

The Validity of Ordination Conferred with One Hand

(2000)

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Did Archbishop Lefebvre perform a doubtful ordination?

IN 1990, I RECEIVED a letter from a priest who claimed that Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre had performed a “dubious” priestly ordination in the 1970s by supposedly imposing only one hand (instead of both) on the head of each ordinand.

The imposition of hands on the candidate’s head is, according to Pius XII’s 1947 Constitution *Sacramentum Ordinis*,¹ the “matter” (i.e., essential visible sign or action) for conferring the Holy Orders of Diaconate, Priesthood and Episcopacy.

Referring readers to works by two authors, the priest maintained that the validity of a priestly ordination conferred with one hand was questionable, and that the dozen or so priests ordained that day were thus “dubiously” ordained.

The good Father, it should be noted, had himself been ordained by Abp. Lefebvre. He had heard this tale many years before, but nevertheless continued to work alongside several of these priests. He raised the issue only after he’d had a major public dispute with one of them.

In any event, the priest prevailed upon a number of other priests to sign the letter with him. One of the signers soon concluded that he had been duped, and then honorably withdrew the charge. Others would follow his lead.

The first difficulty was the authority of the works the instigator had cited. One had been written by a somewhat reputable Jesuit theologian, the Rev. Clarence McAuliffe — but it turned out to be merely a college religion textbook. The other was a doctoral dissertation by the Rev. Walter Clancy — who wrote no other works and then left the priesthood. This is hardly the *Summa*.

But what was worse, the priest had misrepresented (read “lied about”) what both authors said. Here are the passages which his letter cited but did not quote:

Although the bishop imposes both hands when ordaining a priest or bishop, **it is very probable that the imposition of only one hand would suffice for validity.**²

A moral contact, however, is sufficient for the validity of an ordination. **If the bishop were to impose only one hand, as in the ordination of a deacon, the effect of this action as a sensible sign productive of invisible grace would not be lost, in the opinion of this author. The words of the form would determine the application of the matter to the Order of the priesthood.** Since [Pius XII’s] Constitution does demand the imposition of both hands of the bishop (*impositio manuum*),

1. Apostolic Constitution *Sacramentum Ordinis*, 30 November 1947, DZ 2301.

2. Clarence McAuliffe SJ, *Sacramental Theology: A Textbook for Advanced Students* (St. Louis: B. Herder 1958), 361.

however, in the ordination of a priest, the facts should be presented to the Holy See for a judgment.³

Even if one were to accept Clancy's careless recapitulation of what Pius XII actually decreed⁴ — and the Holy See did, by the way, rule that such an ordination was valid — neither author actually states that a priestly ordination conferred with one hand is “dubious.” The passages highlighted above indicate the *opposite* instead: that an ordination conferred with one hand is *valid*.

In the ideal order, one would leave it at that: The priest who instigated the accusation: (1) cited questionable authorities, and then (2) lied about what they said.

Bad theology — case closed.

But bad theology has practical consequences. The priest conducted a whispering campaign against the priests whose ordination he had attacked, and then began conditionally re-administering sacraments to laymen who had already received sacraments from them.

At the root of the charge (apart from obvious malice) is ignorance of the principles of sacramental theology. For the benefit of laymen (or even priests) who have been taken in by this tale, I will lay out the pertinent principles and draw the appropriate conclusions.

The Key Issue: Substantial Change

Matter and form are two essential components of every sacrament. *Matter* is the visible *thing* or *action* necessary for conferring a sacrament — pouring water for baptism, bread and wine for the Eucharist, etc. *Form* is the short phrase that the Church designated as essential for validity — “I baptize you” etc., “This is my body...” etc.

In his 1947 Apostolic Constitution *Sacramentum Ordinis* Pius XII settled a long-standing debate among theologians when he decreed that the essential matter for conferring the Holy Orders of diaconate, priesthood and episcopacy was one and the same: the imposition of hands.⁵

For the ordination rite proper to each of these Orders, Pius XII specified further where in the respective rites this essential imposition of hands on the candidate's head takes place. The rites for diaconal ordination and episcopal consecration each contain only *one* imposition of hands. For diaconate it occurs when the bishop imposes his *right hand* during the consecratory Preface; for episcopacy it takes place when the bishop and the bishop co-consecrators together impose *both hands*, saying “Receive the Holy Ghost.”

For the rite of priestly ordination, which contains *two* impositions of hands, Pius XII decreed:

In ordination to the priesthood, the matter is the first imposition of the bishop's hands which is done in silence, but not the continuation of this imposition by the extending of the right hand, nor the last imposition which is accompanied by the

3. Walter B. Clancy, *The Rites and Ceremonies of Sacred Ordination (Canons 1002–1005)*, (Washington DC: Catholic University Press 1962), 70–71.

4. *Sacramentum Ordinis* §4 does not “demand” an imposition of “both” hands. It merely designates which imposition constitutes the matter: “In ordination to the priesthood, the matter is the first imposition of the bishop's hands which is done in silence.”

5. For a brief history of the debate, see Appendix II.

words: “Receive the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive,” etc.⁶

Now, since Pius XII used the *plural* (imposition of *hands*), should one therefore infer that, if a bishop were to impose only *one* hand at priestly ordination, the ordination would be rendered “dubious”? The answer is given in a work by the Rev. Eduardo Regatillo, Dean of the Canon Law faculty at the Pontifical University of Comillas (Madrid):

From the fact of Pius XII designating the imposition of *hands* as the essential matter for priesthood and episcopate, **one should not dig out the idea that imposing both hands is required for the validity of an ordination.**⁷

Regatillo’s reply is founded on a fundamental principle in sacramental theology: Only a *substantial* change in the matter of a sacrament renders it invalid.

A substantial change occurs when the matter for a sacrament “differs in name and in reality according to common use and estimation from that which Christ established.” Otherwise, a change is merely *accidental*. An accidental change does not affect validity.⁸

The issue of what type of hosts must be used for Mass illustrates how this distinction is applied. The law for the Latin Rite prescribes that hosts be made from wheat flour and be unleavened. Rye or corn flour is considered a *substantial* change and invalidates the sacrament. Using wheat flour, but adding a bit of yeast, as the Eastern Rites do, is considered merely an *accidental* change.

The key issue about the matter at hand (pardon the pun) may therefore be framed as follows:

Does imposing one hand where a rite prescribes ~~the imposing two hands~~ represent a *substantial* change in the matter of a sacrament, i.e. so that it differs “in name and reality” from the matter that Christ established?

And specifically, would such an imposition at a priestly ordination render it “dubious”?

On both counts, the answer is no. This is evident, as we shall see below, from the Constitution *Sacramentum Ordinis* itself, the terminology of various ritual and theological texts, Leo XIII’s Bull *Apostolicae Curae*, papal ordination rites, a decree of Pope Gregory IX, Eastern Rite ordination rituals, and the writings of the only theologians who seem to have addressed the issue.

And finally, as we shall also see, the Holy Office (the Vatican tribunal to which Canon Law gives the competency to decide ordination cases) said in the 1950s that an ordination conferred with one hand is indeed valid. Obviously, this settles the issue.

