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ORDINATION TO THE PRESBYTERATE IN THE SYRIAN CHURCHES: HISTORY AND STRUCTURE OF THE RITE

Abstract. The Sacrament of Holy Orders belongs to one of the most essential mysteries given to us by Jesus Christ. Apostolic succession handed down to the Church is a guarantee of the continuity of tradition and proof of the authenticity of Christian worship focused on the continuously present Lord. Even if liturgical functions are common to the Church as a whole, different liturgical traditions elaborated their own understanding of the sacrament and related ministry. This paper is a reflection on the essence of the ministry of a presbyter in the liturgical space of the Syrian Churches. The author starts by presenting their understanding of the sacrament and its validity and next discusses the structure of the rites in both West and East Syrian traditions. The last part of the presentation contains a theological reflection concerning the main consecratory prayer of Ordination to the Presbyterate.

Keywords: Holy Orders; Presbyterate; Syrian Churches; West-Syrian tradition; East-Syrian Tradition; priesthood.

The liturgies of the Churches of the Syrian tradition, both western and oriental, undoubtedly belong to the most enigmatic group. This is due to several factors: historical (the Syro-Oriental communities grew outside of the Roman Empire and developed a separate structure for their celebrations), linguistic (Syrian language¹ to this day is a natural barrier in learning about

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¹In Polish sources, the reader may encounter the adjective “Syrian” to describe the language of interest to us. Supporters of this nomenclature (e.g. Jan ŻELAZNY, *Zarys literatury patrystycznej kręgu języka syryjskiego* [Outline of Patristic Literature of the Syrian Language Circle] (Kraków: UNUM, 2011), 9) believe that such a distinction avoids ambiguity: Syrian is, in their opinion, the local version of the Arabic language currently used in Syria; hence the suggestion that the ancient Edessan Aramaic dialect, appropriate to the communities of local Christians, should be called Syrian (the author of this opinion in the cited work in the title of the book, how-

and understanding the discussed liturgies) and cultural (centers of the Syro-Oriental tradition were culturally closer to Semitic or even Assyrian bastions). Although Western man knows little about them, they show the original richness of the celebrations and theology, and this knowledge may contribute to a better understanding of the broadly understood Catholicity of the liturgy.

This study is an attempt to reflect on the history and liturgy of the sacrament (mystery, *rāzā*) of the priesthood at the level of presbyter. It aims to show the understanding of this sacrament and the celebration associated with it characteristic of the Western Syrian and Syro-Oriental Churches.

1. TERMINOLOGY

The issue of understanding the sacrament of Holy Orders in general among the Syrians is identical with the traditional teaching of the whole Church: sharing the legacy of the oldest patristic testimonies, the Syrian traditions understand the priesthood to strictly include the episcopate and presbyterate, which belong to higher ordinations, while the diaconate for them is also a ministry of service.² When we look at the levels of the clerical state in particular ordinations (lower and higher),³ we can notice that in the oldest Syrian documents (dated before 200), ordination to the episcopate is not mentioned. Researchers indicate that this is a bibliographical breach, completed after the final formation of the Eastern Church's hierarchy.⁴

Since the early Middle Ages, the Churches of the Syrian tradition have a nine-fold division of ministry and ordination. This is in reference to and a reflection of the heavenly hierarchy described by Pseudo-Dionysius the

ever, uses the word "Syrian" [sic!]). It seems that such a distinction is unnecessary and may be an unnecessary complication from Western languages (such as English *Syriac*, Italian *Siriaco*). In fact, the official language of the modern Syrian Arab Republic is Arabic, hence there cannot be any ambiguity here. Therefore, in this study we will use the term "Syrian language."

² "Nie jest święcony dla kapłaństwa, ale dla służenia biskupowi, żeby wypełniać to, co mu nakaze." HIPPOLYTUS, *Traditio apostolica*, I, 9. SCh 11 (Paris: Cerf, 1946), 39. Cf. Henryk PAPROCKI, "Hipolita Rzymskiego Tradycja Apostolska. Wstęp, przekład, komentarz," *Studia Theologica Varsaviensia* 14, no. 1 (1976): 153–154.

