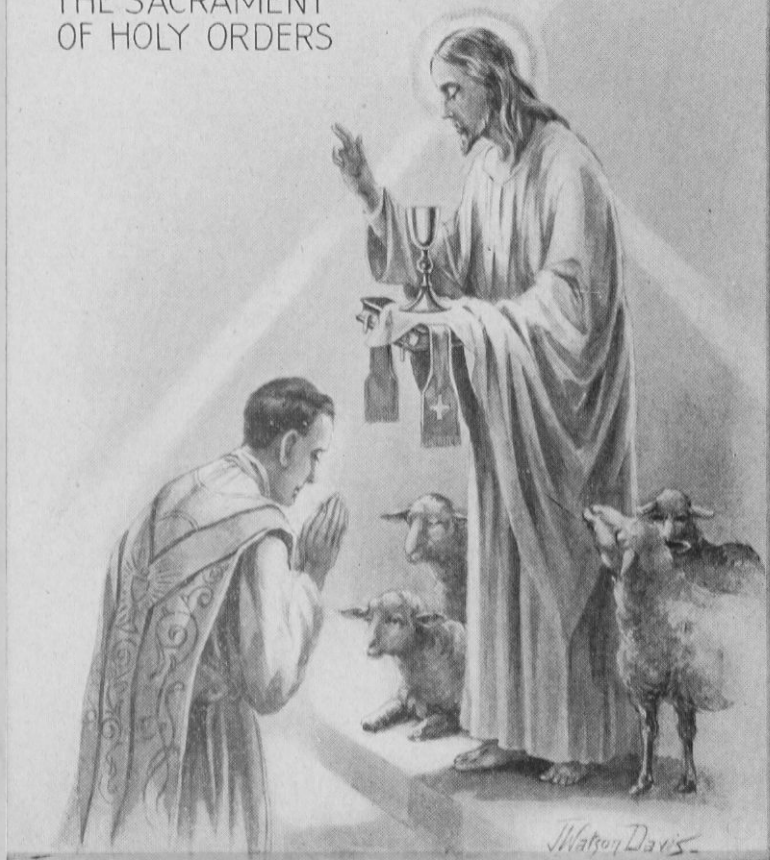
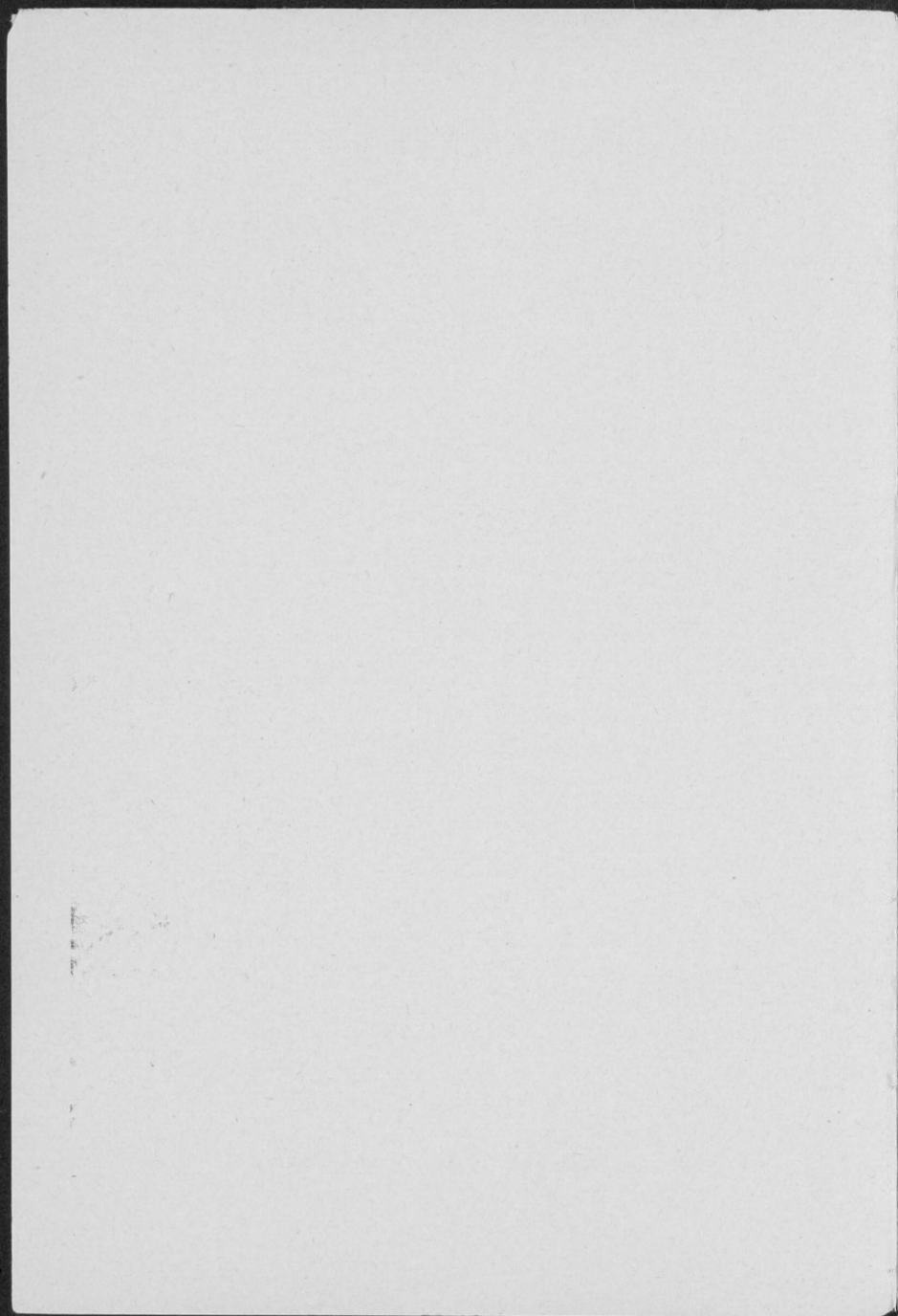


