

TITLE: WHAT TYPE OF LOCAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP DOES GOD COMMEND?

INTRODUCTION:

Here at Solid Rock Community Church we maintain that one of our distinctives is that we are a **plurality of elder led** church. We emphasize that Jesus Christ is the Chief Shepherd, the Head of His church – not only the invisible universal church ... but the Chief Shepherd and Head of **every local body** of believers. The NT pattern is for each local church to be led by a group of godly male elders who meet the biblical qualifications. Elders have equal authority and a servant heart. That is saying a lot. You might find a lot of churches saying similar things in theory ... but their actual practice lines up much more with a one-man centered ministry. We do not support a model where there is a senior pastor whose office and role is differentiated from that of the other elders. However, we do understand that each elder is differentiated by how God has gifted him and should function in accordance with that giftedness. We are not clones of one another. We bring different strengths to the table ... and we each have our own set of weaknesses that require the checks and balances of the other men on the leadership team. We also maintain that church government is not like the authority you see in the world – in the realm of politics or even business – where there is a hierarchical structure and a tendency for those in charge to lord it over those under them. As we have been laying the foundation for this new church plant, we must honestly face the question of **the legitimacy of our own leadership**. Should Jon Hoyle and Charlie Jolly and Paul Apple be the elders right now in this context in this local church plant.

The question is not “What type of leadership would we like to see in our church?” But: ***WHAT TYPE OF LOCAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP DOES GOD COMMEND?***

Detractors could easily say: Who do you think you are? Can you three men just leave some other church situation and set yourself up as leaders in a new context and try to start something? How can that be legitimate? What church council authorized you to minister in such a capacity? Where does your authority come from? [Christ was constantly attacked regarding the basis for his **authority** in his teaching and preaching.] Do you have the right type of ordination for this ministry? Should you be seeking any other type of credentials or human commendation? These are not easy questions. This is not my usual expository message oriented around one central text. There are a lot of principles regarding NT church structure and function that must be pulled together here.

I am going to start with laying out **five simple presuppositions**.

PRESUPPOSITIONS FOR RECOGNIZING CHURCH LEADERS:

Some position(s) required as an antecedent in logic or building a case; these are the foundation stones; if these are incorrect, than you have not proved your point; No time to build a case here for each of these presuppositions – but let’s at least recognize them before we try to make a case

1) Christ as the Head of His Church has a **model** for church structure that He would like to see implemented in this church age. That is why He trained His disciples regarding how to plant churches and disciple believers. That is why God has revealed clear qualifications for the two offices of elder and deacon. That is why we see a consistent pattern repeated in the NT. There

are many areas left up to the freedom of following the lead of the Holy Spirit. But this freedom exists within the confines of the consistent pattern that must be replicated.

- Many groups would dispute this. They would argue that we have the freedom to adapt to every culture and period of time and form our own best idea of how the local church should be structured and even what types of hierarchy should exist above the local church level.

- Again, without trying to prove this point, wouldn't it be strange if Christ did not know what was best for the organization of His church. It would be one thing if He gave no instructions. But why would we want to try to "improve" upon the NT pattern? We are just saying at this point that some type of pattern has been revealed (the details we will discuss later) and we must be committed to replicating that pattern.

2) This NT revealed model (revealed in both example in the Book of Acts and in doctrine in the epistles) [as I stated in my Introduction] establishes Christ as the Head over His church universal as well as over each individual manifestation of His local church. The NT does not present any evidence for any **intervening hierarchical structures** (like General Assemblies and Synods in the Presbyterian model) between the **Chief Shepherd** (Christ) and the **undershepherds** of a particular church. (The voluntary temporary council of **Acts 15** [which addressed one particular doctrinal issue] is often referenced as the precedent for establishing an ongoing permanent type of hierarchical structure. **Principle of Connectivity** – but no mandate for ongoing hierarchical authority)

Gary Inrig: An appeal to Acts 15 and the Jerusalem Council is an appeal to an exceptional case. It should be noted that the decision to go to Jerusalem was purely voluntary, that it was directly related to a specific doctrinal problem in which false teachers claimed to represent apostolic teaching and the beliefs of the Jerusalem Church, and the "Council" never again makes an appearance in the New Testament. To argue, therefore, for a progression from the Jerusalem Council to permanent, representative, legislative church courts is dubious, at best.

- In the transitional period in the Book of Acts, we find **apostles** and their direct **delegates** (like Timothy and Titus) functioning as modern day missionaries (not Senior Pastors) but with **expanded authority**. We do not believe that such apostles exist in the church today and therefore their authority cannot be the basis for appointing elders today. However, there may be parallels between modern day **missionaries** and their role in planting churches and recognizing leaders.

- Where such a **denominational hierarchical structure** exists, it is not surprising to find that they have established their own set of guidelines and requirements for ordaining leaders in their particular churches.

- You might find it interesting that in the Presbyterian system (I am most familiar with this – grew up in this – have a close relative pastoring a PCA church in the area – was even an ordained elder in my local PCA church for a number of years) the senior pastor (a teaching elder as opposed to a ruling elder – we will talk about this supposed distinction) is not even a member of the local church. He is a member of the body above that = the local Presbytery.

“An appropriate Presbyterian extrapolation of this principle [that a presbytery should exist to exercise regional oversight] is that just as the local church has its session, the regional church has its presbytery and the whole church has its general assembly.” – The Biblical Origins of the Presbytery

Summary:

#1 a pattern exists

#2 that pattern relates only to the local church level – not some type of structure above the local church

3) The government structure for this model is a **plurality of godly men** functioning as elders / pastors / shepherds / overseers / bishops – really 3 different words in the Greek – but all referring to the same people and the same office.

