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The Doctrine of the Call into the Holy Ministry

(A Conference Paper)

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IN discussing the doctrine of the call, as we all know, we are not traveling on an uncharted sea, but the subject has been discussed in innumerable books, brochures, essays, lectures, and articles. A person would think that since so many navigators have been at work, surely the proper ocean lanes leading to the desired ports have been discovered. Sad to say, there is no unanimity here. Affirmations are hotly pursued by denials.

Why is it? One reason is that the Word of God does not contain many statements on this subject—a fact which might have shown the investigators a priori that in this area God has given His Church a great deal of liberty, of free choice. While there are many narratives in the Holy Scriptures of people that were called, the directives to be followed by the Christians of all times are so few that they can easily be written on a comparatively small sheet of paper. This is a point which will probably be challenged and be met with a decided *quod est demonstrandum*.

Another reason is that here we come into a field belonging in part not to abstract, absolute doctrine, but to practice, to life, where situations, necessities, people, temperaments, and gifts differ enormously. A custom or practice which may be good under certain conditions may prove unworkable or even harmful under conditions of a different nature.

What I should like to plead for in our joint study is patience and moderation and humble, brotherly forbearance as we look at the various conclusions and opinions with which we are here confronted. To get a view of what is involved, a few Scripture teachings of a more general nature will have to be pointed to.

I

My first proposition is one which for us Christians has the character of an axiom—the blessed Gospel of Jesus Christ has to be preached. Here there is no debate. The Scriptures contain a direct command of the Lord addressed to His disciples: “Go ye, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” There are others of like tenor. And even if we did not possess any directives of this nature, we should know that the Gospel has to be brought to people because it is evident that they need it, and the law of love would compel us to acquaint them with the salvation which God in divine mercy has provided through our Savior, who is over all, God blessed forever.

II

A second proposition likewise has the nature of an axiom—it is the duty of every Christian to help in the spreading of the Gospel. The mission commands are not meant for one group only, for the Apostles, for the clergy, for the male members of the Church; they are general. The words that Peter addresses to the Christians to whom he writes his First Letter are evidently meant for believers of all climes and ages: “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light,” 1 Peter 2:9. On this point, too, there is no debate.

III

My third proposition is a simple historical fact which likewise is not a matter of controversy. It is this: To propagate the Gospel, Jesus called twelve men to whom He gave the title “Apostles.” The word means ambassadors. They were to be His special witnesses, and that is a function which they fulfilled. Their number was added to when Paul was called, who became the greatest of them all. At times even others are given the title, Barnabas and Silas, the companions and co-workers of Paul. This fact is in line with the freedom which prevails in New Testament times. The believers have come of age, as St. Paul hints, and it is no longer the practice of our great God to determine every little step for us in advance.

IV

In the fourth place we have to say the Apostolic office was not continued when these special witnesses of Christ went to their heavenly reward. James the Elder was put to death by Herod Agrippa I, as related Acts 12, and there was no one selected to take his place. The institution of the Apostolate was not meant to be a permanent one. The Irvingites, the followers of Edward Irving, that remarkable and gifted London preacher who attracted even men like Carlyle, the sect which teaches that the Apostolic office has to be reinstated to usher in Christ's Second Coming, are altogether wrong.

V

In the early Christian Church God called other people directly and endowed them with special so-called charismatic gifts for the spreading of the Gospel, but their positions were not continued when the charismatic gifts ceased to be bestowed. We here have to think especially of the prophets. In the early Church the prophetic gift was to be seen, and Paul puts a high value on it. It consisted in this, that certain people whom God had endowed with the peculiar gift of "prophecy" received revelations from above which they pronounced to the Church for its instruction and edification. These revelations at times referred to the future, but by no means always. Frequently they were strong exhortations pertaining to the life of the members of the respective Christian Church. "Prophecy" in this case meant not merely foretelling, but rather forth-telling, proclamation. There were other charismatic functions, such as speaking with tongues and the interpretation of tongues, which were intended to help in the establishment of the Church. All these special gifts have ceased to exist. The Church was founded and has been spread. These gifts are no longer needed. We do not deny that there could be prophets in our midst like the prophets in the early Christian Church if God desired that this institution should come back to life. The power of the Lord is just as great now as it was two thousand years ago. But we have no proof that such is His will. The charismatic gifts, like those of the Apostolate, have become extinct.

