

# **Should Ordination be considered a Sacrament in the Seventh-day Adventist Church?**

## **An Evaluation in the Light of the Biblical Data**

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### **Introduction**

Ordained ministers are considered a critical part of the life and mission of the church by most Christian denominations, but while there is general agreement about the need for ordination there are widely divergent views about the meaning and theology of ordination. The true extent of division has been highlighted by the ecumenical dialogue of the twentieth century, and reinforced by the ongoing and at times heated discussions about the role of women in the church.<sup>1</sup>

One of the most significant disagreements about the nature of ordination pertains to whether ordination should be regarded as a sacrament. Roman Catholics have been foremost in defending the sacramental nature of ordination whereas Protestants have generally rejected the sacramental nature of ordination. Nevertheless, many Protestants have retained the term sacrament to describe the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Seventh-day Adventists, at least in theory, have aligned themselves with their Protestant counterparts in rejecting the idea of ordination as a sacrament. But unlike many of their Protestant counterparts they have also rejected sacramental terminology in relation to any church practices, preferring instead the title of ordinance to describe baptism and the Lord's Supper, and Foot Washing.<sup>2</sup>

It might seem from this preamble that an article discussing whether ordination within the Seventh-day Adventist church is sacramental is somewhat redundant. But while Adventists profess to reject sacramental theology, lingering traces of sacramentalism can be identified in their church practices. Furthermore, the current debate around women's ordination has revealed

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of divisive issues related to ministry which have arisen during ecumenical dialogue, see World Council of Churches. Commission on Faith and Order, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), 16-30. See especially sections 27-29.

<sup>2</sup> Ministerial Association of Seventh-day Adventists. *Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Manual* (Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association, 1992), 77.

that many of the underlying assumptions in relation to current ordination practices and pastors roles also appear to have a sacramental basis.<sup>3</sup> This disconnect between theory and practice is compounded by confusion about the distinction between a sacrament and an ordinance which results in these terms being used interchangeably, even by theologically trained individuals. It is the purpose of this article therefore to examine the nature of sacraments, and then use this framework to consider biblically whether ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist church should be considered a sacrament.

### Understanding the Term 'Sacrament'

The term sacrament lacks precision due a complex history in which its definition was subject to frequent revision and debate.<sup>4</sup> Translated from the Latin *sacramentum* it is etymologically derived from *sacrāre* denoting the concept of consecrating, or setting apart for a divinity.<sup>5</sup> But prior to being employed by Christian writers, the term was more likely to evoke the idea of a pledge or oath, whether as a deposit in a lawsuit,<sup>6</sup> a military oath of allegiance to the emperor,<sup>7</sup> or an oath of allegiance amongst other groups such as thieves or philosophers.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For example, sacramental theology underlies practices such as the necessity for a pastor must be in the font when a non-ordained individual baptizes a candidate, the burning of left over bread from the Lord's Supper, and the limitation on those involved directly in the ordination services of new pastors. It is also associated with a perceived difference in status and prerogatives between pastor and clergy in many parts of the world church. Other denominations have also noticed the tendency for a disconnect between practice and theory in relation to ordination. John E Toews in reflecting on this problem gets to the heart of the matter when he suggests that, "While many Protestant churches, including the Mennonite churches, have tried to de-sacramentalize ordination, the long-time underlying assumption and reality is sacramental." John E Toews, "Rethinking the Meaning of Ordination: Toward a Biblical Theology of Leadership Affirmation," *Conrad Grebel Review* 22, no 1 (Winter 2004): 5.

<sup>4</sup> For a helpful detailed history of the word *sacramentum* see Daniel Van Slyke, "The Changing Meanings of *sacramentum*: Historical Sketches." *Antiphon* 11, no 3 (2007):245-279.

<sup>5</sup> T. F. Hoad, ed., "Sacrament," *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780192830982.001.0001/acref-9780192830982-e-13129> (accessed April 10, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Marcus Terentius Varro. *On the Latin Language* Vol 1, Books V-VII, Loeb Classical Library. Trans Roland G Kent, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1938). 166-169. Varro (127-116 BC) in his history of the Latin language provides a mixed religious and juridical context for the term, describing *sacramentum* as a sacred deposit paid to the pontifex by opposing parties in a lawsuit. The deposit verified that the parties were in earnest about their claim to truth. The individual who won the case got their deposit back while the losing party forfeited their deposit, which was added to the temple coffers.

<sup>7</sup> G. Bornkamm, "Musterion," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967): 4:827. *Sacramentum* was best known as oath of allegiance that Roman soldiers were required to swear to the emperor on induction into his army. The first written record of the military association of the term *sacramentum* is attributed to Julius Caesar in the first century BC.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Van Slyke. "The Changing Meanings of *sacramentum*: Historical Sketches," *Antiphon* 11, no 3 (2007):247.

The earliest Christian writer to employ the term *sacramentum* is thought to be Tertullian (c.150-c.220). Tertullian linked the idea of sacrament to commitment and allegiance to the church. Consequently, he used the term to label objects and rites that are sacred or consecrated such as the rite of baptism. However, Tertullian also expanded the classical meaning of *sacramentum* by using it to identify many of rites of the Old Testament that prepared for the coming of Christ.<sup>9</sup> Augustine built on this foundation suggesting that sacraments were symbols or visible signs of divine things which in some sense resemble that which they represent.<sup>10</sup> As symbols, Augustine understood that they are an outward or visible reminder of the reality of Christ's work of redemption, containing both an internal seal and God's grace.<sup>11</sup>

The Middle Ages saw ongoing revisions of the understanding of the nature and function of the sacraments based on Augustine's framework.<sup>12</sup> These revisions in turn provided the basis for the description of sacraments in the canons of the Council of Trent (1547) which continue to be the key to the Catholic views of sacraments today. The canons identified a total of seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, confession, marriage, ordination and anointing of the sick. They affirmed that sacraments were signs or symbols and insisted that all sacraments must be instituted by Christ.<sup>13</sup> The council further affirmed that sacraments are necessary for salvation and in particular for the grace of justification.<sup>14</sup> Hence in some sense the sacraments became remedies against sin. Reacting to the accusations of the Protestant reformers, the council also made clear that the sacraments contained grace, which the council declared was imparted *ex opere operato*.<sup>15</sup> Literally meaning "by the work performed" this property in essence meant that

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<sup>9</sup> Tertullian *On Baptism* 8; *Against Marion* 3.16, 4.40. A similar range of meanings appear in the works of other prominent Anti Nicean writers most notably Cyprian of Carthage and Lactantius. Although Tertullian was the first Christian writer to use the term *sacramentum*, the first written connection between Christians and *sacramentum* occurred somewhat earlier when Roman magistrate Pliny the Younger described Christians as assembling weekly to "recite a hymn antiphonally to Christ, as to a god and bind themselves by an oath (*sacramento*), not for the commission of any crime but to abstain from theft, robbery, adultery and breach of faith, and not to deny a deposit when it was claimed." C. Plini, *Epistularum libri decem* X.96 In Henry Bettensen & Chris Maunder, eds. *Documents of the Christian Church*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> Augustine, *Letter* 138.1.7; Augustine *De Civi Dei* 10.5; Augustine *Reply to Faustus* 19.11.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Key scholastics in the medieval revision of the ideas of sacraments included Hugo of St Victor (d. 1141), Peter Lombard (c1100-c1164), and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). See for instance Hugo of St Victor, *On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith*, IX,2; Peter Lombard, *Sentences* IV.i.4; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* III. 60-90. The final pronouncements of Trent however are largely based on the views of Peter Lombard.

