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Ordination in the Ancient Church (III)

Everett Ferguson

Ordination in the Second and Third Centuries

A fairly uniform practice in ordination has been found to exist throughout the church in the fourth century. Can this practice be traced to an earlier period? The answer is, "Indeed, yes." Nevertheless, the second and third centuries show more variety than the fourth century.

Rome and North Africa

We may appropriately begin this unit by an examination of a document greatly influential on the later church orders, the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus, written in the early third century but designedly conservative in its contents. The doubts that have arisen about R. H. Connolly's thorough-going identification of the "Egyptian Church Order" as the *Apostolic Tradition*¹ have been successfully dispelled.² The best critical edition is by Gregory Dix.³

Concerning bishops Hippolytus provides for their Election by all the people, a formal Ratification of the Election, and consecration to office by Prayer and the Imposition of hands.

Let the bishop be ordained⁴ being in all things without fault chosen by all the people.

And when he has been proposed (*nominatus*) and found acceptable to all,⁵ the people being assembled on the Lord's Day together with the presbytery and such bishops as may attend, let *the choice* be generally approved;⁶

Let the bishops lay hands on him and the presbytery stand by in silence,

And all shall keep silence praying in their heart for the descent of the Spirit.

After this one of the bishops present at the request of all, laying his hand on him who is ordained bishop,⁷ shall pray thus,

¹*Texts and Studies*, Vol. VIII (1916), No. 4.

²D. B. Botte, "L'authenticite de la *Tradition Apostolique de saint Hippolyte*," *Recherches de Théologie ancienne et médiévale*, XVI (1949), 177-185. Heinrich Elfers, "Neue Untersuchungen ueber die Kirchenordnung Hippolyts von Rom," *Abhandlungen ueber Theologie und Kirche: Festschrift fuer Karl Adam* (Ed. Marcel Reding; Duesseldorf: Patmos, 1952), 169-211.

³Gregory Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus of Rome* (London: S. P. C. K., 1937). Quotations will be made from this edition.

⁴The eastern versions indicate *cheirotonein* was the original word.

⁵The effort apparently was to win unanimous approval. If the *nominatus* refers to the selection (Designation), the "found acceptable" may imply a Scrutiny of qualifications. If it refers to the Nomination of a candidate (as in Dix's translation), then the latter phrase indicates the Election.

⁶If we follow Dix's interpretation here, provision is made for the neighboring bishops to give their approval of the worthiness of the candidate.

⁷The double prayer and laying on of hands may indicate that two practices have become fused in the ceremony: one a corporate action (by a presbytery?) and the other an individual action.

saying:

O God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
Father of mercies and God of all comfort,
Who dwellest on high yet hast respect unto the lowly,
Who knowest all things before they come to pass;
Who didst give ordinances unto Thy church "by the Word of
Thy grace";
Who didst foreordain from the beginning the race of the
righteous from Abraham,
instituting princes and priests and leaving not Thy sanctuary
without ministers;
Who from the foundation of the world hast been pleased to be
glorified in them whom Thou hast chosen;
And now pour forth that Power which is from Thee,
of the princely Spirit which Thou didst deliver to Thy
Beloved Child Jesus Christ,
which He bestowed on Thy holy Apostles
who established the Church
which hallows Thee in every place to the endless glory
and praise of Thy name.
Father who knowest the hearts of all
grant upon this Thy servant whom Thou hast chosen for the
episcopate
to feed Thy holy flock
and serve as Thine high priest,
that he may minister blamelessly by night and day,
that he may unceasingly behold and propitiate Thy
countenance
and offer to Thee the gifts of Thy holy Church,
And that by the high priestly Spirit he may have authority to
forgive sins according to Thy commandment,
To assign lots according to Thy bidding,
to loose every bond according to the authority Thou gavest to
the Apostles,
and that he may please Thee in meekness and a pure heart,
offering to Thee a sweet-smelling savour,
through whom to Thee be glory, might and praise,
to the Father and to the Son with the Holy Spirit
now and ever and world without end. Amen.⁸

Observe that the descent of the Holy Spirit, which occupies a prominent place, is in response to Prayer and not by the Imposition of hands. The authority of the bishop "to assign lots" has generally been taken as a reference to appointing lesser clergy; on the other hand Schermann makes a good case for interpreting this duty as the distribution of the offerings brought to the altar for the bishop to give to the poor.⁹ "To assign portions" or "to make distributions" would then be the best rendering. The bishop's ordination occurred in the setting of the Sunday worship. The new bishop proceeded immediately to the celebration of the Eucharist.

⁸Dix, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-6. For the Prayer the Greek text has been reserved in the *Constitutions Through Hippolytus*. The early and literal Latin version is the best source, where it exists. It is printed in Theodor Schermann, *Die allgemeine Kirchenordnung* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schoeningh, 1914).

⁹Schermann, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-97.

The instructions concerning the ordination of a presbyter have been the occasion of much confusion.

