

The Meaning and Importance Of Ordination

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At the last meeting of our Dist. Synod two years ago a paper was presented by the late Prof. Aug. F. Zich of our Theolog. Seminary, Thiensville, Wis., on the topic: "The Doctrine of the Divine Call, with reference to present day abuses." In this paper (Part I) God's teaching on the divine call was presented on the basis of Scriptures. It was shown that it is the Will of God, the Lord of the Church, that there should be a public ministry. Then it was shown who is to do the choosing or calling. The calling was done directly by God in some cases, especially in the OT. The patriarchs and prophets were called directly. Note the calling of Moses to lead the children of God out of the land of bondage. Thru him God gave His Law written on two tablets of stone, Ex. 3,10 & Ex. 20. Isaiah was called directly (6,9), as also Ezekiel (3,4). In like manner the other prophets were called by God. Even in the NT God called directly the persons who were to preach the Gospel of fulfillment and grace. God sent Jesus directly and Jesus called His disciples directly, Mt. 10 & 28. Paul was also directly called on his way to Damascus, Acts 26:16.

After the church had been well established the calling was still done by God, indirectly and mediately thru the congregation. This power to call was given by Christ to His church not to one individual over & above the other Christians, but to all Christians (Mt. 10 & 18 & 28, Jn 20). The Confessions of our church were also cited) Smal. Art. Tract 67; Trig. p 523, also 511; Apology VII, VIII, 28 Trig. 237.

The first church at Jerusalem (Acts 1. 6. 13.) shows clearly how it understood & carried out the command of Jesus. In Paul's Past. Letters the laying on of hands is mentioned (1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22; 2 Tim 1:6), Here the question of ordination was touched upon.

In the second part of Prof. Zich's paper, present day abuses were set forth. The first abuse touched upon was the disregard of the order set up by the congregations in Synod in brotherly love. Disregarding the advice & counsel of the regularly elected officials, following or listening to self constituted advisors, or their own ideas. Another abuse was the sad custom of "sermon-tasting". As another abuse the Prof. mentioned the issuing & acceptance of temporary calls. The worst & most vicious abuse of the divine call into the ministry is the offering of one's self for a vacancy. This was treated somewhat at length showing the cause of it, its often disastrous results, & the remedy for this abuse.

So far a brief resume of Prof. Zich's paper. When this paper was discussed two years ago the question of ordination was also stressed. The result was that a paper was assigned for the next meeting of the District to treat on the subject of this my paper to-day: "The meaning & import of ordination".

What is the meaning & import of ordination? We are clear that according to God's Word it is the call properly extended by the congregation & the proper acceptance by the called pastor that constitutes a Christian ministry. These are the essentials. Certain customs have been established in the church in connection with the actual entering upon the duties of the ministry at a certain congregation.

Installation

We have the custom of installing the called pastor into his office. By this the called pastor is presented to his congregation by the installing pastor. The installing pastor, or another pastor, preaches the installation sermon which is suited to the occasion and naturally presents some of the important phases of the public ministry. It may outline the duties of the pastor & of the congregation, It may be an encouragement to both in their respective work. It may show the hardships of the ministry but also the comforts & promises extended by the Lord to His servant in the ministry. It should of course, be scriptural and fitting the respective charge. After

the sermon the installation service proper takes place in which the customary questions are put to the new pastor to be answered by him before God & his congregation. Words addressed to the congregation to be answered by it or its representatives, the church council, prayer with laying on of hands & benediction then close the service. In our Agenda we have such forms which are in use in our congregations. So the installation service is a solemn, public declaration on the part of the new pastor and of his congregation that from henceforth they are bound together in the relationship of pastor & congregation & assume the respective duties & obligations of this relationship.

Marriage Ceremony Similar

We have a similar case in our marriage ceremony. The marriage is consummated by the mutual consent of a man & a woman to live together according to God's ordinance as husband & wife. When they appear before the pastor, they repeat their marriage vow, receive the blessing of God & are publicly declared as husband & wife. The marriage ceremony is therefore the public declaration that these two now enter into the new relationship of husband wife & promise faithfulness to one another until death do part them. A marriage without such church ceremony is legal & binding just as much as a marriage with a church ceremony.

So also the mutual consent of the calling congregation & the called pastor constitute a divine call & the installation service does not supply an essential part nor would a duly called pastor entering upon his ministry without a public installation lose any essential of his divine call. The installation under our present conditions is a fine custom which we should not despise nor overemphasize, but maintain for many good reasons.