<sup>13</sup> Council of Trent, Session VII, Canon I and Canon VI. Initiation by Christ was considered to provide evidence that the elements were intended to symbolize the reality attributed to them.

<sup>14</sup> Council of Trent, Session VII, Canon IV.

<sup>15</sup> Council of Trent, Session VII, Canon VI-VIII.

the right words from the priest accompanied by the right elements or symbolic actions ensured that the sacraments would infallibly convey grace to the recipient regardless of the state and merits of the minister or recipient.<sup>16</sup> The canons are emphatic that this grace is only obtained through partaking of the sacraments and hence could not be obtained by faith alone. Finally, the canons of Trent note that the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and ordination confer an indelible mark on the soul of the participant.<sup>17</sup>

The Protestant reformers challenged several aspects of the scholastic understanding of sacraments in particular the idea that grace was imparted *opere operato*. Consequently Luther highlights the role of faith in the efficacy of the sacraments. However, he still considered sacraments were physical signs instituted by Christ which had power to forgive sins.<sup>18</sup> At the other extreme, Zwingli suggested that sacraments were simply signs instituted by Christ by which a participant demonstrated their commitment and loyalty to the church.<sup>19</sup> He rejected any notion that sacraments bestowed grace or forgiveness of sins, returning instead to the original idea of sacraments as oaths or pledges.<sup>20</sup>

The disagreement between the reformers has contributed to a lack of unanimity amongst Protestants in regard to the nature, function and even number of sacraments. Most Protestants however will agree that there are two critical differences between Protestant and Roman Catholic views of the sacraments. The first major difference relates to how sacraments work. While Catholics insist that they work *ex opere operato*, that is, grace is infallibly bestowed if the sacraments are validly administered; Protestants reject this mechanical approach insisting that the faith of the participant is essential for the efficacy of the sacraments. The second major difference lies in the relationship of the sacraments to salvation. Catholics insist that sacraments are essential for salvation, while Protestants reject this claim. Instead, Protestants suggest that

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<sup>16</sup> This invokes a rather mechanical understanding of the sacraments, which Catholics attempted to remedy in Vatican II. While retaining the idea of *ex opere operato*, Vatican II also emphasized the preaching of the word in conjunction with the sacraments as a means to encounter Christ and open the heart to the grace which is to be received. See *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 4 Dec 1963.

<sup>17</sup> Council of Trent, Session VII. Canon IX.

<sup>18</sup> Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520).

<sup>19</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. 3rd ed., (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 513, 519-521. See for instance Huldrych Zwingli, *On the Lord's Supper*, Library of Christian Classics, 24:188-191

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

participation in the sacraments is helpful for the growth and development of faith. The sacraments are not considered essential in themselves for salvation.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Difference between Sacraments and Ordinances**

In comparison with the term sacrament, the word ordinance has little variation in meaning. Used primarily to denote laws or regulations in ecclesiastical history, the term appears to have been first applied to the Lord's Supper and Baptism by the Anabaptists who rejected both infant baptism and the concept of sacrament as defined by the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>22</sup> An ordinance it must only fulfil two simple requirements: it must have been initiated by Christ, and it must be an action that Christians are asked to perform as evidenced by the teaching of Christ or the apostles.<sup>23</sup> By employing a term used most commonly for laws, the radical reformers acknowledged the Biblical command to perform these rites, while rejecting the actual transfer of grace as a consequence of performing them.

Thus, although often used interchangeably, the term ordinance should not be considered a synonym of the term sacrament. While it is true that some Protestant evangelicals do hold a view of sacraments that is Zwinglian in nature, and therefore reject the transfer of grace, the continuing use of the word sacrament implies to their hearers that these rituals do convey grace in themselves. On the other hand, when the term ordinance is used, there is no baggage to mar its meaning. It simply refers to a symbolic ritual that testifies to our faith in Jesus, and recognizes grace which has already been bestowed upon the individual.

### **Ordination as a Sacrament**

The identification of ordination as a sacrament that confers grace upon the recipient is rooted in the sacerdotal ecclesiology which emerged in the third century. Sacerdotalism elevated the role of both the church and the clergy, and applied the Old Testament idea of priesthood to bishops. Consequently, it was understood that in presiding at the Eucharist, bishops actually offered a real

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<sup>21</sup> See for instance Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 618-619. Berkhof notes that Protestants recognize that grace is not exclusively bound to sacraments, and that faith is the key factor identified in scripture as necessary for salvation.

<sup>22</sup> It is uncertain exactly when the term ordinance arose in relation to Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The concept appears to be well understood prior to its appearance in the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith but is not present in the Seven Articles of Schleithem signed by Swiss Anabaptist Pastors in 1527.

<sup>23</sup> Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology*, (Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907), 930.

sacrifice and thus in some special sense represented Christ.<sup>24</sup> In order to fulfil this priestly role it was considered that the bishop needed special grace. Such grace it was suggested could be received by a sacramental understanding of ordination.

The sacramental understanding of ordination is also associated with the idea of an indelible mark being placed upon the recipient. The indelible mark is considered one of spiritual character in which in the individual becomes marked as a permanent member of the clergy.<sup>25</sup> Thus a sacramental understanding of ordination results in the idea that clergy are considered to have some special status that separates them from those who are not ordained.<sup>26</sup> The nature of this status change while not clearly defined appears to involve a change in the individual's relationship with Christ so that the ordinand becomes "configured to Christ in such a way that they are able to act in the person of Christ the head."<sup>27</sup> This then enables them to act in each of the priestly, prophetic and kingly roles of Christ.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, the sacramental view maintains that the ordained individual obtains the ability to mediate divine grace to those without their ordained status, that is, to the laity.<sup>29</sup>

Based on the preceding sections we can conclude that four major conditions appear to be necessary for ordination to be considered a sacrament.<sup>30</sup> First, the rite of ordination must have obvious symbolism, since sacraments are symbols of divine things, or visible symbols of invisible grace. Second, the rite of ordination must convey grace to the ordinand. Third, ordination needs to be instituted by Christ. Fourth, ordination should convey an indelible mark

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<sup>24</sup> Cyprian was the first to apply the idea of the priesthood to ministers of the Christian Church. See Cyprian, *Letter 67.4*; Cyprian, *Letter 63.14*.

<sup>25</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* Complete and updated edition with modifications from the Editio Typica, (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 1582, 1583. The mark is irrevocable. Therefore, while ordained individuals can be forbidden from functioning as clergy, being disciplined in this way is not considered to remove the vocation conveyed by ordination. The indelible spiritual character remains. Consequently they can never become a layperson again.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 1551. Pannenburg in his *Systematic Theology* argues that Vatican II did away with this spiritual distinction, but this is does not appear to be the case based on a careful reading of the Vatican II documents and current catechism.

<sup>27</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 28.

