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PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

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Abstract

All baptised believers are Priests and Kings and Prophets in their communion with Christ. But how and where do we experience this? It is a promise that is hardly ever reflected in the reality of our lives as Christians and Church members.

Citing the Scripture, the Second Vatican Council has brought back into focus the promise of the inalienable equality and dignity and of the collective priesthood shared by all baptised believers. In theology and proclamation, however, this concept has been given little attention, or has even been actively avoided.

This article aims to show the truth of this promise and to point out its significance for the daily lives and the liturgy of Christians. All of us, and especially those with leading functions in the Church, need to develop a greater awareness of it. Those who exercise the ministry of the Church, together with all Church members, live the one priesthood of participation in the priesthood of Jesus.

Keywords: Common Priesthood, Equal Dignity of All, Ministerial Priesthood, Ordo, Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, *Lumen Gentium*, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, Catechism of the Catholic Church

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Pet 2:9).

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The Second Vatican Council has enabled us to see the enriching fullness of being a Christian anew. A part of this fullness is the “Universal Priesthood” of all who are baptized. Knowing its theological responsibility, this article intends to contribute to the rising awareness and formation of a Church that wants to renew itself through the sources of the council.¹

Groundwork and Sources

Soon after taking office, Pope Francis reminded us in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of Vatican II that the Holy Spirit can be inconvenient to us because we resist him — with stubbornness and convenience; that we want to tame him, but he does not let himself be tamed.² Overcoming this convenience requires the decisive engagement of every Catholic Christian with the Council, theologically and practically. The reception of the Council is difficult, as its core topic of the priesthood of all believers shows: While some of the long-serving priests have difficulties with the idea of a “shared” priesthood, the perspective of “lay”³ people needs a more distinct awareness and implementation of this reality which is constituted and conferred through baptism.

An essential prerequisite is that we are or will become people that can gain the joy of what is given to us by *being Christian*. We can and

¹The basis of this article is a presentation before the Pastoral Council of the Archdiocese of Vienna, held on 05/15/2013, first published in “Geist und Leben” GuL 87/1 (2014) 29-47. The third part was considerably revised and expanded (“Priesthood and Ministry”). For the whole topic: E. Mitterstieler, *Das wunderbare Licht, in dem wir leben. Gleichheit, Würde und Priestertum aller in der Kirche*, Würzburg 32015. English translation, *OurLives in Wonderful Light. Equality, Dignity and Priesthood of all the Members of the Church*, is going to be published by ATC Bangalore within 2015.

Scriptural quotations are generally from the Revised Standard Version (RSV) and uses own translations in some cases. All German quotations were translated into English.

²“The Holy Spirit upsets us because it moves us, it makes us walk, it pushes the Church forward ... we wish to calm down the Holy Spirit, we want to tame it and this is wrong ... that’s because the Holy Spirit is the strength of God, it’s what gives us the strength to go forward but many find this upsetting and prefer the comfort of the familiar ... The Second Vatican Council was a beautiful work of the Holy Spirit ... But today, 50 years later, we have to ask ourselves: have we done everything the Holy Spirit was asking us to do during the Council? Could we feel the Council in the continuity and the growth of the Church? No, to the contrary: we celebrate this anniversary, we put up a monument but we don’t want it to upset us. We don’t want to change and what’s more there are those who wish to turn the clock back...” (Casa Santa Marta, Homily on 04/16/2013, Radio Vatican, 04/16/2013).

³I use the terms “lay/laity” in quotes because this beautiful word (I aoj, the people [of God]) has a pejorative undertone. Moreover, the people of God are *all of us* in the Church!

should have an equally profound joy in what is (also) the *other's*. An example in the scripture is the Gospel of the Visitation (Lk 1:39-56), in which the two women Mary and Elizabeth are both grateful to be unexpectedly expecting, a gift which had been bestowed upon them. They recognize each other's role in God's plan without envy and they are happy together and for each other and towards each other. It is the Holy Spirit which elevates them to such a joyful state of mutual recognition and appreciation without envy. Simple perception of the gifts and talents of others and warm sympathetic joy in mutual respect (Rom 12:10b) — is that not often in short supply in many petty and strained everyday situations in the Church, where we work with each other, against each other and beside each other? After so many arduous experiences of past years, it is time for the same rewarding and reciprocal sympathetic joy from the scene of the Visitation to be revived and become a leitmotif in the life of the Church.

A Gap of Awareness

Although the New Testament speaks of the priesthood of Christ and the priesthood of all that belong to him, key persons or other ministries are never referred to as priests. That changes quickly afterwards, notably accompanied by an increasing understanding of the Eucharist as a sacrifice, supported by views of the Old Testament. This development can be well observed in the following centuries of early Christianity, although it did not run a straight course in all places at all times.

The liturgical scientist Reinhard Messner⁴ pointed out that the *Apostolic Tradition* (end of the 2nd/beginning of the 3rd century AD), out of which our Second Eucharist Prayer originates, refers to the bishop as “high priest” *in the midst of the community as his presbytery*. In the original Greek text, which can still be reconstructed from the translations of the Eastern churches, it reads: “We thank you, that you have called us, to stand before you and *to serve you as priests/priestly* (ièrateuein)”. In the course of church history, however, this sense of common priesthood of all believers remained an exception. Leo the Great exemplified this (see below). The theme was only taken up occasionally, for example in the Reformation or in the Catholic tradition by authors such as Yves Congar.

⁴R. Messner, “Die priesterliche Dimension des Bischofsamtes nach dem Zeugnis der liturgischen Tradition,” in S. Hell, A. Vonach, ed., *Priestertum und Priesteramt. Historische Entwicklungen und gesellschaftlich-soziale Implikationen* (Synagoge und Kirchen Vol. 2), Wien/Berlin: LIT Verlag, 251.

So we can say in this regard that there was a gap of awareness, a “hidden stream” over most eras of the Church — until the Vatican II. Oddly enough, it remained very similar after the Council. The topic rarely entered into the academic theological discourse. It was mentioned more frequently in preaching and proclamation, yet it was hardly revisited more thoroughly and if so, mostly in the early years after the Council.

