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Chapter 5: A Biblical Theology of Ordination

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The question of ordination to the Gospel ministry is a vexing one in a world Church that encompasses every continent with their diverse cultures, languages and historical perspectives.¹ Beside the distance of time, culture and language between the early Christian community and the global Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) community of faith, the problem lies in the scarcity of language in both the Old and New Testament that clearly articulates what ordination is and the lack of a coherent service of ordination in the New Testament (NT). In this chapter the Scriptural data will be examined in

1 The significance of this topic in the Seventh-day Adventist Church is attested by the publication of numerous monographs and articles on the subject. The following is only a sampling of published works on the matter: Patricia A. Habada and Rebecca Frost Brillhart, eds. *The Welcome Table: Setting a Place for Ordained Women* (Langley Park, MD: TeamPress, 1995); Nancy Vyhmeister, ed. *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998); Raoul Dederen, "A Theology of Ordination: A Seventh-day Adventist Interpretation," *Ministry Supplement* 51, no. 2 (February 1978): 24K–24P; Keith A. Burton, "A Practical Theology of Ordination," *Ministry* 69, no. 11 (November 1996): 26–27, 29; Nancy Vyhmeister, "Ordination in the New Testament?" *Ministry* 74, no. 5 (May 2002): 24–27; Thomas Blincoe, "Needed—A Theology of Ordination," *Ministry* 51, no. 2 (February 1978): 22–24; Willmore Eva, "Should Our Church Ordain Women? Yes," *Ministry* 58, no. 3 (March 1985): 14–22; Bernard E. Seton, "Should Our Church Ordain Women? No," *Ministry* 58, no. 3 (March 1985): 14–22; Floyd Bresee, "Women in Ministry," *Ministry* 61, no. 8 (August 1988): 22–23; John Brunt, "Ordination of Women: A Hermeneutical Question," *Ministry* 61, no. 9 (September 1988): 12–14; Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, *Searching the Scriptures: Women's Ordination and the Call to Biblical Fidelity* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventists Affirm, 1995); Mercedes H. Dyer, ed. *Prove all Things: A Response to Women in Ministry* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventists Affirm, 2000); Eddy Johnson, "Women's Ordination: The Flaw in the Debate," *Spectrum* 37, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 24–27.

the recognition that it is the Spirit who leads into all truth (Jn 16:13).

The key questions that will be addressed in this paper include: what is the meaning of ordination; does ordination confer on an individual a unique status or does ordination symbolize a community's recognition and selection of a person to provide a spiritual leadership within the community; what would a preliminary theology of ordination look like? According to Rowan Williams, "the theology of Christian ministry is an area in which we are too readily tempted to avoid discussion of first principles since practical urgencies unsettle and distract us."²

In this paper lexical analysis of important words will be engaged first in an attempt to articulate the first principles of the NT in relation to the matter of ordination. Second, the notion of "laying on of hands" will be discussed and relevant points will be made from the analysis undertaken in steps one and two. In the final section of this paper a preliminary biblical theology of ordination will be proposed.

The New Testament Background

There is no unambiguous and informed evidence in the NT that supports the concept of ordination as it is currently practised in the SDA Church. In fact, the NT writings do not have a single word for "ordain." The word "ordination" comes from the Latin *ordinare* which means to arrange, regulate or set in order.³ The first evidence for commissioning known as ordination comes from Hippolytus' *Apostolic Tradition*, written in the early third century AD. It is surprising that, for all he wrote about the Church, Paul makes no reference to ordination or to the laying on of hands in relation to any of the leaders he worked with in the churches under his care (cf., 2 Cor. 8:19).

Furthermore, there is no evidence for ordination or the setting-apart of an individual for ministry in the early Church. Jesus' consecration of the disciples recorded in John 20:22 may or may not involve the laying on of hands. This act of Jesus is also not limited to the disciples, but indeed every believer possesses the Spirit (1 Jn 2:27). While there may have been some sort of installation service for the elder (2 Jn 1; 3 Jn 1) nothing is explicitly mentioned.⁴ In sum, the early Church may have conducted an ordination

2 Rowan Williams, "Women and the Ministry: A Case for Theological Seriousness," in *Feminine in the Church*, ed. Monica Furlong (London: SPCK, 1984), 11.

