

HOW IMPORTANT IT IS FOR PASTOR AND CONGREGATION TO REALIZE THAT THE PUBLIC MINISTRY IS DIVINELY ORDAINED

Excerpted from Francis Pieper, "Layman's Movement and the Bible," in What Is Christianity? And Other Essays (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1933), pp. 130-36.

It is indeed of paramount importance for both the pastor and his congregation to know that he is in charge of his flock and that he performs the functions of his sacred office by God's ordinance and command.

This fact, I repeat, is of the utmost importance for the pastor himself. If the pastor is certain that his holy office has been divinely instituted and that he himself has been called into it, not merely by honorable and judicious men, but by the almighty God, he will be determined to regard and execute his holy office in accordance with this conviction.

a) In the first place, he will earnestly pray God to enable him to administer his office in accord with His Word. That, of course, is the duty of all Christians. Every believer, if he is aware of his own insufficiency, will ask God continually to enable him properly to perform the functions of his civic and of his spiritual calling.

But this feeling of insufficiency, the depressing realization that of himself he is unfit to execute his noble office, is above all an occasion for distress to the faithful pastor. If a conscientious minister firmly believes that his office has been instituted by God Himself and has not simply developed from peculiar conditions within the Church, and if he is convinced that it is God who has placed him into this exalted calling, then he will beseech the divine Author and Founder of this office so much the more confidently to grant him, and preserve in him, the ability which his office demands.

Martin Chemnitz states: "We must not think that this [namely, the calling of ministers] occurs merely as the result of a human institution or simply for the sake of preserving good order"; and then he adds four reasons why it is of the greatest importance for a pastor to know that his call is truly divine. The following reason is the second one which he cites: "A great number of spiritual gifts and above all the guidance and protection of God are required in order that the office may be correctly and constructively administered for the welfare of the Church. Now, if the pastor has a true call, he may pray to God with a clear conscience and expect Him to hear all his prayers, as He has promised, 2 Cor. 3," etc. (*Loci, De Eccles.*, p. 130f.)

b) In the second place, he will rejoice the more in God's guardian care. Every Christian should know that he is under the constant care and protection of God, being one of Christ's sheep and dwelling in the house of God. But the pastor, who serves God in the office of the holy ministry, which the Lord Himself has instituted and into which He has placed him, should be doubly certain of the unfailing guardianship of his Lord; for he is not only a sheep of Christ's fold and a member of God's household, but he is also a shepherd over the flock entrusted to his care and a steward of the mysteries of God, Titus 1,7; I Cor. 4,1. This knowledge must surely endue him with courage and strength to remain at his post, even if all others should forsake him, as, for example, in times of pestilence and dreadful epidemics. A Christian pastor who believes that he has been divinely called is assured that, whenever he visits the sick, he is just as safe in the polluted and plague-filled atmosphere as he is in the most salubrious climate.

c) In the third place, a pastor's assurance that his call is divine gives him boldness to carry on even when everything seems to turn against him. Practically every pastor must at some time or other contend with the disheartening thought that he is laboring in vain in his ministry. But if in such hours of spiritual depression he bears in mind that he holds his office not merely by human authority, but by God's own ordinance and command, he will be impelled to commit the success of

his labors to God, knowing that God in His own time will grant him the victory.

d) In the fourth place, a pastor will be preserved from disseminating human opinions and doctrines. At times he is tempted to mingle human speculations into his preaching of the Word; he may be inclined to add to the Word or to detract from it both in doctrine and practice, whenever his flesh suggests to him that in so doing he might benefit his congregation. But if he ever keeps in mind the fact that this office, both as to its origin and its commission, belongs entirely to God, he will clearly recognize the folly of urging anything but God's Word alone in the administration of his holy office.

e) In the fifth place, a pastor will be kept from slothfulness. As Dr. Walther was wont to remind his students, the Christian ministry at times offers the pastor many temptations to laziness. If, for example, a preacher is endowed with the natural gift of eloquence, he may preach sermons that are satisfactory to the majority of his people, at least to a large number of them, even if they are not prepared with diligence and prayer and are not so well suited to the needs of the flock as it is the will of Him who has ordained the preaching of His Word through a personal ministry. Now, if the pastor remembers that his office is a divine institution and that God has instituted it for the very purpose that all members, young and old, male and female, rich and poor, the spiritually distressed and the spiritually secure, may be properly supplied with His Word, that he must take heed to the whole flock over which the Holy Ghost has made him a shepherd, bishop, and watchman, and that he must give an account to the Chief Shepherd of every soul placed into his care; if, I repeat, a Christian pastor will remember these heavenly truths, his sluggishness and indolence will vanish before them as dew at the coming of the morning sun.