- you must have more than one
- they must be men
- they must be godly

The **geographic evidence** is quite clear and consistent:

- Jerusalem Church	sending the gift “ <i>to the elders</i> ”	Acts 11:30
	[first mention – transitioning from foundational leadership of apostles and prophets]	
- Jewish churches	“ <i>elders of the church</i> ”	James 5:14
- Hebrew churches	“ <i>leaders</i> ”	Heb. 13:17, 24
- Asia Minor	“ <i>they appointed elders in every church</i> ”	
	- Perga, Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:1-4), Iconium, Lystra, Derba	Acts 14:23
	- Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia	1 Peter 5:1
- Ephesus	“ <i>elders of the church</i> ”	Acts 20:17
- Philippian church	“ <i>bishops</i> ”	Phil. 1:1
- Thessalonian church	“ <i>those over you</i> ”	1 Thess. 5:12
- Churches of Crete	“ <i>elders in every city</i> ”	Titus 1:5

Conclusions from the geographical evidence:

- not just a cultural model but meant to be normative
- not just favored by one or two of the NT apostles or writers of the epistles
- not just for churches established very early in the first century – but throughout the period – until abuses arose under the encouragement of Ignatius
- not based on the size of the church

Someone might argue that maybe **each city** had plural elders ... but the city was comprised of a number of local assemblies that each had only one elder. But the Philippian church and the Thessalonian church have always been treated historically as one entity – we don’t know how large. In today’s context of so many variations of Christian churches we certainly would not have any structure for all of the elders of a city to meet together to shepherd the flock – not even an option – unless you are in some type of parish system like Roman Catholicism.

Within this plurality there is no distinction made as to a specially designated senior pastor or chief leader among leaders. Therefore, the **ordination** qualifications, requirements and process should be **the same for all elders** – this is a huge point and one that will be crucial to our understanding in contrast to the traditional practice of most independent Bible churches. Two different types of ordination reveal that you have two very different classes of elders. Typically, the senior pastor is ordained or licensed after examination by a board of senior pastors from some of the surrounding churches. There is a higher standard of doctrinal depth and precision required in this examination process. There may be educational requirements (**seminary** degree, etc.) or other training hoops (internship) you need to jump through. [Is it always best to take your most gifted teachers and remove them from your assembly – send them off to a far-off school despite their family circumstances and have them developed for what then must be a

professional position?? It is if your church can only have one senior pastor who does the bulk of the preaching and teaching.] While the other elders are recognized by some process that remains within the confines of the local church. The proof text for such a distinction is **1 Tim. 5:17 – specific ruling elders as opposed to teaching/preaching elders**

“The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.”

But all elders are involved in ruling; all must be able to teach – all have different gifts of the Spirit; **opportunity is certainly there for any of the elders to excel** – not a matter of drawing a line of distinction between two different types of elders – but showing that the work they do can be characterized into 2 major divisions

Some try to make an **argument for James** being an early example of a **Senior Pastor** – as if he was a special leader over the others at Jerusalem

- Certainly he was highly respected as the Lord’s brother and a godly leader
- But Peter was prominent in the church at Jerusalem as well
- James was not in charge at the Jerusalem Council – voicing his opinion along with the other apostles and elders present; decision made jointly
- recognized himself the importance of plural rule in the church – **James 5:14**

4) It is relatively easy to understand how an existing church uses the authority of the existing elders to recognize a new elder. Some people would want to see some type of congregational vote or democratic process based on a study of the language used [χειροτονήσαντες -- to elect by a vote of raised hands – or simply to appoint]; but we understand what **elder rule** involves in terms of **authority**. [See Acts 14:23 – clearly no congregational vote involved here.]

Joe Fogle: Proof that elders were not elected by popular vote comes from **Titus 1:5**. In this passage the word “appoint” is the entirely different and unrelated word (*kaqisthmi*), which means to “make, order, or appoint.” It is unlikely that this verb indicates that Titus ordered elections and then tabulated the votes. The congregation did not have exclusive authority to appoint elders.

Our more difficult issue will be to consider how to establish elders in a new work such as what we have at Solid Rock.

5) The recognized leaders of the local church must have the goal to **equip all of the saints** to perform their role as ministers – both in terms of outreach to the lost and the edification of the body – **Ephes. 4** – If that is not your conviction and goal, you are not a candidate for leadership. We are not trying to make people dependent on ourselves and our leadership, but dependent on the Lord. There is the **sufficiency of the Scriptures** to guide us; there is the **sufficiency of spiritual gifts** to accomplish what Christ wants to see accomplished in His body.

The leadership of these elders is collegiate; all are active and involved in the ministry; equality of authority in decision-making; not delegating the actual ministry to some paid staff but overseeing all aspects of the ministry.

Gary Inrig: The ministry of gifted individuals [in a leadership capacity] is therefore a ministry of equipping other believers by teaching them God’s truth and by developing their own gifts so that they might do the work of Christian ministry.

The work of the ministry is not to be performed just by the pastors, the recognized leaders. Any structure that stifles instead of encourages the development and functioning of the gifts of all cannot be a structure that is biblical and Holy Spirit directed. Any attitude of pride or elitism or selfish ambition that would tend to exalt self over the individual believers in the assembly must be guarded against.

Those are the **5 Presuppositions** we acknowledge as we begin our more detailed study of the NT pattern for recognizing church leaders (elders/pastors/overseers/bishops):

- a model exists
- the model is local church oriented
- the model involves plurality of elder rule
- that elder rule functions in the process of recognizing additional elders
- that elder ministry involves the equipping of all of the saints for their role in ministry

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*WHAT TYPE OF LOCAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP DOES GOD COMMEND?
AND ... HOW DOES THAT TYPE OF LEADERSHIP GET RECOGNIZED?*

7 PRINCIPLES FOR RECOGNIZING CHURCH LEADERS:

1) **The Holy Spirit** makes men to be leaders in the church by developing in them the necessary fruit of character, by gifting them to function as leaders and by blessing their ongoing ministry in the local body. Paul's message to the elders of the church at Ephesus (vs. 17):

Acts 20:28 *"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."*

Our goal this morning is to understand the implications of this statement: *the Holy Spirit makes specific men overseers* – and to conform to the process by which this should take place in practical terms in a given local church.