Ordination

If a candidate of the holy ministry accepts his first call to a congregation we speak of his installation as the ordination to the holy Ministry. The idea may be conveyed that the ordination is something essentially different from the installation. As other churches lay so much stress upon the ordination -- the Catholics making it a sacrament & the Episcopalians insisting upon it as essential of the Apostolic succession -- & other churches making a distinction between a licensed & an ordained minister, it can readily be seen that this idea has also affected our Lutheran conception of the ordination. But according to the Scriptures & true Luth. teachings there is no essential difference between installation & ordination. -- The ordination does not supply any essential part to the call as little as the installation does. The difference is only in the name: ordination is used for the first call & installation for subsequent calls.

Why Such Distinctions?

But why have we come to make such a distinction? This has grown out of the present day conditions in our synodical life. We now have, what some prefer to call, an over-production of ministers. Years ago, when all of our candidates could immediately after their graduation from the Seminary enter upon their work by receiving a call, we found no opportunity to question the meaning & import of ordination. But now that we have a number of candidates standing idle in the market place, ready to do the work of the Lord but no call forthcoming, we have tried to employ these candidates in assisting in some form or other in the work of the church. Some have been called as teachers, others as assistants to pastors, And here the question arose: "May we ordain such candidates who have been called (only) temporarily into the ministry?" Some have insisted upon the ordination of these temporarily called candidates so they may be authorized to take full charge of the duties of the pastor in the congregation. But the question here again is the call. If they have a divine call from a congregation, who will then deny their ordination or installation? If they have no divine call, ordination or installation are without foundation. Others have tried to evade the question of ordination by simply having the candidate called by the Congregation but not permit him to baptize, pronounce the absolution, the consecration

of the Lord's Supper, & perform marriage ceremonies. They are only assistants to the regular pastor. And here again the question arises: "Have they a divine call or not?"

Temporary and Permanent Calls

So the question hinges on the call. We are accustomed to distinguish between a temporary & a permanent call. The temp. call may be & may not be a divine call. A stigma has been placed upon a "temporary" call & usually every temp. call is declared neither divine, nor valid, nor legitimate. But we have temporary calls, where for instance, a seminary student is acting as a vicar or another pastor is supplying for a pastor called for a time upon others duties or being incapacitated by physical illness for a length of time. These calls are in a sense of the word "temporary" calls, but nevertheless they are "divine". We are now not speaking of a pastor & of a congregation who openly defy God's Holy Word by agreeing upon the right of the congregation to terminate the call whenever they see fit. That this is contrary to the will of God, who calls thru the congregation & terminates the call in a manner pleasing to Him, is very evident from the teachings of Scriptures on the divine call. A congregation must terminate a call under certain conditions - that is evident from Scriptures. Where a congregation simply "hires" a man as pastor it is improper to speak of a call. We should not here speak of a temporary "call": That would degrade the "call" & dignify the "hiring." It would be far better not to use the word "call" in such cases.

A Specific Call

But there is a call which may be called a "temp." call, because it is limited & restricted to time or to specific work. We prefer to distinguish between a "general" call & a "specific" call (or a "restricted" call). Our professors at our institutions have a permanent call but a specific call; likewise our synodical officials have a specific call for a limited time. A "general" call then would be the call to the regular ministry as the pastor of a congregation. A "specific" call would be a call for a limited time & to specified work. A specific call is fully as divine as a general call.

To know from Eph. 4,7.8.11. that God gave gifts unto men (7.) , for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ (12.). God (11.) gave some apostles & some prophets & some evangelists & some pastors & teachers.

1 Cor. 12,1-11 speaks of the various gifts given by Christ to His church and Eph. speaks of the men to whom these gifts are given. But no one has the right to determine how & where he is to exercise these gifts. As the needs arise God will supply the want. He has done so directly or indirectly thru the Spirit (Acts 11&13). In our present day God gives us the gifts & also the man to exercise these gifts for the edifying of the body of Christ. We have pastors & teachers in our congregations, we have professors in our institutions, we have missionaries in our mission fields, we have officers in our Synod & Conferences. But all these are to be called by the Spirit, thru the church & the place assigned to them for their respective work. It is the call by the duly, authorized congregation to the duly qualified men for the general or specific work that is divine. Where such a call has, been duly & properly accepted an installation service is certainly in place & not contrary to God's Word. And whenever such a divine call for general or specific work is extended to & accepted by a candidate to the holy ministry, who will forbid the ordination service, seeing there is no essential difference between the two. As soon as such a specific call is terminated, then also the duties, responsibilities, privileges, & authority given thru the call, immediately cease & nothing has been conferred by the ordination or installation which would give him an indelible character. Our church should be very specific & out-spoken in pronouncing & declaring this & acting accordingly. Such a person should be considered again a candidate for the ministry as our candidates from the Seminary. Such a candidate, outside of the general duty of every Christian to do mission work & bear witness of Xt, should not preach, administer the sacraments, perform a marriage ceremony, without a specific call from a pastor duly in charge of a congregation, conduct funeral services, basing such authority to do so upon the fact of their ordination. A clear pronouncement of the church and synod would

