

## DECONSTRUCTING ORDINATION: BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OR POST-BIBLICAL TRADITION?

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### 1. Introduction

Is ordination a fundamentally theological issue, or merely a matter of church practice and policy? In order to answer this question, contemporary Seventh-day Adventist understandings of ordination will firstly be reviewed, and then the Old Testament, followed by the New Testament, will be considered as possible sources for a theology of ordination. A notable contemporary Protestant theology of ordination will then be critiqued to illustrate the typical underpinning assumptions of many contemporary theologies of ordination. These assumptions will then be further elucidated by analyzing the origins of the modern understandings of ordination in early Christianity.

The approach to be taken here will be both theological and historical in nature.<sup>1</sup> The principles of Biblical theology will be assumed in the arguments made here; explicit in this theological approach are the central principles of *sola scriptura*; progressive revelation through the unfolding history of God's dealings with humanity in Scripture; and Christ as the focus of redemptive history and as the means of continuity between the Old and New Testaments. Because of Biblical theology's high view of Scripture, as well as its emphasis on the Great Controversy narrative,<sup>2</sup> the Seventh-day Adventist Church has always particularly valued the contributions of this approach to theology.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Fundamental Belief 18, "Fundamental Beliefs," Seventh-day Adventist Church (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2013) No pages. Accessed May 1, 2013. Online: <http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental/>

<sup>2</sup> This is clearly reflected, for example in Fundamental Beliefs Nos. 1 and 12.

<sup>3</sup> On the methodology of Biblical theology, see Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948), 11–17; Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (ed. R. O. Zorn; trans. H. de Jongste; Philadelphia:

The analysis presented here does not specifically address the history of ordination in the early development of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and in particular as reflected in the influential writings of Ellen G. White. This is a result of the focus of this essay on Biblical theology; and a focus on the earlier history of the Christian church where historical questions are addressed. The author acknowledges the importance of the history of ordination in the early development of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and that this needs to be elucidated and understood. This should, however, not diminish the importance of the focus adopted in this present essay, since Fundamental Belief 18 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, dealing with the "Gift of Prophecy," states that the writings of Ellen G. White "make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested." This must surely be true of such a seemingly important teaching and practice as is ordination, and it is therefore based on this premise that the dialogue must begin.

## 2. Contemporary Seventh-day Adventist Understanding of Ordination

Ordination is a topic that has not been comprehensively dealt with in the official, general, or scholarly publications of the Seventh-day Adventist church. Ordination as such is not mentioned in the Fundamental Beliefs of the Adventist Church. There are two cognates of the word "ordination" in this document: one mention is in the context of a general statement about gifts of the Spirit providing "all abilities and ministries needed by the church to fulfill its divinely ordained functions,"<sup>4</sup> and the other mention is in relation to Jesus having "ordained the service of foot washing."<sup>5</sup> It is relevant to note that while neither of these variants of the word "ordination" refer to the ritual of ordination itself, and that in both instances, the words assume a divine command of God to the church. It is also worthy of note that there is no reference in the Fundamental Beliefs to any "category" of ministries as being a separate class, as having a special dignity, or as requiring special ritual actions.<sup>6</sup>

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Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1962), xi-xxviii; and recently G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011), 6-29.

<sup>4</sup> Fundamental Belief 17.

<sup>5</sup> Fundamental Belief 6.

<sup>6</sup> Note especially Fundamental Belief 17.

The *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* calls ordination a “sacred rite,” but does not define ordination and provides no theological basis for it.<sup>7</sup> The *SDA Manual for Ministers* refers to ordination as “the setting apart of the man to a sacred calling, not for one local field alone, but for the entire church.”<sup>8</sup> The 1988 volume *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* states that “[t]he church recognized the sacredness of the calling to leadership through ordination, the laying on of hands.”<sup>9</sup> Relevantly, ordination is here equated with “the laying on of hands.”

Since there is no clearly established definition of ordination within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and it varies theologically in meaning across different Christian confessions. I propose using a simple and very general working definition of “ordination” as a “unique ritual by which people are appointed to church office.” Together with this, it must be recognized that different Christian confessions attribute varying degrees of sacramental value to ordination. Within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, due to the essential lack of “official” definitions of ordination, and the scarcity of references to it in current literature, discussion of what the Adventist Church believes on the matter are currently somewhat fluid. We can only refer to the available published material, which will now be analyzed.

In late 1978, the question of ordination was dealt with in a number of articles in the February issue of *Ministry Magazine*. Thomas Blincoe’s suggestively titled article, “Needed—A Theology of Ordination,” sought to “take some steps” towards a “full-blown theology of ordination from a Seventh-day Adventist perspective.”<sup>10</sup> Blincoe’s contribution relies largely on the works of Ellen White as a primary source for theology, with Scripture taking a decidedly secondary position.

In the same issue, Raoul Dederen provided perhaps the most thoughtful treatment of ordination from the perspective of biblical

<sup>7</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (18th ed; The Secretariat, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010), 77.

<sup>8</sup> *SDA Manual for Ministers* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1964), 16–33, quoted in Raoul Dederen, “A Theology of Ordination,” *Ministry Magazine* (Feb. 1978). Note that all articles from *Ministry Magazine* have been sourced from <http://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive>. Pages numbers are not available for these archived articles.