- Church leadership is not just a matter of **volunteerism** – be wary of emotional pleas to commit yourself to full time Christian service; to step up to the plate and be an elder;

- Church leadership is not just **filling a slot** -- we have always had five elders and one just moved away ... so we need to appoint another one ...lots of implications here; should be a very fluid situation

- Usually the Holy Spirit is going to raise up men from your existing flock to be leaders rather than bringing in someone from the outside – this goes against the **candidating practice** that looks for the best talent available in the marketplace. Places far too much importance on their speaking ability and their resume; minimizes what you learn from observing them in your own context; usually the surprises that you find out later are unpleasant surprises; also very discouraging to the men who have invested time and ministry in aspiring to leadership; you also want to make use of your own leaders = the arrows you have for future expansion and growth; yet the church today largely functions in a more independent mode with senior pastor types searching for available opportunities and churches recruiting outside talent that seems the most impressive [Implications for **deputation process** also should be examined.]

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Dr. Walter L. Thomas: Appointing Pastors and Elders

The Expert Model [the Professional Model / the Hired Gun Model]

Our society has adopted the Expert Model in most areas of life. Maybe it should be called the “white coat” model. Our society has made a major commitment to the expert model. When I go to the garage to have my old truck fixed, I get the expert on diesels or fuel injection or computer modules or transmissions. The written estimate which I receive, is more elaborate than the estimates I used to get from the hospital into which I was first admitted. Everyone is an expert and expects the respect (and pay) to which they are accustomed! The service, technical and medical professions have been in the forefront in propagating the Expert Model as a qualification and credence for their expert services. This model may serve us well in matters of technology, business, education, government and medicine.

The world uses very successful, secular methods to identify and recruit the leaders needed in the world’s organizations. The secular world generally uses the expert model in naming its leaders and uses self-promotion, nomination, recruitment and advertisement as its primary methods to locate candidates. They deploy the classic methods of the corporate world in locating executive officers and other management, research, marketing or production positions. The political areas of our society have other methods, basically built around self-promotion and democratic processes salted with a little “good ol’boy” back-patting. . .

Principles of how God chooses Spiritual Leadership:

1. The elder leads best who feeds best
2. God usually “raises up” leaders rather than recruit them from elsewhere.
3. God usually raises up leaders from sources within the flock or among close friends
4. God usually calls spiritual followers before He calls spiritual leaders
5. God usually calls spiritual leaders using existing spiritual leaders.
6. God is more interested in character than He is interested in talents, spiritual gifts or abilities.
7. Spiritual wisdom is more important than worldly wisdom and intelligence.
8. Little is much when God is in it.
9. God usually prepares persons for spiritual leadership by first requiring them to be submissive to spiritual leadership.
10. Spiritual prosperity is more important than worldly prosperity. . .
12. Leadership behavior isn't worth filthy rags if it is not motivated, directed and empowered by the Spirit of God.
13. The model for spiritual leadership is that of the servant. . .
15. Spiritual leadership is inaugurated with the “**laying on of hands**”
<http://www.restorekklesia.com/id8.html>

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2) The role of the local church is to **recognize and formally ordain/appoint** to office those whom the Holy Spirit has already made into an overseer. The word “ordain” carries some baggage that we might better avoid by always using the term “*recognize*” or “*appoint*” to the office of elder.

- “*Ordain*” carries with it that clergy/laity distinction with the emphasis on professionalism; on calling to full-time service

- “*Ordain*” in many circles has some sacerdotal associations – as if you are being made into somebody better – either the conveying of some type of special grace for ministry or empowerment; or the exclusive rights to preach, to administer baptism and the Lord’s Supper – we must be careful to maintain the **priesthood of all believers**

Benjamin Merkle: The New Testament does not teach that those chosen to lead the church are "ordained" to a sacred, priestly office. It also does not teach that only so-called "ordained" clergymen possess the right to preach, baptize, conduct the Lord's Supper, or pronounce a benediction.

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Ken Camp: "The normative position in our Baptist heritage is that ordination is a symbolic recognition of an individual's giftedness. It does not convey it; it simply acknowledges it," Deweese said.

Because of that understanding, some Baptists have rejected the practice altogether—most noticeably Spurgeon, pastor of London's Metropolitan Tabernacle. "Not only was he never ordained; he saw ordination as a form of ritualism that could easily lapse into popery. He detested the dogma of apostolic succession and refused to endorse the delegation of power from one minister to another," said Bill Brackney, professor of church history at Baylor University.

Indeed, some Baptists have refused to play along at all, referring to ordination as a ritual rendered null and void by the priesthood of believers. Charles Spurgeon, the most celebrated Baptist pastor of the 19th Century, is popularly believed to have said that ordination consisted of "**laying idle hands on empty heads.**" **William Loyd Allen**

"Further, he thought every church ought to have the right to select its own ministers, with no assistance from others in appointing him to the office."

The role and composition of the ordaining council also has changed considerably over the years, McBeth observed. The council—sometimes called a presbytery—typically asks the candidate to tell about his Christian conversion and call to ministry and then answer some doctrinal questions.

The Apostle Paul insisted his authority came from God, not from men, and he ministered for about a decade and half before the church at Antioch laid hands on him, he noted.

"I personally favor ordination," McBeth said. "It's a good thing to recognize God's call on a person's life. It's a way to say: 'We recognize God has called and gifted you for ministry. Amen, and more power to you.'"

- LAYING ON HANDS: Ordination practices vary widely among Baptists

Taken from the online journal: The Texas Baptist News Journal -- Posted: 3/17/06

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3) Each elder must **personally aspire** to want to devote himself to the sacrificial work of shepherding God's people. Nobody can be pressed into service. Nobody should serve from a sense of obligation. As in any other type of sacrifice, God desires that we give not grudgingly or out of necessity, but cheerfully and from the heart.

[This is different from the concept of **calling to full time service** that many speak of – actually there should be a complete disconnect between the heart for ministry and whatever may happen in terms of **financial support**.]

1 Tim. 3:1 *"It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine*

work he desires to do.” This prefaces the qualifications that are laid out for the office. You can be willing and still not be qualified. But you at least need to be willing.

- Pastoring is a valued ministry in the sight of God – importance of the local church; special rewards promised for faithful service; necessary for healthy growth of the flock and reproduction via church planting in other areas; we cannot have too many excellent leaders

- The emphasis is on the work, not the privilege of the office. Don’t kid yourself. This is not an easy task.