Human Dignity — Dignity of Christians

The interest in human dignity is a cornerstone of our faith, but it has only recently re-emerged and started to gain emphasis more widely and more sincerely.⁵ The articulation of human dignity and human rights, culminating in the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” by the United Nations in 1948, found its climax in the Church in the Vatican II. The reason for this is that the meaning, even the earnest desire for the equality of all, especially in dignity, is one of the distinctive characteristics of this Council:

Therefore, the chosen People of God is one: ‘one Lord, one faith, one baptism’ (Eph 4:5); sharing a common dignity as members from their regeneration in Christ, having the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection; (...) one undivided charity. There is, therefore, in Christ and in the Church no inequality on the basis of race or nationality, social condition or sex, because ‘there is neither Jew nor Greek: there is neither bond nor free: there is neither male nor female. For you are all ‘one’ in Christ Jesus’ (Gal 3:28; cf. Col 3.11). (...) all are called to sanctity (...). And if by the will of Christ some are made (...) pastors (...), yet all share a true equality with regard to the dignity and to the activity common to all the faithful for the building up of the Body of Christ (LG, 32).

One can find similar words in the writings of Leo the Great in connection to 1 Pet 2:5-9: “In the unity of faith and baptism, we enjoy indiscriminately equality and common dignity.”⁶

Right at the beginning of the Council, the equality in dignity was beautifully expressed. The Constitution of the Liturgy explicitly states that “the Christian people, as a chosen race, a royal priesthood ...” have by virtue of the baptism the right, and duty/ministry (“*ius habet et officium*”) to “fully conscious, and active participation” in the celebration of the liturgy, the summit and font of the activity and all the power of the Church (SC, 14; SC, 10). This means at the same

⁵An important witness of the early modern era is the Dominican Bishop Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484/85 to 1566), protector of the (human rights) of the Indians in Latin America.

⁶Leo Magnus, *Tractatus 4*, in *Tractatus*, ed. A. Chavasse, in CSL 138, 16.

time, of course, the right, duty and ministry to priestly share and shape the *whole* life and activity of the Church together. H.J.F. Reinhardt, a scholar of ecclesiastical law, concluded as follows: "This fundamental equality of all members of God's people, the clergy and laity, was one of the major statements of the Second Vatican Council,"⁷ since the effective church law of 1917 saw "the clerics as the only legitimate institution of the actions in the Church."⁸ We are all coequal to one another by the same birth as people and rebirth as Christians. Accordingly, human dignity and Christian dignity belong seamlessly together. They support and protect each other. The Creator and the Redeemer are one and the same — namely *He* who "has made us kings and priests serving his God and Father" (Rev 1:5ff). "Clergy", inalienable share (κλήροιο) of the Lord, is the whole People of God!

Priests in the New Testament

Among the scriptures of the New Testament, the first letter of Peter and the Revelation of John discuss the priesthood of all who believe in Jesus.⁹ Furthermore, the Letter to the Hebrews is of utmost importance, as it is the only scripture that describes the priesthood of Jesus. Thus, it provides information on what the terms "Priest" and "priesthood" actually meant within the New Testament. The Letter to the Hebrews discusses in detail the unique and still solely valid priesthood of Jesus in connection to the Old Covenant. Not only through his sonship, but also through his devotion in "his own blood," "once and for all" (εἰςάπαξ) consummated (Heb 9:12), is Jesus Christ (high) priest and has thus abolished any other kind of priesthood. Accordingly, the book of Hebrews knows no cultic priesthood anymore; not the one of the tent, nor one of the temple, but only one priesthood from "outside the camp" from where he "suffered." It is a priesthood of "disgrace" that we are compelled to share in our everyday lives among the people (Heb 13:11-13).

The New Testament consistently avoids referring to Christian ministers with terms of priesthood that were commonly used in that environment. The new concept of a priesthood which stems from Jesus was also not specifically related to Christian ministers. For

⁷H.J.F. Reinhardt, c. 208, Ed. No. 2, in MK CIC (as of October 1987), in: K. Breitschnig, "Zur rechtlichen Stellung des Priesters im kanonischen Recht," in S. Hell, A. Vonach, ed., *Priestertum und Priesteramt*, 62.

⁸P. Krämer, *Kirchenrecht II, Ortskirche – Gesamtkirche* (Kohlhammer Studienbücher Theologie 24,2), Stuttgart et al. 1993, 21, in K. Breitschnig, "Zur rechtlichen Stellung," 62.

⁹I prefixed a corresponding scripture (1 Pet 2:9) to this article. For the exegesis of this and other relevant scriptures, see E. Mitterstieler, *Das wunderbare Licht*, 28ff.

them, the New Testament uses only terms such as *elder*, *headman*, *shepherd*, *episcopos*, *leader*. They all come from the fields of religious or secular leadership of communities. "The terms *ièreuj* and *ièrateuma* (Latin: *sacerdos* or *sacerdotium*, i.e.: *priest* or *priesthood*), however, are reserved for *Christ* and the *entirety of all who are baptized*."¹⁰ Therefore, the term of *priest* in all of its unique preciousness and in alignment with the scripture, refers to all who bear the name of Jesus. Likewise, the liturgy of baptism is full of terminology referring to the biblical testimony of the election of every believer into the priesthood.

Baptismal Consecration

In the liturgical celebration of baptism, the celebrant recites the following words after the baptism with water and during the anointing with the oil of catechumens: "The God of power and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has freed you from sin, given you a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, and *welcomed you into his holy people. He now anoints you with the chrism of salvation. As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet, and King, so may you live always as a member of his body, sharing everlasting life*"¹¹ [Emphasis by the author]. These obligatory and explanatory words accompany the venerable act of anointing with chrism (according to the scripture, kings, priests and prophets were anointed). They are words that are often spoken, but too rarely are they spoken about; words which were hardly reflected upon in the theological discourse and which are rarely brought up in preaching, teaching and catechesis. And yet they address a core topic of the abundant mercy of being human; they address something that Jesus has redeemed in us. We are priests and priestesses in Christ. Therefore, we can serve God and the people in freedom and devotion. We are kings and queens. Therefore, we can administer the whole creation according to his intentions. We are prophets and prophetesses. Therefore, we can proclaim him to all in everything. Baptism bestows a radical and comprehensive belonging and configuration to Christ. This is the creative foundation for everything that being a Christian is. Vatican II emphasizes this by referring several times to baptism as "*baptismal consecration*," "*baptismatis consecratio*" (e.g. PC, 5; PO, 12). The Council Fathers underline the aspects which we all have in common by virtue of the baptism: "Christ the Lord, High Priest taken from among men (cf. Heb 5:1-5),

¹⁰St Lyonnet, *Eucharistie et Vie chrétienne*, Foi Vivante, 100, in *Hefte aus Taizé 7*, Die Eucharistie und die ersten Christen, Taizé 2008, 15.

