

Ordaining Priests & Bishops

THE DOCTRINE

Ordination or Holy Orders is one of the seven sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church. Without ordination there would be no Church as such. The Church may say the family is its basic unit but it holds that this unit needs to be formed with the graces channelled by the priest.

Holy Orders can only be validly conferred by bishops. The idea is that Christ gave the power to ordain and celebrate the sacraments only to the twelve apostles who passed these powers on by laying hands on other men, called bishops, to continue these powers. Thus the power was spread like a virus.

The power can only be validly transmitted from bishop to bishop by the laying on of hands.

The bishop is thought to have the full priesthood and a priest only shares in some of the priesthood. A deacon receives some of the sacrament of order, some of the priesthood as well, though inconsistently Rome says deacons cannot say Mass. So when a bishop makes a man a bishop, priest or deacon he is giving the sacrament of Holy Orders.

THE HISTORY

These things comprise Roman Catholic teaching not Bible teaching. Considering how the core of Catholicism is its teaching about the sacraments you would expect the teaching to be clearly in the Bible but it is not. It is conspicuous by its total absence.

The Bible never says that these offices can only be conferred by a bishop who derives his powers from a line of bishops going back to the apostles. It never says that ordination is a sacrament. It never says that the Church has the power to decide what powers an ordination will give a priest. What if Jesus gave the Church the power to forgive sins and only bishops have it? Bishops are considered the successors of the apostles and it was to the latter that Jesus supposedly gave the power to forgive sins. If only bishops really forgive then the huge majority of Catholics are not forgiven at all for they go to the priest.

ARE ALL PRIESTS?

The New Testament never called any elder or presbyter a priest. It says all people are priests but never mentions a ministerial priesthood in the Church. The Old Testament says that all the Israelites were priests but speaks of a ministerial priesthood as well. The Bible never encourages any understanding other than that all the Israelites were priests but some of them dedicated themselves to priestly activities. They were active priests. An analogy would be how in Catholicism priests who no longer practice are still considered to be priests. So if there are priests and ministerial priests it does not imply that ministerial priests are more priests than everybody else. Its a difference of function not of rank.

1 Peter 2:5-9 teaches believers to get "built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ - but you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people". It says all are priests and refers to the Old Testament book of Exodus which says in 19:6: "You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" as proof.

Now what about the Protestant notion that Jesus is the only ministerial priest in these times?

The text we have just looked at is thought to contradict the notion that there are no priests other than Jesus because it says all Christians are priests. But it only speaks of priests metaphorically - people who offer good deeds in God's honour.

Perhaps we should speak of all people being priests but as Jesus being the ONLY active priest.

JESUS THE ONLY ACTIVE PRIEST

The Bible seems to support the Protestant teaching. In 1 Timothy 2 we read that only one person, Jesus mediates salvation.

1 Timothy 2:5 says, "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus who gave his life as a ransom for all." This is said to prove that as a priest is a mediator/intercessor between two disputing parties that

there is only one priest: Jesus.

But is Jesus the kind of mediator that engages in diplomacy or is he the kind of mediator who mediates by offering a sacrifice that settles the dispute? It is both combined. Only Jesus offers sacrifice to God in the real sense. The text calls Jesus the only priest.

Even if the rest of the text says that other people can help you by their prayers it does not say they have the power to mediate between Jesus and you by giving you sacraments.

What about Hebrews 7:22-25? This is supposed to allow for the thought that people can be mediators and intercessors though not in exactly the same unique way that Jesus is.

But the Bible says here that you can go straight to God through Jesus.

The text is, "This makes Jesus the surety of a better covenant. The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them." This text denies that any Christian can be a priest after death. Catholic doctrine says that a priest is a priest forever. Hebrews says that even if Jesus himself were to pass away, there would no longer be anybody being saved by his intercession.

The Catholic Church says the doctrine that you have full access to Jesus is not saying you can dispense with priests. It says it is not an either/or proposition. It sees the Catholic as going directly to God with the priests because the priests are in fact appointed by God to be his representatives. The Church says that even the Bible speaks of go-betweens such as apostles and prophets. The rationale is that the priests participate in the priesthood of Jesus and are not diminishing or usurping his priesthood. But they are for there is no evidence in the New Testament that Jesus set some men apart as priests as they are set apart in Catholicism.

The Greek word, "presbyteros" is used of those who the Church says are priests in the New Testament. This word has a range of meanings and could refer to priest. But there is no reason to think that it does in the New Testament. The Roman Church says it is happy to read that the ministers of the Church had a priestly function. So if they were not called priests they were still priests. The Church claims that they mediate grace and forgiveness to the people so they are priests. That too is only the Church's interpretation.

Paul writes "of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God" (Romans 15:15-16). This refers to priestly service as in offering service to God. It is not anything like a Catholic priest.

The Church says that James speaks of the elders being needed to anoint the sick. But the text might not mean that only elders have the authority but that they took on the job. It could just have been the way things were done. And the text says that the prayer of faith made by the elders can win the forgiveness of sins for the sick person. This is different from Catholic priests who forgive sins themselves instead of merely asking God and hoping for the best.

