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The Ministerial Office a Divine Office!

The highest order or state of a man is that of a Christian. Christians, though, like other men, by nature sinners, are saints in the sight of God, being sanctified through the blood of Jesus Christ. They are children of God, kings and priests, as they are one with Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, His King and Priest. There is within this state of Christianity no higher order, no higher or lower grade of holiness and sanctity, no Christian more a child of God, more a saint, a king, or a priest than others, but all alike participants of these divine privileges. As we read Gal. 3, 26, 28: "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." And as to our relation to one another, the Lord says: "One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." This being so, it must be maintained that pastors, or ministers, who are intrusted with the ministerial office, are of no higher order in the Church than the other members, called laymen. Their office does not invest them with such a priority. To grant it to them would be a violation of the words of the Master: "All ye are brethren." It would lead to the pernicious practise of the Roman Church to consider priests and bishops as having dominion over the faith of the Christians, and being mediators between God and the people.

All this, however, does not justify any one in thinking mean of, or disregarding, the *work* of the servants of the Church. It would be wrong indeed to overestimate the persons

of the Christian ministers, but it would be equally wrong to underestimate their office. The office of a Christian minister is, of all the offices in this world, the highest and most valuable. All the others, serving as they do the things of this world, are secular in character and purpose; the office of the Church, like the Church itself, is not of this world. It is spiritual as to character and purpose. *It is divine.* It is properly so called for several reasons.

I.

The ministerial office is a divine office. *God Himself having instituted it, it is His ordinance.* As the Lutheran Church teaches in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Art. XIII (Book of Concord, Philadelphia 1893): "But as ordination is understood as applying to the ministry of the Word, we are not unwilling to call ordination a sacrament. *For the ministry of the Word has God's command and glorious promise.*" For Scriptural proof we refer to 2 Cor. 3, 5: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God." It is true, we are not told here *expressis verbis* that God has instituted the ministerial office, that it is His ordinance; yet what we read is equivalent to saying as much. Speaking about his office as a minister of the New Testament, *i. e.*, of the Gospel, the Apostle says that such office is of the Spirit, the Holy Ghost speaking and working through it, v. 3, and that his sufficiency to perform the office is of God, "who also hath made you able ministers," says he. Now, as the Holy Ghost has elected to work in the hearts of men through the ministerial office, and, for that reason, has fitted the apostles for the ministration of the same, and made them able ministers, this office certainly is of Him, by Him instituted and ordained.

According to Luke 24, 46. 47, Jesus, after His resurrection, addressed His disciples, saying: "Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations." Here is another

proof that the ministerial office is a divine office. We learn that God's eternal counsel concerning the salvation of the fallen world, as proclaimed and written by the prophets, together with the work of redemption, comprised also the institution of the office through which such redemption should be preached. Upon completion of the work of redemption, in order to fulfil God's counsel, His Father's will, the Lord must needs provide for the preaching of such redemption in all the world, founding the ministerial office, and appointing men to the performing of the same.

Speaking of the ministerial office from the same point of view, St. Paul says, 2 Cor. 5, 19. 20: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, and hath committed unto us the Word of Reconciliation;" etc. When the Son of God had reconciled the world unto Himself, He committed unto us the Word of Reconciliation, or, as the preceding verse puts it, *He gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation*. Whence, therefore, the ministerial office? We have it from God. God gave it to us. Other public offices are of men, made by them as they saw fit and proper; but that there were apostles who preached the Gospel, and that there are such preachers to-day, is of God. The preachers are ambassadors of Christ, we read v. 20. It is needless to say that no one can be Christ's ambassador, His messenger to the world for the publishing of His Word and will, unless he be appointed and sent by Him.

It has been said that all this certainly was true of the apostles. They had their commission from the Lord in His words: "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you"; but it could not be applied to the ministers of the present day. Where is their divine commission? they ask. Ever since the days of the apostles, all the men that followed them in their work of preaching the Word and administering the Sacraments were called and ordained by man. So they were indeed. And yet it must be admitted that their office is divine, the same as that of the apostles, there being no material difference between the Apostolate and the present-day ministerial office, as our

Church professes, Smalcald Articles, App. (*l. c.*, 340), that "the office of the ministry proceeds from the general call of the apostles."

When Paul ordained elders in the congregations of Asia and Europe, and caused Titus to do the same in the congregations of Crete, he acted not arbitrarily, but as the Lord's apostle and in the Lord's name. Consequently those elders were ministers of Christ, called and ordained by Him. By the action of His apostles God has given the churches to understand that in this manner they should provide for the ministers of the public office in their needs, this being the way acceptable to Him. The apostle is himself authority for it that we have thus clearly interpreted his action. In addressing the elders of Ephesus, as we read Acts 20, 28, he used these words: "Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers to feed the Church of God."

