

ORDINATION AND THE BOUNDARIES OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

Ordenação e os Limites da Teologia Bíblica

Eliezer Gonzalez¹

ABSTRACT

There have been few serious attempts to develop theologies of ordination. This essay considers whether ordination lies within or outside the boundaries of Biblical theology. It analyses the topic of ordination from the perspective of Biblical theology. This essay demonstrates that it is not possible to argue for our contemporary concept of ordination from the Old Testament, that the Old Testament concepts of priesthood do not transfer to the New Testament (unless one adopts a sacramental theology), and that the term and the concept of ordination do not appear in the New Testament at all as we might recognize them in our contemporary setting. While arguments may be made for ordination from administrative necessity, tradition, and other theological systems, ordination must be understood as lying entirely outside the boundaries of Biblical theology.

KEYWORDS: ORDINATION; BIBLICAL THEOLOGY; PRIESTHOOD; SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY; NEW TESTAMENT.

RESUMO

Houve poucas tentativas sérias para desenvolver teologias da ordenação. Este ensaio considera se a ordenação encontra-se dentro ou fora dos limites da teologia bíblica. Ele analisa o tema da ordenação a partir da perspectiva da teologia bíblica. Este ensaio demonstra que não é possível argumentar para o nosso conceito contemporâneo de ordenação do Antigo Testamento, que os conceitos do Antigo Testamento de sacerdócio não transferem para o Novo Testamento (a menos que se adota uma teologia sacramental), e que o termo e o conceito de ordenação não aparecem no Novo Testamento a todos como podemos reconhecê-los em nosso ambiente contemporâneo. Embora os argumentos podem ser feitas para a ordenação da necessidade administrativa, tradição, e outros sistemas teológicos, a ordenação deve ser entendida como inteiramente situada fora dos limites da teologia bíblica.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: ORDINATION, BIBLICAL THEOLOGY, PRIESTHOOD, SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY, NEW TESTAMENT

¹ Eliezer Gonzalez has a PhD in Early Christian History, an MA degree in Theology, and an MA in Early Christian and Jewish Studies. He is an Honorary Associate at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia, and publishes regularly in academic and popular publications.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of ordination fundamentally underlies the question of the ordination of women. Within the Christian community, the ordination of women has often been discussed without an appreciation of what ordination is and its relation to Biblical theology. Therefore, this chapter focuses on the issue of ordination itself. How well does the idea and the practice of ordination fit within the boundaries of Biblical theology? This chapter attempts to answer this basic question by evaluating the foundations of our contemporary understanding of ordination through the Old and New Testaments, with particular reference to the perspectives of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

WHAT IS ORDINATION?

Different Christian traditions understand ordination differently; however most Christians usually think first of ordination as a ceremony. This is correct; however, we must not stop here, since it is the *purpose* of the ceremony that is most important. The ceremony of ordination has two basic functions across the breadth of Christianity: to confer a position within a community and to confer sacral power to a person.² Both these two functions have been covered by the concept of ordination since its very introduction into Christian vocabulary although different Christian communities have variously emphasized one or the other at different times throughout history.

From the earliest use of the word *ordination* within the Christian communities, the sacral power of ordination has been largely and traditionally understood to be “sacramental” in

² Yves Congar, “My Path-Findings in the Theology of Laity and Ministries,” *TJ* 32 (1972): 180.

nature.³ This means that the rituals involved in ordination are themselves considered to be intrinsically effective in allowing the power of God to work for the benefit of the believer.⁴ An important aspect of the effectiveness of these rituals is the “ordained” status of the person administering them. Although certain functions in churches are typically restricted to ordained people, many Protestants, including Seventh-day Adventists, would disagree with the sacramental nature of ordination.

Ordination is a topic that has previously not received much attention in the publications of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is not mentioned in the Fundamental Beliefs of the Church, and although the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* refers to the sacredness of ordination, it does not define ordination and provides no theological basis for it.⁵

WHAT IS BIBLICAL THEOLOGY AND WHAT ARE ITS BOUNDARIES?

Biblical theology is a theological approach that takes a high view of inspiration, and gives Scripture priority over all else.⁶ In Biblical theology, the focus is on God’s progressive revelation as presented in the Bible and, more specifically, on

³ On sacramental theology in general, see Darius Jankiewicz, “Sacramental Theology and Ecclesiastical Authority,” *AUSS* 42.2 (2004), 361–382.