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SHEPHERDS OF CHRIST'S FLOCK

THE SACRAMENT
OF HOLY ORDERS





SHEPHERDS OF CHRIST'S FLOCK

The Sacrament of Holy Orders

With Study Club Outline

By

THE REV. FRANCIS J. CONNELL, C.S.S.R., S.T.D.



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I. THE CHRISTIAN PRIESTHOOD

THE obligation to practice religion rests not only on individuals but also on society. Men have recognized this obligation from the beginning of the world. Even in the most primitive times families and tribes assembled to give public worship to God. The acts of formal cult were generally performed by one individual in the name of the whole group, the essential feature of the religious functions being that unique act of divine worship known as sacrifice—the offering of a victim to the Most High and its slaying or destruction. Sometimes the head of the society discharged this duty. Thus, after the deluge Noe offered a sacrifice as the head of his family, the sole survivors of the human race (Genesis viii. 20); and Melchisedech, king of Salem, on the occasion of his meeting with Abraham, sacrificed bread and wine (Genesis xiv. 18). At other times the religious functionary was distinct from the head of the group. The traditional name for the person deputed to fulfill the obligation of public cult is *priest*. In general terms a priest can be defined as an intermediary between God and men, officially designated to bring to God from men homage and sacrifice, and to bring to men from God divine truth and blessings.

The Almighty Himself established the priesthood of the Jewish people, prescribing that this office should be held by the descendants of Aaron, the brother of Moses. To this latter the Most High also revealed the manner in which the various liturgical services, especially sacrifices, were to be performed by the Jewish priests. Because of their exalted dignity as the

legates of God, the priests were held in deep veneration by the Jews. However, in the designs of the Almighty the Jewish priesthood was to be superseded by another priesthood, established by the supreme priest, Jesus Christ.

As the God-Man, our Lord was peculiarly adapted to be a priest, an intermediary between God and man. He became a priest in His human nature at the very first moment of His existence as man in the womb of Mary. During His earthly life He performed many priestly functions. As the ambassador of the Most High He communicated to men the truths of divine revelation, He established those potent means of enriching human souls with divine grace, called sacraments. As the representative of all mankind He offered to God a sacrifice of infinite value, His own body and blood, immolated on the altar of the cross. Even now in heaven He continues to make intercession for us to His Father. The efficacy of His priesthood reaches to all mankind, for all receive grace from Calvary. As St. Paul says: "He (Christ) hath an everlasting priesthood, whereby He is able to save forever them that come to God by Him" (Hebrews vii. 24, 25).

Our Lord determined that He would convey the benefits of His priestly activity to souls through the instrumentality of a new priesthood, superior to that of the Old Law—a body of men, sharing in Christ's own priestly power and continuing His ministry in the world until the end of time. The first to be incorporated into this Christian priesthood were the apostles, the little band selected by our Saviour to accompany Him in His missionary labors, and to hear from His lips the truths of eternal life. To these men Christ imparted

extraordinary spiritual powers as He came near the end of His earthly sojourn. On the night before His death He gathered them about the supper-table, and after establishing the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist by changing bread and wine into His own body and blood, He gave them the power to effect the same marvelous change. And since this act of transubstantiation constituted the offering of His body and blood in sacrifice, and the offering of sacrifice is the chief priestly function, the words by which our Lord empowered the apostles to consecrate the Holy Eucharist—"Do this for a commemoration of Me"—marked the exact moment of the establishment of the Christian priesthood. On the first Easter Sunday, after His resurrection from the tomb, Christ informed the apostles that their priestly power extended to the forgiveness of sins, for He said to them: "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained" (John xx. 23). In the course of the forty days intervening between His resurrection and His ascension He conversed frequently with His first priests, instructing them in the duties of their ministry (Acts i. 3). His final words to them when He was about to ascend into heaven were a commission to exercise their priestly powers throughout the entire world, preaching and administering Baptism to all mankind (Matthew xxviii. 19).

Certainly, the view defended by Martin Luther, that Christ established no distinction in the Church between clergy and laity is utterly irreconcilable with the Scriptures. Not only the words of Christ just cited but also the historical account of the early Church clearly indicate that the apostles possessed sacred

powers elevating them above the other members of the Church—powers acknowledged and revered by the early Christians. Thus, only the apostles could administer the imposition of hands for the giving of the Holy Ghost, the ceremony which is known to us as Confirmation (Acts viii. 14—xix. 6). And St. Paul, referring to himself and the other apostles, says: "Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ and the dispensers of the mysteries of God" (1 Corinthians iv. 1).