- There should be official recognition of leaders; this is a legitimate office. Some people react against the idea of leadership altogether. You need the respect and assistance of the rest of the flock to make your ministry as a leader most effective.

- But your heart has to be in the **work**.

Strauch: A Spirit-given burden for oversight demonstrates itself in action and deed. It cannot be held in. The person lets others know his desire to be an elder, and there is nothing wrong with that. But more important, the person who desires to be an elder devotes much time and energy to caring for the saints. There is no such thing as a Spirit-given desire for oversight without corresponding evidence of sacrificial, loving service. The reason for this is that eldership is a strenuous, shepherding task - not just another position on a decision making board. In fact, the stronger a man’s desire for eldership, the stronger his leadership and love for the people. So, the first step to be an elder is a Spirit-given desire that manifests itself in sacrificial service to the congregation (1 Timothy 3:1; Acts 20:28; 1 Thessalonians 5:12).

4) Each elder must continue to meet the **Scriptural qualifications** on an ongoing basis. These qualifications are set forth in **1 Timothy 3** and **Titus 1**. There can be no ordination of a man who does not meet those qualifications – regardless of the need for leaders. These qualifications are non-negotiable. If we no longer meet these qualifications we need to step down. The reputation of the church of Jesus Christ is what is at stake. That is why the overall summary qualification is the need to be “*blameless*” – not sinless – but nothing

5) Recognition of an elder is a **serious matter**

– often associated in the decision making stage with **prayer** and **fasting** [as well as soliciting the input of the congregation].

-- often associated in the public installation stage with the “*laying on of hands*”

Acts 13:1-6

1 Tim. 4:14

2 Tim. 1:6

6) Church Planting Situations (new start-ups) may involve some **abnormalities** with respect to the recognition of elders

[Fairly straightforward to see how an existing work recognizes additional elders]

Normally you would expect missionaries to be commissioned or sent out in some sense to perform their ministry; Importance of **plurality of church planters**

But remember the rift between Paul and Barnabas – two teams went out from Antioch instead of just one (**Acts 15:36-41**)

Also look at church history and see how new movements were started – you are not going to be supported by those with whom you disagree

Ultimate check and balance is still the Scriptures = which is the ultimate authority

- must not be laying hands on a novice

- must be men of proven character and ministry with a blameless reputation

When you are starting something new, only those who recognize and support your leadership come with you or subsequently join the assembly. It is not like you are usurping any authority or stepping into a position without the assent of a large body of people. Limited liability in that case – you can only hurt those who have willingly put themselves under your leadership.

7) Bottom Line Principle: **the Commendation of God is really what matters**

2 Cor. 10:7-18 key passage

Have some of us been ordained in other contexts? Not really the point ...

Are we God's men to accomplish what is before us here in this context at Solid Rock?

- spiritual leaders are men of the **Word of God** – driven by wanting to see lives conformed to God's truth; determines their methodology as well as their doctrine

- spiritual leaders are **gifted by the Holy Spirit** for effective ministry – they have something to contribute

- spiritual leaders are men with **discernment** – can see the difference between truth and error; between justice and injustice; between theory and practice

- spiritual leaders **take action** in spite of the consequences – willing to confront sin; quick to deal with issues

- spiritual leaders have mutual **love** and **respect** for one another – coupled with **humility** rather than pride

- spiritual leaders evidence a **servant-like, shepherding heart** in both the example of their personal lives and in their leadership approach

- spiritual leaders will have **spiritual followers**

We look forward to the Holy Spirit raising others up to minister in this same office of elder as we go forward and grow.

CONCLUSION:

Michael Peters: Ordination of Elders --

I am convinced that **relational loyalties guided by the Spirit** will direct the ordaining of elders by **those who are over the elders**, by **fellow elders who are work along side the new elders**, and by **the congregation** that is expected to receive the elders. This, I believe, is the pattern of the New Testament because the Body of Christ is organic.

Conclusion:

In the end, only the Holy Spirit makes an elder and only one that He has made should be ordained by men. When elders are made by the Spirit and ordained by men of repute with the consent of the church, both the right man and the right ordination work to the benefit of the church.

<http://www.ctkchurch.net/EldersOrdination.htm>

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PARKING LOT ISSUES FOR RECOGNITION OF ELDERS:

- Local Church Connectivity
- Missionaries / itinerant workers
- Ordination
- Seminary training / training programs
- Senior Pastor arguments
- Candidating Practice
- Deputation
- Laying on of hands
- Fasting
- Priesthood of all believers
- Call to full-time ministry
- Financial support for ministry
- Scriptural Qualifications
- Plurality of church planters

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Should Elders Be Ordained?

By *Benjamin Merkle*

In most denominations or churches, office-holders are publicly recognized when they are installed into office. The questions before us, then, are how we are to understand the significance of this act, and when should it be performed?

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ORDINATION

In order to discuss the significance of publicly recognizing an office-holder, we need to look at the different terms used in the New Testament to describe this process. We read in **Acts 14:23** that Paul and Barnabas "appointed elders" in every church in various cities in Asia Minor. The Greek term translated "appointed" is *cheirotônō*, which is a compound word taken from "hand" (*cheir*) and "to stretch" (*teinō*). In classical Greek the word meant "choose" or "elect," originally by raising the hand. In time, however, the "hand" element became a dead metaphor.[1] Thus, in biblical Greek, *cheirotônō* simply means to appoint someone to an office or designate someone for a specific task. The only other occurrence of the verb in the New Testament is found in **2 Corinthians 8:19**, where a well-noted brother was "appointed by the churches" to accompany Paul on his journey. It is clear in this instance that *cheirotônō* means to designate or appoint one to a position.[2] Nevertheless, in Patristic Greek it again came to mean "ordain with the laying on of hands." Because of this later usage, some interpreters read this meaning back into New Testament and maintain that Paul and Barnabas ordained men to the office of elder by the laying on of their hands, indicating some special conference of authority or ecclesiastical power. Although the laying on of hands is often associated with the appointing of elders, the author conveys such meaning by using a different term. For example, when Luke wants to speak of the laying on of hands, he uses the verb *epitithēmi* plus the noun "hand" (*cheir*) (Acts 6:6; 8:17, 19; 9:12, 17; 13:3; 19:6; 28:8; also see 1 Tim 5:22). Others claim that the word *cheirotônō* means to vote in the context of Acts 14:23. Although this is a possible meaning of the verb, it is

not likely based on the context. Paul and Barnabas appointed, not voted, for the elders of the church.

