

ORDINATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

EKKEHARDT MUELLER, TH.D.

Biblical Research Institute, Silver Spring, Maryland

1. Introduction

To discuss the topic ordination in the New Testament (NT) is an interesting and yet somewhat tricky task. This is so for various reasons that will be discussed in a moment. "Ordination" is derived from the Latin *ordinatio* which points to an arrangement, order or the appointment to a function.¹ But how this term is filled with meaning differs from one denomination to another. Adventist church members have also certain concepts in mind when they talk about ordination. Typically, they think about a worship service in which hands are being laid on deacons, elders or pastors in connection with prayer for them. If something else happens and what happens in conjunction with this rite, may be debated. So why is the topic tricky?

2. Ordination in English Bible Translations

The term "ordination" is not used at all in the New Testament (NT).² The verb "to ordain" occurs here and there in some English translations³ but

¹ See R. P. Lightner, "Ordain, Ordination," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (ed. Walter A. Elwell; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 801. If the term "office" is used it is to be understood as a role and function and not in an ontological sense as taken, e.g., by the Catholic Church.

² Therefore some Bible dictionaries do not contain it, e.g., Siegfried H. Horn, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 1979).

³ King James Version (KJV) twenty-three times, New American Standard Bible (NASB) twice, New English Translation (NET) once, New International Version (NIV) once, The New Jerusalem Bible (NJB) once, New King James Version (NKJV) four times, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) five times, Revised Standard Versions (RSV) three times, Young's Literal Translation (YLT) three times.

not at all in others.⁴ In many cases, the translation “to ordain” does not refer to what we today consider to be the ordination of church leaders, for example, “So God again ordains a certain day” (Heb 4:7, NET), “from the lips of . . . infants you have ordained praise” (Matt 21:16, NIV), the law “was ordained through angels,” (Gal 3:19, NRSV), and the Gentiles “as many as were ordained to eternal life” (Acts 13:48, KJV). Various Greek words were translated with the same English term “ordained,” for instance, the Greek equivalents of “to do,” “to direct,” “to decide,” “to determine,” “to prepare,” “one must,” etc. Translations do not agree with each other in rendering Greek terms with the English word “to ordain.”

The more frequent use of “to ordain” in the King James Version (KJV)—twenty-three times in the NT—is not followed by other translations, not even the New King James Version (NKJV). The KJV seems to use “to ordain” in the wider sense of “ordering” and “determining” and in the narrower sense of “appointing” to a function or task. It translates thirteen different Greek words in certain contexts with “to ordain,”⁵ even words such as “to be”/“to become” and “to do.” Obviously, with changes in the English language translators do no longer feel at ease with such rendering of Greek words and therefore do not follow the KJV.⁶ According to the KJV the Twelve (Mark 3:14), the disciples (John 15:16), Jesus (Acts 10:42; 17:31), Paul (1Tim 2:7), Timothy (2Tim 4:22, editorial addition), Titus (Tit 3:15, editorial addition), elders (Acts 14:23; Tit 1:5), and every high priest (Heb 5:1; 8:3) were ordained. After Judas’ death a replacement for him had to be found, and the person had to be ordained (Acts 1:22, KJV). Some Gentiles are ordained to eternal life (Acts 13:48), while certain evil men are ordained to condemnation (Jude 1:4). However, ordained are also decrees of the apostles (Acts 16:4), commandments (Rom 7:10), governments (Rom 13:1), wisdom (1Cor 2:7), the law (Gal 3:19), good works (Eph 2:10), and the earthly sanctuary (Heb 9:6). The KJV also uses “to ordain” for “to direct” or “to order.” Paul “ordains in all churches” (1Cor 7:17), and “the Lord ordained that they who preach the gospel should live of the gospel” (1Cor 9:14). So what does it mean to be ordained?

⁴ They are the English Standard Version (ESV), the Holman Christian Standard Bible (CSB), and the New Living Translation (NLT) of twelve English Bibles that were studied.

⁵ These are the verbs: *cheirotoneō*, *diatassō*, *ginomai*, *heuriskō*, *horizō*, *kataskeuwō*, *kathistēmi*, *krinō*, *poieō*, *proetoimazō*, *prographō*, *tassō*, and *tithēmi*.

⁶ Even the NKJV uses “to ordain” just five times, in one case the Greek phrase is “laying on of hands.”

3. Ordination in Various Churches

Typically Christian churches have a theology of ordination. The Catholic Church holds to a sacramental view. Ordained are deacons (different from Adventist deacons), priests, and bishops. The rite of ordination does not only bring about an ontological change in the person ordained, it is also a matter of succession. The pope stands in the apostolic succession and shares it with the bishops.

Protestants have a more functional understanding of ordination and do not consider it a sacrament. Yet for some of them ordination keeps a somewhat semi-sacramental character. Ordination is understood in a representative way. Ordained persons represent the body of believers.

Adventists have to ask themselves where they find themselves. They have to ask what ordination is, if it occurs in Scripture and/or if they follow a certain tradition not necessarily established in the Bible, if it is sacramental and moves persons into a specific sphere which makes them different from the rest of the people and allows them to function in a way the rest of the church members cannot function (preaching and administering baptism, Lord's Supper, and marriage), or if it is simply an appointment to a function or specific task, how it relates to the priesthood of all believers, why they ordain deacons, church elders, and pastors and no other persons, why they use laying on of hands, if this is a biblical command or a decision of the Church that the Church may have the authority to make, if there are different kinds of ordination, where pastors appear in Scripture, etc.

