

The degrees of the sacrament of Holy Orders and their liturgical functions
The development of the rite of ordination and the liturgical functions of the various degrees

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Introduction

‘The liturgy of ordinations must be revised in terms of both rite and text,’ stated the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (SC 76). This revision—or rather, reorganisation—culminated in the *motu proprio* **Ministeria quaedam** of 15 August 1972, which, as its title states, ‘reorganises the discipline concerning tonsure, minor orders and the subdiaconate in the Latin Church’. With this declaration, Paul VI ‘effectively set in motion a process of re-examination of the tradition that had governed the practice of ordinations in the Latin Church for over a thousand years’.² Prior to this, the innovations concerning the ordinations of bishops, priests and deacons had been published and promulgated in conjunction with the Apostolic Constitution **Pontificalis Romani recognitio** of 18 June 1968. This reform brought about a profound change in the history of ordinations in the Latin Church, which now requires “a different way of speaking about the sacrament of Holy Orders”³ than had been the case until then.

Until this revision, undertaken in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, the Roman liturgy recognised ‘eight hierarchical degrees’.⁴ The following discussion will focus on their historical development and their liturgical function. First of all, it is necessary to provide a historical overview of its development, which will inevitably remain incomplete. Secondly, we shall examine the liturgical functions of the various degrees of the order.

1. Historical Overview

Although the establishment of the priesthood refers to Christ Himself, who gave it ‘the power, the mission, the direction and the purpose’⁵, its form is nevertheless subject to historical development. Only those degrees of the order that are named in the New Testament can have a sacramental character.

¹ Lecture delivered at the 6th CIEL symposium, in Versailles, on Thursday 9 November 2000.

² B. Kleinheyer, ‘Ordinationen und Beauftragungen’, in: B. Kleinheyer, E. v. Severus, R. Kaczynski, **Sacramentliche Feiern II** (= **Gottesdienst der Kirche**, Part 8), Regensburg 1984, 61.

³ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴ P. du Puniet, **Das Römische Pontificale, Geschichte und Kommentar**, Vol. 1, Klosterneuburg 1935, 104. Most authors recognised only seven degrees of Holy Orders, as the sacramental nature of the episcopate was debatable. The Second Vatican Council reached a definitive decision on this matter: ‘The Sacred Synod teaches that, through episcopal consecration, the fullness of the sacrament of Holy Orders is conferred.’ (LG 21).

⁵ CCC (= Catechism of the Catholic Church), no. 874.

1.1. The New Testament

A look at the New Testament reveals a multitude of tasks and ministries.⁶ Alongside the Twelve and St Paul, there are apostles, teachers and prophets (cf. 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 2:20; 3:5; 2 Tim 1:11; 1 Tim 2:7; Acts 13:1), but also **leaders** (Latin: *praepositores*) (cf. Heb 13:7, 17, 24; 1 Thess 5:12), and evangelists (cf. Acts 21:8; 2 Tim 4:5). These titles resurfaced from time to time even in post-apostolic times, but gradually disappeared.

Alongside these 'charismatic ministries through which the Holy Spirit provided for the needs of the early Church in an extraordinary way'⁷, Scripture already mentions bishops (Acts 10:28; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:7–9), presbyters (Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1, 5; 2 John 1; 3 John 1; 1 Tim 5:17; 4:14; Titus 1:5; Acts 14:23; 20:17) as well as *deacons*⁸ (1 Tim 3:8–13; Phil 1:1). It would appear that, originally, the titles 'bishop' and 'presbyter' referred to the same ministry. They were ordained through the laying on of hands and prayer. Their functions were not yet clearly definable at that time.

From this multitude of ministries, a three-tiered order very quickly developed. At the beginning of the 2nd century, St Ignatius of Antioch attests to the ministries of bishop, priest and deacon. From that time onwards, they are found in all the Churches and are to be regarded as sacramental orders.

2. The development of the lower sacramental orders

Alongside the sacramental ministries, other ranks of the order very quickly emerged, probably due to the growth of parishes. Hippolytus's Church Order (c. 215) recognises, alongside the ordinations of bishops, priests and deacons (Tr Ap 2–4; 7–8), the establishment of witnesses, widows, readers, virgins, sub-deacons and bearers of sacred gifts (Tr Ap 9–14). The same duties and ministries are found in the third prayer of the *Orationes sollemnes*⁹ for Good Friday: '*Oremus et pro omnibus episcopis, presbyteris, diaconibus, subdiaconibus, acolythis, exorcistis, lectoribus, ostiariis, confessoribus, virginibus, viduis*'.¹⁰

⁶ On the issue of offices in the New Testament, see: R. M. Hübner, **Die Anfänge von Diakonat, Presbyterat und Episkopat in der frühen Kirche**, in: A. Rauch and P. Imhof (eds.), **Das Priestertum der Einen Kirche. Diaconate, Priesthood and Episcopate**, Aschaffenburg 1987, 45–89; K. Gamber, 'The New Testament Prophets: An Inquiry into Their Liturgical Ministry', in: A. Rauch and P. Imhof, op. cit., 128–135.

⁷ V. Thalhöfer, **Handbook of Catholic Liturgy**, Vol. 2, Freiburg 1912, 399.

⁸ The Seven (Acts 6:1–6) were probably not deacons but presbyters of the Christians of pagan origin in Jerusalem.

⁹ MR 1962.

¹⁰ On the question of the ordination of women in early Christian times, see: B. Kleinheyer, 'On the Ordination of Women in the Early Church', in: B. Kleinheyer – E. v. Severus – R. Kaczynski, *Sacramental Celebrations II*, Regensburg 1984, 17–18.