The other verb used to convey the idea of "appointing" is found in **Titus 1:5**, where Titus is exhorted by Paul to "appoint [*kathistēmi*] elders in every town." In both classical and biblical Greek *kathistēmi* is used with the meaning of appointing someone to office. For example, Jesus asks someone, "Who *appointed* me a judge or arbitrator over you?" (Luke 12:14, NASB, emphasis added). We also read about how Joseph was shown favor by Pharaoh, "who *appointed* him ruler over Egypt and over all his household" (Acts 7:10, NRSV, emphasis added).

The laying on of hands is often associated with the appointing or commissioning of someone for a specific office or task. The Seven who were chosen to serve the church in order to lighten the responsibilities of the apostles were "set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them" (**Acts 6:6**). At the church in Antioch, the Lord chose Barnabas and Paul to perform a special task: "Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off" (**Acts 13:3**). In another context, Timothy is exhorted by Paul not to neglect the gift that was given to him "by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands" on him (**1 Tim 4:14**).^[3] It should be noted that here the entire body of elders laid hands and appointed Timothy to service and not only one elder or bishop. Finally, Paul warns Timothy, "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands" (**1 Tim 5:22**). Although Paul does not specify the public installation of someone to the office of elder, the context deals exclusively with elders.^[4]

Prayer and fasting is also associated with the selection and appointing of leaders. The apostles followed the example of Jesus who prayed all night before choosing His twelve disciples, the apostles (Luke 6:12–13). After the church selected the Seven we read that the apostles "prayed and laid their hands on them" (Acts 6:6). Similarly, when Barnabas and Paul were appointed as missionaries, the church fasted and prayed and then sent them off (Acts 13:3).

The New Testament never uses the word "ordain" (in the modern, technical sense) in connection with a Christian leader who is installed to an office.^[5] Thus, it is often misleading to use the term "ordain" in our modern context if one has in mind the biblical concept of publicly appointing or installing someone to an office. Today, the word "ordain" carries with it the idea that special grace is transferred through the act of laying on of hands. Unlike the Episcopal tradition which claims that the authority of the office comes from the bishop passed to the appointee by the laying on of the hands, the authority of the office comes from God who calls and gifts men to lead his church (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11).

It is the church's duty to recognize those whom God has set apart for this important duty. Grudem comments, "If one is convinced that the local church should select elders, then it would seem appropriate that the church that elected that elder—not an external bishop—should be the group to confer the outward recognition at election by installing the person in office or ordaining the pastor."^[6] Strauch warns against understanding the appointment of elders in light of the Old Testament priesthood:

Elders and deacons are not appointed to a special priestly office or holy clerical order. Instead, they are assuming offices of leadership or service among God's people. *We should be careful not to sacralize these positions more than the writers of Scripture do.* The New Testament never shrouds the installation of elders in mystery or sacred ritual. There is no holy rite to perform or special ceremony to observe. Appointment to eldership is not a holy sacrament. Appointment

confers no special grace or empowerment, nor does one become a priest, cleric, or holy man at the moment of installation.[7]

THE TIME OF ORDINATION

It is common for people to be given the title "pastor" without having been ordained. But if the above analysis is correct, then to rightfully be a "pastor" (or deacon) is to be "ordained" in the sense of being publicly installed into that office. The idea of separating the title from the public act of commissioning is not found in the Bible. Elders are not appointed to an office after they become elders. But by becoming elders, they are appointed to office. Thus, to be appointed to the office of elder implies that a man has met the biblical qualifications, has been called by God, has been approved by the congregation, and consequently has been publicly recognized as one who holds that office. It does not necessarily imply that he works full-time for the church or has been to seminary. Rather, it means that God has called and gifted a person to humbly lead the church. It is also without biblical precedent to call some church leaders "pastors" before ordination and then "reverend" or "minister" after ordination.

SUMMARY

Elders should be "ordained" if by ordination we simply mean the public recognition of someone to a particular office and ministry. Perhaps a more appropriate, and biblical, term is "appointment" or "commission." The appointment to a ministry was often accompanied by prayer and fasting and the laying on of hands. These public acts draw attention to the seriousness and importance of the appointment. In addition, elders should be appointed as soon as they take their office.

1 It is therefore unlikely that the verb means "having appointed by popular vote." See J. M. Ross, "The Appointment of Presbyters in Acts xiv. 23," *Expository Times* 63 (1951): 288–89; Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 137–39.

2 For a similar use, see Philo, *De Specialibus Legibus* 1.14.78.

3 Later, Paul indicates that the gift was given to Timothy through the laying on of his hands which probably indicates that Paul was apart of the council of elders mentioned in 1 Tim 4:14.

4 The laying on of hands is also found in the connection of those receiving the Spirit (Acts 8:17, 19; 19:6) and those receiving healing (Acts 9:12, 17, 28:8).

5 Banks, for example, writes, "Ordination, as we know it, does not appear in the Pauline letters" (R. Banks, "Church Order and Government," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993], 135).

6 Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 925.

7 Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 285.

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Don Clements: PCA position paper on subject of Ordination, 7/23/1979

I. WORD STUDY ON "ORDAIN":

In the KJV, the English word "ordain" occurs fifteen times in the Old Testament, and twenty times in the New Testament. Five of the OT occurrences and eight of the NT involve the appointment of a man to some sort of ecclesiastical duty. However, in the OT there are four different Hebrew words involved and in the NT five different Greek words. A review of the NT usage will be helpful at this point:

A. "*Titheemi*", used in three different instances:

1) Paul's appointment by Jesus Christ as an apostle, as a preacher and teacher of the Gentiles (1 Tim. 1:12; 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11).