<sup>9</sup> Ministerial Association of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Washington, D.C.: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988), 146.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Blincoe, “Needed—A Theology of Ordination,” *Ministry Magazine* (Feb. 1978).

theology to date.<sup>11</sup> Dederen commences with the New Testament idea of the priesthood of all believers, with the Christian life being “by definition a priesthood, a ministry performed in response to God’s call addressed to all sinners” which “means... every believer has free and direct access to God without the necessity of a priest or mediator.”<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, the ministry “is not an order of men religiously different from those who are supposedly mere “laymen.” It is not even a special group of persons. The ministry is a function of the whole church, distributed among its members according to God giving each various calls and corresponding gifts and capacities.<sup>13</sup>

Dederen refers to the notion of “a special call to ministry”<sup>14</sup> within the context of ordination. We cannot perceive a full-time professional gospel ministry, such as we have today, in the New Testament, so we have no precedents for this specific role being subject to “a special call to ministry” in a strictly biblical context. More generally, in the New Testament conception, we might more correctly say that there is generally no “special call” to ministry; rather, each member of the body of Christ is called to a “special ministry” which is supported by the spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit has conferred upon each person (1 Cor 10:11). Dederen admits that while

it is true that there is no formal description of an ordination service given in the New Testament, there is ample warrant for the setting apart of those who have proved themselves to be called of God into the Christian ministry. The background of this practice is to be found in the Old Testament, where the concept of God’s selectivity already clearly emerges.<sup>15</sup>

We may certainly agree with the principle of God’s selectivity; He selects each of the members of His body for different ministries. However, just as God selects each member of His church for ministry, there is absolutely no warrant in the New Testament for “ordaining” a particular group of people to the exclusion of others. We can certainly not appeal to the model of the priesthood in the Old Testament as the “warrant” and “background” to the practice of ordination.

<sup>11</sup> Dederen, “A Theology of Ordination.”

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Dederen rightly goes on to discuss the importance of ecclesiastical organization. He refers in this context to the offices for which the New Testament gives us evidence, having been designated by the laying on of hands. He remarks: “[b]ut I don’t think that these functions are reported to us as permanent, inflexible “orders” or offices. They are rather displayed to us as the ways by which the early church deployed its forces in the light of the particular campaign on which it was embarked in its own historical situation.”<sup>16</sup> This is quite right, and furthermore, neither is there anything in the New Testament to suggest that the offices that were designated by the laying on of hands were an exclusive group; they are simply the mentions that we have, often in the context of merely occasional references. Going further, there is nothing in the New Testament that differentiates the laying on of hands for the appointment of persons to ministries within the church from the laying on of hands for the purposes of healing or for general blessings. This is a fundamental and largely unrecognized problem with the way that ordination is understood in our modern contexts. Indeed, it is one of the most serious obstacles to developing a theology of ordination.

Dederen then notes the manner in which the Adventist Church restricts “the administration of the ordinances—called sacraments by others—to the church elders and the pastors, as ordained ministers.”<sup>17</sup> He significantly observes that “[t]his restriction is a matter of order, not a sacramental matter.” This may be taken as an informal description of the proper status of ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is a “matter of order, not a sacramental matter.” Correspondingly, it is a matter of church structure, not a matter of Biblical theology. It is for this reason that Dederen ultimately emphasizes that “[o]rdination gives the minister in his person no authority. It does not make him a repository of sacral or supernatural power. The authority and the power lie in the Word he is called to proclaim.”<sup>18</sup>

It is interesting that Dederen deals with the presumed Biblical evidence for a theology of ordination in a footnote. He comments that

[t]he words used for ordination, or setting apart, in the New Testament, specified only a simple laying on of hands. One common form of expression for this was the word *katastasis*, *kathistanein* usually translated “appoint.” This verb is used, for example, in Acts 6:3, of the seven, Titus 1:5, of elders, and Heb. 5:1; 7:28; 8:3, of the Jewish high

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

priest. *Cheirotonein* is found in Acts 14:23. As such, the laying on of hands could be employed as a simple blessing (Matt. 19:13) as in the Old Testament. This practice was doubtless closely related to prayer, or to the act of healing (Mark 6:5), a practice also employed in the early church (Acts 9:12). Hands were even laid upon the recipients of baptism (Acts 9:17–19). While little is said in the New Testament about ordination, there are four passages in which the laying on of hands is referred to in a context directly relevant to this issue (Acts 6:6; 13:3; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6).<sup>19</sup>

We should note here Dederen's acknowledgement of how little we find in the New Testament regarding "ordination," the diversity of contexts for the laying on of hands in the New Testament, and that the words used for this actually specify nothing more than the simple act of the laying on of hands. In his conclusion, Dederen points to the need to develop a theology of ordination:

A closer look at our theology of ordination may mean hard work and reciprocal understanding, for beneath the scriptural data we are often dealing with prejudice and self-interest from all sides as well as established patterns and deep-rooted habits. Yet the theology of ordination and its implications... is without doubt one to which our church must address itself sooner or later. The task is indispensable.<sup>20</sup>

In 1995, Charles Bradford picked up the discussion in the *Adventist Review*. The thrust of his article strongly supports a New Testament perspective. He writes:

In Adventism there is to be the model of the ideal community—truly charismatic, every member filled with the Spirit, every gift appreciated and used for the building up of the body. One body, many members. One worldwide ministry, with every member involved in ministry as the Holy Spirit guides.<sup>21</sup>

Bradford also emphasizes that "Seventh-day Adventists lay claim to being true Protestants, because we are neither sacerdotal nor sacramentarian.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Charles E. Bradford, "An Emphasis on Ministry: Is Ordination for Honor or for Service?" *Adventist Review* (May 1995): 10.

For us, no virtue is *imparted*... by the imposition of hands in ordination."<sup>22</sup> From this sharply Protestant perspective, Bradford argues that "[a]nything that smacks of exclusivity, of special class, of privilege that comes by initiation (ordination) must be demolished with the truth and reality of the gospel."<sup>23</sup>

Bradford asks: "[i]f ordination does not bring special powers why continue the practice?"<sup>24</sup> The implied answer, which does not emerge explicitly in Bradford's article, is that the practice of ordination should be continued for reasons of organization and order. Arguably, there has been little if any progress on the issue of ordination since Bradford's article was published.

In 1996, continuing the discussion in *Ministry Magazine*, Keith Burton refers to Bradford's article as stating that the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not possess a clear theology of ordination. Burton asks: "If that is the case, then under what premise have we been ordaining over the past century and a half?"<sup>25</sup> He urges that "it is time for the church to revisit systematically the relevant biblical passages that address this issue."<sup>26</sup> However, Burton's own contribution does not significantly progress the development of a theology of ordination; instead, he focuses on asking questions of the current church structure.

