

AMEN!

A Publication of the Liturgical Commission of The Episcopal Diocese of New York
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The Episcopate

As the Diocese of New York approaches its election of a Bishop Co-Adjutor on September 27, the New York Liturgical Commission is pleased to publish this special issue of AMEN! on **The Episcopate** by two eminent scholars of our church and diocese. *The Editor*



Tenth century mosaic from Agia Sophia, Istanbul, of St. John Chrysostom when he was Bishop of Constantinople. The Episcopal vesture is archiac in style, dating from before the period when Eastern bishops began to wear imperial vestments.

The Office of the Bishop in the Book of Common Prayer

Anglican tradition has always greatly honored the threefold ministry of Bishops, Priests and Deacons, and has insisted that this commitment represents the continuation of a tradition reaching from the earliest history of the Church. Our strong commitment to this threefold ministry, however, has not prevented our recognition that the Prayer Book tradition coming out of the 16th century has in some ways continued misunderstandings that had crept into the tradition over the centuries. Continuing study of the tradition has corrected some of those ideas and the present Book of Common Prayer represents better than did earlier editions the understanding of the episcopate during the first millennium of the Church's life.

The current Prayer Book represents the fruit of the vast expansion, during this present century and the last years of the preceding century, of our information on the early history of Christian worship. Although this fresh information has illumined especially our understanding of the process of Christian Initiation and the rite of the Holy Eucharist, the impact of liturgical research has also been significant for our understanding of Holy Orders in general and the several orders particularly.

Previous Prayer Books have presented the forms for ordination in the order in which they are normally received: Deacon, Priest, and Bishop. This represented Holy Orders as a sort of ladder on which one could reach a given rung only from the rung preceding. There is no doubt that in much of the Church canonical regulation required one to be a deacon before becoming a priest, and to be a priest before becoming a bishop. At Rome before the 10th century, however, it was common for the principal deacon of the city to be ordained to the episcopate when that see fell vacant. Michel Andrieu has argued, in fact, that those priests who became Bishop of Rome show no evidence of having been ordained deacon, while deacons who became bishop seem not to have been ordained priest. It was as if diaconate and presbyterate were distinct ministries from one or the other of which a Bishop of Rome was most likely to be chosen. In time, however, Rome adopted the practice of other churches and required passage through each of the minor orders (exorcist, reader, acolyte, and subdeacon) before being ordained deacon, and only those who had spent a stated period in the diaconate could be

ordained presbyter or priest. In the 11th century the Archdeacon Hildebrand was elected to the papacy, and a contemporary account tells that he was ordained *sacerdos* (priest) on Ember Saturday after Pentecost and was consecrated bishop, as Pope Gregory VII, on the Feast of SS Peter and Paul. Of the several deacons raised to the episcopate at Rome, he is said to have been the first to be ordained to the priesthood before being ordained bishop.

By that time theologians were beginning to say that it is the second order of ministry, the presbyterate, that is the normal locus of *sacerdotium* (priesthood), and is to that extent the highest order. The episcopate, by contrast, was thought of as a dignity within the order of presbyters. Indeed, it was frequently taught that the major orders of ministers are subdeacon, deacon and presbyter (a distortion institutionalized in the ceremonial of Solemn High Mass). While Cranmer reiterated the more traditional teaching, the 1550 and 1552 ordination rites could be read as treating the episcopate as dependent upon graces already received in ordination as presbyter. At the imposition of hands, for instance, the consecrating bishop said: "Take the holy ghost, and remember that thou stirre up the grace of God, which is in thee by imposition of handes . . .". While that formula was rendered less ambiguous in the revision of 1662, the Cranmerian original made it difficult to know whether the grace referred to was being received at that time or had been received when the ordinand became a presbyter. In neither case was it clear that the bishop is the fountainhead of priesthood, the one by and through whom priesthood is conferred also on presbyters.

It is significant, therefore, that the order in which the rites are presented has been changed in the present Prayer Book. Now the rite for the Ordination of a Bishop comes first, not last. This reflects our understanding that the episcopate is the primary order of ministry, not the ultimate stage of an ecclesiastical career. The Ordination of a Bishop establishes the ministerial foundation of a local church in communion with the Church Catholic.