Here, Hippolytus draws a clear distinction between the episcopate, the presbyterate and the diaconate on the one hand, and on the other hand those ministries which, he says, do not receive the laying on of hands and are not ordained.

The letter from Pope Cornelius (251–253) to Fabius of Antioch is an important source concerning the ranks of the Roman Church. According to this letter, there was ‘one bishop..., 46 presbyters, 7 deacons, 7 sub-deacons, 42 acolytes, 52 exorcists, lectors and ostiarii’. ¹¹ The deacons, subdeacons and acolytes were assigned to the seven regions of Rome, whilst the exorcists, lectors and ostiarii were apparently independent of Rome’s regions.

The ranks of the minor orders represented both permanent ministries and stages of probation prior to advancement to a higher rank. The ideal was to have completed the entire *cursus honorum*, although ordinations *per saltem* had always existed. Thus, most bishops of the 6th–8th centuries had been deacons prior to their consecration as bishops; St Ambrose was likely ordained directly as a bishop following his election and baptism.

In summary, it can be said that from the first half of the 3rd century onwards, the Roman Church recognised all the orders ^{s12} as they existed until the reform of Paul VI, whilst the *Clemens Romanus* mentions only bishops, priests and Levites (deacons). The non-sacramental orders were established for practical reasons .¹³

2.1. The sacramental rites

Having examined the development of the degrees of Roman ordination, we must now turn our attention to the liturgy of ordination. The development of the liturgy of ordination can be divided into three periods: the ordination rite from late antiquity to the early Middle Ages, the Romano-Frankish rites, and finally the development leading up to the *Pontificale Romanum* of 1596.

2.1.1. The ancient Roman rite

The sources for the ancient Roman ordination liturgy are found primarily in the *ordines* of the Roman consecration and the sacramentaries of the city of Rome. To some extent, their origins can be traced back to the 5th century; in any case, it is certain that the ritual was fully established in the time of Gregory the Great (d. 604).

¹¹ Eusebius, Church History 6, 43. 11.

¹² The Eastern Churches have, in part, established different degrees of the order: the Byzantines: reader or cantor, subdeacon, deacon; the Copts: reader, subdeacon, deacon; the Ethiopians: subdeacon, deacon; the Syrians: cantor, reader, subdeacon, deacon; the Eastern Syrians: reader, subdeacon, deacon; the Armenians: ostiarius, reader, exorcist, acolyte, subdeacon, deacon.

¹³ By the 12th century, the offices of ostiarius and exorcist were no longer conferred, as these ranks were no longer necessary. On the other hand, new offices were created for new tasks; thus, in the time of Gregory the Great, the defenders and notaries were established.

Since the **Traditio Apostolica**, bishops have been consecrated on Sundays; the feasts of the Apostles were not added until the 10th century. At least until the time of Leo I (440–461) in Rome, priests and deacons were also ordained on Sundays; since Gelasius I (492–496), they have been ordained during the Vigil Mass on Saturdays of the Four Seasons and on the Saturday of *Sitientes*.¹⁴ For ordinations to the minor orders, there is no fixed date.

The prayers for the consecration of bishops and the ordinations of priests and deacons are recorded in the Veronese Sacramentary and the *Gregorianum*, but they date from the time of Leo the Great; they may even be older. They were probably composed by the same author, as all three reflect the same understanding of the order. Unfortunately, it is difficult for us to examine their content in detail, so we shall confine ourselves to the broad outlines of the rites of ordination.

2.1.1.1. The consecration of bishops

In Rome, a distinction is made between the consecration of the Roman Pope and that of non-Roman bishops. The Pope's consecration takes place in St Peter's. Immediately after the *Kyrie*, the Bishop of Albano recites the first *Adesto* prayer, followed by the Bishop of Porto reciting the *Propitiare*. Next, two deacons hold the open Gospel above the head of the elect, and the Bishop of Ostia recites the consecration prayer whilst laying his hands upon him. The archdeacon then vest the new Pope with the pallium. The Pope ascends to his throne, exchanges the kiss of peace with all the bishops, intones the *Gloria* and celebrates Mass.

When the Pope consecrates a new bishop, this takes place between the Gradual and the *Alleluia*. Although Canon 4 of the Council of Nicaea required the laying on of hands by at least three bishops, since the 6th century only the Pope has laid his hands on the candidate: '*Ut unus episcopus episcopum non ordinet, excepta Ecclesia Romana*'.¹⁵ After the consecration prayer, the Pope exchanges the kiss of peace with the new bishop, who then exchanges it with the other bishops. For the remainder of the celebration, the newly ordained bishop takes the foremost place amongst the bishops. He receives Holy Communion from the Pope's hands and keeps a portion of it, so that he may receive Communion for 40 days. The new bishop then distributes Holy Communion after receiving instructions from the Pope.

2.1.1.2. The ordination of priests and deacons

The ordination of priests and deacons also takes place after the (final) gradual. The Pope calls the candidates forward and announces their title of ordination: '*Talis presbyter, regionis tertiae, titulo tale, Ille*'.¹⁶ The candidates are then vested in the dalmatic or the *planeta*. After the litanies that follow, the

¹⁴ As the Mass of the Four Seasons did not begin until late in the day, ordinations were always celebrated on Sundays, *a vespera ad vesperam*. Thus, the *Decretum Gratianum* (Part I, Dist. 75, c. 4) quotes Leo the Great: 'Ordination must never be conferred on the candidates except on the day of the Lord's Resurrection, which begins on Saturday evening.'

¹⁵ Canon 6 of the **Breviatio Canonum Ferrandi**: PL 67, 949.

¹⁶ Or 39, n. 19. Andrieu OR IV, 284.