¹¹*Rite of the baptism for one child* (accessed August 03, 2014), <http://www.ibreviary.com/m/prehiere.php?tipo=Rito&id=103>.

made the new people 'a kingdom and priests to God the Father' (cf. Rev 6:1; cf. 5:9-10). The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood (*consecrantur*)" (LG, 10). Leo the Great already expressed this as follows: "All who are born again in Christ are made kings by the sign of the cross, while the anointment of the Holy Spirit consecrates them to priests."¹²

Baptism is the source of Christian priesthood in its unity with the sacrament of Confirmation. Through it, we belong to the People of God as members of Christ. We are deeply grown into him, the one vine. Baptism is what makes us all equal, what anoints us in the Holy Spirit to be Christians. Baptism anoints us to one "indivisible person"¹³ with Christ, the "Priest, Prophet, and King."

A baptism received with faith causes us to belong deeply to Christ. With him we are descended and have risen in baptism with him. With him we have heard the words "You are my beloved Son," which also makes us sons and daughters. With him we were also anointed. All what he is and has, he shares with us: his father, his unique sonship, his spirit, his priesthood, his kingdom and his prophetic ministry, his whole life, his work (Jn 14), his being loved and his glory (Jn 17). Even his ministry as shepherd he shares with all of us: to be a shepherd for others (what Cain refused with dire consequences) is fundamental to being human and, a fortiori, to be a Christian. Since we belong so much to him, Jesus, who did not want to be Son for himself alone, but who wanted to have countless brothers and sisters (cf. Heb 2:11f). We therefore belong very much to each other. It seems to me that these dynamics of sharing¹⁴ are passed on to us so that we may enter into it.

The Dynamics of Sharing: Together

Sharing is the basic form of the love of Christ. This dynamic has been professed by Vatican II. It is the decision for the "we" in the sense of "all". "Together" is one of the words that implies a longing among people to share. Should this not be just that in the Church? Is the orientation towards the *common* (cf. Acts 2:44) not a natural

¹²Leo Magnus, *Tractatus* 4, 16.

¹³"en kai. adiaireton uparcomen proswnon": attributed to Epiphanius († 535), *Homilie am großen und heiligen Sabbat*, Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 43, 461.

¹⁴Cf. Ignatius Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises* 231: "Love is a message from both sides ... that the lover tells the beloved what he has or what he has or can" — and we can add "and of what it is"; since in 234, he writes: "... and consequently, how much the same Lord then asks to give *himself to me*, as much as he can ..." [Emphasis of the author].

attitude, taking Jesus as an example? Admittedly, the comprehension and implementation it requires, is a struggle from the start. We can say with certainty that the perspective and decision of the Council for a “we” and “all” was a decision out of the Holy Spirit, was a decision of love: *Everyone* in the Church (priesthood of all believers), *all* bishops (collegiality), *all* Christians (ecumenism). Ecumenism in the deepest, most soteriological connection with our Jewish brothers and sisters, ecumenism with *all* religions and with a perspective to *all* men and women of good will to *all* mankind — in short: a “*brotherly way*” towards everyone (NA, 5).

Jesus had a dynamic of sharing in which he did not consider anything he owned as something to be “exploited” (Phil 2:6). Subsequently, the question for today’s presbytery regarding the priesthood of all believers cannot possibly be what one (still) has to hand over to the “laity.” Would not rather joy be more appropriate, a joy that asks: “How can everything that was given to me/us be gratefully shared with as many in the Church as possible, so that the Church can thrive and be more alive in all its members and beyond?” For there is nothing, from the ministry of the deacon to the one of the Bishop of Rome, that is not founded in every one of us by the baptism as its source. Root, stem and sprout of the one vine Jesus Christ are in all of us. Every branch shares substantially and comprehensively his whole person, his life, his identity (*alter Christ*) for the well-being and life of all.

Christian Priesthood

“Priesthood of all Believers” is not just a buzz word or a concise formula. It should and will unfold its content. For this purpose, it is necessary to comprehend the understanding of priesthood in the New Testament in comparison to its predecessors in the Old Testament¹⁵ and to identify the differences to the time of Christianity. Of course, today’s presbytery is also to be considered, as we are aware of it as a result of a long development within the Church. According to my knowledge, I enter new ground when I attempt to explain more clearly the development of the priesthood of all believers which Vatican II had emphasized. At the same time I am pointing out a *desideratum* in the theology of the post-conciliar period.

In LG, 10 there is a first reference:

“Therefore all the disciples of Christ, *persevering in prayer and praising God* (cf. Acts 2:42-47), *should present themselves as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God* (cf. Rom 12:1). Everywhere on earth *they must bear witness*

¹⁵Cf. More details in my aforementioned book *Das wunderbare Licht*, 28ff.

to Christ and give an answer to those who seek an account of that hope of eternal life which is in them (cf. 1 Pet 3:15)" [Emphasis of the author].

Free Access

Christian priesthood means first and foremost competent and comprehensive free access to God. In many religions, access to the deity was and is reserved to designated priests and priestesses (as well as the offering of effective, reconciliatory sacrifices, etc.). To this day, the priest is commonly understood as the one who 'knows God better' and whose prayer is more potent because he has an exclusive access to the divine. However, in a Christian understanding, this priestly competence is equally granted to all who are baptized:

But this is the covenant (...) I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord (Jer 31:33ff; cf. Heb 8:10ff; see also LG, 9!).