Since Christ intended His Church to endure until the end of time, it is evident that He willed the priestly powers which He gave to the apostles to be passed on to other men. The apostles themselves realized this; and so we read that St. Paul communicated the same ministerial powers that he possessed to Timothy in Ephesus and to Titus in Crete. The ceremony by which this transmission of the priesthood was effected was the laying on of hands with a form of prayer, for the apostle admonished Timothy: "Neglect not the grace that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with imposition of the hands of the priesthood" (1 Timothy iv. 14). And it was understood that those on whom St. Paul had bestowed the priesthood would in turn impart it to other worthy men, for he counselled Timothy: "Impose not hands lightly on any man" (1 Timothy v. 22).

In the beginning all priests seem to have received the priestly power in its full measure, such as was given to the apostles by Christ. However, from the first part of the second century we find two clearly defined classes of priests in the Church. Those who possessed the fullness of the priesthood were called bish-

ops; those who had a limited measure of the priestly power, including the offering of sacrifice and the forgiving of sins, were called presbyters or simple priests. Only the former could communicate the priesthood to others. Another order of sacred ministers, known as deacons, was established by the apostles shortly after our Lord's ascension (Acts vi. 3-6). The functions of these were very limited; they could baptize and preach, but could not consecrate the Holy Eucharist. In the third century other grades of the ministry, inferior to that of deacons, made their appearance, such as the orders of subdeacon, reader, etc.

The ceremony by which men became deacons and priests continued to retain the rite mentioned by St. Paul—the imposition of hands with a suitable form of words—though in later centuries certain other rites were added, such as the giving of sacred vessels. This ceremony was recognized by the Church as a sacrament, an external rite established by Christ to confer grace. That this ceremony gives grace was clearly asserted by St. Paul; that it was established by Christ is implied in the fact that He willed to have a permanent priesthood in His Church, and consequently would have determined, at least in a general manner, the way in which it was to be perpetuated. This rite is known as the sacrament of Holy Orders. Whether this sacrament embraces the ordination to all the grades of the clerical state is not certain. Many theologians think that the subdiaconate and the inferior orders are of merely ecclesiastical origin, and that the rites by which these are conferred cannot be regarded as phases of the sacrament of Holy Orders. Other theologians believe that these orders are participations of the order

of the diaconate and that in their reception the sacrament is conferred in a limited measure. But at any rate, the ceremonies of ordination to the diaconate and the priesthood are of a sacramental nature.

In the Latin rite today there are eight orders. The minor orders are those of porter, reader, exorcist and acolyte. The major orders are those of subdeacon, deacon, priest and bishop. Before receiving the minor orders the candidate is given the clerical tonsure, which however is not an order but a ceremony instituted by the Church to mark the renunciation of the world and the acceptance of the clerical state. In most of the Oriental rites there are only five orders—the minor orders of reader and subdeacon, and the major orders of deacon, priest and bishop.

To understand precisely the nature of the clerical state it must be remembered that the powers which the apostles as bishops received from their divine Master and transmitted to their successors were of two kinds, known respectively as the power of jurisdiction and the power of orders. The power of jurisdiction comprises the right to teach the doctrines of the Christian faith authoritatively and the right to govern the members of the Church in spiritual matters. The power of orders extends to the administration of the sacraments, the offering of the eucharistic sacrifice and other similar spiritual functions. The power of jurisdiction resides in its fullness in the Pope, whose authority extends over the entire Church; diocesan bishops possess this power over the priests and people of their respective dioceses. Absolutely speaking, one not possessing the power of orders could have ecclesiastical jurisdiction—for example, a layman elected pope and

not yet ordained a priest or a bishop. The power of orders exists in its fullness in a bishop; and from this standpoint every bishop, including the pope, is equal. A priest possesses this power in a lesser degree; it exists in a much more limited measure in one ordained to the diaconate or a lower order. It is with the power of orders that we are concerned in this pamphlet.

Questions

1. How is the priesthood connected with the obligation of social worship? What are the chief functions of a priest?
2. How did the Jewish priesthood arise? How long was it destined to last?
3. What is to be noted about the origin and the efficacy of Christ's priesthood?
4. Whom did our Lord make the first priests of the Christian religion? What powers did he give them?
5. How do we know that the early Church recognized the distinction between the priests and the laity?
6. Why did Christ will the priestly powers to be transmitted to other men? How was this done?
7. When did the various orders of the clerical state arise?
8. How can we prove that the ceremony of ordination is a sacrament? Which ordination rites are surely sacramental? What are disputed?
9. What are the orders of the sacred ministry in the Latin rite? In the Oriental rites?
10. Explain the difference between the power of jurisdiction and the power of orders.

II. THE RITE OF ORDINATION

The ceremony of ordination is one of the most solemn and most beautiful functions of the Catholic Church. This is particularly the case when a general ordination is being conducted—that is, one in which all the orders up to the priesthood are conferred. And there is no church in the world in which this rite is more impressive than the basilica of St. John Lateran in Rome, the Pope's cathedral, in which on certain days of the year young men from every nation who have been studying in the Eternal City are promoted to the various ranks of the clerical state.