<sup>28</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1581; *Presbyterorum ordinis*, 5, 6, 7. Sharing in Christ's priesthood is considered to enable the ordained to offer the mass and transform the communion elements into the actual body and blood of Christ; while sharing in Christ prophetic role provides the basis for the preaching and teaching roles, and sharing in Christ's kingly role serves to endorse their ability to exercise church governance.

<sup>29</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1548-50.

<sup>30</sup> I exclude the ideas of necessity for salvation, and working *ex opere operato* since these are rejected by Protestant definitions of sacraments.

which results in a distinction between ordained clergy and laity and allows the clergy alone to represent Christ. Biblical evidence for these conditions will be sought in the following sections in order to determine if ordination should be considered a sacrament within the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

### **Is Ordination Symbolic?**

The first criterion for ordination to be a sacrament requires that the rite of ordination be symbolic. Since ordination as we know it did not arise before the third century, and therefore is not directly addressed in Scripture, I propose to focus on the symbolism associated with the idea of laying on of hands in conjunction with the setting apart for a task since laying on of hands is so central to our current concepts of ordination, that many equate the two ideas.<sup>31</sup>

The hands are frequently mentioned in scripture with more than two thirds of these uses being figurative or metaphoric.<sup>32</sup> Like many of their Ancient Near Eastern neighbours, Israel understood certain attributes to be associated with body parts.<sup>33</sup> Thus in the biblical context references to hands evoked ideas of power, strength, authority, and grace. These images are further intensified in passages which refer specifically to the right hand which is often used to indicate favour or prominence.<sup>34</sup>

The specific act of 'laying of hands' upon a person or object can be found in both the Old and New Testaments and is associated with a variety of functions, each of which draws to some extent upon the notion of power and authority associated with the term hand.<sup>35</sup>

#### *1. Laying on of Hands for Reasons Other than Commissioning for a Task*

Laying on of hands serves five main purposes in Scripture other than commissioning for a task: blessing, healing, arrest, in cultic sacrifice, and for invoking the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the

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<sup>31</sup> V. Norskov Olsen. *Myth and Truth: Church, Priesthood and Ordination*. (Riverside, CA: Loma Linda University, 1990), 125.

<sup>32</sup> Leland Ryken, Jim Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman, eds., "Hand," *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 360-2.

<sup>33</sup> Keith Mattingly, "Laying on of Hands in Ordination: A Biblical Study," in *Women in Ministry* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998), 60.

<sup>34</sup> Leland Ryken et al, 360. Such metaphorical use is also common in other Ancient Near Eastern cultures where body parts were commonly used to portray various attributes. Thus we find God described as supporting, protecting and saving Israel with his right hand. See for example Ps 18: 35, Ps 20:6

<sup>35</sup> More than one form of phrase is used to indicate laying on of hands in the Old Testament. The verbs *śîm* (put), *shîth* (place) are used with the idea of blessing, whereas cultic associations use the verb *sāmek* (laid or leaned upon).

majority of instances of laying on of hands in Scripture have nothing to do with setting apart for a task, or installation to office. The following section discusses three of these purposes which provide background for understanding the possible symbolism associated with the laying on of hands in commissioning for a task. The ideas of arrest and healing are not discussed because they appear to have little relevance for this paper.

Blessing of the first born appears to have been a ubiquitous practice in the era of the patriarchs, but it is not until Jacob's blessing of Joseph's two sons Manasseh and Ephraim that we have evidence that laying on of hands was a part of this ritual of blessing (Gen 48:19). The association of laying on of hands and blessing also appears in the New Testament where Jesus is reported to have laid hands upon children in an act of blessing when parents brought their children to Him (Matt 19:15). Blessing along with healing accounts for the majority of instances of where the laying on of hands occurs in the New Testament.

By comparison, the great majority of the Old Testament uses of laying on of hands, relate to a very different function. They are associated with the cultic practice of sacrifice. Each person who brought an animal from their flock as an offering was required to place one hand upon the animal to be sacrificed before it was slaughtered.<sup>36</sup> Scholars however, are divided in their opinions about the significance of this gesture.<sup>37</sup> Some attempt to interpret this act as an actual transference of the person's sin to the animal in order to align the symbolism of the OT sacrifices with its NT fulfilment in Christ.<sup>38</sup> But, many scholars lean toward the suggestion that laying a hand on the animal simply represented the personal acknowledgement of the one bringing the offering that the sacrifice was theirs, and that the benefits from it belonged to them. In this sense, the worshipper acknowledged they were transferring the ownership of the offering to God.<sup>39</sup> This

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<sup>36</sup> The sacrifices for which this act was required include the burnt offering (Lev 1:4, Lev 8:18), the fellowship offering (Lev 3:2, 8, 12, 13), and the purification offering (Lev 4:4, 15, 24, 29, 33; Lev 8:14). However, it was only required for the large flock animals and not the smaller bird, or grain offerings which could be carried by the worshipper.

<sup>37</sup> See for instance D. P Wright, "The Gesture of Hand Placement in the Hebrew Bible and in Hittite Literature." *JAOS* 106 (1986):433-46.

<sup>38</sup> David P. Wright, "Hands, Laying on of (Old Testament)," in David Noel Freedman, Gary A Herion, David F, Gaf et al, eds, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol 3 ( New York: Doubleday, 1992), 47-48. Adventist OT scholar Roy Gane argues clearly that "it is not necessary to prove that hand-leaning by *itself* accomplishes transfer of sin to Christ so that he can bear its penalty as the substitute for the sinner" since Christ is both Priest and Victim. Roy Gane. *Leviticus, Numbers*, The NIV Application Commentary, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zonderzan, 2004), 67.

<sup>39</sup> Gane, 67. Gane likens this to the modern analogy of signing over a car or house title.



later view best explains the range of offerings that required the ritual of placing hands upon the animals, while at the same time providing an explanation for the omission of placing hands upon smaller sacrifices since such sacrifices fit into the hand and could thus be carried by the individual. Further identification that the offering belongs to the individual is therefore totally unnecessary.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, it should be noted that in the day of Atonement ritual laying of hands upon the scapegoat clearly symbolized a transfer of sin to the animal (Lev 16:20-22).<sup>41</sup>

In the New Testament we also find that laying on of hands was as an accompaniment to prayer for the infilling of the Holy Spirit. While the Holy Spirit was sometimes poured out spontaneously upon believers, this was not always the case. There are two examples where the apostles discovered new believers who had not received the Holy Spirit. Scripture records that the apostles prayed and placed their hands upon them with the result that they were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-24, Acts 19:1-7).<sup>42</sup> Since the jealous Simon made the connection between the action of laying on of hands, and the reception of the Holy Spirit, we can surmise that the infilling of the Spirit occurred rapidly after this ritual.

## *2. Laying on of Hands to Commission for a Task or Role*

We now turn to an examination of the narratives which discuss commissioning for specific task. These will be reviewed in the context of the other functions of laying on of hands, in order to provide a basis for assessing whether or not ordination has inherent symbolism. Four biblical narratives specifically include laying on of hands as part of commissioning.<sup>43</sup> The earliest story is that of the consecration of the Levites (Num 8) who were involved in transporting the sanctuary and its furnishings during Israel's wilderness wanderings, and also in assisting with aspects of tabernacle and temple worship. After ritual purification, members of the Israelite community were called to lay their hands upon the Levites (Num 8:9-10) before the Levites in turn laid hands upon animals which were offered as sacrifices. The context notes that the Levites, were to

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<sup>40</sup> Wright, 47-48.