And when a presbyter is ordained (*cheirotonein*) the bishop shall lay his hand upon his head, the presbyters also touching him. And he shall pray over him according to the aforementioned form which we gave before over the bishop, praying and saying:

O God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
Look upon this Thy servant
and impart to him the spirit of grace and counsel,
that he may share in the presbyterate and govern Thy people
in a pure heart.

As Thou didst look upon the people of Thy choice
and didst command Moses to choose presbyters
whom Thou didst fill with the spirit
which Thou hadst granted to Thy minister,
So now, O Lord, grant that there may be preserved among us
unceasingly the Spirit of Thy grace,
and make us worthy that in faith we may minister to Thee
praising Thee in singleness of heart,
Through Thy Child Christ Jesus
through Whom to Thee be glory, might, and praise,
to the Father and to the Son with the Holy Spirit in the
holy Church now and for ever and world without
end. Amen.¹⁰

Most scholars have followed the suggestion of C. H. Turner to the effect that the first part of the bishop's Prayer was to be repeated (through the phrase "praise of Thy Name") and then followed by the special Prayer applicable to the presbyter.¹¹ Characteristically, the Biblical precedent to which appeal is made is the choice of the Seventy Elders in the time of Moses.¹²

The section on deacons gives the fullest discussion of the theory of the ministry.

And a deacon when he is appointed (*kathistanai*) shall be chosen according to what has been said before,¹³ the bishop alone laying hands on him in the same manner. Nevertheless we order that the bishop alone shall lay on hands at the ordaining of a deacon for this reason:

that he is not ordained (*cheirotonein*) for a priesthood, but for the service of the bishop that he may do only the things commanded by him.

For he is not appointed to be the fellow-counsellor of the whole clergy but to take charge of property and to report to the bishop whatever is necessary.

¹⁰Dix, *op. cit.*, pp. 13f.

¹¹C. H. Turner, "The Ordination Prayer for a Presbyter in the Church Order of Hippolytus," *Journal of Theological Studies* XVI, 542-47.

¹²The "spirit of grace and counsel" is simply grace and counsel. The Holy Spirit, especially in the first part from the bishop's Prayer, is the same Spirit given to the Apostles and puts presbyters as well as bishops in the "succession."

¹³The Election of the bishop by the people seems to be the only possible previous action to which this could refer.

He does not receive the Spirit which is common to all the presbyterate, in which the presbyters share, but that which is entrusted to him under the bishop's authority.

Wherefore the bishop alone shall make (*cheirotonein*) the deacon.

But upon the presbyter the other presbyters also lay their hands because of the similar Spirit which is common to all the clergy.

For the presbyter has authority only for this one thing, to receive. But he has no authority to give holy orders.

Wherefore he does not ordain (*kathistanai*) a man to orders but by laying on hands at the ordination of a presbyter he only blesses (lit. seals, *sphragizein*) while the bishop ordains (*cheirotonein*).

Over a deacon, then, let him say thus:

O God, who hast created all things and hast ordered them by the Word

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ

whom Thou didst send to minister Thy will and reveal unto us Thy desire;

grant the Holy Spirit of grace and earnestness and diligence upon this Thy servant¹⁴

whom Thou hast chosen to minister to Thy church

and to bring up in holiness to Thy holiness that which is offered to Thee by Thine ordained high priests to the glory of Thy name;

so that ministering blamelessly and in purity of heart

he may by Thy good will be found worthy of this high and exalted office,

praising Thee through Thy Child Jesus Christ our Lord

through whom to Thee with Him be glory, might and praise

with the Holy Spirit in the holy Church now and ever and world without end. Amen.¹⁵

This passage is instructive, but some phrases are not as clear as might be desired. One receives the impression that Hippolytus protests too much. Are these relatively new ideas concerning a ministry of three grades?

The Imposition of hands by presbyters in the ordination of another presbyter is interpreted as a Benediction, or an act of "sealing" what the bishop does. The bishop's Imposition of hands "ordains." But what content is to be put in the word *cheirotonein*? It cannot be the imparting of the Spirit, because in this passage the reason given for the presbyters' Imposition of hands is the "similar Spirit which is common to all the clergy." The fact that *cherotonein* in this section is used interchangeably with *kathistanai*, unlike the distinction made in the rest of the treatise, perhaps indicates that the bishop's action is nothing more than the constitutive act.

In both the deacon's and bishop's Prayers there is a statement that

¹⁴On the basis of Hippolytus' statement that the deacon "does not receive the Spirit common to the presbyterate" and of the parallel phrase in the Prayer for a presbyter, this phrase should read "grant the spirit of grace. . ." (with the Ethiopic) and not "grant the Holy Spirit" as Dix reads following the Latin.

¹⁵Dix, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-17.

God has chosen the person to be his servant. The means of this choice was an Election by the people.

One important point emerges from the discussion of the lesser orders: *cheirotomia* and a laying on of hands are denied to all but the bishops, presbyters, and deacons. The reason given in the passage about widows is that the clergy offer the oblation and have a liturgical ministry (*leitourgia*). Other functionaries are "appointed" (*katastasis*) or "named" or given a symbol of their work (a book was handed to the Reader). The earliest use of *cheirotonein* in a restricted technical sense, referring to the bishop's action in the installation of church functionaries, thus occurs in the *Apostolic Tradition*.