Let us imagine ourselves present at a general ordination in this majestic church on a Holy Saturday morning. The officiating prelate is a bishop, usually the Cardinal Vicar, who takes the Pope's place in the actual administration of the diocese of Rome. In the great sanctuary are hundreds of aspirants to the priesthood, their varied racial characteristics expressive of the universality of the Catholic Church. Those who are to receive the subdiaconate, diaconate or priesthood are vested in long white albs. The candidates for the minor orders wear surplices; those to be tonsured carry surplices on their arms. By the time the Mass begins, about 10 o'clock, they have already been in the church some three hours, assisting at the blessing of the new fire, the prophecies, the blessing of the baptismal water and the litany of all saints. During the litany those to receive major orders prostrated themselves before the altar in humble supplication for the graces which the worthy fulfillment of the clerical duties demands. Then the bishop, clad in white vestments, commences the Mass.

Before the *Gloria* the bishop seats himself on a chair placed on the platform of the altar, and those who are to receive the clerical tonsure stand before him, and each one, as his name is called, answers "*Adsum*"—that is, "Present." This calling of the candidates' names is repeated for each order, to make sure that only those authorized by ecclesiastical superiors may be ordained. After those to be tonsured have thus been identified, the bishop recites a prayer, asking that those who are about to take the first step in the clerical state may be freed from worldly aspirations and enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Then as each kneels before him the bishop cuts some hair from the candidate's head in five places, forming the sign of the cross. In the meantime the young man recites the scriptural verse, indicative of his renunciation of the world and whole-hearted consecration of his life to the service of God: "The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup; it is Thou that wilt restore my inheritance to me" (Psalm xv. 5). Afterwards the bishop invests each with the surplice, praying that he may be renewed in spirit, just as he is assuming a new clerical garb.

After the *Gloria* the bishop confers the minor orders of porter, reader, exorcist and acolyte. The ceremonies for each are similar. First, the bishop delivers an instruction on the duties of the particular order; then to each cleric he gives an object symbolic of the functions of the order, at the same time saying appropriate words; finally he pronounces a prayer for those who have received the order. The porter receives a key, the reader a book of sacred lessons (such as a breviary), the exorcist a book containing exorcisms

against unclean spirits, the acolyte an empty cruet and an unlighted candle in a candlestick. Those who have been tonsured may not receive any minor order on the same day, nor may a cleric receive all four minor orders on the same day. Usually they are conferred in pairs, several months apart.

The subdiaconate is given before the Epistle. Since this order brings with it the grave obligation of perpetual celibacy, the bishop reminds the candidates that they are still free to withdraw and to return to the world, and that they should approach to receive this order only if they are firmly resolved to live up to its duties. When they have testified their desire to become subdeacons by stepping forward, the bishop instructs them on the functions of the subdiaconate, then gives each an empty chalice and a paten, with the words: "See whose ministry is given to you; I admonish you, therefore, so to comport yourself as to please God." A priest completes the symbolism of the subdeacon's ministry by giving each a basin with cruets of wine and water and a towel. Then the bishop clothes them in the subdeacon's vestments, the amice, the maniple and the tunic, and finally hands each the book of Epistles, stating that he now is deputed to read them at Mass.

Somewhat similar are the ceremonies for the ordination of deacons, which takes place after the Epistle. However, before conferring this order he invites any of the congregation who may have reason to protest against their ordination to come forward and speak. The chief feature of the administration of the diaconate is the imposition of the bishop's hand on the head of each candidate, with a prayer to the Holy Ghost to

strengthen and sanctify those who are accepting this sacred office. The clerics are then invested in the stole and the dalmatic, and given the book of Gospels.

Ordination to the priesthood takes place before the Gospel. The deacons who are to be raised to this sublime dignity stand before the bishop, clad in albs and stoles, while he asks if any one wishes to object to their ordination. Some dignitary, such as a rector of a seminary, attests the worthiness of the candidates "as far as human frailty permits one to know." After two lengthy instructions the bishop places both his hands on the head of each, and all the priests present do the same. Priests as such cannot indeed ordain, but this ceremony signifies their willingness that the young clerics shall possess the same powers as they themselves. Then, with his hand still outstretched over the group, the bishop pronounces three prayers, imploring that the power and the grace of the priesthood may be lavished on them. Afterwards, he gives each the priestly vestments, crossing the stole on his breast,¹ and placing over his shoulders the chasuble, which however is partly folded in back. Then, while the "Come Holy Ghost" is sung, the bishop anoints the hands of each with blessed oil, and gives him a chalice with wine and a paten with an altar-bread, saying: "Receive the power to offer sacrifice to God and to celebrate Masses both for the living and for the dead, in the name of the Lord." The Mass is then resumed, and beginning with the Offertory the newly ordained priests celebrate the Holy Sacrifice with the bishop, saying the words simultaneously with him. After the

¹ Previously the cleric, as a deacon, wore the stole over the left shoulder, passing front and back to the right side.

Communion of the Mass, at which all those ordained receive the Holy Eucharist, the bishop completes the ordination ceremony of the priests. Laying his hands once more on the head of each, he says: "Receive the Holy Ghost. Whose sins thou shalt forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins thou shalt retain, they are retained." Then he unfolds the chasuble to its full extent, symbolizing that to the power to consecrate the Holy Eucharist has been added the power to forgive sins. Then the bishop embraces each of the new priests, welcoming him into the ranks of Christ's ambassadors.

