

The Problem of Ordination: Lessons from Early Christian History
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Introduction

With few exceptions, most contemporary Christians consider ordination a legitimate rite of setting selected members apart for the purpose of pastoral ministry and oversight in the Christian Church. It is also generally assumed that the rite finds its foundations in the Old and New Testaments.

At the same time, however, we do not find in Scripture an unambiguously clear theology of either pastoral ministry or ordination. Aside from the scarcity of theological data, readers are immediately confronted with additional difficulties. These include the following: (1) the modern notion of the pastor's office does not readily correspond to the position of leaders or elders in the early Christian Church; (2) there appears to be little scriptural evidence for the three-fold ordination of the pastor, elder, and deacon as it is practiced today; (3) while it is often assumed, there is no direct Scriptural evidence that the local elders or bishops were actually "ordained" through the laying-on-of-hands;¹ (4) the current practice of inviting only ordained pastors and elders to lay hands upon those to be ordained is not explicitly found in the New Testament; (5) there appears to be no Scriptural warrant for limiting certain "ministerial" functions to those who have been "ordained"; and, finally, (6) the rite of laying-on-of-hands—today almost exclusively associated with the rite of ordination—was used in a variety of circumstances during the apostolic phase of Christian history, including post-baptismal prayer for the Holy Spirit, healing, setting apart for missionary service, and blessing. It is not surprising, therefore, that there are as many ways in which ministry and ordination can be understood as there are denominations; and there tend to be as many views on pastoral ministry and ordination as there are church members within a particular denomination.

¹While it is commonly assumed that elders were appointed through the laying-on-of-hands, the New Testament does not provide clear evidence for such a claim. Instead, both the local and missionary elders appear to be "voted in" by the raising of hands (Acts 14:23; 2 Corinthians 8:19). *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (1957), s.v., "χειροτονέω," 889.

This is the situation in which we, as Seventh-day Adventists, find ourselves today. Like most modern Christian denominations, Seventh-day Adventists acknowledge the pastoral call through the rite of ordination. We have also adopted the three-fold structure of ministry in the church—pastor, elder, and deacon—each initiated by a separate rite of laying-on-of-hands and each referred to as ordination. The lack of unambiguous Scriptural data, however, has resulted in a decades-long intra-denominational discussion on the meaning of and qualifications for ordination of pastors, elders, and deacons. It is undisputable, and Scripturally warranted, that Christian community needs its authoritative leaders in order to function and propagate its mission in the world, otherwise chaos would reign. The question before us is, however, what is the nature of Christian ministry and how much has our understanding of ministry in the Church been influenced by Christian tradition?

The delegates to the 2010 Session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Atlanta called for a thorough review of the theology of ministry and ordination during the 2010-2015 quinquennium. This paper is written in the spirit of this call and contributes to the discussion by presenting a short history of ministry and ordination in the early Christian Church.

Setting forth of the Problem

In 379 AD Jerome stated: “There can be no Christian community without its ministers.”² By Jerome’s time, however, the Christian Church had moved far from the descriptions of the early Christian community found in the pages of the New Testament. It was well developed organizationally; it promoted both theological and ontological distinctions between laity and clergy; and it accepted a sacramental understanding of ministry and ordination, making the presence of the ministry essential for the salvation of believers. Thus, for many Christian authors writing from the second century onward the Church could not exist without a separate class of individuals distinguished from other believers by the rite of ordination. As a student of history, I find it astonishing

²Jerome *Dialogus contra Luciferanos* 21, in *The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 6:331.

that in such a relatively short time, from the death of the last apostle (late 90s) to the middle of the third century (or about 160 years), the Christian theology of ministry experienced such a radical shift. What factors contributed to Christianity's speedy move in this direction? Before we address these post-apostolic developments a few words must be said of the laying-on-of-hands ritual as it is found in the Holy Scriptures.

Laying-on-of-Hands: The Biblical Precedent³

While modern Christianity associates the rite of laying-on-of-hands almost exclusively with ministerial ordination, both the Old and New Testaments attest that the rite tended to be used in a variety of circumstances. During Old Testament times, hands were laid, for example, in blessing others (Genesis 48:14; Leviticus 9:22); human guilt was transferred upon the sacrificial animals through the agent of human hands (Leviticus 4:4); the entire priestly tribe of the Levites, called to serve the people (Ezekiel 44:11), was consecrated in a one-time ceremony involving the entire congregation (Numbers 8:10); finally, the laying-on-of-hands occurs during the act of commissioning Joshua by Moses as the next leader of the nation of Israel (Numbers 27:23). When we encounter the laying-on-of-hands in the New Testament, therefore, it is clear that the rite had its roots in the ancient Hebrew practices.

Like in the Old Testament, the New Testament mentions the laying-on-of-hands in many different circumstances. In the New Testament the phrase actually occurs about 25 times and is most often associated with healing and blessing (for example, Mark 10:13-16; Luke 4:40, and Acts 28:8). Several times the laying-on-of-hands occurs in association with the reception of the Holy Spirit following baptism. In Acts 8:17 and 19:6, the Samaritans and the converts in Ephesus receive the Holy Spirit through the laying of Paul's hands. In Hebrews 6:2, the laying-on-of-hands also appears associated with baptism. In only two instances the laying-on-of-hands is clearly associated with en-

dorsement of Christian servants, i.e., the setting apart of the Seven (Acts 6) and the commissioning of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13 to fulfill a missionary task.⁴ Several Pauline passages indicate a possible reference to the leadership installment ceremony. The first of these (1 Tim 4:14) refers to the laying-on-of-hands on Timothy by the elders. Unfortunately, it is not known if, on this particular occasion, Timothy was actually ordained to a church office or if this particular laying-on-of-hands followed Timothy's baptism. The fact that Paul speaks of the *charisma* (gift) that was received by Timothy through the laying-on-of-hands suggests this second interpretation (see Acts 8:17 and 19:6). In the second instance (2 Tim 1:6), it is also impossible to ascertain the occasion that called for the laying-on-of Paul's hands upon Timothy. Finally, 1 Tim 5:22 simply lays down the rule that the laying-on-of-hands should not be done hastily. The reader is not informed why Paul says this nor is the laying-on-of-hands related to any particular occasion. Nevertheless, each of these passages has traditionally been interpreted as dealing with installment into an ecclesiastical office. On the basis of known evidence, however, such a conclusion may not necessarily be warranted.

In view of this, several questions must be asked: first, where do we get our way of understanding and practicing ordination? Second, why is the ritual of the laying-on-of-hands today almost exclusively associated with ordination? Finally, why do only ordained pastors lay their hands on those to be ordained? A brief review of the post-Apostolic developments will shed some light and help us to address these questions. Let's begin with the origin of the very word "ordination."

Terminology

The modern term "ordination" comes from the Latin, *ordo* (order, class, rank), and its derivative *ordinatio* appears to refer in ancient Rome to installment or induction, appointment or acces-

³For an excellent study on the laying-on-of-hands ritual in both the New and Old Testaments, see Keith Mattingly's excellent article "Laying on of Hands in Ordination: A Biblical Study," in *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1998), 59-74.

⁴It is important to note that in neither case did the laying-on-of-hands indicate appointment to an office; neither do the people mentioned receive a special rank or status within the Christian community. The Seven are chosen to "serve the tables" (Acts 6:2), a task performed by the Apostles until this time, and Paul and Barnabas are selected for a specific missionary task.

sion to rank.⁵ It is well attested historically that pagan Roman society was ranked according to various strictly separated classes, which were called “orders” (from the Latin plural *ordines*).⁶ The historical evidence points out that already during the early phase of the Roman Empire’s existence (second century BC), society had evolved into three basic orders. Thus historians speak of an *ordo senatorum* – the highest class, *ordo equester* (the knights), and plebs—the lowest class of the society. It was eventually accepted that within Roman society there was *ordo et plebs*, i.e., the higher class of citizens and the lower class.⁷ If, by any chance, a person was destined to move upward in rank, he—and in the Roman Empire it was always a “he”—was to go through the process of *ordinatio*.⁸ *Ordinatio* appears to have also been used as a classical way of installing imperial officers⁹ and for the promotion of officers to a higher rank in the army.¹⁰ Finally, the idea of ordination appears also to have been used in the cultic context of pagan Roman Society. Here, a person would be ap-

⁵Edwin Hatch, *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1918), 129; *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), 31; Catherine Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 2007), 86.

