

XII A THEOLOGY OF ORDINATION Raoul Dederen

The Christian church is that body of people who have been reconciled to God and their fellow men in Jesus Christ. They are all members of a body of which Christ is the head (Eph 1:22, 23).¹ The Christian life, however, the new life in Christ within the church, is not its own end. Christians care profoundly for what God has done and is doing redemptively for His creation. They understand that reconciliation to God in Christ means reconciliation to God's redemptive purpose as disclosed in Jesus Christ.

Baptized in Christ, they have partaken of His death. They died with Him (Rom 6:2-11), and have been incorporated by Christ into His work of redemption.² They no longer belong to themselves but to Christ, into whom they are grafted (Rom 11:17, 23). And since one has died for all, "therefore all have died" (2 Cor 5:14, RSV) and are called to live "no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Cor 5:15, RSV; cf. Rom 6:13). This is why Christians, wherever they are, find it their vocation to bring that part of God's creation into a reconciling fellowship with God and their fellow men.

Priesthood of All Believers

This Christian vocation, this life in the fellowship of Christ with a view to the salvation of mankind, cannot—from a biblical viewpoint—be equated with any "clergy" or professional group. It is true, indeed, that, looking back across centuries, one has to admit that the Christian churches have come, in many instances, to distinguish sharply between clergy and laity, between religious and secular vocations.³ But in the NT there is little sign of such a deep vocational difference. Quite plainly, the NT word *kleros* from which our English word "clergy" is derived is not used to refer to a special group among Christians, but to *all* of them.⁴ Likewise, the word for "laity" (*laos*) refers not to a recipient part of the Christian congregation, but to *all* Christians again.⁵

¹See also Eph 5:23-32; Col 1:13, 18; 2:10, 19. Through baptism the believers enter into a union with their Lord (Gal 2:20; Col 3:4) and are consequently members of His body (1 Cor 12:12).

²As implied, for instance, in the Lord's commission (Matt 28:18-20).

³For a brief study of this development, see for instance, Hendrick Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity* (Philadelphia, 1958), pp. 48-73; Everett Ferguson "Church Order in the Sub-Apostolic Period: A Survey of Interpretations," *Restoration Quarterly* 11 (1968): 225-48. In the NT community there was no office that corresponded to the Jewish concept of priest. T. W. Manson rightly points out that when priests were converted (Acts 6:7) they no longer performed the function of priest—as priesthood was understood among the Jews—in the Christian community.

⁴Thus in 1 Pet 5:3 we find the apostle exhorting the elders not to view themselves as "domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock" (*klēros*). The term *klēros* occurs a few times in the NT (Mark 15:24; Acts 1:17, 26; 8:21; 26:18; Col 1:12; 1 Pet 5:2-3). Its basic meaning is "lot," or "allotment." While it is used in 1 Peter with reference to the church as a portion allotted to the elders, it never means a church official as distinct from the body of believers. See Werner Foerster, "*klēros*" in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, 1964) 3:758-64.

⁵The word "lay" goes back to the Greek word *laikos*, which in its latinized form *laicus* entered a number of Western languages. As used in the Scriptures, it originally meant, belonging to the *laos* that is, to the chosen people of God. In this light all members of the church are *laikoi*. It is significant that as early as the end of the first century A.D. the significance of *laos* and *laikos* is getting a turn different from its basic significance in the NT. Increasingly, "lay" will mean unqualified to speak or to judge, an ignorant or uneducated person. This ecclesiastical development coincides with the emergence of an organized and duly ordained "clergy" as a close "status" over against the *laos*,

Although it seems strange, both words denote the same people, not different people.⁶ All are called to one service, and all alike are God's people. "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people," states Peter, "that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet 2:9).⁷

The Christian life, then, is by definition a priesthood, a ministry performed in response to God's call⁸ addressed to all sinners. This means not only that every believer has free and direct access to God without the necessity of a priest or mediator;⁹ it also denotes that Christians have sacrifices to offer—"spiritual sacrifices" (1 Pet 2:5). That is, they are to present their "bodies as a living sacrifice" (Rom 12:1, RSV) to be instruments of redemption as they "declare the wonderful deeds of him who called" them "out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet 2:9, RSV). They are by definition ministers; and, as members of Christ's body, they have special functions to fulfill, necessary to the health of the whole organism, the church, and to the realization of its mission in the world.¹⁰ There is little that a Christian does that he should not regard as the exercise of his priesthood or ministry.

