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# drulogion

thursday theological thoughts

THURSDAY, JULY 27, 2006

## Laying of Hands: Becoming a Link in a Long Chain

This Sunday I got ordained. Beforehand my wife asked me what I was looking forward to the most about the service. I said that I was most looking forward to the laying on of hands by the other ministers. Why is this part of the act so special?

The laying on of hands was not special because I received some kind of special powers. I preached and administered the sacraments before my ordination and I will do so after without any substantive change. The ministry of the church does not require some special mystical power above and beyond the work of the Holy Spirit himself.

The laying on of hands could also be potentially significant as a symbol of the setting apart among the church for the role of equipping the saints. Now this is certainly an aspect of the act. But in my ordination experience, those who laid hands on me were the community of ministers, not the congregation as a whole. So the symbol in this instance is not so much being "set apart" as being "welcomed into." Certainly I am being set apart by the church as a whole, but the laying on of hands symbolizes more.

What hit me at my ordination was that those who layed hands on me had received the laying on of hands from someone else, and so on and so on back through history. Now I do not need to committ myself to some idea of historical succession to be able to affirm the significance of a long chain of ministry that traces back to Jesus himself. The practice of laying on of hands is practiced in the New Testament and has been a consistent part of ordination services throughout Christian history. Whatever else it means, the laying on of hands symbolizes my induction into a historical community of set apart ministers. I became a link in a long chain of ministers.

The resultant attitude from this realization is that I am particularly excited to some day lay my own hands on an ordinand. I do not want my branch of the chain to end with my link. I feel compelled to

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continue the chain beyond myself.

### Any thoughts?

What "happens" at ordination services?

What experiences or reflections have you had on such acts?

What is the meaning of the symbolic act of the laying on of hands?

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posted by JohnLDrury @ 1:55 PM

[7 comments](#)

### 7 Comments:

At [10:28 AM, July 28, 2006](#), [Scott David Hendricks](#) said...

John,

While I would like to lean more toward the Catholic sacramental view of holy orders, I believe that as protestants we can place much significance, meaning, and even faith in ordination.

Last year it became clear to me that the prayer prayed at Wesleyan Church ordination services is practically the exact same prayer prayed at a Catholic ordination service. With regard to meaning and significance, I would place my eggs in the basket of the prayer as our source for what our ordination means. You see, I thought that surely the Catholics wouldn't use a prayer, but a blessing, because they are convinced that grace is received by the power of Christ ex opere operato. I was surprised to learn that they prayed a prayer just like us Wesleyans. Upon my hopeful ordination someday, I would probably place much faith in the humble prayer of the ministers to God, as well as in their laying on of hands. I would tend to believe that God can and will do something through that sacramental act. I would also place much value in whatever words are said or sung during the service.

At [1:27 PM, July 30, 2006](#), [coach d](#) said...

YOU>>> "What happens at an ordination service?"

ME>>>> For me nothing at the time. BUT years after I recognized that something more happened than I had realized at the time. At the time all that "happened" was my denomintaion ordained a hippie-preacher (I had facial hair--a big issue at that time with DBMDs) even with the doubts of some on the committee.

HOWEVER years later I realized what really happened and embraced it. For some of us ordination is like infant baptism, or childhood conversiona... we might be unaware of the significance of the event at the time and blow it off as something akin to tenure... but later as we study and pray it comes to mean a whale of a lot more.

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I wish I had this understanding back then that you outlined here... I have it now but it would have been so much more significant to me if I had it then.

Your understanding enables a woman to be ordained by a bunch of hillbillies who have little understanding themselves of the significance of the event yet she can still experience an event packed with spiritual --even life-changing--significance.

I guess I'm saying that *at the time* an event can mean less than it can come to mean later--which is how it turned out for me. I wish I could have read this before being ordained myself in 1971... Thank!

At [5:37 PM, July 30, 2006](#), Dave Warren said...

Congratulations John,

And thanks for all your input on the process of ordination this year, from the meeting with Boards through the service.

Several questions came to mind as I read your blog ? Was your dad and brother there; a part of the ministers laying on of hands ? Any others who had touched your life as you prepared for this moment and all that will follow ?

Ordination service has always been a favorite of mine. I can still remember the topic of the message used by our General Supt. at my ordination now 20 years ago.

It's been interesting, though going from the one being ordained to now having a part in the ordination service. Three years ago I became a district secretary in the Church of the Nazarene in Southwest Indiana. I have gone from being ordained, to being one of the ministers who has the privilege of laying on of hands to now walking the group of those to be ordained in as the church sings Holiness Unto the Lord and then getting to present them one by one to the assembly. Believe me it's a great honor and very humbling. I always fear making a mistake in names or something and drawing attention away from the moment.

