

1-1-1967

Theological Observer

Arthur Carl Piepkorn
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Piepkorn, Arthur Carl (1967) "Theological Observer," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 38, Article 8.
Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol38/iss1/8>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER

"DEACON" ORDINATION

Tokyo, Japan—The Japanese Lutherans began an interesting experiment in a new form for the ministry when on Pentecost, 1966, Zion Lutheran Church of Omiya, Japan, ordained Mr. Yoshiro Taguchi as its deacon. The event, the first of its kind in the history of the Nihon Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod), to which the congregation belongs, came as the climax to a year of training under the direction of the Rev. Clifford W. Horn, the missionary serving the Omiya congregation. This congregation, organized in 1952, will be served by Deacon Taguchi and its elders during the immediate future.

The decision to ordain Mr. Taguchi grew out of a problem faced by every missionary-served congregation, the missionary furlough. Adversely affected by such missionary furloughs in the past, the Omiya congregation decided to train an elder to serve in the stead of the missionary. After special training, Mr. Taguchi was called by the Omiya congregation to "proclaim the Word of God" and "administer the Holy Sacraments" and "to care for the congregation, especially the sick and needy." Mr. Taguchi's ordination will enable the congregation to continue the weekly celebration of Holy Communion and to carry out all of its activities as the people of God in the absence of the missionary.

Mr. Taguchi, baptized in 1950, has served the congregation in Omiya as elder for over 10 years. During this time he has both preached and assisted the celebrant at the service; he has also conducted various instruction classes and is the recognized leader of the congregation. He is the head teacher (the equivalent of assistant principal) at Seibo Gakuen, Hanno, Japan, a middle school and high school operated by the Nihon Lu-

theran Church. The father of four children, Mr. Taguchi is the head of a rare Japanese household: his entire family, eight members including his father and mother, is Christian.

The three elders of the congregation play a very important role in Zion's church life also. Each is responsible for one area of Zion's parish, serving as shepherd of his area. They, too, preach and assist in the service. On Pentecost, they together with Rev. Horn laid their hands on Mr. Taguchi, praying for the Holy Spirit's blessing and power.

Rev. Horn, who has been in Japan since 1961, came to the congregation three years ago to assist it in its development and evangelistic outreach and completed his first term in August 1966. It was in preparation for his furlough that the congregation planned. On his return to Japan in 1967, Rev. Horn will continue to assist the Omiya congregation.

The ordaining of Mr. Taguchi is viewed as only the first step in a larger plan. Two other Lutheran congregations in the immediate area of Omiya are planning to develop the same deacon ministry. It is hoped that these three congregations will then together call a seminary-trained clergyman. The seminary-trained man would be chief pastor or bishop, working with and through the deacons and elders. It is hoped that the complete plan can be realized within the next five years.

According to Rev. Horn it is anticipated that the results of this new form of ministry will be three: (1) the congregations will learn to be truly responsible for their life as the body of Christ; (2) a number of congregations can together bear the responsibility that comes with calling a seminary-trained clergyman; (3) the relatively few Japanese pastors can be used to a better advantage. The first of these has already been

seen in the Omiya congregation. Rev. Horn stated, "The congregation has a new awareness of its calling as the people of God and a sense of responsibility as the church. This has manifested itself in many ways, including increased church attendance and greater concern for one another."

EDITOR'S NOTE:

The news release printed above was issued under date of September 12, 1966, by the Tokyo office of the Public Relations Committee of the Nihon Lutheran Church, the Japan Mission of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod. In response to a request for comments on the unique ordination reported in this release, Arthur Carl Piepkorn, professor of systematic theology at Concordia Seminary, has submitted the observations that follow this note. Mr. Piepkorn's contention is that on the basis of the Lutheran Symbols the ordination of Mr. Taguchi is fully valid. He raises a question, however, about the propriety of applying the designation "deacon" to the office involved and suggests that it would be more proper to use terminology that reflects the full pastoral character of the office to which Mr. Taguchi has been ordained. Professor Piepkorn's comments are offered here for the sake of the constructive criticisms they offer and for their potential value as a basis for guidelines pertinent to similar situations not only in Japan but also in other parts of the Christian world.