- 2) The appointment of the Ephesian elders by the Holy Spirit as bishops over the flock (Acts 20:28).
- 3) The appointment of believers to a variety of spiritual ministries (I Cor. 12:28).

None of the above sheds any direct light on the subject of ordination to office in the ecclesiastical sense.

B. "*Kathisteemi*", used twice to describe appointments within the Christian fellowship:

- 1) The appointment of the seven (Acts 6:3)
- 2) Titus being instructed to appoint elders in every Cretan town. (Titus 1:5).

In the Acts passage we see the direct connection of the laying on of hands, which will be discussed later in this paper. In the Titus passage, little is given to help understand the details of the situation, but there is a clear connection between one existing church officer, Titus, and the coming into office of others.

C. "*Cheirotoneoo*", used only twice in the New Testament:

- 1) Used to describe the choice of a representative to accompany Paul on his journey to receive the saint's offerings for the needy at Jerusalem (II Cor. 8:19).
- 2) Paul and Barnabas appointing elders during their first missionary journey (Acts 14:23). . . .

D. "*Eklegomai*", which has as its essential meaning "to choose" is used more frequently in the New Testament:

- 1) to describe the choosing of the twelve to be apostles (Luke 6:13, 2) John 6:70, Acts 1:2, 24; etc)
- 2) God's choice of Peter to bring the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 15:7)
- 3) Choosing of envoys to accompany Paul and Barnabas after the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:7)
- 4) Choosing of the seven by the congregation in Jerusalem (Acts 6:5). . .

Thus the most important ceremony to study is that of the **laying-on of hands**. It too clearly has a basis in the Old Testament. There are three different words used for a rite of blessing in the OT.

1. "*Nasa*" describes the priestly blessing with the hands lifted up, as in the Aaronic benediction.
2. "*Sim*" or "*shish*" describes the act of placing hands upon someone else for blessing, as in Jacob blessing Joseph's sons.
3. "*Samakh*" is the most important. It describes the laying on (literally leaning) as applied to sacrifices when sins were symbolically transferred to a victim, or the laying on of hands where the transference of guilt or responsibility was indicated.

The most important OT illustrations of the laying on of hands will teach us much about this ceremony.

1. In Numbers 8 we find the laying on of hands through which the Levites were ordained to their office. This was an act carried out by the people, presumably through their elders, and thus was a 'lay' oriented act in which the Levites were inducted into responsible representation of the people, appointed to stand for the first-born of the people in their ministry in the Tabernacle.
2. In Numbers 27 (cf. Deut. 34:9) we see the act of Moses ordaining Joshua as his successor in the leadership of the people. This was somewhat different. Joshua is chosen because he has already been endowed with the Spirit. Since God commands Moses to invest Joshua with some of his authority, it would appear that in some way Joshua will represent Moses while the latter is

still alive. To this degree the laying on of hands indicates to Israel that Joshua is Moses' rightful successor and therefore representative of him.

In summary, then, the Old Testament usage teaches us that the laying on of hands was:

1. a public rite
2. to designate a representative (or successor)

Turning next to the New Testament, the first case we encounter is in Acts 6. Here hands were laid on the seven by the congregation, not by the Apostles alone. There is no reason to infer from Acts 6 that the Apostles did *not* take part in this ceremony, but it is clear that they did not do it alone. This then becomes a very strong parallel to the lay-ordination act of the Old Testament ordination of the Levites. One other item we notice in the Acts 6 passage that is important is that it is accompanied by prayer.

The next case of this rite is found in Acts 13, with the laying on of hands on Paul and Barnabas prior to their missionary journey. This is a difficult passage in that, in all probability, Paul and Barnabas were already functioning in an official church office (Apostle, Elder, Prophet, etc.), and this laying on of hands is merely to a special embassy. History teaches us that this was common Rabbinic practice during this period, thus it is not surprising to find it in a still primarily Jewish church.

The most important example is the ordination of Timothy. It is described in two separate verses, and this presents to us a challenge to put them together and arrive at a proper interpretation. The verses are I Tim 4:14 and 2 Tim 1:6. Professor Torrance's remarks at this point are very helpful:

I make the meaning to be as follows. Timothy has been carefully instructed in the faith and trained in the *didaskalia* which he exercises; in that training it was clear that he was called to the ministry, that the Word had imparted to him a gift for its ministry; at the same time that gift was regarded as imparted formally through the act of laying on of hands, authorizing him as an accredited teacher and minister, but used by God as the means of imparting to him a spiritual gift from God, a *charisma* for the ministry; the act of laying on of hands was carried out by Timothy's teacher, Paul, and by the Presbytery acting together (TFT, p. 238).

Two important points to make on this example: First, that ordination was a corporate act. No matter where the Presbytery was located - locally, regionally, whatever - it was a corporate act. And second, it was more than mere symbolism. Not in some magical way, but rather in a truly spiritual sense there was an impartation of a gift - a 'charisma' as Professor Torrance refers to it. Thus we must note the great importance of accompanying prayer. . .

Hodge puts this so well: "Ordination is the public, solemn attestation of the judgment of the Church that the candidate is called of God to the ministry; which attestation authorizes his entrance on the public discharge of his duties." (CH, p. 144)

<http://www.pcahistory.org/pca/2-492.html>

Joe Fogle: **Appointment of Elders**

The New Testament gives very little information as to *how* the elders of each local assembly were chosen. Luke records that Paul and Barnabas appointed elders but gives

no details as to *how* this was accomplished. Titus was left in Crete to appoint elders. Paul lists specific qualifications for an overseer but gives him no explicit instructions as to *how* this was to be done.

First Timothy 3:1 teaches that one important aspect of the appointment of an elder is that it is a position that he must *desire*. This does not mean that all men who *desire* the position will be appointed. There are many other issues and qualifications that must be considered. But if a man does not desire to be an elder he should not be appointed as one. God may call a man to be an overseer but it is up to God to move a man and change his heart. Many times the best elders are those men who already spend time and energy shepherding the sheep. This is because they already have a desire to shepherd the flock even though they no have official recognition or a title. . .