The Pope lays his hands on each one and recites the prayer of ordination. He gives them the kiss of peace, which they then exchange – deacons with deacons, priests with priests. After their ordination, the deacons take their places beside the bishop, whilst the priests take the foremost place amongst the priests. The newly ordained take part in the Mass according to their new office (*secundum officium suum*). This means that one of the new deacons will sing the Gospel and that the new priests will take part in the Offertory. The priests will set aside a portion of the Eucharist to receive communion over the course of eight days.

The rites of ordination for the three higher orders are characterised by a strong parallelism: selection of candidates by the clergy, affirmation by the faithful, the examination of ordination a few days before the ceremony, a common litany, the laying on of hands, the prayer of consecration and participation in Mass '*secundum ordinem suum*'. The rites are structured in a clear and transparent manner, and the laying on of hands, together with the prayer of consecration, form the centre of the celebration.

2.1.1.3. Minor orders

The situation is different for the minor orders. Only lectors, acolytes and subdeacons are now ordained. The ordination itself is very brief and simple.

The lector is ordained as a boy; he must read one of the lessons from the night vigils and, if he passes his examination, the Pope blesses him with the words '*Intercedente beato Petro principe apostolorum et sancto Paulo vase electionis, salvet et protegat et eruditam linguam tribuat tibi Dominus*'.¹⁷ Everyone responds 'Amen', '*and from that time forth he shall be a lector in the Church*'.

The ordinations of acolytes and subdeacons are similar. They take place during the celebration of Mass, whilst Communion is being distributed. Candidates for the office of acolyte are clothed in the chasuble and presented to the bishop, who hands them the *sacculum*, which they will use to carry Holy Communion to the sick, and which is used during the breaking of the host at Mass; they take the *sacculum*, their hands covered by the chasuble, and prostrate themselves on the ground. The bishop says: '*Through the intercession of the blessed and glorious, ever-virgin Mary and the blessed Apostle Peter, may the Lord save and protect you. And from this day forth, you shall be an acolyte*'.¹⁸

The ordination of subdeacons takes place immediately afterwards. Having sworn that there is no impediment to their ordination, the archdeacon hands them the chalice. They then prostrate themselves on the ground, and the bishop pronounces the same formula over them as he did over the acolytes earlier. This demonstrates that the office of subdeacon likely evolved from that of acolyte: subdeacons being the foremost among the acolytes.

¹⁷ May the Lord bless and protect you; may He grant you a clear voice as you recite the prayer of the blessed Apostle Peter and of Saint Paul, the chosen vessel.

¹⁸ May the Lord, through the intercession of the blessed and glorious, ever-Virgin Mary and of the blessed Apostle Peter, keep and protect you.

These rites of ordination from ancient Rome were maintained until the end of the 9th century. They are notable for their clarity and their focus on the act of ordination, as well as for the clear distinction between sacramental and non-sacramental ordinations.

2.1.2. The Romano-Frankish rite

In the West, alongside the Roman rites, there were ancient Gallican rites of ordination, each consisting of three formulas. Following the introduction of Roman liturgical books from beyond the Alps (from the early 8th century onwards), the rites of ordination became blended. This development culminated in the *Pontificale Romano-Germanicum*, around 955.

It is characteristic that certain elements of the preparation for ordination were incorporated into the celebration itself, and that new, non-Roman rites were integrated and given greater prominence than the original rite.

2.1.2.1. The consecration of bishops

During the consecration of a bishop, the examination—which originally took place the day before—is included in the celebration after the Collect. A paragraph has been added to the prayer of consecration. Instead of two deacons, two bishops now hold the Gospel Book, which is now placed on the candidate's nape and shoulders rather than above his head. The anointings, taken from the Gallican liturgy, have been added. The consecrator interrupts the consecration prayer after the words '*caelestis unguente rore sanctifica*', pours the Holy Chrism onto the head of the candidate and recites an explanatory formula.

This interruption divides the consecratory prayer into two parts, and the anointing becomes the pre-eminent sign of the bishop's consecration. The anointing of the hands is also incorporated into the rite, in addition to the anointing of the thumb, which is used for the chrismation at Confirmation. The blessing, as well as the presentation of the insignia—the crosier and the ring—are also new elements.

2.1.2.2. The ordination of priests

The ordination of priests follows a similar pattern: the bishop begins by enquiring as to the candidate's suitability, after which the prayer **Deus sanctificationum** from the **Missale Francorum** is recited. This is followed by the vesting, which the ordaining bishop now performs personally, then the anointing of the hands and the presentation of the offerings on the paten and in the chalice, accompanied by the appropriate formulas.

Whilst the Roman prayer of ordination presents the new priest primarily as a member of the presbyterate and a collaborator with the bishop, the new rites are primarily intended to present him as a celebrant of Mass: he is vested in liturgical vestments and his hands are consecrated to receive the chalice: '*Accipe potestatem offerre sacrificium Deo tam pro vivis quam pro defunctis.*' '

The new vow of obedience derives from a presbyteral oath in Old High German, which in turn originated from a serf's oath to his lord. The celebration concludes with the final blessing: '*... ut sitis benedicti in ordine sacerdotali et offeratis placabiles hostias.*'

2.1.2.3. The ordination of deacons

For the ordination of deacons, the innovations consist mainly in the donning of the dalmatic and the presentation of the Gospel book.

2.1.2.4. The Romano-Frankish liturgy of minor orders

The liturgy of the minor orders, too, has been considerably modified. For this, the Gallican custom is adopted in its entirety. The ordinations of ostiarii and exorcists, long abandoned in Rome, are reintroduced. For all orders, there is a single rite during which the instruments specific to each order are presented: to the ostiarius, the keys to the church; to the lector, the lectionary; to the exorcist, the manual of exorcisms; to the acolyte, the candelabrum and the empty cruets; and to the subdeacon, the empty chalice and paten, as well as the cruets.