eliminate the fear of looking upon such candidates as being ordained. Ordained or not ordained, we say with our Confessions: “No one should publicly teach or administer the sacraments unless he be regularly called”. (A. C. Art. XIY)

We quote from Prof. Zich’s paper (P. 234 in our *Quartalschrift*, Vol. 35, No 4): “The laying on of hands is mentioned by St. Paul in his pastoral letters. 1 Tim. 4,14: “Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.” And again, 1 Tim. 5,22 we find the injunction: “Lay hands suddenly on no man.” And once more, 2 Tim. 1,5: “Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.” Thus ordination of the called ministers of Xt has been practiced since apostolic times as an apostolic custom. But yet it is not a sacrament as the Papists claim for their consecration of the priests. It is not enjoined by Scripture, neither is it forbidden, hence we may term it an “adiaphoron”. It does not make the candidate for the holy ministry a public minister of the Gospel, only the orderly call by the church can do that. It can serve only to confirm the called minister in his ministry. As Luther said: “Laying on of hands blesses & confirms the one already called, as a witnessing by a notary public in civil matters.” (Walch XVII, 156) We are not now discussing how salutary this old custom may be for the ordained or for the congregation, but only its import in the matter of a called minister.

We might quote some of the church fathers on this point, but will confine ourselves to one, John Gerhard (XII, b, 146): “We deny that ordination is necessary, by reason of any special divine command, as this cannot be produced, or any such effect as the Papists ascribe to it, viz., as though by it any indelible character were imprinted, or as though it conferred *ex opere operato*, gifts requisite to the ministry, concerning which no promise can be adduced from the sayings of Xt & the apostles, or by reason of any absolute & pure necessity.” Again, in the *Smal. Art. Tract. Art. 70, Trigl. p. 525*, we read: “And this also a most common custom of the church testifies. For formerly the people elected pastors & bishops. Then came a bishop, either of that church or a neighboring one, who confirmed the one elected by the laying on of hands; & ordination was nothing else than such a ratification.” From all of which it seems clear that the ordination of candidates who have not yet received a regular call into the ministry has no basis either in Scripture or in the correct teachings & practice of the Luth. Church.” -- So far Prof. Zich!

Catholic and Episcopalian Influence

It is true that the emphasis & stress laid upon ordination & its elevation to a sacrament by the Catholic Church, as is evidenced from the statement of the Catholic Church in the *Concilium Tridentinum*, Canon 3 (Hoenecke *Dogmatik IV*, p. 191) has had its effect upon other people & also the outside world & the Cath. Ch. is never loathe to publicize their ordination & emblazoning it with high dignity & authority. The Episcopal Ch., according to the statements of its teachers, stresses ordination as an essential part of a duly constituted minister. It is not the call of the congregation issued according to Xt’s command, but the consecration & ordination of the Bishop which transmits the authority to function as a minister or priest. All who are not thus ordained are not empowered, equipped & authorized to perform the duties of the ministry. They are not ministers, but only laymen. (Dallmann, “Why Not Episcopalian?” p. 5) Luth. Church bodies here & abroad have shown a very strong tendency to elevate the act of ordination & attribute to it certain importance & efficacy, as though, not the call of the congregation constitutes the ministry, but the call in conjunction with the ordination. (See. Hoenecke *Dogm. Vol. IV*, p. 192 ff.)

Our Duty

It behooves us, under these influences, to keep our eyes clearly fixed on the teachings of Scriptures. Let us not be swayed by sentiment, personal likes or dislikes, by a desire under certain circumstances as they may arise, to forestall some probable distasteful consequences & then either disregard the fine church custom of ordination or emphasize it improperly.