3 Vyhmeister, "Ordination in the New Testament?" 24.

4 R. Alan Culpepper, "The Biblical Basis for Ordination," *Review and Expositor* 78, no. 4 (Fall 1981): 471-484.

service of some kind, but no evidence of it has survived. While historical evidence is lacking a lexical analysis of key words can aid in understanding the concept of ordination.

Lexical Analysis

There are four different Greek words found in different contexts in the NT writings that point to the idea of “ordain.” The King James Version (KJV) is most helpful in identifying such words, as it uses the words “ordain, ordained” in translating the New Testament. For example, Mark 3:13–14 states: “And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth (*proskaleitai*) unto him who he would: and they came to him. And he ordained (*epoiēsen*) twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach.” Jesus went up into a mountain, which was, in Jewish tradition, the place of communion with God and for receiving authoritative revelation (Exod. 19:3–6; Deut. 32:48–34:9; Mk 9:2; 13:3). The word *proskaleitai* is translated “calleth” in the KJV and “summoned” in the NIV. The NIV translation reflects more accurately the intent of the word as it is stronger than the verb “call” (*kaleō*) used in the previous call narratives (Mk 1:20; 2:17). The word *proskaleitai* has connotations of a summons to teach, to instruct, of an invitation or call to a special task (see also Mk 3:23; 6:7; 7:14; 8:1; 10:42; 12:43; 15:44).⁵

The word *poiēō*, from which *epoiēsen* derives, means “to do,” “to make” and is repeatedly used to portray the creative, historical and future eschatological action of God.⁶ The word has overtones of a new creative act in Mark. The choosing of twelve disciples is not arbitrary, but evokes biblical connections with God’s covenant people in the Old Testament (OT).⁷ By a sovereign act, Jesus appoints the Twelve as the eschatologically renewed people of God, to be with him and to proclaim his kingdom to Israel and the world.⁸

5 K. L. Schmidt, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 3:500.

6 W. Radl, *ποιέω*, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 3:124.

7 M. Eugene Boring, *Mark*, The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 100.

8 For a discussion on the eschatological implications of Mark 3:13–19, within which our passage is found, see Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark*, Hermeneia – A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007), 215–218. Ellen White writes: “When Jesus had ended His instruction to the disciples, He gathered the little band close about Him, and kneeling in the midst of

The next text of consequence is Acts 1:22, which reads: "Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained (*genesthai*) to be a witness with us of his resurrection." This verse does not indicate any service or any activity on the part of the disciples other than that of casting lots after two names are put forward. The practice of casting lots has precedent in Judaism.⁹ The *SDA Bible Commentary* argues that while some suggest that the word *genesthai* reflects the view of Church government held by the KJV translators, this argument is invalid since the disciples were already ordained.¹⁰ It is interesting however, that the disciples do not lay hands on the newly chosen disciple. The word used by Mark (*epoiēsen*) to portray what Jesus did for his disciples in Mark 3:13–14 is closer to the idea present in Acts 1:22 and may have been used to demonstrate continuity between the eleven disciples and the new disciple.

It is stated in Acts 14:23: "And when they had ordained (*cheirotoneōsantes*) them elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed." Richard Longenecker maintains that *cheirotoneō* means "to choose" or "elect by raising hands" but it can also mean "to appoint" or "to install." It seems that it is the latter that Luke has in mind since it is coupled with prayer and fasting.¹¹ This conclusion is strengthened since it is doubtful that Paul and Barnabas would have left the election or choosing of an elder to a new congregation that were still infants in the faith.¹²

The next text to be examined is 1 Timothy 2:7, which reads: "Whereunto I am ordained (*etethēn*) a preacher and an apostle (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity." The emphatic *I* used here expresses a sense of wonder that God would call Paul as his herald.¹³ Furthermore the verb *etethēn* (placed, appointed) is in the passive

them, and laying His hands upon their heads, He offered a prayer dedicating them to His sacred work. Thus the Lord's disciples were ordained to the gospel." Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1963), 296.

9 F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 47.

10 Francis D. Nichol, ed. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1980), 6:130.

11 Richard N. Longenecker, *Acts*, Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 439.

12 This is a convincing argument made by Nichol, *SDA Bible Commentary*, 6:301.

13 Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 83.

indicating that Paul's ministry "was not of his own choosing but of God's."¹⁴ The same root, *tithēmi* (place, appoint), is also used in 1 Timothy 1:12: "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting (*themenos*) me into ministry." The word *tithēmi* has the general meaning of "put" or "place" and is used here in the sense of appoint. The word is in the aorist tense indicating that this placing or appointing was completed at a specific time or point in the past.¹⁵

Titus 1:5 is another verse of interest. It reads: "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting and ordain (*katastēsēs*) elders in every city, as I had appointed thee." The word *kathistēmi* is an aorist subjunctive and according to Knight, here means "appoint."¹⁶ This does not add much to our discussion but it does highlight another word that NT writers used to express their ideas about ordination.