So the question is: Where do we go from here? The majority of the questions just mentioned cannot be dealt with in this paper. We will focus on vocabulary only that in the NT may be understood as pointing to ordination and evaluate it. From there we will move to some theological questions.

4. New Testament Vocabulary and the Ordination Issue

4.1. The Laying on of Hands

The first expression to be investigated is "laying on of hands." Typically it is assumed that ordination is laying on of hands on someone.

Hands can be powerful, especially God's hands. Peter speaks about "the mighty hand of God" (1Pet 5:6, cf. Heb 10:31). Nobody can snatch believers out of Christ's or the Father's hand (John 10:28-29). Jesus has the angels of the seven churches of Revelation in His hand (Rev 1:16). Indeed,

all things are in His hand (John 13:3). The hand of God was with John the Baptist (Luke 1:66), Paul, and other missionaries (Acts 13:11; 11:21). When Jesus laid hands on people they were blessed and/or healed.

However, the laying on of hands when persons are appointed to a specific ministry happens through humans, not directly through God. Yet the laying on of hands by the apostles led also to healings or the reception of the Holy Spirit. So is the human laying on of hands a representative action through which God works? What happens when hands are being laid on individuals?

4.1.1. Direct Use of the Phrase

The English phrase “laying on of hands/the hand” occurs repeatedly in the NT.

Epitithēmi tas cheiras/tēn cheira (laying on of hands/the hand). This phrase is used twenty times.⁷ However, laying on of hands was used in different contexts and therefore does only rarely refer to the installment to a function or the setting apart for a specific ministry.

- (1) Most frequently it appears in the *context of healing* (Matt 9:18; Mark 5:23; 6:5; 7:32; 8:23, 25; 16:18; Luke 4:40; 13:13; Acts 9:12, 17; 28:8). Hands are being laid on sick people, and their health is being restored. Twelve of the twenty references are connected to health and healing.
- (2) Laying on of hands occurs twice in the *context of blessing* (Matt 19:13, 15). Jesus lays His hands on the children and blesses them.
- (3) Laying on of hands is *connected to baptism* three times (Acts 8:17, 19; 19:16). Acts reports two exceptional cases in which the Holy Spirit was not received with baptism as is common (Acts 2:38). In these exceptional cases the apostles laid hands on the believers, and they received the Holy Spirit. Simon wanted to buy this ability to bestow the Holy Spirit on people by laying his hands on them. However, laying on of hands is not regularly associated with baptism.⁸
- (4) Laying on of hands is found in the *context of appointing or commissioning* persons to a specific ministry and task. The NT reports that the Seven were appointed to their ministry by prayer and laying on of hands (Acts 6:6). Paul and Barnabas were set apart for their missionary ministry, and hands were laid on them in conjunction with fasting and praying (Acts 13:3). Apart from these two references to laying on of hands as appointment to ministry there is a third

⁷ Twice the singular is used and eighteen times the plural.

⁸ Therefore, to claim that baptism must in any case accompanied by an additional laying on of hands goes beyond NT evidence.

reference found in 1Tim 5:22. Timothy is charged by Paul “not [to] lay hands upon anyone/anything hastily” and not to share in the sins of others.” Elders are not mentioned in this verse. The context is somewhat ambiguous.⁹ Therefore, the text has been understood differently. (1) While the majority of commentators seems to favor the “ordination” of elders,¹⁰ others suggest that the issue is (2) “reinstatement of an elder after he has been under discipline,”¹¹ (3) restoration of older men¹² or church members in general after grievous sin, (4) baptism of people, or (5)—if *mēdeni* is understood as a neuter term (“nothing”) instead of a masculine term (“nobody”)—a temple sacrifice in connection with a vow.¹³ In any case, one cannot postulate a priori that this verse has to do with the ordination of elders.

⁹ It could refer to (1) the immediate context or (2) the wider context. (3) It also could consist of a number of exhortations not directly related (e.g., the issue of drinking some wine in v. 23). In such a case verse 22 would not necessarily deal with the elder. One notices also a change from singular (elder in 5:19) to plural (sinners in 5:20) which makes one wonder, if in verse 20 Paul really continues with the elder. If he would, it can be assumed that the elder has indeed sinned and that the accusation is true in any case. However, Timothy would not be able to intervene, if there were not enough witnesses. As mentioned, Paul could have in mind the larger context of chapter 5-6. The context is discussing older men, women, etc. (5:1), widows (5:3), elders (5:17), and in chapter 6 slaves. Verses 24-25 seem to be general in nature and refer to the sins of all humans. It would be strange, if the elders were suddenly addressed as *anthropoi* (5:24; “some men” according to the NASB). If the issue is a financial issue, e.g., misuse of finances by elders (5:17-20) which would be carried on through the entire passage, the text would point to their reinstatement more than to their original ordination. Yet it would be the only text mentioning laying on of hands for the purpose of reinstating someone to the function of an elder. In addition, the question could be raised how someone can be made responsible of someone else’s sin, if at the time of ordination no indication of a present or future grievous sin is visible?

¹⁰ E.g., George W. III. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (The New International Greek Testament Commentary (NIGTC); Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 239; William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (Word Biblical Commentary 46; Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2000), 316.

¹¹ Francis D. Nichol, (ed.), *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (SDABC)* (7 Vols.; Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1980), 7:314; S. Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), on 1Tim 5:22.

¹² Older men are mentioned in the context (1Tim 5:1).