f) In the sixth place, a pastor will be circumspect in his conduct. All Christians, according to God's Word, should be careful as to how they walk in this present world; for through their good works they should make a good name among men for Christ and His Church. Hence, if Christians conduct themselves reprehensibly, Christ and His holy Christian Church are blasphemed on their account by the unbelievers. For this reason Holy Scripture exhorts all Christians to shun the riotous excesses of the world. But a Christian pastor is in so much greater danger of giving offense because his office brings him in contact with all sorts of people and all sorts of temptations. And, oh, how the world rejoices whenever a Christian minister falls! In a twinkling the news of the scandal is flashed from New York to San Francisco, throughout the country. A minister therefore must be exceedingly careful with regard to his conduct. This caution will be intensified if he ever bears in mind that his office is really God's office, and that he himself in a special sense is God's servant and ambassador, who is to represent his God and Savior before the Church and the world.

However, the fact that a Christian minister holds his office and performs all its functions by virtue of God's own institution and command is of paramount importance also for the *congregation*.

a) In the first place, if the members of a congregation keep in mind that God Himself has established the public ministry in their midst and has supplied them with a man of His own choice, they will regard him as the best man in the world for them, even though he may be lacking certain gifts which other preachers in the vicinity possess. Dr. Walther used to say with regard to this matter: "The great importance of the fact that the congregation-members should be assured of the divinity of their pastor's call cannot be adequately expressed. If the hearers are convinced of this, they will gladly be satisfied even with a pastor whose gifts are rather limited, as long as he performs the duties of his office faithfully; hence they will not quit their church and run to hear more brilliant preachers, but their attitude will be this: Our pastor is the man whom God has given to us and through whose ministry He wants to lead us to heaven, so that under his pastoral care He will not permit us to lack anything that we need for our salvation." (Cf. *Pastoraltheologie*, p. 29f.)

b) In the second place, the knowledge of the fact that the public ministry is of divine origin and that the pastor whom they have been given them by God will move all Christians to attend

church regularly and also willingly to listen to the Word of God which their pastor brings to them in his private care of souls. A true Christian will gladly hear the message which God directs to him through the man whom He has ordained to be his pastor. Furthermore, this knowledge will urge him to apply the pastor's message to his own life, to regard both the word of reproof, the Law, and the word of comfort, the Gospel, as though God Himself had addressed both to him.

c) In the third place, if the public ministry is God's ordinance, instituted for the welfare of the Church, then all Christians must ever see to it that it is preserved. How are they to do this? By maintaining and preserving Christian schools, from which the most promising boys are sent to Synod's colleges and seminaries. These schools of higher learning must be provided for, and supported, with the greatest liberality and zeal; we must never allow our interest in them to wane. It would only be proper if in every congregational meeting some time were devoted to a discussion of our synodical colleges and seminaries, in addition to the consideration which, as a rule, is accorded to the rest of the synodical enterprises. The inevitable result of this would be heartfelt supplications and liberal contributions for our colleges; moreover, we would send our boys to our institutions as the Lord has need of them and not esteem them too valuable to serve the Lord in church and school. On this point Luther says: "Since God has given us His Word so abundantly, we should be grateful and earnest, read it, hear it, speak and sing about it, and work day and night to secure a large number of teachers, who may set it forth to us richly and ceaselessly. That is what is meant by letting the Word of God dwell in us richly." (St. L. Ed., XII, 392.)

Although the Pope blasphemes the Gospel of Christ, yet the papists call him Holy Father. Even non-Catholics employ this term. The true ministers of the Gospel, however, are despised by the world, and even Christians frequently commit the same sin. They talk of the "poor preacher" and refuse to allow their sons to become pastors. But Luther declares that one who occupies the sacred office and proclaims God's Word faithfully should be called not only "reverend sir," but even "saintly sir" and "holy father," not indeed because of his person, but out of respect for his office, because he proclaims the Word of God. He even offered to address the Pope as "most holy sir" if he would only teach God's Word. (Cf. St. L. Ed., VII, 600.)

Luther writes in particular: "All upright, pious souls should hold their pastors and ministers in high esteem for the sake of the Lord Christ and His Word and regard them highly as precious gifts and treasures bestowed on them by God and worth more than all earthly gifts and treasures." (St. L. Ed., VII, 600.)