VI

There is one office, not a charismatic one, which the Holy Scriptures indicate the Church must have. It is the office of elder.

The proof for this sweeping assertion is contained in Titus 1:5: "For this reason I left you on Crete that you should continue to supply in proper order that which is still lacking and place elders in the various cities, as I instructed you in detail." Note carefully what Paul says here. He not only tells Titus to see to it that the congregations on Crete are provided with elders, but also that where this office is missing, something is lacking or wanting. From this we have to draw the conclusion that this office must be found in a Christian church if it is to be equipped as it should be. The office of elder is the same as that of bishop, as Titus 1:5, 7 and Acts 20:17, 28 show. Other passages, for instance, 1 Peter 5:1 ff., show us that these elders had the function of pastors, of shepherds. When the New Testament speaks of pastors and teachers, we may assume that the same persons are meant who in other places are called elders by the holy writers. We must say, then, that of the many offices we find in the Church today the one that can be proved to rest on a direct divine mandate is that of elder, or pastor, or bishop. Let us now think of the call into this office.

VII

It is one of the most positive teachings of the Lutheran Church that whoever wishes to occupy the position of pastor must be called into this office. Art. XIV of the Augsburg Confession is well known: "Of Ecclesiastical Order they [that is, our churches] teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called." The word "publicly" has received due attention in the comments of theologians. The Latin word is *publice*. The meaning is not what we express by publicly, but it signifies "in the name of others," "as representative of the public or of the Church." In most churches this principle has been stressed, and, I think, in our Lutheran Church probably more so than in other Protestant denominations: to be a minister of the Gospel a call is required. On this point there is very little, if any, disagreement in the church at large.

VIII

The important question is, Can this thesis be substantiated from the Scriptures? Some of the proof texts advanced evidently are not relevant. Often Jeremiah 23 is quoted. This text speaks of the

false prophets who come before God's people without having been called by the Lord. Such texts are very interesting and instructive historically, but they do not pertain to the present question. We are not talking about prophets, but about pastors, ministers. Besides, it is not Old Testament situations that we are confronted with in our study, but conditions in the New Testament. At most, a person might find something analogous in the case of such prophets, but certainly the texts pertaining to them are not proof texts covering the question whether every pastor of a congregation must be called. Heb. 5:4, quoted in this connection, has a reference to Aaron, saying that no one takes the honor for himself, but one who is called by God, as was Aaron. We here must make the same comment as before — the text does not speak of pastors of congregations. — But there is one text that is compelling, cogent, pertinent. It is Rom. 10:14-17. Given in my own translation, the passage reads: "How, then, shall they call upon Him on whom they have not come to believe? And how shall they believe where they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach if they are not sent? Just as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of those who proclaim good news! But not all have become obedient to the Gospel; for Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed our proclamation? So, then, faith comes through the proclamation, and the proclamation through the command of Christ." The words in which we are particularly interested read: "How shall they preach if they are not sent?" These words imply that if a person is to be a preacher of the Gospel, he has to be sent. To be sent is merely another term for "to be called." We say, then, it is the teaching of Paul and hence of the New Testament, that preachers of the Gospel have to be called for their blessed work.

We are here laboring a point which, I believe, is quite generally conceded. If a pastor is a minister of Jesus Christ, then certainly it is implied that he was put into the service by Christ Himself. He is in the service of Jesus because Jesus has given him that high position. It is a contradiction in terms to call a person a minister of Christ whom the heavenly Master has not honored with a call into this precious service.

IX

Up till now everything is clear. But at this point our difficulties begin. What is the form of such a call? How is it given? In the sectarian churches there is a good deal of discussion of the inner call. This is a factor which should not be brushed aside as a fiction. There is such a thing as an inner call. It is the conviction that God wants me to be a minister of the Gospel. If we had more time at our disposal, if the ideal conditions under which our forefathers lived and worked were still in existence, who, when they assembled in conferences like this one, did not adjourn till a whole week had been spent, we ought to call the roll and let each member of the conference get up and tell us honestly, frankly, how it came about that he is a pastor. Some interesting stories would be told, a few of them probably startling, others very edifying, all giving evidence that God has many different ways of procuring servants for His vineyard. Why the matter of the inner call has not received more attention in our circles will become apparent when we look at the next point.