The ceremony by which a priest becomes a bishop is called episcopal consecration. Generally three bishops officiate. One of them, called the consecrator, is the celebrant of the Mass, while the other two, called co-consecrators, participate in the essential rites whereby the candidate receives the fullness of the priesthood. The most important part of the ceremony takes place when the three bishops impose hands on the head of the bishop-elect, saying "Receive the Holy Ghost" and then recite a prayer, communicating the final degree of priestly power to the new bishop. His head is anointed with chrism, the book of Gospels is first placed on his shoulders and then given into his hands, and he receives the insignia of a bishop—the staff, the mitre, the ring and the gloves. He then celebrates Mass with the consecrator and toward the end of the ceremony goes through the church, bestowing his first episcopal blessing.

Some of the features of ordination have been established by the Church and are not essential requirements for the bestowal of the power of orders. Such.

for example, are the giving of the vestments and the anointing of the hands of the candidates for the priesthood. Others are certainly necessary for the valid conferring of orders, such as the giving of the instruments for minor orders and the imposition of hands for the priesthood. Others are the subjects of controversy among theologians. Thus, it is a mooted question whether the laying on of hands by the bishop and the accompanying words constitute the entire essence of the priestly ordination, or whether the giving of the sacred vessels is also essential. In fact, there is a deeper question at issue—whether Christ Himself determined the requisite elements of the sacrament of Holy Orders and prescribed that they should always be used, or instead deputed to the Church the right to determine the essential features of this sacrament and to change them when it would be deemed feasible. Those who defend the former view contend that only the imposition of hands with the words of the bishop constitute the ceremony of priestly ordination, for this rite alone has always been in use. The giving of the sacred vessels began only in the ninth century. However, those who believe that our Lord gave the Church some power in this matter teach that in the beginning the laying on of hands sufficed for the administration of this sacrament, but that later, through ecclesiastical determination, the giving of the chalice and paten with bread and wine became necessary. Both views are probable, and the question has not much practical bearing since bishops are always most exact in performing every portion of the sacred rite, whether essential or otherwise.

In most of the Oriental rites, both Catholic and

non-Catholic, the sacrament of Holy Orders is conferred only by the imposition of the bishop's hands, without the giving of any sacred vessels or other objects. Even the minor orders are administered in this manner. Of course, a formula of words accompanies the imposition of hands, to serve as the *form* of the sacrament. The clerical tonsure is given, not in a separate ceremony, but in conjunction with the first of the minor orders.

Questions

1. In what circumstances could one best observe the ceremonies of ordination? Who officiates at the conferring of orders?
2. How are the candidates for the various orders vested? What ceremonies precede the Mass on Holy Saturday?
3. In what manner is the clerical tonsure given?
4. Describe the conferring of minor orders. What is to be said of the reception of the tonsure and any minor order or the reception of all the minor orders on the same day?
5. Describe the ordination to the subdiaconate.
6. Describe the ordination to the diaconate.
7. Describe the ordination to the priesthood.
8. Describe the consecration of a bishop.
9. Name some of the ordination ceremonies that are certainly not essential to the conferring of orders. What are some disputed questions?
10. How does the rite of ordination in the Oriental Churches differ from that in the Latin Church?

III. THE POWER AND THE GRACE OF HOLY ORDERS

In general, the effects of Holy Orders are two—power and grace. The power enables the recipient to officiate as a minister of the Church and of Christ; the grace helps him to live up to the standard of holiness demanded by his sacred calling.

The Catholic Church teaches as an article of faith that the sacrament of Holy Orders imprints on the soul of the recipient a character—that is, a spiritual mark, or quality, that can never be erased. This character is a participation of the priestly power of Jesus Christ. As was stated above, the diaconate and the priesthood are certainly sacramental orders; and so it is certain that by the ordination rites of these two offices a character is bestowed. Since it is a matter of discussion whether or not the orders below the diaconate are sacramental grades, it is uncertain whether in the reception of these orders one receives a character. At any rate, it is commonly held by theologians that the characters imparted by different orders do not remain distinct on the soul but blend into one. Thus, a priest bears only one character on his soul, although he has received at least two sacramental rites, the diaconate and the priesthood.

Most present-day theologians hold that episcopal consecration is a sacramental order and increases the priestly character. The medieval theologians were inclined to hold that this ceremony is not a sacrament and that the priest's character does not differ intrinsi-

cally from that of the bishop, although in the case of the latter it comprises the power to perform extra sacred functions. At any rate, it is certain that a priest once validly ordained or a bishop once validly consecrated retains his priestly or episcopal power respectively, even though he may depart from the standard of virtue expected of him or even may leave the Church. For his power is joined to the character imprinted on his soul, and that character is indelible.

Through the reception of the tonsure a man becomes a cleric of the Church. By ecclesiastical law he is henceforth bound to wear clerical garb and also to keep the crown of his head shaven in a circular form. In the United States, however, clergymen are dispensed from this latter obligation in view of the fact that many of our fellow citizens are non-Catholics who would not understand this custom. The laws of the Church also uphold the respect due to a tonsured cleric by prescribing that any one who deliberately inflicts a grave physical injury on him shall incur the penalty of excommunication. Moreover, if a cleric is accused of any crime he has a right to be tried by an ecclesiastical, rather than a civil court. Of course, in a non-Catholic country this privilege would not be acknowledged.