<sup>41</sup> Some have tried to use this difference to argue that the number of hands involved in the ritual of laying on of hands alters the meaning of the term. Keith Mattingly has argued convincingly against this. See Keith Mattingly, 61.

<sup>42</sup> Early church documents reveal that a ritual of laying on of hands for the infilling of the Spirit began to accompany baptism itself. Whether this twofold ritual occurred during the New Testament era is unclear from the limited references we have to baptism in the New Testament.

<sup>43</sup> I do not include Timothy in this list because of the ambiguity surrounding the context of the hands laid upon Timothy as will be discussed in the following section of this paper.

take the place of the firstborn sons of Israel in serving God in the sanctuary. Thus commentators are therefore generally in agreement that the symbolic nature of the laying on of hands here is one of identification and representation.<sup>44</sup> The Levites are identified as those who will serve God as representatives of the people, and are empowered to act on their behalf. Thus, laying on of hands in this context appears to have a similar function to the laying on of hands upon sacrificial offerings.

The second narrative that discusses the laying on of hands in association with appointment to a task, is that of Moses appointing Joshua as his successor (Num 27:18-23; Deut 31).<sup>45</sup> Joshua had been mentored by Moses, in his role as Moses' aide (Num 11:28) and likely had a close relationship with Moses. He is further identified as full of the Spirit. But despite his experience, character, and relationship with Moses, Moses turned to God when considering a successor. Joshua's appointment was thus God's choice (Num 27:18). Moses then followed God's request to commission and give some degree of authority to Joshua by laying hands upon him in the presence of both the High Priest and the entire assembly of Israel (Num 27: 19-20). In a similar manner to the previous narrative, this ceremony publically acknowledged and identified Joshua as God's choice as Moses successor, while at the same time ensuring a smooth transition of leadership as the two worked together prior to Moses death. Joshua thus had power to act on behalf of both God and the nation of Israel. Consequently the Israelites were willing to acknowledge Joshua's leadership and listen to him.

The New Testament also provides two instances where laying on of hands is clearly associated with commissioning for a task. The first of these is the appointment of the seven in Acts 6. The men were chosen to fulfil a particular need in the church, so that the disciples were not diverted from preaching. The criteria for appointment were evidence of wisdom, and the presence of the Spirit in their lives. Once chosen, they were presented to the apostles, after which prayer was offered, and hands laid upon them. The Greek construction does not allow us to know for sure who laid hands upon the seven. Either the congregation laid hands upon them or the apostles

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<sup>44</sup> See for instance Wright, 47; Gane, 66; David E. Aune, "Laying on of Hands," in Walter A Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel. *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1317.

<sup>45</sup> Joshua's commissioning is unusual in the context of the Old Testament. Priests, prophets, and kings and other leader were anointed with oil rather than having hands laid upon them. For an extended discussion of Joshua's commission, see Keith Mattingly, "The Laying on of Hands on Joshua: An Exegetical Study of Numbers 27:12-23 and Deuteronomy 34:9" (PhD, Dissertation, Andrews University, 1997).

laid hands upon them.<sup>46</sup> The context suggests that the laying on of hands publically set them apart for a task, and symbolized the blessing of both God and the church in their task.

The setting apart of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:1-3) occurred after Paul and Barnabas had been teaching in the church at Antioch for some time. The Holy Spirit indicated that they were to be set aside for a work he had called them to. This was accomplished with prayer, fasting and laying on of hands by the congregation. After which they started on a missionary trip guided by the Holy Spirit. In this instance the hands laid upon the apostles appear to be an identification of God's calling and blessing of them, along with the identification and blessing of the church for their mission.

### *3. Conclusions about Symbolism and Ordination*

The brief survey of these narratives, suggests that laying on of hands in commissioning for a task is symbolic, and draws from the symbolism of its use in other contexts. In each of these narratives the individual or individuals have either been divinely identified as being called to a particular task, or as full of the Holy Spirit. Laying on of hands then first of all recognizes and symbolically affirms God's call and God's presence in the life of the individual, and consequently affirms God's blessing and continuing activity in the church.

At the same time, the ritual allows the congregation to identify the one on whom hands are laid as representing them in their specific ministry tasks, and in doing so the congregation implicitly convey their support of the individual. The laying on of hands by the congregation or representatives of it, reminds us that the church is defined not by its hierarchy, but by its members in totality. It is they that delegate authority to the ordinand and not other members of the hierarchy. For this reason, the congregation was actively involved in the laying on of hands in three of these narratives.

Third, the laying on of hands provides a public recognition that the individual is now authorized to undertake certain tasks. So we find that in the case of Joshua, this meant the people obeyed him. Such public acknowledgment should prevent any questions about whether or not the individual should be performing these tasks.

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<sup>46</sup>The ambiguity of the Greek is not obvious in the New International Version, but is more evident in other English translations.

Fourth, the combination of laying on of hands, with prayer, evokes the dual ideas of blessing and infilling by the Holy Spirit. Since those being commissioned are already noted to be filled with the Holy Spirit prior to the laying on of hands, no infilling is required by the ritual, but there is the sense in which the ritual symbolizes the Spirit's equipping and blessing for the task to which the individual is being commissioned.

Together these findings provide strong evidence that ordination is a sign and symbol of God's action in his church. We conclude then, that ordination meets the first criteria required for it to be a sacrament.

### **Does ordination confer grace upon the recipient?**

The second major condition for ordination to be a sacrament is that it confers grace. The primary text used to justify the transfer of grace in ordination is that of 1 Timothy 4:14 which reads "Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed upon you through [*dia*] prophetic utterance with [*meta*] the laying on of hands by the presbytery." (NAS) The argument is generally bolstered by citing it in conjunction with 1 Tim 1:18 and 2 Tim 1:6. At first glance it can be seen that there is a threefold association of spiritual gift, prophecy and laying on of hands in this passage, but several points need to be clarified before assuming that this supports the transmission of a special grace at ordination. First, we must determine if the laying on of hands referred to here is equivalent to ordination or some sort of installation to office. Second, we must determine the relationship between the gift given and the laying on of hands. Third, we must decide if the gift is equivalent to the special grace referred to in the sacramental view of ordination, and finally, we must examine the historical context to determine if the example of Timothy should be considered normative when discussing ordination.

#### *1. The Context of Hands Being Laid upon Timothy*

Most commentators assume that the passages in Timothy refer to Timothy's ordination or at the very least his installation into church office.<sup>47</sup> However, we should not be too hasty in making this assumption. Ordination as we know it did not emerge in the early church until more two

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<sup>47</sup> For example William D. Mounce. *Pastoral Epistles*. Word Biblical Commentary Vol 46, (Dallas TX: Word, 2000); Thomas D. Lea, and Hayne P. Griffin. *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*. The New American Commentary Vol 34, (Nashville TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992); Knute Larson, *I & II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Titus, Philemon*. Holman New Testament Commentary Vol 9. (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000); Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, Hermeneia-- a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972).

centuries after this passage was written.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, to read ordination into this passage is an anachronism. Commissioning for a task is still a valid possibility, but we have already noted that the meaning of the phrase ‘laying on of hands’ in the New Testament is not restricted to being set apart for a specific task. The phrase is also used to refer to the actions of blessing or healing, and to describe the ritual that occurred after baptism for the reception of the Holy Spirit.