In May 2002, Nancy Vyhmeister, again in *Ministry Magazine*, published an article entitled "Ordination in the New Testament?"<sup>27</sup> She rightly notes that "the New Testament gives little specific information about services such as the one I saw that morning. Twelve passages speak of some kind of appointment or commissioning, but none uses the word "ordination."<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, "[t]he Greek phrase equivalent to "laying on of hands" occurs 26 times in the New Testament. In the largest number of times (12) the phrase is used in the context of the laying on of hands to bring about healing."<sup>29</sup> Specifically in terms of our contemporary practice

<sup>22</sup> Bradford, "An Emphasis on Ministry: Is Ordination for Honor or for Service?" Emphasis in the original.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. This quotation appears as a sub-heading in the article, and may have been inserted by the editors.

<sup>25</sup> Keith Burton, "A Practical Theology of Ordination," *Ministry Magazine* (Nov. 1996).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Nancy Vyhmeister, "Ordination in the New Testament?" *Ministry Magazine* (May 2002).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Vyhmeister, "Ordination in the New Testament?"

of ordination, “laying on of hands is mentioned three times in relation to appointment to office.”<sup>30</sup> Among her conclusions, although Vyhmeister observes that the “how, when, where, and even why believers were commissioned to specific tasks or offices may not be clear,”<sup>31</sup> she also states that “ecclesiastical appointment was and is part of the church's legitimate activity. It seems to be one of those items that the church “binds on earth.””<sup>32</sup> This last point in fact seems to be most relevant to our contemporary practice of ordination. In other words, the church is authorized to structure and govern itself following biblical principles.

### 3. Is the Old Testament a Valid Source for the Contemporary Practice of Ordination?

There are significant theological obstacles to basing arguments for ordination on the Levitical Priesthood in the Old Testament. According to the New Testament, the Old Testament priesthood was a type for the saving priesthood of Jesus Christ (Heb 8:5; 9:11, 23; 10:1; Col 2:17), and after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, the Levitical priesthood has no efficacy in the light of the heavenly priesthood of Jesus. In Hebrews 8:13, Paul refers to the Levitical priesthood as “obsolete... growing old... [and] ready to vanish away [παλαιούμενον καὶ γηράσκον ἐγγὺς ἀφάνισμοῦ].” That Paul clearly applies the cultic language of Judaism to the community of believers, rather than to the temple and its cult, strongly supports this understanding. In this way, Paul does not denigrate the temple concepts and its cult; he simply defines these in an altogether different way.<sup>33</sup> Within this paradigm, we have already noted Paul's ecclesiology and pneumatology, focusing on the new spiritual priesthood of all believers.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., citing Acts 6:6; 13:3; and 1 Tim 5:22.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., citing Matt 16:19.

<sup>33</sup> See 1 Cor 3:16, 17; 6:19-20; 9:13-14; 2 Cor 6:14-7:1. See also P. W. L. Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City: New Testament Perspectives on Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 119-122; M. Newton, *The Concept of Purity at Qumran and in the Letters of Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 54-55, 74-78; Raymond Corriveau, “Temple, Holiness, and the Liturgy of Life in Corinthians,” *Letter & Spirit* 4 (2008): 146-157; and J. B. Chance, *Jerusalem, the Temple and the New Age in Luke-Acts* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988), 142.

We should affirm the principles of God's selectivity, and of appointment to different ministries and roles in the church. These are principles that we can certainly see applied in both the Old and the New Testaments. After all, we are dealing with the same God, the same eternal covenant, and the same plan of salvation. However, there is a real sense in which to argue for ordination from the Levitical priesthood equates today's ordained ministry with the Old Testament priesthood. Within the context of Seventh-day Adventist theology, we should not expect that Adventist ministers today would presume to fill a priestly or sacramental role. Indeed, to attempt to transfer the priestly anointing from the Old Testament to the New can be seen as denying the heavenly priestly ministry of Jesus Christ.<sup>34</sup>

#### 4. Ordination in the New Testament

The fundamental reason why it is inappropriate to develop a biblical theology of ordination is because not only are we unable to theologially derive ordination from the Old Testament, but ordination is also not a New Testament concept. Before examining this, it is worth remembering that the full-time, professional, gospel ministry is of course not a New Testament concept either; there are no precedents for "ordaining" people to the gospel ministry in our contemporary setting in this specific sense.

An equivalent word for "ordain," with our contemporary idea of a setting apart for ministry, does not appear in the New Testament. The word *χειροτονέω* appears in the context of appointment to ministry. This word does not carry with it the sense of laying on of hands. Rather, it literally means to "stretch out the hand,"<sup>35</sup> primarily in the sense of raising the hand to express agreement in a vote.<sup>36</sup> This word appears in Acts 14:23 ("ordained" elders); 2 Tim 4:22 (Timothy "ordained" as bishop; and Titus 3:15 (Titus "ordained" as bishop).<sup>37</sup> In each of these cases in the King James Version, the word is translated as "ordained." However, it is

<sup>34</sup> Bradford ("Ordination," 9) makes the same point: "Any attempt to resurrect the office of priest is to obscure the ministry of Jesus, the one and only High Priest."

<sup>35</sup> "*χειροτονέω*," Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*.

<sup>36</sup> Bernhard Lohse, "*χειρο*," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 9.437.

<sup>37</sup> See also 2 Cor 8:10, in which the translators of the King James Version (KJV) translate this same word as "chosen," apparently simply because it is not mentioned in the text in connection with any particular office.

important to note that at the time of the writing of the New Testament, the word carried no particular connotations of a special ceremony or status. Neither did it have any particular religious connotations. The word could be well translated as, “elected” or “selected” or “appointed.” This has been almost uniformly recognized in modern translations of the New Testament. The word χειροτονέω as used in these texts does not even have any connection with the idea of laying on of hands. These texts cannot therefore be used to support the idea that there is any particular *biblical* ceremony to acknowledge a call to the ministry or to appoint people to specific roles within the church. They cannot be used to support the contemporary idea of ecclesiastical ordination.