⁶Frederik van Boddie, *Disputatio Historico-Juridica Inauguralis: De Nobilitate* (Apud viduam M. Cyfveer, 1823), 8-18; cf., A. H. J. Greenidge, *Roman Public Life* (London: MacMillan, 1922), 107-113, 224-225, 398-405; William E. Dunstan, *Ancient Rome* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011), 102-103, 334.

⁷P. M. Gy, “Notes on the Early Terminology of Christian Priesthood,” in *The Sacrament of Holy Orders* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1957), 99; Giambattista Vico, *Universal Right* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B V, 2000), 140; Edward Schillebeeckx, *Ministry: Leadership in the Community of Jesus Christ* (New York: Crossroads, 1981) 39; Joseph Ratzinger, “The Pastoral Implications of Episcopal Collegiality – 1965,” in *Readings in Church Authority: Gifts and Challenges for Contemporary Catholicism*, ed. Gerard Mannion (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2003), 164; cf., Kenan B. Osborne, *Priesthood: A History of The Ordained Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church* (New York: Paulist, 1988), 114-115.

⁸Thus, in *Historia Augusta*, it is stated that Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (121-180 AD) would never ordain anyone to senatorial rank whom he did not know personally. The exact phrase reads: *nec quemquam in ordinem legit, nisi quem ipse bene scisset*. *Historia Augusta*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 159.

⁹Thus, for example, the Roman historian Seutonius (ca. 69-ca. 122 AD) reports that, at one point of his rule, Emperor Domitian (51-96 AD) had decided to ordain Mettius Rufus as prefect of Egypt. The exact phrase reads: *cur sibi visum esset ordinatione proxima Aegypto praeficere Mettium Rufum* (“why he should next ordain Mettius Rufus prefect of Egypt”). Seutonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, vol. II (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 326-327. Aelius Lampridius also appears to use the term in this way, with reference to the appointment of the consuls and procurators. The exact phrases read: *ubi aliquos voluisset vel rectores provinciis dare vel paepositos facere vel procurators. . . ordinare* (“whenever [Alexander] desired to appoint any man governor or a province or appoint him a procurator”). “Life of the Alexander Severus” in *The Scriptores Historiae Augustae* (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1947), 270; cf., Otto Hirschfeld, *Die Kaiserlichen Verwaltungsbeamten: Bis Auf Diocletian* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1963), 443; Hezser, 86; Ludwig Friedländer, *Roman Life and Manners Under the Early Empire*, vol. 4 (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1928), 53.

¹⁰The author of *Historia Augusta* reports that prior to becoming a Roman Emperor, Publius Helvius Pertinax (126-193 AD) sought to be ordained to a command in the ranks. *Historia Augusta*, vol. I (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 315. The exact phrase reads: *ducendi ordinis dignitarem petiit* (“he sought an appointment to a command in the ranks”).

pointed to the cultic office received from the gods of the ancient world.¹¹ All this suggests that when the word *ordinatio* was used in the ancient world, it clearly indicated a movement upward in ranks and status.¹² Once a man was ordained he held some kind of office that not only separated him from ordinary people but allowed him to exercise governmental, jurisdictional, or cultic authority that demanded submission of others. Through the work of second-century Christian writers, and especially the writings of Latin apologist Tertullian (ca. 160-ca. 220 AD), these concepts and ideas seeped into the Christian psyche. Eventually, the post-Constantinian Church wholeheartedly embraced the ways in which the Roman Empire was governed and adapted the structures of the latter to its own needs.

Tertullian was a brilliant Christian writer and apologist who saw his main task as defending Christianity against both heretical and pagan attacks. In his zeal to defend the Christian faith and to show its reasonableness he incorporated common words found in daily usage among the people of his time. He is thus responsible, for example, for introducing into Christian vocabulary such headache-causing words as *sacramentum*, *substantia*, or *persona*.¹³ The opulent list of nouns and verbs Tertullian introduced into Christian vocabulary also includes *ordo* and *ordinatio*.¹⁴ Being intimately familiar with the way in which the Roman Empire was run, Tertullian apparently had no qualms

¹¹In one of the interesting anomalies of ancient literature, the Latin word *ordinatio* found its way into the writings of Greek Stoic philosopher Epictetus. Thoroughly familiar with Roman civic and cultic life, Epictetus imports this Latin word into the Greek language and endows it with cultic importance. See Epictetus, *The Discourses* (London: William Heinemann, 1928), 222. It must be noted, however, that since religion and culture were intimately connected in the ancient world, the cultic meaning of *ordinatio* in some way extended to all orders of society. Thus, higher orders were endowed with more important religious duties.

¹²The authors of the official Roman Catholic Catechism thus express a universally accepted fact when they write: "The word *order* in Roman antiquity designated an established civil body, especially a governing body. *Ordinatio* means incorporation into an *ordo*." See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [paragraph 1537](Liguori: Liguori Publications, 1994), 384.

¹³According to some estimates, during his career as a Christian writer, Tertullian was responsible for coining and introducing 509 new nouns, 284 new adjectives, and 161 new verbs into Latin vocabulary. Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 249.

¹⁴Tertullian uses these words with specific reference to the ministry in the church. See his *On Prescriptions Against Heretics* 41, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed., Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1989), 3:263, henceforth *ANF*; *On Exhortation to Chastity* 7 (*ANF* 2:54).

applying these words to Christian ministry as he understood it.¹⁵ Thus P. M. Gy states that “with the emergence of Christian Latin in Tertullian, we see that the analogy of the *ordo* and the people of the city of Rome was taken up to describe the relationship of the clergy to the people of God.”¹⁶

In light of this evidence, we need to ask: Are there any problems with incorporating pagan words and/or customs into Christian theology? On the one hand, the answer is no. It is an undeniable fact that there are many words and customs within our society that have their roots in the pagan past of our civilization. These concepts seeped into the Christian practices and theology and did not cause any harm. A case in point is the well-known word *ecclesia*, which in secular Greek simply meant assembly. It later became a technical designation for the Christian community.¹⁷ On the other hand, some words and concepts came into Christianity loaded with cultic meanings and connotations.¹⁸ The latter applies to *ordo* and *ordinatio*, which appear to have carried a specific baggage when they entered into Christian vocabulary. This would suggest that when Tertullian used these words for the first time and applied them to Christian ministry, he knew exactly what he was doing. As in the Roman Empire, ordination for him implied a movement from a lower to a higher position and from having no sacral responsibilities within the religious community to acquiring responsibilities for their performance. It represented status and ranking that did not appear to exist among New Testament Christians. This is also why the rite of laying-on-of-hands was eventually limited

¹⁵Osborne, 115; Pierre van Beneden, *Aux origines d'une terminologie sacramentelle: Ordo, ordinare, ordinatio dans la littérature chrétienne avant 313* (Louvain: Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense, 1974), 12; Karl-Heinrich Bieritz, *Liturgik* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 173. Being himself a lawyer and teaching law prior to becoming a Christian, Tertullian must have been keenly aware of the close relationship between the way society was governed and its religion. As a Christian apologist, he saw parallels between Rome and Christianity and thus had no qualms using Roman governmental structures and applying it to Christianity. Cf., Robert L. Thomas and F. David Farnell, “The Synoptic Gospels in the Ancient Church,” in *The Jesus Crisis: The Inroads of Historical Criticism into Evangelical Scholarship*, ed. Robert L. Thomas, F. David Farnell (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1998), 51.

¹⁶Gy, 99.

¹⁷In Acts 19:32 the word *ecclesia* is used in its regular meaning as “assembly.” It appears that, at the time, this term does have any cultic associations. In Ephesians 5:25 Paul uses the same word, this time as a technical term designating the Christian Church.

¹⁸For example, the word *sacramentum*, also introduced by Tertullian, was loaded with cultic meaning when, with reference to the Christian rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper. *Sacramentum*, in ancient literature, referred to a sacred oath or a pledge a soldier made to the Roman emperor. *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, 1995, ed. Richard McBrien, s.v. “Sacrament.”

strictly to ministerial ordination. In order to elevate the status of the church officials, its usage had to be limited to a certain class of people. This immediately raises a question: What happened to Christianity during the post-Apostolic era that made the use of the terms *order* and *ordinatio* so enticing for Tertullian? The story of the theological developments relating to the ministry in the Church is a cautionary tale of Christian ecclesiology gone awry. It is also a complex story with many twists and turns that ultimately resulted in ingenious solutions to the problem of unity facing early post-Apostolic Christianity. It is beyond the scope of this paper to address every single development relating to ministry in the Church; thus, only the main points of this development will be highlighted.¹⁹

Early Post-Apostolic Developments in the Theology of Ministry

The early post-apostolic theology of ordination did not develop in a vacuum but was powerfully influenced by the developing theological trajectory set by a variety of late first-century and early second-century Christian writers. In order to fully understand the early Christian rite of ordination, thus, we must first briefly explore the developing theology of ministry.