⁴ The concept of the sacraments and of sacramental theology is, of course, predominantly a Catholic understanding, both Roman and Orthodox. Illustrating this view, Paul Haffner, in *Sacramental Mystery*, stated that “God guarantees [the sacraments] by an intrinsic objective efficacy, *ex opere operato*, which is also a special work of the Holy Spirit.” Paul Haffner, *The Sacramental Mystery* (Leominster: Gracewing, 1999), 12.

⁵ *The Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 18th ed. (The Secretariat, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010), 156, 160. See also Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: God As Trinity* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2011), 77, which refers to it as a “sacred rite.” See also the *SDA Manual for Ministers* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1964), 16–33; *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Washington, D.C.: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988), 146.

⁶ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1948), 11–12, 17. Beale’s definition of “Biblical theology” is “the exhibition of the organic progress of supernatural revelation in its historic continuity and multiformity.” (G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2011], 9).

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the development of particular themes or subjects throughout redemption history.⁷ Beale therefore refers to Biblical theology as focusing on the “storyline” of Scripture.⁸ In this light, Scripture is understood as both pointing forward to specific fulfillments while also referring back to contexts that foreshadow these fulfillments and help us to understand them.⁹ Because of Biblical theology’s high view of Scripture, as well as its emphasis on the Great Controversy narrative,¹⁰ the Seventh-day Adventist Church has always particularly valued the contributions of this approach to theology. The key elements that define the boundaries of Biblical theology are that it: gives priority to the Bible above all other criteria in establishing theological, moral, and ecclesiastical norms, is centered on Christ as the focus of redemption history,¹¹ establishes a continuity between the Old and New Testaments through Christ,¹² and it considers themes and subjects in light of the entirety of the progressive revelation of redemption history.¹³

ORDINATION AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

The English words *ordain* and *ordination*, particularly in the King James Version, are used to translate a great number of both Hebrew and Greek words that can have a wide variety of meanings. This makes it easy to think that *ordination* is a Biblical

7 Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 17.
 8 Beale, *Unfolding*, 6, 29.
 9 Beale, 3, *Unfolding*, 6; also Vos, 17. See, for example, Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (ed. R. Ö. Zorn; trans. H. de Jongste; Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company: Philadelphia, 1962), xi, xxviii. Biblical theology is complemented by systematic theology, which emphasizes logical analysis. Vos, *Biblical Theology*, v., observes that “Biblical Theology occupies a position between Exegesis and Systematic Theology in the encyclopedia of theological disciplines. It differs from Systematic Theology, not in being more Biblical, or adhering more closely to the truths of the Scriptures, but in that its principle of organizing the Biblical material is historical rather than logical.”
 10 Fundamental Beliefs Nos. 1 and 12, *Church Manual*, 95–135.
 11 See Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: God As Trinity* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Seminary Press, 2011), 276–277.
 12 See Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:1–3; John 17:25–26; and John 14:9.
 13 See Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 17.

word. However, *ordain* and *ordination* as they are used today have no direct or close equivalent in the Biblical languages. It is the translators of the King James Version who may be largely responsible for the connotations of these words in the English-speaking Christian world today. Even so, it is surprising to realize that the English word *ordain* is only used once in the entire first five books of the Bible in the King James Version. This is in Num. 28:6, with specific reference to a burnt offering *ordained* [*ashah* (אָשָׁה = do, make)] by God.

Four other possible examples of ordination may be found in the Old Testament: the appointment of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood,¹⁴ the appointment of the Levites,¹⁵ the appointment of the seventy elders (Num. 11:25), and the appointment of Joshua as Moses' successor (Num. 27:15–18). The issue with these passages in terms of the contemporary understanding of ordination is that they do not reflect a standard manner of proceeding to effect an appointment; for example, some cases specify the laying on of hands, but others do not. The fact that there is no conception of these appointments into various roles as belonging to the same category is demonstrated in the absence of any consistency in the Hebrew words that are used to refer to them.

What we do find in the above examples, as well as throughout the Old Testament, are some general principles—the principle of God's selectivity (God selects people), the principle of God's call (God selects people, and he calls them), the principle of service (God selects people, and he calls them to serve), and the principle of community (God calls people, and he calls them to serve within the context of a community), which implies order and organization. However, these principles cannot be used by themselves to constitute a Biblical theology of ordination because they apply generically to all who serve God in any capacity, and they neither demonstrate nor require a particular form of ceremony that confers a position in the

14 In Exodus 28:41, where God uses three verbs in relation to the appointment of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood: *mashakh* (מָשַׁח = anoint), *male* (מָלַא = accomplish, confirm, consecrate), and *kadash* (קָדַשׁ = make clean, appoint, sanctify). The ritual associated with their appointment is described in Ex. 29 and Lev. 8 and 9.