The ministry, therefore, is not an order of men religiously different from those who are supposedly mere "laymen." It is not even a special group of persons. The ministry is a function of the whole church, distributed among its members according to the various gifts and capacities,¹¹ and corresponding calls that God has given to each one. It is not a group of church officers. Rather, the ministry of the church is its obligation under God to minister, as His servant, in reconciling the world to God. The ministry of the church is its God-given function, its mission, its vocation.

Call to Particular Ministries

But to minister thus, the church by divine appointment also delegates to various of its members specific aspects of its functions. In a real sense each Christian is a minister, a *klētos*, called to faith, discipleship, and service. But at the same time the NT makes much of calling to particular ministries within the church. Or, looking at it from the other side, God personally calls certain members of the church to take upon themselves one of the ministries that the church has recognized to be necessary to its existence and its work. This means that the call to the ministry is only partly a call from the church. It is also, and first of all, an inward call, an inner assurance

the people, the ordinary congregation. Compare H. Strahtmann, "Laos," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 4:29-57, especially p. 56.

⁶Thus in 2 Cor 6:16 we read, "For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, 'I will live in them and move among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people [*laos*]" (RSV).

⁷We have come to call that biblical insight the "priesthood of all believers."

⁸This emphasis on the ministry of all believers, of the *laos* of God, can be found throughout the whole NT. Paul's letters were addressed to the churches, to all members, not just to the apostles. He reminds them of their "high calling" (Phil 3:14), and their "ministry" (2 Cor 5:18; Eph 4:12). The NT is replete with expressions referring to this "calling" (Rom 11:29; 1 Cor 1:26; Eph 1:11, 18; 4:4; etc.), being called or "to be called" (Rom 1:1, 6; 8:28; 1 Cor 1:24; etc.); and they always refer to *all* Christians, not to what we style "ministers." All Christians are "called" (*klētoi*) persons—called to faith, discipleship, and service.

⁹A doctrine strongly underlined by the Reformers.

¹⁰The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers implies that the primary ministry of the people of God is to be performed in the world (Matt 18:19-20). It is in the world that the ministry of the Christian can best be expressed. It is also in the world that the witness for God is most needed.

¹¹"There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor 12:4-7, RSV).

on the part of the individual that it is God's will that he should make himself useful in the role to which the church has summoned him. Such ministry is bestowed and sanctioned by ordination¹² or consecration.

Behind the notion of a "special call" to ministry lie these three considerations: (1) the basic calling of God to all men effected by Jesus Christ (Eph 1:1-14); (2) the special divine calling of some of the body of Christ to perform a particular ministry (Gal 1:15-16; Eph 4:11-16); (3) the recognition by the people of God that some have received a special calling, and the commissioning or these to their task (Acts 6:2-6; 13:1-3). This act of commissioning we refer to as ordination, the laying on of hands. And while it is true that there is no formal description of an ordination service given in the NT, there is ample warrant for the setting apart or those who have proved themselves to be called of God into the Christian ministry.¹³

The background to the NT practice of the laying on of hands is to be found in the OT,¹⁴ where the concept of God's selectivity already clearly emerges. God calls particular people for particular tasks and sets them apart to serve Him. Israel's history, the selection of prophets, priests, and kings—usually accompanied by an anointing ceremony—the very decision regarding the Incarnation itself, witness to selectivity and election. God commonly called and employed individuals and groups of people to serve Him in a unique fashion.

The appointing of the twelve apostles continued this tradition (Mark 3:14). In Jesus' own words, they "did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you" (John 15:16, RSV).¹⁵ Paul used this word of himself as having been "appointed a preacher" (1 Tim 2:7, RSV). Paul's call to the ministry was a calling and an appointment by the Lord Jesus Christ, an appointment and a "[setting] apart for the gospel of God" (Rom 1:1, RSV), sanctioned by the laying on of hands which took place in Antioch (Acts 13:1-3).