Occasionally the phrase seems to combine two ideas such as in Acts 9:17 where both healing and the reception of the Holy Spirit occur as the result of Ananias laying hands upon Saul.

To decipher which of these meanings is intended in Timothy we need to look for contextual clues. The passages themselves call Timothy to remember the past event of the laying on of hands. More specifically, he is urged to recall the prophecies made about him, and advised not to neglect the gift that was associated with the prophecy and laying on of hands. Paul's purpose seems to be an affirmation that Timothy has the gifts to accomplish what God would have him do in the church. The context of the laying on of hands however is ambiguous. Specifically, there is no indication in the passages that the laying of hands was associated with installation to office. Assumptions that these passages do refer to some sort of installation appear to do so based upon the facts that Timothy is in a leadership position when Paul writes to him; that Timothy is later given advice about laying on of hands; and, that a spiritual gift is given in association with the laying on of hands. But this combination of facts does not clinch the argument in favour of installation to office.

Just because someone is in a leadership position does not mean that we must understand any laying on of hands to be related to their installation to office. For example, the apostle Paul himself is described as having hands laid upon him on two separate occasions. First, by Ananias at the beginning of his Christian journey for healing and the reception of the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17) and later, when set aside for a specific task by the church in Antioch (Acts 13:2-3). Any reference to laying on of hands for Paul could thus invoke thoughts of either episode.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> The first explicit connection of laying on of hands for installation to a bishop's role is in the writings of Hippolytus in the third century where there is a discussion the order of service for ordination of the bishops, presbyter and deacons. See Hippolytus *Tradition of the Apostles* Part I.

<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the New Testament discusses the appointment of individuals to leadership tasks where nothing is said about laying on of hands. For instance, Titus is instructed to appoint elders in every town but is not instructed to lay hands upon them (Titus 1:5).

Consequently, we must not simply assume that any discussion of laying hands upon a leader must be an installation to office.

The admonition to Timothy regarding laying hands upon others in 1 Tim 5:22, confirms Timothy's leadership role, but does it really say anything about the nature of Timothy's own laying on of hands? Kelly has argued affirmatively, noting that the admonition is not understandable unless there was "special efficacy and significance in earlier setting apart of elders and deacons."<sup>50</sup> But his conclusion is dependent upon the assumption that 1 Tim 5:22 is describing an installation to office, an assumption which is highly disputed. Some scholars believe 1 Tim 5:22 is discussing the reinstatement of repentant sinners to church membership, and thus the warning is about readmitting sinners to membership before they have manifest sufficient evidence of repentance.<sup>51</sup> Most recently it has been suggested that 1 Tim 5:22 is a warning against premature accusation of sin.<sup>52</sup> The ambiguity of this text means that it cannot be used confidently to bolster support for reading 1 Tim 4:14 as installation to office.

Finally, the fact that a spiritual gift is imparted is likewise is an inadequate defence for the conclusion that the laying on of hands referred to in Timothy must be related to installation to office. Since all members of the church including those not taking on any major leadership role are equipped with spiritual gifts to build up the church, it would be wrong to restrict the timing of the reception of spiritual gifts to an installation of office. We have already noted that the New Testament describes laying on of hands at baptism in associated with the gift of the Holy Spirit after baptism. Prophecies and the reception of some sort of spiritual gift could easily occur in this situation, since both depend directly upon the Holy Spirit which is being received. Consequently, Paul could be telling Timothy who is now in a leadership position to remember

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<sup>50</sup> J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles: I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus*, Black's New Testament Commentaries (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1963), 107.

<sup>51</sup> Dibelius & Conzelmann. *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 80. In support of this suggestion is the immediate context which talks about not sharing in the sins of others. However, the challenge of mass readmissions of repentant sinners does not appear to be a significant problem for the church before the second and third centuries, and the first explicit connection between laying on of hands and readmission of sinners does not occur until the third century, making this suggestion appear to be somewhat anachronistic. Tertullian uses the verse to argue against quick forgiveness of those caught in adultery. Pud XVIII, 9. Cyprian as Bishop of Carthage appealed to this verse when considering readmitting repentant heretics. See Cyprian, Letter XV, 1. LXXXI, 2.

<sup>52</sup> Brian P. Irwin, "The Laying on of Hands in I Tim 5:22: A New Proposal." *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 18, no 1 (January 1 2008).

the prophecies made about him when he received the Holy Spirit, and to use the gift that he was given or prophesied at that time.

Thus we must conclude that not only is the context of the laying on of hands described in Timothy ambiguous, but so too are the grounds usually cited for interpreting this passage as relating to installation for office. This being the case, we must accept that while 1 Timothy 4:14 could refer to being set aside for some sort of leadership position, it could just as easily be interpreted as an event occurring for reception of the Holy Spirit at the time of initiation into the faith.<sup>53</sup>

## 2. *The Relationship Between Laying on of Hands and the Gift*

In order to determine the relationship between the laying on of hands and the gift that Timothy has been given, I will focus on the meanings of the prepositions employed in 1 Timothy 4:14 and 2 Timothy 1:6. In the first passage, the spiritual gift is described as being given through [*dia*] prophecy, which was merely accompanied by [*meta*] the laying on of hands. But in 2 Tim 1:6, Timothy is reminded to use the gift "which is in you through [*dia*] the laying on of my hands."<sup>54</sup> This appears to put a different spin on the relationship. *Dia* used with the genitive of person generally denotes agency, instrumentality or causation.<sup>55</sup> While *dia* can mean attendant circumstances as Ferguson argues, Warkentin observes that this is rare with the genitive, and in the New Testament this meaning only occurs when *dia* is used with the genitive of thing, not the genitive of person.<sup>56</sup> Thus while the *meta* in the first passage indicates that the laying on of hands was merely an attendant circumstance of the bestowal of the gift, the second passage suggests a more direct connection between the gift and the laying on of hands.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, if we

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<sup>53</sup> John E. Toews, "Rethinking the Meaning of Ordination: Toward a Biblical Theology of Leadership Affirmation," *Conrad Grebel Review* 22, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 15. Toews is one of few theologians willing to concede this ambiguity. His critics do not present any evidence to contradict this position, but rather express concern that this position might lead to the total abolishment of ordination.

<sup>54</sup> Because 1 Tim 4:14 focuses on the group of Presbyters laying hands upon Timothy, we should not draw the conclusion from 2 Tim 1:6 that Paul's apostolic authority was required for laying on of hands.

<sup>55</sup> William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 223-26.

<sup>56</sup> Everett Ferguson, "Ordination in the Ancient Church, IV," *Restoration Quarterly* 5(1961):141. Marjorie Warkentin, *Ordination: A Biblical-Historical View* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 174.