¹³ For a detailed discussion see Marjorie Warkentin, *Ordination: A Biblical-Historical View* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 143-152.

Tithēmi tas cheira (laying on of hands). This related phrase in which the verb occurs without prefix is found once in the NT. It describes the blessing of children in Mark 10:16.

Epithēsis tōn cheirōn (laying on of hands). In this case laying on of hands is not a verb followed by an accusative but a noun followed by a genitive.¹⁴ The phrase occurs four times. In Acts 8:18 it is found in the context of baptism in which the Holy Spirit is received after the laying on of hands.¹⁵ Hebrews 6:2 mentions among basic teachings the laying on of hands. Quite likely the phrase does not refer to appointment to a function but either to baptism, as suggested by some expositors,¹⁶ or the Levitical system of sacrifices with laying on of hands on animals that has become obsolete.¹⁷ 1Tim 4:14 and 2Tim 1:6, however, mention (1) the laying on of hands on Timothy by the *presbyterion*, the group of the elders, and a gift given to him in this context by prophecy and (2) the laying on of hands on Timothy by Paul and the gift of God within him. Whether or not this was the same instance cannot be shown on exegetical grounds but may be likely.¹⁸

Epiballō tas cheiras/tēn cheira (laying on of hands/the hand). Here a different verb is used, while the English translation employs the same phrase as above. Of the eleven occurrences of this phrase ten refer to arrest and persecution, either of Jesus (Matt 26:50; Mark 14:46; Luke 20:19; John 7:30, 44) or his disciples (Luke 21:12; Acts 4:3; 5:18; 12:1; 21:27). Once it occurs in an agricultural context as laying on of hands on the plow (Luke 9:62). The phrase is not used in connection with appointment to a ministry.

4.1.2. Related Terms

While the previous terms are translated with "laying on of hands," typically the following ones are rendered differently. However, all of them refer to "hand"/"hands" and some share part of their meaning with those above.

Ekteinō tēn cheira/tas cheiras (extending/stretching out the hands/the hand). The phrase is found in thirteen verses and— with the exception of the plural in John 21:18— always in the singular.

¹⁴ Noun and verb come from the same word family.

¹⁵ See the first exceptional case above.

¹⁶ Nichol, *SDABC*, 7:433; Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistles to the Hebrews* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 316.

¹⁷ See Warkentin, *Ordination*, 115-119.

¹⁸ Cf. Warkentin, 136.

- (1) It appears in the context of healing and saving (eight times). Oftentimes the stretching out of the hand is accompanied by a touch. So Jesus stretched out his hand, touched the leper, and thereby healed him (Matt 8:3; Mark 1:41; Luke 5:13). He healed the man with the withered hand by ordering him to stretch it out (Matt 12:13; Mark 3:5; Luke 6:6). In Acts 4:30 the church prayed that the Lord may stretch out His hand in healings and that signs and wonders be performed. Jesus also stretched out his hand to rescue the sinking Peter (Matt 14:31). This usage is parallel to *epitithēmi tas cheiras/tēn cheira* (laying on of hands/the hand) when used in a healing situation.
- (2) According to Matt 12:49 Jesus stretched out his hands towards his disciples and called them his mother and brothers. This phrase may here appear in the context of an oath, promise, and possibly a blessing. Stretching out His hand toward the disciples Jesus called them His mothers and brothers. In Exod 6:8 and Num 14:30 "to stretch out one's hands" means to swear an oath with regard to the possession of the land,¹⁹ and in Gen 48:14 the stretching out of the right hand is associated with a blessing.
- (3) The phrase occurs four times in the context of persecution. The Jewish leadership attempted to arrest Jesus (described in Luke 20:19 with the phrase *epiballō . . . tas cheiras*, i.e., to lay on of hands) but did not do it when Jesus openly spoke in the temple but only in the darkness of the night (described in Luke 22:53 with the phrase *ekteinō tas cheiras*, i.e., to stretch out the hands). In this case *ekteinō tas cheiras* and *epiballō . . . tas cheiras* are used in a parallel way. The phrase is also found in Peter's use of the sword to defend Jesus (Matt 26:51). In addition it refers to Peter's death (John 21:18), and Paul's defense at his trial before Agrippa (Acts 26:1).

It is not used in connection with an appointment to a function.

Cheirotoneō (to appoint). This term appears two times in the present Greek New Testaments,²⁰ but another two times in the KJV. The KJV adds to 2Tim 4:22 one of the subscriptions which are found in some manuscripts but is not even followed by the NKJV: "The second epistle unto Timotheus, ordained the first bishop of the church of the Ephesians, was written from Rome, when Paul was brought before Nero the second time." The same is true for Tit 3:15: "It was written to Titus, ordained the first bishop of the church of the Cretians, from Nicopolis of Macedonia." The Adventist Bible Commentary notes with regard to 2Tim 4:22: "The postscript following v. 22 does not appear in any ancient manuscript and was evidently not appended to the original document. A few of the older

¹⁹ See also Deut 32:40 and Dan 12:7 where similar vocabulary is used.