6. *Sacramentum Ordinis*, DZ 2301, §4. “In Ordinatione Presbyterali materia est Episcopi prima manuum impositio quae silentio fit, non autem eiusdem impositionis per manus dexteræ extensionem continuatio, nec ultima cui coniungitur verba: ‘Accipe Spiritum Sanctum: quorum remiseras peccata, etc.’”

7. E. Regatillo & M. Zalba, *Theologiae Moralis Summa* (Madrid: BAC 1954), 3:666. My emphasis. “Ergo ex eo quod Pius XII designet tamquam materiam essentialem presbyteratus et episcopatus impositionem *manuum*, erui nequit quod ad valorem ordinationis requiratur utriusque manus impositio.” (His emphasis.)

8. Regatillo-Zalba 3:8 “Mutatio *substantialis in materia* est, quando, juxta communem aestimationem et usum, differt nomine et re ab ea quam Christus determinavit; secus, erat *accidentalis*.” (His emphasis.)

I. Pius XII: One and the Same Matter.

In his Constitution *Sacramentum Ordinis*, Pius XII, having explicitly invoked his supreme Apostolic Authority, declared and decreed:

The matter of the Sacred Orders of Diaconate, Priesthood and Episcopacy is **one and the same**, and that indeed is the imposition of hands.⁹

In the next paragraph Pius XII treated the Orders of Diaconate, Priesthood and Episcopacy separately, and designated where in the ordination rite for each order this essential imposition of hands occurred. In the rite for Diaconate, he designated the imposition done with the bishop's *right* hand as the essential matter.

Because the matter for all three Orders is one and the same — *unam*, as Pius XII decreed — what suffices for one Order suffices for all. If one hand suffices for diaconate, it also suffices for priesthood and the episcopate.

This is the teaching of the canonists Regatillo¹⁰ and Palazzini¹¹ when they discuss the validity of an ordination conferred with one hand. Pius XII, they point out, specifically states that the essential imposition of hands in conferring the priesthood is “continued” by the extension of right hand alone. By force of Pius XII's Constitution itself, says Palazzini, **“it is required that this other imposition of one hand not have less power than the imposition of both hands.”**

To assert that conferring the priesthood with one hand renders the sacrament “dubious” implies that a *substantial difference* exists between the matter for conferring the diaconate and the matter for conferring the priesthood and the episcopate. This position directly contradicts Pius XII, who decreed that for the three Orders the matter was “one and the same.”

II. Theologians, Rituals, Confirmation.

A. Theologians. Theologians writing both before and after Pius XII's 1947 decree use the singular and plural interchangeably when referring to the matter for Holy Orders — a clear indication that no substantial difference exists between the imposition of one hand and both hands.

Father McAuliffe, author of the college textbook falsely cited against the validity of an ordination conferred with one hand,

9. DZ 2301, §4. “...divino lumine invocato, suprema Nostra Apostolica Auctoritate et certa scientia declaramus et, quatenus opus sit, decernimus et disponimus: Sacrorum Ordinum Diaconatus, Presbyteratus et Episcopatus materiam eamque **unam** esse manuum impositionem.” (My emphasis.)

10. *Theol. Mor. Summa* 3:666. “Nam in diaconatu *unica* manus Episcopi imponitur; in presbyteratu *ambae* imponuntur, et haec impositionem deinde continuatur per extensionem *soli*us dexteræ. Et cum in Constitutione Pii XII designetur tamquam *unica* materia essentialis, triplici ordini communis, impositionem *manuum*; pronum est ut sicut ad diaconatum una manus sufficit, ita *unica* ad presbyteratum et episcopatum sufficiat.” (His emphasis.)

11. P. Palazzini & A. de Jorio, *Casus Conscientiae, propositi ac resoluti a pluribus theologis ac canonistis Urbis*, (Rome: 1958 Marietti), 2:287. “At unius manus dexteræ extensio habetur *continuatio* impositionis manuum. *Ceterum impositionem unius manus non minorem habere virtutem quam utriusque iure cogitur ex praedicta Constitutione Apostolica*, quae dum declarat ‘Sacrorum Ordinum Diaconatus, Presbyteratus et Episcopatus materiam eamque unam esse manuum impositionem’ (n. 4), decernit atque constituit: ‘In ordinatione Diaconali materia est Episcopi manus impositio quae in ritu istius ordinationis una occurrit.’ (n. 5).” (His emphasis.)

wrote another text on the sacraments, this one for seminarians and specialists. In treating the essential matter for Holy Orders, Fr. McAuliffe, lo and behold, employs the *singular*:

Most recently however, (in 1948) Pius XII again completely changed the matter for Holy Orders, authoritatively restoring the imposition of **the hand** alone....¹²

Regarding Holy Orders, the Church could at a future date prescribe something other than the imposition of **the hand**. Pius XII in fact authoritatively declared this imposition to be valid, whether it is done through physical contact or moral contact alone.... Nevertheless the pope cannot add anything essential to this imposition of **the hand**.¹³

The great Dominican moralist Prümmer, discussing the various opinions of theologians in the past concerning matter for priestly ordination, uses the singular (imposition of a *hand*) and the plural (*hands*) interchangeably.¹⁴ Likewise, the moralist Noldin,¹⁵ the dogmatic theologian and moralist Tanquerey,¹⁶ and the dogmatic theologian Hervé, in editions of his dogmatic theology manual published both before and after Pius XII's decree.¹⁷

The renowned Jesuit canonist Cappello, in tracing the historical evidence for maintaining that the imposition of hands is the essential matter for priestly ordination, likewise uses both the singular and plural forms indiscriminately.¹⁸

12. Clarence McAuliffe SJ, *De Sacramentis in Genere* (St. Louis: B. Herder 1960), 138. (My emphasis.) "Nuperrime autem (1948 A.D.) Pius XII iterum hanc materiam totaliter mutaverit, auctoritative restituendo solam impositionem manus et abolendo traditionem instrumentorum."

13. *De Sacramentis in Genere*, 141. (My emphasis.) "In ordine Ecclesia potest fortasse ulterius determinare impositionem manus. De facto, Pius XII auctoritative declaravit hanc impositionem valere utrum fiat per contactum physicum an solum morale.... Tamen Pontifex nequit addere aliquid essentialia ad ipsam impositionem manus."

14. Dominic M. Prümmer OP, *Manuale Theologiae Moralis*, 11th ed., (Fribourg: Herder 1953), 3:594. "Prima manuum impositio... impositione manuum... prima manuum impositione... impositione manuum... manus impositionem... tamen de impositione manuum... per solam manus impositionem semper ordinabatur... 2. prima manus impositionem... 3. vel solam manus impositionem... 4. primam et secundam manus impositionem..." etc. (My emphasis.)

15. H. Noldin SJ, *Summa Theologiae Moralis*, 13th ed., (Innsbruck: Pustet 1920), 3:457, 459. "Presbyteratus materia proxima duplex est: a. impositio manus episcopi... Tres in ordinatione presbyteri occurrunt manuum impositiones. a prima est, qua episcopus utramque manum extendit... b. secunda est, qua episcopus (una cum presbyteris) tenet dexteram... De impositione manuum. 1. Manus impositio super caput ordinandi..." (My emphasis.)

16. A. Tanquerey, *Synopsis Theologiae Dogmaticae*, 22nd ed., (Paris: Desclée 1930), 3:1011. "1° Requiritur manus impositio... Manuum impositio..." etc. (My emphasis.)