Therefore, the rite does not treat the bishop-elect as a priest, but as a person chosen and presented by the local church to bishops of the wider community. The rubrical directions before the rite order, "The bishop-elect is vested in a rochet or alb, without stole, tippet, or other vesture distinctive of ecclesiastical or academic rank or order." A similar directive precedes the Ordination of a Priest, "The ordinand is to be vested in surplice or alb, without stole, tippet, or any other vesture distinctive of ecclesiastical or academic rank or order." That

rite has to do with the ordination of a presbyter, not the "advancement" of a deacon, and it is not as a deacon that the candidate is presented, but as a Christian. Similarly, the rite for the Ordination of a Bishop leaves no room for the notion that the rite is predicated upon a priesthood already possessed by the candidate, even though the candidate will normally be an ordained presbyter. It is the priesthood of the bishop that is primary, and presbyters share in that derivatively.

This is likely to be somewhat confusing in contemporary English (or French or German) terminology, which has difficulty in distinguishing two very different words, *presbyter* ("elder") and *sacerdos* ("priest"). The title of the second order of ministers is *Presbyter* in Latin and *Presbyteros* in Greek. The sacred official who offers sacrifices is *sacerdos* in Latin and *hiereus* in Greek. By the time the European vernaculars emerged, however, it had already become customary to think of the episcopate as only a dignity within the order of presbyter, and to see the presbyter as the normal *sacerdos*. Consequently, the only word these vernaculars have to render the Latin *sacerdos* is itself derived from the other concept, *presbyter*. "Priest" is an abbreviation of "presbyter" (as are the French *prêtre* and the German *priester*), yet these are the only words available to translate the Latin *sacerdos*.

The great prayer of consecration of a bishop in the 1979 Prayer Book (p. 520 f.), the same prayer used in the new Roman Pontifical, is taken from one of the major liturgical discoveries of this century, The Apostolic Tradition, most commonly ascribed to the 3rd century Roman theologian, Hippolytus. It is rich in sacerdotal language, but such language is totally missing from The Apostolic Tradition's prayer for the ordination of a presbyter, although other parts of that document suggest that the presbyterate was already beginning to be thought of as participating in the priesthood of the bishop. This means simply that the idea of one bishop over one gathered church had begun to give way under the swelling numbers drawn to the Gospel, and it had become impossible for all the members of a city church to gather in one place -- by AD 250 the number of Christians in Rome was well over fifteen thousand. Presbyters were delegated to preside over the eucharistic sacrifice in other parts of the city, and to this extent they shared in the sacerdotal work of the bishop.

That pastorally unavoidable development was the first step toward the situation a millennium later that saw the subdeacon as one of the "Sacred Ministers" and the bishop as only a dignity within the

presbyterate. In spite of that, the Church never lost sight of the fundamental role of the bishop as a sign of the unity of the Church, and our own time has seen the emergence of a deeper appreciation of the unique role of the bishop as chief pastor.

The Examination in the Prayer Book rite sets forth the duties that characterize the office of Bishop. First, the bishop is to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the Church. As such a guardian, it is the duty of the bishop-elect to lead the congregation in the confession of the Nicene Creed, a liturgical expression of the bishop's responsibility to the wider church in matters of faith and order, to observe and uphold that common life as ordered in Prayer Book, Constitution, and Canons.

Second, the bishop is to celebrate and to provide for the administration of the sacraments. In the case of both Holy Baptism and the Holy Eucharist, the Prayer Book (pp. 298 and 322) expects the Bishop, when present, to be the celebrant of these sacraments. Further, it is recommended (p. 312) that persons be held to be baptized by the Bishop on the day of his visitation of every parish. All this is to emphasize that the priesthood exercised by the Rector of a parish is an extension of the priestly authority vested primarily in the Bishop.

Third, the bishop is to ordain priests and deacons and to join in ordaining other bishops. Today as in the 3rd century, the bishop alone lays hands on the one being ordained deacon, thus giving expression to the principle that the deacon is personally responsible to the bishop and is ordained specifically to the assistance of the bishop. Again, as in the 3rd century so today, all the presbyters of the diocese join in laying hands on the one being ordained to that order, since the presbyterate exists as a college of advisors and councilors to the bishop, and so must give expression to their reception of the ordinand into that college. Similarly, the bishops constitute a wider college of leaders, and a bishop is ordained into that collegial body. Therefore, it is the duty of the bishop to join with other bishops of the province (at least two others since the 4th century) in ordaining to that order. As priests are ordained only to a particular "title" (a specific pastoral responsibility), so in the larger tradition bishops have been ordained only to be leaders of a particular local church. It is **dioceses** that are most commonly understood to be "suffragan", not bishops. The use of that term in the American Episcopal Church is peculiar in that the bishops so designated do not lead any specific church.