

1-1-1961

Ordination in the Ancient Church (II)

Everett Ferguson

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Recommended Citation

Ferguson, Everett (1961) "Ordination in the Ancient Church (II)," *Restoration Quarterly*: Vol. 5 : No. 1 , Article 2.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/restorationquarterly/vol5/iss1/2>

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RESTORATION QUARTERLY

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STUDIES IN CHRISTIAN SCHOLARSHIP
VOL. 5 NO. 1 FIRST QUARTER, 1961

Ordination in the Ancient Church (II)

Everett Ferguson

Ordination in the Fourth Century

Some Accounts of the Ceremony of Ordination

One of the fullest accounts of ordination in the ancient church is preserved in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, compiled in Syria toward the end of the fourth century. The instructions concerning the ordination of a bishop follow.

As all of us have already commanded, a bishop to be ordained is to be irreproachable, being elected by all the people. When he has been designated and approved, the people come together, with the presbytery and the bishops who are present, on the Lord's Day. And the principal bishop is to ask the presbytery and the people if he is the one whom they have chosen as their ruler. After they give their consent, let him inquire further if all men testify that he is worthy of this great and glorious leadership: if he is truly religious toward God, has observed justice toward men, has ordered well his own household, is irreproachable in conduct. If all sincerely testify together that he is such a person, let them be asked again the third time, as in the presence of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit (who is also present), and all the holy and ministering spirits, if he is truly worthy of the ministry, "that at the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established." If they agree the third time that he is worthy, they are to be asked for their consent, and giving it readily, let them be heard. When silence is made, one of the principal bishops standing with two others near the altar, while the rest of the bishops and presbyters pray silently and while the deacons hold the divine Gospels open upon the head of the one being ordained, is to pray to God . . .

After the prayer one of the bishops is to lift up the sacrifice upon the hands of the one who has been ordained. And early in the morning he is to be enthroned in a place set apart for him among the rest of the bishops, who give him the kiss in the Lord. After the reading of the Law, the Prophets, and our Epistles, Acts, and Gospels, the one who has been ordained is to salute the church, saying: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you." And all shall answer, "And with your spirit." And after these words he is to speak to the people words of exhortation.¹

After a prior Election the ceremony of installation begins with a certification of the Election and a Formal Scrutiny of the worthiness of the candidate, acclaimed by the people. The ordination itself is a Prayer said while the book of the Gospels is held open over the ordinand's head, a feature still present in the ordinations of bishops in the Orthodox Church. After this point, he is spoken of as the "one who has been ordained." No Imposition of hands is mentioned,

¹*Apos. Const.* VIII.iv-v. Translated from the Greek text in F. X. Funk, *Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum* (Paderborn, 1905), Vol. I. Translations are the author's unless otherwise noted.

but in view of another passage (VIII.xlvi.9) this may be accidental. Following the Prayer the new bishop receives a symbol of his right to offer sacrifice (Porrection), is seated on his episcopal throne, delivers a sermon, and proceeds with the liturgy (Inaugural Usurpation).

The Prayer for a bishop is not quoted, because for all of its verbosity it adds no new information to that found in other Prayers which will be quoted.² The Prayer stresses God's appointment of rulers and priests for his people in all times. The priestly description of the bishop's work is quite prominent. There is a request that the bishop receive the "power" of the Holy Spirit, and then later that he may have the "communion" of the Holy Spirit. Aside from the priestly duty of sacrificing, the bishop is equipped by fellowship with the Spirit with power to remit sins, to "give lots," and to loose every bond.

The directions concerning a presbyter and deacon are briefer.

When you ordain a presbyter, O bishop, lay your hand on his head, while the presbytery and the deacons are standing by you, and praying, say:³

O Lord Almighty, our God,
who hast created all things by Christ,
and in like manner takes care of the whole world by Him
for He who had power to make different creatures, has
also power to take care of them, according to their
different natures;

on which account, O God, Thou takest care of immortal
beings by bare preservation,
but of those that are mortal by succession—
of the soul by the provision of laws,
of the body by the supply of its wants.

Do Thou now also look down upon this Thy servant,
who is put into the presbytery by the vote and determination
of the whole clergy;

and do Thou replenish him with the Spirit of grace and counsel,
to assist and govern Thy people with a pure heart,
in the same manner as Thou didst look down upon Thy chosen
people

and didst command Moses to choose elders
whom Thou didst fill with Thy Spirit.

Do Thou also now, O Lord, grant this,
and preserve in us the Spirit of Thy grace,

²The full quotation, along with the rescension of the Prayer in the *Constitutions Through Hippolytus* (which is the same as the Prayer in the *Apostolic Tradition*), may be found in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; American Reprint Edition; Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1950-), Vol. VII.

³In order to facilitate the comparison of these Prayers I have attempted to make a division into clauses, returning to the margin for each principal clause, indenting for secondary ideas, and giving a double indentation for the completion of clauses.

