

CHARGE to Sally Bailey on the occasion of her Ordination (18June78), by Willis Elliott

SALLY, early this morning I went to the liturgical section of my library and took down a service book of your communion to see what is deemed proper for my part in this joyous and solemn occasion. I got a rude shock. Here is what I read: "Charge to the Newly Ordained Minister: This should be brief, not to exceed three minutes." With my tendency to instant guilt, I concluded that I had been chosen for this part of the worship as a punishment for all the long-winded speeches I have ever made. Accordingly, I charge myself not to exceed three minutes--for any one of the charges I am about to deliver to you:

1. I charge you to pioneer for us all --all Christians and all humans--in a ministry where hitherto no foot has trod, viz. integrating the arts in the pastoral care of the terminally ill, that they may live as fully as they can not only until they die but while dying. I have been your teacher: the time has come for you to be, as you have always been to a lesser extent, mine. God has given you, in addition to this gift of special caring, a gift of writing: may you join these gifts for the blessing of us all and for the glory of God. I give full meaning to the phrase "the glory of God," for you have a firm grasp of its biblical meaning, viz. the relativization of all creatures to the praise of the Creator-Redeemer-Sanctifier. You deeply and truly know that nothing is for its own sake: not art, not therapy, not the ministered unto nor the minister. Your creative ministry can help redeem us from esthetic, psychologic, and therapeutic idolatries. So I say to you, with your ordination verse [M.1.3aTEV], "Get the road ready for the Lord!"

2. I charge you, in the hard times, to rely on God for the renewal of your dream. You are being ordained in the 300th year of the publication of PILGRIM'S PROGRESS, our language's second most influential book. If Jn. Bunyan had not been imprisoned 12 years for

unlicensed preaching, he probably would not have gotten this book written--for the writing of it was a continuation of his offense by another means. Your ministry, licensed in this ordination but unlicensed in the world in the sense of being unprecedented, will time and again confront the realities to which an old English saying wryly alludes, viz. that nothing should ever be done for the first time. I charge you, on such occasions, to remember Bunyan, and take to your knees and your pen! And remember how he begins this greatest allegory in the history of our language: "As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I came upon a place where was a cave, and I lay me down and slept, and as I slept I dreamed a dream." God bless you in your sleeping dream and in your waking dream, which are one.

3. I charge you to continue to balance and fulfil the journey outward with the journey inward, applying yourself in the Spirit to attending both to the word daily spoken within and to the Word long-written, revered, and transmitted in the Church....that you may be endued with courage and strength, adorned with the right use of suffering and a right judgment in all things, and crowned with thankful joy all your days.

4. I charge you, as you become more and more expert in your unique ministry, to resist the Devil's seduction to arrogance and consequent inflexibility. The first time something happens, it's a miracle; every subsequent time it's only natural. God deliver you from becoming natural, and grant you the perpetual grace of daily receiving your life and developing skills as fresh miracle. You are too passionate to handle holy things without feeling: may you be too humble to compare yourself with others, and modest enough to confess, in attitude and action, that--no matter how stupid and contrary others may seem, and the more you know the more than will seem so--you yourself will die ignorant, ignorant before the mystery of life.

5. I charge you to treasure, above all else, the Story to whose ministry you are called, the Good News you are charged to be and speak. And on this gospel meditate joyfully day and night, being inwardly moved by the Holy Spirit, who has put it in your heart to frame and fashion your life in service within and beyond the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. As a faithful steward of the Lord, may you be found caring when he comes.