X

It is evident that when we speak of an inner call, we are dealing with something that is altogether subjective. When a person comes to me and says, "I have the conviction that God wants me to become a Christian pastor," how can I discern whether or not what he says is true, and, if true, whether it is not the veriest moonshine, some vagary that his imagination has conjured up? An examination of such a person will perhaps soon show what kind of man and mentality I am dealing with, whether he perhaps is like that colored man who came running from the cornfield where he had been plowing, went to a minister in the neighborhood, and said: "Sir, God wants me to be a preacher, because I saw a clear sign in the heavens, two letters, P. C., which mean, preach Christ," whereupon the minister, a wise man, said: "Brother, you are altogether mistaken, that P. C. does not mean preach Christ, but plow corn." I say an examination will show whether it is this sort of person who makes the claim of possessing an inner call or whether the applicant has to be taken seriously. I know of a worthy young man who started out as a student of law. He was drafted

into the army and was caught in the battle of the Bulge when it looked for a few days as if the American invasion forces would suffer a crushing defeat. He was in one of the spots where the fighting was most vicious, and when his comrades fell to the right and to the left, he vowed that if God would see him through that battle alive, he would become a minister of the Gospel. The Lord did spare him. This young man felt he had a sacred obligation to fulfill. He likewise felt he had an inner call to become a servant of the Word. He presented himself as a student of theology, was graduated and ordained, and is now, I am sure, doing blessed work in the Lord's vineyard. There are numerous instances of this kind, some of them instances where men give up lucrative positions and become ministers of the Gospel because they have the conviction that it is God's will they should preach His Word. That is what I term the inner call. God be praised for it that He moves the hearts of young men to become ambassadors of Jesus Christ in this sin-cursed world.

XI

The inner call, precisely because it is entirely subjective, is not sufficient. It is not something demonstrable unless we should be dealing with cases like those of the Apostolic Church where miraculous signs and wonders could be performed to show that the claims of special appointment by the Lord were not either dishonest or a form of self-deception. But such conditions do not prevail and cannot be expected to return. This means that we have to have something nonmiraculous, objective, something that can be demonstrated, as the basis of the call.

We have it in the action of Christian congregations extending calls. It can be demonstrated that God wants Christians to group themselves into congregations, that He does not wish them to remain isolated one from the other, but form communions, brotherhoods, churches. These congregations, according to God's will, must have elders, presbyters, bishops, pastors, teachers, to mention a number of terms occurring in the New Testament, for that office, and they have the right to call men to become their pastors or elders. You will say, This surely is a *quod est demonstrandum*. Very well, we shall reserve the next point for it.

XII

A Scripture passage which to me is really convincing when the question is asked whether the congregations have the right to issue a call to somebody to become their pastor is 1 Cor. 3:21-23: "Therefore let no man glory in men, for all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." — This is a truly comprehensive passage. It sweeps through the whole universe, and gives the Christians the key to everything. What does Paul mean to say? You Christians are foolish to quarrel among yourselves as to whether you belong to Paul or to Cephas or to Apollos or to somebody else. Don't you see that the disputing you are carrying on as to the leader in the Church to whom you wish to cling is altogether vain, idle, beside the point, because all things belong to you? All these men are yours. Paul belongs to you as well as Peter and Apollos. They are all your servants, endowed by God with gifts for your benefit. It is a passage speaking of the immense freedom of the Church, of its great authority in spiritual matters. Must we not say, after reading these words, that if the Corinthian Christians had in their midst a man having all the qualifications for the position of elder and they desired to make him their pastor, they had the full right to call him into that office? Is that not clearly implied?

There is another important consideration. All Christians are spiritual priests, having the right and the duty to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Imagine a group of them living at a certain place assembled in a meeting. They will say to each other: While we all are priests, we know that God wants us to have a pastor, a leader. Let us pray about the matter and then call somebody who is qualified to be our shepherd. They may take one from their own midst who possesses the qualifications that God has indicated. Perhaps they pick a very modest man who has not been much in the limelight. He may be startled. But when they call him, then there may grow up in him the conviction that it is God's will that he serve as elder. Is there anything wrong with the procedure which I have just now sketched? It seems to me to flow quite logically, simply, and naturally out of the circumstances that obtain in such

a case. Being a spiritual priest implies that one has great prerogatives and high authority; in reality, there is nothing higher in the Church. When Christians call a minister, they act as spiritual priests.

