

ORDAINED
A consideration of the pastoral office according to congregational usage

By

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I. INTRODUCTION

“One of the Most important tasks confronting the churches of the twentieth century is the task of restoring to the pastoral office its proper image.¹

We were just leaving an ordination service, after a constructive Council of the Vicinage and the appropriate ordination feast, when an executive from our national association said to me, “I guess I’m not sure that ordination means anything anyway.”

He was, of course, reflecting on a position which may have reached its zenith in the latter part of the twentieth century: that the Protestant conviction regarding “the priesthood of all believers” (1 Peter 2.5-9) means that there is no distinction to be drawn between those Christians known as laity and those Christians who are clergy.

The attitude was possibly re-enforced by two other tendencies of this century: An increased sense of professionalism (*ala* medicine, education, and law for instance) may have implied that choosing to be a minister (or, from the outside looking in, that being a minister) was not essentially different from a career path in one of the other professions. And, from my own observations over the past thirty-five years, the continuing and growing emphasis upon an educated clergy, in our tradition, began to blur the distinction between the attainment of the M.Div. and ordination, making the latter essentially a second stamp on the diploma.

To be fair, when Erwin Britton said, “In a real sense, there are no differences save one: the ordained clergy are given more time to serve, being freed from the necessity of earning a living in the secular world,”² he merely reflected a sense of the times - in which the democratizing tendencies of Congregationalism were, at least verbally, being carried to their logical extreme. Even Arthur Rouner Jr, whose view of church and ministry is of a different order, suggests that “The minister in a free church is only an instrument...And he is an instrument in the same sense that all his people are instruments. He is a man, as they are men. He is no better, no different.”³

As much as clergy would like to “be better” than others; and as much as the congregation expects them to be; Rouner is probably correct on that point. It is not so certain that the cleric is “no different.”

Long tradition supports the position of 1865 “... that the ministry of the gospel by members of the churches who have been duly called and set apart to that work implies *in itself* no power of government, and that ministers of the gospel *not elected to office* in any church are not a hierarchy, nor are they invested with any official power in or over the churches.”⁴ [emphasis added] This remains consistent with the objections to a clerical order which differentiates its members from other people. The implications of the 1865 Symbols, however, are that A) there are other conditions which may imply power of government and B) that being elected to office may have something to do with it.

¹ *Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice, A*; Maring, Norman H and Hudson, Winthrop S; The Judson Press; Valley Forge; 1963; p 96

² *Congregationalism And The Ministry*; Britton, Erwin A.; paper presented to the First International Congregational Fellowship, 1977, p 4

³ *Congregational Way of Life, The*; Rouner, Arthur A Jr; Prentice-Hall, Inc.; Englewood Cliffs NJ; 1960

⁴ Symbols of 1865, Statement of Congregational Principles; cited in *Creeks and Platforms of Congregationalism, The*; Walker, Williston; The Pilgrim Press; 1960; p 568

“Although we are all equally priests, we cannot all publicly minister and teach. We ought not to do so even if we could.”⁵ It is, perhaps, comments such as this from Luther that allow the Roman Catholic commentator Georges Tavard to suggest that our clergy are present “... merely to maintain good order in the church”⁶ Elsewhere⁷, Luther lifts up the image of ten brothers who are co-heirs to their father’s throne. Upon his death, they elect one of the brothers to rule. They each retain equal power but one’s office is to rule. So it is, says Luther, of a bishop’s consecration.

Twentieth Century American sensibilities being what they are, there has been some sense in which any claim to being “set apart” has implied pride or power and was to be eschewed. So, Britton on ordination: “Ordination is the setting of a person in his particular place. It does not bestow special powers.”⁸ In the context in which Dr. Britton makes this statement, he would seem to view ordination as simply a ceremony which accompanies the hiring of a functionary for the Church. To discover the deeper scriptural and traditional bases for ordination, we might look through the eyes of one like Thomas Hooker. “Ordination is an approbation of the Officer, and solemn settling and confirmation of him in his Office, by prayer and laying on of hands.”⁹ There is solemnity and Office. Both of which require our attention.