Those in minor orders have certain tasks assigned to them, as their titles indicate; and in former centuries they fulfilled their functions regularly in the church. The porter stood at the door to see that only worthy and reliable persons entered, and rang the bell for services. The reader instructed the people in the doctrines of faith, especially the children. The exorcist commanded unclean spirits, in the name of the Church, to

leave the bodies of the possessed.² The acolyte rendered service around the altar, especially by lighting the candles and preparing the cruets of wine and water for Mass. In the early Church it was not unusual for men to remain in minor orders all their lives, faithfully performing the humble offices of their state. However, nowadays the Church allows a man to receive minor orders only on condition that he intends to advance to the priesthood.

The chief duty of the subdeacon is to assist the deacon at the solemn Mass, and to chant the Epistle. Another of his functions, mentioned explicitly in the ordination instruction, is to wash the corporals and altar linens. The deacon is empowered to assist the priest at the solemn Mass and to chant the Gospel. Moreover, for a good reason and with the proper permission the deacon may preach, give Holy Communion and administer solemn Baptism.

The powers of the priest are chiefly two—to consecrate bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ for the sacrifice of the Mass and the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, and to absolve the faithful from their sins in the sacrament of Penance. These two powers bear a certain relation to each other, in that the former implies authority over the *physical* body of Christ, the latter implies authority over His *mystical* body, the Church. To the priestly office also are annexed the power to administer Extreme Unction and the power to baptize solemnly. Finally, by a special act of delegation the Pope can empower a priest to administer

² Nowadays, the law of the Church dictates that only a priest, with the authorization of the bishop, may solemnly pronounce exorcisms.

Confirmation and to confer the minor orders and the subdiaconate.³

The bishop is superior in orders to the priest principally because he possesses the power to confirm and to ordain. These powers a bishop always retains, even though he may leave the Catholic Church. Accordingly, the bishops of the Oriental Churches which severed their connection with the Catholic Church in the eleventh century have maintained a true priesthood and episcopate in their communions by continuing to ordain priests and consecrate bishops with the proper rite. However, Catholics do not recognize as valid the priesthood and episcopate of the Anglican and Episcopalian Churches, because they are derived from the English bishops of the sixteenth century who did not intend to bestow the priesthood in the Christian sense, and who accordingly used an ordination ceremony from which essential elements were eliminated.

Besides spiritual powers, Holy Orders gives grace. Every sacramental order, when worthily received, gives the recipient an increase of sanctifying grace and also a special claim (known as sacramental grace) to the divine helps that he needs to lead a holy and zealous life in the sacred ministry. Even those orders which may not be sacramental impart to those who receive them the right to special graces in virtue of the Church's prayers; for the Church is constantly praying for the anointed ministers of the Lord. Indeed, the Ember seasons, observed four times a year, were instituted by the Church primarily as times of special fasting

³ Some theologians think that a simple priest can be delegated even to ordain to the diaconate; but the majority deny this. It is commonly admitted that not even the Pope could depute a priest to confer the priesthood.

and prayer to the end that God may provide the Church with worthy priests.

When a man receives the subdiaconate in the Latin Church he incurs the obligation of perpetual celibacy. Henceforth he is strictly forbidden to marry; if he should attempt to contract marriage, it would be null and void. If he should be so unfortunate as to commit a sin against the sixth or the ninth Commandment, it would have the added malice of a sin against the virtue of religion. However, celibacy in the clerical state has been established by the Church, not by God. In some of the Oriental Catholic rites one who is already married may receive the subdiaconate, diaconate and priesthood, and continue to live with his wife; but the entrance into marriage after the subdiaconate is forbidden, and bishops must be celibates. Moreover, it is well to note, even in the Latin Church a married man is sometimes allowed to receive Holy Orders, on condition that he and his wife agree to perpetual separation. But the Church rarely grants such a permission, and ordinarily it is stipulated that the wife shall enter a convent. There is no Church law forbidding a widower to receive Holy Orders, although one who has been married twice must receive a special dispensation before entering the clerical state.

The obligation of celibacy began about the fourth century, being imposed first by local ecclesiastical councils, then by the universal law of the Church. In certain parts of Europe in the Middle Ages the observance of this law was somewhat relaxed; but zealous popes, like Gregory VII, vigorously legislated for its maintenance. Some non-Catholic historians gravely exaggerate the medieval abuses against clerical celi-

bacy, and it is well to remember the words of an outstanding scholar of recent times, Professor Henry S. Lucas, of the University of Washington. Speaking of the charges of clerical laxity at the time of the Reformation, he says: "The student should guard against sweeping generalizations, for there was a vast body of pure and devoted priests who sacrificed their lives in the service of the Church" (*The Renaissance and the Reformation*, p. 149).

There are many excellent reasons for clerical celibacy. Free from family cares priests can devote themselves more wholeheartedly to the work of the ministry, and risk their health and their lives more readily in the care of the sick. Above all, they are less hampered than married men with earthly affections, and so can render a more loving service and a more ardent devotion to the Most High. The divine Priest, Jesus Christ, led a celibate life, and gave a miraculous approbation to the state of virginity by His birth from a virgin mother. The priest realizes indeed that he has renounced many joys by embracing a celibate life; but he has done so with perfect freedom only after years of prayerful deliberation, and he undertakes this obligation with the conviction that it will make his ministry more spiritual and more effective.