We must not forget that the person so called serves in a dual capacity. He is on the one hand the spokesman, the pastor, the elder of the congregation, serving it with such gifts as he possesses, breaking to it the bread of life. On the other hand he is the servant of Jesus Christ, called to act in that very capacity. How is that? What has Jesus to do with it? Well, the congregation called him because it is Jesus Christ's will that there should be elders in the Church who at the same time would be servants of Christ or God (cf. Titus 1:7). Hence when the members of the Church issued a call to the person in question, it was the expressed intention of the Church to place him as its head in the capacity of a servant of Jesus Christ. He was called by his fellow Christians exactly to have that high position.

Let us think of another matter here. Where things are normal, the man who has been called by the congregation and who accepts the call has been put into his position by a twofold call, the inner one, which I described before, and the external one of the congregation. Perhaps the inner call came first, perhaps not. It may have come after the external call from the congregation reached him. On this subject I intend to have a little more to say by and by.

XIII

I have spoken of the congregation as having the right and authority to call a pastor. But now let us not forget that in this area there is a large degree of liberty when the manner in which the calling is to be done comes into consideration. As we conduct our business in the congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, it is not the whole congregation that calls, but the so-called voters, and usually not all of these, but only a fraction of them, those who assemble, who unfortunately very rarely constitute the total number of voters. It is a representative meeting that calls. Of course, the result of the deliberations issuing in a call are made known to the whole congregation, and every member has a right to protest. To obviate the conceivable necessity

for somebody to protest *after* the final vote, as a rule all the candidates for the holy office are announced beforehand so that every member of the Church has an opportunity of presenting comments or protests. Is this procedure right? Why not? We live in the blessed era of the New Testament where freedom is our birthright, one of our prized possessions. If that is the way the congregation wishes to do its work, we need not object, on principle. There may be better ways, wiser ways, but we need not call such a method wrong. A congregation may go a step further and delegate the selection to a small committee. It may even delegate it to a person, a bishop. If such is its desire, there is nothing in the Holy Scriptures to show that such a procedure is wrong.

XIV

Permit me to elaborate on this last point a little more. The position of the Lutheran Church has always been that *iure humano* we may have bishops. I am here speaking of bishops in the technical sense of the word, leaders or heads of districts or of national churches, such as we have, for instance, in the Lutheran Church of Sweden. In Germany, too, the position of bishop has been reintroduced, so that we have, e.g., a *Landesbischof* of Hanover and of Bavaria. On this matter Melancthon's subscription to the Smalcald Articles should be compared. He says there that he would be willing to acknowledge the Pope as the chief bishop provided that the Pope allowed the Gospel and that it was understood that such a position was held by the bishop of Rome merely *iure humano*, not by divine right. That precisely has always been the view which obtained in our Lutheran Church. The Missouri Synod has not favored the appointment of bishops, because we have the example of the Roman Catholic Church before our eyes, where this position has been used most flagrantly for the oppression of consciences. But we have always been willing to admit that while the system of the Swedish Church may have some dangers inherent in it, we cannot on the basis of the New Testament call it wrong.

XV

I have spoken of the inner call. Suppose a person harbors the conviction that he ought to be a minister of the Gospel. He makes

this conviction known, but he does not receive an external call. What is he to do? My reply is, Let him be patient. Let him work at something else, and let him be a faithful witness of Christ in the place where God has put him. The lack of an external call may be an indication that his inner call, after all, is not so genuine as he would like to believe. At any rate, he should not make himself the pastor of a congregation, step before the people and say, I have an inner call to be your minister. In our democratic atmosphere and climate his pretensions would lead to quick disaster, and properly so.

XVI

If a person has received an external call but does not have the inner call, the situation is difficult. If he has the conviction that God does not want him to become a minister, he must reject the external call. He must not violate his conscience. If he really is definitely of the conviction that God does not want him in the ministry, then let him say No to the call that reaches him. I am sure that I do not speak of fictitious cases. I have heard of qualified men being called into the ministry who felt that the Lord did not desire that they accept a call. In such instances the individual's conscience has to do the deciding. If he is moved by sordid, selfish, carnal motives, he is to be pitied and certainly grievously offends his heavenly Master. But it is certainly conceivable that his course is not dictated by unworthy considerations. We must leave him to the judgment of the Lord.