II. THE PASTORAL OFFICE

⁵ Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian Man* (1520) cited in *Protestant Reformation, The*; ed. Hillerbrand, Hans J.; Walker and Company; New York; 1968, p 15

⁶ *Protestantism*; Tavard, Georges (tr Attwater, Rachel); Hawthorne Books - Publishers; New York, 1959; p 46

⁷ Martin Luther, *The Appeal to the Christian Nobility* (1520); in *Documents of the Christian Church*; ed Bettenson, Henry; Oxford University Press; New York & London; 1947; p 275

⁸ Britton, Erwin A.; *op cit*, p 11

⁹ From Thomas Hooker’s *A Survey of the Summe of Church Discipline* (1645) Pt. 2, p 75; Walker; *op cit*; p

“We are now to speak of the order in which the Lord has been pleased that his Church should be governed. For though it is right that he alone should rule and reign in the Church, that he should preside and be conspicuous in it, and that its government should be exercised and administered solely by his word; yet as he does not dwell among us in visible presence (Matt.26:11), so as to declare his will to us by his own lips, he in this (as we have said) uses the ministry of men, by making them, as it were his substitutes, not by transferring his right and honor to them, but only doing his own work by their lips, just as an artificer uses a tool for any purpose.”¹⁰

Just as a reading of the Cambridge Platform might lead one to wonder if there was agreement on articles of faith among the Congregationalists, so selective reading of materials relating to ordination and the pastoral office might be misinterpreted without the context of the historical understandings which stand behind those statements. We cannot understand the context of our fathers’ writings without at least a cursory glance at Luther, Calvin, and others. It would be appropriate but beyond the scope of this paper to examine the earlier roots of the Lutheran and Calvinist views to be found in the Church Fathers.

Critical to the Protestant heritage is the understanding that salvation comes through faith. Both Lutheran and Reformed traditions, as against the Anabaptists, have held that the church is instrumental in obtaining that faith; and that clergy play a unique role in the life of the church. “... how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?” (Romans 10:14 NRSV) I will expand on the preaching role later. It is enough for now, to lean on the scripture as the foundation for the tradition in which we stand which requires preachers.

From The Augsburg Confession:

In order that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and the sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given...¹¹

¹⁰ The Ministry Given by God; *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; Calvin, John; trans. Beveridge, Henry; <http://www.smartlink.net/~douglas/calvin/>

¹¹ Augsburg Confession, Articles of Faith and Doctrine, V (from the Latin text); in *Book of Concord, The*; transl and ed Tappert, Theodore G.; Fortress Press; Philadelphia; 1959; p 31

From Calvin's Instruction in Faith:

Since the Lord has willed that both his word and his sacraments be dispensed through the ministry of men, it is necessary that there be pastors ordained to the churches, pastors who teach the people both in public and in private the pure doctrine, administer the sacraments, and by their good example instruct and form all to holiness and purity of life.¹²

And from closer to our tradition, Robert Browne:

“Of this church Christ is the head, and his powers and graces are for the use of every member. There are officers of divine appointment, some of temporary use to aid all churches, apostles, prophets, and evangelists, who belong to the past rather than the present; and others designated as the abiding officers of individual churches, the pastor, teacher, elders, deacons, and widows, who ‘have their several charge in one Church only.’¹³ ...”¹⁴

With all that the reformers sought to expunge from the church as they knew it, there was uniform agreement that a recognized ministry was both practically and scripturally requisite. One even finds the use of the word “priest” in reference to these clergy (just as we find pastor, bishop, and elder). There were serious issues with respect to the qualifications, the selection, the placement, and the authorization for clergy as time went on but there are no voices calling for a church without ministers; nor for a ministry without potency. It is abundantly clear that when early Congregationalists spoke of a “solemn settling and confirmation in Office,” that Office came with a clear understanding of sacred duties which were commended directly to the minister by God and confirmed by the election of the Church.

