

# Holy Orders

## 1. Early Christianity - Words

- Order, as in order of deacons, order of catechumens, a religious order = an established group of people
- “bishop” (*episcopos*) = overseer or supervisor, to watch over, cf. “scope” = “see,”
- “presbyter” = elder
- “deacon” = server, servant, minister
- “priest” in world religions = mediator of the sacred. Also associated with offering sacrifice.

## 2. New Testament

- These terms appear in NT, but do not mean what we mean by them today.
- In NT, the only individual known as a priest is Jesus Christ.
- Christian community shares in his priesthood (1Pt 2: “a royal priesthood”)



## 3. Organizational Structure Emerges by 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> Centuries

Three ordained ministries, ordained with prayer and laying on hands.

- One **bishop** for a city or town, elected by people.
  - Leads the local church community.
  - Safeguards & presents teaching of apostles, “successor of apostles.”
  - Presides over the community’s sacramental worship.
- **Deacons** assisted the bishop, esp. in finance and liturgy. Archdeacon often became next bishop.
- **Presbyters** – a council of elders, advised bishop.

### 3-fold role

Govern

Teach

Sanctify

## 4. Developments from 4th c

- a. Role of presbyters changes from advisory to primarily sacramental, from council to individual.
  - Christianity legal, population grew. All can’t gather in one place with bishop for Eucharist on Sunday.
  - Bishop appoints presbyters to substitute for him, presiding at Eucharist in other areas of the city.
  - Eventually presbyters head their own parishes.
  - Presbyters could do Mass, baptisms. But confirmation, public penance, ordination still reserved to bp.
- b. Presbyters become “priests.”
  - Presbyters presided at the Eucharist, thought of as a sacrifice.
  - Sacrifices are something “priests” offer. First applied to bishops, then after 4<sup>th</sup> c. to presbyters.
- c. Celibacy for the clergy begins to develop.
  - Should abstain from sex with spouse night before Eucharist, for purity (like Jewish priesthood).
  - Eucharist was initially only on Sundays, but came to be celebrated every day. Not mandatory yet.

## 5. Middle Ages

- By 6<sup>th</sup> c. order of deacons as a permanent group is gone. Now only temporary step on way to priesthood.
- Priests – main job is private Masses for the dead.
- Priesthood theology – thought of as power personally possessed by the priest: to consecrate, absolve.
  - “in persona Christi” – “in the person of Christ.” Priest represents Christ (infers that laity don’t).
- Medieval bishops – like earthly rulers, possessing wealth and land. “Princes.” Appointed by local nobles.
  - Reforms of Pope Gregory VII in 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> c. centralized authority in Rome. Pope appoints bishops.
  - With power flowing down like a pyramid from pope to bishop to priests to people.
- Reforms also end married clergy. Mandatory celibacy 12<sup>th</sup> c. So children not inherit church property.
- In the Eastern Orthodox churches, priests may be married, although bishops are celibate.

## 6. Reformation

- Luther and 16<sup>th</sup> c. reformers reject Mass as sacrifice, so reject priesthood (sacrifices are offered by priests).
- Ordained ministers for Protestant churches are pastors and preachers, not priests.

## 7. Teaching of Vatican Council II

- **Bishops** are shepherds, not rulers, who know their people & are known. Successors of apostles. CD 16
  - Threefold office: preach gospel (**teach**), shepherd (**govern**), oversee worship & sac (**sanctify**)  
“Among the principal offices of Bishops the preaching of the Gospel is preeminent.” Rites 14, LG 25
    - Cf. Christ as Priest, Prophet, King. Sanctify, Teach, Govern.
  - Ensure unity, both (a) internal within diocese, and (b) external with other local churches (dioceses)
  - Bishops are not mere delegates or agents of pope, but receive own authority from ordination.  
Bishops are vicars (representatives) of Christ, not of pope. LG 27
  - Express teaching for present times: “Bishops should present Christ’s teaching in a manner relevant to the needs of the times, providing a response to those difficulties and problems which people find especially distressing and burdensome.” CD 13
  - Care for *all* in their diocese, not just Catholics: immigrants, refugees, poor. Reach out to non-active Christians, encourage ecumenism and dialogue with other Christians and other religions. CD 16, 30
- **Presbyter/priest** role more than sacraments. Preach, counsel, lead.
  - “co-workers” and “cooperators” with bishop, assist to teach, govern, sanctify. CD 15, 30
  - “in persona Christi” – interpreted through church now, not over against laity.
- After Council, **deacons** restored as permanent order. Baptize, weddings, funerals outside Mass.
  - In Mass, proclaim gospel, preach, intercessions, directions to assembly (e.g. “bow your heads”)
  - Deacons are ordained ministers who may be married.
- Bishop is assisted by presbyters and deacons, collaborators in service of people of God.

## 8. Rites of Ordination (1969, 2002)

- One sacrament, 3 rites
- “Through sacred ordination certain of the Christian faithful are appointed in the name of Christ and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit to shepherd the church with the word and grace of God.” n1, cites LG 11
  - Ordination is first rooted in baptism: “certain of the faithful.” “Faithful” = the baptized.
  - To “shepherd,” not rule
  - Holy Spirit bestowed on candidates to transform them.
- Two “essential elements” to ordination rite: laying on of hands and Prayer of Ordination.
- Participation by the faithful is stressed. Ordination is act of the church, not an independent act of bishop.
  - “Ordination is to be celebrated within the rites of mass, in which the faithful, particularly on a Sunday, take an active part.” (In Mass, between Liturgy of Word and Liturgy of Eucharist.) n9
  - “While the laying on of hands is taking place the faithful should pray silently.” n7
  - “They take part in the Prayer of Ordination by listening to it and by affirming and concluding it through their final acclamation [Amen].” n7
- Role of laity in ordination
  - Attend “[T]he faithful are to be invited ... so that as many as possible may take part.” n15, 104, 179
  - Assent to choice of candidate(s)
  - Litany of saints, “pray for us” for what they are about to do
  - Pray silently during laying on hands
  - Amen to Ordination prayer – faithful “take part in” Prayer
  - Priest – faithful present with bread and wine
- Ecclesiology – understanding of Church. Ordained ministry in context of church, not special elite. Service. Ordination not directly through bishop from God, but mediated through act of church.