

# The English Ordinal

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“IT is evident unto all men diligently reading holy Scripture and ancient Authors, that from the Apostles’ time there have been these Orders of Ministers in Christ’s Church ; bishops, priests, and deacons, which offices were evermore had in such reverent estimation, that no man by his own private authority might presume to execute any of them except he were first called, tried, examined, and known to have such qualities as were requisite for the same, and also by public prayer, with imposition of hands, approved and admitted thereunto. And therefore to the intent these orders should be continued, and reverently used and esteemed in this Church of England, it is requisite that no man (not being at this present bishop, priest, nor deacon) shall execute any of them, except he be called, tried, examined, and admitted, according to the form hereafter following.”

The first sentence of the Preface to the Ordinal of 1550 is, in these days, manifestly untrue. The existence of the threefold ministry in the times of the Apostles is certainly not evident to all men diligently reading either Holy Scripture or the writings of the Apostolic Fathers. One is tempted to say that the strength of anyone’s belief that bishops, priests, and deacons formed the regular ministry of the apostolic Church must be in inverse proportion to the diligence with which he has read the documents. Not only is the claim absurd in the light of modern study ; it was untenable in its strict and literal sense in 1550, for, not to speak of the Calvinist belief that diligent study of Scripture would reveal a different pattern of Church order, laid down in the New Testament and intended as a model for evangelical Christians at all times, it was generally recognized by the Reformers, as by the later Fathers, that in the first century the terms “bishop” and “presbyter” were synonymous.

Nevertheless, although this sentence as it stands is indefensible, the Preface expresses a worthy intention. The Anglican Reformers were anxious to maintain the ancient structure of the Church’s ministry, just as they tried to conserve the traditional pattern of its worship, in so far as this was agreeable to the Word of God. Their criterion was Scripture, together with the interpretation of Scripture (subject always to the final authority of the Bible itself) which they found in the patristic authors, their appeal to the latter being, of course, limited by their scanty knowledge of the actual way in which the early Church was ordered and of its forms of worship. They believed that, despite the ambiguities concerning the identity of the primitive bishops with elders and the relationship between the original apostolate and the episcopate of later times (the fathers were often content to assume the continuity of a threefold ministry from the beginning, on the ground that the pattern of apostle, presbyter, deacon was succeeded by that of bishop, presbyter, deacon), the ancient form of ministry was agreeable

to the Word of God and was therefore to be continued and reverently used and esteemed in the Church of England.

The Reformers believed that the orders of bishops, priests, and deacons could be justified by Scripture, though they did not claim that the New Testament lays down a fixed form of ministry as part of the Gospel. Behind what seemed to them to be the corrupt prelacy of the pre-Reformation Church they discerned an ancient and godly ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons, preachers of the Gospel, rightfully administering the sacraments and tending the flock of Christ. In substance, though not precisely in outward form, this was the ministry appointed for the Church by Christ through the Apostles. In the Scriptures the Reformers also found the principle that the ministers of the Church must be "called, tried, examined, and known to have such qualities" as are needed for their office. The New Testament made it clear, in addition, that those who were called, tried, and examined must be publicly approved and admitted by prayer and the imposition of hands (the Ordinal of 1662 adds "by lawful authority").

The Ordinal thus sets out to secure for the Church of England a ministry of duly called and examined persons of whose qualifications there should be no reasonable doubt, appointed to their respective offices with the full authority of the Church to execute them; and the ancient form of ministerial order was to be reverently used and esteemed for that purpose. The Church of England could therefore be assured in its Articles that the Ordinal contains "all things necessary" to the consecration of bishops and the ordering of priests, "neither hath it anything that of itself is superstitious and ungodly". "And therefore," Article XXXVI proceeds, "whosoever are consecrated or ordered according to the Rites of that Book . . . we decree all such to be rightly, orderly, and lawfully consecrated and ordered."