²⁰ Nestle/Aland 28 and United Bible Societies 4.

manuscripts, however, do have the words 'written from Laodicea' or 'written from Rome.'²¹ The Bible Commentary states regarding Tit 3:15: "The postscript following v. 15 appears in no early manuscript. It was evidently not part of the original inspired record."²²

So we will turn to the other two references. *Cheirotoneō* does not refer to the laying on of hands. It is a compound of *cheir* (hand) and *teineō* (to stretch, extend) and is similar to *ekteinō tēn cheira* (to stretch out one's hand). *Cheirotoneō* describes the stretching out or raising of the hand for the purpose of voting and therefore means "to elect" or "to appoint."²³ 2Cor 8:19 mentions an unnamed Christian brother who has been elected by the churches to travel with Paul and be involved in the collection for the church in Jerusalem. According to Acts 14:23 elders were elected/appointed in every church. These texts are important to our discussion, although laying on of hands is not mentioned.

Epairō tas cheiras (to lift up hands). This phrase is found twice in the NT. Ascending to heaven, Jesus lifted up his hands and blessed the disciples (Luke 24:50) as in Matthew and Mark he had blessed the children (*epitithēmi tas cheiras/ tithēmi tas cheira*, laying on of hands). According to 1Tim 2:8 men are to lift up holy hands in prayer without anger and arguing. The phrase does not relate to an appointment to a function or task.

4.1.3. Evaluation and Summary

In the vast majority of cases the phrases relating to laying on of hands describe other purposes than appointment to a function. However, there are a few instances that have to do with such an activity. Only the Seven, Barnabas, Paul, and Timothy are mentioned in the NT that have definitely received laying on of hands in connection with their ministry. Interestingly enough not even the ministry of the apostles is explicitly associated with laying on of hands. In the case of the elders the text may

²¹ Nichol, *SDABC*, 7:352.

²² *Ibid.*, 7:372.

²³ This is affirmed by current and older Greek lexicons and dictionaries such as Friberg Greek Lexicon, UBS Greek Dictionary, Louw-Nida Lexicon, LSJ Lexicon, Thayer Greek Lexicon, and Gingrich Greek Lexicon. See also Everett Ferguson, "Ordain, Ordination," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ed. David Noel Freedman; NY: Doubleday, 1992), V:37-39. The related term *procheirotoneō* (to choose or appoint beforehand; *cheirotoneō* plus prefix *pro*) cannot be understood as laying on of hands. See also Daniel Berchie, "The Concept of Ordination in the New Testament," unpublished manuscript, BRC of WAD, 2012, p. 9, and Eike Mueller, "Leadership, Spiritual Gifts, and Offices in The New Testament," unpublished manuscript, BRC of EUD, 2012, p. 17-18.

or may not point to it; 1Tim 5:22 is a disputed text. Laying on of hands recognized that God had called the Seven, Barnabas, Paul, and Timothy to a special ministry. It set them apart and requested God's blessing upon them. Timothy received a specific gift.

None of these persons was a local elder. Although Paul (2Tim 1:6) and the body of elders (1Tim 4:14) were involved in laying the hands on Timothy, the term elder is not directly associated with receiving this type of "ordination" unless 1Tim 5:22 is understood in such a way. The NT may not directly connect laying on of hands with the function of the elder nor does it teach that laying on of hands is a prerequisite for the function of elder or any other function. According to Acts elders are appointed, and prayer and fasting are mentioned, yet not laying on of hands (Acts 14:23).

However, this does not mean that laying on of hands is an unimportant and merely symbolic ceremony in the NT. It does not even mean that apostles and elders were not ordained by laying on of hands. It only means that the NT does not record it. Somehow laying on of hands contributed to the healing of sick persons, obtaining a blessing, and receiving the Holy Spirit as well as spiritual gifts and may therefore also be important when persons are appointed to a ministry. The problem is that the NT does not describe a consistent practice in the first century and does not seem to demand explicitly ordination by laying on of hands.

4.2. Other New Testament Vocabulary

4.2.1. *The Vocabulary Itself*

The NT employs other vocabulary that describes appointment to a function. Sometimes these words can be understood as either appointment or election. In their context ritual may also occur. In some cases these terms may be used exclusively or almost exclusively for appointment to a task or ministry, but in the majority of the cases the terms are much broader and only a smaller percentage of their range of meaning refers to appointment of a person to a function or task.

The following list is not exhaustive but provides an illustration of what is going on in the NT with regard to appointment. We have also included references to Jesus but no references to Old Testament (OT) appointments (e.g., high priests in Heb 8:3) and no references to all believers when the same vocabulary is used for them in addition to individuals or function holders (e.g., John 15:16: all believers are called and appointed to bear fruit; Eph 1:4: they are called to holiness and to the adoption as children of

Greek Term	Translation	Occurrence in NT	Reference to Appointment	Appointed Persons	Function or Task	Accompanying Ritual (as found in text or context)
<i>anadeiknymi</i>	to show clearly, appoint, choose	2 times	Luke 10:1 Acts 1:24	The Seventy Matthias	Missionary Apostle	Pre-selection by church, prayer, casting the lot Fasting, prayer, laying on of hands
<i>aphorizō</i>	To set apart, exclude	10 times	Acts 13:2 Rom 1:1 Gal 1:15	Paul, Barnabas Paul Paul	Missionary Apostle Apostle	
<i>eklegomai</i>	To choose, select	22 times	Luke 6:13 Luke 9:35 John 6:70; 13:18 Acts 1:2 Acts 1:24 Acts 6:5	The Twelve Jesus The Twelve The Twelve Matthias The Seven	Apostle Messiah Apostle Apostle Apostle Organization of welfare, evangelist Missionary	Prayer Pre-selection by church, prayer, casting the lot election by church, prayer, laying on of hands
<i>kathistēmi</i>	To bring, conduct, take, appoint	21 times	Acts 15:7 Acts 6:3 Tit 1:5 Heb 7:28	Peter The Seven Elders Jesus	Organization of welfare, evangelist Elder Elder, High Priest	election by church, prayer, laying on of hands
<i>keimai</i>	To lie, stand, be laid, be appointed	24 times	Luke 2:34 Phil 1:16	Jesus Paul	Savior Apologist	
<i>horizō</i>	To determine, appoint, declare	8 times	Acts 10:42 Acts 17:31 Rom 1:14	Jesus Jesus Jesus	Judge Judge Son of God	

