

The Laying Hands, Religion or Social?

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ABSTRACT: The 21st century will be a religious one or not. The revolutions in the former communist bloc seemed to turn the world into churches and set the tone for bringing religion back to the forefront. A rediscovery of the values of the Christian faith will produce a pure and true religion. One of these values is putting hands. Both Jesus Christ and the apostles were healed, "poured out" the Holy Spirit upon the converts, and consecrated men to the ministry by laying on of hands.

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Introduction

Since ancient times, the hand had a significant symbolic meaning, being considered the symbol of human action. Hand washing was the symbol of innocence, prayer was accompanied by raising hands to heaven. The right hand generally symbolizes strength and power. Holding the right hand raised symbolizes protection and favor. In the Bible, the hand of God is presented as an instrument of power (Olsen 1990, 125).

History of Laying Hands

In the Old Testament, the practice of laying on of hands is common: Jacob blessed his sons Joseph by laying on of hands (Genesis 48:8); Aaron, as high priest, laid his hands on the head of the goat for Azazel, to symbolically transfer the sin of the people upon him (Leviticus 16:21); Joshua was appointed a descendant of Moses by the laying on of hands (Numbers 27:18, Deuteronomy 34:9).

The laying on of hands in the case of Jesus Christ meant miracles, blessings, and compassion. He dealt with difficult cases: lepers, deaf-mute, blind, sick with serious and incurable diseases at that time, resurrection from the dead, but also simple cases such as blessing children. He did all these things not to force others to accept Him, but because He had come to fulfill the needs of the oppressed (Isaiah 61:1-3; Luke 4:18-19). Christ's purpose was for all these people to receive more spiritual healing than physical healing, but this did not always happen (the healing of the ten lepers, of whom only one received spiritual healing – Luke 17:17-19).

Some consider Christ a great guru, initiated during His childhood in India or One who heals through telepathy, bioenergy or hypnosis (McDowell 1994, 292-293). Spiritual healing achieved through telepathic transmission of bioenergetic information is one of the simplest ways to explain the divine grace sent to the human being (Munteanu 1998, 178).

The explanation is based on the golden rules of telepathy: you cannot be telepathic if you have hatred and envy in your soul; you cannot be telepathed unless you learn the golden rules of love; telepathy is the simplest and most difficult method of transmitting information, because it requires a high degree of spiritualization; telepathy can be achieved only on a perfect mental vacuum, otherwise they are only transmissions from one's own subconscious; the world of telepaths is a distinct world, for it presupposes peace, calm, and love; the world of telepaths is a relaxed world, for it has only the rule of unconditional love and forgiveness; telepathy is the subtle way of transmitting information, and through it, information can be

obtained from all fields, from all bedridden and ungodly spirits, from all the angels and all the spirits of the Earth (Munteanu 1998, 176-177).

This list fits very well with the teachings about love, forgiveness, understanding, about maintaining a close connection with the divinity promoted by Jesus Christ, which could validate the opinion of the supporters of this idea. However, Christ also healed by word, not just by touch. Although these "golden rules" of telepathy are very Christian at their core, it does not prove that Jesus was a follower of such a healing method (through telepathy or bioenergy).

He also did not teach any of His disciples that when He was before a deaf-mute, He would put His fingers in His ears and spit in His mouth to heal Him. He did not encourage, in any case, to put a spit mixed with spit in the eyes of a blind man to restore his sight. Jesus did not make all these gestures to give them a mystical character. His touches spoke, sent non-verbal messages to those with whom he interacted, not bioenergy or any magical power.

Filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4; 4:31), the apostles laid their hands on their fellow men, healing the sick (Acts 3:7-8; 5:12.15-16; 9:17; 19:11-12; 28:8), giving the Holy Spirit to those who received the Word (Acts 8:17; 19: 6) or consecrating them in various ministries (Acts 6: 6).

Such things were accomplished not only through the apostles, but also through other believers consecrated to God. Here, for example, by putting his hands on Ananias, Saul regains his sight (Acts 9:18) and is filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17); the church at Antioch consecrated Paul and Barnabas as missionaries (Acts 13:2); Timothy was consecrated in the ministry by the elders (1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6). Also, in his Epistle, James mentions another form of laying on of hands: the anointing of the sick with oil (James 5:14-15).

The early Christians did not lay their hands on the sick to cause them to choose Christ, but did so in a selfless way, to meet their needs and deliver them from suffering (healing of Publius' father - Acts 28:7-10). Of course, they too would have wanted all these people to receive more spiritual healing than physical healing.

The laying on of hands did not convey healing, blessings, or the Holy Spirit, but they all came from God. The laying on of hands was a symbolic act and not a means by which divine power came (White 1994, 134-135), because, for example, the Holy Spirit could come upon men without the laying on of hands (Acts 2:4; 4:31; 10:44).

In conclusion, the laying on of hands, in general, does not transmit any power in itself, but only God is the one who heals, yet in the right of Christ, we cannot separate His gestures from His divinity.

As for the apostles, the laying on of hands is a symbolic act and not a sacramental one. Although healings also took place through the apostles (some amazing, being enough for even the shadow of Peter to rest on a sick person and he was healed), this power did not come from them, but was given to them by God.

The Roman Catholic position

The anointing of the sick became a sacrament in the Roman Catholic Church. The first document underlying the transformation of this ritual of the early church into a sacrament is a letter dated 417 AD of Pope Innocent I to Decentius, bishop of Gubbio. Based on the text in James, the pope notes that the oil is blessed by the bishop and applied to the sick person by the bishop or priest (McBrien 1980, 784).