¹² John Calvin, *Instruction in Faith*; cited in *Great Voices of the Reformation*; ed. Fosdick, Harry Emerson; Random House; New York; 1952; p 234

¹³ Here and elsewhere I have modernized spelling

¹⁴ Quotations are from Robert Browne's *Book Which Sheweth the Life and Manners of All True Christians*; Walker, *op cit*; p 13

From the earliest years of our Churches comes the consistent view that the God-given structure of the Church includes officers. So the Second Confession of the London-Amsterdam Church tells us that "... Christ hath placed some special men over the Church, who by their office are to govern, oversee, visit, watch, etc..."¹⁵ and "Christ hath here in earth a spiritual Kingdom..... instructing and governing them by such officers and laws as he hath prescribed in his word; by which Officers and laws he governeth his Church, and by none other (Matthew 7.15, 24.23-24; 2 Timothy 4.3-4)"¹⁶

(Hebrews 13:17 NRSV) Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with sighing--for that would be harmful to you.

"A church being free cannot become subject to any, but by a free election; Yet when such a people do choose any to be over them in the Lord, then they do become subject, and most willingly submit to their ministry in the Lord, whom they have so chosen." [The Cambridge Platform (1648) Chapter IIX, 6; Walker, *op cit*; p 214]

The language of our ancestors poses significant problems for the modern American Congregationalist. We instinctively rebel against words such as "power" (when attributed to someone else); and such phrases as "be subject to" smack of a monarchical setting which lives only in our imaginations (or perhaps more accurately, in our nightmares). It defies the egalitarianism that we think is the hallmark of contemporary Congregationalism.

I think it will become abundantly clear that the "power" of which they speak is not the temporal or secular power of the magistrate or monarch, nor even a personal possession. It is the power of God in Christ, mediated through the faithful fulfilling of the office. The people subject to that power are recognizing its character and know that their pastor, faithfully executing their office, are acting as the tool of God. Indeed, whenever a pastor fails to faithfully execute the office they may, and ought to be, removed by the Church.

(1 Timothy 5:17 NRSV) Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching;

Church-government...is placed by Christ in the officers of the church....so as it is manifest, that an organic or complete church is a body politic, consisting of some that are Governors, and some that are governed, in the Lord. [Cambridge Platform, Chap X, 7; Walker, *op cit*; p 219]

(1 Thessalonians 5:12 NRSV) But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you;

see also Hebrews 13.17 and 1 Corinthians 12.12-29

So it is that

(Acts 14:23 NRSV) And after they had appointed elders for them in each church, with prayer and fasting they entrusted them to the Lord in whom they had come to believe. (See also Titus 1.5)

"...Elders are ordained in every Church

¹⁵ The Second Confession of the London-Amsterdam Church (1596); Walker; *op cit*; p 67

¹⁶ *Ibid*; p 64

(Acts 20:28 NRSV) Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son.

(1 Timothy 5:17 NRSV) Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching;
(See also Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 6.4; 1 Corinthians 4.1)

and are therein authorized officially to administer in the Word, Prayer, Sacraments and Censures.” [Synod of 1662, Question II, Answer 1; Walker, *op cit*; p 337]

To do something “officially” is to do it “in pursuance of the special powers vested.”¹⁷ Recapturing the presumed form of the apostolic church, elders were ordained in each church for the purpose of administering Word, prayer, sacrament, and censure because it is God’s will that those duties be performed for the benefit of the people of God; and it is God’s will that certain persons be set apart for the responsibility of seeing to that work; and that those persons be both called by God and affirmed by the church.

To be ordained, to be set into Office, is to feel the weight of the affirming hands upon their head and to know that it is nothing compared to the weight of the duties to which God has called them. "At the opening of his ministry," writes Harry Butman, "as he takes the solemn vows of ordination, a free local Church, ...ratifies in the eyes of men the inner call God has spoken to his soul in lonely and holy places... He is a minister because God called him to preach and his warrant to proclaim the Word is the authority born of a company of Christians gathered in accordance with Christ's promise."¹⁸ There is little here of professional, secular, or temporal content. The material of ordination is the material of the sacred. What we witness in that rite of ordination is the confirming act of the Christian community, recognizing that God has laid a hand upon the ordinand to be now and forever about God’s work, in the midst of God’s people.

III. FOR NOW OR FOR EVER

“But now they have invented *caractères indelibles*, and pretend that a priest after deprivation still differs from a mere layman¹⁹

A word in passing needs to be said about whether ordination imparts a permanent status upon an individual or reflects a status limited by the call of the church.