The combination of these two distinct, yet self-contained, formulas is characteristic of this period of fusion between the Roman and Frankish ordination liturgies. This leads to a duplication of the ordination prayers. Added to this are the anointings and the presentation of the various instruments, which take on greater significance than the sacramental laying on of hands accompanied by the ordination prayer. The presentation of the instruments was ultimately even regarded as the essential rite of ordinations. Particularly serious was the fact that the moment of the laying on of hands was misplaced during the ordination of priests and the consecration of bishops. For priests, it follows immediately after the litanies; it is therefore separated from the prayer of ordination by the invitation to prayer '*Oremus, fratres carissimi*' and the concluding prayer of the litanies, '*Exaudi*'. For bishops, it is separated from the consecration prayer by the closing prayer of the litanies, whilst the consecration prayer itself is interrupted by the anointing of the head and the accompanying formula.

2.1.3. Development leading up to the *Pontificale Romanum* of 1596

In the centuries that followed, there were no further significant changes. From around 1200, concelebration at the consecration of bishops is attested: 'The (newly) consecrated bishop, who is to concelebrate with the officiant, approaches the right-hand corner of the altar'.¹⁹

¹⁹ Andrieu PR II, 365.

For newly ordained priests, the rubric is more restrained: they take their places at the sides of the altar '*et dicunt totum submissa voce, sicut si celebrent*'.²⁰

The new bishop and the new priests receive the Body of Christ from the bishop's hands and the chalice from the deacon's hands.

Since the end of the 12th century, the office of subdeacon has been regarded as a higher order, but the ritual remains, for the time being, that of a minor order. Gradually, the presentation of the maniple and the tunic is added, followed by the litanies and, finally, the concluding admonition *Filii dilectissimi*.

Other additions date back to the Pontifical of Durand of Mende (d. 1289), such as the monitions in which the various duties of the different orders are detailed. 'Until then, the pontificals merely set out the functions of each order, and the bishop would improvise a catechesis based on this outline: " ".²¹

Another innovation is that newly ordained priests no longer receive Communion from the chalice during their ordination Mass.

Explanatory words are added during the laying on of hands, and the '*Veni Creator*' is sung during the anointing of bishops and priests, which further distinguishes the two parts of the prayer for a bishop's consecration.

Durand introduced further rites: for bishops, the blessing and conferral of the mitre and gloves, enthronement even outside the cathedral, and the '*Te Deum*'. For the ordination of priests, the '*Iam non dicam*' responsory, the '*Credo*', a second laying on of hands for the conferral of the power of absolution, and the unfolding of the chasuble, which had been folded at the back. It is here that the kiss of peace and the promise of obedience now also take place.

Since the 13th-century Pontifical of the Roman Curia, the oil of catechumens has been used – by 'accident' on the part of the rubricists – for the anointing of priests' hands. Another 'accident' on the part of the rubricists was to begin imposing only one hand during the ordination of deacons. With these innovations, the liturgy of ordination took the form set out in the *Pontificale Romanum* of 1596, and it was to remain valid until the reform of Paul VI.

In summary, it can be said that the merger of the Roman and French liturgies was not a success because of its redundancies, which obscured the originally clear structure of the Roman liturgy of ordination. The Council's call for a revision of the rites was therefore not entirely unjustified. Indeed, Pius XII's teaching in the '*Sacramentum Ordinis*' of 1947—stating that the laying on of hands and the sacramental prayer (or part thereof) constitute the form and matter of the sacrament of Holy Orders—should have led to a correction that would once again more clearly bring together

²⁰ Ibid., 349

²¹ A. G. Martimort. '*L'Église en prière*', vol. III, Tournai 1984, 187.

the laying on of hands and the sacramental prayer. However, one may wonder whether the Fathers of the Council had envisaged such a radical renewal of the liturgy of ordination, which would even have replaced the original Roman text of the prayers for the consecration of bishops, even though the three prayers of consecration are of a uniform conception and date back to the early Church .²²

3. The liturgical functions of the orders

Having examined the development of the degrees of holy orders and their liturgy, we can now turn to the question of the liturgical function of the various orders. As with the history of the rites of ordination, the function of the various orders is multifaceted, particularly with regard to the minor orders, which were established for practical reasons, as we saw in the previous chapter.

In our research, we shall leave the early Christian period out of our considerations, in order to focus on the Roman orders, whilst setting aside the presbyterate and the episcopate, whose liturgical functions did not change significantly during the period in question .²³

2.1. The office of ostiarius

The office of the ostiarius was originally similar to that of *the aedituus* of antiquity, the guardian of the (pagan) temple, or to *the janitores* of the Old Testament, the gatekeepers of the Temple in Jerusalem, who were subordinate to the Levites. The task of the ostiarii was therefore ‘the important service of gatekeeper of the church and the sacristy’.²⁴ They took on duties which were originally intended for deacons. Thus, the *Didascalia Apostolorum* from the early 3rd century states: ‘57.7 If any of them is not seated in his place, the deacon must reprimand him and urge him to take his proper seat. The deacon must ensure that everyone takes their seat promptly upon entering and does not sit elsewhere (at first).¹⁰ To this end, the deacon must keep watch over the congregation so that no one chats, sleeps, laughs or fidgets. If strangers arrive, whether a brother or a sister, the deacon must enquire whether they are believers, whether they belong to the Church or are tainted by heresy, and then whether they are married or widowed. Afterwards, the deacon shall lead them to the seat appropriate to their status.’ The deacon’s duties therefore included overseeing the church building and its entrances, and welcoming the faithful. They were to ensure that no unauthorised persons (the unbaptised or heretics) took part in the Mass.