15 Num. 1:50. Here, the word *paqad* (פָּקַד = appoint, charge, commit) is used. See also Num. 8:10.

church, or sacral power to a person.

In the Old Testament, apart from priesthood, there is no general command, no consistent model, nor even a coherent terminology for how God’s people are to appoint others into roles to which they have been called by God. The prophets are a case in point; Elisha was appointed by having Elijah’s mantle thrown onto him. Apart from the Levitical priesthood, the Old Testament does not provide any other potential model on which to base a Biblical theology of ordination.

THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS: PROMISE AND FULFILLMENT

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The Scriptures demonstrate that God has progressively revealed his will to his people within the context of their particular position in the timeline of salvation history. As a result, there are truths that are clearly revealed in the New Testament, but which could only be understood in the Old through the use of foreshadowing and symbols to point to what was to come.

According to Heb. 9:23–24, the Old Testament priestly service was a “type” of the saving priesthood of Jesus Christ, the “high priest of the good things that have come.”¹⁶ Paul declared that the Old Testament sacrifices and observances were “a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.”¹⁷ As a “shadow” (σκία, Heb 10:1a), the earthly sanctuary/temple cult was never intended to be “the true form of these realities” (Heb 10:1a). Now, however, the heavenly things, which fulfill the “examples” and the shadows, are made manifest by Jesus who, in his “more excellent ministry,”¹⁸ is the mediator of a “new”¹⁹ and

¹⁶ Heb. 9:11. For the use of the word *typos* (τύπος = a stamp or model, see Rom. 5:14. For the use of the corresponding word *antitypos* (ἀντίτυπος = representative, figure, literally antitype, see Heb. 9:24 and 1 Pet. 3:21; 10. See also Heb. 9:23 and 8:13. In Col. 2:17 and Heb. 8:5, some aspects of the Mosaic system are called a *skia* (σκιά = shadow) of what was to come. In Heb. 9:9, the word *parabole* (παραβολή = similitude, figure, parable) is used for elements of the tabernacle service.

¹⁷ Col. 2:17; cf. Heb. 8:5.

¹⁸ Heb. 8:6.

¹⁹ Heb. 8:8, 13.

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 “better covenant.”²⁰

Not only does the New Testament teach that the Levitical priesthood and its earthly priestly service are fulfilled by the true heavenly priestly ministry of Jesus in heaven, but because of this heavenly ministry, the Old Testament priestly cult also has an *earthly* fulfillment. However, this earthly fulfillment does not consist in a continuation or a modified version of the Levitical priesthood. Paul clearly applies the cultic language of the earthly sanctuary and temple to the entire *community* of believers rather than to the temple and its cult. It is for this reason that he asks, “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?”²¹

The New Testament calls all believers to be a “holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:5–9). This is not because believers have any role in the mediatorial or atoning ministry, which belongs to Jesus alone, but rather because the Holy Spirit is given to each believer, and because in response to the “mercies of God” (Rom 12:1a), they are to offer themselves completely to be used by God “as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” (Rom 12:1b). For this reason, Raoul Dederen observes that the Christian life is “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.”²²

As such, the Holy Spirit is given in equal measure to all members of the Body of Christ, so that in 1 Cor. 12:4–6, the differences are not in source, degree, quality, or holiness; rather, the differences are in the nature of gifts and, more specifically, in their functions.²³ The Holy Spirit is not given on the basis of appointment to specific positions within the body; he is given to equip believers for different ministries, and the gifts through

²⁰ Heb. 8:6.

²¹ 1 Cor. 3:16. Also, 2 Cor. 6:14–7:1; 1 Cor. 6:19–20; 9:13–14; and 2 Cor. 6:14–7:1. See also Newton, 54–55, 74–78; and Walker, 119–122. (M. Newton, *The Concept of Purity at Qumran and in the Letters of Paul* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985]; P. W. L. Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City: New Testament Perspectives on Jerusalem* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996]).

