

Ordination

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF ORDINATION?

THE PURPOSE OF ORDINATION is to confer the authority of priesthood upon a man. It is bestowed by the laying on of hands by ones having the authority to do so, according to the provisions of God's law. Such authority enables man to act in Christ's stead, by faith in him, in all matters which are expedient according to his will. Men who are ordained to a priesthood office may be set apart according to the laws of the church to function in specialized ways: such as elders to function as seventies, high priests to function as bishops, evangelists, or stake presidents.

The prime requisite for ordination to priesthood is that the call shall originate with God. Ambition, desire, need, or willingness are not prime in this matter. Precedents concerning calls to priesthood office are found in Doctrine and Covenants 17:12; 42:4; Hebrews 5:4; and John 15:16. From them have come certain criteria which have been accepted in procedure:

- a. He must be called by God to a specific office.
- b. The call must be manifest according to the procedures prescribed by the church (usually originating with the presiding elder and concurred in by district, regional, and general officers) before it is presented to the individual.
- c. The individual must indicate his willingness to accept the call with its attendant responsibilities, duties, and privileges.
- d. The body of the church must approve, represented by the stake or district and congregations involved.

Only when the proper procedure is followed is ordination ordered.

F. Henry Edwards has commented: "Worldly ways of life are organized with regard to the wishes of men rather than for the purposes of God. We have grown up in this environment, and have become so accustomed to it that only a miracle can enable us to see clearly. Our vision is impeded by the cataracts of sin. Our Heavenly Father therefore encounters great difficulty in discovering men who can represent him fittingly. Indeed, only one man in all the history of humanity ever represented the Lord of Life perfectly. In the absence of better material, however, he selects the most suitable men available, and uses them as pioneers to lead the way in spiritual understanding. These trail blazers for God and the truth seek to bring their friends to the Master, and as they succeed, a constantly growing company is enlisted in his cause. When we realize that the major qualifications for this kind of ministry include not only character and intelligence, but also a peculiar ability to understand the will of God, we shall see how important it is that God shall choose his own ministry, and not that they shall be chosen by someone else for him."¹

It is right for a man to be willing to accept the call before he can be properly ordained. It is wrong, however, for a man to "aspire to office." Such aspiration is an ambitious desire for priesthood office- for sake of position or preeminence, the extreme of which is typified by Simon.² A man may have godly desires to serve in the ministry of the church, and there is nothing wrong with preparing for such service by study. He may even study the duties of one or more of the priesthood offices or functions. All of this

is pleasing and acceptable in the sight of God, providing his motives are right-that he is moved by the sheer desire to serve God and his people. Such study is no guarantee of ordination.

Although there is established practice in the church today with regard to the origin and proper order in which priesthood are called, other persons, including the man called, may have divine evidence of the call; but it is not required. The man himself may not have direct spiritual evidence. The desire to serve, willingness to apply himself in his task, and confidence in the officers through whom the call comes are sufficient justifications for him to accept the call. In addition, there is no requirement as to the specific manifestation through which the divine call may come. It may be in vision, dream, by the still small voice, or by growing assurance and testimony of the Spirit.

It is right that a man's ordination should be approved by an organized unit of the church in areas where such organized unit exists. "No person is to be ordained to any office in this church, where there is a regularly organized branch of the same, without the vote of that church."³ This is an example of the application of the principle of common consent as recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 25:1; 27:4. The vote of the body is not as to whether the call is divine or not: the vote is concerned with the willingness of the body to accept this man as a minister among them. If the people are unwilling to accept his ministry, he cannot be an effective minister, even should he be ordained. When the body votes to approve the ordination of a man, the members in effect commit themselves to support him in the office to which he is to be ordained. "If my people will respect the officers whom I have called and set in the church, I will respect these officers; and if they do not, they cannot expect the riches of gifts and the blessings of direction."⁴

THE MEANING OF ORDINATION

When a man is ordained it is a meaningful ceremony which is more than an act alone. Through it God accepts and selects a man to minister to mankind on his behalf, and a man accepts and dedicates his life to this purpose.

God recognizes the capacity for ministry which is resident in an individual. The capacity to minister may be largely dormant, but it is present and will grow as the man applies himself to his calling. In selecting the man, God gives him opportunity to serve in a manner greater than was available to him before. When God accepts him, the man is challenged to cultivate and magnify such gifts as God has endowed.

His ordination does not make the man less human. He is still subject to limitations and error. In no sense does he become infallible or all wise. He must study and apply himself. The phrase "magnify thine office and calling" appears frequently in God's communication to us in these latter days.⁵ It is expressive of the fact that a man's ministry will become rich and effective as he does apply himself to the task. It means that he will have to learn the functions of his office, the particular gifts with which he is endowed, and how they come under the general responsibility and authority of his office.