17. J.M. Hervé, *Manuale Theologiae Dogmaticae*, (Paris: Berche 1932 [1962]). 4:405-7: "1) Prima manus impositio. — Episcopus imponit simul utramque manum... 2) Secundus manus impositio. — Finita Missa, Pontifex imponit ambas manus... per ultimam manus impositionem... 1) prima manuum impositio... prima manus impositio cum oratione... vel prima manus impositio... in prima manus impositione et oratione... Assertio: Ad essentiam presbyteratus certo pertinet manus impositio..." etc. (My emphasis.) Similarly the post-1947 edition, 4:404-6.

18. Felix M. Cappello SJ, *Tractatus Canonico-Moralis de Sacramentis*, (Rome: Marietti 1951). Here we give only the many uses of the singular (*manus*) interspersed among uses of the plural. 4:172: "...nullam aliam materiam nominat quam manus impositionem." 4:173: "Presbyteratus (idem dicendum de diaconatu et episcopatu) confertur sola manus impositione et oratione... Titulus XCV refert rubricam impositionis manus." 4:176: "Ritum sacrae ordinationis expresse solam manus impositionem nominat... et docet eam fieri per manus impositionem... aliam materiam sacrae ordinationis quam manus impositionem non commemorat." 4:178: "Ex facto introductionis ultimae impositionis manus... memorat quidem impositionem manus... Praefata caeremonia ultimae impositionis manus..." 4:179: "...caeremoniam ultimae impositionis manus..." 4:182: "...ritus essentialis ex-

B. Ritual Books. Even the Church's own rubrics sometimes treat the imposition of one hand or both as interchangeable.

In the *Roman Ritual*¹⁹ and the *Roman Pontifical*²⁰ the official rubrics sometimes tell the minister to impose *one* hand, while the text of the prayers will speak of imposing *both* hands, or vice versa. Here are some examples:

Rite of Extreme Unction. Rubric: "He extends his **right hand** above the head of the sick person." Prayer: "May the power of the devil become extinct in thee through the imposition of our **hands**."²¹

Visitation and Care of the Sick. Rubric: "The priest places his **right hand** on the head of the sick person and says:" Prayer: "They shall lay their **hands** upon the sick..."²²

Blessing of Sick Children. Rubric: "The priest places his **right hand** on the head of the sick person and says:" Prayer: "They shall lay their **hands** upon the sick..."²³

Blessing of an Abbot by Apostolic Authority. Rubric: "Here the bishop imposes **both hands** ..." Prayer: "That he who today is made an abbot by the imposition of our **hand**."²⁴

Blessing of an Abbess. Rubric: "Here the bishop imposes **both hands** ..." Prayer: "That she who today is made an abbess by the imposition of our **hand**."²⁵

C. Pronouncements on Confirmation. The rubrics in the *Roman Pontifical* for administering the Sacrament of Confirmation prescribe that the bishop anoint the confirmand and recite the essential sacramental form, "with the **right hand** imposed on the head of the confirmand."²⁶

Papal and conciliar pronouncements, however, speak of an imposition of hands sometimes in the plural and other times in the singular:

Innocent III (1204): "The imposition of **the hand** is designated by the anointing of the forehead, which by another name is called confirmation..."²⁷

Innocent III (1208): "We decree that confirmation performed by a bishop, that is, by the imposition of **hands**, is holy and must be received reverently."²⁸

hibetur sola *manus* impositio... sine impositione *manus*..." 4:184: "de quanam impositione manus... de prima *manus* impositione," etc. (All my emphasis.)

19. The Church's official collection of rites for the sacraments and various blessings.

20. The official book containing the ritual for ordinations and for other rites reserved to a bishop.

21. §7. (My emphasis.) "Mox, extensa manu dextera super caput infirmi..." "per impositionem manuum nostrarum."

22. §24. (My emphasis.) "Sacerdos imponit dexteram manum super caput infirmi, et dicit:" "Super aegros manus imponent..."

23. (My emphasis.) "Sacerdos imponit dexteram manum super caput infirmi, et dicit:" "Super aegros manus imponent..."

24. (My emphasis.) "Hic Pontifex imponit ambas manus..." "Ut qui per nostrae manus impositionem hodie Abbas constituitur."

25. (My emphasis.) "Hic Pontifex imponit ambas manus..." "Ut quae per nostrae manus impositionem hodie Abbatissa constituitur."

26. (My emphasis.) "...imposita manu dextera super caput confirmandi."

27. *De Ministro Confirmationis*, DZ 419. My emphasis. "Per frontis chrismationem *manus* impositio designatur, quae alio nomine dicitur confirmatio."

28. *Professio fidei Waldensibus praescripta*, DZ 424. (My emphasis.) "Confirmationem ab episcopo factam, id est impositionem manuum, sanctam et venerande esse accipiendam censemus."

Innocent IV, Council of Lyons I (1245): "...the apostles alone, whose places the bishops take, are read to have imparted the Holy Ghost by the imposition of **the hand**, which confirmation, or the anointing of the forehead represents."²⁹

Gregory X, Council of Lyons I (1245): "The Holy Roman Church also holds and teaches that the ecclesiastical sacraments are seven... Another is the sacrament of Confirmation which the bishops confer through the imposition of **hands** when anointing the reborn."³⁰

Eugene IV, Council of Florence (1439): "But in the Church confirmation is given in place of this imposition of **the hand**."³¹

D. Analysis. If a substantial difference existed between imposing one hand and both hands in a rite of the Church, theologians, the Church's ritual books and doctrinal pronouncements would be utterly consistent and painstakingly precise in employing one term or the other. But they are not.

Of particular significance are the statements on confirmation. Two professions of faith quoted above (for the Waldensians and for Michael Palaeologus) speak of confirmation as conferred through an imposition of *hands* (plural). But the traditional confirmation rite itself, as we noted, prescribes that the bishop impose only his *right* hand.

This clearly demonstrates that no substantial difference exists between imposing both hands and imposing one hand in a rite.

Otherwise the Church would be professing belief that *one* thing is necessary for the validity of a sacrament (imposing *both* hands), while at the same time *not employing it herself* (imposing *one* hand, as actually prescribed in the rite), thus rendering her own sacraments doubtful.

III. Leo XIII: Form Determines Matter

To assert that imposing one hand instead of two renders a priestly ordination doubtful runs afoul of yet another principle in sacramental theology: form determines matter.

In conferring confirmation, diaconate, priesthood and episcopacy, the bishop imposes a hand or hands.³² That is the *matter*. The respective *form* (essential words) for each then specifies what the gesture means, and therefore which sacrament takes place. The imposition of hands, the Jesuit Bligh explains, "simply designates who is to receive the blessing; the exact nature of the blessing is specified by the words of the form."³³

So in *Apostolicae Curae* Leo XIII teaches that the imposition of hands "by itself signifies nothing definite,"³⁴ and accordingly that in Holy Orders "**the matter is the part not determined by itself,**

29. *Circa ritus Graecorum*, DZ 450. (My emphasis.) "Quoniam soli Apostoli, quorum vices gerunt Episcopi, per manus impositionem, quam confirmatio vel frontis chrismatio repraesentat, Spiritum Sanctum tribuisse leguntur."

