ORDINATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT
With Pertinent Biblical Materials
by Berkeley Mickelsen

(Editor's note--We are honored to publish this article for the first time.)

Some lay persons have been surprised when they look in their concordances under "ordain" or "ordination" to find nothing helpful in their search for a biblical basis for the ordination of ministers. A biblical basis for the ordination of ministers involves the interpreter with a lot of inferences and assumptions. Although we do not need to make as many assumptions as with church membership, ordination is not at all in the same category as water baptism or the Lord's supper.

NO EXCLUSIVE TECHNICAL TERM FOR ORDINATION

The terms deacons, elders, shepherds, spiritual leaders, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (one article with both nouns), have much in common. Where then should we put the stress, on office or ministry or both? How was one recognized as appointed and called to any of these ministries? Could one person be called to several of these ministries? The answer to these questions would be easier if there were an exclusive technical term for ordination and if this term were used as an outward recognition of call. Unfortunately the term does not exist. We must recognize this fact.

We must also recognize the tradition of the church. Ordination, like other elements in the Christian church, has plenty of variation among the various Christian denominations, but there is considerable agreement about the need for ordination. How have Christians arrived at this kind of conclusion? I am aware of the Plymouth Brethren and their arguments, but they and others like them are really a small minority. In outline form we will try to summarize a case for the consecration of individuals to an office or a ministry.

VARIOUS MEANINGS FOR THE TECHNICAL EXPRESSION: "LAYING ON OF HANDS"

In the Old Testament.—We are all acquainted with this expression in the New Testament, but before we examine the occurrences there, we ought to see how the expression is used in the Old Testament.

Consecration ceremony of Aaron and his sons.—The elaborate ceremony involved the offering of one bull, two rams, unleavened bread, cakes, wafers. It also involved the washing of Aaron and his sons with water and their putting on of priestly garments. The ceremony was climax¢ed by putting anointing oil on the head. During the ceremony, when it came to the offerings of the bulls and the rams, Aaron and his sons had to lay their hands on the heads of each of the animals. Then the animals were slain and became offerings for them (Exodus 29:10, 15, 19). Here the "laying on of hands" involves identification. When individual Israelites offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, they also had to lay their hands on the heads of the sacrificial victims (Lev. 1:4; 3:22, 8, 13). In these offerings, whether priests or people, the laying on of hands indicated an involvement with a means of an atonement. The laying on of hands was a crucial part of the solemn ceremony.

Consecration ceremony for the Levites.—This ceremony likewise was a rather involved one (Numbers 8:5-13). But twice the laying on of hands accompanies the dedication ceremony. During the ceremony the Levites had to appear before the people. In presenting them before the Lord the people of Israel were to lay their hands upon the Levites; this probably means the princes of the people since a mass laying on of hands does not seem very feasible (Num. 8:10). The Levites were also to lay their hands on two bulls, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. When the people laid their hands on the Levites they were by this action designating the Levites as taking their place. In putting their hands on the bulls the Levites were indicating that in some way the offering of these bulls was a decisive response to their sinful separation from God.

Moses laid his hands on Joshua.—This is described in detail in Numbers 27:18-23. It is summarized by way of review in Deut. 34:9. After Moses had a mountain top view of the land of Canaan, he came down to be gathered to his people (Num. 27:13). Before that, however, the LORD gave Moses instructions as to how he was to consecrate Joshua to take his place. Moses took Joshua and caused him to stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole congregation (Num. 27:22) "And he laid his hand upon him, and commissioned him as the LORD directed..." (Num. 27:33). By this symbolic action Moses was investing Joshua with some of his authority that all the congregation of Israel might obey Joshua (Num. 27:20). So the commissioning of Joshua by Moses in the sight of all the people dramatically expressed a transfer of authority. Joshua was to complete the task that Moses had begun.
Naaman's expectation of healing by the use of hands.—Elijah asked Naaman to bathe himself seven times in the Jordan river and he would be healed from his leprosy. Naaman as a Syrian thought that the rivers of Damascus were far superior to the Jordan. Further, he had a preconceived picture as to how the prophet would heal him: ‘... I thought that he would open the window eastward and shoot the arrow. Further, he had a preconceived picture as to how the rivers of Damascus were far superior to the Jordan. name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper” (2 Kings 5:11). His servants politely suggested to Naaman that he do what the prophet asked since washing in the Jordan river was not difficult. When Naaman obeyed, he was completely healed. Here is an early account of waving the hand over that which was diseased to bring about healing.