A description of how the Election of bishops might be decided in actual practice and how the people viewed such occasions would supplement Hippolytus' formal directions. Such an insight is provided by Eusebius' account of the selection of Fabian as bishop of Rome in A.D. 236.

It is said that Fabian, after the death of Anteros, came from the country along with others and stayed at Rome, where he came into the clergy in a most miraculous manner, according to the divine and heavenly grace. For when the brethren were all assembled for the election of the one who was going to succeed to the episcopate, many notable and distinguished men were in the thoughts of many. Fabian, who was there, came into no one's mind, but suddenly, they relate, a dove flew down from above and settled on his head in clear imitation of the descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove upon the Saviour. Whereupon the whole people, as if moved by one divine spirit, with all eagerness and with one soul cried out, "Worthy," and immediately took him and placed him on the throne of the episcopate.¹⁶

The psychology of early Christian Elections emerges clearly from this account. Nomination was not simply proposing a name in a casual way. The people expected some divine guidance as to the name that "came to mind"; a spontaneous recognition indicated the working of God's Spirit. Nomination was proposing a person who would have divine approval. The combination of Nomination, Acclamation, and Enthronement has a superficial resemblance to certain selections of emperors, but each item had ample roots in Christian practice.¹⁷ The context, also, is specifically Christian—the omen of the dove became a substitute for the Inspired Designation of earlier times.

Cyprian's writings from the mid-third century bind together Rome and North Africa as having the same practice in ordination. Cyprian ascribed a definite role to the laity, the clergy of a city, and the bishops of neighboring churches. In his doctrinal interpretation he stresses that it is God who places the person into office.

The ordination of Cornelius as bishop of Rome and the subsequent

¹⁶H. E. VI. xxix. Greek text for Eusebius in GCS.

¹⁷Eduard Stommel, *Bischofstuhl und hoher Thron*, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, I, 66-72.

schism by Novatian provided the occasion for some of Cyprian's most important pronouncements. One passage summarizes Cyprian's position:

Cornelius was made bishop by the judgment of God and His Christ, by the testimony of nearly all the clergy, by the vote of the people who were present, by the company of old priests and good men.¹⁸

Of the same import are numerous other passages.¹⁹

That ordination is God's action appears in many of Cyprian's statements.²⁰ Not only is the office the institution of God but individuals also fill the office according to God's will, knowledge, and assistance. A person is worthy because of the influence of God in his life, so it may be said that God's "decision" makes a bishop. The "judgment of God" is listed separately from the human actions. No *one* item in the process is made to correspond to the act of God. At the same time God is working through the laity in choosing a bishop and through the bishops in installing him into office, so that the parts of the process are united into one whole. The appointment from God is said to insure worthy priests; on the other hand, one passage (*Ep.* LXVII, 2) gives the reverse emphasis: the people are to choose those who are worthy so that God will accept their ministry.

In one place Cyprian seems to speak as if the only reason for the presence of the laity at Elections of bishops was to guarantee the choice of a worthy person (*Ep.* LXVII, 4). Later in the passage the role of the laity is made more explicit as that of giving their vote. The same epistle stresses the obligation of the people to withdraw from unworthy clergymen (*Ibid.*, 3). *Suffragium* carries its full meaning of "vote" in Cyprian.

Although having a determinative role in the selection of episcopal candidates, the laity's suffrage may have been exercised only on a candidate given a prior Nomination by the clergy. This inherently probable procedure is indicated if (as seems likely) there is a deliberate sequence in the passage quoted above: the judgment of God, the testimony of the clergy, the vote of the people, the company of the priests (*i.e.* the assembly of neighboring bishops). In *Ep.* LXVIII, 2 the local clergy share the *suffragium* of the people; whether a separate vote or participation in the general Election is not indicated. However, in the "Life of Cyprian," supposedly written by his deacon Pontius, the people had the initiative in the Election of Cyprian and presented him as their candidate to the clergy for Ratification. Some of the latter had their reservations, but the ordination proceeded with Cyprian being seated in the episcopal chair.²¹

¹⁸*Ep.* LV, 9. For the Cyprian correspondence we follow the edition of G. Hartel for *CSEL*, Vol. III.

¹⁹*Epp.* LIX, 5 and 6; XLIV, 2 and 3; LXVIII, 2.

²⁰In addition to previous references note *Epp.* XLVIII, 3; LV, 9; LXI, 3; LXVI, 1 and 9.

²¹"Life of Cyprian," 5, 6. English translation in *Fathers of the Church* series, Vol. XV. The Latin text in *CSEL* Vol. III, Part III.

The neighboring bishops were present to bestow the episcopate in a formal Imposition of hands (*Ep.* LXVII, 5). Otherwise, Cyprian has little to say about the Imposition of hands and the interpretation to be given to this act.