30. *Professio fidei Michaelis Palaeologi* [Varia], DZ 465. (My emphasis.) "Aliud est sacramentum confirmationis, quod per manuum impositionem episcopi conferunt, chrismando renatos."

31. *Decretum pro Armenis*, DZ 697. (My emphasis.) "Loco autem illius manus impositionis datur in Ecclesia confirmatio."

32. In confirmation the application of the chrism to the confirmand's forehead by anointing is considered an imposition of the hand.

33. John Bligh SJ, *Ordination to the Priesthood*, (New York: Sheed & Ward 1955) 91.

34. *Apostolicae Curae*, DZ 1965. "Quae quidem nihil definitum per se significat."

but determined by the form.”³⁵ In his Constitution on Holy Orders, Pius XII likewise speaks of the form as “the words determining the application of this matter.”³⁶

To question the validity of an ordination conferred with one hand turns this principle on its head: *Matter* (one hand or two) ends up determining what *form* signifies.

But the popes teach that sacramental *form* — not the imposition of one hand or two — indicates whether diaconate, priesthood or episcopate is conferred.

This will become even more evident from the priestly ordination and episcopal consecration rites discussed below.

IV. Papal Consecrations & Ordinations.

A. Papal Episcopal Consecrations. Papal ritual books employed in the Middle Ages (*Ordines*) clearly show that popes imposed only one hand when consecrating a bishop. Here is one typical passage:

And the Apostolic Lord [the pope] alone blesses him [the bishop being consecrated] by himself, placing **a hand** on his head. For a bishop cannot be blessed by less than three other bishops: one who gives the blessing, and another two who impose **a hand** on the head of him who is blessed.³⁷

A ~~another~~ papal *Ordo* for consecrating a bishop contains a similar direction:

With the rest of the bishops holding their hands next to **the hand** of the Supreme Pontiff, this prayer is said by the pope in a solemn voice.³⁸

In fact when a simple priest was elected pope, he was consecrated a bishop with a rite that called for his consecrator to impose only one hand on his head:

Then the Bishop of Ostia, the principal consecrator, places the Gospel book on the shoulders of the elect, and, saying nothing, imposes **the right hand** on his head, which the rest of the bishops also do in turn.³⁹

The imposition of one hand for episcopal consecration in Rome was the norm for many centuries:

In Rome, at least up to the beginning of the 14th century hands were imposed on bishops in the way that they are on priest~~s~~

35. *Apostolicae Curae*, DZ 1965. “Materia sit pars per se non determinata, quae per illam determinatur.” (My emphasis.)

36. *Sacramentum Ordinis*, DZ 2301, §4. “Verba applicationem huius materiae determinat.”

37. *Ordo xxxv*, Michel Andrieu, *Les Ordines Romani du Haut Moyen Age*, (Louvain: Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense 1956), 4:44. (My emphasis.) “65. Et benedicet eum dominus apostolicus solus per semetipsum, inposita manu super caput eius. 66. Nam a ceteris episcopis episcopus benedici non potest minus quam a tribus, unus qui dat benedictionem et alii duo qui imponunt manum super caput ipsius qui benedicitur.”

38. *Ordo xxxva*, Andrieu, 4:74. My emphasis. “8. Qua finita, dominus apostolicus elevat ipsum electum, imponens caput eius super altare et duo episcopi nitentes aevangelia tenent super verticem eius; reliquis etiam episcopis iuxta manum summi pontificis manus tenentibus, lenta voce ab apostolico hae oratio dicitur:...”

39. *Ordo xiv*, Mabillion, cited in Joachim Nabuco, *Pontificalis Romani Expositio Juridico-Practica*, (New York: Benziger 1944), 1:291a. (My emphasis.) “Deinde episcopus Ostiensis, principalis consecrator, ponebat evangelistarium super humeros electi, et, nihil dicens, imponebat manum dexteram capiti ejus, quod et ceteri episcopi successive faciebant.” (Original italics.)

today. First the consecrating bishop, then all the bishops present, impose **the right hand alone** in silence.⁴⁰

B. Papal Priestly Ordinations. We encounter the same practice in the Roman books used for priestly ordinations conferred by the Pope. Out of the 12 *Ordines* which give ritual directions, eight *Ordines* (iii⁴¹ iv,⁴² v,⁴³ vi,⁴⁴ viii,⁴⁵ x,⁴⁶ xi,⁴⁷ xiii⁴⁸) prescribe that the bishop impose *one* hand. The following is a typical rubric:

When a priest is ordained, the bishop blesses him and places **his hand** on his head. All the priests who are present do likewise, and they place their hands on his head, next to **the hand** of the bishop.

Of the rest, three *Ordines* are ambiguous as to whether one or two hands are used (ii,⁴⁹ ix, xv⁵⁰), and only one (xvi), prescribes both hands.

A full two-thirds of the Roman books, therefore, used at various points over a period of several hundred years, prescribe that one hand be imposed for priestly ordination.

C. Rites Derived from Rome. Other liturgical texts derived from those used in Rome likewise bear witness that only one hand was imposed to ordain priests.

The Gregorian Sacramentary used in France in the 8th and 9th centuries contains the following rubric. It is identical to the one cited above:

When a priest is ordained, the bishop blesses him and places **his hand** on his head. All the priests who are present do likewise, and they place their hands on his head, next to **the hand** of the bishop.⁵¹

40. Nabuco, 1:n133. (My emphasis.) “Romae, saltem usque ad initium saeculi XIV, manus imponebantur episcopis sicut hodie imponuntur sacerdotibus, videlicet prius consecrator, deinde omnes episcopi praesentes, imponebant manum dexteram *sub silentio*.” (His emphasis.) The context of this passage is a discussion of the more recent practice at an episcopal consecration of the co-consecrators imposing hands on the bishop-elect simultaneously with the consecrator.

41. E. Martene, *De Antiquis Ecclesiae Ritibus* 2nd ed. (Antwerp: 1736), 2:110. “...& benedicente eum episcopo, *manum* super caput ejus ponant. Similiter & presbyteri, qui praesentes sunt, manus suas juxta manum episcopi...”

42. Martene 2:121. “...episcopo eum benedicente, etiam omnes presbyteri qui praesentes sunt, manus suas juxta *manum* episcopi super caput illius teneant.”

43. Martene 2:127. “Hac expleta, manum super capita eorum ponat, nec non & circumstantes presbyteri manus suas juxta manum episcopi supra capita illum teneant...”

44. Martene 2:137. “...manum super caput ejus tenente, etiam omnes presbyteri qui praesentes sunt, manus suas juxta manum episcopi super caput ipsius teneant.”

45. Martene 2:146. “Tunc eo inclinato, imponat manum super caput ejus, & omnes presbyteri, qui assunt, manus suas juxta manum episcopi super caput illius teneant...”

46. Martene 2:173. “...episcopo eum benedicente, & manum super caput ejus tenente, etiam omnes presbyteri, qui praesentes sunt, manus suas juxta manum episcopi super caput illius teneant.”

47. Martene 2:179. “...episcopo eum benedicente, & manum super caput ejus ponente, etiam omnes presbyteri, qui praesentes sunt, manus suas juxta manum episcopi super illius ponant caput.”