Our present conditions with the so-called over-supply of candidates who are to be temporarily employed in the ministry may lead us to attribute too great importance to the ordination & may lead us to withhold ordination from such who have a temporary, but a divine Call. Again in our German Agenda, in the form of the Beichgottesdienst, we have in the words of the Absolution the following words: “Kraft meines Amtes, als ein berufener u. verordneter Diener des Worts.” These words, being very proper, can easily be emphasized & construed as though “berufener” were not sufficient but must be augmented & authorized by the word “verordneter”. In our English Confessional Service we have the same words: “I, by virtue of my office as a called & ordained servant of the word” - & it can be easily understood that “called” is not sufficient but that ordination is something essentially necessary in order to be empowered to speak the words of Xt in the Absolution. These Words may be correctly understood, but they may also convey the Roman & Episcopalian idea of ordination & apostolic succession. So it behooves us to ever bear in mind the clear teachings of the Scriptures, that ordination is not an essential part of the Holy Ministry.

Who?

For the sake of discerning clearly & teaching properly in accordance with Holy Scriptures, let us now ask the question: “Who then is to be ordained?” It has been a general custom that the graduates of our Seminary who have completed the prescribed course of our Theolog. Sem. & have, after due examination, been declared “reif” by our Faculty, are to be ordained after having received a call. Let us here guard against the idea that the mere fact of such a declaration of our Theo. Sem., now has qualified such candidates for the position of pastor of any congregation in our Synod. Remember, these candidates have the theoretical training, some in a greater & some in a lesser degree, some are endowed with more gifts than others, but they all lack the practical experience in the ministry & this, naturally, they will have to gain by actual work in a smaller congregation or as assistant to a pastor, in a larger congregation & thereby show their fitness for greater work & greater responsibilities. Other candidates, who have also received “Das Zeugnis der Reife”, receive no call & are on the waiting list for years at times. These candidates are often employed in teaching school, in assisting a pastor, or taking over the work of a pastor as a vacancy or interim pastor, or taking charge of a mission field. Should they be ordained? Yes! If they have a divine call, either “general” or “specific”, as we have outlined above. Both calls, general or specific, being divine calls, constitute the ministry. And remember that when their calls terminate then they at once are again to be considered as candidates of the Holy Ministry & have received no authority to perform the duties of a minister, unless they are again duly called.

Where?

And now the second questions “**Where is the ordination to take place?**” There are some who emphatically declare that an ordination should not take place in any other congregation, except in the congregation which has issued the call. There has been a general disapproval of a pastor who has asked for the ordination authority for his son or a member of his congregation who has been called into the Holy Ministry to ordain such a called candidate in the home congregation. Our “Conference of Presidents” has established a rule that no president should authorize such an ordination in the home congregation. Certainly there must be considerations of brotherly love & rules & regulations are necessary for the sake of avoiding discord & giving offense. But we have no authority over & above the authority of the congregation & although we are united together in our Synod we have not transferred any authority, that rightfully belongs to a congregation, to a group to exercise it over & above the congregation. Our Synod is an advisory body & when we meet as Synod where the representatives of our congregations are assembled & we agree on such orders, rules & regulations, then naturally they are to be respected & followed by all such congregations who through their representatives have adopted them. There are others who have looked upon the ordination in the home congregation as a farewell service for the candidate who has probably spent his entire life within that congregation, having been baptized, attended the Christian Day School, been confirmed, has preached as a

student at various times & now leaves his congregation to assume the duties of his call into the ministry in another congregation. In looking back upon the past history of our Synod, we find that a goodly number of our ordinations have taken place in the home congregation. Why not? May the ordination take place in the home congregation since it confers nothing essential upon the candidate, since it is not a sacrament, since it is a church custom, & since the calling congregation is not deprived of anything, since the ordained pastor will be installed nevertheless in their midst. The ordination service is a declaration that the person to be ordained has been duly called by a congregation as pastor. The "ordinand" solemnly declares his allegiance to the teachings of Scripture & the Confessions of the church. The church prays that the Lord may bless the now pastor in his work & fill him with His Holy Spirit for a faithful discharge of his pastoral duties. This is certainly proper, well fitting, & can be of great benefit to the members of the home congregation. Take an example: It is a good church custom that our marriage ceremonies be performed in the church of the bride. The ceremony does not constitute the marriage. The consent is the thing that makes the marriage. The ceremony in the church is a public declaration & the blessings are asked for the bride & groom. Such a ceremony can just as well take place in another church, say for instance the church of the groom, if he should not be a member of the same local church.