²² Raoul Dederen, “A Theology of Ordination,” *Ministry Magazine* (Feb. 1978). Note that articles from *Ministry Magazine* have been sourced from <http://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive>. Page numbers are not available for these archived articles.

²³ See also Eph. 4:4–10; 16.

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which believers are equipped for service are all of equal honor (1 Cor 12:24–25). God has therefore arranged his church so that in it there are to be no distinctions in terms of honor; any distinctions exist merely in relation to the functions performed through the gifts that God has given. For this reason, Bradford remarks 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.”²⁴

Within this framework, in the church “all things should be done decently and in order,”²⁵ and the church should therefore have its appointed leaders.²⁶ This leadership is to be based on the selection and calling of God, supported by the confirmation of the people, and not on a higher or liminal status of holiness.²⁷ For this reason, the use of spiritual gifts in the New Testament is not restricted to those holding specific “positions” in the church.²⁸ There are no Biblical restrictions mentioned concerning the performance of New Testament rituals of baptism or of the sharing of the Lord’s Supper on the basis of positions held in the church.²⁹

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Since neither the physical forms of the Old Testament cult nor those of the Levitical priesthood, which administered them, are transferred to the New Testament, it is not possible to use the Old Testament priesthood to argue for ordination in the New Testament church today. The Old Testament cult and its priesthood all pointed to the coming and the work of the person of Jesus; to his one-time, all-atoning sacrifice; and to his ministry for sin in the heavenly sanctuary. Attempting to base a theology of ordination today on the Old Testament priesthood results in a denial of the traditional Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the New Testament teachings about

²⁴ Charles E. Bradford, “An Emphasis on Ministry: Is Ordination for Honor or for Service?,” *AR*, May 1995, 10.

²⁵ 1 Cor. 14:40. See also 1 Cor. 12:27–29 and Eph. 4:11–12.

²⁶ Heb. 13:7.

²⁷ 1 Cor. 6:19; Rom. 12:1.

²⁸ 1 Cor. 12:4–6, 11; Eph. 4:7–13.

²⁹ Although the church may legitimately make rules to regulate its functioning, which may perhaps come under the authority conferred upon it by Christ (Matt. 16:19), the remarks on Biblical theology made here are limited strictly to Biblical teachings and practices. In this vein, Dederen, “Theology of Ordination,” does remark that the manner in which the Adventist Church restricts the administration of the Lord’s Supper to ordained persons is “a matter of order, not a sacramental matter.” See also Nancy Vyhmeister, “Ordination in the New Testament?” *Ministry Magazine*, May 2002.

the atonement (soteriology), the church (ecclesiology), and the Holy Spirit (pneumatology). Each one of these teachings is fundamental to the Biblical understanding of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.³⁰

Other Christian traditions understand things differently. The ideas of a sacramental priesthood and a sacramental theology are an important part of the Roman Catholic tradition, and it is specifically from this paradigm that both the conceptual model and the word *ordination* originate.³¹ This statement is also true for significant sections of Protestantism to the extent that ordination is understood to confer spiritual power not available to the laity and to restrict certain ecclesiastical functions only to ordained people.

For example, the Vatican's Congregation of the Clergy explains that the church's liturgy "sees in this Old Testament priesthood a prefiguring of the New Covenant's ordained ministry."³² Furthermore, the ordained clergy and the offering of the Eucharist are inextricably bound together in the Roman Catholic tradition, so that as the Congregation of the Clergy again states, "the Eucharistic sacrifice has an absolute need for the ministerial priesthood" because it is the "ministerial priesthood that fulfills the eucharistic sacrifice in *persona Christi*, and offers it to God."³³

This understanding of ordination clearly fits outside the boundaries of Biblical theology. To see ordination in this way requires a different understanding of the role of divine revelation and tradition in relation to the church compared to that which many Protestants would hold. So, if we cannot find our contemporary idea of ordination in the Old Testament, can

³⁰ See Fundamental Beliefs 5 and 12 (*Church Manual*, 157, 160.)

³¹ The earliest uses of the word "ordination" within the writings of Christianity appear within an ecclesiastical and specifically sacramental context in the writings of Tertullian (c.160–c.225 A.D.), who was the first Christian writer to use the Latin word *ordo* in this sense, in *Against Marcion*, 4.5.2. This concept was theologically developed further by Cyprian of Carthage in his important treatise, "On the Unity of the Church" (251 A.D.).