Jesus emphasizes what the prophet Jeremiah had pointed out: "'And they shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me" (Jn 6:45, Isa 54:13). The word of *free access* is owed to Eph 2:17, referring to everyone: "And he (Jesus) came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him we both have access (*prosagwghn*) in one Spirit to the Father." This applies not only to Jews and Gentiles, but to everyone, is demonstrated a few verses later in Eph 3:12: "in whom we have boldness and confidence of *free access* (*parrhhsian kai. prosagwghn*) through our faith in him." Through our faith in Jesus and our regeneration in the baptism, we can see ourselves as "children of God," as his sons and daughters.¹⁶ As such, we have free access to God. In all the experiences of alienation and distance from God in our world, in our society and our own self, we hear "the gospel of Jesus Christ" (Mk 1:1), the message of a reality which is only accessible in all its depth by him: the "mystery we call God" (Karl Rahner).

All which is unheard and exhilarating about "free access" is completely encompassed by the word "father"; the simplest form of addressing God. It is a word with which we sometimes have to struggle, but it cannot be substituted in the Judeo-Christian history of

¹⁶Cf. the old reference of baptism as *fwtismoj*: Through baptism we come to the light (*fwtj*) of Christ, in which we recognize him, everything of his and ourselves. "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light" (Eph 5:14b).

revelation. Jesus has told it to us to share it with us. This one word, which also encompasses the whole motherhood of God, holds the miracle of our and all human's proximity to God.¹⁷ "Abba", "(o) pathr", "pater", "Father": the whole happiness of Jesus, out of which he lived and into which he died in deep distress, is comprised in him, his father. He is our Father too.

Self-giving

"Deus nos quaerit, non nostra": "God is looking for us, not for the things we own."¹⁸ For relationship in the full sense of the word is only possible from self to self. God himself is self-giving. He is in everything he does and affects. Self-giving is the content of his being, the source of creation, the origin of our existence. It is the first reason and deepest content of his work in all of his creation, in his revelation, in the redemption through his son, in every man and woman and in his Church. The sacrifice of Jesus corresponds with this. His devotion to us is not the provision of anything; it is not a ritual sacrifice. He is rather giving himself "with his own blood (dia. de. tou/ idiou aimatoj)" – "once and for all (εἰς ἅπαντα)" (Heb. 9:12).

We are called to such devotion as well, because God wants to give himself and prepares us for it, without measure. Sacrifice, or to put it more simply: the answer on the part of human beings can consequently only be self-giving too, not in a grand gesture, but as a gift of himself and herself that goes the patient way of everyday life and that we offer in the celebration of the Eucharist in and with the self-giving of Jesus to the Father. For no "sacrifice" that has ever been offered by anyone of us is — in regard to both the first and the second covenant — a true sacrifice, if it is not accompanied by the giving of ourselves at the same time.¹⁹

Similarly, the head of the eucharistic celebration has not been entrusted with any other sacrifice than this one: the self-giving of Jesus, the self-giving of the Church in the assembled congregation and the self-giving of himself. The head of the congregation is in his capacity the promise that the self-giving of the celebrating

¹⁷Eugen Biser formulated: "With the Abba-Father — 'with his reverent and tender address of Abba' - he (Jesus) stormed the heaven, he broke through the wall of the divine aloofness, he bridged the abyss of God's absence and he opened up the access to the heart of God" (quoted in: TE DEUM, May 2013, 252).

¹⁸Aurelius Augustinus, Sermo 42, in *Sermones de vetere testamento*, ed. Lambot, CCSL 41, 504 I. 11.

¹⁹Many prayers over the gifts in the Eucharist and the third Eucharistic Prayer speak of it ("May he make of us an eternal offering to you ...").

congregation is connected to the self-giving of the Church in its entirety. Therefore, everyone concelebrates together with the head (the bishop or the presbyter) and celebrates and proclaims the death and resurrection of the Lord. All celebrating believers together “offer the Divine Victim to God, and offer themselves along with It” (LG, 11). The exercise of the universal priesthood in the celebration of the Eucharist reveals itself most strikingly, as already mentioned above, in the “priestly service” (ιερατεutin) of the Second Eucharistic Prayer, whose “we” is spoken by the head on behalf of the whole celebrating community.

Forgiveness

Furthermore, forgiveness is another essential characteristic of the priesthood of all believers. A few days before John XXIII died, following the farewell audiences for the members of the Curia, he had said to his secretary: “We have worked together and served the Church, without stopping, and we’ve thrown back the rocks that have sometimes obstructed our way. You got along with my weaknesses and I got along with yours. We will always be friends ... I will protect you from heaven.”²⁰ John XXIII undoubtedly did not say this by virtue of papal authority. It was his attitude, his attitude as a person and as a Christian.

Jesus expects us to forgive one another like God forgives us. But God forgives passionately. Without measure, just as the sky stretches out above us, comes forgiveness from him, because he wants us to live — at any cost, even at the cost of himself. Since without forgiveness, there is no human life. We are all called to contribute to his forgiveness, as we are all priests by baptism in the name of Jesus. It is never about reconciling God, rather that we allow ourselves to be reconciled by him, to let his forgiveness in Jesus come to us, to accept it and to carry on his appeal “on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:20). The Church is the sacrament of God’s forgiveness in this world. It is and wants to be the sacrament of reconciliation in all its members. The order to forgiveness and reconciliation is addressed to everyone and the Sacrament of Reconciliation serves this order (but not exclusively!).

The terms “forgive” and “self-giving” both include the word “to give.” It refers to those primordial dynamics which constantly emanate from God: to give oneself, without preconceived restriction, and also to

²⁰Quoted in H. Gaisbauer, *Ruhig und froh lebe ich weiter. Älter werden mit Johannes XXIII.*, Wien, 2011, 199.

forgive according to the measure of God: seventy times seven (Mt 18:21ff.) — patiently and passionately as we hope to be forgiven.

Proclaim

In proclaiming we find the same urgent dynamics of sharing and giving: Proclamation is another key feature of the priesthood of all believers.