Elisha's use of his hands in a symbolic action of victory.—At the close of Elisha’s life, Joash the king of Israel visited Elisha during his final illness. The prophet commanded the king to take a bow and arrows. He was to draw the bow, insert an arrow, open the window eastward and shoot the arrow. When the king did this, Elisha laid his hands upon the king’s hands. The arrow that had been shot Elisha called: “The Lord’s arrow of victory, the arrow of victory over Syria!” (2 Kings 13:16-17). With the remaining arrows (probably tied in a bundle) the king was to smite the ground. The king did this a mere three times. Elisha was angry with the king because he wanted the king to have smitten the ground five or six times. Three times meant that Israel would achieve only three victories over Syria. Five or six victories would have eliminated Syria from being a threat to Israel. The laying on of the hands of the prophet in this symbolic action pointed to God’s presence in, and control of, history.

In the New Testament.—The technical expression, “the laying on of hands” is used in a variety of ways in the N.T. We will summarize these and give most of our attention to the passages which have implications for ordination. The laying on of hands is found (as):

A foundational element.—Hebrews 6:1-3 lists six foundational elements: (1) Repentance from dead works, (2) Faith towards God, (3) Teaching about baptism, (4) about the laying on of hands, (5) about the resurrection of the dead, and (6) about eternal judgment. The first three elements have to do with conversion. The last two elements have to do with eschatology. Hence it is the fourth element, “the laying on of hands,” that covers a variety of things in the Christian life, in Christian service and ministry.

In connection with physical healing.—Jarius made the request of Jesus that he come and lay his hands upon his daughter who was at the point of death. He believed that when Jesus did this she would be cured and recover (Matt. 9:18, Mark 5:23). Mark 6:5 records, “He laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them”, and in Mark 7:32-37 Jesus was asked to lay his hands upon a man who was deaf with a speech impediment. The account tells just how Jesus restored this man.

In healing the blind man near Bethsaida Jesus put hands on him twice, Mark 8:23, 25. The longer ending of Mark speaks of the disciples putting their hands on the sick (Mark 16:18). Luke covers a whole day of Jesus miracles and then when the day came to a close he says: “... when the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to him; and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them” (Luke 4:40). Jesus healed a cripple woman on the Sabbath by laying hands upon her only to be rebuked by the ruler of the synagogue (Luke 8:10-17).

Ananas of Damascus laid his hands on Saul (later Paul) so that he could recover his sight (Acts 9:12, 17). Paul laid his hands on the father of Publius, the chief official on the island of Malta; he recovered from his fever and dysentery (Acts 28:8).

When Jesus blessed the little children.—Matthew reported an event that brought the rebuke of the disciples towards Jesus. “They brought to him children that he lay his hands upon them and pray” (Matt. 19:13). Mark and Luke speak about Jesus “touching” the children (Mark 10:13; Luke 18:15). All three gospels note the immediate response of the disciples—that of a stern rebuke of Jesus. Matthew concludes: “And after he had placed his hands upon them, he proceeded from that place” (Matt. 19:15). The symbol of laying on of hands accompanied by prayer points to some kind of dedication or consecration. The disciples thought that Jesus should not waste his time with this. But since his kingdom consists of such kind, Jesus says: “Allow the children and stop hindering them from coming to me” (Matt. 19:14). Jesus seems to have been consecrating them for service in his kingdom.

In connection with the bestowing of the Holy Spirit.—Four times in the book of Acts the Holy Spirit comes upon groups of people: (1) In Acts, chap. 2; (2) in Acts, chap. 8; (3) in Acts, chaps. 10-11; (4) in Acts, chap. 19. The first of these is the Pentecost feast day in Jerusalem. The second is the coming of the Holy Spirit on believers in Samaria. The third describes how the Holy Spirit came upon the Gentiles—the household of Cornelius. And the fourth describes how the Holy Spirit came upon followers of John in Ephesus.

Two of these accounts involve the laying on of hands. Peter and John went down from Jerusalem to Samaria as soon as they heard about the Christian believers in Samaria. They laid their hands upon these believers that they might receive the Holy Spirit
A prominent person who practiced magic in Samaria, Simon became a believer and when he saw that the Holy Spirit came through the laying on of hands requested that he also be able to do the same thing (Acts 8:18-19). He offered money so that he could receive this power. Peter sternly rebuked Simon. His request was a clear indication that Simon’s heart was not right with God. He was in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity (Acts 8:21-23). Simon asked Peter to pray for him, but the account does not tell us the level or depth of his repentance.

Paul laid hands on the disciples of John in Ephesus. When he did this “the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied” (Acts 19:6).

In connection with particular ministries.—This is the area where we will find implications for ordination. However, these implications may not point only to the traditional patterns. In fact other patterns may be more viable than the traditional patterns.