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The fact that the Church of England determined to continue the historic ministry does not imply that this ministry was regarded as essential to the very existence of the Church, or that where the ministry was not episcopally ordered there could be no guarantee of sacramental validity; nor is it possible, in the light of the theology either of its compilers or of other Anglican writers of the sixteenth century, to read such a doctrine into the Ordinal. There is no emphasis on the apostolic succession of the ministry as a necessary condition of the validity of the sacraments. The continuity of the threefold Ministry from the time of the Apostles is the ground on which it is to be reverently esteemed as a godly order, but there is no suggestion that its maintenance is essential if the Church of England is to remain within the Catholic Church of Christ. The language of the Ordinal is in no way inconsistent with Whitgift's contention that forms of Church government, like rites and ceremonies, may "be altered and changed, appointed and abrogated, according to time, place, and person, so that nothing be done against the word of God", and that "no certain manner or form of electing ministers is prescribed in the Scripture, because every church may do therein as it shall seem most expedient for the same".

In prescribing that the sermon at the ordination of "ministers"

(according to the rubric prefixed to the Ordering of Deacons in 1550), and at the ordination of both deacons and priests (1662), shall declare "how necessary such orders are in the Church of Christ", the Ordinal does not intend to assert the absolute necessity of these orders if the Church is truly to be the Church. The fact that no such "necessity" is mentioned in connection with the consecration of bishops is sufficient evidence that this rubric has never meant to assert that the historic ministry is of the *esse* of the Church. The Articles, which interpret the Prayer Book and the Ordinal, are most careful not to suggest that the existence of the Church depends upon the continuity of the episcopal ministry and that, in consequence, those Reformed communions in Europe which adopted presbyterian order are no true part of the Catholic Church. Hence there can be little doubt that in this context "necessary" means approximately the same as "useful" (as in Shakespeare's "harmless, necessary cat"), and that H. W. Montefiore is right in his claim that "an interpretation of 'necessary' in this rubric which does not equate it with 'indispensable' is philologically sound. When the rubric is read in connection with Articles XIX, XX, XXIII, it surely can only mean that episcopal orders are necessary, not for the existence of the Church, but for its fullness" (*The Historic Episcopate*, ed. K. M. Carey, 2nd edition, p. 109).

The Preface, therefore, expresses the firm intention of the Church of England to retain the historic ministry for itself, without implying either any condemnation of foreign churches which have abandoned it, or any doctrine that the apostolic succession is necessary in order to ensure the due administration of the sacraments according to Christ's ordinance. The ancient threefold ministry is a godly order which the Church of England binds itself to retain; but it is not in itself a part of the Gospel. Faith and Order are distinct; and it was not through any misunderstanding of the meaning of the Ordinal that, as Keble observed of the sixteenth century divines in his preface to his edition of Hooker: "It is enough, with them, to show that the government by archbishops and bishops is ancient and allowable; they never venture to urge its exclusive claim, or to connect the succession with the validity of the Sacraments". It was consonant with the Ordinal to hold, as Whitgift and Hooker held, that, in the last resort, the form of Church government is among the "things free to be ordered at the discretion of the Church" (*Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, III, 4), while maintaining that episcopacy is fully in accordance with scriptural principles, and to contrast this position with that of the Puritan party to whom "matters of discipline and church government are (as they say) matters necessary to salvation and of Faith, whereas we put a difference betwixt the one and the other" (*ibid.*, III, 2). It is ironical that in the present-day ecumenical situation Anglicanism should appear to be committed to a position which is the reverse of that which its apologists assumed in the reign of Elizabeth I: that Order is a "matter necessary to salvation and of Faith", and that a particular form of church government is laid down by the divine will as universally binding, so that, with the substitution of episcopacy for presbyterianism, the Anglo-Catholic makes the same claim as the Puritan of four centuries ago.