³ In the Syro-Oriental tradition, when giving lower ordination to the lectors, the bishop puts his hands on the candidate, but in this case it is not a sign of epiclesis and succession, but a symbol of choosing and appointing. Cf. Heinrich DENZINGER, *Ritus Orientalium Coptorum, Syrorum et Armenorum in administrandis sacramentis* (Würzburg: Typis et sumptibus Stahelianis, 1863), 134.

⁴ Cf. Samuel Hugh MOFFETT, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, vol. I (New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 118.

Areopagite.⁵ According to the Dionysian ideas, three angelic groups gather around the throne of God, each of which consists of three choirs. The first, the highest and the closest to God, are the choirs of Cherubim, Seraphim and the Thrones; then there are the Dominions, Strongholds and Authorities; the third group are the Principalities, Archangels and Angels. According to the Syrian tradition, the hierarchy of heaven is represented by the hierarchy of the Church on earth, where the highest group includes the patriarchs, metropolitans and bishops; the presbyters, deacons and subdeacons are slightly lower; the lowest group consists of lecturers, cantors and exorcists.

In turn, in the work *Liber Patrum*, three groups of choirs are represented as follows: the highest priests (Patriarch-Cherubim, Metropolitan-Seraphim, Bishop-Thrones), priests (Chorbishop-Dominions, Inspector-Strongholds, Presbyter-Authorities) and servants (deacon-Principality, subdeacon-Archangel, lector-Angel). The contemporary pontificates seem to be based on this division, omitting the “inspector,” and adding the “archdeacon.”⁶ It is worth noting that among the nine degrees of Holy Orders, only three use the original Syrian names (lector-*qārūyā*, deacon-*mshamshānā*, presbyter-*qašišā*), while the rest are taken from the Greek (*hypodqāqnā*, *chārepisqāpā*, *arkidyāqān*, *episqāpā*, *metrāpālitis*, *patrayarkā*), which may indicate that these developed latter in Syria.⁷

It should be noted that among the Fathers and Syro-Oriental writers, the priesthood is called the basic sacrament⁸ and the place that holds the key to God’s mercy. Since the Middle Ages, this sacrament is mentioned in the first place in the catalog of all the mysteries of the Church. Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV († 2015) drew attention to this, stating: “Priesthood is the most important and noblest sacrament in the Church, thanks to which the other sacraments of the Church can be celebrated and fulfilled; it is the greatest gift God has given to man, in which he gave mankind the power to forgive the sins of

⁵ More on this topic cf. Tomasz STĘPIEŃ, “Hierarchia niebiańska jako wzór idealnej społeczności. Polityczny aspekt myśli Pseudo-Dionizego Areopagity,” *Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne* 27, issue 1 (2014): 161–170.

⁶ Cf. Thomas MANOORAMPARAMPIL, “Holy Orders and Priesthood in the Syro-Malabar Church,” in *Syriac Dialogue. Sixth Non-Official Consultation on Dialogue within the Syriac Tradition*, ed. Peter Hofrichter, Gerhard Wilflinger (Vienna: Pro Oriente, 2004), 119.

⁷ Bawai SORO, “Priesthood in the Church of the East,” in *Syriac Dialogue. Sixth Non-Official Consultation on Dialogue within the Syriac Tradition*, ed. Peter Hofrichter, Gerhard Wilflinger (Vienna: Pro Oriente, 2004), 96.

⁸ Cf. ABDIŠŌ, “Marganitha,” IV, 2, in *The Book of Marganitha (The Pearl). On the Truth of Christianity: Written by Mar O’Dishoo Metropolitan of Suwa (Nisibin) and Armenia* (Trichur: Mar Themotheus Memorial Printing & Publishing, 1965), 47.

their fellow men.”⁹ Indeed, the oriental Christian intuition regarding the institutional priesthood sees in it the ability to validly perform all other sacraments, including baptism.¹⁰