Other members of the clergy below the rank of bishop were filled by the bishop, but ordinarily with the approval of the rest of the clergy and of the people (which could be dispensed with in time of emergency).²²

Asia Minor

The Greek East demonstrated its attachment to historic democratic processes in the prominence given to Parochial Election. The "Life" of the third century bishop Gregory Thaumaturgus by the fourth century Gregory of Nyssa gives striking details of the Election of a bishop. Although the later Gregory's language is that of his own time, there seems no reason to doubt the basic accuracy of the report of the events. The description accords well with the circumstances of the third century. The narrative is all the more remarkable because it records the institution of a new episcopal see. The people of Comana had invited the missionary Gregory to come and ordain a bishop for them.

When the time came to accomplish their request and proclaim someone of the church their high priest, then the leading men busied themselves to put forward those considered conspicuous in eloquence, in ancestry, and in other things. Since these things were in the great Gregory, they considered it necessary that these things not be lacking in the one coming to this grace. Because the votes were divided and some preferred one and some another, Gregory awaited some counsel from God to come to him concerning one to be appointed. . . . As the people presented their several candidates with commendations each in behalf of his choice, he recommended that they look among those of lower station of life (for it was possible that someone would be found among these more endowed with riches of the soul than those most conspicuous in life). One of those presiding at the vote felt pride and irony at such judgment of the great. . . and coming to him he said tauntingly: "If you recommend these things, to overlook such who have been chosen from the whole city and to take someone from the lowest ranks for elevation to the priesthood, it is time for you to call Alexander the charcoal-maker to the priesthood. If you say so, we, the whole city, transferring the votes to this one, will agree together." . . . It entered Gregory's mind that it was not without divine providence that Alexander came to the minds of the voters and was mentioned. And he said, "Who is this Alexander of whom you make mention?"

The man mentioned as occupying the lowliest position turned out to be a philosopher who had been converted to Christianity. He had taken up his trade in order to avoid observation and to follow his philosophical studies with greater privacy. Impressed, Gregory planned to win popular support for him as bishop. After accomplishing his purpose, Gregory gave a lecture on the dangers of superficial judgments.

²²*Ep.* III, 3; XXIX; XXXVIII, 1 and 2; XXXIX.

After he said these things, he presents the man to God by consecration after the form prescribed for the impartation of grace.²³

Presumably Gregory was the only bishop present to perform the ordination. The author's failure to speak of details in the ceremony of installation is more than compensated for by the full picture of the Election. We see the full arrangements for Elections in Greek civil life, including Election-conducting officials, distinct from the visiting bishop. Nomination was important, and it was related to the expectation of divine guidance: God caused a given name to come to mind and be submitted to the people. There is abundant reference to the voting, the division of the populace so that no one had a clear majority, and the evident desire to secure unanimous support for a spiritually worthy candidate.

Asia Minor is also the locale which furnishes the earliest reference to the laying on of hands in an ordination setting outside the New Testament. In the *Acts of Peter* (The Vercelli Acts) from about the year 200 Peter is addressed:

If, therefore, you, on whom He imposed hands and whom He elected, did doubt, I, having this testimony, repent, and take refuge in your prayers.²⁴

The reference is to the appointment of Peter as an apostle; apparently the act of Imposition of hands was so common in ordination that the author could not think of conferring an office in the church without it. The Imposition of hands must have already had a history in church life, a fact which would go far to fill the gap in our evidence in regard to ordination during the second century.²⁵

Palestine and Syria

The region of the first home of Christianity knew some anomalous practices. One of these, traces of which barely survive in the literature but which may not have been uncommon, was the appointment of a successor by a dying bishop. Theodoret records one definite instance of such in the late fourth century at Antioch.

After him when Evagrius had occupied his see, hostility was still shown to the great Flavianus, notwithstanding the fact that the promotion of Evagrius was a violation of the law of the Church, for he had been promoted by Paulinus alone in disregard of many canons. For a dying bishop is not permitted to ordain another to take his place, and all the bishops of a province are ordered to be convened.²⁶

Canon 23 of the Council of Antioch earlier in the century contains the prohibition:

It shall not be lawful for a bishop to appoint another in his place as his successor, even if it happens at the end of his life. And if any such thing is done, the appointment shall be invalid.²⁷

²³*Vita S. Greg. Thaum.* PG XLVI, 933ff.

²⁴*Act. Pet.* 10. Latin text in Leon Vouaux, *Les Actes de Pierre* (Paris: Letouzey, 1922).

²⁵Behm, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

²⁶*H. E.* V. xxiii. Translation from *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers.*

²⁷Lauchert, *op. cit.*

We may be reminded that what no one does no one prohibits. The canon is a confirmation of the practice of Episcopal Designation of a successor, presumably a practice which would reach back into the third century.