<sup>57</sup> The use of these two texts together introduces another exegetical issue in addition to the difference between prepositions. 1 Tim 4:14 indicates that the elders laid hands on Timothy, while 2 Tim 1:6 indicates that Paul was the one who laid hands on Timothy. There have been several proposed solutions to this discrepancy. The first suggests that these represent two separate occasions in the life of Timothy. More likely explanations are that

understand the two texts to be describing the same event, we must allow for the possibility that the gift was given to Timothy as a result of the laying on of hands.<sup>58</sup>

### 3. *The Gift and Grace*

In light of the possibility that a gift was given by the laying on of hands, Warkentin argues that we must therefore "accept the reality of the transference of 'grace' through the laying on of hands," while Dibelius and Conzelmann take it one step further arguing that this indicates that sacramental "grace of the office" is transferred.<sup>59</sup> But the text does not mention any bestowal of office, nor does it emphasize any sort of official status as the result of laying on of hands.

At issue is not only the context of the laying on of hands, but also the nature of the gift which Timothy receives. There are three main explanations of the gift amongst New Testament scholars. The first suggests as do Dibelius and Conzelmann that sacramental grace of office is transferred.<sup>60</sup> A second suggestion is that the gift should be considered a spiritual gift which equips Timothy for service, but which is not sacramental in nature.<sup>61</sup> Proponents of this view may embrace the conferral of grace but are careful to exclude the idea that this grace places an indelible mark on the character of the minister as described by the Catholic and Orthodox traditions. By contrast, the third approach seeks to distance itself from any conferral of grace by minimizing any suggestion of a special gift, focusing instead on the ideas of blessing and prayer that is associated with the laying on of hands.<sup>62</sup> While the later position is appealing because it avoids ideas which might be mistakenly considered to support a sacramental approach, it appears

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both texts describe the same event in which Paul participated as one of the elders, or that Paul presided at a ceremony in which the elders were involved.

<sup>58</sup> This is in contrast to the SDABC which explicitly denies any power or gift giving at the laying of hands upon Timothy, noting that the event merely recognized gifts and abilities Timothy already possessed. See Francis D. Nicole ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* Vol 7 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1980), 307. While this is an appealing response which accords with Adventist rejection of sacramentalism, this response fails to engage with the subtleties of the texts themselves. Ellen White does not comment specifically on this passage although she does note that no gift was transferred to Paul and Barnabas at their laying on of hands. See Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 162.

<sup>59</sup> Warkentin 175-6; Dibelius and Conzelmann, 70.

<sup>60</sup> Dibelius and Conzelmann 70

<sup>61</sup> Eduard Lohse, "Choir," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and G. Fredrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-67) 9:433-434.

<sup>62</sup> Everett Ferguson, "Laying on of Hands: Its Significance in Ordination." *Journal of Theological Studies* 26 (April 1975): 1-12. Grace is not conferred in this approach, but rather, the prayer spells out "the grace which God is asked to bestow."



to ignore important textual indicators that as we have seen allow the possibility that *charismata* or *charisma* are temporally related to hands being laid upon Timothy.

The words *charismata* and *charisma* which are translated as gift in these passages, are derived from the Greek *charis* meaning grace. Grace is therefore integral to the gift, which is thus a favour one receives without any merit of his own.<sup>63</sup> Spiritual gifts could thus be correctly conceived as an expression of God's grace. Therefore, if we conclude that it was at least possible that Timothy received a spiritual gift as a result of the having hands laid upon him, we must also concede that accepting this possibility means that Timothy received grace due to the laying on of hands. But is this grace a special grace, or a grace of office that imparts an indelible mark upon him as a sacramental view requires?

When we examine the context of 1 Tim 4:14, we note Paul advised Timothy to devote himself to "public reading of Scripture, preaching and teaching." (v13) This is followed immediately by the admonition "do not neglect your gift. . . ." (v 14) and subsequently by a call to diligence and wholehearted application to these matters (v 15). The context thus suggests that the gift that Paul is referring to may be one of teaching or preaching, or indeed both of these. The context of 2 Tim 1:6 suggests the gift is either the Holy Spirit, or some sort of gift of speech. The gifts therefore are unquestionably ones that equip Timothy for his leadership role. At no point however, is there any evidence that the gift sets him apart from other Christians who display different spiritual gifts, or that the gift gives him a superior status. Thus, while Timothy received grace in the form of a gift at an unspecified time, there is no evidence to support this as a special grace in the sense implied by the sacramental understanding of ordination.<sup>64</sup>

#### *4. Evidence from other Biblical Narratives*

Before making any conclusions about the transfer of grace, we must examine the wider context of Scripture, in particular the narratives in which laying on of hands is definitively associated with appointment to a task.

In the narrative of the appointment of Joshua as Moses successor, we have one text which may be of relevance. Deut 34:9 attributes a spirit of wisdom to Joshua as a consequence of Moses

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<sup>63</sup> J. P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989).

<sup>64</sup> See discussion of special grace in the next section.

laying his hands upon him. While this text does not appear to have had the same level of scrutiny as the texts about Timothy, opinion is divided over whether anything was transferred by Moses laying hands upon Joshua. However, since Joshua was identified as full of the Spirit prior to his commissioning (Num 27:18), it is not necessary to attribute the Spirit's gifting to the laying on of hands itself. Rather, the commissioning appears to have given Joshua a role in which the Spirit's gifting could be made manifest.

In the remaining narratives that we have discussed already in this paper, that of the installation of the Levites, the setting apart of the seven in Acts, and the setting apart of Paul and Barnabas, there is no evidence that any special gifting accompanied the laying on of hands. Ellen White likewise notes that in the case of Paul and Barnabas, "there is no record indicating that any virtue was imparted by the mere act of laying on of hands."<sup>65</sup>

##### *5. Conclusions about Ordination and the Transfer of Grace*

In this section we have noted that while the Greek allows for the possibility that Timothy may have received a gift of grace as a result of the laying on of hands, the context of the laying on of hands is uncertain, and further, that this gift is not characterized as one of special grace that results in an indelible mark on the soul. Together these argue against using these passages in Timothy to support a sacramental view of ordination. Furthermore, the absence of any mention of the transfer of grace or spiritual gifts in relation to the laying on of hands in the other New Testament narratives where individuals are set apart for a task provides evidence that even if the example of Timothy did indicate a transfer of grace, this should not be considered normative.<sup>66</sup>

Thus we must conclude that there is no firm evidence to support the normative transfer of grace by laying on of hands, and more specifically, that there is no evidence for the transfer of special grace by the laying on of hands in ordination.

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<sup>65</sup> White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 162. She does not comment specifically on the verse we are examining in 1 Timothy.

<sup>66</sup> There are several other good reasons that the example of Timothy should not be used as normative. First, if a practice is expected to be normative, we would be given explicit information about the context in which the practice should occur. Since laying on of hands is only mentioned in passing as part of personal exhortation to Timothy, and we are not given the context of the practice, Paul clearly is not attempting to teach it as a normative practice. Second, while Paul frequently appointed some form of leadership in the churches he planted and nurtured, these texts in Timothy are the only place that Paul talks about laying on of hands. If Paul intended this to be normative, it is likely that he would have written about laying on of hands elsewhere. Third, there are some clues that this might be a special case in which the Paul-Timothy relationship and laying on of hands is patterned after that of Moses and Joshua.