³² Congregation of the Clergy, *The Priesthood of the Old Covenant*. n.p. [cited 6 March 2013]. Online: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cclergy/documents/rc_con_cclergy_doc_24111998_pandold_en.html

³³ Congregation of the Clergy, *La Eucaristía y el Sacerdote (The Eucharist and the Priest)*. n.p. [cited 6 March 2013]. Online: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cclergy/documents/rc_con_cclergy_doc_20030613_priest-eucharist_sp.html, quoting *Lumen gentium* 10. This document has not been released in English, and this is my own translation from Spanish.

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 we find it in the New Testament?

ORDINATION AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

While the New Testament refers to apostles, elders, prophets, deacons, evangelists, pastors, teachers, and overseers, it never refers to any of these generic roles as belonging to a category that has been set apart from other believers by ordination. In fact, an equivalent word for *ordain*, in the contemporary sense of setting apart for ministry, does not appear in the New Testament at all.

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An important Greek word that is used in the New Testament in connection with the appointment to roles within the New Testament church is *cheirotoneō* (χειροτονέω = stretch out the hand). This word is important because it has to do with the action of the hand in relation to appointments to church office. However, it is also important to understand that this word does not have the sense of “laying on of hands.” Rather, it literally means to stretch out the hand,³⁴ primarily in the sense of raising the hand to express agreement in a vote.³⁵ This word appears in Acts 14:23 (ordained elders); 2 Tim. 4:22 (Timothy ordained as a bishop) and Titus 3:15 (Titus ordained as a bishop).³⁶

In each of these cases in the King James Version, the word is translated as *ordained*. However, it is 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,” “selected,” or “appointed.” This has been almost uniformly recognized in modern translations

³⁴ “χειροτονέω,” H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, and H. S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 8th ed. (New York: Harper and Bros., 1897), 1721.

³⁵ Bernhard Lohse, “χείρ,” *TDNT* 9: 424–437 at 437; *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich; trans. G. W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976), 10 vols.

³⁶ See also 2 Cor. 8:10, in which the translators of the KJV translate the same word as “chosen,” apparently simply because it is not mentioned in the text in connection with any particular office.

of the New Testament. These texts therefore cannot 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.

Another word used in connection with the idea of ordination is *kaqistemi* (καθίστημι = put in place).³⁷ This word is used seven times in the gospels, notably in the parables, in the simple sense of giving someone a responsibility.³⁸ In the rest of the New Testament, the word is used 14 times, with the same generic meaning. Therefore, although in Acts 6:3 the word is used in the sense of *appointing*³⁹ the seven, in the very next chapter it is also used in the sense of Pharaoh *making*⁴⁰ Joseph governor of Egypt, and in the complaint of the Israelites to Moses, “Who made thee a ruler and a judge?”⁴¹ καθίστημι is used in the book of Hebrews to refer to the appointment of the High Priest in the Levitical system.⁴² However, of the 21 times that καθίστημι is used in the New Testament, there are only two verses, Acts 6:3 and Titus 1:15, in which it is used in a sense that we would recognize as having to do with the structure of the early church.

In spite of the tendency of the translators of the King James Version to translate various Greek words as “ordain,” Titus 1:15 is the only verse in the entire New Testament where καθίστημι is translated 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 no reason to believe that it denoted any specific ceremony in particular or even that it had any specific use in relation to the appointment of people to any specific office in the New Testament church. Not only is the idea of laying on of hands *not* particularly attached to this word,⁴³ but neither does it appear to carry any particularly religious connotations. Therefore, in the passages in which this word appears in the New Testament, we cannot find the modern concept of ordination as

37 Albrecht Oepke, “καθίστημι, ἀκαταστασία, ἀκατάστατος,” *TDNT* 3: 444.

38 Matt. 24:45, 47; 25:21, 23; Luke 12:14, 42, 44.

39 KJV.

40 Acts 7:10; KJV.

41 Acts 7:35; KJV. See also v. 27.

42 See Heb. 5:1; 7:28; 8:3.

43 The word καθίστημι only appears in the context of laying on of hands once in the New Testament in Acts 6:3; cv. v.6.

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 a discrete ritual by which people are appointed to positions in the church.