So certain were the early Congregationalists that ordination was induction by the Church into Office in that Church only, and could not be transferred to another Church, that when Benjamin Colman attained Presbyterian ordination in England in order to serve the Fourth Church in Boston, Increase Mather wrote, “To say that a Wandering Levite who has no Flock is a Pastor, is as good sense as to say, that he who has no Children is a Father.”²⁰

¹⁷ Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary, Second Edition, 1979

¹⁸ Butman, Harry R; Pamphlet: *The Freedom of the Preacher*, 1959; cited in *How to Gather and Order a Congregational Christian Church*; Abercrombie, A Vaughan; self published, Milwaukee, 1966; p 55

¹⁹ Martin Luther, *The Appeal to the Christian Nobility* (1520); cited in *Documents of the Christian Church*; ed. Bettenson, Henry; Oxford University Press; New York & London; 1947; p 276

²⁰ Walker, *op cit*; p 478

In reaction to the creation of a “priestly caste,” in the light of essentially lifetime settled ministries, and in the absence of ministries outside the Church, there was every reason to preserve that tradition and very little pressure to do otherwise. Very early, however, in the American experience that began to change. The Congregational historians Atkins and Fagley write, “The rule in the early churches that the minister’s ordination was in effect only as long as he was serving as pastor of that particular church had been long outgrown [*ed.* speaking of the council of 1865]. From the first it had been generally accepted that a man who had served as minister acquired thereby ‘an odor of sanctity’ which could not be dissipated should he be without ministerial employment.”²¹

Even in this instance, the tradition has held firm that while the “odor of sanctity” may be permanent, the power of office is limited. There can be no exercise of office without the call of the church; and a minister without a call “ranks as a lay person.”²²

That being the *de facto* case even today, the question of “standing” raises its controversial head. Atkins and Fagley are un-confused: “His standing, however, was no longer with the church that ordained him but in an association into whose fellowship he had been formally received by vote. This association, not a local church, had the right to depose from the ministry should charges be made and sustained against a minister.”²³ Logic and tradition would seem to suggest that Congregational polity ought either to opt for the old New England pattern in which clergy without call are no clergy at all; or should find comfort in later practices where ordination is regarded as permanent but, lacking answerability to the Church in some instances, remains answerable to an association of Churches. Anything less is to create among us those *caractères indelibles* so impugned by Luther and Mather.

IV. THE CRITICAL ROLE OF PREACHING

“Therefore see to it, pastor and preacher! Our office has now become...a real and saving office.”²⁴

Zwingli reminds us of the centrality of preaching to the office of the pastor. It is not simply the center-piece of the worship service, nor the best craft of the minister. Far more importantly, it is a function of the office which is critical to obtaining faith. “I believe that the work of prophesying or preaching is most sacred, so that it is a work most necessary, above all others. For to speak scripturally or strictly, we see that among all nations the outward preaching of apostles, evangelists, and bishops preceded faith....Whithersoever, then, prophets or preachers of the Word are sent, it is a sign of God’s grace, that He wishes to manifest a knowledge of Himself...”²⁵

Nothing could be more appealing than to justify the time to properly and adequately prepare sermons, knowing that it is “a work most necessary, above all others.” Little could be more frightening than to understand that what the minister does in the pulpit is that very thing upon which the faith of each of the congregants depends. God chose this flawed vessel from which to pour the divine word. It is sobering to think that laziness, erroneous priorities, pride, or other failings on the minister’s part could be a stumbling block for the people who called them.

In his *Reply to Sadoleto*, John Calvin wrote: “We admit, therefore that ecclesiastical pastors are to be heard just like Christ Himself, but they must be pastors who execute the office entrusted to them. And this office, we maintain, is... (to) religiously and in good faith...deliver the oracles which they have received at the mouth of the Lord...”²⁶ Our preaching is entitled to be heard as the Word of the Lord but ONLY if

²¹ *History of American Congregationalism*; Atkins, Gaius Glenn and Fagley, Frederick L.; The Pilgrim Press, Boston and Chicago; 1942; p 367

²² *Ibid*; p 365

²³ *Ibid*; p 365

²⁴ Martin Luther, *The Short Catechism* (1529); Bettenson, *op cit*; p 290

²⁵ Huldreich Zwingli, *An Account of the Faith*; Fosdick, *op cit*; p 190f

²⁶ *Protestant Reformation, The*; ed. Hillerbrand, Hans J.; Walker and Company; New York; 1968; p 169

our preaching is conveying to the congregation that word which we have received. There is great challenge in utilizing all the skill and craft we possess to effectively remove our person from the communication. The minister will, of necessity, be the one seen. Their office is to insure that God is heard.