His ordination leaves his freedom of agency with him. No man is compelled to serve God, even though he is an ordained minister. Ordination does not guarantee that he shall neither commit sin nor fall away from the church. He is still free to make his own choices. He may be genuinely called of God and properly ordained, and yet fail to live up to the terms of his calling. "There are many who have been ordained among you, whom I have called, but few of them are chosen: they who are not chosen have sinned a very grievous sin, in that they are walking in darkness at noonday."⁶

DIVERSITY OF CALLINGS

Every priesthood member is ordained according to the gifts and callings of God to him.⁷ Within the offices of priesthood there are many gifts and callings. For example, the duties of the elder given in Doctrine and Covenants 17:8 are:

- a. to baptize
- b. to ordain other elders, priests, teachers, and deacons
- c. to administer bread and wine—the emblems of the flesh and blood of Christ
- d. to confirm those who are baptized into the church, by the laying on of hands for the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost
- e. to teach
- f. to expound
- g. to exhort
- h. to watch over the church
- i. to take the lead of all meetings

This impressive list does not mean that the elder shall of necessity be all things to all people, functioning in every way enumerated in order to discharge the responsibilities of his office. Not every elder is gifted with the capacity to preach, as is spoken of in Doctrine and Covenants 53:2 b, nor is every elder gifted with administrative ability. The lack of a gift is no excuse for failure to multiply one's gifts through study and fruitful living, but we recognize human limitations. Every minister should function to the best of his ability.

CONDITIONS OF AUTHORITY

While ordination authorizes a man to act in the office to which he is ordained, this does not automatically mean that his ministry will be authoritative. Two conditions must be met: his own life and conduct must measure up to godly living, and the congregation must accept his ministry.

Dwight Davis wrote concerning the conditions in the minister's life prerequisite for spiritual authority:

"1. Compliance with the moral ethics of the church. The higher one's personal standards of conduct, the more efficacious is his ministry. The Lord has said that 'Holiness is my name.' If we are to represent him, our pattern of life must seek to conform to his standards of Christian perfection. . .

"2. Recognition of certain minimum capacities for action. For ultimate survival, authority must be respected. Those sent to minister must be respected, or their message falls on deaf ears. God knows this and therefore selects what he considers to be the best available material at the time and place to represent him.

Such selection is conscious of a man's intelligence, judgment, skill in working with people, motives, aspirations, and personal integrity. One of the most significant things about priesthood is that God calls men not so much for what they are today as he does for what he knows they will become tomorrow....

"3. Priesthood authority contingent upon a continuance of ministry. Authority dies with a cessation of activity.

"Possession of a piece of cardboard—a certificate of ordination, designating the office of ministry does not in itself constitute authority. It is a symbol only. When a minister is silenced he does not necessarily lose his priesthood. The man is accountable only to God for the stewardship entrusted to his care. What is lost, however, is the right to be recognized in his ministry by the church membership....

"The measure of priesthood success must be interpreted as a ratio between capacity and achievement. The man who has been blessed with the full measure of the ten talents and uses but eight of them is a failure in contrast with the man blessed with one talent who utilizes that one to its maximum.

"4. Communication with the source of authority. . .

"Communion with God is a must. It is from this source alone that the minister learns the mind and will of Deity. Enlightened spiritual government can come no other way. Whatever else the elder does, he must cultivate the gift of prayer....

"Every elder must respond to the challenge to evaluate the spiritual quality of his own life to determine whether it is such as to qualify him for such communion... challenged constantly by the voice of inspiration to qualify for 'the privilege of receiving the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.' "⁸

What has been said of the elder is true of every member of the priesthood when it applies to spiritual authority.

ORDINATION AS A SACRAMENT

Let us examine how ordination measures up to the criteria of a sacrament.

A Sacramental Ordinance

1. An ordinance of God
2. A ceremony
3. Employs outward sign or symbol
4. Officiated by priesthood
5. A pledge or covenant
6. Partakes of divine grace

Ordination

- Call initiates from God
- Ordination service
- Laying on of hands
- Only duly authorized priest-hood may officiate
- Accepts the call before ordination
- Authority bestowed

THE PURPOSE OF THE ORDINATION RITE

"Ministers are set apart to their several tasks by the rite of ordination. Such a ceremonial induction is obviously necessary in order to indicate both the call of the minister and the nature of his duties. If there was no specific act initiating members of the priesthood into their ministry, we would not know when or in what degree they were commissioned. Furthermore, ordination by the laying on of hands is not only sanctioned by ancient practice and by the word of God, but is also beautifully adapted to symbolize the inner significance of the investiture of which it is part. These two principles which underlie ordinations are recognized and applied in many parallel fields. For example, no matter what the native ability of a president of the United States may be, nor how large a majority he may have secured in the election, he cannot function until he has been inaugurated. Moreover, at the inauguration, the procedure is specially designed to indicate and solemnize the nature of the duties which he is about to undertake."⁹

Ordination is performed by the laying on of hands of authorized ministers and by the prayer which is uttered by him who lays on his hands. The pattern for the ordinance is given in the following illustrative Scriptures: Numbers 27:18-23; Deuteronomy 34:9; Acts 6:6; Alma 4:1; III Nephi 8:70, 71; Doctrine and Covenants 42:4; 68:2; 117:3.