From our considerations thus far we can speak of ordination as the church's setting apart a person whom it believes God has called. The church cannot call the minister into being, but it is the authority that can confirm the fact that he has been called, and give official recognition to the gifts God has bestowed upon him. This setting apart is not to a superior status, above the rest of the church, but rather to service *within* the church. Ordination is not intended to create categories of Christians or levels of discipleship. The call to membership in Christ's body is not based in

¹²The words used for ordination, or setting apart, in the NT specified only a simple laying on of hands. One common form of expression for this was the word *katastasis*, *kathistanein* usually translated "appoint." This verb is used, for example, in Acts 6:3 of the seven, Titus 1:5 of elders, and Heb 5:1; 7:28; 8:3 of the Jewish high priest. *Cheirotonein* is found in Acts 14:23. As such, the laying on of hands could be employed as a simple blessing (Matt 19:13) as in the OT. This practice was doubtless closely related to prayer, or to the act of healing (Mark 6:5), a practice also employed in the early church (Acts 9:12). Hands were even laid upon the recipients of baptism (Acts 9:17-19). While little is said in the NT about ordination, there are four passages in which the laying on of hands is referred to in a context directly relevant to this issue (Acts 6:6; 13: 3; 1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6).

¹³On the one hand the world shuns and sets God's people aside (Luke 6:22); on the other God invites His children to separate themselves from this world's goals (2 Cor 6:17; cf. Lev 20:26).

¹⁴The question of Jewish antecedents to Christian ordination has been diversely argued by Christian theologians. E. Lohse in his *Die Ordination im Spätjudentum und im Neuen Testament* (Gottingen, 1951) holds that Christian ordination was modeled after the pattern of a Jewish rabbi, while Arnold Ehrhart is inclined to believe that it comes directly out of the OT and not through later Judaism. See his "Jewish and Christian Ordination," in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 5 (1954): 129ff., reprinted in *The Framework of the New Testament Stories* (Univ. of Manchester Press, 1963), pp. 132-50. For Ehrhart, Christian ordination has more in common with the use of hands in blessing, or in prayer for praise to God who provides strength and life. For a more recent and well-documented study, see Everett Ferguson, "Laying on of Hands: Its Significance in Ordination," in *Journal of Theological Studies* 26 (1975): 1-12.

¹⁵Other versions translate "ordained." The Greek is from a verb meaning "to put," "to place."

any way on merit; it is simply an undeserved gift of God's grace. So it is also with the can to serve or to minister. The ministry conferred upon ministers is *diakonia* (service),¹⁶ not privilege or right as such.¹⁷ Arising and functioning within the corporate priesthood of all believers, it reveals the same cruciform pattern as Christ's own ministry in which it is rooted.

Ecclesiastical Organization and the Ordained Ministry

In studying the essence of the church it soon becomes plain that the church has an order, or an organization, as we are used to calling it. This is not due to the fact that the church lives in this everyday world and of necessity must adopt something of the forms of the world's social life. Not at all. The order of the church is implicit in the service it is called upon to fulfill. Both as a local church and as a totality it is built from the functions which fall upon it as a responsibility. Ordering is the necessary response of the church as it determines, equips, and sustains the special services or ministries necessary to its mission in the world. It approaches its task in a systematic, orderly way. Here again, the life of the church is ordered from above, from Christ, who acts through His Spirit and His gifts.

But what are the marks of such an order? As Seventh-day Adventists we have referred to Scriptures and have declared that we must adhere to its precepts. On this basis we have recognized several offices. To some—"pastors," (Eph 4:11)—is given by the church the task of preaching and teaching, administering the ordinances, and pastoral care of souls. To others—local church "elders,"¹⁸—is given the task of discipline and overseeing. To others—"deacons,"¹⁹—is given the care of the poor and the benevolent work of the congregation. These officers, recognized as leaders by the congregations, govern through governing bodies called into existence by the church, organized over each congregation and over larger areas of the church as need may determine.²⁰

These ordained ministries have been given by the Lord to the church so that it may be conformed to Christ and ordered by the Gospel. All members of the church, to be sure, are called to contribute to this conformation. Yet upon the ordained pastoral ministry is laid the central responsibility to serve the church in word and ordinance,²¹ so that the church may be constantly recalled to its scriptural foundations, exposed to the soon-coming Lord, and set under the cross and the resurrection.²²

¹⁶See T. W. Manson, *The Church's Ministry* (Philadelphia, 1948), pp. 21-27; Hermann W. Beyer, "*diakoneo, diakonia, diakonos*," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 2:81-93.