Alerted to the possibility, we may be able to see something in the earlier literature that otherwise would be missed. There is a set of passages in the Pseudo-Clementines giving a brief statement of the appointment of bishops at various places by Peter. At Tyre, "Peter established a church and installed (*kathistanai*) for them a bishop from one of the presbyters who were with him."²⁸ The same pattern was followed at Sidon, Beirut, and Laodicea.²⁹ A fuller statement of the same import is made of Peter's activities at Tripolis.³⁰ With Schmidt we would agree that the editor has the general standpoint of the catholic church of the third century that all bishops are of the same rank and have received their appointment from the apostles.³¹ But is not even more indicated? The choice in each case is Designation by the Apostle. Puzzling is the fact that Peter makes the Designation out of Presbyters who traveled with him. A large entourage of traveling presbyters from whom local bishops are appointed is quite improbable. But another solution suggests itself. The compiler is reflecting practices from his own time—the bishop designated and ordained his successor from the circle of presbyters in his church.³²

The Pseudo-Clementines show a close affinity with Jewish Christianity. Another set of references presents in a Christian dress ideas which have been found in Rabbinic Judaism.

Jesus Christ is presented as the true prophet who, like Moses, hands down an authoritative tradition through a succession of teachers. In what has been called the "oldest document" of the Clementina,³³ the "Epistle of Peter to James," this idea is the dominant theme. Peter is pictured as warning James not to commit the books of his preachings to the Gentiles, or to any of "our own race" without examination.

But if any one who has been proved is found worthy, then to him commit them according to the traditional practice, even

²⁸*Hom.* VII.v.3. The Greek text has been newly edited by Bernhard Rehm, *Die Pseudoklementinen*, for GCS. The latest study, and containing a review of previous research into the complicated literary history of the Pseudo-Clementines is Georg Strecker, *Das Judentum in den Pseudoklementinen* ("Texte und Untersuchungen"; Berlin: Akademie, 1958). A brief survey in English of the critical positions is J. A. Fitzmyer, "The Qumran Scrolls, The Ebonites, and their Literature," *Theological Studies* XVI (1955), pp. 345-50.

²⁹*Hom.* VII.viii.3; xii.2; XX.xxiii.3.

³⁰*Hom.* XI.xxxvi.2.

³¹Carl Schmidt, *Studien zu den Pseudo-Clementinen* ("Texte und Untersuchungen"; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich, 1929), pp. 333f.

³²More evidence of this practice will be forthcoming from the writings of Origen, but the Alexandrian stage will have to be set before considering his testimony.

³³Schmidt, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

as Moses delivered his teaching to the seventy who succeeded to his chair.³⁴

A Christian counterpart in the apostles and early disciples to the seventy elders of Numbers 11 and their role in Pharisaic tradition is evident from several passages.³⁵

The taking over of the action and associations of Solemn Seating from the Jewish background is prominent even in those passages more in line with the orthodox tradition of the Church. The "Epistle of Clement to James" purports to be the announcement of the ordination of Clement as bishop of Rome. Now instead of a Jewish-Christian under the mask of Peter, a Gentile Christian writes under the mask of Clement.³⁶ Although there is Imposition of hands in this ordination, the central conception is the Seating of the candidate on the *cathedra* of the teacher. Peter speaks:

I ordain (*cheirotonein*) for you as bishop this Clement, to whom I entrust my chair of discourse.³⁷

Clement protested his unworthiness:

While he was speaking, I knelt before him and entreated him, declining the honor and authority of the chair.³⁸

Peter replied as follows:

This chair has no need of a presumptuous man who loves the position.³⁹

After a charge to Clement which gives first importance to teaching ahead of judging and an extensive discussion of the organization of the church Peter gives a charge to the people.

You also, my beloved brethren and fellow-servants, be subject to the president of the truth in all things, knowing this, that the one who grieves him has not received Christ, with whose chair he has been entrusted.⁴⁰

The ordination of Clement was performed according to the following description:

Having said these things and laid his hands on me in the presence of all, he compelled me to be installed in his own chair.⁴¹

A similar account in some detail is given of Peter's ordination of Zacchaeus as bishop of Caesarea in the third *Homily*. Peter states the following:

³⁴*Ep. Pt. ad Jas.* 1:2.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 2; *Hom.* II.xxxviii.1; *Recog.* I.xl. According to H. J. Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1949), pp. 51f, the latter two passages go back to a "Preachings of Peter," one of the two main documents drawn on by the "Source Document" which is the basis of the two recensions surviving as the "Homilies" and "Recognitions" of Clement. In the *Contestatio*, the latter part of the document containing the "Epistle of Peter to James," there is described the initiation of a scholar into the Christian Rabbinic Academy, a ceremony without parallel in Christian or Jewish sources.

³⁶Schmidt, *op. cit.*, pp. 328f.

³⁷*Clem. ad Jac.* 2:2.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 3:1.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 3:2.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 17:1.

⁴¹*Ibid.* 19:1.

Since therefore it is necessary to set apart someone instead of me to fill my place, let us all pray to God with one accord, in order that he might make known who among us is the best, that having been installed in the chair of Christ he may administer his church piously.⁴²

After a discourse on the value of monarchy, the narrative continues:

After he said this, he laid hold on Zacchaeus who was standing by and forced him to sit down in his own chair.⁴³

Then after the Seating occurs the Imposition of a hand and the Prayer (which in this case bears no resemblance to any other that has been preserved).⁴⁴

The word rendered "install" in these quotations is *kathistanai*. Its close association with the placing of the candidate in a chair in these accounts may have some relation to the prevalence of the word even at a later date.