The *Apostolic Constitutions*, the *Testament of our Lord*, the *Constitutions Through Hippolytus*, and the *Canons of Hippolytus* are indebted to the *Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus* from the third century.

that this person, being filled with the gifts of healing and the word of teaching, may in meekness instruct Thy people, and sincerely serve Thee with a pure mind and a willing soul, and may fully discharge the holy ministrations for Thy people, through Thy Christ, with whom glory, honour, and worship be to Thee, and to the Holy Spirit for ever. Amen.

You shall appoint a deacon, O bishop, laying your hands upon him, while the whole presbytery and the deacons stand by you, and praying, you shall say:

O God Almighty, the true and faithful God,
who art rich unto all that call upon Thee in truth,
who art fearful in counsels,
and wise in understanding,
who art powerful and great,
hear our prayer, O Lord,
and let Thine ears receive our supplication,
and "cause the light of Thy countenance to shine upon this Thy servant,"

who is being ordained for Thee to the office of a deacon;
and replenish him with Thy Holy Spirit, and with power,
as Thou didst replenish Stephen, who was Thy martyr, and follower of the sufferings of Thy Christ.

Do Thou render him worthy to discharge acceptably the ministration of a deacon,
steadily, unblameably, and without reproof,
that thereby he may attain a higher degree,
through the mediation of Thy only begotten Son, with whom glory, honour, and worship be to Thee and the Holy Spirit for ever. Amen.⁴

The *Testament of our Lord* represents another working up of the traditional materials utilized in the *Apostolic Constitutions*. Although the English editors⁵ date the *Testament* in the 350's and give a preference to Asia Minor, most students have dated it after the *Apostolic Constitutions* and placed its origin in Syria.

Book I, chapter 20 contains the statement, "Let the bishop be appointed, being chosen by all the people according to the will of the Holy Ghost." Qualifications are then given, following the Pastoral epistles. Chapter 21 describes the "ordination"⁶ on the first day of the week as including the assent to the appointment and the witness to his life by the people, the silent prayer by the presbyters, the laying on of the hands of the neighboring bishops while they pray,⁷ and finally the laying on of hands by one bishop (commanded by the others) while he says the "calling of appointment." This Prayer belongs to the main stream of ordination liturgies but contains much flowery embellishment, especially in the address to God

⁴VIII.xvi.-xvii.

⁵James Cooper and J. J. Maclean, *The Testament of our Lord* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1902), pp. 41ff. Quotations are made from this edition.

⁶Literally, "the laying on of the hand," with the word being from the Semitic root *sim* and so throughout the ritual.

⁷This Prayer seems to be the work of the compiler and is without precedent or posterity in ordinations.

who is praised as the One who has always provided princes and priests for his sanctuary. The petitionary part may be quoted in order to give the atmosphere of the document. After petitioning for the Spirit to come to the Church the bishop prays as follows:

Grant, O Lord, that this Thy servant may please Thee for doxology, and for laud without ceasing, O God, for fitting hymns of praise, and for suitable times, for acceptable prayers, for faithful asking, for an upright mind, for a meek heart, for the working of life and of meekness and of truth, for the knowledge of uprightness.

O Father, who knowest the hearts, grant to this Thy servant whom Thou hast chosen for the episcopate, to feed Thy holy flock, and to stand at the head of the priesthood without fault, ministering to Thee day and night; grant that Thy face may be seen by him; vouchsafe, O Lord, that he may offer to Thee the offering of Thy holy Church carefully and with all fear; bestow upon him that he may have Thy powerful Spirit to loose all band, as Thou didst bestow Him on Thy apostles, to please Thee in meekness; fill him full of love, knowledge, understanding, discipline, perfectness, strength, and a pure heart, when he prayeth for the people, and when he mourneth for those who commit folly and draweth them to receive help; when he offereth to Thee praises and thanksgivings and prayers for a sweet-smelling savour through Thy beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are given to Thee praise and honour and might, with the Holy Ghost, both before the worlds, and also now, and at all times, and for ever and ever without end. Amen.

The people respond to the prayer by saying "Amen" and shouting three times, "He is worthy."⁸

The ceremony for the ordination of a presbyter in chapter 30 provides for the bishop to lay his hand on the ordinand while the presbyters touch him. The bishop's wordy prayer petitions for the Holy Spirit, apparently under the influence of the reference to the choosing of the elders by Moses in Numbers 11. The elders' duties are summarized as to "help and govern" the people, or elsewhere, "to shepherd."

According to chapter 33, "the deacon is appointed, chosen like the things which have before been spoken of," perhaps referring to the Election of the bishop. In chapter 38 the directions are given that the bishop alone lay a hand on the deacon, "because he is not ap-

⁸This is the place where the acclamation, *Axios*, comes in the Orthodox liturgies today.

⁹For a similar stress in the other church orders that the deacon is not a priest, Cooper and Maclean, *op. cit.*, pp. 191f, 195.

pointed to the priesthood,⁹ but for the service of attendance on the bishop and the Church." The bishop prays for God to "give the Spirit of grace and earnestness to this Thy servant," not the Holy Spirit. Both liturgical and benevolent activities are indicated for the deacon in the Prayer.