The Ordinal expresses the Church of England's determination, on

this basis, to continue the orders of bishops, priests, and deacons. In doing so, however, it makes it very clear that the significance which is to be attached to the first two is very different from that which they possessed in pre-Reformation times. The orders are the same ; there is no question of a reordination of ministers ordained with the Sarum Pontifical, whose ministry, now that the liturgy has been reformed in accordance with the Word of God, is agreeable to Scripture and the ancient tradition of the Church. Nevertheless, the content, as it were, of priesthood and episcopacy, is different, by the very fact of the reformation of worship, from that of the same orders as interpreted by the medieval ordinals. This difference had to be expressed by means of a drastic revision of the old services, according to the Reformers' notion of the mind of the primitive Church. They had little knowledge of the early forms of ordination known to us today in such documents as the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus. The basis of their work (in this case carried out primarily by Cranmer and Ridley with the aid of a draft by Bucer) had to be the late medieval rites. The main structure of these was preserved, but their content was altered in such a way as to demonstrate that the intention of the Ordinal was different in certain vital respects.

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The Sarum Pontifical begins, after the bishop's preliminary warning to the candidates concerning their qualifications, and the admissions to the minor orders, with the Litany, including special clauses. The bishop then declares the duty of deacons : " to minister at the altar, read the Gospel, baptize, and preach ". The deacons are ordained with the imposition of the bishop's hand and prayer is made, at the bishop's invitation, for the blessing of the deacons in their office and their way of life, the institution of the Levites being mentioned as a scriptural precedent. The bishop places the stole over the deacon's left shoulder as an emblem of the "*stola immortalitatis*", with the charge "*imple ministerium tuum*", and delivers the Gospel book to him with the words " receive power to read the Gospel in the Church of God, *iam pro vivis quam pro defunctis*". A further prayer, recalling St. Stephen and the seven deacons, is followed by the late medieval innovation of vesting with the dalmatic and the reading of the Gospel by one of the new deacons.

The Ordinal of 1550 follows a similar course : presentation and inquiry, the Litany, prayer for the candidates, recalling the ordination of St. Stephen and the Seven, and after the Epistle the " oath of the king's supremacy and against the usurped power and authority of the Bishop of Rome ". There follows, in accordance with the scriptural principle that the minister must be " called, tried, and examined ", a much fuller examination of the candidates by the bishop, with instruction in their duties, than was provided in the Pontifical. Ordination by the laying on of the bishop's hands is now accompanied by the words : " Take thou authority to execute the office of a Deacon in the Church of God committed unto thee ". Authority to read the Gospel in the Church of God and to preach the same " if thou be thereunto ordinarily commanded " (no longer for the " living and the dead ") is

committed with the same ceremony of the delivery of the book, now the New Testament. In the ancient Roman rite the delivery of a symbolical instrument of office was the essence of the ceremony of appointment to any of the minor orders, the doorkeeper receiving the keys, and so on. From about the eleventh century this *porrectio instrumentorum* had come to take a prominent place in the ordination of bishops, priests, and deacons as well, and the English Reformers retained the practice. The Gospel is read by one of the new deacons, and a collect for them precedes the blessing at the end of the Communion.

In the case of the ordination of deacons the Ordinal thus makes little change apart from the omission of the ceremonies of vesting. The office of a deacon is understood in the traditional sense; the Reformers, however, lay greater emphasis on the educational aspect of his ministry of the Word (he is "to instruct the youth in the Catechism") and on his function to assist in the Church's care for the physical and material well-being of her members. The Anglican Ordinal recovers something of the importance of the deacon outside his purely liturgical and educational role, and looks back to the function of the Seven as the model for the deacon's charitable work for the sick and poor. Thus in theory he becomes something rather more than a mere apprentice priest, however little this ideal has been realized in the general practice of the Church of England.

It should be noticed that in the ordination of deacons, as in the Ordinal as a whole, the concept of "authority" replaces that of "power" which is typical of the pre-Reformation rites. The intention is to convey, in the divine Name, authority to perform a ministry in the Church. The minister is not invested by God with special and exclusive power to do something which it is in principle impossible for the rest of Christ's people to do. He receives authority, through the bishop as the representative of the whole Church, to act representatively on behalf of the entire priestly and "diaconal" body.

