

20. Ordination Vow

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I came by this assignment rather by accident. Some months ago I volunteered a rather simple observation to a member of the committee. I asked him this simple question: "Doesn't the ordination vow required of our pastors and educators, in fact, preclude the possibility of any unqualified persons ever being assigned to a position of authority and responsibility within our church." As a result, I was promptly asked to study the ordination vow and then read it here at the Congress.

As it turned out, it was not quite that simple. The more I studied the vow and the more I read it and related it to the problems which we are facing today, the more I became disturbed.

In the secular world we have a similar situation. As a matter of course, we require people in high office to accept and make a statement of loyalty before we will place them in sensitive positions of responsibility. As I thought about this, I couldn't help but say to myself how much more important then should be the ordination vow which our ministers, teachers, and educators make and by which they are committed to serve their Lord and their church.

I will now simply read in part what is stated in this vow. Most of you have heard it and have read it many times:

Dearly beloved brother: Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ said unto His disciples: Go ye, therefore, 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. And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.

And when He had ascended far above all heavens, that He might fill all things, He gave unto His Church some, Apostles, and some, Prophets, and some, Evangelists, and some, pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

Whereas, after due examination, you have been found well versed in Christian doctrine and able to teach others, and have been called to the office of the holy ministry in this congregation, it is meet and right that you should hear and ponder what God, in His holy Word, inculcates upon His ministers concerning the solemn responsibilities of their sacred office.

Thus says St. Paul:

This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desires a good work.

Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman who needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth.

Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine.

Speak the things which become sound doctrine, in all things showing yourself a pattern of good works.

Take heed unto yourself and unto the doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this you shall both save yourself and them that hear you.

Thus the ministers of Christ are His ambassadors and as such are to preach the Word and administer the Holy Sacraments.

Whereas, dear brother, you have accepted the call extended to you by this congregation and are about to enter on the performance of the duties pertaining to the holy office of the ministry, in accordance with the Word and the will of the Lord Most High, I now ask you in the presence of God and this congregation:

Do you believe the canonical books of the Old and the New Testament to be the inspired Word of God and the only infallible rule of faith and practice?

Do you accept the three Ecumenical Creeds — the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian — as faithful testimonies to the truth of the Holy Scriptures, and do you reject all the errors which they condemn?

Do you believe that the Unaltered Augsburg Confession is a true exposition of the Word of God and a correct exhibition of the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and that the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the two Catechisms of Martin Luther, the Smalcald Articles, and the Formula of Concord — as contained in the Book of Concord — are also in agreement with this one Scriptural faith?

Do you solemnly promise that you will perform the duties of your office in accordance with these Confessions and that all your teaching and your administration of the Sacraments shall be in conformity with the Holy Scriptures and with the afore-mentioned Confessions?

Will you, finally, adorn the doctrine of our Savior with a holy life and conversation?

To all of the above, our ministers and teachers answer, "I will, the Lord helping me through the power and grace of His Holy Spirit."

The officiant then continues:

I now commit unto you the holy office of the Word and the Sacraments; I ordain and consecrate you a minister of the Church and install you as pastor of this congregation in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. The Lord pour out upon you His Holy Spirit for the office and the work committed to you by the call, that you may be a faithful dispenser of the means of grace. Amen.

Go, then, take heed unto yourself and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost has made you an overseer, to feed the Church of God, which He has purchased with His own blood. Feed the flock of Christ, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lord over God's heritage, but being an example to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, you shall receive a crown of glory that fades not away. The Lord bless you from on high and make you a blessing to many, that you may bring forth fruit, and that your fruit may remain to eternal life. Amen.

Complacency

I didn't feel that I could close just by reading this. As a layman, I have a further observation to make. This was touched on in part by previous speakers. It deals with the subject of complacency. I must ask myself the same question and address it to all the laymen, and perhaps even to some of our pastors and teachers. Who is there among us who can truthfully say that we have not become somewhat complacent?

As I see it today in the light of what is happening, those of us who have been indoctrinated all our life in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod seem to have taken our church for granted. As is so often the case, we probably don't fully appreciate what we have until we run the risk of losing it. And this is the problem as I see it.

I must also point a finger at the leaders of our church, at our pastors and teachers. I have done this privately several times in the last few months in the sense that I tried to inform myself more clearly on what is the total background for what has been going on. This is not something which has happened only in the last year or two. After searching I find that some things have been

developing over a period of fifteen to twenty years and perhaps even longer as we heard yesterday was the case in the Presbyterian Church.

I have asked myself and also some pastors: "Why is it that our leaders have not enlightened our laity?" I want you to ask yourselves that question today. I have yet to hear from a minister either publicly or privately in our regular church life that the problems we are facing today actually existed. I think it is incumbent upon our ministers to tell their people exactly what the facts are. Someone touched on this this morning in an indirect way, but I cannot emphasize it too strongly.

In order to attain the results that we are looking for from this Congress, we must have the backing, the help, and the support of our laymen across the country. During the last few months, I have had the opportunity to discuss this subject with laymen. I was appalled that people didn't know what I was talking about. They had little or no conception of the true facts. How can they know them unless someone tells them? How can they act unless they are informed?

So I would like to close my remarks with this one admonition: Tell the people. Give them the facts, and I am sure that you will tap for this cause to conserve pure doctrine a reservoir of strength which has heretofore been unknown!