One of the most circumstantial accounts of ordination from the ancient church is found in the "Life of Polycarp," probably from the fourth century in the region of Asia Minor.¹⁰ Unreliable for Polycarp's life, the work still has a capital importance for the climate of opinion in the author's own day. The author speaks of "those who are chosen by God as His ministers,"¹¹ and this popular conception of God's choice is embroidered at places by a touch of the miraculous. The description of Polycarp's ministerial career reflected the careers of others witnessed by the author.

He (Bucolus) perceived therefore that he was worthy; and for the present, owing to his youthfulness, he enrolled him in the order of deacons with the approval of the whole Church. Blessed indeed was he in being permitted to cover such a head with his hand and to bless so noble a soul with his voice . . .

As a deacon he approved himself among his own contemporaries, as Stephen did among those of the Apostles.¹²

Notice the stress on popular approval, the worthiness of the candidate, the recalling of the memory of Stephen, and the interpretation of the bishop's action as a Benediction.

An interesting picture of a presbyter emerges from the description of Polycarp's advancement to that position.

Bucolus, therefore, seeing that Polycarp's age was adequate and that the propriety of his conduct throughout all his life was even more adequate than the number of his years, perceived that he was most excellent as a fellow-counsellor to him in questions relating to the Church and as a fellow-minister in teaching; while the Lord set His seal on and ratified his design; giving him commandment in a vision. Accordingly he appointed him to an office in the presbyterate, the whole Church with one accord welcoming him with great joy, although he himself shrunk from such an undertaking.¹³

The bishop Bucolus indicated a desire for Polycarp as his successor and then the people talked about their hope of getting such a man for their pastor (chap. xx). Then comes a fairly full account of the choice and installation of Polycarp as bishop.

And without any delay, not many days after, gathering together bishops from the cities round about and making preparations for the reception of the visitors, they took measures for the appointment of a successor to preside over the Church. When they arrived, great crowds gathered from the cities and villages and fields, some knowing Polycarp, others desiring

¹⁰J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Vol II² (London: MacMillan & Co., 1885), pp. 1011f. Lightfoot's translation will be used.

¹¹Chap. x.

¹²Chap. xi, xii.

¹³Chap. xvii.

from what they had heard of him to behold him. So when they were assembled together and the church was filled, the glory of a heavenly light shone among them all, and certain brethren saw marvellous visions. One saw hovering over Polycarp a white dove encircled in light, Another beheld him, before he had sat down, as if already seated in his chair of office . . .

And on the sabbath, when prayer had been made long time on bended knee, he, as was his custom, got up to read; and every eye was fixed upon him. Now the lesson was the Epistles of Paul to Timothy and to Titus, in which he says what manner of man a bishop ought to be. And he was so well fitted for the office that the hearers said one to another that he lacked none of those qualities which Paul requires in one who has the care of a Church. When then, after the reading and the instruction of the bishops and the discourses of the presbyters, the deacons were sent to the laity to enquire whom they would have, they said with one accord, "Let Polycarp be our pastor and teacher." The whole priesthood then having assented, they appointed him notwithstanding his earnest entreaties and his desire to decline.

Accordingly the deacons led him up for ordination (*cheirothesia*) by hands of the bishops according to custom. And being placed in his chair by them, he moistened and anointed with tears of piety and humility the place where in the Spirit he saw standing the feet of Christ who was present with him for the anointing to the priestly office. For where the ministers are—the priests and Levites—there in the midst is also the High-priest arrayed in the great flowing robe. Then the company present urged him, since this was the custom, to address them. For they said that this work of teaching was the most important part of the communion. . .

After this the others also having made the proper exhortations and appeals on the Sabbath and on the Lord's Day, and offerings and eucharists, rejoicing and partaking of food, returned each to his own home rejoicing greatly at having communicated with Polycarp, and glorifying Christ Jesus the Lord for it, to whom is the glory for ever. Amen.¹⁴

According to the vivid description given here the initiative in the Election belongs with the people. The Election as well as the installation takes place in a liturgical setting. The Imposition of hands is central, but the Enthronement occupies a prominent place in the mind of the people. There was eagerness for Polycarp to carry out the custom of delivering a sermon at this occasion. Most of the elements, therefore, found associated with the subject of ordination are brought together into a consistent whole in this narrative.

The ordination prayers contained in the Prayer-book of Serapion, fourth century bishop of Thmuis in the Egyptian Delta, have no literary connection with the other Prayers of the period but offer a valuable insight because they contain the same motifs. The titles in the manuscript, which serve as rubrics, for the Prayers at the ordination of a bishop, presbyter, and deacon, follow the same form: "Laying on of hands (*cheirothesia*) of the appointment (*katastasis*) of . . ." The word for the imposition of hands is used in other con-

¹⁴Chap. xxi-xxiii.

texts in reference to catechumens, the laity, and penitents, in each case accompanying a prayer.