48. Martene 2:191. “Tunc eo inclinato, imponat manum super caput ejus, & omnes presbyteri qui adsunt manus suas juxta manum episcopi super caput illius teneant; & ille orationem super eum dicet.”

49. Martene 2:100.

50. Martene 2:209.

51. Cited in Pierre de Puniet, *The Roman Pontifical: A History and Commentary*, (London: Longmans 1932), 272. My emphasis. “Presbyter cum ordinatur, episcopo eum benedicente, et manum suam super caput eius tenente, etiam omnes

A similar rubric is found in another French liturgical manuscript, the *Ordo Romanus Antiquus*:
Then when he is bowed [the bishop] imposes *a hand* on his head and [then] all the priests.⁵²

Likewise we encounter this direction in the Gallican *Statuta Ecclesiae Antiqua*:

When a presbyter is ordained, as the bishop blesses him and holds **his hand** on his head, let all the presbyters who are present also hold their hands beside the hand of the bishop on his head.⁵³

D. Interchangeable Use. Impositions of one hand or two hands, in fact, are employed in ancient ordination rites interchangeably without any distinction whatsoever as to the degree of Holy Orders being conferred.

Thus in a 3rd-century ritual “the hand” is imposed for consecrating bishops and ordaining priests, while “hands” are imposed for deacons.⁵⁴

In 5th-8th century Roman rites, one hand is imposed for bishops, priests and deacons⁵⁵ alike.

A 13th-century rite mentions no imposition for bishops, “the hand” imposed for priests, and “hands” for deacons.⁵⁶

E. Conclusion. In *Sacramentum Ordinis* Pius XII set forth the Church’s teaching regarding the sufficiency of ordination rites she employed in the past:

Now the effects which must be produced and correspondingly signified in sacred ordination to the diaconate, the priesthood and the episcopate, namely power and grace, **have been found to be sufficiently signified, in all the rites used at different times and in various places in the universal Church** through the imposition of hands and the words determining this action.⁵⁷

In the past popes ordained priests, consecrated bishops, and were themselves consecrated bishops in rites in which only one hand was imposed. There can be no dispute whatsoever, therefore, that the gesture “sufficiently signifies” the effects of Holy Orders and validly confers the sacrament.

To say otherwise, once again, contradicts Pius XII.

V. Gregory IX: Imposition of the Hand.

In a 1232 Epistle to the bishop of Lyons concerning the matter and form of ordination, Pope Gregory IX likewise used the

presbyteri, qui praesentes sunt, manus suas juxta manum episcopi super caput illius teneant.”

52. De Puniat, 275. “Tunc eo inclinato, imponat manum super caput eius et omnes presbyteri.”

53. Cited in Paul F. Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites of the Ancient Churches of East and West*, (New York: Pueblo 1987), 222.

54. Cf. J. Tixeront, *L’Ordre et les Ordinations: Etude de Théologie Historique* 12th ed. (Paris: Gabalda 1925), 113, 115, 118.

55. Cf. Tixeront, 135, 133, 131.

56. Cf. Tixeront, 153 (“L’imposition des mains n’est pas explicitement signalée, mais elle va de soi”), 151, 150-1.

57. *Sacramentum Ordinis*, DZ 2301, §3. “Iamvero effectus, qui Sacra Diaconatus, Presbyteratus et Episcopatus Ordinatione produci ideoque significari debent, potestas scilicet et gratia, in omnibus Ecclesiae universalis diversorum temporum et regionum ritibus sufficienter significati inveniuntur manuum impositione et verbis eam determinantibus.” (My emphasis.)

singular (a *hand*) to designate the imposition that takes place in the ordination rite:

When a priest and deacon are ordained, they receive the **imposition of a hand** by a physical touch, by the rite introduced by the Apostles.⁵⁸

This also confirms what we presented in the previous section: that the pope imposed one hand for ordinations in Rome.

But what follows is equally significant:

If this shall be omitted, it must not be partially repeated, but at an established time for conferring orders of this kind, what through error was omitted must be carefully supplied. Moreover, the suspension of hands over the head must be made, when the prayer of ordination is uttered over the head.⁵⁹

Note that he has prescribed an imposition of a **hand** (singular) to render valid an ordination that was invalid.

VI. Holy Orders in Eastern Rites

A. Byzantine Rites. The Byzantine liturgy for priestly ordination contains the following direction:

When the bishop rises, the ordinand goes to him, and is signed with the cross three times above his head... The deacon exclaims: "Let us attend." Immediately the bishop, holding his **right hand imposed** on his [the ordinand's] head, exclaims: "Divine Grace, which always heals what is weak and completes what is lacking, promotes N. the devout Deacon unto the Priesthood: Pray for him that the grace of the most Holy Ghost come upon him."⁶⁰

Note that the bishop is told to impose his right *hand*. Except for a change of wording ("bishop" instead of "priest") in the sacramental form, an identical procedure — imposing the right hand alone — is followed for episcopal consecration in the Byzantine rites.

There are no less than 10 Catholic uniate groups using the Byzantine rite: Melkite, Ukrainian, Podocarpethian Ruthenian, Hungarian Ruthenian, Yugoslav, Rumanian, Greek, Bulgarian, and Russian.⁶¹

B. Other Eastern Rites. The imposition of one hand for priestly ordinations or episcopal consecrations is likewise used by other

58. *De Materia et Forma Ordinationis*. DZ 445. My emphasis. "Presbyter et diaconus cum ordinantur, manus impositionem tactu corporali, ritu ab Apostolis introducto, recipiunt."

59. DZ 445. "quod si omissum fuerit, non est aliquatenus iterandum, sed statuto tempore ad huiusmodi ordines conferendos, caute supplendum est quod per errorem exstitit praetermissum. Suspendio autem manuum debet fieri, cum oratio super caput effunditur ordinandi."

60. Enzo Lodi ed., *Enchiridion Euchologicum Fontium Liturgicorum* (Rome: CLV Edizioni Liturgiche 1979), 2974. My emphasis. "Exurgente deinde Pontifice ad eum Ordinandus accedit, et ter ab eo in capite cruce signatur: et frontem sacra mensa sufficiens, utrumque genu incurvat. Et Diacono exclamante: Attendamus, confestim Pontifex dextram manum ejus capiti impostitam tenens, exclamat: Divina gratia quae semper infirma curat, et ea quae desunt adimplet, promovet N. devotissimum Diaconum in Presbyterum: oremus pro eo, ut veniat super eum sanctissimi Spiritus gratia. Et qui sunt in tribunalibus, ter, Domine miserere, dicunt: st similiter cantores." (Original italics.)

61. See Donald Attwater, *The Christian Churches of the East: Volume I, The Churches in Communion with Rome* (Milwaukee: Bruce 1961).

Eastern Rite Catholics such as the Syrians,⁶² the Copts,⁶³ and the Maronites.⁶⁴

C. Conclusion. Pius XII states that the Roman Church always regarded Eastern Rite ordinations as valid, and indeed insisted that Greeks, even in Rome itself, be ordained according to their own rite.

Since the majority of the Eastern Rites impose only one hand to confer Holy Orders, it is impossible to maintain that an ordination so conferred in the Latin Rite would be “dubious.” Such would imply a *substantial* difference between Holy Orders in the West and in the East — that the latter mode of ordination somehow “differs in name and in reality according to common use and estimation from that which Christ established.” In light of the Church’s constant teaching, this would be absurd.