The subdiaconate also brings another obligation—the duty of reciting daily the divine Office, or canonical hours—sometimes called the breviary, from the book in which these prayers are compiled. The Office is composed mainly of readings from the Bible, selections from the Fathers of the Church and the lives of the Saints. These constitute the official prayer of the Church, and even when the priest recites the Office

privately he is acting in his public capacity as a minister of the Church. Hence, he recites these prayers in an external fashion, vocalizing the words with his lips and tongue. In some of the greater churches of the Catholic world, especially in the cathedrals of Europe, a group of priests, called canons, daily recite the divine Office aloud in common, and the same custom is observed by certain religious orders, such as the Benedictines and the Dominicans.

Questions

1. What, in general, are the effects of Holy Orders? Explain the sacramental character. Which orders certainly give a character? In regard to which is this a matter of uncertainty? What is the relation between the character and the sacred power of the priest and the bishop?
2. What are the privileges and the obligations of one who has received the clerical tonsure?
3. Explain the duties of those in minor orders. How did the custom of the early Church in reference to the reception of these orders differ from present-day ecclesiastical legislation?
4. What are the functions of subdeacons and deacons?
5. What are the powers of the priest by virtue of his office? What powers can be delegated to a priest by the pope?
6. In what respect is a bishop superior to a priest in the power of orders? Why are the ordinations performed by the Oriental non-Catholic bishops valid? Why are those performed by Anglican or Episcopalian bishops invalid?

7. What graces are given by Holy Orders? When should Catholics pray in a special manner that God may provide the Church with worthy priests?
8. Explain the obligation of clerical celibacy in force in the Latin Church. What different legislation prevails for the clergy of some of the Oriental rites?
9. Give a brief account of the history of clerical celibacy. What are the reasons for celibacy?
10. Explain the meaning of the divine Office. How is it composed? How must it be recited?

IV. WHO CAN BECOME A PRIEST?

Only one who is baptized can receive Holy Orders, for by divine legislation Baptism must precede the valid reception of any other sacrament. Furthermore, only a male can receive Holy Orders. That women cannot be admitted to the ranks of the clergy is implied by St. Paul, when he says: "Let women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted them to speak, but to be subject" (1 Corinthians xiv. 34). The constant tradition and practice of the Church confirm this. In the third century certain heretical sects allowed women to receive the priesthood, but the Church vigorously condemned this practice and declared that such ordinations are null and void. In recent years some of the Protestant denominations are admitting women to the ministry, but this can never take place in the Catholic Church. There was indeed an order of deaconesses in the early centuries, but these women, while they performed corporal and spiritual services for the faithful, such as caring for the sick and instructing converts, were never regarded as members of the clergy.

Since it is a most sublime privilege to minister at God's altar, the Church is most solicitous that only men worthy of this dignity shall receive Holy Orders. Thus, the Church rules that those shall be excluded from the clerical state who come under certain impediments, technically called irregularities. Some of these imply no guilt on the part of the individual concerned, but would render him incapable of performing the functions of the ministry, such as blindness or the

lack of a hand, or would bring some dishonor on the clerical state, such as the fact that one was born out of wedlock or had served as an executioner. Other irregularities arise from the commission of a grave crime, such as apostasy from the Catholic faith or murder. Even after one has received the forgiveness of his sins, the irregularity still remains. However, the Church for a good reason will sometimes dispense from an irregularity, especially if it is not culpable, provided there is a good reason for such a dispensation.

As maturity of judgment is a requisite for the sacred ministry, involving as it does many grave responsibilities, the law of the Church prescribes as the minimum age for the subdiaconate twenty-one years, for the diaconate twenty-two years, for the priesthood twenty-four years, and for the episcopate thirty years. Dispensations are sometimes granted from this legislation, especially when a young man has completed the required course of studies for the priesthood and lacks only a few weeks or a few months of the prescribed age.⁴ It is important to note that these laws refer only to the *legitimate*, not the *valid*, reception of Holy Orders. Even a little boy who had not yet come to the age of reason could be validly ordained; and a custom of this nature is not infrequent among some of the Eastern non-Catholic Churches.

The priest must be equipped with learning suitable

⁴ The present legislation regarding the age required for the various orders dates from the Council of Trent, held in the sixteenth century. However, even after the passing of this law, its rulings were not observed very exactly in some of the European countries. Thus, Cardinal Richelieu was only twenty-one years old when he was consecrated a bishop, and St. Vincent de Paul seems to have been only nineteen when he was raised to the priesthood.

to his state; and so the Church insists that before receiving the priesthood a man must study philosophy, theology, sacred scripture, canon law, Church history, and various other ecclesiastical subjects for at least six years. Moreover, this presupposes that he has completed a high school and junior college course. Clerical studies are usually made in an institution especially adapted to the preparation of candidates for the priesthood, called a seminary. Besides acquiring the suitable knowledge for the clerical state, seminarians are expected to make progress in virtue, and are supervised and directed by prudent and edifying priests. During his years in the seminary a young man can study and test his own character and motives, and find out whether or not he is fitted for the priesthood and whether he is willing to undertake the arduous tasks of the ministry. If he decides that it is better for him not to advance to the clerical state, he is always free to leave the seminary. If he determines to receive Holy Orders, he is given the tonsure and the minor orders during his third or fourth year. Usually the cleric is ordained a subdeacon at the end of his fifth year, a deacon several months later, and a priest at the end of his sixth and final year of study.