For a bishop:

Thou who didst send the Lord Jesus for the gain of all world,
thou who didst through him choose the apostles,
thou who generation by generation dost ordain holy Bishops,
O God of truth, make this Bishop also a living Bishop,
holy of the succession of the holy apostles,
and give to him grace and divine Spirit,
that thou didst freely give to all thy own servants and prophets
and patriarchs:

make him to be worthy to shepherd thy flock
and let him still continue unblameably and inoffensively in the
Bishopric

through thy only-begotten Jesus Christ,
through whom to thee (is) the glory and the strength in holy
Spirit both now and to all the ages of the ages. Amen.

For a Presbyter:

We stretch forth the hand,
O Lord God of the heavens, Father of thy only-begotten,
upon this man,
and Beseech thee that the Spirit of truth may dwell upon him.
Give him the grace of prudence and knowledge and a good heart.
Let a divine Spirit come to be in him
that he may be able to be a steward of the people
and an ambassador of thy divine oracles,
and to reconcile thy people to thee the uncreated God,
who didst give of the spirit of Moses upon the chosen ones,
even holy Spirit.

Give a portion of holy Spirit also to this man, and from the
Spirit of thy only-begotten,
for the grace of wisdom and knowledge and right faith,
that he may be able to serve thee in a clean conscience
through thy only-begotten Jesus Christ,
through whom to thee (is) the glory and the strength in holy
Spirit both now and for all the ages of the ages. Amen.

For a Deacon:

Father of the only-begotten who didst send thy Son
and didst ordain the things on the earth,
and hast given rules to the Church and orders for the profit
and salvation of the flocks,
who didst choose out Bishops, Presbyters, and Deacons for the
Ministry of thy catholic Church,
who didst choose through thine only-begotten the seven Deacons,
and didst freely give to them holy Spirit,
make also this man a Deacon of thy catholic Church,
and give in him a spirit of knowledge and discernment,
that he may be able cleanly and unblameably to do service in
this ministry in the midst of the holy people,
through thy only-begotten Jesus Christ,
through whom to thee (is) the glory and the strength in holy
Spirit both now and to all the ages of the ages.
Amen.¹⁵

¹⁵The translation is by John Wordsworth, *Bishop Serapion's Prayer-Book* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1923), pp. 72-74. The Greek text is given by F. E. Brightman, "The Sacramentary of Serapion of Thmuis," *Journal of Theological Studies*, I, pp. 266, 267.

The ordination of Athanasius as bishop of Alexandria may be selected as a typical instance of fourth century sentiment in Egypt. In answer to Arian charges of a clandestine and uncanonical Election of Athanasius the Egyptian bishops wrote an encyclical letter which Athanasius incorporated into his *Apologetica contra Arianos*.

Because all the multitude and all the laity of the catholic Church when they gathered together, shouting as if on one soul and one mouth, kept on crying out asking for Athanasius as bishop for the church. . . . The majority of us ordained him under the eyes and with the acclamations of all.¹⁶

In Sulpicius Severus' "Life of St. Martin," who became bishop of Tours about 371, there is information which may be taken as typical of the popular conceptions in the West.

An incredibly large number of people—not only from Tours but from nearby localities—had assembled to voice their vote. Among them there was one single will, one prayer, one judgment: Martin was the most worthy to be bishop; the church would be fortunate which had such as he for its head. Yet, there were a few men—among them some of the bishops who had been called together to ordain the future prelate—who set up an unscrupulous opposition. . . . And the only course that lay open to them was to do what the populace, inspired by the Lord's will, thought best.¹⁷

The turning point came when the Scripture reading for the day seemed so appropriate as a judgment on the chief opponent to Martin that it was taken as an expression of the divine will.

Important Features of the Procedure

From all regions the evidence converges to form a picture of nearly uniform practice, which may be summarized in the words of Priscillian of Spain about A.D. 380, "Even as the dedication of a bishop depends on the bishop, so the election depends on the petition by the people."¹⁸

Popular Election is prominent in the accounts cited above. The choice by the people was considered as expressing, or being influenced by, the divine will. In the narrative of the ordination of Ambrose as bishop of Milan in 374 the expectation of divine guidance was so strong that a childlike mistake was taken as an omen from God.

When the people were about to revolt in seeking a bishop, Ambrose had the task of putting down the revolt. . . . And when he was addressing the people, the voice of a child among the people is said to have called out suddenly: "Ambrose bishop." At the sound of this voice, the mouths of all the people joined in the cry: "Ambrose bishop." Thus, those who a while before were disagreeing most violently . . . suddenly

¹⁶*Apol. c. Arian.* vi. Cf. also, chap. xxx, and Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 21:8.

¹⁷"Life of St. Martin," ix, from the translation of B. M. Peebles for *The Fathers of the Church*, Vol. VII (New York, 1949).