It is evident, therefore, that the difference between the two impositions is nothing more than *accidental* — like the difference between the Eastern Rites and the Latin Rite in using for Mass, respectively, leavened and unleavened bread. Such a difference can in no way render a sacrament doubtful.

VII. Teaching of Canonists.

A. Nabuco. In his three-volume canonical and rubrical commentary on the Roman Pontifical, Msgr. Joachim Nabuco, an expert on the conduct of episcopal ceremonies, discusses various defects which may occur when conferring episcopal consecration. Regarding the imposition of hands, he says:

The matter for episcopal consecration is the imposition of the hands, or of at least one hand on the head of the bishop-elect.”⁶⁵

B. Cappello. In editions of his monumental tract on the sacraments issued both before and after Pius XII’s 1947 decree, the Rev. Felix Cappello, a canonist at the Pontifical Gregorian University and a consultor for the Vatican Congregation for the Discipline of the Sacraments, says the following:

If one hand alone was imposed on the head of the ordinand and not both hands, the imposition [of hands] is considered valid, and thus **the ordination must be regarded as valid.**⁶⁶

C Regatillo. In the mid-1950s the renowned Spanish canonist Regatillo researched the issue of an ordination performed with one hand.

Apart from the passage in Cappello we have just quoted, he found no canonist, liturgist or decision of the Holy See that even discussed the issue. “This is a sign,” Regatillo said, “that this defect is not considered something substantial.”

62. See H. Denziger, *Ritus Orientalium* (Wurzburg: 1864), 2:90. “Mox imponet dexteram suam super caput ejus; sinistram movet huc et illud, dicitque lente orationem sequentem invocationis Spiritus Sancti.”

63. Attwater, 135.

64. See Denziger, *Ritus*, 2:148–165, *passim*. “Quando quis debet suscipere impositionem manus... [preceding the essential form] Episcopus illum utrumque genu-flectere jubet ei manum suam imponens super caput eius dicit... “ etc.

65. *Pontificalis Romani Expositio* 1:291. (My emphasis.) “Materia consecrationis episcopalis est impositio manuum, vel saltem unius manus super caput electi.”

66. *Tract. de Sacramentis* 4:218. (My emphasis.) “Si una tantum manus imposita fuerit super caput ordinandi, non vero utraque, impositio valida censetur, et consequenter ordinatio ut valida habenda.”

Fr. Regatillo explained his reasons at great length (see Appendix I) and adopted the same position as Cappello:

Both I and the other canonists I have consulted consider an ordination conferred this way to be valid, and we would leave a person so ordained to exercise his orders in complete peace.⁶⁷

D. Palazzini-de Jorio. In their collection of moral theology cases (“proposed and resolved by numerous Roman canonists and theologians,” as the book’s title notes), Msgrs. Palazzini and de Jorio reply to an inquiry on the issue in the following manner:

No one doubts the validity of a priestly ordination or episcopal consecration conferred by the imposition of one hand. For indeed the power which is conferred is sufficiently signified by the imposition of one hand.⁶⁸

Note that this is a categorical statement — “*No one* doubts the validity of an ordination conferred with one hand” — and that the men who made it were considered experts in the field of canon law and moral theology.

E. Aertnys-Damen. After discussing Pius XII’s pronouncement on the matter and form for Holy Orders, the Redemptorist moral theologians pose the following question: “Whether the imposition of both hands would be required for validity.” Their response:

No. In the Ordination of a Deacon the *Roman Pontifical* prescribes in clear terms an imposition of only one hand. In the Ordination of a Priest and of a Bishop an imposition of both hands is indeed prescribed — but **it is plain that this is in no way necessary to it for validity**, as though a fuller transmission of power would be signified. For the fullness of power is also sufficiently shown to be transferred by the imposition of one hand alone, extended over the head. Nor, moreover, is this

67. *Theol. Mor. Summa* 3:666; E. Regatillo, *Jus Sacramentarium* 3rd ed. (Santander: Editorial Santander 1960), 873. (My emphasis.) “De vi huius defectus neque canonistae, neque liturgistae loquuntur; nec ullam inveni dispositionem S. Sedis. Hoc signum est quod hic defectus non habetur tamquam substantialem.... Alii canonistae, quos consuli, et ego validam putamus ordinationem sic collatam; et sic ordinatum relinqueremus ut ordinem in pace exerceret.” The only point about which there appeared to have been a discussion was whether a bishop was required to “supply ceremonies” later if he had imposed only one hand at a priestly ordination. The general rule before *Sacramentum Ordinis* was that *any* rite or prayer omitted in performing an ordination *must* be supplied later (see Nabuco, 1:208–9), and various opinions were offered as to how much of the ordination rite a bishop was to repeat in supplying ceremonies. In *Theol. Mor. Summa*, the earlier of the two works cited above, Regatillo advised “At interea suaderemus ut consulatur S. Officium: an aliquid sit *supplendum* in casu.” My emphasis. Similarly Cappello (*Tract. de Sacramentis*, 4:218) says: “Num practice iteranda sit ordinationis vel saltem *supplenda* manus utriusque impositio, disputatur. Integra ordinationis certe repetenda non est, forte sola manuum impositio.” My emphasis. To *supply* ceremonies is not to render valid a sacrament which was doubtfully or invalidly conferred, but rather merely to meet all the ceremonial prescriptions which enhance the dignity of a rite. A classic example is an emergency baptism where the anointings and other rites are later supplied. In *Jus Sacramentarium*, which recounts a subsequent decision of the Holy Office affirming the validity of an ordination conferred with one hand (see below), Regatillo dropped the sentence about supplying ceremonies.

68. Palazzini-de Jorio 2:286–7. (My emphasis.) “Item nemo dubitat de validitate ordinationis sacerdotalis vel consecrationis episcopalis, conlatae per unius manus impositionem. Etenim potestas, quae confertur, satis significatur per unius manus impositionem.”

viewed as differing essentially from the extension of both hands.”

F. Analysis. Out of the hundreds of works in moral theology, dogmatic theology, liturgy, and canon law that I have consulted over the years, these were the only authors who even discussed the issue of priestly ordination conferred with one hand. These experts say it is valid.

Backed into a corner with such weighty testimony, adepts of the dubious ordination theory insist that certainty is impossible and that, somehow, doubt remains. And inevitably, they quote the moral principle: *In dubiis pars tutior est eligenda* — “In doubt, the safer course must be chosen.”

But this is nothing more than parroting a phrase.

First, there *is* no “doubt” present that dictates choosing a supposedly “safer” course. Recall the statement of Msgrs. Palazzini and de Jorio: “**No one doubts** the validity of an ordination conferred with one hand” — shorthand for “no one with any brains” doubts it.

Second, according to the moral theologians Aertnys and Damen, the principle of the safer course applies only to a choice between a morally safe course of action and a morally unsafe one. That is when you are morally obliged to choose the “safer” course. Otherwise, they say, “**we are not bound to follow the safer course when another course is safe.**”⁶⁹

And how does one know that priestly ordination conferred with one hand is a “safe” course? Because, in addition to the teaching of these canonists, we know that popes ordained priests and consecrated bishops this way in Rome for centuries, that newly-elected popes were themselves consecrated bishops this way, that the Eastern Rites have always ordained this way, and that Pius XII told us in *Sacramentum Ordinis* that *all* these rites were valid.