Another word used in connection with the idea of ordination is καθίστημι. The fundamental idea of this word is “to put in place.”<sup>38</sup> This word is used seven times in the gospels, notably in the parables, in the simple sense of appointing someone to a position of responsibility (Matt 24:45, 47; 25:21, 23; Luke 12:14, 42, 44). In the rest of the New Testament, the word is used 14 times, with the same generic meaning. Therefore, although in Acts 6:3 (KJV) the word is used in the sense of “appointing” the seven, in the very next chapter it is also used of Pharaoh “making” (7:10; KJV) Joseph governor of Egypt, and in the complaint of the Israelites to Moses, “Who made thee a ruler and a judge?” (7:35; KJV).<sup>39</sup> Of the 21 times that the word is used in the New Testament, there are only two verses in which it is used in a sense we would recognize as in the context of the structure of the early church (Acts 6:3 and Titus 1:15).<sup>40</sup> In fact, it is significant that in spite of the tendency of the translators of the King James Version to inappropriately translate various words as “ordain,” Titus 1:15 is the only verse in the entire New Testament where they translated καθίστημι in this way (“ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee”). An analysis of how the word is used in the New Testament provides us with no reason for believing it denoted any ecclesiastical ceremony, or that it had any specific use in relation to the appointment of people to church office. Neither did it carry any particularly religious connotations. It is also significant that the idea of laying on of hands is also not particularly attached to this word; it appears only in relation to Acts 6:3 (see v.6). We cannot, therefore, find

<sup>38</sup> Albrecht Oepke, “καθίστημι, ακαταστασια, ακαταστατος,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3.444.

<sup>39</sup> See also v. 27. The KJV translation has been used throughout, since this is the version that most prominently translates a number of Greek words as “ordain.”

<sup>40</sup> We should also note that Hebrews uses καθίστημι to refer to the appointment of the High Priest in the Levitical system. See Heb 5:1; 7:28; 8:3.

the modern concept of ordination as a unique ritual by which people are appointed to church office in the passages in which this word appears.

## 5. The Laying on of Hands in the New Testament in the Context of Ordination?

Not only are the Greek words often seen as referring to a “ceremony of ordination” merely generic words with a broad range of applications in the New Testament, the idea of laying on of hands was a similarly generic concept and practice. In the New Testament, the laying on of hands is simply a form of generic blessing, as in the Old Testament. There is no particular differentiation between laying hands on children (Matt 19:13), laying hands as part of the act of healing (e.g., Mark 6:5 & Acts 9:12), or as a whole-of-church blessing before a missionary journey (Acts 13:3), or to receive a spiritual gift (1 Tim 4:14),<sup>41</sup> or as a part of a blessing for people newly appointed to church office (Acts 6:6). In fact, this latter passage is the only reference in the New Testament to the laying on of hands in connection with something we might recognize as “ordination.”

Acts 13:3 is particularly interesting, in that it uses the term “set apart” in the context of laying on of hands. Today, this term is used in the church vernacular to refer to formal ordination. In relation to Acts 13:3, we should note that this is not an ordination to the gospel ministry. The Holy Spirit asks the church to “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (v.2). This work was the evangelization of the Gentiles, for which, after the laying on of hands, they are “sent out by the Holy Spirit” (v.4).

The word “set apart” is ἀφορίζω. It is significant that Paul himself uses the term to refer to his apostolic calling, notably in Rom 1:1: “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God [ἀφωρισμένος εἰς εὐαγγέλιον θεοῦ].” Paul may here be remembering the blessing at Antioch (Acts 13:3). However, note also Gal 1:15, where Paul refers to having been “set apart” (ἀφορίζω) from his mother’s womb. It is significant that in 2 Cor 6:17, Paul uses the same

<sup>41</sup> See also 2 Tim 1:6. The gift to which Paul refers in 2 Tim 1:6 is not specified. With regard to this, Paul F. Bradshaw (*Ordination Rites of the Ancient Churches of East and West* [New York: Pueblo, 1990], 33) comments that “2 Timothy 1:6 speaks of a gift being bestowed through the laying on of hands, but it would be dangerous to conclude from that sole reference that such was its universal interpretation in early ordination practice.”

word in quoting from the LXX of Isa 52:11: "Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing." In its original context (Isa 52:11), the subject is clearly the Levitical priesthood ("you who bear the vessels of the LORD." However, Paul quotes this passage in the context of broadening the meaning of the priesthood to the entire church, "the temple of the living God" (2 Cor 6:16).

Therefore, while Paul has been "set apart" for a particular ministry, so too has every member of the "temple of the living God." Every member of God's church has been set apart by God for ministry. There is no sense of exclusivity in relation to other spiritual gifts or ministries in the New Testament idea of having been "set apart." We cannot therefore restrict the idea of having been "set apart" to elders or deacons or any other church office. In terms of our common conception of what it means to be "set apart," this demonstrates our own overlaying of Scripture with cultural and ecclesiastical understandings which are not necessarily biblical.

Furthermore, with regard to Acts 13:3, we may note that this is not the first time that Saul had had hands laid on him (Acts 9:17), and Paul and Barnabas had already been involved in ministry for quite some time (Acts 9:19-29; & 12:25). Also in Acts 13:3, it is significant that the elders are not mentioned in connection with the laying on of hands; indeed, the subject here appears to be the whole of the church.<sup>42</sup> It is the entire church, then, that seems to have laid hands on Paul and Barnabas, in obedience to the instruction of the Holy Spirit through the prophets in the church. This action is best paralleled by the instances in the New Testament where the laying on of hands is part of the reception of the Holy Spirit and of specific spiritual gifts. It is certainly not an appointment to a church "office," nor an appointment to preach the gospel in any general sense.

The laying on of hands is most significantly associated in the New Testament with the reception of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17; 19:6) and with baptism (Acts 19:5-6). We might also note that the only reference to anointing with oil in the New Testament is in connection with healing (in James 5:14); it is never mentioned in connection with appointment to a church office.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> See v. 1 and the pronouns in vv. 2-3.

<sup>43</sup> Bradshaw (*Ordination Rites*, 33) observes that it has often been thought that primitive Christianity may have adopted the practice of laying on of hands from rabbinic ordination in Judaism, but that this is far from certain, and even if this were the case, the meaning of the gesture in early Christianity may well have been different.