¹⁸*Tract.* ii, in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (cited *CSEL*), XVIII, 40.

agreed on this one with miraculous and unbelievable harmony.¹⁹ Ambrose himself later wrote to the church at Vercellae and gave the following interpretation of the Election of Eusebius, one of its early bishops:

Justly did he turn out so great a man, whom the whole Church elected, justly was it believed that he whom all had demanded was elected by the judgment of God. . . . Where the demand of all is unanimous, ought we to doubt that the Lord Jesus is there as the Author of that desire, and the Hearer of the petition, the Presider over the ordination, and the Giver of the Grace?²⁰

The will of the people was often violently expressed and overcame strong opposition. The historian Socrates relates that at the council of Constantinople in 381 "Nectarius was seized by the people and proposed for the episcopate."²¹ In the oration on the death of his father Gregory Nazianzen gives an account of the activities of the people of Caesarea that has all the fervor of a political campaign.²²

Ratification by the Clergy of the Election by the people is to be expected. Their joint action with the people is noted in the sources. Theodoret relates that Eustathius was compelled to become bishop of Antioch (c. 324-331) "by the common vote of the bishops, priests, and Christ-loving laity."²³ The same historian speaks of Lucius, an Arian rival to the Alexandrian episcopate, in this way: "No synod of orthodox bishops had chosen him; no vote of genuine clergy; no laity had demanded him; as the laws of the church enjoin."²⁴ Roman practice is indicated by Siricius: "After the passage of time, he is appointed presbyter or bishop, if his election is proclaimed by the clergy and people."²⁵ Some of these passages may indicate clerical initiative and popular Ratification, for which see the next section.

The *Imposition of hands* by a bishop or bishops accompanying a *Prayer* was clearly the central element in the ceremony of installation. That only bishops were regarded as entitled to bestow an office is illustrated by Athanasius' quotation concerning Ischyras, "saying he was a presbyter when he is not a presbyter; for he was appointed by the presbyter Colluthus, who pretended to be a bishop."²⁶ The consecration of a bishop required three bishops.²⁷

¹⁹"Life of Ambrose" III.6 by Paulinus, quoted from the translation in *Early Christian Biographies* of the *Fathers of the Church Series*.

²⁰*Ep.* LXIII. 2,3. Migne, *Patrologia Latina* (cited *PL*) XVI, 1240f.

²¹*H. E.* V.8. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* (cited *PG*) LXVII, 577.

²²*Or.* XVIII.33.

²³*H. E.* I.vii.10. The second edition of his works in *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller* (Berlin: Akademie, 1954), which series is cited *GCS*.

²⁴*Ibid.*, IV.xxiii.9.

²⁵*Ep.* I.10. (*PL* XIII, 1143.)

²⁶*Apol. c. Arian.* lxxv. *Apos. Const.* III. x, xi is emphatic in denying ordination to other than bishops.

²⁷Canon 4 of the Council of Nicaea, in C. J. Hefele et H. LeClercq, *Histoire des Conciles* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1907). I, p. 539.

An *Inaugural Usurpation* is prominent in the accounts of installation. A Solemn Seating in the chair of office was a regular feature, and the word "Enthronement," as the act was called in the fourth century, could stand for the whole ceremony. Synesius wrote to Theophilus of Alexandria an account of the appointment of Paul as bishop of Erythrum: "The bishops of the province said that in obedience to a letter received from you they proposed Paul to the people for bishop. These agreed to have him and the others proceeded to the enthronement."²⁸ Although of medieval derivation, the English word "install" represents etymologically this act. The demonstration of having assumed the office was given when the new bishop celebrated the Eucharist and delivered a sermon.

New Features

The importance of the clergy in the selection of officers is much more in evidence in the fourth century. The sixth canon of Theophilus of Alexandria outlines a procedure of clerical choice, popular Ratification, and then episcopal ordination for the orders below the bishop.²⁹

A trend toward centralization is evident in the role assigned to the Metropolitan bishop and the synod of bishops in a province. Canon 4 of the Council of Nicaea decrees:

It is by all means fitting that a bishop be appointed (*kathistasthai*) by all the bishops in the eparchy. But if this should be difficult either on account of urgent necessity or of the great distance, at least three should meet together for this purpose, the absent bishops giving their favorable vote and communicating it in writing. Then perform the ordination (*cheirotonian*). But in every eparchy the ratification of what is done is given to the Metropolitan.³⁰

A council at Antioch gave similar instructions:

A bishop shall not be ordained without a synod and the presence of the metropolitan. When he is present, it is by all means better that all his fellow-ministers in the eparchy be with him, and it is proper that the metropolitan invite them by letter. And if all should meet, it is better. If this be difficult, it is necessary by all means that the majority be present or give their vote by letters, and thus the appointment shall take place with the presence or the vote of the majority.³¹

The ecclesiastical organization followed the civil. The Metropolitan had a preeminence not only because of the civil importance of his city, but also probably because his city was the first of the province to receive the Gospel. The other cities received the Gospel and their first ordinations from the capital city. What was initially necessity became custom and finally part of the constitutional structure of

²⁸*Ep. LXVII (PG LXVI, 1417).*

²⁹*PG LXV, 40*

³⁰Hefele—Leclercq, *loc. cit.*

³¹Translated from the Greek text of the canons of the council of Antioch in Friedrich Lauchert, *Die Kanones der Wichtigsten Alt-kirchlichen Concilien* (Freiburg: J. C. B. Mohr, 1896).

the Church.³² Since these canons were written by and for bishops, they are silent on the role of other people. The approval of the neighboring bishops made the ordination representatively an act of the entire church.