There is no safer course.

VIII. Decision of the Holy Office.

The final nail into the coffin for the theory that a one-handed ordination is “dubious” comes from an account of a decision of the Holy Office in the late 1950s, when it was headed by Alfredo Cardinal Ottaviani. The Holy Office is the Church’s supreme doctrinal tribunal, and among its functions was to judge the va-

69. I. Aertnys & C. Damen, *Theologia Moralis*, 17th ed., (Rome: Marietti 1958), 2:563. (My emphasis.) “Quaer. 2°. Num ad validitatem requiratur quod utraque manu impositio fiat. Resp. Negative. In Ordinatione diaconi Pont. Rom. expressis verbis praescribit unius tantum dexteræ impositionem. In Ordinatione presbyteri et Episcopi utriusque quidem manus impositio praescribitur sed nullo modo patet eam esse ad validitatem necessariam ad hoc ut plenioris potestatis translatio significaretur. Sufficiens enim etiam plenitudinem potestatis transferri exprimitur impositione unius tantum manus extensae super caput; neque perspicitur istam essentialiter differe ab extensione utriusque manus. Deinde constat in antiqua liturgia saepe unius tantum manus impositione presbyteros et episcopos ordinatos fuisse idque adhuc fieri in pluribus ritibus orientalibus.” (His emphasis.)

70. Aertnys-Damen 1:86. (My emphasis.) “Quaeritur, quid censendum sit de principio: In dubiis pars tutior est eligenda. Resp. 1. Sano sensu acceptum est vera et universalis regula. Etenim non accipit tutiorem partem *comparative* ad aliam, quae etiam tuta est, sed *adversative* ad aliam, quae non est tuta: quia non adstringimur partem tutiorem sequi, quando altera est tuta. Sensus ergo est quod in dubiis debemus relinquere partem dubiam seu intutam, et tutam seu certam eligere.” (His emphasis.)

lidity of an ordination when some mistake had been made in the rite.

A bishop who had accidentally performed priestly ordinations with one hand asked Fr. Regatillo about their validity. Regatillo replied that the ordinations were valid and that those who were so ordained should be left in complete peace. During a visit to Rome, the bishop consulted the Holy Office, and

Its response was that **a priestly ordination in which the bishop imposed one hand was valid, and that such had been its response many times.**⁷¹

The Church, therefore, settled the issue.

* * * * *

I AM UNDER NO ILLUSION that any of the foregoing material — even Regatillo’s account of the Holy Office decision — will convert those who spread this “dubious ordination” tale. Like traditionalists who claim that *all* Abp. Lefebvre’s ordinations were doubtful because of a “Masonic connection,” they will probably go right on insisting that there is still a “doubt,” and that they are only following the “safer” course.

But the laity should understand that this it not the “safer” course — it is the ignorant one.

When an issue about the validity of a sacrament arose before Vatican II, a priest looked the answer up in an approved moral theology book, or phoned the chancery, where diocesan officials looked it up in *their* books.

When major theologians or canonists all agreed that something was valid matter for a sacrament, you took their word for it. Why? Because they taught in Pontifical Universities right under the Pope’s nose, and they were very, *very* smart.

And you — a priest in some backwater diocese — at least you had enough sense to acknowledge that, compared with them, you were really, *really* dumb. You did not continue to insist that there was still “a doubt.”

But as our moral theology professor in Switzerland, Canon René Berthod, used to say: *Quand on est bête, on ne peut rien faire* — when you’re stupid, *nothing* can be done.

Be that as it may, we have amply demonstrated that the imposition of one hand in a priestly ordination is *not* a substantial change in the matter of the sacrament and therefore *cannot* render an ordination “dubious.” The reasons may be summed up as follows:

1. Pius XII decreed specifically that for diaconate, priesthood and episcopacy the matter is one and the same. The canonists Regatillo and Palazzini therefore state that, since the imposition of one hand suffices for diaconate, it also therefore suffices for priesthood and the episcopacy.

2. Theological commentaries and the Church’s ritual books, as well as papal and conciliar pronouncements on confirmation, use the singular and plural interchangeably (*hand, hands*) to designate the same action. This confirms that there is no sub-

71. *Jus Sacr.*, 3rd ed., 873. (My emphasis.) “Tandem quidam Episcopus, qui ordinandis presbyteris unicum manum imposuerat, accepto nostro responso, iuxta quod ordinationes illae fuerunt validae, et sic ordinati poterant relinqui in bona pace; postea in visitatione *ad Limina* oretenus S. Officium consulit; eique responsum fuit validam fuisse ordinationem presbyteralem in qua Episcopus unicum manum imposuit; et ita pluries fuisse responsum.”

stantial difference between a singular and a plural imposition of hands.

3. Leo XIII teaches that the imposition of hands by itself signifies nothing definite, and that the form (essential words) determines the sacrament or order being conferred. The imposition of one hand or both, therefore, makes no difference as regards the validity of the sacrament, because the form specifies what the gesture means.

4. The older Roman liturgical books attest that the popes themselves imposed one hand when ordaining priests and consecrating bishops. A simple priest who was elected pope received episcopal consecration in a rite in which his consecrator imposed only one hand on his head. Impositions of one hand or two hands are employed in ancient ordination rites interchangeably without any distinction whatsoever as to whether episcopacy, priesthood or diaconate were being conferred. Pius XII declared that the imposition of hands in all such rites “sufficiently signified” the effects of the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

5. In a 1232 Epistle to the bishop of Lyons, Pope Gregory IX stated that priestly ordination was conferred by the imposition of a hand (singular), and decreed that this should be supplied if it had been omitted.

6. Thirteen Eastern Rites of the Catholic Church confer priestly ordination and episcopal consecration by the imposition of one hand. Pius XII declared that the Church has always regarded Eastern Rite ordination rites as valid.

7. Both before and after the decree of Pius XII, eminent canonists and theologians — Nabuco, Cappello, Regatillo, Palazzini, di Jorio, Damen — taught that a priestly ordination or episcopal consecration conferred with one hand is valid. Palazzini and di Jorio specifically state that “No one doubts the validity of an ordination conferred with one hand.”

8. In response to a question on the issue, the Vatican tribunal of the Holy Office replied that a priestly ordination conferred with one hand is valid, and that this had been its response many times.

For all the foregoing reasons, a priestly ordination conferred with one hand must be considered valid.

And as for someone who *still* insists otherwise? Well, *quand on est bête, on ne peut rien faire...*

Appendix I

Canonists on Priestly Ordination with One Hand

E.F. Regatillo

Ius Sacramentarium 3rd edition (Santander: Sal Terrae 1960), 873. Except for the mention of the Holy Office decision, it is identical to the passage on the topic in his 1954 *Theologiae Moralis Summa* (Madrid: BAC), 3:495–96.

In the ordination rite for the priesthood or episcopacy, the imposition of *hands* (plural number) is said to be essential. What if a Bishop were to impose only *one* hand. Would the ordination be valid?