A significant reference to hand-laying is seen in 1 Tim. 5:22. However, as Robinson noted, “[u]nfortunately what is meant by the gesture is not unclear, leaving a number of possible usages open for interpretation, including healing, blessing, ‘ordination,’ conferral of the Spirit, restoration of penitents, or sacrificial handlaying.”⁴⁴ The fact that the laying on of hands is overwhelmingly used in the New Testament to refer to the giving of general blessings and healings would also lead us to understand this passage in this way. However, the context of this passage has to do with elders, sin, and church leadership, so that the laying on of hands in the particular context of appointment to church office is feasible in this passage. However, even if this passage is understood to refer to appointment to church office, this is not necessarily related to contemporary notions of ordination; in this case, it merely provides one of the only two instances in the New Testament where the word *epitithemi* (ἐπιτίθημι = put on, lay on) is specifically associated with the appointment to a role within the church.

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Still, the reality is that the Greek words often referring to ordination are merely generic words with a broad range of applications in the New Testament. If there is no specific language in the New Testament for ordination as we understand it, then can we at least find the idea of laying hands on people to appoint them to church office in the New Testament?

What we do find is that the practice of laying on of hands was very generic in concept and practice. In the New Testament, the laying on of hands is simply a form of generic blessing, as in the Old Testament. The New Testament does not particularly differentiate between laying hands on children (Matt 19:13), laying hands as part of the act of healing,⁴⁵ having the whole church lay hands to bless evangelists before a missionary journey (Acts 13:2–3), laying hands when receiving a spiritual

⁴⁴ Clayton David Robinson, “The Laying on of Hands, with Special Reference to the Reception of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament” (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, School of Theology, 2008), 191.

⁴⁵ For example, Mark 6:5 and Acts 9:12. In most cases, in the New Testament, laying on of hands is for the purpose of healing.

gift,⁴⁶ or laying hands as part of a blessing for people appointed to roles in the church (Acts 6:6). In fact, and perhaps surprisingly, this latter passage (Acts 6:6), which deals with the appointment of the seven men chosen “to serve tables,” (Acts 6:2–3)⁴⁷ is the only clear reference in the New Testament to the laying on of hands in connection with something that we might recognize as ordination.⁴⁸

We have mentioned Acts 13:2–3 above as referring to the laying on of hands in the context of a missionary journey; this passage is also interesting because it uses the concept of being “set apart” (*aforiz* [ἀφορίζω = separate]),⁴⁹ which is a phrase that is today used in the vernacular to refer to formal ordination to the gospel ministry. In this passage, 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).

It is significant that Paul himself uses the term ἀφορίζω 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.” When was Paul set apart? Although he was specifically set apart for his missionary journey in Acts 13:2–3. More importantly for Paul, in Gal. 1:15, he 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 word in quoting from the Greek New Testament (the Septuagint) of Isa. 52:11: “go ye out from the midst of her; separate [ἀφορίζω] yourselves, ye that bear the vessels of the Lord.”⁵⁰ In its original context, the subject here 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 ministry,

46 1 Tim. 4:14. See also 2 Tim. 1:6. With regard to this latter verse, see Paul F. Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites of the Ancient Churches of East and West* (New York: Pueblo, 1990), 33.

47 Interestingly, the New Testament itself never refers to Stephen or the seven as “deacons,” although Paul specifically refers to the “office of a deacon [διακονέω]” (1 Tim. 3:10, 13).

48 To this, some may add 1 Tim. 5:22, as discussed above, although the reference here is not necessarily clear.

49 v.2, ESV.

50 LXX, ed. Rahlfs; trans. Brenton. (Alfred Rahlfs, ed., *Septuaginta*, Editio altera by Robert Hanhart [Stuttgart: Bibelgesellschaft, 2006]).

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so too has every member of the “temple of the living God.” There is no sense of exclusivity in the New Testament idea of having been set apart, except in the differentiation of each ministry. Therefore, the idea of having been set apart cannot be restricted to any particular church office.

Furthermore, with regard to Acts 13:3, we should note that this blessing did not inaugurate Paul’s ministry because Paul and Barnabas had already been involved in ministry for quite some time.⁵¹ Furthermore, this was not the first time that Paul had had hands laid on him.⁵² Additionally, in Acts 13:3, it is not the elders who laid hands on Paul and Barnabas; rather, the subject of this action appears to be the whole of the church.⁵³ For all of these reasons, we cannot see in this passage a generic appointment to preach the gospel ministry; it is rather a specific formal recognition and blessing by the church of God’s calling of Saul and Barnabas to undertake their missionary journey to the Gentiles. It is best paralleled by those instances in the New Testament where the laying on of hands is associated with the reception of the Holy Spirit and of specific spiritual gifts. It is not an appointment to a church office nor an appointment to preach the gospel in any general sense.