The experiment described in the preceding account is interesting indeed. We betray no lack of sympathy either with the needs of Zion Church, Omiya, or with the seriousness with which the congregation, the American missionary, and the Nihon Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod) approached these needs by saying that all concerned in the ordination of Mr. Taguchi as "deacon" seem to be the victims of semantic confusion.

What is Mr. Taguchi?

We concede that he is a "deacon" in the broad sense, as the Greek *diakonos*, from which we derive our English word "deacon," is used, for instance, in John 2:5 of the "deacons" at the wedding of Cana; or in Matt. 22:13 of the "deacons" whom the king

commanded to cast the wedding guest who had no wedding garment into outer darkness; or in Rom. 15:8 of our Lord as a "deacon" to the circumcised; or in Col. 1:7 of Epaphras as a "deacon" of Christ on St. Paul's behalf; or in Rom. 13:4 of the government official as the "deacon" of God; or in 1 Cor. 3:5 of Apollos and Paul as "deacons" through whom the Corinthians believed. That is to say, Mr. Taguchi is a "deacon" in the same sense in which in New Testament language any person who engages in the service of others is called a "deacon" — that is, basically, a servant.

But it is clear from the release that it was not the intention to make Mr. Taguchi a "deacon" in this very general sense. Manifestly the intention was to give him an official status and position in the church. The New Testament does use the word "deacon" in this sense of the incumbent of a specific official position in the church in three (or possibly four) passages — Phil. 1:1, and 1 Tim. 3:8, 12; to which we may have to add Rom. 16:1.

In Phil. 1:1 Paul and Timothy salute the Christian community in Philippi in three groups: (a) "all the holy ones in Christ Jesus," that is, the members of the community who have no particular office, along with (b) the "bishops" and (c) the "deacons." The last two groups are the holders of public offices in the Christian community. We have an idea of what the "bishops" did. What was the function of the "deacons"? This passage does not tell us, and it would be perilous to try to conjecture what the functions of the "deacons" were from this passage. All that we know from this passage is that the "deacons" were intimately associated with the "bishops" and apparently subordinated to them. 1 Tim. 3:8-13 (which includes the two other clear occurrences of "deacon" as a technical title in the New Testament) describes the qualifications of a deacon, but says little about their task. When we com-

pare the requirements of the "deacon" with the requirements of the "bishop," it is noteworthy that they are largely parallel. Both must have only one wife, both must manage their children and their households well, neither may be addicted to wine, neither may be avaricious. Significantly, the requirement of being an "apt teacher" applies to the "bishop" but not to the "deacon." This would suggest that the "deacons" did *not* engage in the public, responsible preaching of the divine Word. There is no indication that they administered Holy Baptism or consecrated the Sacrament of the Altar. The general conclusion of scholars from the extremely limited evidence of this passage is that the functions of the "deacons" were chiefly in the area of administration and the distribution of the charities of the Christian community. The "deacons" were thus primarily the "bishops'" right-hand men in the administrative aspects of the episcopal office. It is not impossible that the "deacon" even at this early date had an official role in the worship of the community, but we cannot be wholly certain of this. If so, this was a symbol of the fact that he was spending his time in a public office of the church that deserved recognition when the community gathered for worship.

A fourth passage that may apply is Rom. 16:1, where Phoebe is described by the title "deacon," but this passage contributes nothing explicit to our understanding of the functions of the "deacon" in the apostolic church.

By representing Stephen, the first martyr, and others of "the seven" named in Acts 13:1 in the liturgical vestments of medieval deacons, church art has helped to perpetuate the idea that the seven were "deacons." There is in the text no justification for this conclusion.

It may not be amiss to point out in passing that the term "elder," as we have come to use it in the Lutheran Church, has no real connection with the New Testament office