²² This does not alter the fact that the current prayer, which dates back to Hippolytus, is still used by the Ethiopians and the Maronites and therefore has ecumenical significance.

²³ More detailed research into these orders would also be very interesting, particularly with regard to presbyters, but this would go beyond the scope of our presentation.

²⁴ J. Pascher, **Die Liturgie der Sakramente**, Münster, 1950, 121.

This office became redundant as soon as the Church became a public institution. Thus, the office of the ostiarii was quickly entrusted to laypeople, the *mansionarii*, who were numerous in the great basilicas. At Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, for example, there were several hundred of them. In Rome, the office of the ostiarii ceased to exist.

It was re-established with the revival of the Frankish rite of ordination, but solely as a stepping stone to higher orders. The Roman-Frankish rite of ordination, contained in the *Pontificale Romanum*, lists the duties of the ostiarii: '*The ostiarius shall strike the cymbal and the bell, open the church and the sanctuary, and open the book for the preacher*'.²⁵ Apart from opening and guarding the doors, it was also their duty to summon the faithful to Mass by ringing the bells or 'striking the cymbals' or another instrument (cf. the Greek cymandron). The task of 'opening the book for the preacher' seems to indicate that the ostiarius also served as a reader.

Virtually none of these functions, as set out at the time of ordination, are carried out by the ordained; these tasks have, to this day, been performed by sacristans. This is why the Council of Trent sought to restore the office of ostiarius and to add to it the care of cemeteries, the supervision of the faithful's participation in the liturgy, and the administration of the sacraments.

3.2. The office of lector

The office of reader was established very early on and is recognised in all Churches, except among the Ethiopians. As early as the mid-2nd century, Saint Justin mentions a specific reader during Mass, distinct from the presider of the assembly.²⁶ Tertullian lists the reader after the bishop, the priest and the deacon^{re27}, and Saint Cyprian counts him amongst the clergy.²⁸

Originally, the lector sometimes read all the liturgical readings, as attested on several occasions by Saint Cyprian.²⁹ As we have already seen, the ancient Roman rite of ordination allowed the lector to read the readings at the night vigils. Frequently, the lector also read the responsorial psalm.³⁰ Thus, the Roman Martyrology contains an account of a young reader whose throat was pierced by an arrow just as he was about to intone the Easter *Alleluia*. However, there was also the office of psalmist or cantor; the Pontifical has preserved the rite of simple ordination at the end of the book. Originally, in Rome, these duties fell to the *Schola*

²⁵ This description of the duties refers, as with the other ordinations, to a letter by Isidore of Seville in which the *Decretum Gratianum*, dist. XXV, is included.

²⁶ Cf. Justinian, Apol. 1,67,4.

²⁷ Tertullian, *De praescriptione*, ch. 41.

²⁸ Cyprian, ep. 38,2: '*in the presence of the clergy, the exorcist and the lector*'.

²⁹ Cf. Cyprian, Ep. 38,2: 'to read the Gospel of Christ', and also Ep. 39,4: 'to proclaim the Good News of the Lord... to hear the reading of the Gospel from his lips'.

³⁰ Cf. Augustine, Sermon 352.

cantorum, a group of young boys or men, particularly gifted, who were not necessarily members of the clergy. Later, when the readings were reserved for deacons and subdeacons, the young readers could also form part of the *Schola cantorum*. The adoption of the psalmist from the Gallican liturgy in the 10th century was an innovation in Rome.

The Pontifical Rite shows us a later state of affairs in which the reading of the Gospel is now part of the deacon's duties, whilst that of the Epistle falls to the subdeacon. The reader's duties are set out as follows: 1. *legere ea (or ei) qui praedicat*, 2. *lectiones cantare*, 3. *benedicere panem et omnes fructos novos*.

The first function, '*legere ei qui praedicat*', corresponds to the ancient practice whereby the lector read the Mass readings before the celebrant commented on them in his homily. As this rite had long since been abandoned by the time of *the Pontificale Romanum*, the first point reads '*ea quae praedicat*', meaning the solemn proclamation of the Word of God. This overlaps with the second function, the singing of the readings. In practice, the ordained reader reads the night vigils (Matins), as was already mentioned in the ancient Roman Ordo of Ordination, as well as the prophetic reading in celebrations on certain days with more than two readings (the days of the Four Seasons, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil). In Masses without a deacon or subdeacon, he also reads the Epistle, which is usually reserved for the subdeacon.³¹ Thus, the role of the reader as a reader of the Holy Scriptures has been preserved, at least as preparation for higher orders, even though it is no longer a permanent ministry within the Church.

The blessing of bread and fruit was added later to the ordo for a reason that is no longer known today. It was probably due to the collection of tithes.³² It is no longer clear exactly what this authority entailed.

3.3. The Exorcist

The name of this order clearly indicates its function. The Roman deacon John stated at the beginning of the 6th century ago: 'They are called exorcists because they lay their hands on people'.³³ The exorcist was therefore tasked with banishing evil spirits and those possessed, as well as laying hands on catechumens during their preparation for baptism. But in Rome, this task was soon reserved for higher orders, such as acolytes and priests, as can be seen in *the *Sacamentarium Gelasianum** and in the Roman **ordo** of baptism. This is why the ancient Roman liturgy no longer recognises this order.

³¹ Cf. Rit. Celebr. Missam VI,8.

³² Cf. LThK, 6, 937.

³³ John the Deacon, Epist. ad Senarium, 10.

The Pontifical lists three functions of the exorcist: 1. *to drive out demons*, 2. *to instruct the people that those who do not receive Communion should make way*, 3. *to pour water during the service*. Although, following the revival of the Romano-Frankish liturgy, reference continued to be made to the exorcism of spirits, this no longer had any practical effect; the rite existed in name only.