2. PERMANENT EFFECTS OF ORDINATION IN THE EASTERN CHURCH

According to the teachings of the Catholic Church, the effects of receiving the Sacrament of Holy Orders are indelible. In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC 1582) we read: “As in the case of Baptism and Confirmation this share in Christ’s office is granted once for all. The sacrament of Holy Orders, like the other two, confers an *indelible spiritual character* and cannot be repeated or conferred temporarily.” In the Assyrian Church of the East (ACE, the Syro-Oriental tradition), this issue is not so obvious. Patriarch I ̄ō’yahb III († 658)¹¹ was the first person to notice this, stating that there is no real priesthood outside the Church, and any departure from the community results in losing the grace received from ordination.¹²

In recent years, the discussion on this subject was revived thanks to the Assyrian Bishop Mar Bawaia Soro, who in 2005 decided to join the community of the Catholic Chaldean Church. After announcing his decision, the Holy Synod of the Assyrian Church of the East issued a statement clearly confirming that the hierarchy was no longer “a priest or a bishop,” suggesting that the character given to him at the time of his ordination was taken away once and for all. Referring to this document, Felix Shabi from the Chaldean Church reminded everyone of the Catholic teaching on the nonrecurring, unrepeatable and indefatigable character of the Sacrament of Holy Orders.¹³ On behalf of the ACE, Genard Lazar responded by stating,

⁹ Op. cit.: Dietmar WINKLER, *Ostsyrisches Christentum. Untersuchungen zu Christologie, Ekklesiologie und zu den ökumenischen Beziehungen der Assyrischen Kirche des Ostens* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2003), 144.

¹⁰ Cf. DENZINGER, *Ritus Orientalium Coptorum, Syrorum et Armenorum in administrandis sacramentis*, 21.

¹¹ Cf. IŠŌ’YAHB III PATRIARCHA, *Liber epistularum*, CSCOSyr 64, (Parisiis: C. Poussielgue, 1904), 189.

¹² Cf. Tawer ANDRIOUS, *Die Sakramente der Kirche des Ostens (Ostsyrische Kirche) im theologische-historischen Rahmen* (Magisterarbeit–Universität Wien) (Wien: Universität Wien, 2010), 52. Cf. Wilhelm DE VRIES, *Sakramenten theologie bei den Nestorianern*, (series: *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 133) (Rome: Pontificum Institutum Orientalium Studiorum), 70.

¹³ Felix AL SHABI, *Does the Assyrian Church of the East (ACOE) Understand the Sacrament of Holy Orders*, http://www.kaldaya.net/2010/Articles/11_November_2010/43_Nov27_FrFelixShabniEnglish.html (accessed: 2.01.2018).

among others: “despite the fact that in the Latin tradition an indelible mark is imprinted, this is not the case with the theology of the Eastern Church.”¹⁴

Referring to the tradition of the Eastern Church, G. Lazar reminded that the priest and his ministry can be understood only in reference to the community that chose him, in which and for whom he was ordained. Consequently, he is ordained a priest for as long as he continues *in communione* with the Church that grants him the grace of consecration. Moreover, the priesthood is a gift of the Church, a charism and function, but according to the tradition of the ACE, it does not change a man in an ontological way. Although it is not possible in this Church to repeat the priestly ordination on someone who, for example, fell into excommunication, made penance and returned, this is not done because of the validity of the previously accepted sacrament, but only for moral reasons.¹⁵ It remains an open question whether such a state of affairs is the result of the actual theological understanding or terminological incoherence and the mutual incompatibility of the East and West (as has often been the case throughout history).

3. COMMON ELEMENTS OF THE ORDINATION RITES OF EASTERN CHURCHES

One of the oldest preserved Syro-Oriental manuscripts (1496) contains the ordination rites of a reader, subdeacon, deacon and presbyter, and in later texts, we also find ordination rites for a bishop, metropolitan, patriarch, archdeacon, *shahare*,¹⁶ cor-bishop¹⁷ and deaconess.¹⁸ In contrast, in the West

¹⁴Genard LAZAR, *A Response to Chor-bishop Felix Shabi*, <http://assyrianpost.blogspot.com/2010/12/response-to-Chor-bishop-felix-shabi.html> (accessed: 10.10.2017).

¹⁵Cf. *ibidem*.