Assignment Committee

Remember also that the training & education of our future pastors is a work in which the whole Synod, constituted by all of its congregations, is vitally interested. It is the church or the Synod, the congregations together, that prepare the candidates for the ministry, not the individual congregation alone. Our young candidates are a gift of God to the church, particularly to our Synod for the work in our Synod. We therefore do not permit any congregation to send a personal call to a candidate disregarding the right of all other congregations to the gifts which God has given to our church. If this were permitted one candidate may receive several calls & be put to a great responsibility to decide which of the calls is a divine call for him, over & above the other calls. Therefore we have a good & fine custom of having all calls for candidates sent to the Assignment Committee in blank. It is the duty of this A. C. then to take into consideration the importance of the call submitted, as also to determine the qualifications of the various candidates for the respective work called for. We have candidates who are especially qualified for a certain kind of work in the Synod, such as the work of a tutor at one of our institutions. Not every candidate would be qualified for such a position. We have calls into mission fields, as for instance, the Apache Indian mission & not every candidate would be qualified in the special measure & degree required to do this work. So it is the great responsibility &, duty of the "A. C." to assign the calls to the most fitting & qualified candidates. This is a good custom & done in accordance with God's Holy Word.

Home Congregation, Part of the Synod

So then also the whole church is interested in the ordination of such a candidate & as the home congregation is a part of the Synod, as well as the congregation which calls the candidate, there can be no valid reason advanced against the ordination in the home congregation, remembering what the ordination means & signifies. The home congregation can also hear the declaration of the candidate called that he solemnly promises allegiance to the teachings of Scripture & the Confessions of the church, that he will faithfully conduct the duties of his office. The home congregation can certainly also pray for the candidate that God may bless his work & fill him with His Holy Sp.

Professors, Missionaries

Again there are cases in which a candidate is called as a professor to one of our institutions or as a missionary into some mission field where we have no organized congregation. In the first place, a professor

may assume his duties as professor without being ordained to the Holy Ministry but nevertheless he will be installed as professor of such institution. Such an installation usually takes place in the individual institution where the professor is called to. Such an installation is then in the presence of the faculty & of the student body. We have had cases where the installation of the professor took place in one of the churches of the city where the institution is located & we have had cases where missionaries have been called into a mission field & the ordination & installation of such missionaries has taken place in one of the larger churches of our Synod. I recall vividly when our first missionaries were sent out to the mission field in Arizona among the Apaches. The service was held in the church Watertown, Wis. Our missionary to Nigeria, Africa, was ordained & installed in the St. John's Church in Milwaukee. A distinction is made there that this was not an ordination or installation service, but a commission as missionary. Here we would have a new word for the ordination or installation. We see no essential difference & the place of the ordination does not make any essential difference either. So we see that there must be exceptions to the rule.

It certainly is proper that the ordination be held in the congregation to which the candidate is called & such ordination is no more valid & legal than the ordination in the home congregation, but it can not be mandatory that it can be held there only. Due consideration should be given both to the home congregation, as well as to the calling congregation. So it should not be an iron-clad rule & can not be, under circumstances mentioned above, that the place for the ordination must & can be only in the congregation which calls the candidate.

Rights of Congregation

Let us in this question of ordination also respect the individual congregation in its authority & rights. It is the congregation which has the authority to call & the congregation may call to suit its individual needs & requirements. Whether a congregation has one or two pastors that is its privilege. It is also the congregation which determines the work to be done by the pastors. It may assign to one, especially the public preaching & mission work in the congregations to the other the visiting of the sick, the instruction of the Confirmation classes & the supervision of the school. All have a divine call & all thus called are entitled to ordination if called as candidates to the Holy Ministry.

As long as things are done decently & in order & are in compliance with the Word of God, the congregation can arrange the work of its pastor or pastors to meet their respective needs. If a congregation calls a candidate from the Seminary to assist the pastor in part of his work & to teach in the school such a call is divine in as much as the call into the work of the ministry as the assistant pastor is concerned. Such a called candidate has the right to be ordained even if the call is for a limited or restricted time. You may brand such a call as a "temporary" call, but it is nevertheless divine, having been duly extended by the congregation according to the authority given by Xt & accord. to its liberty to arrange its affairs without the interference from any, if you will, higher church authority as a Synod or a Conference of Presidents.

Dr. Hoenecke writes in his "Dogmatik": "The ordination makes no one a pastor, but only confirms a pastor as a regularly & properly called pastor. Ordination is no more than this that the Church recognizes the call of someone & confirms it in two respects: that it declares the call has been properly ("legitim") extended confirms it as divine, & that the congregation could call him with full assurance before God. We teach therefore that ordination does not give nor convey the Holy Ministry, because the Scriptures do not say so, nor demand it. Only what God demands thru His Word & desires must be done & is necessary. With, this our Confession agrees: An ordination was nothing else than such a ratification," (Smal. Art. English, p. 155)

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