Imperial interference had increasingly to be reckoned with in key bishoprics. Theodoret relates, for instance, that prior to the Election of Ambrose the emperor Valens had summoned the neighboring bishops and instructed them, "Now, therefore, seat a man of such character among the high priestly chairs."³³ The bishops and the emperor paid deference to each other:

After the emperor had spoken these things, the synod begged him as being a wise and religious ruler to make the choice. He said, "The responsibility is too great for us. You who have been worthy of the divine grace and have received illumination from above will make a better choice."³⁴

Terminology

The fourth century terminology in regard to ordination is mirrored in the language of the *Apostolic Constitutions*.

Cheirotonein ("ordain") is used of any formal appointment or institution as well as technically of ordination in the church. It is used of the three major orders and of sub-deacons, but the compiler draws the line here on who receives *cheirotomia*. However, in some loose series the word covers the lesser orders as well. This word refers to the whole ceremony of installation in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, not to Election nor to Imposition of hands.

Procheirizein ("appoint," "select") occurs often and seems indistinguishable from the meanings of *cheirotonein* except for its reference to the appointment of lesser orders. *Kathistanai* ("appoint," "install") is also frequent and appears in the variety of senses noticeable in non-ecclesiastical Greek. It occurs both interchangeably with and in contrast to *cheirotonein*.

Cheirothesia ("imposition of hands") is used of confirmation, reconciliation of penitents, benediction on the faithful, and benediction on catechumens. The word is thus used of any benediction bestowed by an imposition of hands, but is distinguished from a benediction which did not include this act (*eulogia*). The word continues in the language of the Greek Church today to mean a benediction. *Cheirothesia* is contrasted to *cheirotomia*; the compiler here has introduced a distinction not found elsewhere in early church literature, for *cheirothesia* customarily refers to the laying on of hands in ordination.³⁵

Epithesis cheiron ("imposition of hands"), except in New Testament quotations about healing and about the apostles conferring the

³²Hefele-Leclercq, *op. cit.*, pp. 540ff.

³³*H. E.* IV.vi.7.

³⁴*Ibid.*, IV.vii.1.

³⁵C. H. Turner, "*Cheirotonia, Cheirothesia, Epithesis Cheiron*," *Journal of Theological Studies* XXIV (1923), pp. 496f.

Holy Spirit, is used exclusively of ordination. The phrase is not the equivalent of *cheirotomia* but expresses the visible part of which *cheirotomia* is the whole. The phrase is used of the appointment of deaconesses and readers, although these receive *procheirizein* and not *cheirotonein*. This usage suggests that the compiler's distinctions were largely verbal, or else these two were really considered as ordained.

Katastasis appears to have been, if not the technical, at least the normal word for installation in Egypt. In addition to Serapion's Prayer-Book, this conclusion is supported by the usage of Athanasius.³⁶

Canon 10 of the Council of Ancyra in 314 uses *kathistanai* interchangeably with *cheirotonein*. At the end of the century Basil of Caesarea used *cheirotonein* for the formal installation into office by a bishop (e.g. *Ep.* 53); however, *kathistanai* could still be employed interchangeably with this word on occasion (*Ep.* 225).

The Council of Sardica in 343³⁷ has special interest due to the fact that it issued its canons in both Greek and Latin so that we have parallel Greek and Latin terminology from the same date and place. *Ordinatio* and *ordinare* are the technical terms in the Latin, translating a variety of terms still used in the Greek for the formal act of installation—*horizein* and *katastasis* in Canon 15 (19).

Meaning of the Installation Ceremony

Earlier passages have shown that the selection was interpreted as a divine choice. Special attention must now be given to the significance of the installation ceremony.

With the exception of the unsuccessful effort of the *Apostolic Conventions*, the literature surveyed made no distinction between the Imposition of hands (*cheirothesia*) in ordination and the same act in the bestowal of benedictions. That this circumstance was no accident of terminology is demonstrated by two explicit interpretations of ordination, from an Eastern and a Western theologian. Chrysostom gave a definition which has become a classic in the Greek Church. In *Homily* xiv in Acts 6 after stating that the people chose the seven, Chrysostom continues his comment on Luke's narrative:

For he says not how, but simply that they were ordained by prayer; for this is the ordination. The hand of man is laid on, but God performs everything, and it is His hand which touches the head of the one being ordained, if he is truly ordained.³⁸

Imposition of hands is subordinated to the constitutive act of Prayer,

³⁶E.g. *Apol. c. Arian* xi, where *cheirotonein* also occurs but with the meaning "elect" in distinction to the *katastasis*; xii; lxxv; *ad. Dracon.* ii.