The Lord *Jesus*, 'whom the Father has sent into the world' (Jn 10:36) has made his *whole* Mystical Body a sharer in the *anointing of the Spirit with which he himself is anointed*. In him *all* the faithful are made a *holy and royal priesthood*; they offer *spiritual sacrifices* to God through Jesus Christ, and they *proclaim the perfections of him* who has called them out of darkness *into his marvellous light*. Therefore, there is *no member who does not have a part in the mission of the whole Body*; but each one ought to hallow *Jesus in his heart*, and in the *spirit of prophecy bear witness* to Jesus (PO, 2) [Emphasis by the author].

What Vatican II confirms in this statement to all the baptized does not only apply to acting as a witness in everyday life — which is one aim of this "spirit of preaching."

It is also true for the celebration of the liturgy. The liturgy is a highly significant aid to keep Jesus holy in our hearts and is an act of proclamation itself which bears witness to the mystery of our faith. Until Vatican II, the vocal participation of the congregation was limited to the concluding "Amen" in the Eucharistic Prayer. Afterwards, it gained more speech in this prayer that had been reserved for the official head of the celebration. The whole celebrating community was entrusted with a highly important word of proclamation: "We proclaim your Death, O Lord, and profess your Resurrection until you come again." This acclamation of the congregation, immediately after the institution narrative, confirms *all of us as a royal priesthood, as bearers of common priestly proclamation*. In the solemn proclamation of the paschal mystery of our faith, we all together *proclaim the Paschal Mystery of the Lord*, the origin and the core content of our faith. It should not be necessary to point out that this naturally applies to everyone in the celebrating congregation, men and women alike.

The topic of "women in the Church" must be an alarming question today, more than ever. I approach this question from a biblical perspective: How do we deal with the message of the events of Easter? Did not the path of the risen Lord, his new creation, begin with the women who had followed him? Did not the resurrected come *to them first* in the early morning of the first day of the week, with the most simple, undramatic, and natural greeting: "Greetings /

Rejoice" (In NT Greek "cairete")? Apparently he considered the women worthy and competent to be first witnesses of Easter for the proclamation of the most unprecedented of all messages. Could it be that we — like the apostles at that time — do not fully understand his actions and words till today? Rethinking our prejudices regarding the allegedly feminine tendency for "lhfoj" = "chatter" (Lk 24:11) as well as the timelessly common injustices against women is just as necessary for us today as it was for the Apostles back then. In fact, men should "blush with shame," that we "had not even started to look for him, whom the (women) had already found by then" (Jerome, 347-420).²¹ There is still a tendency to coerce women into inferior roles and to confine them in these roles, the objective being to ensure that they are not taken seriously, considered reliable, trustworthy or competitive, and are ultimately not able to disprove our own prejudices. Is it not a similar case with the biblical women who were, from the early days of the church fathers on, often called: "Apostles of the Apostles," "*apostolae apostolorum*"?

It is true about all the members of the Church: "*The holy people of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office; it spreads abroad a living witness to Him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise, the tribute of lips which give praise to His name*" (cf. Heb 13:15) (LG, 12) [Emphasis of the author]. Preaching is by no means limited to the official ministry in the Church. All of us are priests and priestesses, are prophets and prophetesses. The phrase "especially by means of a life of faith and charity" is obviously true of *all* its members: women and men, official ministers and all services. Everyone has to take this mission to heart as a condition to serve, to be such a witness in his or her life, and everyone has the same competence for it. Immediately following these words, the Council reminds us of the competence in faith of the *whole* people of God and speaks with the highest respect of it as "the entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One" (cf. 1 Jn 2:20.27) (LG, 12).

Karl Rahner already wrote very concisely in 1936: "Baptism is the fundamental consecration to pastoral care ... Every baptized person is an ordained pastor."²² It implies that Rahner includes both men and women in this statement.

²¹Jerome, *In Sophoniam Prophetam, prologus*, in *Commentarii in Prophetas minores*, ed. Adrien, in CCSL 76A.

²²K. Rahner, *Weihe des Laien zur Seelsorge*, in ZAM XI/1 (1936/Vol. 1), 30, = K. Rahner, in *Schriften zur Theologie*, Vol. III, Einsiedeln et al. 1956, 323.

Intermediation

The last aspect of the priesthood of all believers to be discussed here is the subject of intermediation. Mediation always belonged to the obligation of the priest according to common understanding. Although we are given the role of mediation due to the universal priesthood in Christ, since Christ is our one and only mediator, I would rather like to use the term of "*intermediation*," when talking about this service which has been entrusted to us.

Faith, hope and the love of Christ are all poured into us through the act of baptism. Therefore, assisting faith, hope and fraternal love are part of this service of intermediating God which can be rightfully expected of us as priests and priestesses by the Church and world. As baptized Christians, we are all in this ministry; we are ordained and assigned by our Lord to do so. The love as a fruit of the faith which we have received and in whose power we actualize the love of God and make it perceivable has the absolute priority and first place — wherever we are and however we live. The love, from which and in which we live, is the most fundamental sacrament of God's presence. In the simple, everyday devotion to one another in self-giving, forgiveness, etc., unending priestly intermediation is accomplished through us *in persona Christi*.

A precious example of the love which is given to us in our priestly service by baptism is the service of intermediation of *intercession*. The prayer of the Church is abundant with this, especially in the liturgy, whether it is addressed to Jesus or addressed through him to the Father and to the Spirit. This is not only true for the intercessions at the end of the Liturgy of the Word. The Eucharistic Prayers, which the head of the congregation speaks on behalf of the whole community, have always included a striking number of intercessory elements: for the Church; for the whole people of God; for the ministers and for all who are appointed to a service in the Church; for the living and the dead; for all who are close and far. The solemn intercessions of the liturgy on Good Friday testify profoundly to the depth of intercessions in the Church. Other examples are the celebrations of the sacraments, the rich Missals and the prayers of blessing. Beyond the liturgy, the whole earthly and heavenly community of believers is united in such praying for the Church and for countless people in various situations of need. We are all priestly involved in this loving, petitionary advocacy for one another, as individuals and as the Church. The scripture is full of paradigmatic intercessory prayer. Think of the audacity of Abraham ("Suppose ten [righteous] are found there?" Cf.