On the basis of the New Testament evidence alone, Bradford's assertion that "[i]n the New Testament times ordination was a simple service of dedication in which the ministers of the church laid their hands on the one chosen" is questionable.<sup>44</sup> To maintain this is to rely on one verse alone (Acts 13:3), which, as has been demonstrated here, does not specifically refer to ordination to the gospel ministry as we understand it today.

If we are to remain faithful to Scripture, the possibility of deriving a theology of ordination from the New Testament must therefore, be seen as extremely tenuous. For this reason, many are tempted to go back to the Old Testament for support. Some of the theological teachings of the church that are compromised in this way include fundamental questions of pneumatology, ecclesiology, as well as the doctrine of the atonement<sup>45</sup> and of the High Priestly ministry of Jesus. However, it seems clear from the verses examined here that the New Testament church did not transfer priestly or prophetic ordination from the Old Testament Scriptures to their own practice. It is also not possible to infer from the New Testament the existence of any particular ceremony to recognize the call to ministry or to appoint someone to an office of the church. There is not even any consistency or uniqueness in the terminology used in such contexts.

We have the instance of one verse, (Acts 6:6),<sup>46</sup> in which the laying on of hands, together with prayer, was involved in a church appointment. Beyond this, the New Testament provides us with no hint of anything we might recognize as ordination in our contemporary setting. The Bible provides evidence that the New Testament churches designated certain offices for the proper administration of their communities,,although these offices do not necessarily correspond with our own contemporary church structures.

Beyond this, there is scant evidence of a consistent understanding or practice that may be used as a model. In this regard, David Power, a Roman catholic sacramental theologian, deals fairly with the evidence when he observes that as far as the New Testament is concerned, "[t]he general impression is that ministry is wide-ranging, that it comes from the power of the Spirit, and that it goes with membership in the community

<sup>44</sup> Bradford, "Ordination," 9.

<sup>45</sup> To suggest the continuation of any aspect of the Levitical priestly ministry other than in the person and through the ministry of Jesus Christ is to deny the fundamental Protestant understanding of the atonement.

<sup>46</sup> Possibly also 1 Tim 5:22, although the context of this text suggests that the reference here may not be to "ordination" at all.

rather than being the result of any particular commission."<sup>47</sup> Neither the concept nor practice of ordination as it is understood in contemporary Christianity may be derived from the New Testament. From where, then, does our modern understanding of "ordination" come? This question will be examined in the final sections of this essay: firstly by examining the underpinnings of a recent theology of ordination proposed by Thomas Dozeman, and secondly by examining the historical origins of ordination in the early church.

## 6. A Critique of Thomas Dozeman: *Holiness and Ministry*

Having considered the difficulties of using the Biblical data to support the contemporary understanding and practice of ordination, it is instructive to see how contemporary theologians attempt to go about constructing theologies of ordination. Thomas Dozeman's *Holiness and Ministry* has recently made a significant contribution as a serious Protestant attempt to construct a theology of ordination.<sup>48</sup> Dozeman's fundamental premise is that "[o]rdination for ministry derives from the holiness of God."<sup>49</sup> He notes that "[t]he divine quality of holiness introduces... separation between God and humans... the separation between the sacred and the profane."<sup>50</sup> We may take issue with Dozeman even on these fundamental premises. He is correct in maintaining that there is separation between God and humans. However, this separation is not caused by God's holiness; it is instead caused by sin (Isa 59:2). This is not a "chicken and the egg" kind of question. It is clearly as a result of sin that humanity cannot enter into the presence of Divine holiness. The holiness of God embraces all of His creation in love; it is not God's holiness that separates.

One therefore suspects that there is a non-Biblical basis for the view that the holiness of God separates Him from humanity. This is confirmed by the next logical step in Dozeman's reasoning, in which he affirms that, because of this separation, "[o]rdination for ministry allows for the safe

<sup>47</sup> David N. Power, "Order," in vol. 2 of *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives* (ed. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 294.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas B. Dozeman, *Holiness and Ministry: A Biblical Theology of Ordination* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

transfer of the sacred to the profane world of humans. The ordained must undergo a rite of passage to achieve a liminal status of those who are able to bridge the gap between the sacred and the profane.”<sup>51</sup> These are the fundamental theological assumptions underlying many theologies of ordination. Importantly, Dozeman makes them explicit; they are often simply assumed.

These assumptions define a paradigm that is appropriate for understanding ancient pagan religions, but hardly does justice to the pneumatology and ecclesiology of the New Testament. Even if we grant that God allowed rituals and ceremonies to teach ancient Israel in the wilderness, these were transitional types and figures (Heb 8:1–6; Col 2:17). Furthermore, the entire didactic focus of the tabernacle in the wilderness was on a God who was certainly holy, but who at his own initiative in mercy and love came to dwell with His people Himself (Ex 25:8). It is not the people who “bridge the gap between the sacred and the profane,” but God Himself who does so, providing the means for communication with His people.

When we come to the New Testament, the reality toward which the Old pointed is made clear. There is no “liminal status.” Among the believers in Christ, there is no special class of people who can “bridge the gap between the sacred and the profane.” It is the Son of God who has Himself come to dwell in humanity (John 1:14), and through His Spirit has filled each human member of His body (1 Cor 12:12–13), so that the church can be truly called the Temple of God (1 Cor 3:16–17; 2 Cor 6:16). All believers therefore form a new priesthood, in which all have full access to God in equal measure through Jesus Christ (Heb 4:16; 10:19–20). It is in this sense that the New Testament calls all believers the brothers and sisters of each other in general, and of Jesus in particular (Matt 23:8; Heb 2:12–17). That the church should have its appointed leaders is certainly ordained by God (Heb 13:7). However, they are not leaders in the sense that they achieve any kind of liminal status between the profane and the holy, or in that they have access to God over and above their fellow believers. It is evident that Dozeman is operating via a different paradigm regarding the nature of God and His holiness than that which is foreshadowed in the Old Testament and fully revealed in the New. His paradigm seems to have much more in common with non-Christian religions.