The change of emphasis is much greater and more fundamental in the case of the priest. In the Sarum Pontifical the rite of ordination begins, after the ordination of the deacons and the Gospel, with the definition of the priest's duty: "*offerre, benedicere, praeesse, praedicare, conficere* [sc. the Body and Blood of Christ] *et baptizare*". The imposition of hands by the bishop and priests takes place in silence. Prayer follows, on the lines of the prayer for deacons, recalling the precedents of the appointment of the seventy elders as assistants to Moses and the conferment of sacrificial priesthood on Eleazar and Ithamar. The stole is placed over the right shoulder as an emblem of the "yoke of the Lord" and the "robe of innocence", the priests are vested in the chasuble as the priestly vestment symbolizing charity. This is followed by the ceremony of the anointing of the hands, introduced by a prayer for grace that the priests may prove themselves true "elders", may meditate on God's law, believe what they read, teach what they believe, and imitate what they teach, show forth the Christian virtues in their lives, and "through the prayer of Thy people transform bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Thy Son by a holy and immaculate benediction". The *Veni Creator* having been sung, the priests' hands are anointed and blessed "*ad consecrandas hostias, quae pro delectis atque*

*negligentiis populi offeruntur* ", and another prayer at the consecration of the hands asks that they may be hallowed "*ut quaecunque consecraverint consecrentur et quaecunque benedixerint benedicantur et sanctificentur*". The bishop then delivers to the priest the chalice and paten with the words: "Receive power to offer sacrifice to God and to celebrate mass both for the living and the dead". After the Communion there is another imposition of hands with the words: "Receive the Holy Ghost: whose sins thou dost remit they are remitted unto them, and whose thou dost retain they are retained". After the bishop's kiss a charge is given to the newly ordained that they presume not to say mass until they have thoroughly learnt the rite from instructed priests.

In the 1550 Ordinal the *Veni Creator* follows the Gospel, the candidates are presented and inquiry made, prayer is offered for them, and the oath administered. The duty of the priest is then set out in a charge and a detailed examination. It is declared to be a pastoral office: "to be the messengers, watchmen, pastors, and stewards of the Lord, to teach, to premonish, to feed, and provide for the Lord's family; to seek for Christ's sheep that be dispersed abroad, and for his children which be in the midst of this naughty world, to be saved through Christ for ever". This pastoral ministry is of so high a dignity and importance and of so great difficulty that much exhortation and admonition are needed; and the bishop's charge is largely devoted to commending to the candidates the duties of prayer, study of the Scriptures, and conduct, on the part of themselves and their families, agreeable to the scriptural rule. The bishop's examination of the candidates begins by considering the teaching office: the priest is to instruct the people out of the Scriptures as the sole source of all doctrine required of necessity for eternal salvation through faith in Christ. He is to administer the doctrine, sacraments, and discipline of Christ, banish and drive away erroneous teaching, and use both public and private admonitions and exhortations to the sick and to the whole. He must be diligent in prayers and in studies in and pertaining to the Scriptures. He must lead an exemplary life, promote quietness, peace, and love, and obey the Ordinary and other chief ministers. The bishop's subsequent prayer includes a commemoration of Christ's sending of his apostles, prophets, evangelists, doctors, and pastors to gather together a great flock in all parts of the world. The bishop and priests then lay their hands on the candidates with the prayer: "Receive the Holy Ghost ["for the office and work of a priest in the Church of God", adds the 1662 book]. Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven, etc." In the Ordinal of 1550 the *porrectio instrumentorum* takes the form of the delivery of the Bible into one hand, and "the chalice or cup with the bread" into the other, with the words: "Take thou authority to preach the Word of God and to minister the holy sacraments in this congregation, where thou shalt be so appointed". From 1552 onwards this ceremony is modified. The delivery of the chalice and bread is discontinued, and the Bible alone is given. A collect for grace precedes the blessing at the end of the Communion service.