¹⁷In the NT being set apart does not imply governance. The NT avoids using the common Greek words for office, such as *arche, time, telos*, because they could be understood in terms of the exercise of power rather than service.

¹⁸See Acts 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6, 22-23; 20:17. It seems quite clear that the function of ruling, of oversight, is a major one for the elders of a congregation. It should be noted however that it is a function which is shared jointly by all elders of a particular congregation who exercised their *episkopē*, their oversight. Preaching and teaching was also part of their function as Titus 1:9 and 1 Tim 3:2 indicate, along with the "care of God's church" (1 Tim 3:5, RSV).

¹⁹Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim 3:8-13. The Greek word translated "deacon" signifies "servant," and is so translated in Matt 23:11; Mark 10:43; John 12:26; 1 Cor 3:5; 1 Thess 3:2.

²⁰The opening chapters of Acts seem to indicate that the Christian church in Jerusalem patterns itself after the Jewish synagogue. Cf. B. W. Powers, "Patterns of New Testament Ministry—I. Elders," *Churchman* 87 (1973): 166-81; A. Lemaire, "The Ministries in the New Testament: Recent Research," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 3 (1973): 146-47.

²¹Reformation theology prefers to speak of "word and sacrament."

²²Unless the minister leads, the church cannot become a true congregation, the people of God," remarks Langdon Gilkey, *How the Church Can Minister to the World Without Losing Itself* (New York, 1964), p. 103.

Diverse and Complementary Gifts

The mode of government in the church has thus been delivered to us in the Scriptures. Yet while it is true that the NT has much to say about the ministry which is normative for all times, it seems just as obvious that in matters of ordering God had little intention of telling us what must be done in each specific instance. Along with the pastors, elders, and deacons to which we just referred, we also read in the NT of apostles, prophets, evangelists, healers, administrators, speakers in various tongues, and a few more as well.²³ Paul describes the task of the recipients of these gifts as being “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12).²⁴ Clearly the proclamation of the gospel, the Christian service to the world, and the edification of the community required a variety of activities, both permanent and provisional, spontaneous and institutional.

For this purpose the Holy Spirit gave diverse and complementary gifts to the early church. Among these was the ordained ministry, which could not be faithfully exercised without a close relationship with the other charismata. But I don’t think these functions are reported to us as permanent, inflexible “orders” or offices. They are rather displayed to us as the ways by which the early church deployed *its* forces in the light of the particular campaign on which it was embarked in its own historical situation. I recognize from Scriptures that the functions of pastors, elders, and deacons must be permanently fulfilled if the church is to expand and be preserved.²⁵ These are the basic elements of an organization that “was to serve as a model for the organization of churches in every . . . place where messengers of truth should win converts to the gospel.”²⁶ That is what I mean by saying that the model of government in God’s church has been put forth for us in Scripture. Yet I believe we have received in Scripture general patterns of order and organization; in matters of organization and order it was not God’s will to prescribe in detail. This, rather, is an integral and contextual part of our response to God’s call. Organization, as we have understood and experienced it in Adventist history, is intrinsic to our obligation of theological reflection as we stand here and now, under God’s Word, vis-a-vis the task given to us, the work of ministry.

Additional Ministries

of the Spirit, we as a church have come to recognize and to institute other ministries, that is, ministries beyond those of pastor, elder, and deacon. Progressively, we have come to recognize such functions as ministers of administration, treasurers, auditors, not to mention the medical ministry.²⁷ On the one hand new needs did appear; and on the other; men and women did hear

²³See Eph 4:1-16; 1 Cor 12:3-11; Rom 12:6-8. For a comparative list of all 18 “charismata” mentioned in these passages, see. G. E. Ladd, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1974), p. 534.

²⁴It has been suggested that the comma after “saints” should not be there since there were no commas in NT Greek. In this case the ministers’ chief function is “to equip the saints for the work of ministry” (RSV). See, for instance, William Robinson, *Completing the Reformation* (Lexington, 1955), pp. 19-20; F. B. Edge, “Priesthood of Believers,” *Review and Expositor* 60 (1963): 12.

²⁵Some, like E. Kasemann, consider that all NT statements concerning the church have their particular historical setting; and therefore are subject to constant change. All the NT is supposed to offer us is “certain basic ecclesiological types.” E. Kasemann, “Unity and Diversity in New Testament Ecclesiology,” *Novum Testamentum* 6 (1963); 290-97.