From this brief excursion into the NT literature we can conclude the following: the call of the disciples, not just to follow Christ, but to be like him, is in its primary sense a call to witness to his ministry and be able to pass on authentic traditions about him (Lk 1:2). In a plenary sense I would argue that this summons in Mark 3:13–14 is what Seventh-day Adventists call the "inner call" of God that a man or woman receives to Gospel ministry. This call is to devote and surrender one's life to Jesus—to be with him—and to engage in the specific task, flowing from this "being with," of proclamation and service. At its core this "inner call" is to continue the ministry of Jesus and to proclaim him, the Living Word.

The placing of Paul in ministry was a sovereign act of God, just as the placing of the disciples was a sovereign act of Jesus. This putting or placing of Paul, on the basis of the letter to Timothy, suggests that it also corresponds to the inner call. Paul asserted that God enabled him, counted him faithful and put or placed him in ministry at a set time. The inner call of God established Paul in the ministry of herald or proclaimer of Jesus and his truth.

14 Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, New International Bible Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 69.

15 George Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 125.

16 Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 288, understands this passage as pointing back to Acts 6 and Acts 13 and suggests that the verb χειροτονέω could be rendered "lay on hands" or "ordain."

Laying on of Hands

After careful research on the subject of “laying on of hands” in both the OT and NT Keith Mattingly concluded that: 1) laying on of hands is an act of identification; 2) it sets an individual apart from the community for a specific task; 3) it mediates a transfer from God and the community of faith; 4) it indicates that an individual represents the community; and 5) it identifies an individual as appointed to an office.¹⁷ In examining the role and function of Moses’ laying on of hands in relation to Joshua, Mattingly concluded that the laying on of hands was a public gesture that confirmed and authorized the spiritual gifts God had already bestowed on Joshua.¹⁸

It would be surprising if the NT evidence did not lean in the same direction because the NT writers inherited the idea of laying on of hands from their OT counterparts. There are five texts that speak of a commissioning or installation service of some kind (Acts 6:6; 13:3; 19:6; 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22; 2 Tim. 1:16). These texts have traditionally been interpreted as referring to ordination. The NIV will be used in this section of the paper.

The first reference to the laying on of hands (Acts 6:6) reads: “They presented these men to the apostles who laid their hands on them (*epethēkan autois tas cheiras*).” This is the first explicit mention of the act of laying on of hands in the NT¹⁹ and it recalls Moses’ commissioning of Joshua (Num. 27:18–23). Through this act Moses imparted some of his authority to Joshua. Similarly the apostles delegated authority to the seven deacons (Acts 6).²⁰ Luke uses the word *diakonia* (ministry) in Acts 6:1–6 in reference to the ministry of the apostles and deacons. Clearly both apostles and deacons have different functions but the same ministry. In Acts 13:1–3 it is recorded that Paul and Barnabas were sent as missionaries to Cyprus. One of the prophets no doubt received a message from God and the whole church, in a

17 Keith Mattingly, “Laying on of Hands in Ordination: A Biblical Study,” in *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Nancy Vyhmeister (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998), 70.

18 *Ibid.*, 66.

19 Nichol, *SDA Bible Commentary*, 191. Further, the commentary suggests that this first use of the laying on of hands is the blueprint for all the other occasions where there is reference to the laying on of hands. It also equates the laying on of hands with the later practice of ordination, referencing 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22 and 2 Tim. 1:6.