¹⁶*Shahare* are people who fulfill a ministry that we could call “paradiakonatem” or “paraprezbiteratem”; they fulfilled certain functions assigned to these orders in the absence of proper ministers. Cf. Aimé Georges MARTIMORT, *Diaconesses: An Historical Study* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 160.

¹⁷Chor-bishop is a title given initially to a country bishop, who has authority in the name of the metropolitan bishop. These were priests who had the right to grant lower ordinations. Today in the majority of Syrian Churches, this function has disappeared, the title itself is simply honorary. Cf. Pericles JOANNOU, “Chorbishop,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. III, ed. Berard L. Marthaler (Washington: Thomson, 2003), 525–526.

¹⁸A liturgical function found in many liturgical traditions of antiquity. In the case of the Syrian Churches, the forms of the institution or ordination of deaconesses are found only in the Syro-Oriental tradition. Although the prayer over the candidate contains a form of epiclesis, it seems that this tradition rather shows a blessing than an ordination. This may be indicated by the

Syrian liturgical books, we find the ordination rites for the cantor, lector, subdeacon, deacon, presbyter and bishop, as well as the rites for establishing an archdeacon, cor-bishop, abbot or prioress.¹⁹

The Assyrian Church of the East, the Chaldean Church and the Syro-Malabar Church, which share a common liturgical tradition, have rituals that are the result of the editorial work of several generations of patriarchs: Marabasa I († 552), Išō'yahba III († 659), Cyprian of Nisibis († 767) and Gabriel of Bassorah († around 884).²⁰ In turn, the ordinations of the West-Syrian tradition's final forms were based on the pontificate attributed to the anti-Chechen patriarch Michael the Great († 1190).²¹

In the rites of both Syrian traditions, we find a number of elements that are also common to other liturgical traditions of the Christian East. These include:

- ◆ announcing the candidate's nomination;
- ◆ the community's approval (Greek ἄξιτος);
- ◆ prayers of supplication;
- ◆ the sign of the cross on the candidate's forehead (in the Eastern Churches, this means the renunciation of bodily desires and taking on a Godly life);
- ◆ the laying on of hands;
- ◆ the prayer of Holy Orders;
- ◆ a kiss of peace;
- ◆ celebrating the Eucharist;
- ◆ (in the case of an Episcopal ordination), placing the book of the Gospel on the head and a solemn "enthronement."²²

Essentially, in the traditions of the Christian Orient, only the bishop lays his hands on the candidate for ordination. It should be noted that, in principle, ordination to the presbyterate is given during the Eucharistic liturgy. The exception here is the Syro-Oriental tradition, which allows the possibility of ordination outside of the Eucharist.²³

fact that in the known manuscripts of the rite were not found immediately net to the ordination of deacons, and the place it was to be given was not the church but instead the sacristy. Paul F. BRADSHAW, *Ordination Rites of the Ancient Churches of the East and West* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1990), 89–90.

¹⁹ Ibidem, 11.

²⁰ Ibidem, 10.

²¹ IGNATIUS APHREM I BARŠAUM, *Geschichte der syrischen Wissenschaften und Literatur* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012), 64–65.

²² Paul F. BRADSHAW, *Rites of Ordination. Their History and Theology* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2013), 83.

²³ BRADSHAW, *Ordination Rites of the Ancient Churches*, 58.

Among the above-mentioned common ritual elements, there is an important prayer, the Ἡ θεία χάρις,²⁴ which although it comes from the circle of Greek liturgies, it is also found among the Syrians. Its two versions are presented below:

A. THE WEST SYRIAN TRADITION

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, which always completes what is lacking in us, by the will of God the Father and the power of the Holy Spirit, here present, who with fear, trembling and true faith, bends his neck before the holy altar and through the eyes of the mind looks at you, who dwell in the heavens, and awaits your heavenly gift, may he call and transfer *N.* from the deaconate state to the noble priesthood, that he may be a priest of the holy altar of the Holy Church ... Let us all pray that he receive the grace and presence of the Holy Spirit ...²⁵

B. THE SYRO-ORIENTAL TRADITION

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, which always fulfills the needs of the Church, the love of God the Father, and the power of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Let this holy and important rite that is given for the salvation of our lives, now, forever and ever be fulfilled by me. Amen.²⁶