Certainly, Dozeman’s theology is firmly grounded in the Old Testament. In this vein, he maintains that “Biblical authors use the story

<sup>51</sup> Dozeman, *Holiness and Ministry*, 32.

of Moses to fashion a theology of ordination."<sup>52</sup> This is a highly questionable assertion, since there is no theology of ordination based on Moses found in the Old Testament.

To begin with, Moses is not of the Levitical priesthood, to whom the anointing and the ministry of holy things belonged (Heb 9:6; Ex 28:38; Lev 22:2). Moses himself is certainly not "ordained" through any means described or modeled in the Old Testament. It is evident that in Second Temple Judaism, Moses was accorded a level of holiness even above that of the Levitical priesthood. Indeed, Philo even refers to Moses as "discharging the duties of high priest,"<sup>53</sup> as enjoying "the first priesthood,"<sup>54</sup> and as having "perfectly conducted sacrifices."<sup>55</sup> However, this can hardly be adduced as evidence for a Biblical theology.

In spite of this, Dozeman largely bases his theology of ordination on the Mosaic model. One is led to suspect that this is because of the theological difficulties—significantly impacting even on the teaching of the atonement of Jesus Christ itself—that would flow from basing a Biblical theology of ordination on the Levitical priesthood. However, in spite of the priority he gives to Moses, Dozeman still cannot avoid referring to "the theology of holiness and ordination in the book of Deuteronomy and in the priestly literature" as the "foundation for the ordination to the word and the sacrament in Christian tradition."<sup>56</sup>

This model of holiness logically leads Dozeman to a "sacramental view of holiness" that necessarily "presupposes gradations of holiness based on the locations of objects in the sanctuary. The altar area is more holy than the sanctuary where the laity sit, because it is the location of the sacramental objects and rituals."<sup>57</sup> This is certainly not a model of holiness to which the authors of the New Testament would subscribe (1 Cor 3:17).

When Dozeman comes to discuss the New Testament, he admits that "[t]he priestly office... is restricted to the mission of Jesus."<sup>58</sup> Therefore, in order to extend the concept of and office associated with the "ordained,"

<sup>52</sup> Dozeman, *Holiness and Ministry*, 35.

<sup>53</sup> Philo, *Mos.* 1.2. For more detail, see *Mos.* 13–24.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.5.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Dozeman, *Holiness and Ministry*, 104.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 104–5.

Dozeman maintains that the language of holiness is “deceptive”<sup>59</sup> in the New Testament, and that “the separate role of the ordained is maintained.”<sup>60</sup>

In conclusion, Dozeman writes that a Biblical theology of ordination requires “a broad view of biblical authority,” in which the Old Testament Scriptures “provide a framework for theological reflection.”<sup>61</sup> The question is whether this view of biblical authority is a sufficient basis for a Biblical theology. Dozeman answers his own implied question, admitting that “scripture alone is inadequate for constructing a contemporary theology of holiness and ordination... [and] the identity of the clergy” and that what is required for such a theology is “the postbiblical theological reflection of the church universal.”<sup>62</sup> In this way, Dozeman ultimately betrays and undermines the sub-title of his monograph, *A Biblical Theology of Ordination*.

In critiquing Dozeman’s work, one should also appreciate the thoughtfulness, incisiveness, and honesty of his approach. For the purposes of this study, its value lies in that it lays bare the theological assumptions that often implicitly underlie many discussions of ordination. Very often, discussions of ordination do not make clear these underlying assumptions. Given that the Seventh-day Adventist Church inherited ordination from its Protestant heritage, Dozeman’s work, as a serious Protestant attempt at defining a Biblical basis for ordination, is of particular importance. As we will see, many of Dozeman’s assumptions are also often implicit in Seventh-day Adventist considerations of the question of ordination.

## 7. The Origins of the Modern Understanding and Practice of Ordination

What is true of Dozeman’s theology of ordination appears to be true of the question of ordination in general: how ordination is understood in contemporary Christianity is based on extra-Biblical traditions. To appreciate this, we must consider the first centuries of post-Biblical

<sup>59</sup> Dozeman, *Holiness and Ministry*, 105. We may question whether it is appropriate to describe the language of the Bible as “deceptive” in this context.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* Here Dozeman refers particularly to Paul’s defense of his apostolate.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

Christianity. In his study of the evidence for ordination rites in early Christianity, Bradshaw points out that

[a]lthough references to different ministerial offices and functions are quite plentiful in the Christian literature of the first three centuries, references to a rite of ordination are almost nonexistent: election and appointment are mentioned, but few details are given as to how these were carried out.<sup>63</sup>

Bradshaw also comments that the imposition of hands is only rarely mentioned, suggesting that “the gesture was not regarded as especially significant at this time.”<sup>64</sup> As ordination rites evolved, the imposition of hands accrued increased importance. Bradshaw suggests that this may have been at least partially due to the ambivalence of the Greek word χειροτονέω. Early Christianity extended the usage of this term from “the lifting up of hands,” signifying election, to designate the whole ordination process.<sup>65</sup> He notes that a similar shift in meaning occurred in the Latin West with the Christian use of the terms *ordinatio* and *ordinare*.<sup>66</sup>

The English word “ordination” has these Latin origins in general, and Latin ecclesiastical origins in particular. The concepts that the term “ordination” reflects within Christianity are derived principally from Latin ecclesiastical usage rather than from the New Testament.

The word *ordo* and *ordino*<sup>67</sup> are Roman judicial terms that denoted the special status of distinct social classes, as, for example, senators versus plebeians.<sup>68</sup> However, the Romans used these terms in a different and much more precise way than we use our modern phrase “social class.”<sup>69</sup> M. I. Finley defines an *ordo* as “a juridically defined group within a

<sup>63</sup> Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites*, 3. Bradshaw also points out that it is for this reason that the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus, usually dated to AD 215, “has assumed crucial importance in providing the only full account of ordination procedure prior to the fourth century.” However, on the major difficulties in using the *Apostolic Tradition* as a historical source, see John F. Baldovin, “Hippolytus and the Apostolic Tradition: Recent Research and Commentary,” *Theological Studies* 64 (2003): 520–542.