20 Richard N. Longenecker, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Expositors Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 9:331. So also, Jon Dybdahl, *Andrews Study Bible* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2010), 1428.

posture of fasting and prayer, agreed with this decision.²¹ Bruce avers that the laying on of hands did not impart any spiritual gift or authority that the apostles did not already possess. The church at Antioch commissioned these men for service and they returned to share the good news of God's blessing with them at a later stage.²²

The next text of consequence is 1 Timothy 4:14, which reads: "Do not neglect your gift (*en soi charismatos*), which was given (*edothē*) you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you (*meta epetheseōs tōn cheirōn*)."²³ In this instance Timothy's gift is given through a prophetic message, while in Acts it is also a prophetic message that is the catalyst to send Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. Timothy's case is unique in Scripture since his gifting was given to him prophetically. It was confirmed and accompanied by the laying on of hands. A number of scholars have drawn attention to the fact that the laying on of hands (*epetheseōs tōn cheirōn*) is preceded by *meta* in 1 Timothy 4:14. C. K. Barrett asserts that the laying on of hands is not a means but rather "an accompanying act" for the endowment on Timothy of *charism*, for "meta with the genitive must mean 'with' not 'through.'"²⁴ Timothy is given a gift that comes with prophecy rather than through the laying on of hands which only accompanies the prophecy.

A number of important questions now emerge. Is what took place in the early Church normative for the Church at all times? Might someone in the local church today have their gift confirmed prophetically? Might what happened in the book of Acts, for example, happen again? Not every feature in the early Church functions as the norm for practice and experience in the contemporary Church. Much of what the early Church did was for pragmatic reasons rather than to follow any specific theological injunction.

Fee and Stuart maintain that "unless Scripture explicitly tells us to do something, what is only narrated does not function in a normative way – unless it can be proved that the author intended for it to function in this way."²⁵

21 See Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1948), 160; Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1948), 303.

22 Bruce, *Book of Acts*, 246.

23 The aorist passive *edothē* indicates the gift was given by God.

24 C. K. Barrett, *The Pastoral Epistles*, New Century Bible (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), 71–72. Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 775, also notes "the preposition *meta* has no known instance in the *Koine* of an instrumental sense."

25 Gordon D. Fee and Douglas K. Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All*

What is normative in Acts is therefore what Luke explicitly and intentionally wanted to teach. An example of something that would not happen today, unless sovereignly willed by God, is the experience described in Acts 8. Luke reports that Peter and John came to verify that the Samaritans had accepted the word of the Lord (Acts 8:14–16). While they had been baptized into Christ they had not yet received the Holy Spirit, so they laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. It is not God's normal purpose for the reception of the Spirit to be an experience subsequent to conversion and baptism.²⁶ In Peter's sermon reported in Acts 2 forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit are twin blessings that one receives upon repentance and baptism (see Acts 2:38; Rom. 8:9, 14–16; 1 Cor. 6:19; Gal. 3:2, 14; 4:6). Since this was the first time the Gospel was to be taken out of the boundaries of Jerusalem, God delayed the gift of the Holy Spirit to ensure "the acceptance of these converts by believers in Jerusalem."²⁷ God worked in ways that were conducive not only to the reception of the Gospel but also to promote the unity of the Church and the preparation of the apostles for the expanding Gentile mission.

This occurrence recorded in Acts 8 is an historical exception. The question of biblical precedent must then be handled with careful exegesis and a consideration of the overall message of the Scriptures to determine Luke's or any other Bible writer's actual intent. However, since "all Scripture is inspired by God" (2 Tim. 3:16) we can discover truth for Christian life and practice from those passages that may have been incidental to the author's primary intent. God provides the inner call to a person through his Spirit and the Church; seeing the fruit of ministry confirms this call.

The *SDA Bible Commentary* states unequivocally, "Timothy's gift of church leadership was not bestowed on him at the time of his ordination. No special power flowed through the hands of the 'presbytery.' Rather, the ordination service recognized Timothy's abilities and consecration and thus

Its Worth, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 106. Contra Philip B. Payne, "The Fallacy of Equating Meaning with the Human Author's Intention," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20 (Summer 1977): 243–252 and Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 144–148.

26 I refer here to the initial reception of the Spirit which initiates conversion, grows and guides the new Christian and leads to baptism. See James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (London: SCM, 1970), 127–131 and Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 767–768.

27 Longenecker, *Acts*, 359.

expressed the church's approval of his appointment as a church leader."²⁸ The prophetic message of Timothy's gifting, however, is an exception.

The next text to be explored is 1 Timothy 5:22 which reads: "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure." The wider context of 1 Timothy 5 suggests that Paul was speaking to Timothy about how to handle public accusations and appoint leaders. He advised Timothy that the accusations must be guided by the objective criteria of two or three witnesses and that those who commit sin must receive a public rebuke. The whole process must be done without prejudice or preference. Paul admonished Timothy not to lay hands on someone aspiring toward leadership too quickly since he could share in their sins (verse 22). This reference is important in demonstrating that there needs to be a time of examination and reflection and that stringent precautionary measures need to be put in place when someone who aspires to leadership has been involved in a damaging public or personal dispute that may jeopardize the advancement of the kingdom.