XVII

If the external call comes, and there is no inner call, nor the conviction that God does not want him in the ministry, then the person in question should follow the commandment of love and serve the congregation, trusting that the longed-for inner call will come in the course of time. Here I take it for granted that the congregation is in a state of severe difficulty and that the man in question is qualified for the position of minister. I imagine that in the pioneer days situations like the one here visualized were not rare. My view here rests on the old principle that in cases of doubt we should let the law of love decide.

XVIII

One great factor in this matter is prayer. Let no one who is confronted with the question whether or not he should enter the holy ministry forget this mighty means of receiving help from God. I do not think that a person can be too emphatic in this particular respect. The Christians of today are fast getting to be a worldly-minded generation; the fleshpots of Egypt are more delectable to them than the austere fare on the hills of Zion. That earnest communion with God taught us in word and in unparalleled example by our blessed Savior is not practiced as it should be. Who of us can say that he approaches the piety and the prayer life of our fathers? Many of our difficulties are due to our reliance on what we consider our own superior knowledge and acumen rather than on God's help obtained in ardent prayer. In no area is the injunction to go to God in prayer more important than in that of calling a pastor for a congregation, where we are dealing with the special service of Christ.

XIX

It is very important that the advice of experienced brethren be sought whenever an external call reaches a person. God has arranged our lives in such a way that we do not lead existences of isolation, but have brethren with whom we are connected by mutual ties of confidence and love. Who can enumerate the many instances of disaster that could have been avoided if the respective person had taken his call to a brother or brethren for advice! Such advice should be sought prayerfully, but it does not have to be followed. The brother to whom you turn is not infallible; but his glasses may be less colored than yours, and he may discern factors which elude you.

XX

If a person has the inner conviction that he ought to serve in the ministry, the conviction which I have termed the inner call, then let him make this known to the brethren. If he does this in a humble way, his motive being the ardent desire to serve the Savior and his fellow men, then there is nothing reprehensible in such a course. We frown on people that are overambitious, that lack in modesty and humility. Yes, lack of humility, human pride, is a serious sin. But is it necessarily a sign of pride when a man

says he would like to serve the Savior as a pastor and that he has the conviction that God wants him to occupy such a position? If this springs not from motives of self-aggrandizement or a longing for earthly glory and distinction, why should it be wrong? Is it not entirely right and proper? Would silence in this case not be reprehensible? Let us in this matter keep our vision clear and not judge in superficial fashion.

XXI

While the congregation has the right to extend a call to a person to become its pastor, it must not overlook the qualifications which the New Testament lays down for ministers and which are chiefly given in the Pastoral Epistles. Nor should it disregard the advice of brethren, especially of officials of Synod. "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient," says St. Paul 1 Cor. 10:23. That word has its application in this area. The minister of Jesus who is to be the pastor of a congregation must have certain qualifications laid down chiefly 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. You know them well, having heard them read at ordination and installation services and having pondered them, I am sure, many a time in the privacy of your study and elsewhere. Just as our liberty, whether it be political or spiritual, must never become license, so the privileges and authority of a congregation must never take on the form of recklessness and misuse. This is all so self-evident that I need not dwell on it any longer. And synodical officials, who in some quarters are shunned because it is held their advice does not flow from a genuine concern for the well-being of the congregations, must by all means be consulted. We have elected them for the very purpose that they may serve us with their counsel, which is given from a high vantage point from which the whole field of the Church can be surveyed. I intimately know several congregations who have made it a rule not to proceed without the advice of synodical officials in calling a pastor, and they have fared well.

XXII

Let me emphasize once more: The New Testament is a testament of freedom. The Church has the right to create offices beside that of the pastoral office. While Paul informs us that the pastoral office should be established, he does not say that it is the only one which

the Church has the right to introduce in its midst. That Paul was well aware of here moving in a territory where great liberty has to be granted is evident from his pointing out in writing to Timothy the qualifications of deacons, but omitting the mention of deacons when he tells Titus what kind of ministry the church on Crete had to have. In fact, in his Letter to Titus he does not mention deacons at all. Another indication we may find in his giving rather detailed instructions on the topic of widows in the First Letter to Timothy, but abstaining from reference to the subject when he tells Titus what had to be done on Crete. These are arguments from silence, the logicians among you will say, and that fact has to be admitted. But they do prove, it seems to me, that for Paul these questions as to the precise structure of the ministerial office were not of prime importance.