In the Middle Ages, anointing became more and more a sacrament of preparation for death, other than the original purpose of healing the sick. The Second Vatican Council made a clear distinction between the sacrament of anointing the sick and the sacrament of

preparation for death. Anointing is not a sacrament of those who are about to die, but in the holy anointing of the sick, accompanied by the prayer of the priest, the whole Church commends the sick of the Lord, who suffered and was glorified, asking Him to give release and rescue (McBrien 1980, 785-787).

Regarding the laying on of hands for consecration in services, the Roman Catholic Church states that all those who have been baptized are in some way priests of Christ. However, ordained priests differ from those baptized not only in rank but also in essence. There are three degrees of ordination: bishop, elder and deacon; bishops as successors of the apostles are superior to others (McBrien 1980, 806-807). All the ordained have a supernatural power to administer the sacraments, through which they offer the beneficiary supernatural grace. According to the Council of Trent on Baptism and Ordination, the priesthood is imprinted with a character that can never be taken away (Olsen 1990, 121).

The Orthodox position

The priesthood of Christ, in Orthodox opinion, is exercised through three steps: bishops, priests and deacons. Each bishop is the successor of all the apostles and is therefore considered a partaker of the same hierarchical grace and of the same teaching and guardian of the Church. After that, each bishop is ordained by several bishops in the name of the whole episcopate, receiving the same grace and the same teaching that all the apostles and all the bishops had and at the same time being able to share to the priests, and through them to the faithful of his diocese, the same grace and the same unchanged teaching (Staniloaie 1997, 157).

This uninterrupted succession of grace comes through the intercession of persons who, with grace, also transmit their faith in the Holy Spirit. In other words, with the succession of the grace of the apostles we have the succession of faith from them. The priesthood as the objective mediator of Christ includes in it the present actuality of the work of Christ (Staniloaie 1997, 158).

Christ ordains invisible, directly and visibly, through bishops, bishops, priests, and deacons, communicating to them the Holy Spirit or the infinite love of God and of God, which is in His body. However, this communication is made through the prayers of the first apostles, then the bishops (bishops: 1 Timothy 1:6; Titus 1:5; priests: 1 Timothy 5:22; Acts 14:22; 20:28; deacons: Acts 6:6; 1 Timothy 3:10, etc.).

In conclusion, both the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic position are identical in terms of the mystique of ordination. The ordained receive special powers, based on apostolic succession and "once ordained forever ordained". Also, the laying on of hands is hierarchical, there are three levels of the priesthood, the first level (the bishop) ahead of the other two.

The Protestant position

In his book *A Prelude on the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Martin Luther attacks the concept of Roman Catholic ordination, saying that it is ridiculous to consider it a sacrament of God, something He did not establish. This sacrament, he continues, is the invention of the pope's church. Ordination is nothing but a ritual in which one is called to serve the Church (Olsen 1990, 153).

For his part, Calvin attacks this sacrament of the Roman Catholic Church, saying that all these claims are nothing but insults to Christ. Both, however, speak in favor of the priesthood of all believers (Olsen 1990, 153).

Both Calvin and Luther found biblical support for the laying on of hands in the installation ceremony. But they considered this event to be only a ritual or ceremony, as it

had no power or force in itself. Regarding the installation in a service, what matters is not the ceremony, but the calling of that man (Olsen 1990, 157).

In conclusion, these Protestant positions, supported by Luther and Calvin, condemn Catholic mysticism, supporting the biblical position on the laying on of hands, that of a symbolic act and not a sacramental one.

Rediscovering the value of laying on of hands

At the end of the twentieth century, the question arose as to whether or not the next century would be a religious one. Today, the healing and "descent" of the Holy Spirit are phenomena specific to charismatic movements, but they are viewed with great skepticism and great reservations by Christianity and beyond. In fact, the phenomenon itself is very limited. Laying on of hands is the only event in all Christianity practiced today.

The phenomenon of healing is very rare, if not almost non-existent (Boice 2000, 582). In Augustine's opinion, the only reason there are no miracles today is that the world should not become too accustomed to them and the faith should cool. However, he does not deny that the phenomenon still exists, but on a small scale (Augustin 1997, 59-60).

Throughout the history of God's people, miracles and healings have taken place in the time of Moses, Elijah, and Elisha, but also in the time of Christ and the apostles (isolated during the Babylonian captivity (Rotaru 2015,188-193)). Therefore, God chooses when the phenomenon of miraculous healings occurs. In other words, it does not necessarily depend on the faithfulness of the people or their representatives.

During His life, Jesus Christ was not content to draw attention to Him alone as a miracle worker or healer. He wanted to take their minds away from the earthly and lead them to the spiritual (White 1997, 204). The Savior performed miracles only when absolutely necessary, and each miracle was intended to heal them spiritually (White 1997, 296).

For their part, Christians contemporary with Christ were eager to be free from sickness and suffering, but they were not interested in spirituality. In other words, for many Jews, His miracles did not produce faith or spiritual values (White 1997, 317).

God does not work miracles where He has left to man the means to accomplish a particular work, yet we must not lose sight of the fact that the Bible speaks of the existence of the gift of healing (White 1997a, 121). On the other hand, miracles should not be the goal but the formation of a noble character (Matthew 7:21-27).

Although the world today is greedy for "hunger for flesh," by which we mean erotic touches, yet we must not forget that man's hands can produce healing touches to the soul, producing comfort, or soothing the pains of others. We must not overlook the marginalized by society, the sick or neglected. Jesus Christ took time to deal with such people. He laid His hands on these beings, but He does not work miracles where a simple gesture of sensitivity can bring healing.

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