Gen 18:32) or the one of Moses, who even stood up for his people to God against God (cf. Deut 9:25f). People faithfully plead to Jesus for their sick and bring them to him. Think of Jesus himself, especially of his “*High Priestly Prayer*” (Jn 17), which is entirely an intercession for his own disciples. It is Christ, “who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us” — “kai. entugcanei uper himwh” (Rom 8:34b).

Anyone who has begun to integrate intercessory prayer into his or her personal prayer will sooner or later experience that love, warmth, solidarity and certainty grow even in the midst of disappointment and urgency. The priestly ministry of our praying advocacy²³ for one another and for everyone with Jesus, in the authority of our free access, is an intermediating service in frankness and immediacy before God.

Are we aware of the abundance and joy of being Christians? Nowhere else in this world do we find a priesthood as the one entrusted to us! Such a way of love as the prayer of intercession is always and everywhere available to us — even when every other way seems to be blocked.

Priesthood and Ministry²⁴

Between the universal priesthood (*sacerdotium commune*) that was presented here in some essential features and the priestly ministry (*sacerdotium ministeriale*) of the Church, there must be a real and describable connection: alive and interpreting, clarifying and promoting one another. Vatican II could not or would not formulate such a recognizable and articulated connection between the two as precisely as one may desire. Theological scholars have also not developed a clear picture of the relation between the two — according to my knowledge — also because they hardly address the topic of the priesthood of all believers. The relation between the two cannot be *beside* or *above* each other and cannot be artificially constructed. When looking at the life of the Church today, it should rather be discernable out of the matter itself and it must be comprehensible.

The Catechism of 1993

In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, we read:

Christ, high priest and unique mediator, has made of the Church ‘a kingdom, priests for his God and Father’ (Rev 1:6) [See Rev 5:9-10; 1 Pet 2:5.9]. The whole community of believers is, as such, priestly. The faithful exercise their baptismal priesthood through their participation, each

²³lat. Intercessio — intercession.

²⁴Cf. S. Hell, A. Vonach, ed., *Priestertum und Priesteramt*.

according to his own vocation, in Christ's mission as priest, prophet, and king. Through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation the faithful are 'consecrated to be ... a holy priesthood' (LG, 10).

The ministerial or hierarchical priesthood of bishops and priests, and the common priesthood of all the faithful participate 'each in its own proper way, in the one priesthood of Christ.' While being 'ordered one to another,' they differ essentially (LG, 10). In what sense? While the common priesthood of the faithful is exercised by the unfolding of baptismal grace — a life of faith, hope, and charity, a life according to the Spirit — the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood. It is directed at the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians. The ministerial priesthood is a means by which Christ unceasingly builds up and leads his Church. For this reason, it is transmitted by its own sacrament, the sacrament of Holy Orders.²⁵

That is absolutely correct! It is most definitely the task of theology to further investigate the relation between the two and their deeper commonality. I will hereafter attempt this. The often quoted but probably still little-reflected words of Augustine support this endeavour and specify the direction: "Where I'm terrified by what I am for you, I am given comfort by what I am with you. For you I am a bishop, with you, after all, I am a Christian. The first is the name of an office undertaken, the second a name of grace; that one means danger, this one salvation."²⁶ The common *being Christian* is comfort, grace and salvation. The official, ministerial service "for you" would only be terror and danger, without living and standing in and out of the "with you," of the common *being Christian*. This is the source of life and comfort of the ministry: it shares the *fullness of Christian life* out of the baptismal with all sisters and brothers.

Eph 4:11-16: Participatory Growth towards Christ

The bases for such a determination of the relation are the statements in the New Testament about the *Communio* of God's people, to which everybody belongs, ministerial priests and "lay" people. Eph 4:11-16 speaks very impressively about the way of a growing *Communio* in Christ. The ministry is given by Christ as an aid to advance the constitution of his Body, the Church, which is supported together by everyone in this communicating Body:

²⁵Nos. 1546 und 1547.

²⁶Ubi me terret quod vobis sum, ibi me consolatur quod vobiscum sum. Vobis enim sum episcopus, vobiscum sum christianus. Illud est nomen (suscepti) officii, hoc gratiae; illud periculi est, hoc salutis. Aurelius Augustinus, *Serm. 340,1*, in *Sermones (Caesarius Arelatensis), Pars altera*, ed. D.G. Morin, in CCSL 104, 919; respective *Serm. 340, 1*: PL 38, 1483; quoted in LG, 34 after *Serm. 340, 1*: PL 38, 1483, without "suscepti".

The focus of Eph 4:11-16 is not on the fate of individuals, but on the community as a whole. It is growing. The first one in this process is Christ: "him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint." As "saints" we are all involved and are contributors in the growth process of Christ. Each and every individual interacts as a joint (i.e. as a connecting link in the body) with its respective power. In all of us, in each and every one, occurs at every stage of this event the presence of the growing body of Christ. It promotes the common growth process, which strives towards "mature manhood," so that we can together display him, "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." The power and dynamics for growth are in *all* of us. This process, the building up of the Church which is carried by all, requires several means of support which are provided by Christ. This draws a first outline of the official ministry (in the sense of recognized assignments or charismas). Namely, they are called "apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers." They are "given" by Christ. Their assignment is described as "to equip": "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ." This takes place in the living testimony of the resurrection of the Lord, in the gift of interpretation (of the signs of the times, by the Spirit), and in *updating*; in the authentic proclamation of the good news of Jesus, in the service of leading, teaching and creating unity. In such a way, it "makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love," from Christ and for him and in mutual aid for one another.

Priesthood and Ministry: A Development

Among the above mentioned means of support for the increasingly differentiated ministry, the term "priest" (*ièreij*) cannot be found in the discussed scripture of Eph 4:11-16, nor is it included in any other list of official ministries in the New Testament. Accordingly, even those aids for the upbuilding of the *Communio*, which we call sacraments today, have not yet been completely named and were not bound to official priests. Of course, they are essentially given: the breaking of bread and various other acts that turn out to be aids in the communities for unity, reconciliation, the strengthening of the saints in the Spirit, and for physical and mental healing.