Greek Term	Translation	Occurrence in NT	Reference to Appointment	Appointed Persons	Function or Task	Accompanying Ritual (as found in text or context)
<i>procheirizō</i>	to choose for oneself, appoint	3 times	Acts 3:20 Acts 22:14 Acts 26:16	Jesus Paul Paul	Messiah Witness Servant, witness	
<i>tassō</i>	To order, appoint	8 times	Acts 15:2	Paul, Barnabas, and others	Delegates to council In Jerusalem	Sent by church
<i>tithēmi</i>	To put, place, lay, make, appoint	100 times	Matt 12:18 Acts 13:47 1Cor 12:28 1Tim 1:12 1Tim 2:7 2Tim 1:11 Heb 1:2	Jesus Paul, Barnabas Apostles, prophets, teachers, etc. Paul Paul Paul Jesus	Messiah Missionary Apostle prophet teacher etc. Ministry Preacher, apostle, teacher Preacher, apostle, teacher Heir, Creator, Sustainer, King	
<i>chrīo</i>	To anoint	5 times	Luke 4:18 Acts 4:27; 10:38 Heb 1:9	Jesus Jesus Jesus	Proclaimer of gospel Proclaimer, Healer Creator, King	Enthronement, being worshipped

God; 2 Cor 1:21: they are anointed with the Holy Spirit). While the Holy Spirit is given to all believers and while they have received spiritual gifts and various tasks, this is not the focus of this study. In other words, appointment vocabulary in the NT is applied to Jesus, all believers in a general sense, and specific groups and individuals with a specific divine assignment.

4.2.2. Evaluation of the Data

Those appointed according to this list were the Twelve, the Seventy, the Seven, elders, Matthias, Paul and Barnabas, and Peter. In addition, the Seven, Barnabas, Paul, and Timothy received laying on of hands, as we saw earlier. Spiritual gifts are mentioned in 1Cor 12:28. In this case, "appointed" can be understood in the sense of "placed" and may not describe a formal appointment process. Nevertheless, the appointment of persons to ministry is quite important.

The functions or tasks to which they were appointed comprised apostle, prophet, teacher, preacher, missionary, "ministry",²⁴ elder, servant, defender of faith, witness, evangelist, delegate to the apostolic council, and bearer of spiritual gifts that became tasks or functions. Thus persons were not only appointed to leadership positions such as apostle, elder, and bishop but also to other ministries.

Accompanying rituals included pre-selection or election by the church, prayer, fasting, laying on of hands, casting the lot and sending out. However, in many cases no ritual is mentioned. In no instance are all elements found together. In addition one should note that, although very meaningful, these rituals are not explicitly prescribed.

4.3. Function Bearers

In the NT the term *presbyteros* (elder) is applied to Christian elders, i.e., church leaders on earth, eighteen times.²⁵ Moreover, the term *presbyterion* (the group or council of elders) occurs once (1Tim 4:14). Elders are typically associated with a local church. However, Peter calls himself fellow elder (1Pet 5:1). The terms *presbyteros* and *episkopos* (bishop or overseer) are used interchangeably (Acts 20:17, 28; Tit 1:5, 7). The term "bishop" is used five times in the NT. One time it describes Jesus

²⁴ *Diakonia* is a broader term, also used for the ministry of the word by the Twelve (Acts 6:4). It is not to be limited to the work of a deacon.

²⁵ Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18; 1Tim 5:17, 19; Tit 1:5; Jam 5:14; 1Pet 5:1, 5; 2John 1:1; 3John 1:1. It is used for Jewish elders thirty times, for the twenty-four elders in Revelation twelve times for older people, men and women, and the people of old six times.

(1Pet 2:25). He is the real bishop from whom others derive and receive their ministry. Aside from Jesus the term applies to Christian leaders only (Acts 20:28; Phil 1:1; 1Tim 3:2; Tit 1:7). Finally, in 1Tim 3:1 *episkopē* describes the "function of bishop."²⁶

The term *diakonos* (servant, deacon) is found twenty-nine times in the NT, but in most of the cases it is used in a general sense. The technical use of the term, namely deacon, may occur in Rom 16:1; Phil 1:1; and definitely and specifically in 1Tim 3:8, 12. The passage 1Tim 3:8-13 provides the most extensive description of deacons in the technical sense. As indicated above, the term *diakonia* is much broader than a reference to the function of a deacon. Some have suggested that the Seven (Acts 6:3) were deacons, while others think they are elders. It is more likely that they prefigure the ministry of the elder as well as the ministry of the deacon.²⁷ Their election happened early during the development of a church structure. Obviously at that time the only other established function was that of the Twelve, a specific form of apostleship. So we would not count the Seven among the later deacons and the elders.