The *Didascalia*, from Syria in the middle of the third century, has some references of importance for ordination. Concerning the "pastor who is appointed bishop and head among the presbytery in the Church" it is directed that he "be proved when he receives the imposition of hands to sit in the office of the bishopric."⁴⁵ In keeping with the general picture of the bishop as the center of the community, it is he who appoints the rest of the clergy, apparently without any intervention by the people.⁴⁶

The region of Syria and Palestine definitely shows a greater prominence by the clergy and a more marked monarchical tendency than the rest of the Church at this period.

Egypt, Especially Alexandria

A series of relatively late but independent witnesses testify to something unusual in the ordination procedure of the church at Alexandria in the ante-Nicene period.

Jerome provides the earliest evidence in his letter to Evangelus.

At Alexandria from the time of Mark the Evangelist until Heraclas and Dionysius the presbyters always named (*nomina-bant*) as bishop one elected out of their own number and placed on a higher rank, just as an army makes an emperor or deacons elect from themselves one whom they know to be diligent and call him arch-deacon. For what except ordination does a bishop do that a presbyter does not do?⁴⁷

Jerome thus affirms that at Alexandria the presbyters both selected and installed their bishop. Although there was an Election and a placing in a higher rank (Solemn Seating?), the significant

⁴²*Hom.* III.lx.1.

⁴³*Ibid.* lxiii.1.

⁴⁴*Ibid.* lxxii. Cf. *Recog.* III.65f for a briefer account in Latin.

⁴⁵*Didas.* 4. We quote the translation of R. H. Connolly, *Didascalia Apostolorum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929). The Syriac word for "laying on" is from the root *sim*.

⁴⁶*Didas.* 9.

⁴⁷*Ep.* 146. *PL XXII*, 1194.

action was the Naming, bestowing the title "bishop."⁴⁸ The natural sense of the words indicates that the practice covered the episcopates of both Heraclas and Dionysius, but the manner of expression shows that Jerome did not know when it came to an end. Since these were the last two bishops known to Origen, Jerome's information may have come from Origen.⁴⁹

The strongest independent support for Jerome comes from Severus, Monophysite patriarch of Antioch in the early sixth century who was exiled to Alexandria. He offers the following testimony:

The bishop also of the city, renowned for its orthodox faith, of the Alexandrines was in old times appointed by presbyters: but in modern times, in accordance with the canon which has prevailed everywhere, the solemn institution of their bishop is performed by bishops, and no one makes light of the accurate practice that prevails in the holy churches and recurs to the earlier condition of things, which has given way to the later clear and accurate, deliberate and spiritual injunctions.⁵⁰

This tradition continued in the Alexandrian church and was preserved in the *Annals* of the tenth century Melkite patriarch of the city, Eutychius. Although Eutychius does not come off too well as a historian, his details and the agreement of his account with earlier testimony suggest that he was using good sources in the following passage:

Mark the Evangelist appointed at the same time with the patriarch Hananias twelve presbyters who were to be with the patriarch, so that when there was a vacancy in the patriarchate they should elect one of the twelve presbyters and the remaining eleven laying their hands on his head should bless him and make him patriarch. Afterwards they should elect another eminent man who would be appointed in the place of the one made patriarch, that there might always be twelve. And this custom of the twelve presbyters of Alexandria appointing the patriarch out of themselves continued until the time of Alexander patriarch of Alexandria, who was one of the 318 (at Nicaea). He forbade the presbyters henceforth to appoint the patriarch. He decreed that on the death of a patriarch the bishops who would ordain a bishop should convene. He further decreed that on a vacancy in the patriarchate they should elect any excellent man of well-known worth, whether one of those twelve presbyters or any other, from the region and make him patriarch. And thus ceased that ancient custom by which the patriarch was made by the presbyters alone, and the power of making the patriarch came to belong in its place to the bishops. . . . From Hananias, whom Mark the Evangelist appointed patriarch of Alexandria, to the time of Demetrius the

⁴⁸Karl Mueller, "Kleine Beitrage zur alten Kirchengeschichte," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, XXVIII (1929), p. 278, points out that according to his parallels Jerome meant "called," not "nominate" by *nominabant*. The sentence structure also would be against "nominate."

⁴⁹W. Telfer, "Episcopal Succession in Egypt," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. III (1952), p. 4.