We now call attention to the words by the Apostle St. Peter on the same subject, 1 Pet. 5, 1—4. Writing to various churches in Asia and exhorting their elders, or ministers, to a proper ministration of their holy office, he says: "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder. . . . And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory." That is to say, I know from experience what I am speaking of, as I, too, am intrusted with this office. You and I are commissioned by the same Lord Jesus to be feeders of His flock. Christ is the Chief Shepherd; and we, the elders, are His helpers. The flock is His; and as He has told me to feed His sheep, so He has also intrusted you with the same work in the flock of your respective congregations. Such words of the Apostle leave no room for a material difference between the office of the apostle and that of an elder, or pastor, of the present time.

And last, but not least, we refer to Eph. 4, 11: "And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers." Christ, our Lord, after having

descended into the lower parts of the world, and then having ascended far above all heavens, that He might fill all things, gave some men to be apostles, and some to be prophets, and some to be evangelists, and *some to be pastors and teachers.* "With 'pastors and teachers' Paul describes the regular *ministerium Verbi*, which at all time of the Church has been and remained the same, the public ministerial office." (Stoeckhardt.) God has given to the Church, to the congregations of the Church, some men to be pastors and teachers, *i. e.*, shepherds of a flock and preachers of the Word. In so doing, the Lord certainly meant to say that the congregations should have pastors, and that He expected them to use the men given them for this purpose. *Smalcald Articles* (*l. c.*, 343): "Furthermore, the ministry of the New Testament is not bound to persons and places as the Levitical ministry, but is dispersed throughout the whole world, and is there where God gives His gifts, apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers."

II.

2 Cor. 3 the apostle praises the great things wrought by him in that congregation. Says he: "Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God." This might be taken for personal boasting on the part of the apostle, but it is not. He writes, v. 1: "Do we begin again to commend ourselves?" No, we do not, says he. "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God, who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter, but of the spirit," vv. 5. 6. This is to say: We have done this great thing with no power and ability of our own, no praise or acknowledgment being due us for it. Why not? "Such trust have we of Christ to God-ward," v. 4. We, myself and the other apostles, have shown ourselves able ministers, it is true, but such ability and sufficiency is not of our own, but of God. He has made us able ministers of the spirit. God, the Founder of this ministry, has wrought in us such sufficiency.

As the apostle writes chap. 4, 6: "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Here we have another reason why the ministerial office is rightfully called a divine office, namely, because it requires the ministers to be made able by God. .

This is certainly true, one will say, as regards the apostles, seeing that they were to preach and to write what they did not know of themselves, what no man *could* know, even God's thoughts and purposes concerning man's salvation. Truly, they could read all about it in the prophets. And St. Paul assures us that he said "none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say," Acts 26, 22. But how were they to understand and interpret the prophets clearly? We know also that Jesus, beginning at Moses and all the prophets, expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself, Luke 24, 27. But could they be expected to reproduce all these things with faultless accuracy from mere memory? We see they needed divine revelation. They needed the continuous teaching and guiding of God no less than the prophets. And Jesus, being well aware of this, when He was about to send them forth, gave them the promise: "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all¹ things, and bring all things to your remembrance whatever I have said unto you." So, indeed, the ability of the apostles was of God. However, is it not a different thing with the preachers of to-day? They have the writings of the apostles to guide them. In fact, they are expected to teach nothing but what is written therein, John 17, 20. All they need to do is to read the apostles and to preach accordingly. Now, if a minister of the Gospel is able to read and understand the language of the New Testament; and has the ability of speaking in public, is he not sufficiently equipped for his office? Nothing, therefore, seems to be required to make a good preacher but that a man has some natural gifts and a fair education. This argument might seem conclusive; but one

important fact is overlooked, namely, that the writings of the apostles do not deal with things material, perceptible by human reason and understanding, but with things spiritual, concerning which we read: "Natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." One may read the words of Scripture, and understand them grammatically, and yet be unable to grasp the divine thoughts therein contained. Let the words be ever so clear and simple, and their real import ever so manifest, the fact that the same is foreign to his nature and at variance with his reason may influence a person to misinterpret the divine Word. Hence so many different and often contradicting explanations of Scriptural words. It is not because the words really meant so many different and even contradictory things, but because the respective teachers and interpreters were lacking the divine ability to understand them right. The ministerial office, being a divine office, as in the days of the apostles, so also to-day, requires the incumbents of this office to be made able by a God-given habitude.