### **Christ and the Laying on of Hands**

The third condition for a sacramental view of ordination is that the practice be instituted by Christ. Review of the gospels show that Christ laid hands upon children to bless them (Matt 19:13-15), and laid hands upon individuals for healing (Mark 6:5; Mark 8:22-25; Luke 13:13). While Christ is noted as appointing the twelve disciples and the seventy-two, in neither of these instances is the idea laying on of hands or associated prayer specifically noted, nor are these ideas implied from the verbs used. *Epioēsen* used in Mark 3:14 in relation to the disciples suggests making, or bringing the group into being, or simply appointing, whereas *anedeixen* is used in relation to the seventy-two, and simply means assigning as task.<sup>67</sup> Hence, we can conclude that while Christ recognized the need of leaders and the need for individuals to undertake certain tasks, attributing ordination to him is going beyond the available evidence.

### **Is there a Distinction between the status of Clergy and Laity?**

The fourth criteria for understanding ordination as a sacrament is that ordination must confers an indelible mark or seal upon the ordinand which results in a distinction between clergy and laity that allows them alone to specifically represent Christ and dispense grace. This argument cannot be sustained directly with biblical evidence for while the New Testament indicates that all believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of Gods ownership and his promise of redemption, evidence for any seal or mark specific to laying on of hands on installation to office is absent in scripture.

In the absence of biblical evidence for a seal, the Roman Catholic Church points to the sacerdotal role of clergy as proof that a sealing must occur.<sup>68</sup> This is offered in conjunction with an argument that contrasts the Old Testament priesthood and the priesthood of Christ in order to suggest that 1 Peter 2:5,9 should be understood to mean that the regular member is a priest in some sense being consecrated through the sacraments, whereas the clergy participate in the priesthood of Christ in such a way as to "act in the power and place of the person of Christ."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

<sup>68</sup> Sacerdotalism understands clergy to have a priestly role that involves the offering of sacrifices.

<sup>69</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1539-1550.

To be able to do this, it is argued, there must be a clear distinction between the clergy and those to whom they dispense grace.

In spite of the sharp distinction between clergy and laity that is described in a sacramental view of ordination, such a distinction has no New Testament precedent. I will argue this by examining three separate lines of evidence: the concept of the priesthood of all believers; an examination of the Greek words from which the words clergy and laity are derived; and the choice of vocabulary in the description of the role of leaders in the New Testament.

### *1. A Priesthood of all Believers*

While the Old Testament Levitical priesthood defined a group set apart from the remainder of God's people, Christ's high priestly role with its continuous intercession for us, eliminates the need for a separate ongoing earthly priesthood that mediates between God and man. Rather, all believers united with Christ participate in a priesthood derived from the priesthood from Christ, enabling Peter to write "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession" (1 Pet 2:9).<sup>70</sup> Thus while the New Testament speaks about a priesthood, it does not recognize the priesthood as a special office in the church, but rather, teaches a universal priesthood of all believers who are called to a ministry that declares the power and character of God, and builds up the church.

Consequently, in the apostolic church we find that ministry was not restricted to a particular group of super Christians, or those with some sort of superior status.<sup>71</sup> It was a function of the entire church. Indeed, God's calling of all believers is repeatedly emphasized in the New Testament, especially in the writings of Paul.<sup>72</sup> Each individual convert is called not only to live in a certain way as a consequence of their calling, but to minister according to the spiritual gifts which they have been given.<sup>73</sup> The diverse gifts given by the Holy Spirit ensure that the church lacks nothing it needs to fulfil its role in the world.

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<sup>70</sup>Raoul Dederen, "The Priesthood of all Believers," in Nancy Vyhmeister, ed., *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives*, 9-27.

<sup>71</sup> See for instance Acts 8:4 where those who moved because of persecution preached wherever they went; and 1 Cor 11 & 14 which also allow speaking, prophesying and praying by members provided it is done in a specified manner and order is maintained.

<sup>72</sup> See for instance Rom 11:29; Gal 1:6; Gal 5:8; Eph 1:18, 4:1; 1 Thes 5:24; 2 Thes 1:11.

<sup>73</sup> 1 Cor 12; Rom 12:6.

In addition to the gifting, some individuals appear to be called to particular functions in the church such as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (Eph 4:11). These functions were not introduced to form some rigid hierarchical church structure, nor to elevate any one person to a higher spiritual or administrative plane than another, but rather to respond to genuine needs of the church. So for instance, the appointment of the seven in Acts 6 was a response to the need to make sure that widows were cared for appropriately. Likewise, when a group of believers was formed, someone needed to take responsibility for encouragement and continued building up of the church when the founder moved on to preach elsewhere. Furthermore, the presence of leaders encouraged order in the church, something that was encouraged from its very inception so that the church could best fulfil its mission.<sup>74</sup>

## 2. *Clergy and Laity*

The second line of evidence that argues against a distinction between clergy and laity is the use of the words from which clergy and laity are derived. The New Testament uses the Greek word *kleros* from which the English word clergy is derived to convey the idea of something that is assigned by lot, or more loosely as, a portion, share or inheritance.<sup>75</sup> In contrast to the regular contemporary usage of the term clergy, the New Testament never uses the term *kleros* to describe a group of leaders. Rather, it is used to describe of all God's people who are his possession and share in the benefits of belonging to God (1 Pet 5:3; Acts 26:18 and Col 1:12). The entire group of Christian believers are part of the *kleros*

An examination of the Greek *laos* from which the English word laity is derived is also helpful. *Laos* takes on several meanings in the New Testament. The gospel writers use it to describe a group of people or a crowd, and more specifically when discussing the nation of Israel.<sup>76</sup> In the rest of the New Testament the word often moves beyond both these meanings to signify the idea of the Christian community as a whole.<sup>77</sup> Christians are thus rightly called the *laos* of God.

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<sup>74</sup> See for instance 1 Cor 14.

<sup>75</sup> Words derived from the root *kleros* can be found in Matt 27:35; Mk 15:24; Lk 23:34; John 19:24; Acts 1:17, 26; Acts 8:21; Acts 26:18; Col 1:12 and 1 Pet 5:3. See Werner Foerster "klēros" in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and G. Fredrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-67) 3:758-64.

<sup>76</sup> Hermann Strathmann "laos" in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and G. Fredrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-67) 4:50-53.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:54-57. This is a natural extension of Paul's appropriation of the Old Testament promises to the Christian community who he considers to be the 'new' people of God, or the new Israel. See for instance Acts 15:4, 2 Cor 6:16, Tit 2:14, 1 Pet 2:9.

Thus both the words *laos* and *kleros* are used in ways that signify the Christian community as a whole.<sup>78</sup> The New Testament context then does not support a difference between them.

Changes in the meaning of both of these words occurred gradually over the first few centuries of the early church. As a distinct leadership hierarchy emerged those individuals at the top of the hierarchy came to be understood as clergy and were given increased status, and sacerdotal function. As a consequence the understanding of laity became more restricted. In comparison to the clergy they were increasingly seen as unqualified and uneducated and therefore unable to make decisions about the church. With further time, the laity came to be defined simply as those who were 'not clergy' and supposedly therefore not called of God.<sup>79</sup> Thus the idea of a distinction between clergy and laity emerged in the post New Testament church

### 3. *The Vocabulary used in Association with Church Leaders*

A third line of evidence that the New Testament church did not see a distinction between its ministers and its other members comes from an analysis of the vocabulary used in association with church leaders. The vocabulary appears to have been very carefully selected. Warkentin for instance, observes that the "words in secular Greek for civil and religious authorities are consistently avoided in connection with the ministries of the church."<sup>80</sup> Included in this group of omitted words are the words *archē*, *archōn*, and *timē*. The Greek *archē* always denotes the idea of primacy whether in time, rank, or power.<sup>81</sup> It is frequently used of Roman and other Gentile authorities, and in the Septuagint, is also used for Jewish leaders such as the priests and Levites.<sup>82</sup> However, it is never used in the New Testament of Christian leaders.<sup>83</sup> In the same word group, the Greek *archōn* is defined as an individual who is a ruler, or who exercises power and authority.<sup>84</sup> It is used frequently in the New Testament for Roman and Jewish officials of various kinds, of supernatural powers, and also of Christ. But once again we find no evidence

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<sup>78</sup> Dederen comes to a similar conclusion in Raoul Dederen, "A Theology of Ordination," *Ministry Supp* (Feb 1978): 24K-24P.