The ministry of the seven deacons (Acts 6:1-6).—In this chapter we learn of the complaint of the Greek-speaking Jews against the Aramaic-speaking Jews because the widows of the Greek-speaking Jews were neglected in the daily distribution. Here we have Greek-speaking Jews in conflict with Aramaic-speaking Christian Jews. The apostles declared that here was a task that they did not feel they could add to their other duties. So they asked the group to pick out seven men to handle and correct this problem. To the credit of these early Christians they chose seven Greek-speaking deacons. They all have Greek names (Acts 6:5). Before they took up this ministry we read: “These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands upon them” (Acts 6:6). So by the laying on of hands, the apostles consecrated these men to carry on an important social service.

Stephen was one of these deacons. However, even though he was commissioned for this specific task, there is no indication in these early chapters of Acts that he did not do other things as well. His preaching, the great signs and wonders which he did are evidence for the breadth of his ministry (Acts 6:8-10). This means that if we interpret the laying on of hands here as a consecration to a particular, confined office we will miss the point. Stephen must have been preaching and doing signs and wonders for some time. Hands were laid upon him for a new or further ministry which the circumstances of the time demanded. He took up these new duties, but he continued in perhaps a more limited way the things he had been doing. He became a martyr not because of his ministry to Greek-speaking widows but because of his preaching Jesus as the Messiah in various synagogues.

The ministry of Paul and Barnabas to the Gentile world.—When a Christian church was formed in Antioch of Syria, the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to Antioch. The work continued to grow and Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Paul. He persuaded him to come to Antioch and they worked together for a whole year with the church (Acts 11:20-26). They taught a large company of people there. Antioch of Syria was the first place where others called Christ’s disciples, “Christians.”

In this church there were prophets and teachers. Barnabas and Saul were included in this group. Beside them were “Symeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the Tetrarch” (Acts 13:1). With a growing church rich in leadership we are not surprised that the Holy Spirit moved the group to set apart Barnabas and Saul for missionary work. We note how this was done: “Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off” (Acts 13:3).

What did the laying on of hands indicate in this situation? The symbol indicated that the church at Antioch was consecrating Paul and Barnabas for a new task, i.e. of doing missionary work in countries beyond them. It was not any ordination to ministry as we carry out ordination today. Paul and Barnabas had been in the ministry for some time. So from this incident we may conclude that the laying on of hands should be given to those who are veterans whenever they move to some new task or begin some new operation.

Ministries of Timothy himself.—After the Jerusalem Council Paul and Barnabas decided that they would return and see how their converts were doing, those who had become Christians during their first missionary journey. But a conflict arose between them as to whether or not they should take John Mark along. Barnabas wanted to give Mark another chance since he had turned back and did not finish the first campaign. Paul was unwilling, probably feeling that Mark was not yet ready for the rigors of such kinds of campaigns. So Paul and Barnabas parted. Barnabas took Mark and went one direction; Paul took Silas and went another.

When Paul and Silas came to Derbe and Lystra, they met a young disciple there named Timothy (Acts 16:1-3). Since his mother was a Jewish woman, but his father was a Greek, Paul had him circumcised so that as a Christian and a Jew he could be effective in working among Jews as well as Gentiles. Paul made Timothy a member of this evangelistic team—Paul, Silas, and Timothy (Acts 16:3). We see how active Timothy was on this journey. When Paul was sent away from Berea because of rising tensions, Timothy and Silas remained there to carry on the campaign (Acts 17:14). When Paul was in Athens, he sent
Timothy back to Thessalonica to establish the Christians in that city. Then when Timothy returned to Paul, he caused Paul to rejoice at the news of continued progress in the faith by the Thessalonians (I Thess. 3:2, 6). All of this seems to be background for Paul’s statement in II Timothy 1:6—”Hence I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands.” If the church at Antioch laid hands on Paul and Barnabas before they took up their missionary activity, then it would seem very likely that Paul would lay hands on Timothy when he joined the team and took up the task.

After Timothy had been working with Paul for a number of years, he got one of the most challenging assignments of his whole career. Paul asked Timothy to remain in Ephesus and set things in order there (I Timothy 1:3). He was to charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine. He gave Timothy specific instructions as to how to enroll widows into a care program for destitute widows—those who had no relatives to care for them (I Timothy 5:9-16). He was to watch specifically for godless chatter and the oppositions of the falsely called knowledge (I Timothy 6:20). He was to teach and exhort; he was to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith or faithfulness, love, endurance, considerateness (I Tim. 6:2, 11).

With such an assignment, one wonders how Timothy was prepared to stay in Ephesus and give himself to such a vast undertaking. One of Paul’s commands to Timothy may shed some light on how Timothy was prepared for his supervising work in Ephesus: “Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you through prophecy with the laying on of hands of the church council” (I Tim. 4:14). Again, Timothy was no novice. We do not know for sure where this church council met and laid hands on Timothy. But it is very unlikely that Paul is referring to some experience of 15 or more years earlier. Here was a new church council to take up the task, then he surely should not neglect the gift that came with his consecration to particular ministries. Ordination in this sense would not be for beginners or novices. (We, of course, may consecrate them also but not with the idea that this one consecration is to last for a whole lifetime!)