The term *poimēn* (shepherd, pastor) occurs in the literal sense in Luke 2:8, 15, 18, 20, when the shepherds visit the newborn baby Jesus. Otherwise it is used symbolically. Jesus is the one who takes care of the people that are like sheep without a shepherd (Matt 9:36; Mark 6:34). As a shepherd, He will also separate the goats from the sheep (Matt 25:32). He is the Shepherd (Matt 26:31; Mark 14:27; 1Pet 2:25), even the good Shepherd (John 10:2, 11, 11, 12, 14, 16) and the great Shepherd (Heb 13:20). Once the term is applied to Christian leaders, the pastor/shepherd-teachers of Eph 4:11. This is the only NT reference to a "pastor." The Greek construction of Eph 4:11 seems to imply that in this verse pastor and teacher should not be kept separate but be understood as one function, involved with the equipping of the saints to their ministry. It has been suggested that the elders who are "worthy of double honor" due to their teaching²⁸ and preaching (1Tim 5:17)—and this would imply respect and a financial reimbursement for their ministry (1Tim 5:18)—may point into the direction of a paid ministry and be a prototype of pastoral

²⁶ In Luke 9:44 and in 1Pet 2:12 it is used with the meaning "visitation" referring to the time or day of visitation. However, in Acts 1:20 it represents Judas' function which after his suicide was vacant and had to be taken by someone else.

²⁷ See Robert M. Johnston, "Leadership in the Early Church During Its First Hundred Years," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 17/2 (2006): 10-11.

²⁸ See the literary connection between "the teaching" (*didaskalia*) in 1Tim 5:17 and "teacher" (*didaskalos*) in Eph 4:11.

ministry.²⁹ If this is true, pastors would be a subcategory of the elders, a special group of elders.

While elders are mentioned more frequently, deacons appear seldom and pastors hardly at all in the NT. The appointment of deacons is not mentioned. In the case of pastors the text notes that God has “given” (*didōmi*) among others pastor-teachers. This could indicate their appointment. Only twice is the appointment of elders clearly mentioned. In Acts 14:23 we are informed that elders were appointed in Asia Minor (*cheirotoneō*). This was done under prayer, fasting, and dedication to the Lord. Titus was requested to appoint elders in every town/city (Tit 1:5). What is surprising is that the NT does not contain a general command to appoint elders in churches and that laying on of hands is applied to them only, if 1Tim 5:22 talks about them. In other words, there is very little about the “ordination” of function bearers in the NT.

5. Toward a Theology of Ordination in the New Testament

In this section we will raise a number of questions and attempt to provide some answers that hopefully will help us toward the establishment of a NT theology of ordination. Some of these questions we may have already partially addressed but they need to be revisited.

5.1. Why is Ordination/Appointment to a Function Important?

According to the Gospel of Matthew Jesus talked about his *ekklēsia*, his church, twice (Matt 16:18; 18:17). Indeed, it was Jesus who created a visible community “. . . a fellowship of men and women under the kingship of God, a religious community of which He was the leader. . . The concepts of disciples, a remnant, and messiahship were constitutive of a new community, a people of God, which is the Messiah’s possession.”³⁰ Although Jesus was probably not talking directly about an organization, but rather about his specific people—“my church”—his

²⁹ However, it has also been suggested that these are older men like in 1Tim 5:1 but not church officers, although this is not likely. See the discussion in George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 231-233.

³⁰ Raoul Dederen, “The Church,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (ed. Raoul Dederen; (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 540.

sayings prepared the way for the church as we later find it in Acts and in the New Testament epistles.

The concept of Jesus' church is not limited to the term *ekklēsia*. Jesus' call to individuals to become his followers (Matt 4:19; 8:22; 19:21; Mark 2:14; 10:21; Luke 5:27; 9:59; 18:22), the election of the Twelve out of a larger group of his disciples, their designation as apostles, their sending out on a mission trip (Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:13-16; Matt 10:1-20), Jesus' particular teachings such as the Sermon on the Mount addressed to his disciples (Matt 5-7), and his sayings about his flock (Luke 12:32, Matt 26:31) and his family (Matt 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21) indicate that the Synoptic Gospels are well aware of the fact that Jesus was gathering a special people, his church.

The Gospel of John agrees with the Synoptics. According to John 1:43; 21:22 Jesus called people to follow him and to become or remain his disciples. In John 15:1-8 Jesus compares himself with a vine and his community with its branches. Jesus is the good shepherd of his sheep (John 10:1-18). Finally, Jesus charges Peter to tend his lambs and his sheep (John 21:15-17). Thus, there is a Messianic community that will later be of a universal and yet united character (John 10:16).³¹

To care for, maintain, and grow this community Jesus called and installed a specific group of disciples, as we mentioned, the Twelve and later a larger group of Seventy (Luke 10:1). He trained them and sent them out to proclaim the nearness of the kingdom of God (Luke 9:1-6; 10:1-12). Being part of his church, they carried specific responsibilities. From that perspective it is important to notice that it was Jesus who appointed them for their ministry, following the pattern of the OT people of God. Thus the Twelve, named by Jesus "apostles" (Luke 6:13) were "made"/appointed (*poieō*) to be with him and to be sent out to preach and heal (Mark 3:13-14).

This fact indicates that appointment or "ordination" to a ministry in the messianic community originated with Jesus Christ and that the setting apart of some believers to specific ministries is crucial for the well-being, survival, and growth of the church. It also creates order and preserves unity.

³¹ Gentile believers will not form a Gentile church separate from a church consisting of Jewish believers. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 512, notes: "They are to become united in one flock. And they all stand under the leadership of one shepherd. The unity is not a natural unity but one brought about by the activity of the Shepherd in 'bringing' them."