<sup>79</sup> "Laity" in F. L. Cross, and Elizabeth A. Livingstone. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. 3rd ed. rev. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 949.

<sup>80</sup> Warkentin, 160. See also Hans Küng, *The Church*, (London: Search Press, 1968), 388 who makes a similar observation.

<sup>81</sup> Gerhard Delling, "archē," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and G. Fredrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-67) 1:479-84.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> *archē* is however used of Christ in Col 1:18

<sup>84</sup> Delling, *TDNT* 1:488.

for its application to Christian leaders.<sup>85</sup> Finally, the word *timē* which is frequently used in secular material to indicate the honour or honouring of prominent people and those in office, is used in the New Testament to indicate what Christ deserves, what all Christians should give each other, and what husbands should give their wives.<sup>86</sup> While it is also used in 1 Tim 5:17 in relation to elders who direct the affairs of the church, contextually this seems to refer to the idea of elders receiving wages or an honorarium rather than honour in the sense seen in secular literature.<sup>87</sup> The only New Testament use in which the word clearly intends honour associated with office, relates to that of the first Jewish high priest Aaron (Heb 5:4) and not officers of the New Testament Church. Thus the vocabulary used of leaders in the New Testament church does not support any status differences between them and other members of the church.

#### *4. Conclusions regarding the relative status between Leaders and other Church Members*

The fourth criterion for ordination to be considered sacramental is that the rite conveys an indelible mark which results in a differing status between clergy and laity. Catholics base much of their argument upon the sacerdotal model of clergy that sees clergy as mediatorial priests. However, this section has shown that Christ's high priestly role eliminates the need for a mediatory human priest, and that the New Testament instead regards all Christians as having a form of priesthood derived from Christ. This undermines the very foundations of the argument in favour of a mark leading to a distinction between clergy and laity.

Further we have seen that the distinction between clergy and laity emerged in church history in the centuries after the New Testament. The New Testament uses both *laos* and *kleros* to describe all Christian believers and hence does not support boundaries and or status differences between them.

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<sup>85</sup> The absence of *archon* (ruler) is not obvious to the casual reader because some English translations employ the word ruler or rule. See for instance Heb 13:17 (KJV) where we find "obey those who rule over you" and 1 Tim 5:17 (KJV, NAS) where elders are directed to "rule well." In Heb 13:17, the NIV better captures the nuance of the Greek which is one of trusting, and being persuaded by your leaders or guides. In 1 Tim 5:17, the Greek word translated as rule (*proistēmi*) has a range of meaning including, guiding, managing, helping, striving, caring for, giving aid, and directing. While BDAG includes the idea of ruling as a possible meaning of *proistēmi*, the other words in the semantic domain encapsulate the ideas of Christian leadership espoused elsewhere.

<sup>86</sup> Johannes Schneider "timē," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and G. Fredrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-67), 8:174. See for instance Rom 12:10.

<sup>87</sup> See Schneider *TDNT* 8:176. This text is contentious and interpretations vary from honorarium, to double pay, to honour and pay, or to simply to double honour. Given the contextual clues, the lack of other supporting suggestions of honour associated with office, and the overall picture painted of NT leaders, the ideas of honorarium or double pay would seem to be the more likely interpretations.

Finally, we have noted that words that ascribe status differences in secular administration are not applied to the leaders of the New Testament church. We can thus conclude that there is no evidence of an implied difference in status between leaders and the members they shepherd. As Papandrea acknowledges, the only distinction in the apostolic church was "between those who knew Jesus and those who did not (Acts 1:21-22).<sup>88</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist church like many other issues of church organization, developed primarily to serve the function and integrity of the church. The earliest ordination amongst the Sabbatarian Adventists is thought to have occurred in 1853, even before the fledgling group had chosen a name or developed any formal organizational structure.<sup>89</sup>

Ordination and licensing however were considered necessary to protect believers by indicating which preachers were trustworthy, exhibiting good characters, and teaching in harmony with the revealed truth. Such a pragmatic approach meant that little thought was given to the theology of ordination in the early years of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Nevertheless, the idea of ordination as a sacrament was rejected outright in the writings of founder Ellen White.<sup>90</sup> This early decision is consistent with biblical evidence examined in this paper.

While laying on of hands is clearly symbolic, the evidence for transfer of grace has been shown to be tenuous at best. Even if Timothy's laying on of hands was for the purpose of commissioning, and grace was transferred to him as part of this rite, there is no evidence that this was special grace that set him apart from others, and no evidence that this example is normative for the church as a whole. Furthermore, evidence for institution of ordination by Christ and a spiritual distinction between clergy and laity are completely absent from Scripture. Therefore we must conclude that ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist Church should not be considered a sacrament.

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<sup>88</sup> Jim L. Papandrea. *The History and Meaning of Ordination in the Pre-Reformation Church*. 2009. <http://www.garrett.edu/gmedia/pdf/communications/Symposium-Ordination-Paper-Papandrea.pdf>. The lack of distinction does not however detract from a necessity of leaders being examples to their fellow members.

<sup>89</sup> James White reports laying hands upon Bro Lawrence during the White's tour to the Eastern States. He notes that this was for the purpose of setting him apart for gospel ministry and for administration of ordinances. *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 20, 1853.

<sup>90</sup> Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1911), 162.



This conclusion has implications not only for the pastors' view of themselves, but also for the way the ordination is carried out. First, in keeping with the priesthood of all believers, ordination should not appear to give extra status to the clergy or in any way suggest a ranking of clergy over and above laity. Nor should it devalue the role of the unordained in the ministry and mission of the church. The current system of making special high days for ordination of pastors, while crowding ordination of elders and deacons in to a regular service, and failing to recognize any other tasks with laying on of hands, tends to imply differences of importance and status even if unintended.

Second, since the symbolism in part involves identification, representation, and recognition that the minister will do some tasks on behalf of the congregation, the congregation should in some way be actively involved in laying hands upon the individual being ordained. It is the members and not the other leaders who impart their authority to the ordained. Adventists have rejected apostolic succession and defining the church by means of its hierarchy, yet they have continued to maintain that only those who are ordained can participate in the laying on of hands. This disconnection between practice and belief has sometimes been attributed to the need for order, but order need not be sacrificed to allow the participation in this rite by those who are not ordained.

As ongoing examination of the topic of ordination is conducted, it is essential that church practice continues to be examined closely in order to ensure that practice matches verbal affirmations and rejections made by the Church.