³⁷See the new study of Hamilton Hess, *The Canons of the Council of Sardica* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958). The texts are in He-fele-Leclercq, *op. cit.*, I, 797f.

³⁸PG LX, 116. The Greek text requires the punctuation given.

in response to which God bestows a blessing. Jerome similarly makes Prayer the central element in his definition of ordination in his commentary on Isaiah, XVI, 58:

Cheirotonian—that is, the ordination of the clergy which is accomplished not only at the verbal prayer but at the imposition of the hand (lest indeed in mockery someone be ordained ignorantly to the clergy by a secret prayer.)³⁹

Jerome defines the technical term as consisting of two parts, the Prayer of the voice and the Imposition of the hand. The latter he explains in a wholly practical way: with the sacramental associations being given to ordination (below) an outward sign was required. But it is to be noticed that the sacramental powers are not ascribed to the Imposition of hands; indeed the action had a wholly subordinate place and the manner of expression gives primary emphasis to the Prayer.

By the fourth century the blessing received in ordination was identified with the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of ordination for this period is set forth with unusual clarity about A.D. 360 in a work of Lucifer of Cagliari in Sardinia about Athanasius.

It was and is in God's hand to institute the one who was thought worthy by his people to be bishop through those manifestly his servants, namely the catholic bishops. For no one can be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit to govern the people of God except the one whom God has chosen and on whom a hand has been placed by Catholic bishops, just as when Moses was dead we find his successor Joshua the son of Nun full of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁰

Lucifer clearly makes ordination an act of God: if it is performed by him through bishops on those chosen by the people of God. The installation is accomplished through the Imposition of hands, the necessary precondition, although not necessarily the means, of the giving of the Holy Spirit. The sending of the Holy Spirit would be God's induction of the person into office.

Gregory of Nyssa gives expression to a doctrine of a sacramental change worked in a person through ordination, the only statement of the kind to be found in this period.

Although before the benediction they are of little value, after the sanctification bestowed by the Spirit each has its several operation. The same power of the word also makes the priest venerable, honorable, and separated by the benediction bestowed on him from the common mass. While yesterday he was one of the mass, one of the people, he is suddenly rendered a guide, a president, a teacher of righteousness, an instructor in mysteries. And he does these things without being at all changed in body or in form; but while continuing to be in all appearance the man he was before, by some unseen power and grace the unseen soul is transformed for the better.⁴¹

Observe that the change is attributed to the Benediction and not to an action.

³⁹PL XXIV, 591.

⁴⁰De S. Athan. I, 9 (CSEL XIV).

⁴¹"On the Baptism of Christ," PG XLVI, 581 D.

Gregory Nazianzen seemingly connects the Spirit with the Imposition of hands in his oration in praise of Basil.

For when he was almost dead, and breathless and had lost the greater part of his powers, he grew stronger in his last words, so as to depart with the utterances of religion, and, by ordaining the most excellent of his attendants, bestowed upon them both his hand and the Spirit.⁴²

Athanasius, writing to the monk Dracontius, gives expression to a belief in a special gift bestowed in ordination. In chapter two he speaks of the "grace of the episcopate" Dracontius received, and in chapter four he makes this gift parallel to the one received in baptism, citing 1 Timothy 4:14. Nowhere does he elaborate on the nature of the gift or how it is received.

Theodoret relates an outburst by the monk Moses against the Arian interloper at the see of Alexandria, Lucius: "God forbid that I should be ordained by your hand, for the grace of the Spirit answers not your calling."⁴³

Although the fourth century gave a certain explicitness to the idea that the grace of the Holy Spirit is received at ordination, this gift was thought as coming in response to the Prayer so that a relation to the concept of Benediction was quite in evidence.

Some Things Ordination Did Not Mean

The priestly interpretation of ordination occurs only in the Syriac church at this date. In the Edessene Canons, called "The Doctrine of the Apostles" by Cureton, as part of the introduction we read the following:

And at the time of the great morning our Lord lifted up his hands, and laid them upon the heads of the Eleven Disciples, and gave to them the gift of the Priesthood.⁴⁴

Later additions to the "Doctrine of Addai" and the "Martyrdom of Barsamya" speak of receiving "the hand of the priesthood."⁴⁵ The Syriac church appears to have had a more sharply focused concern to continue the priesthood of the Old Testament than did the church in other regions.

Ordination was not conceived as conferring an indelible character so that the rite could not be repeated. Canon 8 adopted by the Nicene Council dealt with the Cathari (Novatians).

Concerning those who call themselves Cathari if they (who

⁴²*Or.* 43:78. (PG XXXVI, 600). The translation is from the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955), Vol. VII, p. 421.

⁴³*H. E.* IV.xxiii.

⁴⁴Translated by W. Cureton, *Ancient Syriac Documents* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1864), pp. 24f.