The Christianity of the post-apostolic era found itself under much pressure. The issues Christians struggled with included the following: Jesus did not return, as expected; the first generation of leaders disappeared, leaving Christian communities with a problem of viable leadership;²⁰ Christianity was pressured both externally, by persecutions initiated by the Roman authorities, and internally, by various dissensions, heretical movements, and schisms. In such circumstances, maintaining the unity of the church became a major issue. Virtually all Christian authors writing during

¹⁹For an in-depth study of these developments, see Han von Campenhasen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969). Campenhausen discusses these developments from a Protestant perspective. For a Catholic perspective, see Francis Sullivan, *From Apostles to Bishops* (New York: The Newman Press, 2001). Interestingly, although a Catholic, Sullivan finds himself in an agreement with Campenhausen when he states that none of the post-apostolic developments in theology and structures of ministry and ordination can be traced to the New Testament.

²⁰The preoccupation with the future leadership of the church is already evident in Paul's writings late during his life. See 1 Tim 3:1-12 and Tit 1:5-9.

this era address the problem of unity in one way or another. Whether they influenced Christianity towards finding the right way of dealing with these problems is another matter.

Responding to these external and internal threats, the early Christians looked to their leaders for guidance and protection. According to historical sources, it is apparent that the system of elders, which seemed to spring out of the Jerusalem Church, spread rapidly throughout the Christian world.²¹ As it spread, historical circumstances, such as an attraction to the pagan system of governance as well as inattention to the witness of Scripture, gradually pushed Christianity towards what later became the papal system of church organization.²² This movement began innocuously enough.

Two of the earliest Christian writings that document the gradual changes in the theology of ministry are *1 Clement* and the *Didache*.²³ The significance of both of these documents lies in the fact they seem to be the first actual Christian writings dealing with the importance of the office of bishop in the early Church. *1 Clement* is a pastoral letter written in the name of the Roman Church and by one of the Roman bishops, Clement, to admonish the younger men in Corinth to respect the office of bishop in the church.²⁴ In it, Clement supported his arguments by surveying the history of the local church ministry, which, according to him, went back to the period of apostolic evangeliza-

²¹Campanhausen, 76.

²²Catholic scholars readily admit that while the movement from the simple New Testament church structure to a fully developed papal system of church governance was necessitated by historical rather than biblico/theological exigencies, it was nevertheless guided by the Holy Spirit. The current papal system of church governance constitutes, therefore, the will of God for the Church. Sullivan, 217-236 ; cf., Richard McBrien, *Catholicity* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers,1994), 744-745; Hans Küng, *Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), 417

²³*1 Clement* is considered to be one of the earliest patristic documents of the post-Apostolic era and is generally dated to about 100 AD. Although the author did not introduce himself, the unanimous opinion of the ancient fathers and traditions accepts the authorship of Clement, the bishop of Rome. For more information, see *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations of Their Writings*, ed. and trans., J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 23-27. The *Didache*, the full title of which reads *The Teaching of the Lord to the Gentiles Through the Twelve Apostles*, is an important document of Christian antiquity and can be seen as the first Christian Catechism. Ever since its discovery, there has been debate regarding its authorship and date, but most scholars place it at the end of the first century, since it is mentioned in other early patristic writings. Idem, 246-249. Philip Carrington, *The Early Christian Church, vol. 1, The First Christian Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 483.

²⁴It appears that at the time the Church of Corinth was experiencing an internal struggle during which the younger members of the congregation removed the duly elected bishops. Consequently, Clement rebukes these younger men and calls for them, to restore the bishops to their rightful positions and to submit themselves to the judgment of the church. The elders, in turn, were asked to exercise forgiveness. Carrington, 381-382.

tion in the middle of the century, when the Apostles “went through the territories and townships preaching, [appointing] their first converts . . . to be bishops and deacons for the believers in the future.”²⁵ The reading of the document clearly conveys the thought that Clement viewed the presbyterate (or episcopate, an equivalent term for Clement) as a permanent institution established by the apostles.²⁶ It appears that the authority of the presbyters was based on a continuation of apostolic authority—although this is not clearly expressed—and their office was to serve as a protection of the apostolic tradition. On this basis, Clement of Rome rejected the claim of the Corinthians that they were able to depose officers who had been “commissioned by the Apostles.”²⁷

The *Didache*, another of the earliest Christian documents, also addresses the importance of the bishop’s office. As in *1 Clement*, the unknown author of the *Didache* uses *episcopos* interchangeably with *presbuteros* (elder). The focus of the author, however, appears to be the itinerant, rather than the established, ministry, as he spends considerable time dealing with the itinerant ministers of the early Church, the apostles and prophets, whom he considers as superior to bishops/presbyters.²⁸ Reading the *Didache* leaves one with an unmistakable impression that the class of the prophets and teachers had already begun to show ominous signs of corruption, and the author is anxious to give the early Church some tools that would enable them to distinguish between the true servants of God and those who sought their own interests. One of the answers offered is an efficient presbyterate, i.e., specially designated church officers who were to help the ordinary people to distinguish between true and false ministers.²⁹ One can also see in the *Didache* a stress on

²⁵*1 Clement* 42 in *Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. Maxwell Staniforth (Harmondsworth, UK: 1968), 45.

²⁶Schillebeeckx, 19.

²⁷*1 Clement* 44, in Staniforth, 46.

²⁸The *Didache* 11, 13 in J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer 263-267; Edmund Hill, *Ministry and Authority* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1988), 33; cf., Osborne, 92; W. K. Lowther Clarke, “The Origin of Episcopacy,” in *Episcopacy Ancient and Modern*, ed. Claude Jenkins (London: SPCK, 1930), 26.

²⁹The *Didache* 11, in Staniforth, 233; Peter Stockmeier, “The Election of Bishops by Clergy and People in the Early Church, in *Electing Our Own Bishops*, ed., Peter Huizing and Knut Walf (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 5; Eric G. Jay, “From Presbyter-Bishops to Bishops and Presbyters,” *Second Century* 1 (1981), 128.

the correct performance of the rites during the worship service. In order to perform all the ordinances in a proper way, the church needed a special type of leaders. Presbyters, having attained their position by popular election (which was still practiced at the time), seemed to be perfect candidates for that office.³⁰

While neither document explicitly mentions a laying-on-of-hands ceremony (or ordination), both present the first signs of the early post-Apostolic Church's attempts towards unification and institutionalization.

Second and Third Century Developments in the Theology of Ministry

The second century A.D., and especially its second half, is a very important period of time for Christian ecclesiology. This is the time where ecclesiology develops by leaps and bounds, eventually leading to the development of mature institutional doctrine in the third century.

It appears that already, by the beginning of that century, the presbyterate became a well-established institution that was readily embraced by various Christian congregations that had sprung up throughout the Roman Empire. The historical evidence suggests that during the early part of the century, the itinerant ministry of prophets and teachers slowly vanished as its functions became unnecessary or were absorbed by the rising order of resident ministers.³¹ The most important documentation from this period consists of the epistles of Ignatius (d. ca. 110-130 AD), the writings of Irenaeus (d. ca. 202), and Tertullian (ca. 160–ca. 225 AD). The writings of these three writers represent the earliest evidence of the evolution of the presbyterate and had significant impact on the theology of the laying-on-of-hands ritual, which during this period became known as “ordination.”

³⁰The *Didache* 15, in Staniforth, 234; cf., Adolf Harnack, *The Constitution and Law of the Church in the First Two Centuries* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1910), 80; Schillebeeckx, 15-16.

³¹Bernard Cooke, *Ministry to Word and Sacrament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 61.