The change in the meaning of priesthood which the Ordinal implies is obvious. It is made especially clear by the space given to the bishop's exhortation to the candidates, which was itself an innovation. Here we find a long exposition of the Anglican understanding of the priestly office. It is stated in terms of pastoral care, preaching, teaching, and study. The Pontifical defined the priest's function in terms of offering (the Eucharist), blessing, presiding, preaching, "making" (*i.e.*, "consecrating", in the "Catholic" sense), and baptizing. The difference of emphasis is already apparent. This change can be observed at many significant points in the rite.

The Ordinal makes no allusion to the sacrificing priesthood of the Old Testament. The anointing of the hands, a central feature of the old service, has disappeared and with it the prayer that the priest may transform bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, as well as the consecration of the priest's hands for consecrating and blessing. The omission of the ceremonies of vesting is of little consequence; but the change in the *porrectio instrumentorum* is of great significance. This ceremony was important, even though in fact it is a late addition to the rite of ordination for the major orders. It had been defined as the essential feature of ordination by Eugenius IV at the Council of Florence; and the Anglican Reformers retained it. But they gave it a totally different content. The delivery of Bible, chalice, and bread, and in the later Ordinals of the Bible only, signify authority to preach the Word and administer the sacraments. No longer does this ceremony confer power to offer sacrifice to God and to celebrate mass.

The Ordinal thus redefines the function of the priest. As the Dean of Bristol has expressed the matter (*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 123), "all sacerdotal language is removed. The Anglican priest is a presbyter, not a sacrificing priest". He is, in fact, ordained a minister of the Word and sacraments, receiving neither a power to effect a transformation of the eucharistic elements nor to offer sacrifice, except in the sense of leading the people of Christ in their self-oblation in union with their Head and by virtue of their Communion with him, as the Prayer of Oblation clearly states. He receives no exclusive power, for it is the whole Church corporately which is the priestly Body of Christ, empowered by the one true Priest; but he is given authority to act as a ministerial priest in and for the priestly community by virtue of his reception from the ascended Lord, in the same Body and through its representative leaders, of the Holy Spirit for the office and work of a priest: an office and work which consists in the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. As Whitgift remarked, the signification of the word "priest" is now altered from that of one who sacrifices to a minister of the Gospel (*Works*, p. 351).

Hooker does not misrepresent the sense in which the Ordinal speaks of priests when he remarks that if ordinary people are asked "what a priest doth signify", "their manner is not to answer, a priest is a clergyman which offereth sacrifice to God; but they shew some particular person whom they use to call by that name". "Howbeit," he continues, "when learned men declare what the word priest doth properly signify . . . their ordinary schools do well expound it to imply sacrifice. Seeing then that sacrifice is now no part of the

Church-ministry, how should the name of priesthood be thereunto rightly applied? . . . Wherefore [*i.e.*, since the term has lost its original meaning in popular speech] let them use what dialect they will, whether we call it a priesthood, a presbytership, or a ministry, it skilleth not."

The Ordinal retained, and gave a most prominent place to, the citation of Jn. 20: 23 at the ordination of priests. Although this may seem at first sight to imply that the gift of the Holy Spirit for the office and work of a priest confers a special and exclusive power and prerogative of absolution, this is not so. The Sarum rite stops short at "and whose sins thou dost retain they are retained"; but the Ordinal significantly continues "and be thou a faithful dispenser of the Word of God, and of his holy sacraments", thus subsuming the priest's authority to absolve under his general ministry of God's Word and sacraments. Christ, as the one Priest, is the mediator of the divine forgiveness to men. His work of reconciliation is applied to the whole world through the mission of His Church, and representatively by those who are commissioned as its ministers of His Gospel. They are entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation in Christ's name, and where they exercise that ministry sinners receive the divine forgiveness. That particular form of their ministry which we call the ministry of absolution is part of the general ministry of the Word, and the authority committed to them to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in Christ is given to them as ministers of Christ, representative of his priestly Body, who have received in ordination the gift of the Holy Spirit for the work of a dispenser of God's Word and of his holy sacraments. Hence, as Cranmer observed (*Works*, Parker Society, I, p. 350), it is as "ministers of Christ's words and sacraments" that priests "have to them committed the keys of heaven, to let in and shut out by the ministration of His Word and Gospel".