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Instead of being especially associated with appointment to a church office, the laying on of hands is particularly associated in the New Testament with the reception of the Holy Spirit⁵⁴ and with baptism (Acts 19:5–6). Also, 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.

On the basis of the New Testament evidence alone, we cannot maintain 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.”⁵⁵ To maintain this is to rely on two verses alone: Acts 13:3 and Acts 6:6. The former does not specifically refer to a ceremony of ordination to the gospel ministry as we understand it today, which leaves us

⁵¹ See Acts 9:19–29 and 12:25

⁵² See Acts 9:17.

⁵³ See v. 1 and the pronouns in vv. 2–3.

⁵⁴ Acts 8:17; 19:6.

⁵⁵ Bradford, 9.

with only one verse: Acts 6:6. 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 church designated certain offices for the proper administration of the church, although these do not necessarily correspond with our own contemporary church roles. Moreover, the church filled these offices with suitable people. 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 rather than being the result of any particular commission.”⁵⁶ Neither the concept nor practice of ordination as it is understood in contemporary Christianity may be derived from the New Testament.

CAN ORDINATION BE MADE TO FIT INTO BIBLICAL THEOLOGY?

The discussion so far leads us inevitably to the conclusion that ordination lies outside the boundaries of Biblical theology. So, what happens when we try to force ordination within the bounds of Biblical theology? To answer this question, an examination of some theologies of ordination is required. The Roman Catholic Church has a very clear theology of ordination, which is sacramental in nature, as has been noted earlier.⁵⁷ In Protestant Christianity, on the other hand, theologies of ordination are much fewer and less comprehensive in nature.

An example of a serious attempt to develop a theology of

⁵⁶ David N. Power, “Order,” in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives* (ed. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin: Vol. 2; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2011), 294.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, specifically 567–582.

ordination within the Protestant tradition is Thomas Dozeman's *Holiness and Ministry*.⁵⁸ As is usually the case in theologies of ordination, Dozeman's theology is fundamentally sacramental in nature, affirming that, "[o]rdination for ministry allows for the safe 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."⁵⁹ Dozeman's theology is firmly grounded in the Old Testament.⁶⁰ Dozeman accordingly refers 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."⁶¹

Ultimately, Dozeman considers that Biblical theology of ordination requires "a broad view of biblical authority," in which the Old Testament Scriptures "provide a framework for theological reflection."⁶² The question is whether even Dozeman's broad view of Biblical authority is a sufficient basis for 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 theology is "the post-biblical theological reflection of the church universal."⁶³ In this way, Dozeman ultimately betrays and undermines the subtitle of his monograph, *A Biblical Theology of Ordination*.

For the purposes of this study, the value of Dozeman's work lies in the fact that it reveals the theological assumptions that often implicitly underlie many discussions of ordination. These assumptions result in a theological approach, reflected in many ways within Protestantism, that tends to be, to a lesser or greater degree, sacramental in nature. This kind of theology ultimately conflicts with traditional Protestant understandings, as well as the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the teachings of the Bible, including those on the nature of God,

⁵⁸ Thomas B. Dozeman, *Holiness and Ministry: A Biblical Theology of Ordination* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 32, 35.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁶¹ Dozeman, *Holiness and Ministry*, 104.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 119.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

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the atonement, the heavenly priesthood of Jesus Christ in the heavenly sanctuary,⁶⁴ the nature of the church, and the work of the Holy Spirit. Fundamentally, not only does ordination not fit, but it also cannot be forced to fit within the boundaries of Biblical theology.

CONCLUSION

God established his church, he selects people to serve him, and then he calls them. It is the Holy Spirit who is responsible for equipping and appointing people for specific ministries and roles within the church, and his dispositions are to be acknowledged by the church. Jesus Christ, through his Spirit, provides all that is necessary for the harmonious working of the Body of Christ. Ordination is neither a Biblical word; nor is it, as traditionally understood, a Biblical concept. Ordination necessarily stands outside the boundaries of Biblical theology.

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⁶⁴ Bradford, "Ordination," 9, recognized this same point: "Any attempt to resurrect the office of priest is to obscure the ministry of Jesus, the one and only High Priest."

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ELIEZER GONZALEZ