Among the early writers, Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch, stands out.³² Although, as many scholars contend, only a few decades separate Ignatius from the writings of the late part of the first century, he is often viewed as the first unambiguous representative of the episcopal type of church polity. While on the way to Rome to face martyrdom, Ignatius desired to encourage congregations in each city he passed through and produced a series of letters dedicated to each church he and his party of Roman soldiers passed on the way.³³

These letters show twofold concern: first, Ignatius shows a strong concern for the unity of the Church. He thus refers to himself as a man “dedicated to the cause of unity.”³⁴ Second, he also desires that his fellow Christians remain steadfastly faithful to Christian teachings in the face of heresy.³⁵ Notwithstanding his noble intentions several departures from the New Testament may be detected in Ignatius’ writings. These departures ultimately became the foundation of Roman Catholic ecclesiology. In his letters, for example, one for the first time finds that a distinction is made between bishops and presbyters; something which had been absent in the literature of the first century.³⁶ The two terms are clearly applied in a different sense and are used to designate two separate offices. The bishop is presented as the undisputed head of the congregation, surrounded by a council of presbyters, as well as deacons, who in Ignatian letters appear to exist at the bottom of the hi-

³²Very little is known about Ignatius, who is considered to have been bishop of Antioch in Syria. While some biographical information may be found in his letters, most of the information about Ignatius comes from the 4th century Christian historian Eusebius of Caesarea. Cf. Hermut Löhr, “The Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch,” in *The Apostolic Fathers: An Introduction*, ed. Wilhelm Pratscher (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 91-113.

³³The letters which are relevant to this paper belong to what is known as the middle recension and are considered by most scholars as authentic. There seems to be a general agreement among scholars that these letters were written at the end of Ignatius’ life during the reign of emperor Trajan, who reigned from 98 to 117 AD, although there is scholarly debate suggesting a later date. These letters represent a system of episcopal structure which was eventually to become the standard pattern throughout most of the Christian world. For a discussion on short, middle, and long recensions, see *The Apostolic Fathers in English*, ed., and tr., Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006) and Löhr, 93-95.

³⁴Ignatius, *Philadelphians* 8.1, in Staniforth, *Early Christian Writings*, 113; cf. Ignatius, *Polycarp* 1.2, in Staniforth, 127, where he wrote of giving “thought especially to unity, for there is nothing more important than this.”

³⁵John E. Lawyer, “Eucharist and Martyrdom in the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch,” *Anglican Theological Review* 73 (Summer 1991), 281; cf. Michael A. G. Haykin, *Rediscovering the Church Fathers: Who They Were and How They Shaped the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 32.

³⁶Osborne, 52.

erarchical ladder. For Ignatius, this three-fold ministry was grounded in a divinely ordained pattern and essential for the existence of the church.³⁷ He thus wrote: “Let the bishop preside in the place of God, and his clergy in place of the Apostolic conclave, and let my special friends the deacons be entrusted with the service of Jesus Christ.”³⁸ The ministry of the bishop was, for Ignatius, analogous to the work of God in presiding over the whole of creation, whereas the ministry of the presbyters was to be a continuation of that of the Apostles.³⁹ Edwin Hatch thus rightly observes that if one builds the theory of ecclesiastical organization upon this analogy, the existence of a bishop becomes an absolute necessity.⁴⁰ Considering it as such, Ignatius proceeded to elevate the position of bishop to previously unknown heights. For him, obedience to the bishop was equal to obedience to God, whom the former represented.⁴¹ For this reason, the unity of church members with their bishop was the single most important duty of individual Christians.⁴² Ignatian emphasis upon the importance of the episcopal office gave rise to what became known in Christian ecclesiology as mon-episcopate or monarchical episcopate. While, according to the New Testament, there appear to be many bishops/presbyters in a particular city or region, apparently all having equal authority, the monepiscopal system changes that and introduces the rule of a single bishop per city. Only such a system, in which the believers are required to submit to the leading officer of the Church in all matters, had a chance to protect the unity of the Church and ensure peace and stability in a Christian

³⁷Daniel J. Harrington, *The Church According to the New Testament: What the Wisdom and Witness of Early Christianity Teach Us Today* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 163-164.

³⁸Ignatius *Magnesians* 6.4, in Staniforth, 88.

³⁹Ignatius *Magnesians* 6.1, in Staniforth 88.

⁴⁰Hatch, 89.

⁴¹In the epistle to *Magnesians*, Ignatius wrote: “For your part, the becoming thing for you . . . [is] to show him [the bishop] every possible respect, having regard to the power God has conferred on him. My information is that the sacred clergy themselves never think of presuming on the apparent precocity of this rank; they give precedence to him as a sagacious man of God – or rather, not so much to him as to the Father of Him who is the Bishop of us all, Jesus Christ. So for the honour of Him who loved us, propriety requires an obedience from you that is more than mere lip-service. It is not a question of imposing upon a particular bishop who is there before your eyes, but upon One who is unseen; and in such a case it is not flesh and blood we have to reckon with, but God, who is aware of all our secrets” *Magnesians* 3, in Staniforth, 87-88.

⁴²Ignatius *Philadelphians* 3.2, *Smyrneans* 8.1 *Tralians* 3.1, in Staniforth 112, 121, 95-96. Ernst von Dobschütz, *Christian Life in the Primitive Church* (New York: Williams and Norgate, 1904), 242.

community.⁴³ Through his insistence upon the authority of the bishop and his role as a protector of unity, Ignatius inadvertently laid the foundation for further developments that ultimately led to the establishment of the papal office.

Christianity in the second half of the second century found itself in the midst of a great struggle. Gnosticism, a heresy which had already shown its early precursors in the Apostolic era, had reached its peak and was threatening to engulf the Church.⁴⁴ Facing the danger, the believers grew closer to their leaders.⁴⁵ It appears that, by that stage, the Ignatian type of church, with one bishop as the head of the congregation, assisted by a variable number of priests and deacons, became widely accepted.⁴⁶ By now, bishops came to be seen by the congregations as those who alone taught pure doctrine and defended the community against heretical teachings.⁴⁷ The second century writer who greatly contributed to this development was Irenaeus.⁴⁸ In the context of his struggle with Gnostic teachers, Irenaeus borrows the concept of successive teachers from Gnosticism and develops a theory of apostolic succession;⁴⁹ a theory that put Christian bishops in a chain of succession linked directly with the Apostles and aimed at preserving the pure teaching handed down by them.⁵⁰ As one can expect, a side effect of the theory of apostolic succession, which eventually became one of the foundational doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church, was that it not only

⁴³John-Paul Lotz, *Ignatius and Concord: The Background and Use of the Language of Concord in the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 170-174.

⁴⁴The main focus of all forms of Gnosticism was on the acquiring of special knowledge as a requirement for salvation. Such beliefs naturally tended to elevate those who possessed that special knowledge above other believers. The influence of Gnosticism upon the governmental structures of Christianity is often underestimated in scholarly circles. For a comprehensive discussion on Gnostic influences upon Christianity, see Campenhausen, 167-170.

⁴⁵Jules Lebreton, *The History of the Primitive Church*, vol. 2 (New York: MacMillan, 1949), 661.

⁴⁶Everett Ferguson, "Bishop," *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson (1997), 183-184.

⁴⁷Campenhausen, 171.

⁴⁸While Ignatius gave the church a system of organization, Irenaeus, who followed Ignatius after an interval of about two generations, is known to be the first Christian writer to provide a concise theology of the ecclesiastical institution. Mary T. Clark, "Irenaeus," *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson (1999), 588.

⁴⁹The Catholic doctrine of apostolic succession, thus, traces its roots directly to the Gnostic idea that there exists a line of enlightened teachers who are charged by Christ with transmitting the true apostolic tradition. Campenhausen, 167.

⁵⁰Carlos Alfredo Steger, *Apostolic Succession* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1995), 17. It must be observed, however, that Irenaeus was not the first to use the argument of apostolic succession. The concept was already present in the writings of Hegesippus, early in the second century, and Tertullian, a younger contemporary of Irenaeus. It was Irenaeus, however, who developed it theologically. Campenhausen, 165.

strengthened the episcopal organization of the Church against heresy, but also elevated the position and authority of the bishop to a higher level than ever before.⁵¹ The ministry gained a new dimension. While for Ignatius, the episcopate represented the very center of ecclesiastical unity, and thus the spiritual unity of the Church, for Irenaeus, the episcopate came to be seen as a depository of apostolic tradition.⁵² Only bishops who stood in the apostolic succession possessed the true interpretation of the Christian Scriptures and could teach the truth. From this viewpoint, Irenaeus made the episcopate one of the primary essentials of Christianity.⁵³

Another interesting element found in Irenaeus' writings relates to the special spiritual endowment that Christian bishops receive as they enter the chain of apostolic succession. Thus he writes in *Against Heresies*, "Wherefore it is incumbent to obey the presbyters who are in the church—those who, as I have shown, possess the succession from the apostles; those who, together with the succession of the episcopate, have received *the certain gift of truth*, according to the good pleasure of the Father."⁵⁴ In this passage, some scholars find one of the first allusions to ordination, although the laying-on-of-hands is not explicitly mentioned.⁵⁵ For Irenaeus, the succession to the episcopate, or the episcopal consecration, is accompanied by a special gift referred to as the "certain gift of truth" (in Latin *charisma veritatis certum*), which enables bishops to teach the truth.⁵⁶ Only bishops receive this gift and they can exercise it only if they are in communion with other bishops.⁵⁷ The remainder of the Catholic priesthood possesses it in a derivative way, as long as they stay in the

⁵¹Robert Lee Williams, *Bishop Lists: Formation of Apostolic Succession of Bishops in Ecclesiastical Crises* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2005), 132-133.

