

## Ordination: Consecration and Benediction

Theodor Kliefoth

Logia 25/4 (2016), 62-6

Excerpts from ages 394-95, 404-07, 413-14, "Von der Ordination und Introduction," *Liturgische Abhandlungen*, vol. 1, Schwerin and Rostock: Stiller'schen Hof-Buchhandlung, 1854.

Translated by Dr. John W. Kleinig

If we compare ordination with other church rites, it is quite clear that it is not a sacrament...We will then, in the first place, classify ordination together with those church rites that have, in some way, to do with the administration of God's Word, its enactment. In this most important, basic definition the agenda of the Pomeranian Church helps us out with its explanation to the congregation about what will happen to the candidate for ordination in the rite of ordination. It states as its main purpose: "we intend to enact God's Word on you." It is the enactment of God's Word on the candidate for ordination.

Since the different church rites of this kind, such as the rite of absolution in contrast with the rite of marriage, enact God's Word differently, we must make some further distinctions. Thus, if we focus on what they are called, they are rites of consecration. Candidates for ordination were said to be "consecrated," not only in the early church and the medieval church, but also in the Lutheran church. This is not just a matter of casual congregational speech which could be the residue of medieval views, but is a technical term used in the church orders and in dogmatics...ordination is an ecclesiastical *rite of consecration*.

Previously we have attempted to explain the notion of ecclesiastical consecration as it applies to things, such as churches or cemeteries...We saw that acts of consecration in the church go back to the sanctification that is offered to all Christians in 1 Tim 4:4-5 and is based on their spiritual vocation, the sanctification of each created thing with the Word of God and prayer for its use by them ...In fact all the distinctive marks of ecclesiastical rites of consecration are once again to be found in the ordination of a pastor; the church intends to take him into its public use and the service of God, so that he administers the means of grace for it which the Lord has given to it. Thus it is appropriate...that the church does not make use of this person without first sanctifying its use of him for itself, so that he becomes a blessing to it. No other means are given for the sanctification of this created person than the Word of God and prayer. Just as Christians present their food to God with a pertinent word of God, such as Ps 145:15-16, before they take it to eat, and pray over it, so that its use will be a blessing to them, so the church, before it makes use of a suitable, called person as a pastor, presents him before God with an appropriate Word of God; then, guided by His Word, the church calls on God in prayer to bless its use of this person for this ministry, together with its creaturely gifts and powers, on account of His Word, and to bless it, the church, through him...

Ordination is not just a rite of consecration; it is also *a rite of benediction* because it involves the consecration of a person. Thus Hollaz maintains: “the laying on of hands in ordination is a sign of divine benediction which a holy person may expect from God in his office. Indeed it was an ancient custom to bless with the laying on of hands.”

In the church a benediction is not an act of prayer or intercession, let alone the expression of a human wish for something good. It always presupposes an objective, divinely ordered relationship that is provided with a task to be done and a command to be kept and graced with a promise and a blessing. It presupposes that the order for this relationship, God’s mandate, promise and blessing for it, is made known in His Word...So the church enacts that benediction when it speaks the words of institution and blessing for it over some of its members who enter that divinely ordered relationship, and places these words on them through the office that mediates God’s grace. In this way the church puts these people into that relationship through God’s Word and in His name. Consequently the words that are spoken over them bring it about that when these persons faithfully and obediently enter the order that has been established by God’s word for this relationship, and when they also faithfully and confidently take hold of the spoken promises for this relationship, they really and truly share in the blessing that is promised by them.

God institutes the holy office of preaching. In His Word He also gives the words which tell of its institution, its duties, its promise, and its blessing. He too commands the church to always retain and maintain the office of preaching which he has instituted. So, when one of its members enters this office, the church takes these words of institution and blessing from God on its lips, places them with prayer on this person through its office that mediates God’s grace, and thereby enacts these words of God on this person.

Thus the rite of benediction for the office of preaching is not just a prayer and wish of the congregation, but it actually accomplishes something. It actually puts this person into that office; when he faithfully and obediently takes hold of God’s words that are enacted on him, he shares in God’s promise for this office and all His blessing for himself in it. So in the rite of ordination God places a person into the office of preaching through His word which was enacted on him. The benediction of a person for the office of preaching in the rite of ordination enacts the dogmatic teaching that God does not just institute and establish the office of preaching; He Himself also preserves it always...

When the ordained pastor faithfully takes hold of God’s Word which had been enacted on him at his ordination; when he again and again bases his work on it and steps himself in it, the Holy Spirit confirms God’s Word and his faith in it; from God’s Word the Holy Spirit grants to his believing heart spiritual gifts, faithfulness, power, patience, and everything else that belongs to his calling, so that he becomes fit for it and fruitful in it, just as He provides all believing Christians all that they need for their vocation; just as he provides married couples with all that they need for the management of a happy marriage from God’s words that were enacted for their faith in the rite of marriage.