of "presbyter," which translates literally from the Greek *presbyteros* as "elder." The "elder" in the New Testament is more or less identical with the "bishop"; indeed, it may not be too much to say that they are different designations for the same office. Lay "elders" do not occur in the New Testament; the passage that the Reformed tradition has traditionally cited in behalf of its institution of lay "ruling elders," 1 Tim. 5:17, does not warrant the distinction between "elders who rule" and "those who labor in preaching and teaching." There is one office of "presbyter." His task is to rule and preach and teach. The distinction implied by the adverb "especially" is created by the verb "labor" and differentiates those who give themselves unstintingly to their task from those whose work is not marked by similar energy and excellence (see 1 Cor. 3:8; 4:12; 15:10; 2 Cor. 11:23; Gal. 4:11; Phil. 2:16; Col. 1:29; 1 Thess. 2:9; 3:5; 2 Thess. 3:8 for the use of both the verb and the noun). The office of lay "elder" in the Lutheran Church does not derive from any New Testament office but came about through an assimilation of Lutheran practice to the Reformed practice instituted by John Calvin. Thus when the "elders" of the Omiya congregation laid hands on Mr. Taguchi at his "ordination" as "deacon" this was not the laying on of hands by the *presbyterion* described in 1 Tim. 4:14, but a symbolic identification of the person whom they were remembering in their intercessions. (Again, if these lay district "elders" preach, as the release tells us that they do, it is to be hoped that they do not presume to do so on their own authority but under the supervision of a clergyman.)

We return to our consideration of "deacons." With the emergence of the monarchical episcopate at various places in the early church, as, for instance, under Ignatius at Antioch, we begin to read of "bishops," "priests" (or "presbyters"), and "deacons." Until the beginning of the third century, the

bishops and priests were regarded as belonging to the Christian officialdom, or "clergy," but the deacons were thought of as part of the "laity." The priests thus received an "ordination," while the deacons received only an appointment from the bishop, whose "hands" they were in the administration of the material affairs of the Christian community and in the distribution of the church's charities. In the era of the church fathers the deacons gradually made the transition from the ranks of the "laity" to the ranks of the "clergy." It is about this time, too, that the office of deacon was clearly thought of as a lifelong one. The tasks of the deacon continued to be chiefly administrative and eleemosynary, but their consecration to the service of God found liturgical recognition in the roles that they had in the service — they chanted the liturgical lessons (especially the Gospel), received the offerings of the faithful, distributed the Holy Communion (or at least the chalice) that the bishop had consecrated, directed the intercessions of the congregation, and gave the signal for the dismissal of penitents and catechumens from the service. As early as the Council of Nicaea in 325, it became necessary to limit the authority that the deacons were claiming for themselves, and even in the 7th century synods had to remind the deacons that their responsibilities did not confer the authority on them to take precedence over the priests. The diaconate tended to decline in importance in the medieval church of the West, and by the time of the Lutheran Reformation it was merely a transient stage in the sequence of offices through which a person was elevated to the priesthood. In the Lutheran Church the designation "deacon" (*Diakon, diaconus*) was long reserved for ordained clergymen who occupied assistantships in parishes that had a number of clergymen.

It would appear then that Mr. Taguchi is not a "deacon" in any of the traditional senses of the term, except possibly the ex-

traordinary post-Reformation usage of the early Lutheran Church.

Perhaps we can discover his real status from a review of his duties. The release states that he is "to proclaim the Word of God" and "administer the Holy Sacraments" and "to care for the congregation, especially the sick and needy." If the last of these three functions is in the area of material care, it is a function traditionally associated both with the bishop as a part of his responsibility and with the deacon as the executor of the bishop's directives. If it is in the area of spiritual care, it is traditionally part of the responsibility of the pastoral office of the bishop and priest, except insofar as all Christians have a duty to exercise spiritual concern for one another in word and action.

The other two activities, "to proclaim the Word of God" and "administer the Holy Sacraments," probably provide us with the best clue to Mr. Taguchi's real status. This is the language that the Lutheran Church uses to describe the pastoral ministry. When with proper authorization a Lutheran clergyman ordains a candidate for the sacred ministry, the former says to the latter: "I now commit unto thee the holy office of *the Word and the Sacraments*; I ordain and consecrate thee a minister of the Church." (*The Lutheran Agenda*, p. 107)

These duties of Mr. Taguchi reflect the language in which the Lutheran symbolical books, to which the Nihon Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod) is as much committed as its parent body in North America, speak about the clergy. Augsburg Confession, XXVIII, 5 states: "The authority of bishops according to the Gospel is the authority or commandment of God *to preach the Gospel, to remit and retain sins, and to administer the sacraments.*" Paragraph 21 of the same article describes the bishops as "those to whom the *ministry of the Word and sacraments is committed.*" The corresponding article in the Apology states in Paragraph 13:

"A bishop has the authority of order, that is, the *ministry of the Word and of the sacraments*." Article XIII of the Apology states that "priests . . . are called to *teach the Gospel and administer the sacraments* to the people" (p. 9). The Treatise on the Authority and Primacy of the Pope declares in Paragraphs 60 and 61: "The Gospel gives those who rule over the churches the command to *preach the Gospel*, to remit sins, and to *administer the sacraments*. . . . This authority by divine right is common to all those who rule over churches, whether they are called pastors, priests (*presbyteri*), or bishops."