5.2. What are the Problems with the Use of the Term Ordination?

As already noted, the term "ordination" has been loaded with different notions of meaning in church history and may raise expectations and trigger ideas that do not fit the NT picture of the appointment of persons to various ministries. Because the term may not be avoided completely, it has to be used with great caution. "Ordination" cannot be linked to a sacramental view, the concept of succession, and the idea of an ontological change in the ordained persons. In the NT individuals are assigned to leadership roles and other positions/tasks. The Bible speaks about appointment, setting apart or in the OT about consecration (Exod 29:33) for a specific ministry without necessarily limiting it to laying on of hands. Therefore one of the questions would be: Should the term "ordination" be used today at all and if so, should it be defined as laying on of hands only or should it include appointment to a task, even if laying on of hands is not involved. This would be a decision the Church has to make.

5.3. What is the New Testament Understanding of Use of the Term Ordination/Appointment to a Specific Function?

Reading the NT, one recognizes that appointment to a ministry is a process, consisting of a number of different elements. This process seems to have to do with (1) a divine calling of individuals, (2) the working out of their call in their lives and their involvement in some type of ministry in the church, (3) a ritual in connection with their official appointment to a ministry, and (4) the involvement of the church.

The divine call can be as dramatic as Paul's Damascus experience (Acts 9; 26) or the experience of OT prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. It can also be less pronounced as was most likely the case with most Christians throughout history. But at one point or another an individual believers recognizes that God wants him/her to take on a specific ministry. Many, if not the majority of Adventist pastors would affirm that they have received such a divine call and were chosen by God to a special function. Many would consider this even a lifelong calling.

The election of the Seven reveals that they were already filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom and had a good reputation (Acts 6:3). So they must have been committed to Jesus as their Savior and Lord and must have lived Christian lives and presumably were involved in some church activities. Their appointment may be understood as a ratification of the

gifts already received. 1Tim 3:2-7 lists prerequisites for the function of a bishop (i.e., an elder) that affirm the second point we have made.

What is described as "ritual" would be elements such as an election process by the church, fasting, praying, laying on of hands, and sending out by the community of believers. Obviously the validity of such an appointment was not jeopardized, if one or more elements were missing.

The church may be involved on every level or may not be involved on every level. But it is evident that the church is and must be involved in the appointment process. The church must become aware that God has chosen an individual to a specific ministry. The church may be involved in the call through some of its members.³² The church will definitely be involved in the evaluation of the individual. The lists of characteristics of bishops and deacons found in the NT indicate that an evaluation process by the church is to take place. The election of a person, following the divine call and the biblical guidelines, is the responsibility of the church as are the ritual and the final appointment or credentialing.

Such an outline of the appointment process, if correctly reflecting the NT, would mean that in the NT setting apart/appointing/commissioning is not just a standard procedure to be followed slavishly. For instance, the use of the lot in connection with an appointment to a function is mentioned just once and obviously has been abandoned by the NT church. These general principles may be constitutive to the appointment to a function or a specific task in the church.

5.4. What Happened when Hands Were Laid on Individuals?

The five references to laying on of hands in the NT (Acts 6:6; 13:3; 1Tim 4:14; 5:22; 2Tim 1:6) describe different consequences or results of the appointment process. We can certainly assume that with their appointment the appointees received the task or function to which they were "ordained" and most likely the respect and support of church members. But did they receive an additional gift that people today can also expect when they are appointed to a function?

Nothing like this is mentioned with the Seven, although their appointment "inaugurated a completely new type of ministry and church leadership."³³ They were already filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3, 5). In the case of Paul and Barnabas, the church recognized their divine

³² Church members or officials may encourage an individual to pursue a certain course or ministry, and God may be speaking through them. See Ananias visiting Paul (Acts 22:12-16).

³³ Johnston, 8-9.

calling and giftedness—they were prophets and teachers—and installed them to the function the Holy Spirit had assigned them to. They set out on their missionary journey. No additional gifts are mentioned as being given to them along with the appointment process (Acts 13:1-5).

With Timothy this may have been different (1Tim 4:14; 2Tim 1:6). It seems that in his case a spiritual gift or the gift of the Holy Spirit was received with the laying on of hands.³⁴ Obviously both can happen, the reception of a gift or no reception of an additional gift. That something would happen always can be assumed. It does not make sense to pray for people and lay hands on them without expecting that the Lord would do something. In addition to the appointment and the bestowal of authority, one should assume that the Lord would at least bless the appointees.

Nevertheless, the case of Timothy's appointment to his ministry may have been unique. Timothy is not called an elder and is not considered as such.³⁵ He stands in a special and close relationship to Paul and is the apostle's representative (1Tim 1:2). The language used by Paul seems to align Timothy's appointment with the installation of Joshua by Moses. Deut 34:9: "Now Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; and the sons of Israel listened to him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses." As Joshua became the unique successor of Moses, so "Paul sees in Timothy the one person to whom he can entrust the gospel. . . Paul is, in a sense, delivering his last will and testament . . ." ³⁶ Therefore, his "ordination" is not necessarily the paradigm for all subsequent appointments.

Nevertheless, in the case that a new spiritual gift or the fullness of Holy Spirit are bestowed on appointees, this gift does not change them foundationally. It does not elevate them to a higher level, superior to the rest of the church members. Those who have taken on a new function and responsibility are not and do not become different from others in their inner being. They are still part of the priesthood of all believers.

