

Should Theological Students Officiate at the Administration of the Lord's Supper in Non-Emergency Situations?

C. F. W. WALTHER:

The ministry of the Word [*Predigtamt*] is conferred by God through the congregation as the possessor of all ecclesiastical power, or the power of the keys, by means of its call, which God Himself has prescribed. The ordination of the called [persons] with the laying on of hands is not a divine institution but merely an ecclesiastical rite [*Ordnung*] established by the apostles; it is no more than a solemn public confirmation of the call. ... Dannhauer [writes]: ... "Is ordination necessary for conscience' sake? It certainly is necessary, but not because of any necessity of purpose or means (as though the purpose in view could only be accomplished by this means); for also without ordination Paul and Barnabas (Acts 9:24), as well as Aquila and Priscilla, Frumentius and Aedesius, could effectively administer the office of the ministry. ... Nevertheless, it (ordination) is necessary according to the necessity of an apostolic and positive (not moral) command: 'Separate to Me Barnabas and Saul' (Acts 13:2) and the ancient apostolic custom (1 Tim. 5:21). There is also a necessity that accrues from the benefit that the examined and unexamined teachers of the church may be distinguished and no one may raise the accusation that the Lutherans often use certain scholars who are not yet ordained with the laying on of hands as vicars, permitting them to hear confession, feed the sick, and administer Holy Communion.* Nor should anyone think that the case of a pastor and a reporter were one and the same. ... Who then is the opponent of good order who superciliously despises this custom? He is neither peaceful, because he goes counter to the church, nor conscientious, because he regards the means that serve to calm consciences as worthless; but he is an obstinate ass" (*Liber conscientiae*, pp. 1005-06). [*But here we cannot deny what Kromayer writes: "Students of theology in certain places, as in the congregations at Württemberg, sometimes also here in Swabia, administer the sacraments" (*Theologia positivo-polemica*, p. 1059).] (*Church and Ministry* [Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1987], pp. 219; 265-66; 366)

E. W. KAEHLER:

If we do not wish to deny, for example, that the administration of the holy supper by a non-ordained layman called only for a time by an entire congregation in an emergency is effective and legitimate, still we must determinedly stress that only the most difficult of emergencies would permit this. If a congregation in ordinary circumstances calls an unordained person, she despises ecclesiastical order. The call to the office of the word must have some public witness on account of those who run and are not sent (Jer 23:21), and ordination gives this witness. If this is the case – and no Lutheran will deny it – then it is also correct when we claim: He who should administer an essential part of the holy ministry should be ordained. If circumstances arise in which it is impossible to hold to the order of ordination, then we must at least demand some type of setting apart of the person called to the holy office, for Acts 13:2 says: "When they had served the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit spoke: 'Set apart for me (αφορισσατε) Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'" (see Rom 1:1). ... The Strassburger theologian Dannhauer writes concerning ordination: "Is ordination necessary on account of conscience? It is most certainly necessary: not on account of a necessity of its goal and means (as if the intended goal could only be accomplished though this means). ... Still it is necessary on account of an apostolic and positive (not moral) command: 'Set apart,' Acts 13:2, and an ancient apostolic practice (1 Tim 5:21). Likewise [it is necessary] according to the need to be able to distinguish between the proven and unproven teachers of the church and for showing reverence to the ministry. Therefore no one can complain that Lutherans

often use students who have not yet been ordained as vicars and allow them to hear confession, visit the sick and administer the sacrament to them. [This is our practice] so that no one might think that a pastor and an attendant are the same thing.” Kromayer seems to contradict [the statement that only ordained men should work in the office of the word] when he writes: “In some places, as in the region of Württemberg, as well as from time to time even here in Swabian churches, students of theology administer the sacraments.” This apparent contradiction with the earlier citation from Dannhauer is solved by the following text found in the Wittenberg Judgments: “In many Württemberg, Schwabish, Alsatian, and other highland churches of the Augsburg Confession, it is customary that such *actiones sacrae* (preaching, administering the sacraments, comforting the sick, burying) are committed to ordained students of theology who do not yet have a parish or place of their own as helpers of the regular clergy.” (“Does a Congregation Ordinarily Have the Right Temporarily to Commit an Essential Part of the Holy Preaching Office to a Layman?,” *Logia*, Vol. VI, No. 3 [Holy Trinity 1997], pp. 44-45 [translated by Mark D. Nispel]) (This essay was originally published [in three parts] in *Lehre und Wehre* [edited by C. F. W. Walther], Vol. 20, Nos. 9, 11, and 12 [Sept., Nov., and Dec. 1874].)

JOHN H. C. FRITZ:

May an entire congregation under exceptional circumstances *call* a layman (or a student of theology) to administer to them the Sacrament? We need not hesitate to answer this question affirmatively; for under such circumstances the layman, by virtue of his having been called to do so by the entire congregation, *acts* as the congregation’s representative, even as a regularly called minister would do. In due respect, however, to God’s own established order of the ministry and His precise mention of the necessary qualifications a layman should not be called to administer the Sacrament unless *very exceptional* circumstances justify it. For the same reason a student of theology who is serving as a supply had better not, as a rule, be asked even to assist at Communion. (*Pastoral Theology* [Second Edition] [Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1945], pp. 145-46) (emphases in original)

IRWIN J. HABECK:

What about having a theological student assist with the distribution of the Lord’s Supper or *in an emergency* even to function alone? Again it is a case where the pastor delegates this function which has been entrusted to him to another in a given situation. True, the qualifications of the student for the public ministry have not yet been established by his being presented to the church as a candidate for the holy ministry. But this does not involve a permanent call to exercise all of the functions of a pastor but only a very limited assignment. The fact that a man is a student in good standing at our Seminary will be accepted as evidence that he possesses the general qualifications which the Lord requires for the exercise of any public function in the church. If, however, there should be a question on the part of any congregation about having a student officiate at the Lord’s Supper, charity would demand that the question be discussed and the arrangement continued only if unanimity has been attained. As said before, charity, which includes the avoiding of offense, must be exercised in all arrangements for the worship life of the church. (“Who May Officiate at the Lord’s Supper?,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 65, No. 3 [July 1968], pp. 197-98) (emphasis added)