Some believe that elders should be appointed by a popular or majority vote of all members of the congregation. They attempt to buttress this view by claiming that the word "appoint" (*xeirotoneo*) means to vote by stretching out the hand. This is reading something into the word that is not necessarily implied by context. Although the word in classical Greek can mean "chose or elect by the raising of hands", most Greek lexicons claim that the term in Acts 14:23 "does not involve a choice by a group; here the word means appoint, install, with the apostles as the subject."[46](#) There is actually no place in the New Testament where the word (*xeirotoneo*) means to vote by the raising of the congregation's hands.

Kelley writes regarding Acts 14:23:

If any voted by the stretching out of their hands, it was apostles only...The true meaning is that the apostles chose elders for the disciples in each assembly (not the disciples themselves).[47](#)

Proof that elders were not elected by popular vote comes from Titus 1:5. In this passage the word "appoint" is the entirely different and unrelated word (*katisthemi*), which means to "make, order, or appoint." It is unlikely that this verb indicates that Titus ordered elections and then tabulated the votes. The congregation did not have exclusive authority to appoint elders.

Since apostles are no longer present to appoint elders or delegate their appointment for us, it seems ideal that both the current leadership and the congregation agree on those individuals whom the Holy Spirit has raised up to be shepherds. The congregation should not have ultimate voting authority but neither should the elders "lord it over" the congregation (1 Peter 5:3). If elections are held too much emphasis is placed upon the congregation. Especially since there is no biblical basis for congregations voting on leadership for the local assembly. Likewise, the current elders should be careful not to appoint men whom godly members have valid biblical reservations. There is a danger of self-perpetuation of elders which can degenerate into political favoritism. In light of the lack of clear teaching on the method of appointing elders, it appears that the selection of new elders should be made by the current elders with approval of the congregation. All this must take into consideration the

qualifications listed in 1 Timothy and Titus and the leading of the Holy Spirit for each congregation.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Alexander Strauch. *Biblical Eldership*, p. 79.

⁴⁶ Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 889.

⁴⁷ William Kelley, *Lectures on the Church of God* (London: W. H. Broom, 1873) p. 217.

⁴⁸ Kenneth Daughters, *New Testament Church Government*, p. 49.

<http://theoslog.com/appointmentofelders.html>

William Loyd Allen -- The meaning of ordination

One in a series of articles contributed by the Baptist History Heritage Society

The New Testament gives no comprehensive instructions for ordination. The doctrine and practice of ordination has continued to evolve over the centuries, resulting in a variety of forms with a multiplicity of meanings.

From the New Testament to the end of the Middle Ages, the meaning of ordination moved toward an ever more exclusive and hierarchical rite designed to establish the primacy of the clergy over the laity. By the 16th Century, the Roman Catholic tradition viewed ordination as an indelible mark granted by God and conferred by ordained clergy upon those whom the clergy approved for entry into elite ministerial society.

In this system, ordination served as certification for the clergy, the sole representatives of the body of Christ able to mediate divine grace to the laity. The belief that ordination bestows some special and sacred status beyond that of the ordinary Christian still has currency among many Christians today.

Divine authority in Baptist beginnings did not trickle down from ordained clergy to the common Christian, but flowed upward through the members of the congregation to its chosen leaders. The very term ordination was avoided for several decades in the two original Baptist groups, Generals and Particulars, in favor of terms such as "set apart," "called," and "appointed." . .

Ordination for Baptists is a service of thanksgiving for God's love revealed in the minister's calling, a service of petition for God's continued blessing upon the one called, and a service of submission to God's authority revealed in the gifted one set aside for ministry.

http://www.biblicalrecorder.org/content/opinion/2006/07_14_2006/gc140706the.shtml

Darryl Erkel: Problems with Traditional Ordination

1. Traditional and modern "ordination" concepts are unscriptural. The New Testament knows nothing of "ordaining" one man to an exalted, sacred, and priestly "office" within a church. Neither does it teach that only "ordained" clergymen possess the right to baptize, preach, conduct the Lord's Supper, lead in congregational worship, and pronounce the blessing as if the rest of the believing community is unfit to carry out these functions. And, yet, The American College Dictionary [ed. C.L. Barnhart] (New York: Random House, 1967) reflects the thinking of most Christians when it defines "ordination" as: "to invest with ministerial or sacerdotal functions; confer holy orders upon."

2. The traditional Protestant idea of "ordination" comes dangerously close to a sacerdotal and sacramental view of ordination, which dominates the Roman Catholic Church and other highly liturgical churches. "The insistence among some that only the ordained may administer baptism and conduct the Lord's Supper demonstrates the persistence of the sacramental view of ordination" (Marjorie Warkentin, *Ordination: A Biblical-Historical View*[Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans, 1982] p.100).

3. Traditional "ordination" concepts contradict the New Testament teaching on the priesthood of all believers (Ephesians 4:11-12; 1 Peter 2:5,9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10). It confers upon one person special and priestly rights which is denied to the rest of the congregational members. Yet, according to the New Testament, the entire Christian church is a ministerial body – and in this sense "ordained" – with full authority to minister and actively participate during the church meeting (Romans 12:4-6; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11,14; 14:26; 1 Peter 4:10-11).

4. The various words translated as "ordain" in some of our English translations carry no special ecclesiastical meaning, but simply means to "appoint." Thus, the New Testament speaks of appointing or laying hands on people for a special task or function, such as serving tables (Acts 6:1-6), evangelism and missionary work (Acts 13:2-5), or eldership (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).

Leon Morris, one of the most respected Bible commentators of the twentieth century, writes: Considering the role played by the ministry throughout the history of the church, references to ordination are surprisingly few in the New Testament. Indeed, the word "ordination" does not occur, and the verb "to ordain" in the technical sense does not occur either. A number of verbs are translated "ordain" in [the] Authorized Version, but these all have the meanings like "appoint" (New Bible Dictionary, 2nd ed., s.v. "Ordination," p.861).