The Church says that in John, Jesus said the apostles could declare the sins of people forgiven. "If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven." But even Catholicism admits that nobody can forgive sins as if they were God. A better understanding is that the apostles will only forgive those who they clairvoyantly see have been forgiven by God.

And as for the Mass, there is nothing in the Bible that tells the apostles to do anything other than just think of Jesus whenever they eat bread or drink wine. The Church of Rome argues that only priests and bishops have the power to give you the body and blood of Jesus in the Mass so Jesus' commands that we must eat his body and drink his blood presuppose a Church. Not a word of the New Testament mentions anybody needing power to do it. In fact if Jesus did tell the Jews to eat his body and drink his blood Catholic style that would rule out the need for the Church for he implied to them that they could have his body and blood there and then and there was no Church or priests then! The real purpose of the Mass is to bolster up Church power and influence and thus it is a dreadful lie.

There is no evidence of anything like a Catholic priesthood in the Bible.

LAYING ON OF HANDS

The Catholic Church claims that if a genuinely consecrated bishop lays hands on a male with his consent he makes him a priest. Acts 13:3 is then turned to in desperation to prove this doctrine. Bizarrely the Church says Jesus ordained the apostles as priests at the last supper when he told them to offer his body and blood and did not use the laying on of hands!

If you read Acts 13:3 you see no indication that the laying on of hands here was an ordination. The Holy Spirit asked for Paul and Barnabas to be set apart for his mission and this was done by the laying on of hands. They went then directed by the Holy Spirit on a missionary journey. At most this was just a blessing for the journey. The text doesn't tell us if the hands were essential or if they conferred sacramental powers or were more than just an indication of approval and a blessing in preparation for sending these men on a mission. 2 Timothy 1:6 has Timothy asked by Paul to rekindle the grace within that he got through Paul laying hands on him. This text or context doesn't indicate that Timothy was a bishop or ordained. Nor does Paul say that the grace happened because it was a sacrament. Grace can be transmitted by prayer and laying hands is a prayer. And Timothy needs to rekindle the grace even though Paul praised him as exemplary just a few verses earlier. A sacrament's grace will stay with you as long as you are holy.

VALIDITY

The New Testament says that only a prophet can call a man to be a priest. Aaron was called that way. "No man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron." (Hebrews 5:4). Roman Catholic priests feel called but that means nothing. It does not mean they really are called.

Just as the Church has found that many marriages are invalid – and these are the few it was able to know about – obviously there must be invalid ordinations as well. The Council of Trent made it official Catholic teaching that a sacrament can only be conferred by intending to at least do as the Church does. "If anyone shall say that intention, the intention at least to do what the Church does, is not required in ministers while performing and giving the sacraments then let him be accursed" (Session VII, Canon 11). So an unbelieving bishop can validly make new bishops as long as his intention is this: "I don't believe this stuff but if there is anything in it then I intend to make this man a true bishop and give him grace." Obviously, then ordinations done by a bishop like this should be repeated to be on the safe side. What if because of his unbelief he can't intend to consecrate? What if he thinks, "What a superstition this rite is! I am so sure there is no power in it and I can't give any and I don't even intend to." Can you trust a man who goes through the motions to have a suitable intention?

The Roman Catholic Church decreed with Pope Leo XIII that since Anglican bishops though intending to ordain priests didn't believe in ordaining priests to celebrate Mass the ordinations were invalid. For Roman Catholics, Anglican bishops and priests are really not ordained at all. The Catholic Church re-ordains them unconditionally as if there is no doubt that the orders they got before were fake.

The decree would imply that unbelievers cannot give real sacraments. The Church says they cannot give real ordination. Inconsistently, though it may recognise their baptisms.

There is nothing the Church can do to guarantee that you are getting a real sacrament. The Church says that it trusts in God to protect her from such disasters as ministers giving invalid ordinations. When God lets the Church be bothered with invalid marriages and lets it be fooled by false popes why be so sure? The Church has admitted to excommunicating people and groups unfairly causing grave division in the Church by its invalid excommunications. This does even worse damage than the consecration of fake priests and fake bishops.

Suppose somebody is invalidly baptised. If that person becomes a priest or bishop that person will not be a true priest or bishop. Church law is that the sacraments can only be validly received by a baptised person. If a priest is invalidly ordained he cannot become a valid bishop for it is necessary to be a priest first. The doctrines surrounding the sacrament of ordination are so ridiculous that one must question the sanity or normality of any man that becomes a priest.

Protestant baptisms cannot be valid in the eyes of honest Catholics. A valid baptism must be done with the intention to let God put grace into the child. Even an atheist or Jew can do this. Not believing in God does not mean you can't think, "I am totally sure I am right that there is no God. But if there were I would want this rite to let him help the child with his grace." Protestantism consecrates the child to the doctrine of total depravity which means the child is not being consecrated for God. Thus the many priests and bishops of the Catholic Church who had been baptised as Protestants are not really ordained at all.

FINALLY

We can be sure that the Catholic priesthood as created quite a mythology around itself in the pursuit of social standing and glory. But that is all it is: lies and mythology.

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