²⁶AA 91.

²⁷Other churches, more particularly in North America, have recognized a much wider range of specialized ministries, providing chaplains not only for the military services, but also for state and federal institutions, social

the call of God to dedicate their lives to the service of the church in order to exercise a ministry different from, but complementary to, for instance, the strictly pastoral ministry. These, I believe, are founded on a divine calling and on the remnant church's recognition of this calling. In our eyes they require, as does the pastoral ministry, the full effort and time of those who undertake them.²⁸ Like the pastoral ministry, they have as a prerequisite an appropriate preparation. And although in a different and occasionally more limited form, they participate in the ministry of the word, in the teaching, and in the care of souls. The major difference between these ministries and the pastoral ministry is to be found in the type of responsibilities entrusted and the competence attributed to them.

It may be helpful at this point to state why the Adventist Church restricts the administration of the ordinances—called sacraments by others—to the church elders and the pastors,²⁹ as ordained ministers, for it is this fact more than any other that makes acceptable to so many people the erroneous idea that the pastorate, for instance, carries a sort of sacramental or sacerdotal status. This restriction is a matter of order, not a sacramental matter. It is in order that it will be clear that there occurs in the administration of the ordinances an act of the church—that no one may perform it without the church's mandate.

What Then Is Ordination?

But what then is ordination? I mean, what is ordination for the Seventh-day Adventist Church? We are probably aware of the fact that we have no elaborate doctrine of the ordination to the ministry. While Roman Catholics have formulated in a clear and coherent doctrine the sense and import of their church's ordinations,³⁰ we have nothing similar in our official documents. Yet we are more fortunate than quite a few major Protestant bodies who in their confessions of faith or their liturgies prescribe the act, but usually say nothing at all as to what the act signifies and effects.

Chapter two of the Seventh-day Adventist *Manual for Ministers*,³¹ for instance, deals with ordination to the ministry. Although some 90 percent of its content is devoted to matters of procedure, the examination of candidates for ordination, and the ordination service itself (the charge and the address of welcome), this chapter defines ordination as “the setting apart of the man to a sacred calling, not for one local field, but for the entire church.”³²

In the absence of a more elaborate statement, let us read some remarks by Ellen G. White on the meaning and implications of the ordination to the pastoral ministry.

It is important, in the first instance, to remind ourselves that Ellen White held the ordained ministry in the highest regard. While she professed that “it is a fatal mistake to suppose that the work of saving souls depends alone on the ordained minister,”³³ and that “all are bound to devote

service agencies, college and university campuses, whether related to the churches or not. More recently there have been calls from industry for chaplains, whose ministry has been utilized in a variety of ways.

²⁸Although it cannot be said whether or not a *paid* or a *full-time* ministry is mandatory and of the essence of the gospel.

²⁹*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, (Washington, DC, 1967 ed.), pp. 82-84, 121.

³⁰See for instance Piet Fransen, “Order and Ordination,” *Encyclopedia of Theology, the Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner (New York, 1975), pp. 1122-48; John A. Hardon, *The Catholic Catechism* (Garden City, NY, 1975), pp. 523-28; John L. McKenzie, *The Roman Catholic Church* (New York, 1969), pp. 164-70.

³¹*Manual for Ministers*, (Washington, DC, 1964), pp. 16-33.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 17.

³³DA 822.

themselves actively and unreservedly to God's service,"³⁴ she also regarded the ordained ministry as "a sacred and exalted office,"³⁵ "divinely appointed,"³⁶ and in comparison to which there is on earth "no work more blessed of God."³⁷ As for the hands of ordination, these were to be laid on those "who have given full proof that they have received their commission of God,"³⁸ as the apostles had done when the early church was sending out its appointed preachers.³⁹

Mrs. White wrote about this in 1853. In mentioning Paul and Barbanas' dedication to God by prayer and the laying on of hands, as recorded at the beginning of Acts 13, she notes, "Thus they were authorized by the church, not only to teach the truth, but to perform the rite of baptism and to organize churches, being invested with full ecclesiastical authority,"⁴⁰ Their ordination was "a public recognition of their divine appointment to bear to the Gentiles the glad tidings of the gospel."⁴¹

In later centuries ordination came to be "gratly abused"; and "unwarrantable importance" became attached to the rite "as [though] a power came . . . upon those who received such ordination, which immediately qualified them for any and all ministerial work."⁴²