Alfred Plummer, an Anglican clergyman and Bible commentator, similarly writes: In these passages [Titus 1:5; Mark 3:14; John 15:16; 1 Timothy 2:7; Hebrews 5:1; 8:3] three different Greek words (poieo, tithemi, kathistemi) are used in the original; but not one of them has the special ecclesiastical meaning which we so frequently associate with the word "ordain"; not one of them implies, as "ordain" in such context almost of necessity implies, a rite of ordination, a special ceremonial, such as the laying on of hands. When in English we say, "He ordained twelve," . . . the mind almost inevitably thinks of ordination in the common sense of the word; and this is foisting upon the language of the New Testament a meaning which the words there used do not rightly bear . . . The Greek words used in the passages quoted might equally well be used of the appointment of a magistrate or a steward. And as we should avoid speaking of ordaining a magistrate or a steward, we ought to avoid using "ordain" to translate words which would be thoroughly in place in such a connection. The Greek words for "ordain" and "ordination," in the sense of imposition of hands in order to admit to an ecclesiastical office (cheipotheti, cheipothesia), do not occur in the New Testament at all ("The Pastoral Epistles," in *The Expositor's Bible*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll [New York: Armstrong, 1903], Vol.23, pp.219-221).

5. Traditional "ordination" notions help to perpetuate the "clergy-laity" division. It helps to reinforce the idea that some Christians are called to ministry while others are not. Although adhering to traditional clericalism, John Stott sees its inherent dangers:

It is only against the background of the equality and unity of the people of God that the real scandal of clericalism may be seen. What clericalism always does, by concentrating power and privilege in the hands of the clergy, is at least to obscure and at worst to annul the essential

oneness of the people of God . . . I do not hesitate to say that to interpret the Church in terms of a privileged clerical caste or hierarchical structure is to destroy the New Testament doctrine of the Church . . . In other words, in revealing the nature and work of the Church, the overwhelming preoccupation of the New Testament is not with the status of the clergy, nor with clergy-laity relations, but with the whole people of God in their relations to Him and to each other, the unique people who have been called by His grace to be His inheritance and His ambassador in the world (One People [New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell, Co., 1973] pp.25-26).

Concerning our traditional "clergy-laity" conceptions, Howard Snyder has insightfully noted: The New Testament simply does not speak in terms of two classes of Christians – "minister" and "laymen" – as we do today. According to the Bible, the people (laos, "laity") of God comprise all Christians, and all Christians through the exercise of spiritual gifts have some "work of ministry" [Ephesians 4:12]. So if we wish to be biblical, we will have to say that all Christians are laymen (God's people) and all are ministers. The clergy-laity dichotomy is unbiblical and therefore invalid. It grew up as an accident of church history and actually marked a drift away from biblical faithfulness. A professional, distinct priesthood did exist in Old Testament days. But in the New Testament this priesthood is replaced by two truths: Jesus Christ is our great high priest, and the Church is a kingdom of priests (Hebrews 4:14; 8:1; 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6). The New Testament doctrine of ministry rests therefore not on the clergy-laity distinction but on the twin and complementary pillars of the priesthood of all believers and the gifts of the Spirit. Today, four centuries after the Reformation, the full implications of this Protestant affirmation have yet to be worked out. The clergy-laity dichotomy is a direct carry-over from pre-Reformation Roman Catholicism and a throwback to the Old Testament priesthood. It is one of the principle obstacles to the Church effectively being God's agent of the Kingdom today because it creates the false idea that only "holy men," namely, ordained ministers, are really qualified and responsible for leadership and significant ministry. In the New Testament there are functional distinctions between various kinds of ministries but no hierarchical division between clergy and laity (The Community of the King [Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977] pp.94-95).

6. Traditional "ordination," as commonly understood and practiced, attaches an undue emphasis to one man (i.e., "the pastor") at the exclusion of the rest of the believing community. The New Testament not only teaches that the local church is to be pastored by a plurality of godly men (Acts 14:23; 20:17,28; Philippians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:5; Hebrews 13:17; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1-4), but we ought never to make one man alone the focal-point of our church gatherings (as commonly practiced in most "evangelical" churches) – "For the body is not one member, but many" (1 Corinthians 12:14).

7. Congregational elders are not appointed to a hierarchical and clerical office (which is modeled after the power-structures of this world), but to a pastoral function. Their primary task is to humbly and sacrificially serve the saints so that they might reach maturity and effectively fulfill God's purpose for their lives (Ephesians 4:11-16; Colossians 1:28; Hebrews 6:1).

Alexander Strauch, author of the outstanding work on church leadership, *Biblical Eldership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth Publishers/Revised, 1995), writes:

Elders and deacons are not appointed to a special priestly office or holy clerical order. Instead, they are assuming offices of leadership or service among God's people. We should be careful not to sacralize these positions more than the writers of Scripture do. The New Testament never shrouds the installation of elders in mystery or sacral ritual. There is no holy rite to perform or

special ceremony to observe. Appointment to eldership is not a holy sacrament. Appointment confers no special grace or empowerment, nor does one become a priest, cleric, or holy man at the moment of installation. The vocabulary of the New Testament is carefully chosen to communicate certain concepts and beliefs, and its writers chose to express simply appointment to office. Therefore, to speak of ordaining elders or deacons is as confusing as speaking of ordaining judges or politicians (p.285).

8. To assert that every Christian is "ordained" to ministry should not be confused with the mistaken notion that everyone is called to serve as a pastor within a local body of believers. While some Christians are indeed ordained/appointed to church leadership, others are ordained/appointed to different ministries and functions. But, either way, the point remains: Each and every believer has gifts for ministry and, thus, called to serve others for God's glory and the church's edification (1 Corinthians 12:4-11; 14:12,26; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 10:24-25; 1 Peter 4:10-11). According to Hans Kung:

This priesthood of all believers by no means excludes a particular pastoral ministry . . . Those who are empowered to exercise a particular pastoral ministry in the church are not, at least as far as the New Testament tells us, a separate caste of consecrated priests, as they often are in primitive religions. They do not act as mediators between God and the people by means of ritual actions which they alone can perform, representing the people before God in sacrifice, and representing God to the people through oracular statements and law-giving. In the Church of Jesus Christ, who is the only high priest and mediator, all the faithful are priests and clergy (The Church [New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967] p.438).

<http://www.5solas.org/media.php?id=85>