The choice of bishops rests with the Pope; and the sovereign pontiff appoints a priest to the exalted dignity of the episcopate only after lengthy deliberation. The official notification is contained in a document called a bull, which designates the episcopal see consigned to the candidate and authorizes him to receive episcopal consecration from any three Catholic bishops he may select. In countries where there are few bish-

ops permission is sometimes given to a bishop-elect to be consecrated by two bishops or even by only one. A priest appointed to the episcopate is supposed to be consecrated within three months. A residential bishop is one who has his abode in the city from which he derives his title—such as the archbishop of New York, the bishop of Brooklyn. A titular bishop is one assigned to a post in some place different from the see to which he is named. For example, an auxiliary bishop for a large diocese, such as New York, receives as his official see some city in Northern Africa or Asia Minor, where Catholicity once flourished, but where there are not enough Catholics now to warrant a regularly organized hierarchy. Now, although this city furnishes his episcopal title, his ministry is exercised not there, but in the diocese whose bishop he assists.

We often hear the expression "a vocation to the priesthood." Does this mean that God chooses only a few boys whom He wishes to be priests and to them alone imparts the requisite abilities and graces? This is the idea of a priestly vocation proposed by some theologians and spiritual writers. Others, however, attribute more concurrence to the individuals themselves. They believe that the Almighty has endowed many boys with the requirements for the priesthood, and any one of them can be said to have a vocation if he himself is willing to give his life unselfishly to the work of the ministry and to practice the virtues required of a priest. However, it must always be remembered that the priesthood is directed to the benefit of the Church rather than of the priest himself, and so no man, however holy or talented he may be, or however ardently

he may desire the priesthood, receives the final element of a priestly vocation until he has been invited to receive Holy Orders by an official of the Church—that is, a bishop or, in the case of a religious, his superior.

The practical solution of the question of vocation is this: Any boy or man who desires to be a priest and feels that he has the necessary qualifications should pray fervently and frequently to the Almighty that he may reach this goal; and if it is conducive to God's glory and to his own spiritual advantage, divine Providence will open the way to him. He should, moreover, seek the advice of a pious and experienced priest.

The priestly life, whether it be in the ranks of the secular clergy or in a religious order, demands great self-sacrifice. The priest must renounce many things that lay persons can lawfully enjoy; he must be prepared to minister to the spiritual needs of his people without regard to his own convenience, sometimes even at the risk of his life. At times the priest must submit to insults and calumnies and ill-treatment, even from those for whom he is laboring. But as Christ's representative and ambassador, he must be willing to endure these sufferings in imitation of Christ Himself who endured the death of the cross in fulfillment of His priestly ministry.

However, the priest has joys to compensate his sorrows. It is a source of great happiness to a good priest to prepare innocent children for their first Communion, to bring sinners back to God, to soothe the last hours of the dying. It is most encouraging to receive the affection of simple, devout Catholics. Above

all, it is a constant joy for the priest to ascend the altar each morning to renew the sacrifice of Calvary and to commune heart to heart with Christ. Whatever trials the priest may have to undergo, he knows that our Lord is ever at his side, to comfort and to strengthen him. He has the assurance that the cause for which he is laboring will triumph in the end. Even though his individual efforts in the ministry may result in failure, the Church and the priesthood will endure forever, for it was to the Church and its priests that Christ gave the consoling promise: "Behold, I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world" (Matthew xxviii. 20).

Some of those who read this pamphlet are doubtless boys or men preparing for the priesthood. My advice to them is that they strive most diligently to attain to the highest possible measure of priestly virtue and of priestly learning. No preparation can be too great for the exalted office of a shepherd of Christ's flock. Above all, aspirants to the priesthood should remember that devotion to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament is the chief aid to priestly holiness and the principal source of priestly zeal and efficiency. And those readers of this little treatise who are destined to pass their life among the lay members of the Church should remember their duties toward their priests and especially their bishops—to respect their sacred character, to heed their admonitions and teachings, to cooperate actively with their labors for the spread of God's Kingdom. The laity, too, should not fail to pray often that God may enrich His Church with an abundance of learned and pious priests and bishops.

Questions

1. Why can only a baptized person receive Holy Orders? Why can only a male be ordained?
2. Why has the Church established impediments to the clerical state? Give some examples of such impediments.
3. What age is required for the various major orders? What of the ordination of infants?
4. Describe the preparation for the priesthood in a seminary.
5. How are bishops selected? How is a bishop-elect notified? Explain the difference between a residential bishop and a titular bishop.
6. What is meant by a vocation to the priesthood?
7. What is the practical solution for a boy who wishes to be a priest?
8. What are some of the difficulties of the priestly life?
9. What are some of the joys of the priest?
10. What are the duties of those preparing for the priesthood? What are the duties of the laity toward their priests?