The second function set out in the Pontifical refers to the ancient custom of sending away those who do not receive communion before the distribution of communion. To this end, the deacon would announce: ‘If

quis non communicat, det locum’.³⁴ Gregory the Great attests to this custom.³⁵ It was

certainly also practised in the Gallican rite, where a solemn episcopal blessing was prescribed before Communion in order to dismiss those not receiving Communion.³⁶ It is no longer possible to explain today how this function came to be included in the ordination liturgy of the Pontifical; in any case, it was never performed by the exorcist.³⁷

The third duty, that of passing the water during the celebration of Mass, was practised by exorcists for only a short time. Originally, it was the deacon who passed the water for the washing of hands³⁸, or else the subdeacon.³⁹ In the 4th century, the deacons of Rome sought to delegate several of their duties to the minor clergy, notably that of passing the water. Thus, the **Ordines Romani** assigned this task to the acolytes. In the 10th century, it passed to the exorcists. It seems this was a practical solution, to give them at least one practical role: ‘Given the lack of more important roles, the boys, being part of one of the three ranks of the minor clergy, at least fulfilled the role of assisting the clergy of Rome, as seminarians and altar servers have done ever since’.⁴⁰

3.4. The office of acolyte

Pope Cornelius refers to acolytes as ‘*sequentes*’,⁴¹ which means that in their service they are attached to deacons and subdeacons; they form part of their retinue and take on some of their duties.

As can be seen in the **Ordo Romanus I**, their role was once far more extensive than is described in the pontifical. The seven acolytes from the districts of Rome carry seven candelabra during the procession to the station church, which they place before the altar. On the way to the altar,

³⁴ Cf. J. A. Jungmann, **Missarum Sollemnia**, Vol. II, Freiburg 1958, 424.

³⁵ Gregory the Great, Dial. II, 23.

³⁶ Cf. K. Gamber, **Ordo antiquus gallicanus. Der gallikanische Messritus des 6. Jahrhunderts**, Regensburg 1965, 41; and also: **Die Messfeier nach altgallikanischem Ritus**, Regensburg 1984, 49.

³⁷ See P. de Puniet, **Das Römische Pontifikale**, Vol. I, Klosterneuburg 1933, 141–142.

³⁸ Cf. Cyril, Catech. Myst. V. 2.

³⁹ Cf. Apostolic Constitution, VIII, 2.

⁴⁰ P. de Puniet, op. cit., 142.

⁴¹ See note 10.

One of the acolytes presents the Pope with a vessel containing one of the consecrated hosts from the Pope's last Mass, which the Pope adores, before placing it on the altar. During the Gospel procession, two of the acolytes carry candelabra. The acolytes assist with the collection of offerings at the choir screens; they carry them to the altar and prepare them for the Offertory. The acolytes unfold the corporal on the altar. During the Canon, one of the acolytes guards the paten. Before the breaking of the Eucharistic bread, the acolytes receive it in the *sacculum*, a small linen pouch, in which they carry it to the assisting and concelebrating priests and bishops for the breaking of the bread. They also carry the *fermentum*, a portion of the consecrated host, in titular churches. It was also part of their duties to carry Holy Communion in a *sacculum* (later in a pyx) to the sick and prisoners. This is why, as the *ordo* emphasises, acolytes must never attend the papal Mass '*absque sacculis et sindonibus*'. Later, the acolyte was also required to carry the Holy Chrism with him when accompanying the bishop. Nowadays, they must never appear at Mass '*absque sacculis et sindonibus et chrismate*'.

Finally, acolytes perform duties during baptism. They enter names in the registers during the scrutines, carry the children to be baptised in their arms and recite the formulas on their behalf; they recite the exorcisms and assist the priests and deacons during the immersion.

The acolytes have retained very little of these original, varied duties; the Pontifical now lists only three: 1. *to carry the candlesticks*, 2. *to light the church lamps*, 3. *to minister wine and water for the Eucharist*.

Since then, the duties of acolytes have consisted of carrying the candelabra during processions and at the entrance to Mass, as well as during the Gospel procession. At the Offertory, they are to carry the water and wine to the altar; they also bring the water for the *lavabo*. In fact, this duty is usually performed by young, non-ordained boys, the altar servers.

Only in the old Good Friday liturgy have remnants of their former role been preserved. They place the folded altar cloth on the altar at the start of the *Missa praesanctificationum*, then they unfold the cloth completely and light the candles on the altar at the start of the Eucharistic part.

3.5. The subdiaconate

The liturgical functions of subdeacons are set out in the **Ordo Romanus I**. Regional subdeacons assist the pontiff in putting on his liturgical vestments and accompany him to the altar. Upon reaching the chancel, they help the deacons to remove their chasubles and remain standing on either side of the altar. One of the regional subdeacons also reads the 'Apostolus' (epistle), as has been the

custom in Gaul since the 9th century. For the Gospel procession, two subdeacons carry censers, whilst another adds incense and opens the Gospel book for the deacon.

They play an important role during the collection of offerings. One of them holds the chalice into which the archdeacon pours the wine for the faithful, whilst others receive the loaves that the Pope himself has gathered and carry them to the altar, where the archdeacon places as many as are needed. The subdeacons carry the chalice containing the wine, as well as the water which the archdeacon pours into the chalice. Since the 11th century, the subdeacon has poured it himself.

After the Offertory, they stand behind the altar, '*aspicientes ad pontificem*'. During the Canon, they remain deeply bowed until the '*Nobis quoque*'. Thereafter, one of them receives the paten from the hands of the acolyte and carries it to the archdeacon for the breaking of the bread. During this, they assist alongside the acolytes; thus, one subdeacon assists the pontiff during Communion from the chalice. During the recessional procession, the regional subdeacon carries the censer.