³⁴ Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr. *1, 2 Timothy, Titus* (The New American Commentary; Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1992), 139, suggest: "The 'gift' likely represented an aptitude for teaching and preaching together with an ability to understand the gospel and discern error." Commenting on 2Tim 1: 6 they propose that "The act of laying on hands was itself symbolic. The laying on of hands was not the cause of Timothy's receipt of a spiritual gift but was a visible representation and symbol of it" (188).

³⁵ See William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, 2000), 263.

³⁶ Warkentin, *Ordination*, 138. See also pages 136-143.

5.5. Who Did and Who Did Not Experience Laying on of Hands?

We remember that those mentioned as having received laying on of hands are the Seven, Paul and Barnabas, as well as Timothy. The elders are disputed. 1Tim 5:22 may or may not apply to elders.

On the other hand, those that are not mentioned include Jesus, the twelve Apostles, the Seventy, Matthias as an apostle, deacons, and that we definitely know of having received laying on of hands are special and do not necessarily form a pattern for a present-day practice. Maybe with the exception of Barnabas none of their functions or ministries is directly found in the church today.

Yet it may be very unlikely that while the elders were involved in laying hands on others, they did not receive laying on of hands themselves.

5.6. For What Task/Function Did these People Receive Laying on of Hands?

It seems that laying on of hands was not done for one specific ministry only. Although the precise role of the Seven is difficult to describe, obviously their *diakonia* included taking care of social and physical needs of church members. At least two of them were involved in evangelism. In the case of Timothy his role and function can be describes as providing leadership. With Paul and Barnabas we find missionary activity which would include at least cross-cultural evangelistic outreach, organization of churches, and pastoral care. Although all of this is descriptive rather than prescriptive, it may help the church today when she considers her theology of ordination. The Church, faced with the question how to organize itself and its ministry, will in any case take a close look at the NT and follow its model of organization and ministry even if it is not explicitly prescribed.

5.7. Does the Church Have the Authority to Define and Regulate "Ordination"/Appointment to a Function or Ministry?

This study has pointed out that the NT does not contain a direct command for post-NT times to appoint elders, deacon, and pastors. It does not contain a prohibition either regarding the appointment of these and/or others for various types of ministry. The NT does not contain a command to lay on hands on certain persons. It does not have a three-tier

“ordination” system of deacons, elders, and pastors. Rather such a system reminds us of a similar approach used by the Catholic Church. The NT does not expressly teach that in these three cases or tiers appointment is different, that a pastor has a worldwide scope of ministry while elders and deacons are limited to a local scope, that “ordination” can and needs to be repeated, if a person has previously served as an elder and then becomes a pastor, and that deacons and elders can be “ordained” right away, while pastors have to serve several years before hands are being laid on them. In other words the appointment process or “ordination” is not precisely prescribed in the NT. Rather one finds descriptions of what happened here and there in the first century AD when the church was organized and began to grow tremendously.

While we stated that the Church will follow the NT model of organization, not all issues have been settled in the NT. This brings us to the question whether or not the Church has the authority to rule on issues not directly prescribed in Scripture. This is a somewhat dangerous question, because it could—if abused—lead to a situation in which the Church becomes the master rather than the servant of the Word of God. Therefore this question must be carefully considered in this context. Adventists hold that the Church cannot make decisions against what is clearly expressed in Scripture.

However in case that Scripture does not provide a fully prescribed approach to appointment to function, we are faced with the question which of the following approaches we should choose: (1) What Scripture does not prohibit is allowed; (2) what Scripture does not allow is prohibited, or (3) using biblical principles to determine how questions on theological issues should be decided. While the first approach sounds good on first glance, it has major weaknesses and would, for instance, allow for the use of narcotic drugs, smoking, and involvement in gambling and pornography. The second approach is not as wide as the first one but faces problems on the other side. It is too exclusive. It would, for example, prohibit the use of all modern means of transportation and communication, modern medicine, and the Adventist Church structure including most of its institutions. The third approach, namely to look for biblical principles and then structure a respective theology is found in Scripture.³⁷ Our fundamental beliefs and other tenets of our belief system reveal that Adventists have decided to use this third approach. This approach keeps the authority of Scripture intact, while it allows the Church to formulate a theology based on biblical principles.

³⁷ See, e.g., Jesus and divorce in Matt 19. For a more detailed discussion of these approaches see Ekkehardt Mueller, “Hermeneutical Guidelines for Dealing with Theological Questions,” *Reflections: The BRI Newsletter*, October (2012): 1-7.

While at this stage of Adventist history we are involved in formulating or re-studying Adventist ecclesiology, particularly the theology of "ordination," we should make sure that all data be placed on the table. The Church should be willing to reconsider how laying on of hands should stay away from being traditionalists, namely followers of an Adventist tradition, merely for tradition and practice sake. We should also stay away from making changes for change sake only. That does not mean that after careful study we as a Church may not come up with the same or a very similar approach to ordination that we have practiced so far or that indeed some adjustments are necessary. But it is our duty as believers and as a Church to check again and again whether or not what we do is still in agreement with the Word of God or in this case the principles of Scripture.

6. Conclusion

The NT clearly teaches that there are different ministries and functions and that among other things leadership is indispensable. It also suggests that an appointment or installation process is necessary, even though precise rituals and various details are not prescribed. Nevertheless, what we have is a good starting point for hammering out an Adventist Theology of Ordination. The process of studying this topic that we are currently going through is an excellent opportunity to check where we are and make adjustments, if necessary.