No canonists or liturgists speak of the import of this defect, neither have I been able to find a disposition of the Holy See. This is a sign that this defect is not regarded as being something substantial. Only Cappello, that I know of, touches upon the question: “If one hand was imposed, not both, the imposition is considered valid, and consequently the ordination must be regarded as valid. Whether the entire ordination

must be repeated or whether only the imposition of both hands must be supplied is disputed. The whole ordination certainly must not be repeated; perhaps only the imposition of hands."⁷² (*De Ordin.* 218). Cappello wrote this before the Constitution of Pius XII. He cites no author or decision of the Holy See.

Both I and the other canonists I have consulted consider an ordination conferred this way to be valid, and we would leave a person so ordained to exercise his orders in complete peace.

For in conferring the diaconate, *one* hand of the bishop is imposed; in the priesthood, both are imposed and this imposition is continued by the extension *of the right hand alone*. And since in Pius XII's Constitution the only essential matter common to all three holy orders is designated at the imposition of *hands*, it is obvious that just as one hand suffices for the diaconate, so also one hand would suffice for the priesthood and the episcopate.

The Greek phrase which always occurs the same way in the rite of diaconal, priestly and episcopal ordination is this: "The Bishop... holding his *hand* imposed," in the singular, to be sure.

Holy Scripture often mentions the imposition of hands. Some texts refer to ordination, others to confirmation, other to healing. In those texts which refer to ordination, the term hand is used in the plural number *cheiras* together with the singular number, *cheira*.

From this someone might conclude that Sacred Scripture is referring to the practice of imposing *both* hands together. But the texts which are in the plural number refer in fact to the imposition of the hands not of one man alone, but of many men. And therefore, although each individual would have imposed only one hand, the term *hand* was aptly employed in the plural number in the sense of *the hands of many men*. There is only one text which clearly speaks of the imposition of the *hands* of one individual. It is a text of St. Paul: "For which cause I admonish thee that thou stir up the grace of God which is in thee by the imposition of *my hands*." (2 Tim 1:6)

In ancient Greek rituals, the word *hand* is found in some places in the plural, in others in the singular. In Latin rituals the rubric appears as impositions *of the hand* or imposition of the *hands*.

Therefore, from the fact of Pius XII designating the imposition of *hands* as the essential matter for priesthood and episcopate, one should not dig out the idea that imposing both hands is required for the validity of an ordination. Far from it. Because the imposition of one hand was sufficient according to the numerous ancient documents cited, the same must be said now — especially since the intention of the Supreme Pontiff was to take away an occasion for scruples.

Finally, a certain bishop who in ordaining priests had imposed only one hand, having heard our response that those ordinations were valid and that those who had been ordained that way could be left in complete peace, afterwards during an *ad Limina* visit, consulted the Holy Office orally. Its response was that a priestly ordination in which the bishop imposed one hand was valid, and that such had been its response many times.

P. Palazzini, A. de Jorio

Casus Conscientiae, propositi ac resoluti a pluribus theologis ac canonistis Urbis, (Rome: 1958 Marietti), 2:287.

Francis the Master of Ceremonies of a cathedral church, tells the Bishop, Paul, that he has imposed only one hand (and covered with a glove at that) on the

72. These last two sentences refer to "supplying ceremonies." See note to section VII.C above.

head of Aemilius in a priestly ordination. Further Francis tells Paul that he has presented Aemilius with an empty chalice and a paten without a host.

Francis therefore asks: (1) Whether in this case the sacred ordination was valid. (2) And, if so, whether some ceremonies need to be supplied.

Solution.[Discussion of issue of glove.]

Likewise, no one doubts the validity of a priestly ordination or episcopal consecration conferred by the imposition of one hand. For indeed the power which is conferred is sufficiently signified by the imposition of one hand.

It is indeed true that the Apostolic Constitution *Sacramentum Ordinis* determines and constitutes the first imposition of hands which takes place in silence to be the matter in priestly ordination.

However, the extension of one right hand is held [by *Sacramentum Ordinis*] to be a continuation of the imposition of hands.

That this other imposition of one hand does not have less power than the imposition of both hands is required by force of the aforesaid Apostolic Constitution itself which, while it declares “The matter of the Sacred Orders of diaconate, priesthood and episcopacy is one and the same, and that indeed is the imposition of hands” (§4), determines and lays down: “For ordination to diaconate, the matter is the imposition of the hands of the bishop which occurs once in the rite of this ordination” (§5). [Discussion of presentation of chalice. Not necessary for validity.]

I. Aertnys, C. Damen

Theologia Moralis, 17th edition, (Rome: Marietti 1958), 2:563.

Question 2. Whether the imposition of both hands would be required for validity.

Answer. No. In the Ordination of a Deacon the *Roman Pontifical* prescribes in clear terms an imposition of only one hand. In the Ordination of a Priest and of a Bishop an imposition of both hands is indeed prescribed — but it is plain that this is in no way necessary to it for validity, as though a fuller transmission of power would be signified. For the fullness of power is also sufficiently shown to be transferred by the imposition of one hand alone, extended over the head. Nor, moreover, is this viewed as differing essentially from the extension of both hands. This is evident from the ancient liturgy in which priests and bishop were often ordained by the imposition of only one hand, and it is still done to this day in many oriental rites.

Appendix II

The Matter for Holy Orders: A Historical Note

The issue of what constituted the essential matter for the Holy Orders of diaconate, priesthood and episcopacy had been debated for centuries.

The debate arose because the rites used for conferring these orders were long and complex, and contained many ritual actions which appeared to express the essence of the order being received — imposition or impositions of a hand or hands, anointing, ceremonial touching of or presentation with symbols of office, vesting with robes of office, etc.

Most controverted of all was the matter for ordination to the priesthood. In the traditional rite there are two impositions of hands (three, if one counted a subsequent extension separately), anointings, and a presentation of the instruments of sacrifice. There were six different schools of thought as to which ceremony or combination of ceremonies constituted the essential matter for priestly ordination.

Surprisingly, Rome did not seem particularly concerned about stepping in to issue a definitive decision, so the controversy went on for

centuries. When a mistake or omission occurred during an ordination ceremony, the result was scruples, anxiety and appeals to Rome.

The commission charged with preparing the 1917 *Code of Canon Law* tried to prepare a canon to resolve the problem, but with no success. Its members, it turned out, followed various schools of thought on what constituted the essential rites for the various orders. A list of questions was submitted to Pius X, who passed it along to the Holy Office (the Vatican's chief doctrinal tribunal) for study and an eventual decision. (See F. Hürth, "Commentarius ad Cons. Apostolicam *Sacramentum Ordinis*," *Periodica* 37 [1948], 9–11.)

The decision arrived forty years later when Pius XII definitively settled the issue in his 30 November 1947 Constitution *Sacramentum Ordinis*. The pontiff declared that for conferring the Orders of diaconate, priesthood and episcopacy the essential matter was the same: the imposition of hands.

Only one imposition takes place in the Rite of Episcopal Consecration (with both hands) and only one (with one hand) in the Rite of Diaconal Ordination. These Pius XII designated as the matter for the respective orders.

For Ordination to the Priesthood the traditional rite prescribed: (1) both hands imposed in silence after the Litany, (2) one hand held extended immediately thereafter until a prayer has been recited, and (3) both hands imposed at the end of Mass.

Pius XII designated (1) as the essential matter for the priesthood.

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(Monograph, 2000)

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