Mrs. White saw the danger of false teachers and urged the Adventist pioneers, by the laying on of hands, ministers to go as messengers with "the sanction of the church" to "carry the most solemn message ever given to men."⁴³ While false teachers threatened the very foundations of the gospel message, men of faith, commissioned by God, were to be set apart "to secure the peace, harmony, and union of the flock."⁴⁴ Thus Adventist ministers were ordained to "devote themselves entirely to His [God's] work."⁴⁵ The Adventist pioneers considered this practice very much in harmony with "the order of the gospel."⁴⁶

³⁴Letter 10, 1897, as found in 4BC 1159.

³⁵2T 615.

³⁶TM 52.

³⁷6T 411.

³⁸EW 101.

³⁹Ibid., pp. 100-101.

⁴⁰AA 161, GW 441.

⁴¹AA 161.

⁴²AA 162.

⁴³EW 101.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶It is most interesting in this setting to trace the context and history of what seems to have been in 1853 the first ordinations of Adventist ministers. *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* of November 15, 1853, specifies that it took place at New Haven, Vermont. The feeling prevailed that "there were those present that should be ordained to the work of the Gospel ministry." Thus James White and Joseph Bates laid hands on J. N. Andrews, A. S. Hutchins, and C. W. Sperry. These were "set apart to the work of the ministry," specifically "that they might feel free to administer the ordinances of the church of God." A few weeks later James White took time to underline that this setting apart to the work of the ministry was intended to "produce and secure union in the church," to protect it against "the influence of false teachers," and let those who teach the word to the world know "that they have the approbation and sympathy of ministering brethren and of the church" (ibid., December 20, 1853). See also Robert George Hunt, *A Study of the Qualifications to the Gospel Ministry During the Years 1853-61 and 1902-03*, unpublished typewritten Seminary research paper, Andrews University, 1972 (Heritage Room), pp. 3ff.

What Does Ordination Confer?

What, then, does ordination confer? The NT gives no indication of an ordination which provides spiritual or official gifts that are otherwise unobtainable.⁴⁷ We find there no evidence that ordination confers some indelible character, accompanied by special powers to administer valid ordinances. Nor does it, all at once, confer the Holy Spirit, to somehow guarantee the formulation of right doctrine.

Thus, for instance, the ordination of Paul and Barnabas as recorded in Acts 13:1-3 did not provide them with new gifts, nor did it set them apart to a new ministry, different in *kind* from that in which they had previously been engaged. Both men excelled in doctrine and in other graces *before* they were ordained to the ministry.⁴⁸ The laying on of hands “added no new grace or virtual qualification” to their ministry, comments Ellen White.⁴⁹

But there is no objection to saying that when God wished to avail Himself of their services, and called them, He continued to mold them and fill them with His graces.⁵⁰ “Having received their commission from God, and having the approbation of the church, they went forth baptizing . . . and administering the ordinances of the Lord’s house, . . . to keep fresh in the memory of God’s beloved children His [the Saviour’s] sufferings and death.”⁵¹

It seems to me that the Seventh-day Adventist concept of ordination can be summarized as follows: Adventists believe in a personal, divine call to the Christian ministry and have historically insisted on an ordination procedure for those thus called.

By this act the church confirms the call by publicly recognizing its validity. This official action is also a token of the fact that the individual thus set apart to the new ministry is a representative of the church.⁵² As part of the act of ordination, the church engages in intercessory prayer for the continuation of the gift of the Holy Spirit upon those fulfilling the ministry committed to the church. But it is understood that the act itself carries with it no sacramental or sacerdotal meaning or authority whatever.⁵³

A Diversity of Ministries

On the basis of the NT there exist in the church several ordained ministries: in the pastors, the “doctors” (teachers),⁵⁴ the elders (or church disciplinarians), and the deacons, who were to

⁴⁷One should be aware of the inappropriateness of the word “ordination” (from the Latin *ordo*) for the act which sets apart an individual to a special ministry in the church. There can be no real *ordo* that places the minister on a higher level of being than the rest of the faithful.

⁴⁸In Acts 13:1 Barnabas is listed among the prophets and teachers; and by that time Paul had already been engaged in an extensive ministry in the are of Syria and Cilicia (Gal 1:21; cr. Acts 11:24 ff).