<sup>64</sup> Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites*, 33.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Hence the present infinitive, *ordinare*.

<sup>68</sup> Stephen V. Sprinkle, *Ordination: Celebrating the Gifts of Ministry* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2004), 35.

<sup>69</sup> James S. Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1999), 181.

population, possessing formalized privileges and disabilities in one or more fields of activity, governmental, military, legal, economic, religious, marital, and standing in a hierarchical relation to other orders... an order is... testable by objective norms."<sup>70</sup>

The notion that membership in a given *ordo* gave one greater honor and privileges, as well as defining the functions that the person was not able to perform, is a fundamental one in the social order of ancient Rome.<sup>71</sup> In this regard, the Roman *ordo* implied a separation between the various social classes, so that, in the words of Livy, "if each order retained its own rights and its own dignity, then, and only then, would the state be free and the laws equal for all. [*ita demum liberam civitatem fore, ita aequatas leges, si sua quisque iura ordo, suam maiestatem teneat.*]"<sup>72</sup>

The concept of the *ordo* operated within the context of an ancient shame/honor culture. Within this understanding, in ancient Rome, the notion of *ordo* represented "ascribed honour," which could not be earned, but was rather inherited.<sup>73</sup> Ascough observes that "ascribed honour was of more consequence than acquired honour,"<sup>74</sup> so that ultimately the rank of one's family took precedence over their actions or abilities.<sup>75</sup>

Ancient Mediterranean honor-shame societies were typically highly gendered. Ascough notes that "[i]n such a culture, women had shame, but in a positive sense insofar as they understood their role in maintaining the honor of their family."<sup>76</sup> In contrast to females' passive role with regard to honor, the role of males was active and aggressive, so that what was in reality a social competition for honor was "played out primarily among males."<sup>77</sup> Not only was gender a defining factor in terms of the Roman *ordo*, but in practical terms so too was social status, since as Osiek and Balch note, "the notion of *ordo* was confined to the very small upper ranks

<sup>70</sup> Moses I. Finley, *The Ancient Economy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 45.

<sup>71</sup> Jeffers, *Greco-Roman World*, 181.

<sup>72</sup> *Livy* 3:63.9–10, in vol. 2 of *Livy*, in B. O. Foster, ed. and tr., *Livy*, vol. 2, The Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1959–1967). 214–215.

<sup>73</sup> Richard S. Ascough, *Lydia: Paul's Cosmopolitan Hostess, Paul's Social Network* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2009), 62.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> See Jeffers, *Greco-Roman World*, 181, for a chart showing social class in the Roman Empire.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 62–63.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

of society, who constituted the elite in whose hands most power was concentrated."<sup>78</sup>

It is also important to be aware that in a society in which the secular and the cultic were inseparable, so too the Roman understanding of the notion of *ordo* was integrally tied to the performance of sacral duties. This was particularly true for the upper levels in Roman society. Therefore, for example, the decurionate played an important role in imperial cult activities.<sup>79</sup>

If the above description of the ancient Roman concept of *ordo* resonates loudly with modern concepts associated with ordination within Christianity, this is not mere coincidence. As Torjesen reminds us, "[t]he *ordo clericus* of the Christian Church. . . was modeled on these Roman *ordines*. Ordination was the ceremony for entry into the *ordo*."<sup>80</sup>

It is specifically within this context, and with the sense of "setting in order" and "regulation,"<sup>81</sup> that the word *ordinare* (ordination) was specifically used in the Roman Empire to refer to the appointment of magistrates and governors to office. Thus, Suetonius wrote that Julius Caesar "appointed magistrates to hold their offices for terms of years [*magistratus in pluris annos ordinavit*]."<sup>82</sup> That the word had an official and formal sense is evident from its usage in decrees and edicts.<sup>83</sup>

We should note the Vulgate's rendering of the clause "they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints" in 1 Cor 16:15. Here, the Vulgate uses *in ministerium sanctorum ordinaverunt se ipsos* to translate εἰς διακονίαν τοῖς ἁγίοις ἔταξαν ἑαυτούς. This suggests that the Vulgate is using the *Vetus Vulgata* at this point, since it uses the word *ordinare* in its general, non-ecclesiastical sense (this passage is not referring to a specific ecclesiastical office).

Tertullian, in the mid-third century, was the first Christian writer to use the word *ordo* in a distinctively Christian sense. He uses the word *ordo*

<sup>78</sup> Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and house Churches, Family, Religion, and Culture* (Louisville, KY: Knox, 1997), 92.

<sup>79</sup> Jonathan Edmondsun, "Cities and Urban Life in the Western Provinces of the Roman Empire 30 BCE–250 CE," in David Stone Potter, ed., *A Companion to the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 250–280, 273.

<sup>80</sup> Karen Jo Torjesen, "Social and Historical Setting: Christianity as Culture Critique," in Frances Young, Lewis Ayres, and Andrew Louth, *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, 181–199, 189.

<sup>81</sup> Lewis and Short, "ordino."

<sup>82</sup> Suetonius, *Iul.* 76.3.

<sup>83</sup> Lewis and Short.

to refer to distinct social groups within the church. For example, he uses *ordo episcoporum* to refer to a “succession” of bishops from apostolic times.<sup>84</sup>

In the writings of Tertullian, we find that the words *ordinare/ordinator/ordinandus* are used strictly to refer to the priestly function, and in terms of a specifically sacramental role.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, Rankin observes that “[o]f the eight occasions on which Tertullian employs the term ‘ordo’ to denote an ‘order’ proper, seven clearly indicate the clerical ‘ordo’ and at least one of these explicitly excludes non-sacerdotal ministries.”<sup>86</sup> This is significant, because it indicates that the principal meaning of the term as it enters into the writings of early Christianity focuses on the sacerdotal functions of the clerical order.

