

DOCTRINE FOR THE YOUNG

ORDINATION

by the Rev. J. Clark Echols

In June we think of the ordination of priests. This is a rite of the church. Ordination is the worship ceremony in which a man is called to serve the Lord as a priest of the church. As we read in the book of Numbers, this is a very ancient rite. The Levites, priests of the Jewish church, were to be set aside from all other men. They were to be holy men, serving in the Tabernacle.

Then, in the Christian Church, the Apostles were set apart when they received the Holy Spirit after the Lord had risen. The Holy Spirit is the influx of the Lord, bringing the light of heaven to those who receive it. And in the Writings, we are told that those who are in the clergy, who are priests, receive enlightenment special to their use of teaching the truth and so leading people to the Lord.

And so it is that in the New Church, there is also a special rite in which a man is set aside, prepared and inaugurated into a special use of the priesthood.

In this worship service, the man who is to be ordained is asked some questions by the Bishop, who ordains him. The man says that he believes that the call to be a priest is from the Lord. He states that he is ready to take on the responsibilities that come with ordination. He declares his faith in the truths of the Word. And he says that he is willingly, of himself, coming to the Lord to be ordained.

Ordination into the priesthood, considered as a rite of the church is only an external thing. But it is very important. For by it the Lord is able to come and be present when a man enters the priesthood. For actually, ordination itself is from the Lord, and not from any man. But, as the Writings teach, the Holy Spirit, or the Lord going forth from Himself to enlighten all people, is passed through men. That is, when the Bishop ordains a man into the priesthood, the Lord comes, as the Holy Spirit, and acts through the actions of the Bishop. This is how the Lord selects men, and sets them apart to serve Him in the work of the church.

To make this promise that the Holy Spirit will be with the priest, the Bishop lays his hands on the man's head, and blesses him. This is what the Children of Israel did when they ordained the Levites. For the laying on of hands represents the communication and reception of the Holy Spirit, and the power that is in the Divine Truth. Now this power is the Lord's alone. But it is with the priest who has been ordained, and who strives to live a good life according to the truth.

Ordination, then, is an external rite that carries within it, spiritually, the power of the Divine Truth. It invites the Holy Spirit, which brings the man enlightenment, perception, a disposition to look to the saving of souls, and instruction in the truths of doctrine. The rite sets a man apart from other men. It establishes the man as a priest—as a man who is to dedicate his life to learning the Lord's truth, teaching it to others, and leading them to know and love the Lord, and

so living a good life. This is the priest's special responsibility. And it comes to him by means of ordination.

“Since man was born for eternal life, and is introduced into it by the church, the church is to be loved as the neighbor in a higher degree, because it teaches the means which lead to eternal life and introduces man into it, leading to it by the truths of doctrine and introducing into it by goods of life. This does not mean that the priesthood should be loved in a higher degree, and the church because of the priesthood; but it means that the good and truth of the church should be loved, and the priesthood for the sake of these. The priesthood merely serves, and is to be honored so far as it serves” (*True Christian Religion* 415).