**LAIITY AND CLERGY: WHY THESE ARE COMPLEMENTARY**

In the history of the church a variety of views have been advocated concerning the distinctions between laity and clergy. For some the differences were slight, for others they were sharp, and for still others there was the attempt to obliterate all distinctions. I believe these two groups are complementary with necessary distinctions between them.

We need to observe some bold assertions of the New Testament. We are all people of God (I Pet. 2:9-10) who acknowledge Jesus as Messiah and Lord. Unlike the O. T. we are all priests (I Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10). We are all prophets and we are to strive to prophesy (Acts 2:17-18; I Cor. 14:1, 31, 39), We are all sons (Gal. 3:26). We are all part of the bride (Rev. 21:2, 9; 22:17). We are all called (Acts 2:39). We are all recipients of Christ’s gifts (I Cor. 1:4-6, 7-11, 27-31; Eph. 4:7-13; Rom. 12:3-8). These passages make male-female role distinctions of little or no consequences for Christian service by either laity or clergy. For those who have put on Christ for themselves, there is neither Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female because we are all one new humanity in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:27-28).

But we also need to observe that there is a distinction between laity and clergy. Although Paul worked and did not receive a regular allotted pay for his Christian ministry, he argues vigorously that those
who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel (I Cor. 9:14, see I Cor. 9:1-14). He spoke of himself as being called to a special office (Rom. 1:1; I Cor. 1:1). We have O.T. models for God’s special call for particular servants—Jeremiah (Jer. 1:4-10), Deborah as a Judge and a Prophet (Judges 2:16-19; 4:4-7). Certainly Timothy and Silas as well as others of Paul’s workers show also a distinctive call.

If we assume that ordination is for specific tasks, then it should be for those who have prepared themselves and are prepared by God to carry out these tasks. It should be for those who are called and gifted. It should be for those who get their living from the gospel. Again there are no sexual barriers. However, there must be consecration to God, and to the task that he calls the individual, before any group of Christians can consecrate the individual in a public ceremony. That such consecration might occur several times should be regarded as normal, not exceptional.

"You have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, but Christ is all, and in all. (Col. 3:10-11)

CBE PRESIDENT LEADS TOUR TO ASIA MINOR

by Terilynn Russ

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Pictures taken during "The Apostle Paul and the Women of Asia Minor" tour can help me to remember the trip to Turkey, yet not one of the three by five photos can compare with the magnificent images imprinted on my mind. The tour was a wonderful experience! Dr. Catherine Kroeger, former chaplain and religious lecturer at Hamilton College, is to be commended for her sacrificial labor in organizing the study tour.

The dynamics of the tour group are worth a story in itself. Twenty seven women and three men comprised the most fascinating composition of women-in-ministry pacesetters. They were professors, noted authors, archaeologists, worldwide evangelists, retired missionaries, and founders of Christians for Biblical Equality. Everyone seemed to have unusual histories and experiences. The relationships formed and the friends made during the Turkey adventure will be treasured for years.

During the first two days of the tour, we crammed in the sights of Istanbul. We toured the Sultan’s Topkapi Palace and his harem quarters. We touched two original candle holders that Florence Nightingale held as she walked the hospital halls at the Selimize Barracks during the Crimean War. The church of Saint Sophia was particularly unusual. The sanctuary was changed into a mosque by the Muslims centuries ago. While it is being restored today, St. Sophia may still reveal hidden secrets about the formative years of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Cappadocia is considered the location of one of the first Christian communities in Turkey. It’s the birthplace of Macrina and her brothers Basil and Gregory. The Christian Cappadocians literally lived in hollowed caves. Their churches are more advanced than stone-age dwellings, however. They are regal with columns and remnants of mural paintings that still tell the story of Jesus Christ and his followers. One of my greatest memories of the trip is when the tour group broke into a song of praise inside one of the cave churches. It was as if the echoes of generations of Christians before us joined in our praising of God.

Catalhoyuk was an interesting archaeological site despite its weathering and neglect. This ruin is nine thousand years old, which is a great deal older than any civilization in the United States. It was a society in which women appeared to be the ones with authority over the economic structure and the family. Idols of the ancient Mother goddesses were excavated here. Other goddesses of Asia Minor were Cybele, Aphrodite and Diana/Artemis.

The attraction of the Turkey tour was to walk where Paul walked. He spent a large portion of his life in what we today call Turkey. Here are some of the cities of Paul that we toured, by their biblical names: Iconium, Antioch of Syria, Attalaia, Perge and Tarsus. Seeing the geographical terrain of these areas made me realize what a true commitment Paul made to spread the good news. Though the people of Turkey are quite hospitable, the land certainly is not. Paul would