The evidence of Acts 6 suggests that the concept of "laying on of hands" refers to the delegation of a specific task and the conferring of authority to function and to perform the duties required for that task. In Acts 13 it is related that it was the whole church that sent Paul and Barnabas out into the mission field, a task initiated by the Holy Spirit. The laying on of hands functions in this instance to confirm the direct message of the Holy Spirit to set Paul and Barnabas aside for missionary work. While the prophetic confirmation of Timothy's leadership given in 1 Timothy 4:14 is a historical exception, there is no reason for a prophetic message not to be given to a contemporary leader in relation to a person who may be considering Gospel ministry.

Toward a Theology of Ordination

A biblical theology must be grounded in the *whole counsel of Scripture* and must seek for principles that are germane to the inspiration of Scripture as a means to discern the divine will. The overall thrust of Scripture is that every member of the Church has the opportunity for Jesus to shape and transform their lives into conformity to his plan and will (Rom. 8:29; 12:1-2; Eph. 4:23-24). It is at the time of baptism, as it was for Jesus (Matt. 3:13-17), that the Holy Spirit fills all believers and grants them his gifts for ministry. This act of granting spiritual gifts is the prerogative of the Spirit and he grants them according to his purpose and with no distinction (1 Cor. 12:4-11; 1 Cor. 11:11-12; Gal. 3:13, 28, 5:1).

²⁸ Nichol, *SDA Bible Commentary*, 7:307.

The NT evidence suggests that God is sovereign in calling a person to a specific ministry. Ordination is the setting apart of an individual for service to God and his people. God sovereignly calls an individual to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ—the ministry of the Word—to the Church and the world. This inner call is then authenticated by the body of Christ as the examples in Acts and the later witness of the NT demonstrate. There is no evidence that the authenticity of the inner call is questioned or debated in the NT. The body of Christ is nurtured and grows by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit and it is in staying sensitive to the voice of the Spirit that the Church is able to discern who is to be ordained. The fruit (character and soul-winning) of a person's life is normally an important step to consider in the process of ordination (Gal. 5:22; Jn 15:1–11).

There is no evidence in the NT that the inner call of God is gender-biased. Jesus eradicated class and racial distinctions of “Jew and Gentile, slave and free” at the Cross (Gal. 3:28).²⁹ Christ came to establish a new community built on mutual respect and mutual submission (Eph. 5: 21) through a new covenant.³⁰ The Old Covenant was a sexually discriminatory one in that the mark of entrance into it was by circumcision of males (Gen. 17:10). However, in the NT the mark of entrance into the new community is by baptism without any gender discrimination. Both sexes enter the Christian community on an equal footing based on their acceptance of Christ as Lord and Saviour.

While there are different roles and functions for God's leaders in the NT

29 Ben Witherington III, states that “Gal. 3:28 has been called the Magna Carta of Humanity and there is a sense in which that label is apt, but it is also well to be aware that Paul is not suggesting here the obliteration of the distinctions he mentions in this verse, but rather their redemption and transformation in Christ. The new creation is the old transformed and transfigured. These ethnic, social and sexual distinctions continue to exist but in Christ they are not to determine one's soteriological or spiritual or social standing in the body of Christ. It is also fair to say that being in Christ and being led by the Spirit also affects what roles one may play in the Christian community...” Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 280–281.

30 John Stott argues passionately that there is to be mutual submission of men and women in the home and the church on the basis of equality. Even though the husband is head of the home just as Christ is the head of the Church this does not preclude the submission of husbands to their wives. John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians: God's New Society*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1979), 213–220.

(Eph. 4:11–13) there is no evidence that there are different levels of ordination or that ordination meant something different to those that had different roles. The Church is a worshipping, serving and discipling community for everyone.

Conclusion

My examination of the NT literature in this paper has shown that the strongest evidences for ordination are the inner call which comes sovereignly from God and the fruit of a person's life. The early Church practised ordination by "laying hands" on the individual and in so doing set them apart for service. Furthermore, ordination does not grant a person a higher status or a "direct line" to God, but simply refers to being called by God to proclaim the Living Word in a life of service to the Church and the world. The ordained person should indeed be deeply humble and grateful for the privilege and joy of proclaiming Christ.