

Forde, "The Ordained Ministry," in *Called and Ordained: Lutheran Perspectives on the Office of the Ministry*. Edited by Todd Nichol and Marc Kolden. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991, pp. 117-36; here 118.

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is to accomplish. What is needed is to work out a view of ministry consequent to and consistent with the fundamental theological doctrines that gave birth to the Lutheran movement in the first place.

#### ROOTS

The roots of the doctrine of ministry in Lutheranism lie in the doctrine of divine election. That, however, is to state the matter theologically, that is, with reference to God. Anthropologically stated, that is, with reference to the human predicament, the roots lie in the doctrine of the bondage of the will. Christologically stated, they lie in the theology of the cross. To say that about roots is, of course, to suggest at once the reason for ambiguity in Lutheran views about ministry. Lutherans, like other Christians, never are so nervous and divided as when it comes to these doctrines and their consequences. Such nervousness and division, however, are bound to surface in the understanding of ministry. When one views Lutheran history it is perhaps not strange that a view of ministry has never been worked out consistently from these roots. This is what now needs to be attempted.

Why is the ministry of Word and sacrament necessary? Why is it necessary to have a preacher who is to say something from God to us? Most other religions do not do that. To be sure, they have teachers. But for the most part they seem to be gurus of some sort who instruct in how to conduct oneself appropriately or perhaps in how to approach or become one with the desired religious goal or god. They are not what Christians call ministers or pastors. Why do we have such? The answer and also the problem are rooted in the fact that God is a God of election, a living God who chooses and who thus speaks. Since God is an electing God, it is necessary that someone come to speak to us who can actually do the electing in the name of God. It is necessary that there be a minister, a speaker of the Word of God. If there is no actual speaker, election becomes an abstract idea that only threatens and destroys us. The only solution to that threat and that destruction is for someone to come to us and actually do the electing. That is the theological root of the doctrine of ministry.

Usually, however, the doctrine is not so rooted. And that is the reason for much of the trouble. The problem surfaces because we do not get on well with the idea of an electing God. In attempting to think and speak about God we run into that collection of magnificent abstractions which threatens to undo us. God is timeless, almighty, unchanging, infinite, unsuffering, omnipresent, omniscient. The idea that such a God elects becomes just the last straw. As an idea it is simply taken to mean that God has decided things once and for all from timeless eternity. And so it is usually thought that an electing God leaves no room for ministry or preaching or sacrament. Why preach if all has been decided from eternity? Rather than the foundation of the doctrine of ministry, election becomes the rock on which it is shipwrecked.