⁵⁰E. W. Brooks, ed., *The Sixth Book of the Select Letters of Severus Patriarch of Antioch* (London: Text and Translation Society, 1903), II, 213.

patriarch (who was eleventh in the succession) there was no bishop in the provinces of Egypt, nor had the patriarchs before him appointed a bishop. When he was made patriarch he appointed three bishops, and he was the first patriarch of Alexandria who made bishops. On the death of Demetrius, Heraclas was elected patriarch of Alexandria, who appointed twenty bishops.⁵¹

Telfer has brought together the confirmations of Eutychius' statements and has shown the dependence of all of Egypt on Alexandria for its bishops.⁵² Eutychius not only testifies to the custom of presbyters ordaining the bishop, but he also explains the reason. For a long time there were no other bishops in Egypt. Eutychius fixes the time of the change in the constitution of the Alexandrian church between the episcopates of Alexander and Athanasius.⁵³

A younger contemporary of Eutychius, the Egyptian Monophysite bishop Severus, has been appealed to as preserving a more reliable Egyptian tradition. His accounts of the ordination of the patriarchs of Alexandria through the fourth century show considerable variety but within a pattern.⁵⁴ The early bishops were only names to the historian. In describing their appointment he stresses the selection by the people and generally mentions the presence of other bishops (but he gives incidental confirmation that Demetrius was the first bishop to appoint other bishops). These statements follow the same pattern as the formulas announcing the appointment of fourth century patriarchs. The conclusion which presents itself is that Severus has made up the earlier accounts according to his knowledge of later practice.

Demetrius is the first bishop of whom Severus has historical knowledge, and this is through Eusebius. But it is to be noted that with Demetrius there begins a series of bishops of whom no details are supplied for their appointment. It hardly seems accidental that the first bishops for whom details of their lives are known are those for whom the least is recorded about their ordination. The first of the "historical" bishops details of whose appointment are given is Peter I; and with the addition of a selection of him by his predecessor the account corresponds exactly to the Jerome-Eutychius version of episcopal consecration at Alexandria. Severus has apparently reproduced a source contrary to his own principles at this point.

The *Canons of Hippolytus* add a confirmatory testimony. Since the studies of R. H. Connolly, it is generally held that the *Canons of Hippolytus* are no earlier than the latter half of the fourth century.⁵⁵

⁵¹A Latin translation is given in *PG CXI*, 982.

⁵²Telfer, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-4.

⁵³Perhaps Telfer (*op. cit.* p. 12) is right in conjecturing that Alexander accepted the fourth canon of Nicaea requiring episcopal consecration of bishops in return for the extended jurisdiction granted Alexandria in the sixth canon.

⁵⁴Translated by B. Evetts in *Patrologia Orientalis*, ed. R. Graffin and F. Nau, Tome I, Fascicules 2 and 4, pp. 144-155, 175-211, 383-425.

⁵⁵Connolly, *op. cit.*, pp. 132f.

Egypt would seem the most likely place of composition, both because the work survives only in Arabic and because the theory of the ministry would only have been stated by someone familiar with early Alexandrian history. Since the compiler of these canons was only revising the *Apostolic Tradition*, we need not quote from it at length. The person who imposes his hand and prays over the bishop-elect is said to be "one of the bishops and presbyters."⁵⁶ The regulations concerning the presbyter are most instructive:

If now a presbyter is ordained, all things are done with him in the same way as with the bishop, except he is not seated in the chair.

Also in the same way a prayer is prayed over him in all respects like that over a bishop, with the exception only of the name of the episcopate.

The bishop in all things is equal to the presbyters except in the name of the chair and in ordination, which power of ordaining is not assigned to him.⁵⁷

This is a theory of the ministry strikingly like that held by Jerome. The bishop differs from a presbyter only in the special seat given him and in the power of ordination. The similarity was enforced by directing that a similar Prayer be stated except for the name "bishop." The directions of the *Apostolic Tradition* apparently were misunderstood and its Prayer for a presbyter was simply omitted.⁵⁸ The obvious reason for the compiler taking this alternative and giving the directions which he did was that he had a theory of the ministry based on the recollection of an earlier state of affairs, when there was no great difference between presbyters and bishops and when ordination was restricted to the chief minister (who occupied the chair) for the sake of the order of the church.

Origen, who himself received ordination to be a presbyter through the imposition of the hands of Palestinian bishops,⁵⁹ is a key figure for Alexandrian practice. However, his interest was mainly theological, and his few statements of interest exist only in Latin translation.

In discussing Leviticus 8:4f Origen gives two reasons for the presence of the people at an ordination: to be witnesses to the person's character, and to prevent any refusal by the people to obey.⁶⁰ On another occasion Origen expresses the thought that a person who has the qualifications laid down by Paul is a bishop in God's sight even if he does not receive ordination by men.⁶¹ Again, Origen

⁵⁶CH II, 10. The Arabic has been translated into Latin by Haneburg and printed in Hans Achelis, "Die Canones Hippolyti," *Texte und Untersuchungen*, VI (1891) and into German by Wilhelm Riedel, *Die Kirchenrechtsquellen des Patriarchats Alexandrien* (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1900), pp. 200-230.

⁵⁷CH IV, 30-32.

⁵⁸C. H. Turner, *op. cit.*, pp. 542-47.

⁵⁹Eusebius, *H.E.* VI.viii.4; xix.16; xxiii.4.

⁶⁰*Hom.* in Lev. VI, 3. The text for Origen followed is that of W. A. Baehrens in *GCS, Origenes Werke*, Vol. VI.