⁴⁵George Phillips, ed., *The Doctrine of Addai, the Apostle* (London: Truebner and Co., 1876), p. 38; and Cureton, *op. cit.*, p. 71. Ephraem Syrus, *Hymn contra Haereses* xxii 18ff, says God on Sinai extended his hand over Moses and the rite continued in the Old Testament through John to Jesus and through him to the apostles and the church.

are clerics) come over to the catholic and apostolic church, it is decreed by the holy and great synod that upon receiving a laying on of hands (*cheirothetoumenous*) they are to continue in the clergy. . . . But if some come over where there is a bishop or presbyter of the catholic church, it is evident that the bishop of the church has the rank of the episcopate; and the one named a bishop by those called Cathari has the honor of the presbytery . . . in order that he may be seen to be of the clergy, and that there may not be two bishops in the city.⁴⁶

The central problem in the interpretation of the canon involves the significance to be attached to the Imposition of hands. Is this the usual act in receiving repentant schismatics or is this a new ordination? The earliest Greek writer to cite the canon, Theophilus of Alexandria at the close of the fourth century, understood it as enjoining a fresh ordination.⁴⁷ This meaning seems demanded by the synodal letter in which similar instructions are given in regard to Meletian clergy on their return to the catholic church.

Since the synod was disposed to act gently (for in strict justice he was worthy of no leniency), it was decreed the Meletius should remain in his own city and have no authority to make appointments or to lay on hands (*cheirotherein*) or to appear in any city or village for this purpose, but should possess the bare title of his rank. Those who have been appointed by him, after they have been confirmed by a more sacred ordination (*cheirotomia*), may on these conditions be fellowshipped and have their rank and officiate, but they shall be the inferiors of those enrolled in each parish and church who have been ordained by our most honorable colleague Alexander. These have no authority to make appointments of persons pleasing to them or to propose names or to do anything without the permission of the bishop of the catholic and apostolic church serving under Alexander.⁴⁸

From this context *cheirothetein* would be to lay on hands in ordination, for the Meletian clergy are to receive a new ordination.

The use of *cheirothesia* for laying on of hands in ordination by the Nicene bishops is also illustrated by canon 19.

Concerning the Paulicianists who have fled for refuge to the catholic Church, it has been decreed that they must by all means be rebaptized. If any of them who in time past were found in the clergy and if they appear to be blameless and without reproach, when they have been rebaptized they are to be ordained by the bishop of the catholic Church. But if the examination finds them unfit, they ought to be deposed. Likewise in the case of their deaconesses and generally concerning those enrolled in the canon, the same policy shall be observed. We are mindful of deaconesses enrolled on the list (since they do not have any laying on of hands—*cheirothesian*) that they are numbered only among the laity.⁴⁹

⁴⁶Hefele-Leclercq, *op. cit.*, I, 576. This work takes the laying on of hands as referring to the reconciliation of penitents.

⁴⁷PG LXV, 44.

⁴⁸Translated from the Greek text preserved by Theodoret, *H. E.* lix.7ff.

⁴⁹Hefele-Leclercq, *op. cit.*, I, 615. The interpretation of the canon given in this work is in error.

The last sentence has caused difficulties, but we propose the following solution. The council is saying that the same procedure is followed for minor orders as for major orders: the converts are to take up the same position, if worthy, they held among the Paulicianists, but they have to go through the same process used in appointing the faithful to these positions. *Cheirotonia* has either the generalized sense of "appoint," or, if the sense of "ordain" as we have rendered it, is not intended to be included in the same policy later enjoined (the examination and the placing on the church's canon, that is, the assistance roll comprising clergy and benevolent cases). *Cheirothesia* certainly refers to the Imposition of hands in ordination. This act deaconesses did not receive; hence the council is at pains to specify that they are technically "laity," although among the enrolled persons of the church and probably regarded as clergy by the Paulicianists.

The baptism of schimatics such as the Novatians and Meletians was accepted, but the baptism of heretical Paulicianists was not. That the ordination of neither was recognized as binding shows that ordination had not attained the same sacramental status as baptism. Only out of the context of the Donatist controversy did a doctrine of the indelibility of orders emerge.

Ordination did not make one a "minister-at-large." Canons 15 and 16 from Nicaea legislate against the translation of clergymen from one parish to another, either with or without the people's consent. A person certainly had the rank of his office wherever he went (he did not lose the right to exercise his ministry, with the permission of the bishop of the church where he was visiting), and he was a minister of the whole church as well as of his local church. On the other hand, he was considered as wedded to the church where he was ordained. A minister was ordained in and for a given church; his work was for a particular people at a particular place. Canon 16 even seems to envision a new ordination for those translated to another church, but since this probably involved a promotion as well no special significance need be attached to the fact. In the known instances of translation of bishops (as that of Eustathius from Beroea in Syria to Antioch⁵⁰) only an Election by clergy and people is mentioned. No evidence of a renewed Imposition of hands is forthcoming, but some ceremony, such as an Enthronement, would seem to have been demanded in order to indicate the assumption of the new see. The increasing practice of translation and emphasis on the universal nature of the church broke down the congregational concept of ministry.

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⁵⁰Theod., *H. E.* I.vii.10.