It is specified that subdeacons are permitted to touch the sacred vessels directly, whilst the acolytes carry them '*super planeta*'.

Essentially, these same duties are assigned to subdeacons according to the *Pontificale Romanum*. The subdeacon sings the Epistle, then accompanies the deacon during the Gospel procession and holds the Gospel book for him if the church does not have a suitable ambo.⁴²

During the Offertory, he brings the chalice and paten to the altar and assists the deacon. He pours the water, which the celebrant has previously blessed, into the chalice. During the Canon, he holds the paten, covered with the humeral veil, unlike in the old rite. As the *fractio panis* now refers only to the priest's large host, he has no further task to perform and hands the paten to the deacon. Instead, he exchanges the kiss of peace with the clergy present, a duty which was formerly reserved for the archdeacon.

The Pontifical specifically details the task of washing the altar cloths and the corporal. According to the **Liber Pontificalis**, Pope Boniface I (418–422) had already forbidden nuns from claiming this right. Whilst we now distinguish between the altar cloth and the corporal, the **Ordines Romani** recognise only a single cloth covering the entire altar. It was known as the **pallium altaris**, which is equivalent to our corporal.

3.6. The diaconate

⁴² The *Caeremoniale Episcoporum* of 1600 expressly stipulates that, in churches possessing an ambo, the reading must take place there. This also applies to the present-day situation, since almost all churches have one for the proclamation of the Word: during the celebration of the 'classical' liturgy in such a church, the ambo must therefore be used for the Epistle and the Gospel, if space permits. In this case, the subdeacon does not hold the book but stands before the ambo, holding the Gospel book on both sides; if the ambo is not suitable for this, he stands to the right behind the deacon (cf. Hartmann, *Repertorium Rituum*, Paderborn 1940, 503). Anything else would be contrary to the liturgy and constitute false rubricism.

As we have already seen in the description of the Mass according to the **Ordo Romanus I** for the subdiaconate, a distinction was made between the archdeacon—the Pope’s permanent assistant in all his duties—and the other deacons, who assisted him. Their duties mainly involved singing the Gospel, occasionally assisting the archdeacon, and dismissing the faithful with the *‘Ite, missa est’*, whilst the archdeacon carried out most of the tasks, notably the most important one during the Offertory: He receives the wine of the offering from the hands of the faithful, pours it into the chalice, and arranges the bread of the offering on the altar, as well as the chalice—into which he has previously poured water—in the shape of a cross. The celebrant sang only the **oratio super oblata**, which was later called the **secreta**.

At the end of the Canon, for the *‘Per ipsum’*, the archdeacon raises the chalice, which the Pope touches with the host whilst singing the doxology. He gives the kiss of peace ‘first to the first among the bishops, then to the others according to their rank, and to the people’. During the commingling of the elements, he held out the chalice towards the Pope. He then announced, with the chalice in his hands, the Station Mass in accordance with ^{e 43}; then, after receiving Communion himself, he passed the chalice to the bishops so that they might receive Communion.

Later, the duties of the deacons and the archdeacon were transferred to the deacon of the Mass. The Pontifical summarises these duties with the words *‘Diaconum oportet ministrare ad altare’*. He assists the celebrant with the book, sings the Gospel and assists at the Offertory by passing the host to the celebrant, pouring the wine into the chalice and assisting during the presentation of the chalice. Since the 14th century, he has recited the *‘Offerimus’* prayer together with the celebrant. ⁴⁴ During the *‘Per ipsum’*, he now holds only the chalice, which the celebrant raises himself together with the host. The distribution of the chalice to the faithful was abolished in the 12th century, when their reception of Communion under both kinds fell into disuse. However, the deacon has the right to distribute Communion in the form of bread: for the Communion of the sick and in cases of emergency. ⁴⁵ This corresponds to the ancient rite, confirmed by various councils, which stipulates that deacons have the right to distribute Communion in the absence of bishops and priests. However, Hugh of St Victor also states that deacons always have the right to distribute the Body and Blood of the Lord. Today, the deacon’s role is normally limited (in the traditional Mass), during the distribution of Holy Communion, to the service of the paten. ⁴⁶

The Pontifical then lists ‘baptizare’ as a diaconal ministry. Already, the deacon Philip administers baptism in the Acts of the Apostles, whilst Tertullian testifies that this power is granted to him only with the bishop’s consent. ⁴⁷ Deacons administered baptism alongside priests, solely

⁴³ Ordo rom. I, no. 108: *On that day, there shall be a station at the holy place, either outside or inside the city. Resp.: Thanks be to God.*

⁴⁴ In the past, there were no such private prayers; those in the *Missale Romanum* of 1570 are not of Roman origin and only appeared in the second millennium.

⁴⁵ CIC 1917, can. 845, 2.

⁴⁶ Where, in accordance with the new provisions, Communion is received under both kinds, the deacon once again performs the service of the chalice.

⁴⁷ Tertullian, *De baptismo*, 17.

during the Easter Vigil whilst the bishops were administering Confirmation. Thus, the 1917 Code of Canon Law, can. 17, designates the deacon as an administrator of Baptism in exceptional circumstances, that is to say, in cases of emergency and with permission, whilst the Code of Canon Law, can. 861, §1, designates him as the ordinary administrator.

The third ministry listed by the rite of ordination is the task of preaching. Whilst in the early Church the deacon was permitted to preach only outside Mass, preferably at baptisms, modern times have granted him this right also during Mass.

It should be added that the 1983 Code of Canon Law also grants him the right to assist at weddings (can. 1108 §8; 1111 §1) and to preside over the exposition of the Most Holy Sacrament with the sacramental blessing (can. 943).

