengert surrounds with paper walls to immunize them against criticism nearly as craftily as medieval papacy did for itself according to Luther's tract *To the Christian Nobility*). Such mixing arouses the suspicion that the historical-theological analysis is meant to serve a purpose and to arrive at a predetermined goal.

The book opens with a great surprise: There is no such thing as the priesthood of all believers in Luther's thought! This "imaginary" concept, this "pious myth," is all an invention of the nineteenth (or eighteenth or seventeenth?) century! As the basis for his discovery Wengert proudly claims to have analyzed Luther's works on the basis of "the latest technology," Luther's works online (1). Anyone working with students enthusiastic about this electronic tool knows the great dangers of the seemingly most efficient access it secures: You only get

out what you fed in, and you only get out individual lines without the context of the whole writing. Luther's statements on the priesthood of all believers come in many different linguistic variants, so it makes little sense to look only for specific formulations. In fact, Wengert himself speaks of the priesthood of all Christians so often and in several different wordings ("universal, spiritual, general priesthood") to make one wonder what the trumpet call "there is no such thing in Luther" really means. Closer analysis shows what the author really wants to say: Luther's passages on the priesthood of all believers mean much less than what is commonly thought. They only mean: All Christians are Christians (8)! In this respect Christians are all equal, ministers and non-ministers, simple parish folk and bishops.

Luther's statements about the priesthood of all believers hardly would have made an uproar with friends and adversaries alike (just think of the flood of *Flugschriften* [pamphlets] about this topic!) if their essence had been such an undisputed banality. Furthermore, their force does not rest on the implication that there is no higher spiritual position before God than that of being baptized—this concern is central rather to Luther's discussion of monasticism. Where he writes about all of us being priests the stress is on what follows from our common baptism for our spiritual *potestas* (power): "that we all have the same *potestas* in the Word and in whichever sacrament" (WA 6:566.27f). It is this statement which everyone—and rightly so—associates with Luther's discovery that all Christians are priests. For it means that baptism, the celebration of the Lord's Supper, absolution, and so forth, are acts "any Christian" can perform (WA 12:189.41ff). Luther really says "any Christian," and when shortly before he writes "all Christians in common," this is meant in the same sense—not in the sense of something which is "given to 'all Christians communally,'" as Wengert translates thereby shifting the sense (21). Only because Luther is serious about every Christian having this same *potestas* does his argument make sense that order forbids every Christian to make use of it in public on his own initiative.

Equally unsatisfying as Wengert's treatment of Luther's writings is his interpretation of the Lutheran Confessions. I shall concentrate

on his comments on CA 5. He contends this article is on ordained ministry. Yet he not only fails to put forward convincing arguments, but also dispenses with invalidating the data that speak against his assumption. He fails to consider that in the logical sequence of the articles a treatment of ministry at this point would make little sense. Articles four through six address justification: justification by faith (art.4), the means for faith to come into being, namely, the communication of word and sacraments (art.5), the fruits of faith (art.6), before those on the church (art.7 and 8), on the sacraments (art.9–13) and finally the one on the condition for the public communication of word and sacraments, namely, proper calling (art.14, considered by Wengert to be the bridge between the treatment of the sacraments and that of the church! [41]). Nor does he analyse the documents Melancthon used to elaborate CA 5, all of which show that the topic is not ministry but the communication of word and sacraments as God's outward means awakening faith—Romans 10:17 being in the background. Nor does he consider the anathema, which makes the same point. Instead Wengert puts forward lengthy theories on the words *ministerium* and *Amt* which show an unfortunate linguistic weakness regarding Latin (see also the completely wrong translation of the title *De instituendis ministris* [18 and 60]) as well as the German of the time (which, by the way, was not *Mittelhochdeutsch* (132), but *Frühneuhochdeutsch*). To begin with the latter, it is an absolutely unfounded contention that “[d]as *Predigtamt* can only mean ‘the office of preaching’” and is to be understood as “‘clerical’” (38). This is true in today's German, but in the sixteenth century the term (*Predigt*)*amt* was used just as well in the functional sense of fulfilling a task (in fact, Wengert himself quotes an example of this usage from Melancthon on page 132: *Amt der Predigt* paralleling *Handreichung der Sakramente*, “distribution of the sacraments”—which of course has to be understood functionally). The same applies for *ministerium* which can also mean office as well as service in the sense of *διακονία*; it is not at all the case that the word “almost always referred to the . . . public office” (37). We have to ask in every instance where these terms occur whether they are meant in the institutional or in the functional sense. In the case of CA 5 all the indicators point in the latter direction, the article does not speak

about the ordained ministry. This does not mean, though, that the opposite interpretation, put forward by others, is adequate: CA 5 does not speak about the common priesthood either. It is situated, so to speak, on the level below this differentiation, pointing out God's institution of the communication of word and sacraments for the sake of faith as such, before CA 14 deals with the prerequisite for their public communication.

The challenge in dealing with the Lutheran theology of ministry is to show how the two go together: that Luther upheld the ordained ministry and upheld it as an ecclesial factor in its own right while at the same time making the strong statements on the priesthood of all Christians he indeed makes. By simply interpreting away Luther's concept of the common priesthood Wengert evades the test. No wonder he makes no attempt to get into serious discussion with scholars with whom he disagrees. This is particularly obvious in his comments on the monograph by Harald Goertz, *Allgemeines Priestertum und ordiniertes Amt bei Luther* (Marburg, 1997) which, though admittedly onesided at some points, is by far the most thorough study on the topic in recent times. What would be needed here is not a few superficial and condescending remarks (e.g., 116) but arguments that match its thoroughness.

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Heretics for Armchair Theologians. By Justo González and Catherine Gunsalus González. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. 168 pp.

Justo González and Catherine Gunsalus González offer to a general audience an overview of major heresies that appeared on the radar screen of Christian faith during its first five hundred years. They summarize each of the heresies in chronological order, situating them properly in their original contexts and showing how they contributed to the formation of orthodox Christian doctrine.