The above euchological formula is an extremely valuable ancient work, to which such Church Fathers as Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite refer to.²⁷ In the past, there were assumptions (e.g. Bernard Botte) that in some liturgical circles, especially among the Syrians, this prayer could have been an essential sacramental formula for ordination, since the bishop said it at the time of laying on of hands.²⁸ This theory was quickly challenged by other scholars (such as, for example, Pierre-Marie Gy), who noted that it was necessary to distinguish between this prayer of proclamation and the invocation, or the epiclesis *sensu stricto*,

²⁴ For the original Greek prayer Cf. *L'Euclologio Barberini gr. 336*, ed. Stefano Parenti, Elena Velkovska (Rome: CLV, 2000)², 165.

²⁵ Cf. *Pontificale di Sharfet* (syr., karsh.), Sharfet: [no publisher] 1952. Op. cit.: Manel NIN, *La liturgia dell'Ordine nella tradizione Siro-Occidentale* (dispense per gli studenti) (Rome: PIO, 2012), 25.

²⁶ Cf. *Taksā d-simidā d-qashishā*, Mosul: [no publisher or date], 9.

²⁷ Cf. Stefano PARENTI, *Gli ordini sacri e i ministeri in Oriente*, (series: Scientia Liturgica, vol. IV) (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 1998), 220–222.

²⁸ Cf. Bernard BOTTE, “La formule d’ordination ‘la grace divine’” *L’OrientSyrien* 2 (1957): 292–296.

which is missing in the above prayer.²⁹ However, putting this question aside, this prayer is an important element in celebrating higher orders in the East.

4. STRUCTURE OF THE SACRAMENTAL RITES OF HOLY ORDERS IN SYRIAN CHURCHES

Although the ordination rites of various Eastern traditions have a number of common elements, yet each community has developed its own rituals, which we can find both in their structure and in their associated euchologies.

STRUCTURE OF CELEBRATING THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY ORDERS

West Syrian Tradition (A)	Syro-Oriental Tradition (B)
<p>1. INTRODUCTORY RITES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Glory to the Father... (as in the celebration of other Sacraments); ◆ The bishop instructs the candidate; ◆ The candidate signs the vow; ◆ The tonsure (on four sides of the head in the shape of a cross); ◆ the prayer for the Church; ◆ Psalms 15 and 51 (responsorial); ◆ The <i>prohemion</i> and <i>sedro</i>; ◆ The prayer: “come and hear...”; ◆ The incense. 	<p>1. INTRODUCTORY RITES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The candidate signs the vow; ◆ The tonsure; ◆ Glory to the Father... (as in the celebration of other Sacraments); ◆ The introductory prayer; ◆ Psalm 105.
<p>2. LITURGY OF THE WORD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 4 Pauline pericopes (1 Cor 12:28; 1 Tim 3:1-11; Tt 1:5-9); ◆ The Alleluia; ◆ Three fragments from the Gospel according to St. John (J 20:19-23; 16:33; 17:12) are sung by the bishop. When the Holy Spirit is mentioned, the bishop blesses the candidates; ◆ The <i>Credo</i>. 	<p>2. LITURGY OF THE WORD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ In the ordination rites of this tradition, the Liturgy of the Word is not necessary. If the ordination is given during the Eucharistic liturgy, then the Bible passages for the day are read.

²⁹ Cf. Pierre-Marie GY, “Ancient Ordination Prayers,” *Studia Liturgica* 13 (1979): 75. Cf. BRADSHAW, *Rites of Ordination*, 87.