But one of the things that has hit me, that I didn't expect, is signing the ordination certificate. When I do that, I'm saying I agree with the church (and those boards)that this person has a call to ministry and is ready for this step. It's something that really hit me as the first 2 years, my associate and then another young man who had been my associate were ordained. I've been fortunate. The dozen are so that I've signed for are all still in ministry. I wonder how I'll feel if one of them fall ? I must admit I pray for the ordinates a little more these

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days because I feel a responsibility to them!

I've said all this to say, I wonder if we really ever quit learning, feeling something, being moved by the ordination service? Personally I hope not! If ever I can walk a group of individuals down the center aisle as the church sings and not feel something. I hope I'll give up the privilege, skip the service and go spend more time reminding myself of the awesome privileges as well as responsibilities we have as ministers of this gospel of grace. Again congratulations and God bless!

In Christ's grip

At [11:21 AM, August 01, 2006](#), [Dave Ward](#) said...

I really resonate with your thoughts here John. My exact words were "a group of other ministers are saying I am not crazy...I am called." Of course I didn't need that...I was marrying, burying, baptizing etc. already. But it was deeply meaningful to me to be "welcomed into" as you put it.

This may sound strange, but there was one part that grew on me, in the same way as Keith.

I was ordained at Fairmount campgrounds. Peeling white paint coming off of buildings in an old holiness campground.

I thought it was silly then. I love it now.

I just spent 11 days at an old holiness camp in the southern Georgia heat. Open air tabernacles and the same peeling white paint.

What struck me was the connection with heritage, the rootedness of the past. When we entered the airport it was serious culture shock. For eleven days life slowed down, people dressed in an up-to-date modesty, and nobody hawked their wares.

This year, looking back on ordination, I am glad it happened in a place so deeply connected to my heritage...good and bad. All the problems there are my problems. And I am grateful to own them.

At [10:37 AM, August 03, 2006](#), [Matt Guthrie](#) said...

Congrats John. I appreciate your perspective of being "welcomed into" a group as much as being "set apart" by another group. For me, the highlight of district conference is the ordination ceremony. I love sitting with the other ordained ministers and celebrating with the men and women who are being welcomed as we set them apart.

As a mystic, though usually very rational mystic, I do believe

something else happens during the ordination ceremony. Perhaps the Catholic Church is on the right track when they view ordination as a sacrament. Not meaning to engage into a sacramental discussion, I do believe that we open ourselves up to grace as hands are laid upon us. Are we better preachers, priests, prophets, and the such? I say yes if we allow that grace to work in our lives. That of course does not exclude the need for daily fillings as we go about our pastoral duties.

I too was very skeptical of the whole process. Part of me wanted to thumb my nose at the DBMD and the necessity of their approval. Even as I was driving to my own ordination service, I was somewhat apathetic. Then I believe God inserted a little humor. Traffic on the interstate was backed up for literally 8 - 10 miles because of an 18 car pile up. I just happened to be part of the first 500 yards and there was no way off the highway to take an alternate route. I sat there thinking, "I'm going to miss my ordination. How will they handle this? I want to be there." We were able to get off the highway and get to the ceremony, about 10 minutes late. And when I knelt at that altar, it was the most moving experience of my life apart from my wedding and the birth of my children.

At [4:21 PM, August 06, 2006](#), [Russ Veldman](#) said...

John,

My ordination was a powerful event. Our Free Methodist ordination service makes it clear that ordinands are being set apart from the body for special ministry by the bishop assisted by the elders present.

Thomas Oden points out several things about what ordination means including the idea of "insurance" (My word, not his). Ordination is supposed to assure a congregation that the minister they are receiving has been duly examined in terms of call, theology, integrity and has been adequately trained to for ministry. Plus - and this is what I needed - ordination should assure the ordinand that he or she is not self-deluded about his or her calling, has been adequately prepared, screened, etc. In my experience, I considered the ministry such a high calling that I did not want to be pastoring until a wise group told me I was ready. I needed the affirmation and discipline of the Church.

At [12:42 AM, August 12, 2006](#), [Jo Anne Lyon](#) said...

Congratulations John - I too had the sense of being welcomed into the community when I was ordained. Some of the ministers who did the "Laying on of Hands" had been ordained by my father. However, I did not know it during the prayer but as they shook my hand and gave me a hug they whispered in my ear with tears in their eyes, " your father ordained me x number of years ago." My father has been deceased for many years - so I felt a new connection to him.

But I must say even more there has been an added grace and power that has entered my ministry since ordination which is a bit difficult to describe.

Yes, I know we could get into the "sacrament" discussion-- I will postpone that for another time. But for now I will just leave it with the "experiential" discussion.

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