Information has reached this writer that the Rev. Clifford Horn "ordained" Mr. Taguchi by the authority of the official of the Nihon Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod) who corresponds to a District president in the American church body. We do not know what rite the Rev. Mr. Horn used, although we may assume that it was a translation of *The Lutheran Agenda's* Order for the Ordination of a Minister (probably with some adaptation of terminology). The only other conceivable office that might have been used, the Order for the Installation of a Church Council, does not contain any grant of authority to proclaim the Word of God or to administer sacraments.

The *intention* of the rite as described in the release is abundantly clear. Despite the use of the inapplicable designation "deacon" — we do not know what Japanese word was used or what the word may connote — the purpose of the Rev. Mr. Horn in imparting to Mr. Taguchi the authority to preach the Word of God and to administer the sacraments was to ordain him to the sacred ministry. By all indications Mr. Taguchi meets the Biblical requirements for the office of a bishop-presbyter (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). On the basis of the Lutheran symbolical books we must judge that this ordination accomplished the intention of the Rev. Mr.

Horn and of the worshiping congregation that participated in the service. "It is clear," says the Treatise on the Authority and Primacy of the Pope, "that an ordination performed by a pastor in his own church is valid by divine right (*manifestum est ordinationem a pastore in sua ecclesia factam jure divino ratam esse*)" (65). The official German translation is even more explicit: "It is beyond doubt that when the rector of a parish (*Pfarrherr*) ordains a number of qualified persons to the offices of the church, such an ordination is valid and right according to the divine laws (*nach gottlichen Rechten*)."

Mr. Taguchi is therefore properly the Rev. Yoshiro Taguchi, a member of the clergy of the Nihon Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod), possessed of the fullness and permanence of tenure for which Carl Ferdinand Walther contended on behalf of the clergy of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in the 19th century. If there were any irregularities in the Rev. Mr. Taguchi's ordination, it is devoutly to be hoped that these will be promptly corrected by the appropriate authorities so that the basic fact of his ordination to the sacred ministry is not beclouded. At the same time, it is also to be hoped that in the future the misleading and inappropriate term "deacon" will be avoided and that ordinations of this sort will not be undertaken on the authority of a single congregation, if indeed that is what happened in this instance. Since a clergyman is a minister of the whole church by virtue of his ordination, a representative segment of the church beyond a single congregation should be involved. But this is a matter of good order and not of basic validity.

In other ways, the ordination of the Rev. Mr. Taguchi reflects some aspects of a practice of early Lutheranism. Between 1537 and 1560, roughly a quarter of a century, 1,979 persons were ordained to the sacred ministry of the Lutheran Church in St. Mary's

Church, Wittenberg, the parish church (*Stadtkirche*) of that university city. A minority were university graduates. In the case of 1,025 of these clergymen we know the vocations in which they engaged before they entered the sacred ministry; 44 are described in the record merely as "citizens" (*Bürger*) without indication of their vocation and 92 were artisans. (Hans Lietzmann [editor], *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche, herausgegeben im Gedenkjahr der Augsburgischen Konfession 1930*, 5th ed. by Ernst Wolf [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963], p. 501, n. 1)

It is not necessary for a clergyman to have seminary training. The "seminary-trained clergyman" whom Zion Church, Omiya, and the other two congregations propose to call

within the next five years will presumably be more fully trained in formal theology than the Rev. Mr. Taguchi, but after he is ordained he will have no greater spiritual authority. Again, it is not necessary for a clergyman to be engaged full-time in the sacred ministry; in the case of the Rev. Mr. Taguchi, if we read the release correctly, he was engaged on a full-time basis in the service of the church-at-large even before his ordination.

We wish both the Rev. Mr. Taguchi and the congregation in which he is now the assistant pastor (and of which he has become *locum tenens* during Pastor Horn's leave of absence) well.

St. Louis ARTHUR CARL PIEPKORN