

Ordained Into Whose Ministry?

By Robert W. Bertram

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The Christian people in a given locality who call and ordain a pastor for their congregation have the right to do that not because they belong to the Missouri Synod but because they belong to Christ and because, in this place, they are Christ's Church. So it is not into the Missouri Synod that their pastor is called and ordained but into the very service of Christ and of this congregation of His, which is itself the Christian Church.

It is exactly that Christian understanding of ordination, thank God, which the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod at its best has always enjoyed. When a congregation in this Synod ordains a pastor, they speak not of his ministry in the Missouri Synod (the Synod is not so much as named) but rather of his “ministry” in this congregation, which they identify directly with “the flock of Christ,” “The Church of God.” That fully Christian understanding of ordination – no more, no less – is indeed, as our synodical rite of ordination puts it, “the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.”

If synodical President Preus and his associates now think that by means of merely man-made rules they can invalidate such a divine call and ordination, then they have dragged synodical rules to a new low of sectarianism. For they that must certainly answer to Christ, who – as our rite of ordination reminds us – is “the only Head of the Church”. Do they think so little of ordination as to imagine it depends on which seminary a pastor attends? At first President Preus tried warning congregations that the ordination of “Seminex graduates who are not certified by the proper faculty” are “unauthorized ordinations.” But now, since that did not work, he is declaring outright that such ordinations are “null and void in our Synod.”

Does that mean that, so far as “our Synod” is concerned, these pastors have not really become pastors of “the flock of Christ”? Really? If that is the case, then let this rash new decree be announced, not in innuendoes but loudly and clearly for Christ and all His flock to hear.

Does it mean (to use the recent language of the Commission on Constitutional Matters) that “as far as recognition by the Synod is concerned” the Sacraments which these new pastors administer and the Word they proclaim are to be declined by us? Then let us decline them to God’s face, from whom these Word and Sacraments come. Does it mean that the congregations which these pastors serve are to be excluded from our synodical fellowship for not submitting to President Preus? Has their exclusion been authorized by “the only Head of the Church”?

Are these young pastors, even though they “hold and profess the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church,” disqualified from our membership just because they “are not certified by the proper faculty”? If so, then let us by all means hide behind that dubious bylaw. We shall need all the alibis we can get when we are called to account. So what if our synodical constitution, let alone Scripture and the Confessions, requires no such faculty certification as a condition of synodical membership. When the Lord comes asking us about these new pastors He has given us, we can at least make the excuse: “We have a bylaw, and according to that bylaw....” But of course with such a lame excuse, we should not be surprised at the answer we get.

The answer we get, “namely, the judgment of God –that is exactly what these young pastors have been trying to warn us about before it is too late. But their warning, their evangelical criticism, is what the present synodical administration does not want us to hear, for then the administration itself would stand exposed. That is really why it wants these courageous pastors silenced and their ordinations annulled. That is why it offers them, even now, only one alternative to be “certified by the proper faculty.” That way, if they submit, the impression might yet be given that they have suddenly withdrawn their protest and will now compromise their consciences in favor of this legalistic administration after all. The only things that the administration wants known is the bare fact that these pastors have not been “certified by the proper faculty.” What it does not want known is why, for what reasons of conscience and Christian faith they have refused such certification. But whether the administration wants that known or not, the truth will out. The legalism is becoming more and more frantic, thus more and more obvious, so that now it even has to resort to annulling ordinations in the Church of Christ. Our Lord is making the guilty secret expose itself....