The pastoral ministry, "given" by Christ, has already exclusively claimed the priesthood of Christ in the course of the first Christian centuries in the wake of the forming of the universal Church. To be more precise, it claimed the priesthood of Christ for its service in the Church. One could also say: it was increasingly more assigned to it in

the course of this development. Crucial to this development was undoubtedly the early evolution of the concept of the Eucharist as a sacrifice and the strengthening connection between presiding over the Eucharist and the ministry. Many aspects of the priesthood of Christ have been incorporated into the ministry of pastor and leader and thus these parts assumed features of this ministry (as if they naturally belonged to it). Now, after Vatican II revived the priesthood of all believers as “consecrated,” all the aspects which are common to all baptized persons should also be reciprocated back to everyone. It should not be overlooked that, in the meantime, the pastoral ministry and priesthood have merged together to such an extent that this reincorporation requires a thorough and prudent approach to raise consciousness in theology and pastoral work.

If the Second Vatican Council initiated this process *rightfully*, helpful approaches for such an endeavour must also be found there. In my view, the most important key to this is its understanding of baptism as a “baptismal *consecration*.”²⁷ Therefore, it is logical to distinguish between the “*baptismatis consecratio*” to the “*sacerdotium commune*” and the “*ordinatio*” to the “*sacerdotium ministerii*.” If it can be considered certain according to the findings of the NT that the foundation of the ministry of the Church is the service of leader and pastor, then baptism turns out to be the source of the official ministry too, since: “the baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood” (LG, 10). By baptism, since they are priests (*ièrei*) already by *being Christian*, the ministers are being appointed in “laying on of hands and prayer” to the service of leadership and unity.²⁸ In the ordination by the bishop, on behalf of the whole Church, the assigned ministry is merged with the already existing priesthood of *being Christian* to a stature of Christian priesthood that is *appropriate to the requirements of the ministry*.

Founded in the baptism, certain essential features of the service of leadership and unity are formed within the *priestly ministry*²⁹ by

²⁷Therefore the whole priesthood of the Church has to be theologically reconsidered according to the premises given by the Second Vatican Council; especially in regard to its foundation through *being Christian* by baptism.

²⁸M. Schneider SJ, Frankfurt St Georgen, in an interview with the author: “It is like this: we are priests through baptism. Additionally, we are presbyters.” Therefore according to Schneider, this is a quite common theological opinion. Developed independently, I can only attribute myself to it.

²⁹It should be unnecessary, but still we have to remind ourselves to be clear: In this ministry of the one Christian priesthood, the presbyter is not “more priestly” and

virtue of the one and the same priesthood within official priestly actions, such as the celebration of the sacraments. It is priestly by virtue of the priesthood of the baptized and it is capable of sacramental ministry by the ordination in which it was assigned to this service (“in persona Christi *capitis*”, c.f. PO, 2!³⁰).

The Ordo

The pastoral ministry of the Church (episcopate, presbyterate, and diaconate) which is passed on in the respective sacrament through the imposition of hands and prayer by the bishops in “apostolic succession” is priestly by virtue of the “priestly community” of the Church (LG, 11), as has been shown. It is “given” to the Church by Christ as a service to the communities, to the whole Church and to its individual members.³¹

The act of consecration by imposition of hands and prayer in which a person who is a priest by baptismal consecration is accepted into the presbyterate, into the service of leadership/ministry, carries the sober name of “ordination” (“*ordinatio*”).³² The Ordo is in itself “hierarchical” (ièrh. arch), i.e. of sacred origin, because it was “given” by the Lord to his Church (Eph 4:11), it is endowed to the Church by Christ and subdivided into episcopate, presbyterate and diaconate.

the bishop is not “even more priestly” than everybody else. Such a view would not be appropriate for the different configurations of the one priesthood of Jesus in all the baptized.

³⁰The term “in persona Christi” by itself is misleading (even if the council uses it as such [e.g. LG, 10 “Sacerdos quidem ministerialis ... sacrificium eucharisticum conficit in persona Christi conficit ...”]; but contrary to this PO 2!); since all of God’s people and all individuals are called and act in the person of Christ, as they put him on in the baptism.

³¹A. Vanhoye, based on his article *La structure centrale de l’Épître aux Hébreux* (Heb 8/1 to 9/28) RSR 47 (Strasbourg 1959), 44-60, speaks in his many publications (e.g. Vanhoye BA, *Homilie für haltbedürftige Christen. Struktur und Botschaft des Hebräerbriefes*, Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1981), in regard to the official ministry of the mediation of Christ, which takes shape in the Church through this priesthood. However, I do not think you can thus clarify the specificity of the ministry. If you want to start with the concept of mediation, you need to comprehend the community of the whole Church with all its members.

³²About “ordination” and “Ordo” in the early days of the Church cf. J. Kochanowicz *Für euch bin ich Priester, mit euch bin ich Christ. Das Verhältnis von gemeinsamem und besonderem Priestertum*, FTS 59 (Frankfurt a. M. 2000), 67–71. About the increasing understanding of the ministry as an office after Constantine (“head of officials in the Byzantine Empire”) cf. 67. In the further development, the Council of Trent did not reject the priesthood of all believers; it has, however, in return to Reformation “sacerdotalised the ministry in an excessive manner” and “sacralised” it, which resulted in an even greater elevation of the priest from the community: 89-90.

The Ordo is the pastoral ministry of leadership bestowed by the Lord upon the Church. As such, it is part of the one royal and priestly people of God who are *as one people* holy to the Lord and who are his acquired share (κληροϋ) in the Paschal mystery of his death and resurrection.

As far as the “priestly ministry” (*sacerdotium ministerii*) differs within the one and the same priesthood of Christ in which we all participate through the baptism in the form of the “universal priesthood” (*sacerdotium commune*), does it also differ not only by its “degree” but also in its “essence” (LG, 10).³³ For the character of its nature is, as can be clearly seen in the NT, the *pastoral ministry: service of leadership and unity* with the respective assignment to teach and to preach, which is constituted and exercised by virtue of the priesthood of the whole Church.