⁴⁹AA 161-62.

⁵⁰“By that action,” specifies Ellen White, those who laid hands on Paul and Barnabas “asked God to bestow His blessing upon the chosen apostles.”

⁵¹EW 101.

⁵²This relationship of representativeness exercises itself not *vis-a-vis* but *within* the church. The person so specially commissioned represents by life, word, and activity God’s act of reconciliation in Christ as understood in the confessional communion that ordains him to this new responsibility. Here ordination confers the authority to publicly proclaim the gospel and administer the ordinances on behalf of those who recognized in him the divine call to do so.

⁵³Ordination gives the minister *in his person* no authority. It does not make him a repository of sacral or supernatural power. The authority and power lie in the word he is called to proclaim.

⁵⁴Many prefer to speak of “pastors” and “doctors” (Eph 4:11) as of the same office.

exercise a ministry of mercy and stewardship of good. All receive their calling from God; and, in addition, they receive from the church a recognition of their authority by the laying on of hands.

But the modern ministry is increasingly considered a profession as well as a calling. It generally requires specialized knowledge and often long training, for it is first of all an equipping ministry (cf. Eph 4:12), designed to help Christians perform their various individual types of ministry. This professional role of the minister includes various functions. While preaching still remains the most general means of communicating the gospel, today's minister is also expected to be a teacher, a leader in worship, a shepherd and also an expert in the art of pastoral care.

The multiple staff in the local church is in keeping with the NT understanding of the ministry as well as with our age of specialization. And specialization is not incompatible with the Christian calling to the pastoral ministry, so long as it serves its primary vocation—the proclamation of Jesus Christ and the communication of the gospel. Even so, all are ministers in the true sense of the word. Thus we may speak of ministers of music, of religious education, of youth, of social work, of pastoral care, and counseling; and all should be duly and properly recognized by ordination to the Christian ministry. (Or should we rather speak in terms of *ministries*?)

The contemporary minister is also part of a healing team. The members of this healing team include the medical doctor, the psychiatrist, the psychologist, the educator, who show concern for the needs of the whole person.

But where shall we draw the line between the ordained ministry and lay ministries? It is not without interest for us, as Seventh-day Adventists to notice that Ellen White considers that “medical missionaries who labor in evangelistic lines are doing a work of as high an order as are their ministerial fellow [workers].”⁵⁵ Both are “engaged in the same work. . . . a largely spiritual work.”⁵⁶ This vocation, she underlines, calls for “prayer and the laying on of hands; he . . . should be as sacredly set apart for his work as is the minister of the gospel. Those who are selected to act the part of missionary physicians, are to be set apart as such.”⁵⁷ Here are clearly two ministries, recognized by the congregation as God-given talents, and at the church's request devoted to the reconciliation of the world to God.

Might God have been trying to help us recognize by implication, a plurality, a diversity of ministries of all those who in response to God's calling wish to dedicate their lives to the advancement of the gospel message?

It is at this point that a good deal of our concern is focused. If it be agreed that the twentieth century world calls for a plurality of ministries, how are these to be related to the ordained ministry? Are they to be seen as falling within the scope of the pastoral ministry, or as fresh facets of lay ministry? The debate is no mere haggles over terminology. It forces the church to do some hard thinking about the meaning of ordination by focusing attention, as it does, upon a sensitive area that cannot be bypassed.

If the ordained ministry, as indicated, is given for the ordering of the church by the gospel, and if it ministers in word and ordinance, how far can its bounds be properly extended? When does the relationship to word and ordinance become so strained and indirect that it loses its reality?

⁵⁵Ev 546.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid.

Conclusion

The call is still for a church shaped in obedience to the gospel and to God's revealed will, and responsive to the needs of the world. We should ask how far existing forms of the ordained ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church are adequate and in harmony with God's plan, and what new forms might be required.

A closer look at our theology of ordination may mean hard work and reciprocal understanding; for beneath the scriptural data we often deal with prejudice and self-interest—from all sides—as well as established patterns and deep-rooted habits. Yet the theology of ordination and its implications, briefly evoked in these pages, is without doubt one that our church must address itself to sooner or later. The task is indispensable. As a theologian, I would hope that a great many will participate in this study, making their individual contribution, so that God's people as a whole will find a sound solution to pressing problems of our time.