<p>3. ORDINATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The bishop's silent prayer; ◆ the prayer "The grace of our Lord..." (recited by the deacon); ◆ the bishop's silent prayer; ◆ prayer for the candidate's worthiness; ◆ the laying on of hands and the spiritual "transfer" of blessings from the Eucharistic species onto the candidate together with the epiclesis gesture imitating the movement of wings; ◆ the prayer of ordination with the epiclesis; ◆ anointing with holy oil (only in the Maronites, a Latin Church element); ◆ placing the right hand on the head of the ordained. 	<p>3. ORDINATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The prayer "The grace of our Lord ..." (recited by the bishop); ◆ the bishop's prayer for himself; ◆ Psalm 84; ◆ prayers for the ordination candidate; ◆ Psalm 21; ◆ the epiclesis prayer; ◆ kissing the altar and the baptismal font by the candidate; ◆ prayer for the candidate; ◆ Psalm 132 with a prayer; ◆ prayer and anointing with holy oil; ◆ Psalm 123; ◆ the bishop's prayer; ◆ placing the right hand on the head of the candidate; ◆ prayer with the ordination rite; ◆ dressing in the priestly robes; ◆ handing on the Book of the Gospel; ◆ blessing and kissing the forehead of the ordained; ◆ Psalm 144:18–25; ◆ kissing the altar by the newly ordained; ◆ the kiss of peace.
<p>4. CONCLUDING RITES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Prayer of thanksgiving; ◆ dressing in the priestly robes; ◆ incensing the sanctuary by the newly ordained; ◆ Holy Communion. 	<p>4. CONCLUDING RITES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Concluding prayer and blessing (except when the Eucharistic Liturgy will be celebrated).

In the above statement, it can be seen that the priestly ordination to the degree of presbyter in both Syrian traditions has a similar structure, and the rites themselves contain similar elements. The essential differences include the context of performing an ordination: while the East Syrians allow for the possibility of ordination outside the Eucharist and on any day of the week, the Western Syrians do not separate the stewardship of this sacrament apart from the Eucharistic context and the most appropriate day for giving it is Sunday. Although the contemporary practice of the Eastern Church rarely includes the "non-mass" form of ordination, here we see a difference between the two Syrian traditions: if in the Antioch Churches, due to the fact that the consecrated species are "used" during the ordination, it is given at the end of

the anaphora,³⁰ then in the Syrian Orient, the moment of ordination is not clearly indicated: the sacrament is most often given immediately after the beginning of the liturgy or before the *Credo*, which in this tradition precedes the Eucharistic prayer.³¹ Another element differentiating the Syrian tradition is the lack of their own readings in the Syro-Oriental rites. The biblical elements found here are mainly from the Psalms and in the content of the prescribed prayers. In addition, in the case of the Syro-Oriental tradition, the rites contain the Bishop's prayers for himself.

In these patterns of ordination rites, we can see that the liturgy of ordination is more developed in the Syrian East: the presence of several epiclesis elements makes the entire rite one action of summoning the Holy Spirit. In the Oriental *taksā*, however, there is a lack of catechesis explaining the presbyter's ministry, which is very appropriate among the Syrians. Its function in the West Syrian rites is performed by the *sedrā*, containing a catalog of about thirty charisms that should characterize a priest.³²

During the presbyterate ordination in the West Syrian Churches, the bishop, before he places his hands on the head of the ordained, first places them over the consecrated species, then he somewhat transfers the grace obtained for them onto the head of the ordained; next, vibrating his hands, he imitates the movement of wings, thus indicating the epiclesis that is taking place. Irénée H. Dalmais notes that this gesture is extremely important and is a characteristic element of Syrian pneumatology, used to strengthen the faith of the community through the action of the Holy Spirit, which at this point makes the man a real pneumatophore, and this is almost noticeable.³³

The very gesture of "transferring" spiritual gifts from the consecrated species onto the body of the ordained also has a deeply Christological character: it clearly shows that it is not the bishop, the main celebrant of the liturgy, who is most important, but Christ himself is the one who ordains his priests.³⁴ What is important here is that this gesture is a spiritual anointing and replaces the anointing of a priest with holy chrism oil present in other

³⁰ Cf. NIN, *La liturgia dell'Ordine*, 9.

³¹ Cf. *The Order of the Syro-Malabar Qurbana* (Kochi: Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Commission for Liturgy, 2012), 44.

³² Irénée Henri DALMAIS, "Les ordinations dans la tradition syro-antiochienne," in *Ordinations et ministères. Conférences Saint-Serge XLII semaine d'études liturgiques* (Rome: CVL, Edizioni Liturgiche, 1996), 99, 101–102.