As the Roman Catholic Church developed its sacramental theology into the middle ages, the words *ordo/ordinare* came to be more clearly defined in these terms. It is important to note that we are not dealing with New Testament evidence here, nor even first- or second- century usage. If we may use Tertullian as a reference point, these words seem to have entered Christian usage relatively late, in the early to mid-third century. It was only natural that over time, given its focus on the ministry as a literal priesthood, the Old Testament typology was given great importance within the Roman liturgy associated with ordination.<sup>87</sup>

The understanding of the nature of ordination in the Roman Catholic Church, which Protestantism largely inherited, is explained by David Power: “With the poorly developed pneumatology of the Latin churches... in common understanding and theological reflection the notion of an institutional transmission of office and power prevailed over that of a response of the Spirit to the prayer of the church and an enabling for ministry through its gifts.”<sup>88</sup> To illustrate the subsequent development of the term, we may note how Thomas Aquinas, “distinguishes two meanings of the word ‘ordo’: *ordo* as a sacrament and *ordo* as office... [in

<sup>84</sup> Tertullian, *Marc.* 4.5.2.

<sup>85</sup> J. F. Puglisi, *The Process of Admission to Ordained Ministry: A Comparative Study* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1996), 213.

<sup>86</sup> David Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 177. Rankin (*ibid.*) also observes that “[i]n the writings of Tertullian the ‘*ordo sacerdotalis*’ (*De Exhortatione Castitatis* 7,2) or ‘*ordo ecclesiasticus*’ (*De Idolatria* 7,3)—that order of the church which exercised the exclusive right to administer the Eucharist—is reserved to males.”

<sup>87</sup> Pierre-Marie Gy, “Ancient Ordination Prayers,” *Studia Liturgica* 13 (1979): 86.

<sup>88</sup> Power, “Order,” in vol. 2 of *Systematic Theology*, 297.

the second meaning] the episcopacy is an *ordo* because the bishop has power over and beyond a priest with regard to the Mystical Body of Christ, that is, the Church."<sup>89</sup> In general terms, the Protestant Reformation continued to use the word "ordination" in this way, though with a greater or lesser sacramental focus depending on the theological tradition followed. To illustrate this, the great Lutheran historian of canon law, Rudolf Sohm, was of the view that the spirit of God operates in ordination, so that it is the realization of the divine will, and for this reason "in a strict sense [it] is a sacrament."<sup>90</sup> It was the reformers who transferred and "canonized" the word "ordination" within Protestantism by inappropriately and anachronistically translating the Greek words described earlier in this essay through this ecclesiastical term.

This is where our fundamental presuppositions concerning ordination come from. Charles Bradford was right when he observed that "[t]he problem is not with ordination—the problem arises out of our concept of ordination, our presuppositions."<sup>91</sup> He elaborates by explaining that "[i]n many instances our views on ordination are based on the practices and teachings of an early church already sliding down the slippery slope of apostasy."<sup>92</sup>

The Seventh-day Adventist Church appears to theologically deny that ordination impacts any virtue; however, the way in which the church interprets and applies ordination in policy and practice implicitly suggests that it does. By limiting the performance of certain functions within the church to those who have been ordained, the church suggests that, for example, a baptism by an ordained minister has efficacy, while a baptism by a non-ordained person does not. These administrative controls may be necessary for organizational reasons. However, there is no reason to compound the theological issues by seeking a theological and ultimately extra-biblical basis for ordination. To do this is to suggest a move towards sacramentalism.

<sup>89</sup> Hermann J. Pottmeyer, "The Episcopacy," in Peter C. Phan, ed., *The Gift of the Church: A Textbook on Ecclesiology in Honor of Patrick Granfield, O.S.B.* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2000), 337–354, 345.

<sup>90</sup> Rudolf Sohm, *Kirchenrecht*, vol. 2, München-Leipzig 1923, 263, quoted by Gy, "Ancient Ordination Prayers," 78.

<sup>91</sup> Bradford, "Ordination," 8.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

## 8. Conclusion

Amadi-Azuogu observes that “it is not difficult to see that power is at the center of the ordination controversy. There is no gainsaying that contemporary Christian ministry is power-centered or authority-oriented. Hence, to talk about ordination is to talk about church power. By implication politics is unavoidably involved.”<sup>93</sup>

Unfortunately, history shows us all too clearly that issues of power and politics can muddy theological considerations. If we apply the principle of *sola scriptura* to our contemporary understanding of ordination, then we must recognize that it is neither a New Testament idea nor practice. While some may think it easy to disagree, for example, with fundamental aspects of Dozeman’s theology of ordination, it is much more difficult to avoid falling into similar theological misunderstandings.

What, then, are we left with? The Seventh-day Adventist practice of ordination serves an important function within the church, which is the recognition by the church of the divine call of God for various ministries. However, we cannot justify it with a biblical theology. We may class ordination together with the many other practices within Christianity which do not necessarily have a specific biblical precedent, but which have been “ordained” by the church to provide for its proper leadership and administrative needs. Indeed, God gave the church such authority (Titus 1:5). We may observe and apply the broad principles that we find throughout all of Scripture, such as God’s selectivity, the appointment of humans to roles in God’s plan, and the principle of order in all things. However, these hardly form sufficient basis for a theology of ordination as it is understood and practiced today.

In terms of actual practicalities, it is not clear from the New Testament that there was any specific ceremony associated with the appointment of people to church office. Even if we were able to demonstrate this, there is no indication that there was any consistency or uniformity to the practice. Neither is there any reflection in the New Testament about what any such ceremony may have meant. There is no indication in the New Testament of what appointment to any particular church office “allowed” or “qualified” people to do, or conversely, which church functions were “restricted” to people who were appointed to particular church offices. These are all notions and practices that the church has developed as it has responded to various organizational challenges throughout history.

<sup>93</sup> Adolphus Chinedu Amadi-Azuogu, *The Politics of Power and the Ordination of Women* (Maitland, FL: Xulon, 2007), 151. The context of this statement is the broader debates within Christianity concerning the ordination of women.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church does not believe that ordination confers special spiritual powers or spiritual status on a person. This position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church sits well with the fact that neither the word "ordination" nor its modern understanding appear in Scripture. This position should be maintained. To do otherwise is to potentially compromise our biblical understanding of the church, the Holy Spirit, and the atonement. Ordination is ultimately a matter for policy, and not for theology.