XXIII

With full assurance we look upon such offices as those of our synodical presidents, professors, missionaries, mission secretaries, parish school teachers, as offices the call into which is a divine call. All these offices and functions are covered in the command of Jesus: Go and teach all nations; go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. Let the message of Christ be proclaimed in the best way possible and as abundantly and widely as possible — that is the great big directive. It is often thought that we have to safeguard the divine character of the work done by the officials or church workers mentioned by showing that their activity is a subsidiary one to that of the local pastor. I do not think that such laborious and often tortuous reasoning is needed here at all. Christians, being spiritual priests, have the right to establish offices which will be helpful in the great cause in which they are jointly engaged, if only good order and the law of love are not violated. The difficulties which in some quarters are felt to exist vanish when we think of the high degree of freedom the New Testament Church enjoys.

XXIV

Now a few additional points. It will be said perhaps that my presentation is wrong because it is evident that not the *congregations* of the first Church elected elders, but that elders were given to them by the Apostles or their assistants. Acts 14:23 will

be cited, where it is stated that Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in the congregations which they had established in Southern Asia Minor. That argument is at least partly justified. I cannot agree with the theologians who look upon the Greek word in that passage, whose literal meaning is "a stretching forth of hands," as an allusion to the voting of the congregation members for a person by a show of hands. The people "voting," one must not forget, were not the congregation, but Paul and Barnabas. The word therefore must mean "select," "appoint." But is there anything strange in the procedure of Paul and Barnabas? The congregations had barely been founded. They knew very little of Christian doctrine and practice. They needed men to help them in the understanding of God's Word. And Paul and Barnabas undoubtedly made inquiries in a place like Iconium as to who the men were that could serve as leaders, as elders, and said these men should become your pastors. Knowing Paul and Barnabas as we do, we can be sure that this was not done in a legalistic, but in a brotherly, evangelical manner. The congregations were still infants who had to be led. We have to proceed pretty much in the same way in the mission fields in India, Japan, and elsewhere.

Another passage that will be cited against me is Titus 1:5, discussed before, where Titus is ordered to appoint elders for the various churches on Crete. What I just said about the course of Paul and Barnabas in Southern Asia Minor applies here, too. The churches on Crete were young. They were not able to administer their own affairs as yet. So Titus is told to appoint elders. That he did so in an evangelical way we may take for granted. I have no doubt that the Apostles and missionaries, as they proceeded in this manner, gave the proper explanations. In the Church there is freedom. This was the best way of ordering the affairs of the young congregations. The Apostles chose that course, and the congregations, we may be sure, acquiesced. We may go further and say it was the only way in which under the circumstances the organization that was required could be effected. One could add, too, in defense of my position, that Paul and Barnabas were definitely inspired and as such had the Holy Spirit to guide them; and on that account their course could not be fully normative for us who do not have that direct divine inspiration.

XXV

Another objection that may be raised against my remarks is that I have altogether failed to dwell on the importance of ordination and the laying on of hands. Is it not, so it may be inquired, this very laying on of hands of the clergy which bestows the office of the holy ministry? I must say that I fail to find in the New Testament any injunction that there should be a special act of ordination when a person is called as, or to be made, a minister. There are instances reported of the laying on of hands when such important function was entrusted to a person or persons; but that is all. We must not forget that the laying on of hands had a general significance and that it took place, too, when charismatic gifts of various kinds were to be bestowed. In Acts 8 it is reported that when a number of people in Samaria had become believers, Peter and John were sent there, "then they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit." A similar report we have in Acts 19 in reference to people whom Paul baptized or directed to be baptized.

What was this laying on of hands? It was simply a solemn ceremony indicating the deep interest felt for those on whom the hands were laid. It accompanied prayer, voiced in behalf of these people, assuring them of the depth of regard which was entertained for them. That must have been the meaning of the ceremony when men were set aside for some special service in the Church or were ordained to the holy ministry. The outward act portrayed vividly the warmth of sympathy and the genuineness of the prayer of the people who prayed and laid on their hands. There is no proof that the ceremony was commanded or that it was made a sacrament, as the Roman Catholic Church teaches.

XXVI

In all these matters let the aim of congregations, synods, pastors, and teachers be that of exalting our blessed Savior and of serving His holy cause. Let us not despise proper forms and ceremonies. They are of great value. But let us not forget they are means to an end. The great thing is the exalting of our divine Redeemer and the spreading of His holy Gospel.

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