³³ *Ibidem*, 99–100.

³⁴ Cf. BRADSHAW, *Ordination Rites of the Ancient Churches*, 178, 181, 183, 191, 195, 197.

liturgical traditions (only the West Syrian Maronites have a tradition of anointing hands with oil, but this was influenced by the Latin tradition).

5. PRESBYTERATE ORDINATION PRAYERS IN THE SYRIAN TRADITIONS

Paul F. Bradshaw notes that the tendency to multiply ordination prayers is inherent in all traditions of the Christian East. In the case of the Syro-Oriental tradition, we have two: the first comes before the prayer of the faithful and is the same for every degree of ordination, changing only its name; the second follows the gesture of the hands, and seems to be the main prayer of consecration.³⁵ In the West Syrian tradition, too, several prayers were formed, which we can call preparatory or following the main prayer. The ones that should be considered most important are presented below.

ORDINATION PRAYERS

West Syrian Tradition (A)	Syro-Oriental Tradition (B)
<p>God, great and worthy of admiration, who does glorious and awe-inspiring things that cannot be counted; you who are great in your power and inconceivable, more wonderful in giving advice than men. You are a God who knows the secrets of our hearts, you know our thoughts and penetrate our intentions, because there is nothing hidden before the eyes of your just judgments.</p> <p>You are God who knows the life of this your servant, for you see what was, is and will be. You, in all generations, choose for holy ministry those who you want: choose now your servant to be a presbyter and let him receive the great gift of the Holy Spirit in immaculate disposition, without blemish and with unwavering faith, and in this way he will become worthy of obeying the Gospel of your Kingdom, to stand before your holy altar, to offer spiritual gifts and sacrifices, and to renew your people through the baptism of rebirth.</p>	<p>God, you are our King, you are good and full of compassion (<i>repeats</i>). You are rich in mercy and great in your favor. Lord, out of your immeasurable grace, you have placed me as a steward of your divine gifts in your Holy Church to distribute spiritual talents in your name to those who serve your holy ministry of the sacraments. In accord with the Apostolic tradition that was passed on to us through the laying on of hands and Holy Orders, we present you your servant <i>N.</i>, that he may become a priest in your holy Church. Let us pray for him (<i>repeats</i>). May the grace of the Holy Spirit descend upon him. May he be strengthened and perfected to faithfully fulfill the priestly ministry that will be entrusted to him. Amen.</p> <p><i>The bishop makes the sign of the cross over the candidate.</i></p> <p>Lord God Almighty (<i>repeats</i>), Creator of heaven and earth and of all that is in them, you chose the Holy Church. You gave us prophets,</p>

³⁵ BRADSHAW, *Rites of Ordination*, 93.