⁵²Thomas C. Oden, *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), 182.

⁵³The doctrine of apostolic succession remains foundational for Roman Catholicism and some Episcopal Protestant churches. This is despite the fact that the New Testament and the early first century writers do not support the theory and that it is impossible to verify historically an unbroken chain of succession from apostles to bishops. This is well attested by Sullivan, 12–16; cf., *Lumen Gentium* 20-29, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed., Walter M. Abbott (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), 39–56.

⁵⁴Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 4.26.2 (*ANF* 1:497)

⁵⁵J. F. Puglisi, *The Process of Admission to Ordained Ministry: A Comparative Study* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 16.

⁵⁶Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 146.

⁵⁷Henri De Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 248; cf., *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, [paragraph 1556-1558], 389.

communion with their local bishop.⁵⁸ Christians of the second and subsequent centuries embraced this teaching, seeing it as the best way to protect the Church against Gnosticism and other heretical teachings. Irenaeus' efforts to protect the unity of the Church, thus, further elevated the authority of the bishops. Today, no modern scholar, Catholic or Protestant, questions the fact that a clear link exists between this statement of Irenaeus and the modern Roman Catholic teaching on papal and episcopal infallibility.⁵⁹

This was the kind of ideological and theological context within which Irenaeus' younger contemporary, Tertullian, lived and worked. Interestingly, in his writings one encounters for the first time a statement that appears to ontologically separate clergy from laity. In his *Exhortation to Chastity*, he thus wrote: "It is the authority of the Church that instituted the distinction between clergy and laity [Lat.: *ordinem et plebem*] and the honor shown the ranks of the clergy made holy for God."⁶⁰ With this and other statements to this effect, Tertullian powerfully contributed to the clericalization of early Christianity and to the belief that there exists an ontological distinction between the clergy and laity, a doctrine that continues to function as one of the foundational teachings of the

⁵⁸Jerome D. Quinn, "Charisma Veritatis Certum: Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 4, 26, 2," *Theological Studies* 39:3 (1978), 520-525; Anthony J. Figueiredo, *The Magisterium-Theology Relationship: Contemporary Theological Conceptions In the Light of Universal Church Teachings Since 1835 and the Pronouncements of the Bishops of the United States* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 2001), 32-33; Carl Sommer, *We Look for a Kingdom: The Everyday Lives of the Early Christians* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 170; cf. David Currie, *Born Again Fundamentalist, Born Again Catholic* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 70; *Lumen Gentium* 28-29, in Abbott, 53-55.

⁵⁹In recent centuries, this teaching found its most clear expression in the pronouncements of both the First and Second Vatican Councils (1869–1870 and 1962–1965 respectively). For example, *Dei Verbum*, one of the documents issued by the Second Vatican Council, speaks of bishops as those "who have received through episcopal succession the sure gift of truth." *Dei Verbum* 8 (in Abbott, 116). The official *Catechism of the Catholic Church* issued by Pope John Paul II in 1994 states: "The mission of the Magisterium [the Pope and bishops] is linked to the definitive nature of the covenant established by God with his people in Christ. It is this Magisterium's task to preserve God's people from deviations and defections and to guarantee them the objective possibility of professing the true faith without error. . . . The Roman Pontiff, head of the college of bishops, enjoys this infallibility in virtue of his office, when, as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful, . . . he proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals." *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [paragraphs 890, 891], 235; cf., Quinn, 520-525; Figueiredo, 32.

⁶⁰Tertullian *Exhortation to Chastity* 7.3. Translation by Robert B. Eno, in *Teaching Authority in the Early Church* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1984), 54-55; cf., ANF 4:54. The exact Latin phrase reads: *Differentiam inter ordinem et plebem constituit ecclesiae auctoritas et honor per ordinis consessum sanctificatus*. John Henry Hopkins, *The Church of Rome in Her Primitive Purity, Compared with the Church of Rome at Present Day* (London: J. G. and F. Rivington, 1839), 89. Note the parallels between the order and plebs of the Roman Empire and this usage found in Tertullian.

Roman Catholic Church.⁶¹ It appears that Tertullian was also the first to apply priestly language to the Christian ministry and to endow the bishop with the title of *summus sacerdos*, or the chief priest.⁶²

It is into this kind of theological environment that Tertullian introduced the loaded word ordination. While nowhere in his writings is the laying-on-of-hands referred to, it is reasonable to assume that both Irenaeus and Tertullian were familiar with the rite and that is how the ministry was installed into office during their times. Both of these thinkers, thus, lay the foundation for the rite of the laying-on-of-hands to become one of the most important Christian rites, a rite that separated clergy from laity through an invisible ontological, or essential, barrier. This barrier placed ministers on a higher spiritual level than the rest of the believers and endowed them with rank, status, and authority that clearly did not belong to the Christian ministry during New Testament times.⁶³ Notwithstanding their noble motivations of protecting the Church from heretical teachings and preserving its unity, the work of Tertullian and his colleagues, in an aberrant and unexpected way, eventually resulted in the Christian ministry assuming the role of *ordo senatorum* as in ancient Rome.⁶⁴

The writers of the third and following centuries built upon the foundation laid by Ignatius, Irenaeus, and Tertullian, and thus made the spiritual life and salvation of the believers thoroughly dependent upon the clerical class. Also in the third century, for the first time in Christian literature,

⁶¹*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* thus states: "The ministerial or hierarchical priesthood of bishops and priests, and the common priesthood of all the faithful participate, 'each in its own proper way, in the priesthood of Christ.' While being 'ordered one to another,' they differ essentially." *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [paragraph 1547], 386. The quotations within the quote come from the Vatican II Document *Lumen Gentium* 10 (*Light of the Nations*) in *The Teachings of the Second Vatican Council: Complete Texts of the Constitutions, Decrees, and Declarations* (Westminster: Newman, 1966), 85.

⁶²Tertullian *On Baptism* 17 (ANF 3:677); cf. David Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 163.

⁶³A Catholic writer, Francis Sullivan, readily acknowledges that "the historical episcopate developed in the post-New Testament period." Sullivan, 217. For an extended discussion on the episcopal office and powers, see *Lumen Gentium* 20-27 (in Abbott, 39-52).

⁶⁴Gy, 100.

we encounter the description of an actual ordination service. To these developments we now briefly turn.

Further Developments in the Theology of Ministry and Ordination

While no literary evidence from the late first or second century exist of the ministerial laying-on-of-hands ceremony, it is reasonable to assume this rite was practiced among the Christians of the second century. It is also plausible that it became increasingly limited to the ministerial *ordo*.⁶⁵ The first complete description of the Christian ceremony of ordination, however, does not appear in literature until the beginning of the third century and is found in the *Apostolic Tradition*, a work attributed to Hippolytus of Rome (ca. 170–ca. 235 AD).⁶⁶ In this work, we find a detailed description of early Christian ordinations, complete with a detailed theology of ministry and the liturgy to be followed in the ordination service.⁶⁷ The document takes for granted the Ignatian three-fold structure of ministry, each necessitating a separate ordination service through the laying-on-of-hands and a separate set of prayers, with each order of ministry requiring a higher order to place hands upon the lower order.⁶⁸ From this time on, only ordained bishops could ordain lower ranking clergy. This is probably the root of the common Christian practice, both Catholic and Protestant, of only ordained clergy ordaining candidates for ministry.

No other writer of the early Christian centuries contributed more to elevating the authority of the episcopal office than did Cyprian of Carthage (d. ca. 258 AD). Like his predecessors, Cyprian's main concern was the unity of the Church. In fact, his most famous treatise is entitled *On the Unity of the Church*. While not being known as a theological innovator, his writings consolidate and

⁶⁵Henry Chadwick, *The Church in Ancient Society: From Galilee to Gregory the Great* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 220.