The purpose of the ceremony of ordination can be summarized as:

- a. To confer the authority and the responsibility of a specific office upon the one ordained
- b. To officially inaugurate the ordained into the office to which he has been called

- c. To symbolize the acceptance of the man to the call and office
- d. To symbolize his covenant and to interpret the gospel of Jesus Christ to all people everywhere as his office directs

PRESUMED ATTRIBUTES

When a man is called to the priesthood, it is assumed that he has a testimony that God is and that he is willing to serve Him. We assume that he has so ordered his life that he is seeking to go on to perfection, having turned from those habits of life which make men base and mediocre. It is assumed that he is sufficiently familiar with the Scriptures that he accepts them as containing the word of God and is interested in learning all he can about them. It is assumed that he is a leader among men. It is also assumed that the church needs him as a member of the priesthood.

SOLEMN RESPONSIBILITY

Jesus, speaking of one who accepts this calling, said that the man accepts an "oath and covenant of my Father, which he can not break, neither can it be moved; but whoso breaketh this covenant, after he hath received it, and altogether turneth therefrom, shall not have forgiveness of sins in this world nor in the world to come" (Doctrine and Covenants 83:6). It is wise, therefore, that we strongly urge that man to become fully aware of the responsibility to which he is called. Priesthood is not a hobby; it is a lifetime calling to service. There is a price to pay. The price is a lifetime of concern for the souls of others. It is paid in hours of labor and service. It demands many more hours of preparation and study. It cannot be paid with money, but its stewardship is paid in the essence of heavenly value: life itself. Its returns are the satisfaction of work with God and his people toward kingdom building.

PREORDINATION TRAINING

Since ordination to the priesthood is so important to the individual and to the church, it would be wise for those who are called to enroll in studies of the church designed to introduce them to the duties, responsibilities, and privileges of the office to which they are to be ordained. Such study may well be completed before his ordination. Courses of study are provided through the Office of Priesthood and Leadership Education by means of enrollment in the School of the Restoration, or in local priesthood schools.

PRIESTHOOD EDUCATION

Every ordained man of the church should desire to acquire those qualities needed to make his ministry most effective. Some of this can be provided through personal devotions and study of the Scriptures. The church provides the means whereby systematic study can be pursued in all of the areas of need. Under the leadership of trained instructors he can receive "on-the-job" training wherein his study of the Scriptures, history, ethics, duties and skills of office, theological comprehension, and methods of communication will help him to minister in the total administrative field of church endeavor: worship, individual and family ministry, service, and so forth.

PLANNING THE ORDINATION SERVICE

Since ordination is a sacrament of the church, it is a worship experience. The order of worship should therefore be carefully planned. All of the elements of good worship technique should be considered by the administrative officer who makes the plans. (See Appendix.)

Distinctive features of the ordination service are the charge to the candidates, the arrangement of the chairs for the ordinands, the prayer of ordination, and special music.

The charge to the candidates rightly belongs with that portion of the order of worship having to do with affirmation of faith. It should include a statement of the importance of the calling to God, the individual, and to the church. It may enumerate some of the duties of the office to which he is called.

The number of chairs for ordinands should not be more than three -- two is preferable. If there are more than three being ordained, consideration should be given as to whether or not it would be wise to have two services at different times. This may be especially effective when there are two priesthood orders involved. The consideration here is that the service not be too lengthy or rushed and that it not appear as if there is a "mass production" of priesthood.

The prayer of ordination, prayed as the officiating ministers place their hands upon the head of the ordinand, properly belongs in the dedicatory part of the order of worship. The prayer should be short and to the point. For simplicity and brevity, the ordination prayer example given in the Book of Mormon (Moroni 3) is a good example.

The music used should be chosen for each section of the order of worship, with concern that it builds toward the climax of the ordination. See *O Worship the King*, by Weddle and Oakman, for helps, or consult the hymnal.

Suggested Scripture Reading

Num. 27:18-23

Deut. 34:9

Acts 6:6

Heb. 5:1-5

John 15:16

Alma 4:1

III Nephi 8:70, 71

D.andC.17:12;23:24;42:4;⁶8:2;85: 21; 117:3-5, 135:2,3;136:3

1. *Fundamentals*, 1951 edition, page 97

2. Acts 8:18-24

3. D. and C. 17:16

4. D. and C. 125:14c

5. D. and C. 23:2, 4; 85:21; 117:5; 135:2

6. D. and C. 92:1

7. *Ibid.*, 17:12

8. *The Ministry of the Elder*, pp. 34-37

9. *Fundamentals*, by F. Henry Edwards, 1960 edition, pp.98, 99