<p>May he himself appear as the lamp of the light of your only begotten son who is co-eternal with you, for the order and adornment of your holy Church, to fulfill good by the laying on of his hands; that in this way the Word of your Gospel may be spread, and that your name be adored in every creature, just as it is in the Church, which will be entrusted to your servant ...</p> <p><i>The bishop turns to the altar and sings out loud:</i></p> <p>... and that in this way also he, present at our Lord's second coming from heaven, the great God and Savior Jesus Christ, among the line of presbyters, may receive a good reward for his good management through the abundance of the grace of your only-begotten Son, through whom and with whom you deserve glory, honor and power, together with your holiest and good Spirit. Amen.</p> <p><i>The bishop blesses the people: Peace.</i></p> <p><i>He calls the deacon to bow his heads, and the bishop concludes with the prayer:</i></p> <p>Look upon us Lord and our ministry and cleanse us from all blemishes, giving heavenly grace to your servant, that he may become worthy, thanks to your gift, to serve you without blemish, and to find the mercy that comes from you, together with all your saints who have always been pleasing to you.</p>	<p>apostles, teachers and priests for perfecting the bodies of the saints and for serving ministries, to build the Church's body through them. You are the Almighty God, King of the whole world, by the grace and mercy of your only begotten son. To you and to the Holy Spirit, let there be praise, honor, thanksgiving and adoration, now and forever and ever.</p> <p>Look favorably upon your servant, choose him and change him through the descent of the Holy Spirit. Give him the grace of proclaiming the true word. Lord God Almighty, choose him for the presbyterate, so that when he puts his hands on the sick, they be healed (<i>the bishop extends his right hand over the new priest</i>), and for the service of your holy altar with a pure heart and sincere intention. May he offer you sacrifices of prayer and thanksgiving, sanctify the baptismal waters with the power of your gift and introduce a new family into your Holy Church, sons and daughters for the glory of your name. Let him be able to stand steadfast before you on the last day, preparing a holy people ready for you decorated with good deeds. Grant, Lord, that he may stand firmly in your temple.</p> <p>We ask this through the grace and mercy of your only begotten son. To you, to him and to the Holy Spirit, let there be glory, honor, thanksgiving and adoration, now and forever and ever. Amen.</p> <p><i>The bishop marks the head of the ordained</i></p>
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The presented prayers are based on the traditional format for the entire Church: a short anamnesis follows the introductory part, next is the epiclesis, and finally the doxology. In the case of the West Syrian prayer, the anamnesis takes on a deeply theological character and points to God's omnipotence and omniscience, who in his greatness is interested in the fate of every particular person. The axis of the initial narrative is characterized by the God-man relationship. In the case of the Syro-Oriental prayer, the anamnestic dimension of salvation economy is emphasized. The ordination candidate is placed in the stream of tradition reaching back to the prophets, apostles, teachers and priests. In this key, the priesthood transmitted by the

Church appears to be a perfectly preserved tradition of the Old Testament. This part of the prayer also shows the essential meaning of the choice which God himself made.

The most important elements of both prayers are fragments about the future ministry and tasks of the presbyters. In West Syrian prayers, a presbyter's ministry primarily includes the sacraments of Christian initiation. In turn, in the Syro-Oriental prayers, the tasks of presbyters include: the mission of proclaiming the word, the service of the sacraments of initiation and bringing relief to the sick. Even though Syro-Oriental Churches usually do not include anointing of the sick among the other sacraments,³⁶ the healing ministry is given a special place here. An eschatological direction is also present in these prayers. The good management of God's husbandry on earth is to become the distinguishing element of a presbyter who awaits Jesus Christ's parousia.

The last element we ought to pay attention to is the nomenclature used in the prayers. Although in the Syrian language two titles are used to describe a presbyter-priest, *kāhnā* (priest) and *qašišā* (elder), only the first title is used in the ordination ceremonies. The second is used only during the Eucharistic liturgy in order to emphasize that although an ordained man participates in the priesthood, ultimately the only celebrant and priest of the Eucharist is Jesus Christ.³⁷

6. CONCLUSION

The institution of the sacrament of Holy Orders among the Syrians is, next to the Eucharist, the greatest gift that Jesus Christ gave to his Church. Without this mystery, access to all the other sacraments would remain closed. Although the essence of Holy Orders is common to all Christians, in their traditions we find a special interpretation. This study shows the historical context of the development of the sacrament, its understanding in two Syrian traditions, as well as the ritual connected with it. In addition to many elements that combine this ritual with other liturgical families, a number of original features have been pointed out, such as the lack of anointing of the

³⁶ Cf. Mateusz POTOCZNY, "Namaszczenie chorych w liturgiach Kościołów tradycji bizantyjskiej i syryjskiej," *Liturgia Sacra* 22, no. 2 (2016): 386–401.

³⁷ Cf. IDEM, "Saint or Sinner? The Figure of the Priest-Celebrant in the Pre-Anaphoric Prayers of the Liturgy of the West-Syriac Tradition," *Parole de l'Orient* 46 (2017): 340.

hands of a neo-presbyter in the West Syrian tradition or the absence of the need for ordination to be performed along with the celebration of the Eucharist. In addition, the issue of the lasting effects of Holy Orders in the Eastern Assyrian Church seems interesting. Although the context of shaping these two processes of the celebration was different, the theology concerning ordination to the priesthood in the Syrian East and West mutually complement each other and, as a whole, are complementary to the rites of other traditions.

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