4. Summary and assessment

Our research has shown that the sacramental orders of the episcopate, the priesthood and the diaconate have their origin in the New Testament, although alongside them there are a multitude of other ministries. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, these three orders soon gave rise to the model of the apostolic ministry in three degrees, as attested by Saint Ignatius of Antioch at the beginning of the 2nd century and which has been perpetuated in all the apostolic Churches.

For practical reasons, we see other ministries developing during the first two centuries, amongst which the subdiaconate was already present. By the 3rd century, in Rome, the eight degrees of holy orders already existed as a fully organised system.

As these minor ministries existed for practical purposes, some of them disappeared when they were no longer needed. Thus, the ancient Roman rite of ordination no longer recognised the orders of ostiarii and exorcists once these had become irrelevant to the life of the Church following the Constantinian change.

All these orders were permanent positions, but there was always the possibility of rising to a higher office.

This is why the reintroduction of the office of ostiarius and exorcist in Rome, when the Gallo-Frankish rites were revived – without any real need on the part of the Church and without any real function within it – appears somewhat anachronistic.

Gradually, the minor orders and the diaconate once again became transitional stages towards the priesthood, which became the all-powerful order. The sacrament came to be governed entirely by the full powers of consecration. Thus, even the sacramental character of the episcopate was no longer recognised, as it was defined solely by the *iurisdictio vel potestas regimini*^{s 48}, and no longer as the fullness

⁴⁸ Cf. CIC 1917, canons 196 and 197.

of participation in the threefold office of Christ, as later defined by Vatican II. Consequently, only seven degrees of holy orders were now spoken of, the first six of which were regarded merely as stages leading to the priesthood. The minor orders and the diaconate no longer had any practical significance.

The Council of Trent undertook a final attempt to preserve all the ministries. It sought to see all the orders reinstated ‘in cathedrals, collegiate churches and parish churches’. If there are not enough clergy to fulfil the duties of the four minor orders, it is permissible to employ married men of good moral character, provided they have not remarried, are capable of fulfilling these duties and bear the tonsure and ecclesiastical habit ”.⁴⁹ This attempt failed and the was continued. Instead, new roles not requiring ordination have developed in modern times (e.g. catechists, liturgical assistants, commentators).

A turning point was marked by the **Sacramentum Ordinis** of 1947, which was characterised by the universal Church’s renewed emphasis on the three sacramental degrees of Holy Orders. This was already paving the way for the revival of the diaconate as a permanent ministry, as the Council re-established it, though without real effectiveness, as the introduction of multiple lay ministries caused it to lose its significance.

During the development of the liturgy of ordination, from ancient Roman times up to the *Pontificale Romanum* of 1596, the clarity of the rites of ancient Rome became evident, placing the laying on of hands and the prayer of consecration at the centre of the ordination ceremony. The prayers of ordination, which were probably written by the same author, demonstrate a consistent theology of the apostolic ministry in three degrees. The minor orders, of which only those necessary for the life of the Church are conferred, are clearly distinguished from ordinations to the major orders by their very simple rite; the minor orders – including the subdiaconate – are clearly presented as non-sacramental ministries.

When the Gallo-Frankish rites were adopted, two complete ordination liturgies were combined, leading to a duplication of rites and prayers. Elements which had previously served as preparation for ordination were incorporated into the ordination liturgy itself; new, non-Roman formulas were added to the traditional ritual and were often accorded greater importance than the original rite. Thus, the sacramental laying on of hands and the prayer of consecration were no longer the centre of ordination and were soon no longer regarded as the form and matter of the sacrament. The new presentation of the instruments was regarded as such. The subdiaconate became a higher order, a development also reflected in the alignment of its ordination liturgy with that of deacons and priests. This ‘mixed liturgy’ was ultimately adopted by the *Pontificale Romanum* of 1596.

⁴⁹ Sess. 23, chap. 17.

In summary, it may be said that a revision such as that ordered by the Fathers of the Council was justified and necessary in more ways than one. A revision of the liturgy of ordination was necessary in order to rediscover the former richness of Roman ordinations. Of course, we cannot examine the reform that was actually carried out in detail here. Certain aspects have undoubtedly been improved and serve to clarify the meaning of the sacramental prayer of ordination, such as the removal of the formula '*Accipe Spiritum Sanctum*' during the laying on of hands at the consecration of a bishop and the ordination of a deacon, which could easily have been regarded as a sacramental form.⁵⁰ But one may question the merits of replacing the ancient Roman prayer for the consecration of a bishop with that of Saint Hippolytus, since the three Roman prayers of ordination, as we have seen, share a consistent theology and were likely written by the same author.

As the non-sacramental nature of the subdiaconate had been established since the **Sacramentum Ordinis**, it was necessary to reclassify the subdiaconate as one of the minor orders. Of the minor orders, only the lectorate, the acolyte and the subdiaconate had practical significance; thus, a return to the ancient Roman practice was certainly called for. One might ask, on the one hand, whether the current solution of regarding the lectorate and the acolyte as lay ministries was the right one, and whether they should, moreover, be performed by non-ordained men and women; and, on the other hand, whether this corresponds to the intentions of the Fathers of the Council. A similar question arises regarding the abolition of the subdiaconate, which, incidentally, still features in the first edition of Paul V's missal . I.⁵¹

⁵⁰ See, for example: F. Diekamp, **Katholische Dogmatik nach den Grundsätzen des hl. Thomas**, Vol. 3, Münster 1942, 364–365.

⁵¹ The development of this issue from 1965 to 1972 is described in: A. Bugnini, *Die Liturgiereform 1948–1975, Zeugnis und Testament*, Freiburg 1988, 759–784.