It is unnecessary to compare the Sarum rite of episcopal consecration with that of the Ordinal, for the differences between them illustrate the same points. Once again, there is a greater emphasis on the pastoral and teaching functions of the bishop, and the "instrument" which is delivered to him is, as in the case of priests, the Bible, the source of the doctrine which he is to teach and the ground of his authority.

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The Anglican Ordinal secures the continuity of the historic ministry, and thereby ensures for the Church of England a ministry possessing both the authority of the Church and regularity. Inasmuch as it is the same ministry which existed from the very early days when the varied forms of Church organization in the apostolic age gave way to a single settled pattern, it carries the authority of the catholic Church in its undivided state and possesses potentially, though in a divided Christendom not actually, the authority of the universal Church at the present time. It is regularly commissioned according to the practice of the universal Church; for there is no doubt that the Ordinal contains all that is necessary for the ordination of ministers in the three orders. Like the rites of the Church of patristic times, it provides for the public imposition of hands, with prayer, by those who have authority to do this within the Body of Christ as the agents of its Head. The only



important element in ancient practice which may be inadequately represented in the Anglican rite is that of popular approval of the candidates, for it is somewhat hard to recognize the voice of the whole community in the archdeacon's testimony to the suitability of those whom he is presenting for ordination. There is no doubt that in this rite the intention is to do what the Church has always done in conveying Christ's commission to those who are called to be its ministers.

If this is what is meant by the ambiguous term " validity ", there is no doubt that the Church of England possesses a fully valid and regular ministry. If, however, a valid ministry of priesthood is defined in terms of intention to continue, not merely the office of priesthood (that is, the pastoral ministry of Word and sacraments as the Ordinal believes it to have existed in the Church from the beginning) but also the pre-Reformation conception of that office which defines it in terms of the power to " consecrate " and offer sacrifice, then the clear implication of the Ordinal is that Anglican orders are in this sense invalid—as Bonner, Pole, Julius III, and Paul IV evidently believed. The Anglican priest has every reason to claim that his orders place him in the historic succession of the ministry of the universal Church throughout the centuries, and that he is fully and regularly commissioned to the ministry of the Word and the sacraments in the sense in which the New Testament understands that ministry. If he is loyal to the Ordinal he cannot, however, rightly claim that he has been ordained to do what the Sarum Pontifical understood to be the principal function of a priest. On the contrary, he will be thankful that he has not. He will also look with gratitude and hopeful expectation to the present striking developments in the " Catholic " (Roman and Anglican) theology of eucharistic presence and sacrifice, with increasing confidence that in the light of the revival of biblical study and fuller understanding of patristic theology the concepts which have dominated the Catholic-Protestant controversy about " sacrificing priests " from the sixteenth century to the time of Leo XIII will, before long, be drastically modified.

It has often been maintained in the current debate about intercommunion that loyalty to the Ordinal forbids Anglicans to recognize an equality of episcopal and non-episcopal ministries. If this means that he may not ascribe to the latter the same degree of regularity and authority, this is true. If, however, it is taken to refer to the possession by the former of a *sacerdotium* which the latter necessarily lacks, the Ordinal offers no support to the contention ; for it knows of no *sacerdotium* but that which is the essence of priesthood : the ministry of Word and sacraments by which Christ's priestly mediation is made effective for all believers. In this priestly ministry others besides episcopally ordained priests obviously share, however defective their orders may be in regularity and in the authority of the universal Church ; and the Ordinal offers no ground on which Anglicans can refuse to recognize a fundamental equality between these ministries in respect of the grace of priesthood.