⁶¹*Comm. Mt.* Ser 12. *Ibid.*, Vol. XII. (Cf. Clem. Alex., *Strom.* VI.xiii.106.)

stressed the selection of the man God would choose, appealing to the practice of the Apostles in selecting a successor to Judas by praying and committing the outcome "not to chance but . . . to a divine choice by providence."⁶²

In commenting on the appointment of Joshua, Origen emphasizes that Moses did not select one of his sons or nephews but asked God to make the choice. He then applies a lesson to the practice of his own day.

If therefore such a one as Moses gives not his judgment in electing a leader of the people, in appointing a successor, what man would be he who dares to do so, either of the people who are always accustomed to be moved by shouts for favor or perhaps excited for money, or of those who may even be priests and judge themselves suitable for this task, except only him to whom through prayers and petitions it is revealed by God? You hear as God says to Moses: . . . (Num. 27:18-20). You hear obviously the ordination of a leader of the people clearly described, so that there is almost no need of exposition. Here there was held no acclamation of the people, no regard of kinship, no consideration of friendship. . . . The Government of the people is delivered to him whom God elected.⁶³

Origen's language in the whole context perhaps points to his knowledge of three different modes of selection: by the bishop himself (note that Moses does not appoint his own successor), by the clergy or the church or from neighboring churches (the "priests"), and the acclamation of the people (who could be stirred by less than spiritual motives).⁶⁴ These procedures were characteristic of Palestine, Alexandria, and the Greek East, respectively. against all of these methods Origen is advocating the committing of the choice to a spiritual man who through prayer knows the mind of God.

Egypt is the probable provenance of the *Apostolic Church Order*, which in its present form probably dates from the beginning of the fourth century. Harnack has identified two source documents dealing with the church order, which go back to the end of the second century, in the latter part of the work.⁶⁵ The instructions concerning the Election of a bishop belong to one of these sources.

If there are a few men and a congregation where there are not twelve men competent to vote at the election of a bishop, they are to write the neighboring churches where there is a

⁶²*Hom.* in Joshua XXIII, 2. *Ibid.*, Vol. VII.

⁶³*Hom.* in Num. XXII, 4. *Ibid.*

⁶⁴This interpretation accounts for different scholars finding in the passage what they want to find: Emil Goeller, "Die Bischofswahl bei Origenes," *Ehrengabe Deutscher Wissenschaft* (Ed. Frank Fessler; Freiburg: Herder and Co., 1920), pp. 611-13; Telfer, *op. cit.*, p. 9; Mueller, *op. cit.*, p. 283; Charles Gore, *The Church and the Ministry* (London: S.P.C.K., 1949), pp. 126-129; E. W. Kemp, "Bishops and Presbyters at Alexandria," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, VI (1955), pp. 129-131.

⁶⁵Adolf Harnack, "Die Quellen der Sogenannten Apostolischen Kirchenordnung," *Texte und Untersuchungen*, II, 5 (1886), p. 6.

settled one so that the selected men may come thence and examine carefully who is worthy.⁶⁶

Election by the men of the congregation is presupposed, and there seems no necessity that the three men from neighboring churches be clergymen. The following chapter states, "He who has been appointed (*kathistanai*) bishop . . . shall appoint two presbyters whom he approves."⁶⁷ This provision is ascribed by Harnack to the last redaction of the church order. Accepting the analysis of Harnack, Hennecke has sought to place the document in the history of the Egyptian church by postulating an intermediate stage in its development, dating from c. 230, as part of the program of Demetrius and Heraclas for instituting bishops in the outlying churches from Alexandria.⁶⁸ Whether this be accepted, the primitive state of affairs could have prevailed almost anywhere, and thus we are prepared to turn to the earliest period of the church.

PERSONALIA

GEORGE HOWARD is a graduate of David Lipscomb College (B.A.) and Harding College School of Bible and Religion (M.A.) and soon to receive the Th.M. He is minister to the church of Christ at Brinkley, Arkansas.

NEIL R. LIGHTFOOT is Asst. Prof. of Bible at Abilene Christian College. He is a graduate of Baylor (B.A.) (M.A.) and has the Ph.D. from Duke University. His Ph.D. dissertation was an evaluation of the Revised Standard Version of the N. T.

EVERETT FERGUSON is a graduate of Abilene Christian College (B. A.) (M.A.) and of Harvard University (B.D.) (Ph.D.). His article is the third in a series based upon his dissertation.

VIRGIL R. TROUT is minister of the Sunset Church of Christ, Lubbock, Texas. He has had wide experience in speaking at universities and schools and in the field of philosophy of science.

FAUSTO SALVONI is a frequent contributor to the pages of the *Restoration Quarterly*, as well as to many European journals. He has both earned and honorary doctors' degrees from leading universities in Italy. He is a former professor at Roman Catholic Universities in that country. He is presently engaged as a lecturer and evangelist for churches of Christ throughout Europe.

⁶⁶*ApCO* 16. The Greek text is printed by Schermann, *op. cit.*

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 17.

⁶⁸Edgar Hennecke, "Zur Apostolischen Kirchenordnung," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, XX (1921), pp. 246-248.