The language is not that of orthodoxy, but the words ring true which William Ellery Channing spoke at the dedication of Divinity Hall in 1826: "To bring the created mind into living union with the Infinite mind, so that it shall respond to him through its whole being, is the noblest function which this harmonious and beneficent universe performs. For this revelation was given. For this the ministry was instituted. The Christian teacher...is to give vitality to the thought of God in the human mind; to make his presence felt; to make him a reality, and the most powerful reality to the soul."²⁷

Similarly, Henry Ward Beecher, who wrote: "The Word of God in the Book is a dead letter...In the preacher that word becomes again as it was when it was first spoken by prophet, priest, or apostle...Paul--the greatest of preachers--aimed all the way through...at

reconstructed manhood...The end, Manhood. The means, Truth. The spirit, Love. The ideal, Christ. The inspiration, the living Spirit of God."²⁸

V. PASTORAL RESPONSIBILITY

"As ruling in the church they [*ed. Elder or bishop*] are to be not lords over God's heritage; but being the servants of all, for Christ's sake, they are to watch for souls as they that must give account."²⁹

There is general agreement among Congregationalists about the efficacy of "good" preaching. The proper administration and efficacy of the sacraments is a subject for another paper; although it should be noted that the modernist Congregationalist view that "anyone" can administer the sacraments presses the notion of the "priesthood of all believers," finds no warrant in our tradition and little (or no) scriptural support, and is generally unacceptable to the people who are rather jealous of those to whom they will grant the power to handle the sacred rites.

Prayer and censure will also be left to another time.

The *sine qua non* of ordination is that the Office into which the ordained person is settled is an Office which carries with it the duties common to congregational life but, more significantly, the responsibility for the souls of those to whom they have been called. It would be easier and far less frightening to simply be a lay-person working full time in the Church. Then God would have no greater expectations of the minister than of anyone else.

VI. THE FRIGHTENING REALITY

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."³⁰ (Hebrews 10:31 NRSV) No man knows this fear more surely than the Christian minister.

"Am I asked," queried Channing, "to state more particularly what these influences are to which the church owes its efficacy?...The first is the character of the minister...I say his character, not his ordination. Ordination has no end but to introduce into the sacred office men qualified for its duties,"³¹

It remains true then, that ordination (by which I mean the rite of the Church) imparts no power or authority. It is not ordination that makes the minister. It IS ordination that recognizes and confirms that God has made the minister. And it is with considerable fear and trembling that any person should accept

²⁷ *Works of William E. Channing, D.D., The*; American Unitarian Society; Boston; 1886; p 261

²⁸ *Yale Lectures*; Abercrombie, *op cit*; p 101

²⁹ Bacon-Quint Report to the Council (1865); Atkins and *Fagley, op cit*; p 366

³⁰ Rouner; *op cit*; p 148

³¹ Discourse delivered in the 1st Unitarian Church of Philadelphia. May 30, 1841; Channing; *op cit*; p 433

public acknowledgment of the duty to which God has called them; and assume the trust which the Church places in its call.. Scripture is full of stories of those who were justifiably reluctant to say “yes” to God. Being chosen by God for this office is being chosen to bear awesome responsibility in the absence of anything the world would recognize as authority.

(Deuteronomy 33:10 NRSV) They teach Jacob your ordinances, and Israel your law; they place incense before you, and whole burnt offerings on your altar.

“Their Pastor must be apt to teach, no young scholar,

(1 Timothy 3:1 NRSV) The saying is sure: whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task.

able to divide the word aright,

(2 Timothy 2:15 NRSV) Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.(Also Malachi 2.7)

holding fast that faithful word, according to the doctrine, that he may be able also to exhort, rebuke, improve, with wholesome doctrine, and to convince them that say against it : he must always be careful and watchful over the flock whereof the Lord hath made him overseer...doing his duty to every soul, as he will answer before the chief Shepherd...”(The London Confession of 1589; Walker; *op cit*; p 35

(2 Timothy 4:2 NRSV) proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching.