⁶⁶*The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome*, ed., Gregory Dix (London: Alban, 1992).

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 2–18.

⁶⁸For a detailed description of these three ordination services, see Osborne, 117-129.

strengthen the ideas of his predecessors.⁶⁹ Cyprian exercised his ministry during a very difficult time in the history of Christianity, when persecution, schisms, and heresies threatened the very survival of the faith.⁷⁰ Firmly agreeing with his predecessors, he believed that the only way to overcome the difficulties was to stress church organization and discipline. In his eyes, in order to survive, the Church should resemble a well-trained army, where submission to the leadership of the Church was of utmost importance and insubordination was simply wrong.⁷¹ He believed that the Church was, above all, a concrete, visible community, a corporate body, with a clearly established structure and constitution comprised of two classes of members, the ordained clergy and non-ordained laity. This system, Cyprian believed, was established by God and, as such, was indispensable for the existence of the Church.⁷² The strongest endorsement in the writings of Cyprian was granted to the office of bishop in the Church. In Cyprian's eyes, God established the office of bishop and made the bishop his spokesman. A bishop was thus the ultimate and virtually irremovable authority in the church, the center of the congregation, final arbiter, and decision maker. In Cyprian's writings, notes Everett Ferguson, the bishop was not only the chief teacher "on the teaching chair of the church" but also the "magistrate making governmental and judicial decisions."⁷³ "The necessity for unity," writes Edwin Hatch, "outweighed all other considerations. Henceforth, whoever in any city claimed to be a member of the Christian Church must belong to the established organization of

⁶⁹In his ecclesiology, Cyprian appears to be heavily dependent on Tertullian, whom he considered as his teacher. Thus Campenhausen writes: "Cyprian treads consciously in the footsteps of his 'master' Tertullian; he copies him and plagiarizes him in his writings." Campenhausen, 266.

⁷⁰Robert D. Sider, "Cyprian," *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson (1997), 306-308; Rose Bernard Donna, "Introduction," in *Saint Cyprian Letters*, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1964), ix.

⁷¹Peter Hinchliff, *Cyprian of Carthage and the Unity of the Christian Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1974), 40-41.

⁷²Campenhausen, 269, 273.

⁷³Ferguson, "Bishop," 184; J. B. Lightfoot writes that, "if with Ignatius the bishop is the center of Christian unity, if with Irenaeus he is the depositary [sic] of the apostolic tradition, with Cyprian he is the absolute vice-regent of Christ in things spiritual." J. B. Lightfoot, *St Paul's Epistle to the Philippians: A Revised Text with Introduction, Notes and Dissertations* (London: Macmillan, 1868), 240.

the city. The seamless coat of Christ must not be rent. As there was one God, and one Christ, and one Holy Spirit, so there could be but one bishop.”⁷⁴

Although, as noted above, Tertullian appears to be the first to use the term “priest” (Latin: *sacerdos*) in the Christian vocabulary, it was Cyprian who developed the theology of priesthood by a large-scale application of the Old Testament priestly language to the ministry of a Christian pastor. For him, notes Edward Benson, “the Bishop is the sacrificing priest. Christ was Himself the Ordainer of the Jewish Priesthood. The Priests of that line were ‘our predecessors.’ The Jewish Priesthood at last became ‘a name and a shade,’ on the day when it crucified Christ. Its reality passed on to the Christian bishop.”⁷⁵ The new terminology applied especially to the Eucharist, of which, according to Cyprian, the bishop is the only celebrant.⁷⁶ From that time on, the bishop became an indispensable channel of God’s grace and blessings. This innovation raised the episcopate to an even higher level and put new force into the old titles of respect, because it caused the spiritual life of the faithful to be entirely dependent upon the bishop. Cyprian clearly saw this and believed that unless one was in unity with the bishop and belonged to the true Church, his salvation was doomed.⁷⁷ The Church, consisting of the ministry and those in unity with them, was, for Cyprian, the divine “ark of Noah,” outside of which there was no possibility of forgiveness of sins, no true sacraments, thus, in short, no possibility of salvation.⁷⁸ Thus he famously stated, *Quia salus extra ecclesiam non est!* (“Outside of the Church there is no salvation”).⁷⁹ All this, of course, depended on the rite of ordination that the bishop received from the hands of other ordained bishops. In this fashion, Cyprian combined

⁷⁴Hatch, 105.

⁷⁵Edward White Benson, *Cyprian, His Life, His Times, His Work* (London: MacMillan, 1897), 33.

⁷⁶Schillebeeckx notes that originally the title “priest” was bestowed only on the bishop. However, with the passage of time, as the presbyters increasingly began to replace bishop as presiders at the Eucharist, they too were finally called priests. In this way, “sacerdotalizing” enveloped all the ministers of the church.” See Schillebeeckx, 48-49.

⁷⁷Cyprian *Epistle* 27.21 (*ANF* 5:383).

⁷⁸Cyprian *On the Unity of the Church* 6 (*ANF* 5:423)

⁷⁹Cyprian *Epistle* 72.21 (*ANF* 5:384). Throughout the centuries, and especially since the Second Vatican Council, both Catholics and Protestants wrestled with Cyprian’s exact intention when he uttered this phrase (later also known as *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*). Mahmud Aydin, “The Catholic Church’s Teachings on Non-Christians with Special Reference to the Second Vatican Council,” in *Multiple Paths to God: Nostra Aetate, 40 Years Later*, ed. George F. McLean and John P. Hoga (Washington, DC: John Paul II Cultural Center, The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy,

the Ignatian prerogatives of ecclesiastical authority with the sacerdotal claim of the ordained ministry and made obedience to the ordained clergy necessary for the unity of the Church and the salvation of the believers.

To this day, this understanding of the Christian ministry and its role dominates the Roman Catholic thinking on the matter.⁸⁰ Thus, there appears to be a clear ideological line between these early developments, spurred on by the thinkers discussed above and their emphasis upon the unity of the church, to the statement made by John Paul II in his 1995 encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (*That They May Be One*), in which he presented the papal office as the “perpetual and visible principle and foundation of unity”⁸¹ and the pope as “the visible sign and guarantor of unity.”⁸² Historically speaking, then, it could be said that when the emphasis on the clearly unscriptural kind of unity taught by the second- and third-century thinkers replaced the early Christian emphasis on the charity within the Church, the papacy was born! (Revelation 2:4).

Two more developments relating to ordination into Christian ministry must be mentioned. First, from the time of Augustine on, Christian writers began to write of ordination as the moment when the Catholic minister receives a special, permanent seal upon his soul.⁸³ This indelible mark assures that the actions of the priest, such as baptism and administration of the Lord’s Supper, are valid in a sacramental sense, i.e., they convey God’s salvific grace. According to this view, ordination becomes one of the most important Catholic rites since it allows the Catholic priest to function as a

2005), 23-39.

⁸⁰*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* thus states “The Pope, Bishop of Rome and Peter’s successor, ‘is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful. . . .’ The individual *bishops* are the visible source and foundation of unity in their own particular Churches’.” Ibid. paragraphs 882, 883, 886, page, 234.

⁸¹John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint* 88 in *The Encyclicals of John Paul II*, ed., J. Michael Miller (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 1996), 967–968. This quotation is taken directly from *Lumen Gentium* 23, in Abbott, 44.

⁸²John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint* 88, in Miller, 968; cf., Martin C. Albl, *Reason, Faith, and Tradition: Explorations in Catholic Theology* (Winona: Saint Mary’s Press, 2009), 353.

⁸³This seal is variably referred to as *character indelebilis*, *dominicus character*, or sacramental character. For Augustine’s teachings on this matter, see Emmanuel J. Cutrone, “Sacraments,” in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 741-747.

channel of God's grace. Salvation, thus, in some way, depends on ordination. This much is clear from the following statement found in the official *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: "By the imposition of hands and through the words of the consecration, the grace of the Holy Spirit is given, and a sacred character [seal] is impressed in such wise that bishops, in an eminent and visible manner, take the place of Christ himself, teacher, shepherd, and priest, and act as his representative."⁸⁴

Christ, thus, is present in the Church through his representatives, bishops and priests, who together function as *vicarius Christi*, or in the place of Christ.⁸⁵ This is only possible if the rite of ordination is performed correctly and according to the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church.