A brief word shall be added regarding the theological concept of “indelible character” (“*character indelebilis*”).³⁴ Because of the importance of the service of unity and leadership for the Church, not only baptism, but also the ordination can grant the unquestioning commitment and election of God, by which he binds himself to his Church, to every person and to all mankind.

The ministry of the Church, the pastoral ministry, is reflexive due to its nature. It is characterized by its “for”, “upon”, i.e. it is facing the people of God as an aid by him for them. The communities, the Church and its individual members need the “Ordo”. The *Ordo* is essentially a service for the unity. It “organizes”³⁵ the Church according to the *Communio* of God’s people and all people in love,³⁶ peace and justice that Jesus has founded by giving up himself. The *Ordo* has to lead and to reconcile far from any polarization, trusting the growing power of the whole body towards the perfected stature of Christ. The pastoral ministry also protects the unity of the doctrine

³³About the effort by the council to clarify the relationship between *sacerdotium commune* and *sacerdotium ministeriale*, cf. Kochanowicz, *Verhältnis*, 132-165.

³⁴A “history of the formulation of the indelible character” from the Church Fathers to the Council of Trent and an “attempt towards a new understanding” can also be found in Kochanowicz, *Verhältnis*, 165-182.

³⁵C. Hennecke, *Kirche, die über den Jordan geht. Expedition ins Land der Verheißung*, Münster 52011, 234.

³⁶Service for the unity, “Unity in Love” is a basic duty of the service of the ministry. Ignatius of Antioch (letters and martyrdom around the year 110) lists in his letter *PROS RHIMAIOS*, 1 (Migne, *Patrologia graeca* vol. 5, 685) the Church of Rome as “prokaqhmenh thj agaphj”: meaning it “presides in love” as head of a “federation of love.”

in the sense of a service for unity (as it has already clearly emerged in the Pastoral Epistles). But it does not only protect, it also inspires and is being inspired, in communion with the whole people of God, with all the “saints”, carefully paying attention to the “signs of the times.” The most vivid example and a symbol for this in our time is the Second Vatican Council.³⁷ Setting an example itself, the *Ordo* is concerned about the sanctification of all the saints.

“Love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honour” (Rom 12:10) should distinguish not only the people of God, but particularly the ministry: out of respect for the ones entrusted to them (the “saints”) and their equal dignity, listening attentive to their concerns and their suggestions and their sense for the faith.³⁸ It must happily and gratefully give space to the priesthood of all believers (out of which it lives itself!), which the Vatican II made us aware of anew, and acknowledge it wholeheartedly so that it can unfold its effectiveness for the Church of today and tomorrow. Yes, it is even the duty of the ministry to proclaim and pass on this message of the Council, namely onto us, each and every one, who are in Christ as humans and by baptism.

The ministry of the Church, like all its members, depends on the fraternal communion of the whole Church and on what is fundamentally shared — especially on what is given as “basic equipment” through baptism: faith, hope and love. Without them, it would be isolated and would not really be capable to act and persevere. For John XXIII (who according to reliable sources used to celebrate the anniversary of his baptismal), “faith, hope and love” is the “honour” of a bishop. In those, he saw the brightness of the episcopal ministry, its distinction and its example.³⁹

Since the ministry is essentially a service to the *Communio* and within it, it is a service which can only be appropriately exercised if it is *Communio* itself and lives by it, humbly not seeking or aspiring to

³⁷Just like in the case of the renewed liturgy (SC, 14), a profound commitment, insight and understanding of the pastors is required for the realization and implementation of contents from the Council like the priesthood of all believers!

³⁸Cf. LG, 12.

³⁹John XXIII, *Geistliches Tagebuch*, paperback edition Herder Freiburg et al, 1968, entry dated 08/13/1961, 331: “Faith, hope and love are the three stars of episcopal honor. At the top and at the same time as an example are the Pope and the bishops, all the bishops of the Church.” Cf. in Hannah Arendt’s epilogue the anecdote of the reaction of a Roman maid: “... How could a real Christian come to sit on the Holy See?” Page 361.

anything else. It should be wholeheartedly interested and enjoying the community with all the brothers and sisters in *the one and same abundance of Christian life*. Pope Francis said that pastors should have the “smell of the sheep,”⁴⁰ “for better or worse,” or so to speak, to be associated in fraternal closeness with the existence and fate of the people entrusted to them.

Conclusion

This contribution is a theological attempt to determine more precisely the relation between *sacerdotium ministeriale* and *sacerdotium commune*, between priestly ministry and the priesthood of all believers. Therefore and for the required structural change, much more theological reflection and courageous practice is necessary. We *all* together comprise one holy, priestly people. We are all holy through our belonging to Christ, we are saints and anointed by our calling in the faith which is given to us through baptism and confirmation. Likewise, the *ministry*, its respective consecration and its service are holy and priestly by the calling of the Risen Lord, anointed from the same source. Yes, *every* man and woman is and has to be holy to the Lord, as everyone has the dignity of a human person.

And it can be considered certain today: *Without a much greater measure of “common” — brave, substantial and in many ways — there will not be a renewed Church.* “The Church — a fraternal community!” These words were recently used by a 90-year-old brother of mine to summarize his vision. These simple words reflect the joy that the Second Vatican Council awoke in us. The statements presented here endeavour to contribute to that joy: “that I may see the prosperity of thy chosen ones, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation” (Ps 106:5a).⁴¹

⁴⁰Mass of the Chrism, Holy Thursday, 3/28/2013. This word corresponds entirely to his desire for a “coherent” Christian life. Cf., for example also the Apostolic Letter of the Holy Father Pope Francis *Evangelii Gaudium*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013, 104: “In the Church, functions ‘do not favour the superiority of some vis-à-vis the others’”.

⁴¹“*The spiritual savour of being one people.* The word of God also invites us to recognize that we are one people: ‘Once you were no people but now you are God’s people’ (1 Pet 2:10) ... Moved by his example, we want to enter fully into the fabric of society, sharing the lives of all ... we experience intensely what it is to be one people, to be part of one people ... It is a wonderful thing to be God’s faithful people.” Nos. 268-274.