(Titus 1:9 NRSV) He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching, so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it.

Channing closed his dedication discourse by “... naming the chief source of power to the minister,... I mean the spirit of self-sacrifice, - the spirit of martyrdom. This was the perfection of Christ, and it is the noblest inspiration which his followers derive from him. Say not that this is a height to which the generality of ministers must not be expected to rise.... It enters into all the virtues which deeply interest us. In truth, there is no thorough virtue without it.”³²

If we understand, and if we communicate this truth to our ministerial students and ordinands, the Church may be spared the necessity of trying to demean the ministry - at tremendous, but unseen, cost to the Church. The Reformation became a necessity in some measure because the clergy sought power in the temporal sphere. It may be that the modernist Congregationalist view arises for similar reasons. But God has not called ministers to be the brokers of power or wealth. They are called (and ordained) to serve God in ministrations to the people of God. Channing may have been excessive in his invitation to martyrdom. Yet there remains the word of the Master, “The greatest among you will be your servant.” (Matthew 23:11 NRSV)

”Feel the greatness of your office,” Channing told J.S. Dwight, “Let not its humble exterior, or the opinion of the world, or its frequent inefficacy, hide from you its unspeakable dignity. Regard it as the highest human vocation, as greater than thrones, or any other distinctions which relate merely to the present life....Glory in your office. Feel that it associates you with the elect of past ages, with Jesus Christ, and apostles, and confessors, and martyrs, and reformers; with all who have toiled and suffered to raise men to intelligence and moral greatness...”³³

³² Discourse at the Dedication of Divinity Hall, Cambridge, 1826; Channing; *op cit*; p 267

³³ Charge at the Ordination of Rev. J.S. Dwight, 2nd Church of Northampton, May 20, 1841; Channing; *op cit*; p 289

VII. CONCLUSION

“Since the Lord has willed that both his word and his sacraments be dispensed through the ministry of men, it is necessary that there be pastors ordained to the churches, pastors who teach the people both in public and in private the pure doctrine, administer the sacraments, and by their good example instruct and form all to holiness and purity of life.”³⁴

- A. The ministry of the Church, as attested by scripture and the continued leading of the Holy Spirit, is no mere matter of convenience but, rather, the form and order which flows from the will of God.
- B. The inner call of a person to ministry is pre-requisite to preparation or ordination.
- C. The Church is to elect to office only those whose gifts have been tried.
- D. The Rite of Ordination is the public acknowledgment of the inner call of God and the election by the Church.
- E. Those ordained shall be regarded as ordained for life unless removed for cause (by Church or association); but there is no power of office except upon the election of the Church.
- F. It is the responsibility of the pastor to “teach the people both in public and in private the pure doctrine, administer the sacraments, and by their good example instruct and form all to holiness and purity of life.”³⁵

³⁴ John Calvin, *Instruction in Faith*, Fosdick: *op cit*; p 234

³⁵ *Ibid*

The notion that a Congregational minister is “raised up” is the testimony that those individuals who will be called to ministry will come from within the gathered fellowship of believers we call a Church. This will not be a stranger but, rather, one of us. When, in that context, the finger of God presses on a soul and demands that “this one be called to ministry,” the groundwork is laid. Prayerfully responding, carefully preparing, the pastor-to-be proceeds to become what God has ordered. If the call and the gifts are real, the Church will, by the power of the Holy Spirit, recognize that; and will be moved to confirm in the eyes of the world what God has done in the inner sanctum of a single soul.

To be “set apart” is, among us, essentially a lateral movement. There is no sense in which the pastor is of some higher, or even different, order than the other members of the Church. But the separation is one of duty and responsibility. God has said to this pastor: “Feed my lambs.” The Church has said to this pastor: “God said we could get our food from you!”

To be ordained is to accept all of this - the joy and excitement of God’s call; the affirmation of the community of faith; the election to office; but, most of all, the awesome responsibility of the trust in the frail stuff of a single man or woman to whom God gives the charge to care for the souls entrusted to them.

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