Another development relates to the practice of absolute *ordinatio*, i.e., ordination in which hands are laid upon a minister without his being asked to fulfill a particular task or minister to a particular community. It appears that, until the fifth century, only those who had been called by a particular community to be its pastor and leader, or to a particular missionary endeavor, were actually ordained. The rite was thus attached to the task at hand. It appears that only around the time of the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) did it become widely accepted to practice absolute *ordinatio*. Ordination thus becomes attached to a person rather than a task.⁸⁶

The death of the last apostle and that of Cyprian in 258 AD are separated by approximately 160 years. It took, thus, only 160 years for the church to depart from its New Testament roots and

⁸⁴*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 1558, page 389.

⁸⁵Cyprian also appears to be the first Christian thinker to apply this title to the bishop. While in the early Christian ages, the title *Vicarius Christi* was applied equally to all bishops, during the later ages it became a monopoly of the bishop of Rome. The pope, according to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, is to be considered as the "first among equals" (*primus inter pares*). The title *vicarius Christi*, thus, may equally apply to the bishops who stay in communion with the bishop of Rome and to the priests who stay within communion with their bishop and who represent their bishop to the communities within which they perform their priestly duties. Michael G. Lawler, Thomas J. Shanahan, *Church: A Spirited Communion* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 107; cf., Richard R. Gaillardet, *Teaching with Authority: A Theology of the Magisterium in the Church* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997), 58-59; Agostino Paravicini-Bagliani, *The Pope's Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 58-59;

⁸⁶Schillebeeckx, 38-41; the ontological distinction between *ordinem et plebem* that had already appeared in Tertullian, and was eventually accepted by Christian thinkers, made this development inevitable. Cf., Vinzenz Fuchs, *Der Ordinationstitel von seiner Entstehung bis auf Innozenz III* (Amsterdam: P. Shppers, 1963), 280; R. Paul Stevens, *The Other Six Days: Vocation, Work, and Ministry in Biblical Perspective* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999), 151; Gary Macy, *The Hidden History of Women's Ordination: Female Clergy in the Medieval West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 27.

thoroughly embrace sacramental ecclesiology, where the sacraments of the Church officiated by the ordained ministry (a sacrament itself), rather than individual faith, became accepted as the means of salvation. It was also during this period that the Church departed from a variety of biblical teachings such as the seventh-day Sabbath and the mortality of the soul. Interestingly, the same period of time witnessed the phasing out of the ministry of women in the Church. For example, Canon XI of the Council of Laodicea (364 AD) forbids ordination of women elders.⁸⁷ The same Council, in Canon XXIX, forbade observance of the seventh-day Sabbath as the day of rest once and for all, designating all those who continue to observe the Sabbath as judaizers. "But if any shall be found to be judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ," the council declared.⁸⁸ Obviously, the Council's message regarding the ordination of women elders did not receive widespread acceptance, since Pope Gelasius I, in 494 AD, felt it necessary to issue a strong condemnation in his letter to the bishops in Lucania (Southern Italy): "Nevertheless we have heard to our annoyance that divine affairs have come to such a low state that women are encouraged to officiate at the sacred altars, and to take part in all matters imputed to the offices of the male sex, to which they do not belong."⁸⁹ Other teachings, such

⁸⁷W. A. Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, vol. 1 (Collegeville, MN: The Order of St. Benedict Inc., 1970), 316. There exists overwhelming historical and inscriptional evidence that, prior to the developments of the second and third centuries, women served the church in various leadership capacities. Many were ordained. Both Catholic and Protestant studies have shown conclusively the existence of women ministers in the early church. See, for example, a recent work by a Catholic scholar, Gary Macy, who does not appear to endorse the ordination of women in the Catholic Church. Gary Macy, *The Hidden History of Women's Ordination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek, *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2011); cf. William Tabbernee, "Epigraphy," in the *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David Hunter (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 134. Interestingly, inscriptional evidence exists that, in ancient Jewish synagogues, there existed women elders who, at times, even functioned as head elders. See the insightful work by Pieter Willem Van Der Horst, *Jews and Christians in Their Graeco-Roman Context* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 25.

⁸⁸Heidi Heiks, *AD 538 Source Book* (Ringgold: Teach Services, 2010), 252.

⁸⁹Deborah Halter, *The Papal No: A Comprehensive Guide to Vatican's Rejection of Women's Ordination* (New York: Crossroads, 2004), 50. Interestingly, the Biblical Pontifical Commission established by Paul VI in 1967 declared that opposition to women's ordination cannot be sustained on biblical grounds. The Commission concluded: "It does not seem that the New Testament by itself alone will permit us to settle in a clear way and once and for all the problem of the possible accession of women to the presbyterate" (Origins 6:6 [Jul 1, 1976], 92-96). Even more significant is the following remark: "It must be repeated that the texts of the New Testament, even on such important points as the sacraments, do not always give all the light that one would wish to find in them." *Commentary on the Declaration of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1977), 27). Notwithstanding such findings, both Paul VI and John Paul II defended the male priesthood. In 1994, John Paul II published an apostolic letter, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, in which he authoritatively declared that the church had no authority to ordain women on traditional grounds. Commenting on the

as various Marian doctrines, the cult of the saints, and veneration of relics were also introduced into Christian theology at the time. Could it be that creating a division between the laity and clergy, thus separating the Church into two distinct groups of individuals and granting the ordained clergy special powers and authority, contributed in a significant way to the Church's departure from its New Testament roots?

The Church, divided into two classes, *ordo* and *plebs*, continued throughout the centuries. The idea of ontological class division within the Church received a powerful jolt during the sixteenth century Reformation. However, not even the Protestant Reformation, with its emphasis on the priesthood of all believers, was able to break the grip of sacramentalism on Christian ecclesiology. On the one hand, the Reformers preached salvation by faith and grace alone; on the other hand, they perpetuated the sacramental vision of the Church. Echoing Cyprian's *extra ecclesiam*, Martin Luther thus wrote: "Outside of this Christian Church there is no salvation or forgiveness of sins, but everlasting death and damnation."⁹⁰ Similar concerns are found in Book IV of John Calvin's *Institutes*, devoted entirely to the doctrine of the Church. He even used language that is reminiscent of Cyprian when he referred to the Church as "mother." "For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and guidance until . . . we become like angels. . . . Furthermore, away from her bosom one cannot hope for forgiveness of sins or any salvation. . . . It is always disastrous

papal letter, Avery Dulles, a well-known Roman Catholic scholar and ecclesiologist, recalled the traditional Catholic argument against women's ordination, known as the "iconic argument," which states that "the priest at the altar acts in the person of Christ the Bridegroom. These theological reasons," Dulles concludes, "show why it was fitting for Christ to have freely decided to reserve priestly service to men. If the maleness of the priest is essential to enable him to act symbolically in *persona Christi* in the eucharistic sacrifice, it follows that women should not be priests." Avery Dulles, "Infallible: Rome's Word On Women's Ordination," *National Catholic Register*, January 7, 1996, 1, 10.

⁹⁰Martin Luther, *Confessions Concerning Christ's Supper*, in *Luther's Works*, ed. Eric W. Gritsch (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 37:368. The fact that this statement appears in Luther's treatise on the Lord's Supper further accentuates his position on sacraments viewed as the means of grace and salvation. Further elaboration on Luther's understanding of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* may be found in his *Large Catechism*, where he makes a close connection between being a part of the Church and forgiveness of sins. Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 56-62.

to leave the church.”⁹¹ For Calvin, therefore, clearly there was no salvation outside of the Church.⁹² At the core of Calvin’s ecclesiology, as in Cyprian, however, lies deep concern for the unity of the Church.⁹³ John Hesselink thus writes that Calvin has rightly been hailed as the “Cyprian of the Reformation,” as “none of the reformers had a higher view of the church and . . . worked so tirelessly toward achieving its unity.”⁹⁴ While it is uncontested that Calvin subscribed to the Protestant principle of the priesthood of all believers, he continued to believe in the elevated status of the Christian ministry, although not entirely in a Catholic sense.⁹⁵ “The church,” he wrote, “can be kept intact only if it be upheld by the safeguards in which it pleased the Lord to place its salvation.” These “safeguards” were the Christian ministers who governed the church and who were, for Calvin, “the chief sinew by which believers are held together in one body.”⁹⁶ The vestiges of Catholic sacramentalism thus hampered the Magisterial Reformers’ emphasis on the priesthood of all believers and their attempts to establish alternate governmental structures.⁹⁷ As a result, the Reformers continued, albeit inadvertently, the Catholic tradition of separating clergy from laity through the act of ordination. Consequently, the elevated status and prestige of the Christian ministry was never fully repudiated, and ordination continued to separate clergy and laity into two separate castes of believers. Could it be that by leaving the traces of Catholic sacramentalism in Protestant theology, as

⁹¹John Calvin, *Institutes* iv.i.4, ed., John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 2:1016.