Referring once more to 2 Cor. 3, we beg to notice that the ministers of the Gospel are said to be the ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter, but of the spirit, v. 6. They are to proclaim the thoughts of the Holy Ghost in the life and the death of Christ, a task far exceeding the ability of the most able, which only he can perform whom God has made able. Were the duties of this office of a secular nature, as, *e.g.*, the duties of a judge or a business man, natural ability, guided by human reason, would suffice; but the task being spiritual, even to minister to the Church of God in behalf of the work of the Holy Ghost, sufficiency must come from God as in the case of the apostles. St. Paul was a highly gifted man of great learning, yet not until the Lord had chosen and fitted him a vessel unto Himself to bear His name before the Gentiles, could he go forth as a preacher of the Gospel. The scribes in the time of Jesus were educated men, with a fair knowledge

of the Scriptures. Yet, not having divine ability for their work, they were blind leaders of the blind. Many a scribe of our days who is considered a very able preacher because of his great eloquence and other natural gifts, must be classed with the blind leaders of the blind masses of mankind. They know not the Scriptures nor the power of God. They quote the Bible, interpreting and applying the words with a show of confidence and learning; but any one having spiritual understanding will realize that they have not the Holy Ghost to enlighten them, and to teach them the things of the Spirit of God.

The Lord gives to the Church men to be preachers and teachers, we have learned from Eph. 4. Not only has He instituted and ordained the ministerial office in the Church, the office of pastors and teachers, but He also gives the very men to serve in the office, men that are fitted and able to be such pastors and teachers. They come from Him, and He makes them able. *The ministerial office is a divine office, requiring, as it does, the ministers to be made able by God.*

III.

In the above quoted passage, 2 Cor. 3, the ministerial office is spoken of as to its *end and aim*. We find this in the two expressions: "The Spirit giveth life," and: "The administration of righteousness." A mere human institution or ordinance could never give life, nor administer righteousness. God alone can do this, and He does so through the ministerial office. Another proof that this office is divine, Rom. 6, 20. 21, we read: "For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the *end of those things is death.*" In fact, sin always carries death with it. "Ye were dead in trespasses and sins," the apostle tells the Christians, Eph. 2, 1. Speaking of the time before their conversion, when they were yet living in sin, the apostle says that during all that time they were dead. Men living in sin are spiritually dead. No fear of God, no faith and trust in Him is in their hearts. How

could they live in righteousness? They surely are "free from righteousness." And what does this mean for man? The curse of the Law, eternal death and damnation. Who but God alone can rescue man from this terrible condition, removing death and imparting life? And we are told in the Scriptures, 2 Cor. 5, 19, 20, that for this very aim and purpose God has instituted the ministerial office. Here we hear His ambassador stating the fact that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself; and praying the sinners in Christ's stead, Be ye reconciled to God. And by such preaching and praying the sinner is drawn to Christ to believe in Him; and believing in Him he is reconciled to God, and made righteousness in His sight, God no longer imputing his trespasses unto him, but imputing unto him the righteousness of Christ. And now it becomes evident that also life is given him, a willingness and desire to have his way directed by the statutes of the Lord, Ps. 119, 5, an actual beginning of following the same being the fruit of such conversion to faith in Christ.

Turning again to Eph. 4, 11, where we have learned that the Lord gives to the Church pastors and teachers to perform the functions of the ministerial office, we are told that the end and aim of our work is the building up of the Church in this world, which, *quoad rem*, means the same wonderful work of God spoken of in the preceding passage. God has given pastors and teachers "*for the edifying of the Church of Christ.*" The Church in this world is called the body of Christ, a mystic body, Christ Himself being Head of the body, and the various Christians the members of the same. It is likened to a building, a spiritual building, that is continually being built up in this world; a holy temple of God, which, though invisible and unseen by man, stands before God in heavenly glory. This Church, this communion of saints, which, though being in this world, is not of this world, and shall outlive the coming destruction of this world, death having no power over it, and the Son of God having long ago prepared a place for it in His Father's house, — this spiritual body of Christ, its building up and perfecting,

is the object of the ministerial office, the end and aim of all its functions. In short, pastors, the called ministers, in the performance of their office, are servants and helpers in the Lord's great work of salvation. As St. Paul writes to Timothy, 1 Tim. 4, 16: "Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine, continue in them; for in doing this, thou shalt both serve thyself and them that hear thee."

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