⁹²According to the analysis provided by the Reformed scholar Louis Berkhof, at the center of Calvin’s ecclesiology was the belief that “the blessings of salvation can be obtained only through the Church, since God in dispensing His grace binds Himself absolutely to the ordained means, the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments.” Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1937), 238.

⁹³John Calvin, *Institutes* iv.i.4, 11; iv.iii.1 (McNeill, 2:1019, 1026, 1054). He thus wrote, “Always, both by word and deed I have protested how eager I was for unity.” John Calvin, “Letter to Sadoleto,” quoted in William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 215.

⁹⁴John Hesselink, “Calvin’s Theology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed., Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 87; cf., Gottfried Wilhelm Locher, *Sign of the Advent: A Study in Protestant Ecclesiology* (Fribourg: University of Fribourg Academic Press, 2004), 157.

⁹⁵Calvin *Institutes* iv.iii.2 (McNeill, 2:1055). Not that it mattered to common, theologically untrained people, who were often forced to take on the religion of their magistrates.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*

⁹⁷For a detailed study of the sacramentalism of the Protestant Reformers, see my three papers: Darius Jankiewicz “Sacramental Theology and Ecclesiastical Authority,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 42 (Autumn 2004): 361-382; “Models of Ecclesiastical Authority,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 18 (2007): 15-34; and the forthcoming “Adventist Ecclesiology and the Sixteenth Century Reformation,” in *Studies in Adventist Ecclesiology—II: Message, Mission, and Unity of the Church*, ed., Ángel Rodríguez (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2012).

well as through the perpetuation of the non-biblical rite of “ordination” (as contrasted with the biblical laying-on-of-hands ritual) the Reformers inadvertently contributed to the faltering of the Reformation?

Early Adventism, Organization, and Ordination

As a result of the magisterial reformers’ hesitancy,⁹⁸ various restorationist movements advocating a complete return to New Testament Christianity arose already during the life of the Reformers (most notably the Anabaptists) and throughout subsequent centuries. Many of these movements attempted to portray the Christian ministry in a more functional (i.e., service oriented) rather than sacramental way, thus bringing their communities towards a closer realization of the New Testament principle of the priesthood of all believers. Over time, some of these movements continued to maintain their anti-clerical ethos, while others oscillated between a functional and a more sacramental understanding of ministry and ordination.

Seventh-day Adventists consider themselves heirs of the various restorationist movements that advocated a return to biblical Christianity. Two out of three of the principal founders of Adventism, Joseph Bates and James White, were part of the movement known as Christian Connexion, which advocated just such an ideal. As a result, early Adventist Sabbatarians tended to view such human constructs as creeds, organization, and structured ministry with great suspicion.⁹⁹ It took some years for Adventists to realize that, while not present in Scripture, not all organizational forms are necessarily pernicious and opposed to the spirit of Scripture. In fact, they recognized that some form of organization was necessary in order to facilitate the preaching of the Advent message. Under the leadership of James and Ellen G. White, and amid significant strife, the first organizational

⁹⁸The term Magisterial Reformation is usually applied to the three branches of the sixteenth century Reformation going back to Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli.

⁹⁹In his book, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission*, Gerard Damsteegt notes that the ecclesiological thinking of early Sabbatarian Adventists was a “consistent extension of the Millerite views,” in which any form of “organized” religion was “considered to be Babylon.” Any discussion on the “church” in these early years appears to have been limited to differentiations between false and true religion (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1977), 147-148.

steps were taken during the mid-1850s. These eventually culminated in the achievement of formal organization in 1863.¹⁰⁰

It was only natural that, during those turbulent years, the question of ministry would also be discussed. The early Adventist Sabbatarian communities struggled to distinguish between legitimate Adventist Sabbatarian preachers and those who were not. As a result of such difficulties, Adventist leadership of the early 1850s decided to issue credentials to those who truly represented the message of the nascent denomination. At about the same time, aware of the needs of the church and mindful of the Protestant practice of ordination, early Adventist leaders began to ordain their ministers through the laying-on-of-hands.¹⁰¹ These moves followed a careful study of the Scriptures and were supported by Ellen G. White, who concluded that, for the sake of “gospel order,” men who were clearly called by God to a special ministry of the gospel should be set apart through the laying-on-of-hands.¹⁰² These laying-on-of-hands rituals were to follow the model found in Acts 13:1-3, where Paul and Barnabas were set apart for a special ministry of the gospel. Set apart as such, these ministers were to preside over baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and other rites of the church. These and other organizational developments were necessary to protect the church and its mission. It is still necessary today, and Scripturally supported, to identify those who have the gift of leadership and set them apart for ministry. While acknowledging the importance of the ministerial calling and the solemnness of the laying-on-of-hands rite, however, Ellen G. White warned early Adventists against ascribing to the rite of ordination more than its due:

At a later date, the rite of ordination by the laying-on-of-hands was greatly abused; *unwarrantable importance* was attached to the act, as if a power came at once upon those who re-

¹⁰⁰This and other developments have been documented in George Knight’s excellent book *Organizing to Beat the Devil: The Development of Adventist Church Structure* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2001).

¹⁰¹George Knight thus notes that “The Sabbatarian approach to ordination was pragmatic and eclectic rather than built upon a tightly-reasoned theology of ordination. The leaders of the movement, however, were concerned to justify their practices from the Bible. The function of ordination was to serve the mission of the church.” George Knight, “Early Seventh-day Adventists and Ordination,” in *Women in Ministry*, ed. Nancy Vyhmeister (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1998), 111.

¹⁰²Ellen G. White, *Supplement to the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White* (Rochester: James White, 1854), 18-19; cf., Knight, *Organizing to Beat the Devil: The Development of Adventist Church Structure*, 37.

ceived such ordination, which immediately qualified them for any and all ministerial work. But in the setting apart of these two apostles, there is no record indicating that any virtue was imparted by the mere act of laying on of hands. There is only the simple record of their ordination, and of the bearing that it had on their future work.¹⁰³

Careful perusal of early Adventist literature regarding ordination indicates that while Adventist writers viewed the rite as thoroughly scriptural, they were also mindful of White's warning and did not ascribe to the rite of ordination "unwarrantable importance." It appears that for them, the rite had more to do with "gospel order" and was necessary at the time more for pragmatic than theological reasons.¹⁰⁴ One is hard pressed to find in these early writings any discussion on the status, rank, or gender of these ministers. This simply did not appear to be on the agenda of the early Adventists. All that mattered was the proclamation of the three angels' messages.

Conclusion

In the light of my findings, as presented in this paper, I feel that the following questions need to be asked: Could it be that, as we have been experiencing the delay of the Second Coming of Christ, we may have begun placing more emphasis on the institutional aspects of the church, where rank, status, and position matter more than the preaching of the gospel? Have we tended to ascribe "unwarrantable importance" to the simple New Testament custom of laying-on-of-hands—thus inadvertently repeating the mistakes of early Christianity? Is the distinction between ordained clergy and un-ordained laity, as accepted and practiced within our denomination, in agreement with the biblical principle of the priesthood of all believers? Have we sufficiently freed ourselves from the shackles of sacramentalism bequeathed to us from other Christian churches? Have we truly understood the radical implications of Paul's teaching on the Body of Christ and His belief that "to *each one of us* grace has been given as Christ apportioned it?" (Eph 4:7, 11; Rom 12:6). Finally, we must ask ourselves the all-important question: Does the current way of understanding and practicing ministerial ordination continue to serve the mission of the church?

¹⁰³Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles* (Place: Publisher, Date), 162; emphasis mine.

In answering these questions, let the history of the organizational developments of the early church serve as a warning to us; for it did not take long for the persecuted church to become a persecuting church, with those who disagreed suffering much at the hands of the ordained clergy. This church, so enamored with its own institution and the protection of the powers of its clergy, ultimately lost its place in the divine scheme of things. There are no guarantees that history will not repeat itself again.

Two Models of the Church diagram



¹⁰⁴George Knight, "Early Seventh-day Adventists and Ordination," 111.