INSTITUTES

OF

THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

BOOK FOURTH.

OF THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH.

CHAPTER III.

OF THE TEACHERS AND MINISTERS OF THE CHURCH.

THEIR ELECTION AND OFFICE.

The three heads of this chapter are,—I. A few preliminary remarks on Church order, on the end, utility, necessity, and dignity of the Christian ministry, sec. 1-3. II. A separate consideration of the per­sons performing Ecclesiastical functions, sec. 4-10. III. Of the Ordina­tion or calling of the ministers of the Church, sec. 10-16.

*Sections.*

1. Summary of the chapter. Reasons why God, in governing the Church, uses the ministry of men. 1. To declare his condescension. 2. To train us to humility and obedience. 3. To bind us to each other in mutual charity. These reasons confirmed by Scripture.

2. This ministry of men most useful to the whole Church. Its ad­vantages enumerated.

3. The honourable terms in which the ministry is spoken of. Its necessity established by numerous examples.

4. Second part of the chapter, treating of Ecclesiastical office-bearers in particular. Some of them, as Apostles, Prophets, and Evangelists, temporary. Others, as Pastors and Teachers, perpetual and indispensable.

5. Considering the office of Evangelist and Apostle as one, we have Pastors corresponding with Apostles, and Teachers with Prophets. Why the name of Apostles specially conferred on the twelve.

6. As to the Apostles so also to Pastors the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments has been committed. How the Word should be preached.

7. Regularly every Pastor should have a separate church assigned to him. This, however, admits of modification, when duly and regularly made by public authority.

8. Bishops, Presbyters, Pastors, and Ministers, are used by the Apostles as one and the same. Some functions, as being temporary, are omitted. Two, namely, those of Elders and Deacons, as pertain­ing to the ministry of the Word, are retained.

9. Distinction between Deacons. Some employed in distributing alms, others in taking care of the poor.

10. Third part of the chapter, treating of the Ordination or calling of the ministers of the Church.

11. A twofold calling, viz., an external and an internal. Mode in which both are to be viewed.

12. 1. Who are to be appointed ministers? 2. Mode of appointment.

13. 3. By whom the appointment is to be made. Why the Apostles ere elected by Christ alone. Of the calling and election of St Paul.

14. Ordinary Pastors are designated by other Pastors. Why certain of the Apostles also were designated by men.

15. The election of Pastors does not belong to one individual. Other Pastors should preside, and the people consent and approve.

16. Form in which the ministers of the Church are to be ordained. No express precept but one. Laying on of hands.

1. We are now to speak of the order in which the Lord has been pleased that his Church should be governed. For though it is right that he alone should rule and reign in the Church, that he should preside and be conspicuous in it, and that its government should be exercised and administered solely by his word; yet as he does not dwell among us in visible presence, so as to declare his will to us by his own lips, he in this (as we have said) uses the ministry of men, by making them, as it were, his substitutes,[[1]](#footnote-1) not by trans­ferring his right and honour to them, but only doing his own work by their lips, just as an artificer uses a tool for any purpose. What I have previously expounded (chap. i. sec. 5) I am again forced to repeat. God might have acted, in this respect, by himself, without any aid or instrument, or might even have done it by angels; but there are several reasons why he rather chooses to employ men.[[2]](#footnote-2) First, in this way he declares his condescension towards us, employing men to perform the function of his ambassadors in the world, to be the interpreters of his secret will; in short, to represent his own person. Thus he shows by experience that it is not to no purpose he calls us his temples, since by man’s mouth he gives responses to men as from a sanctuary. Secondly, it forms a most excellent and useful training to humility, when he accustoms us to obey his word though preached by men like ourselves, or, it may be, our inferiors in worth. Did he himself speak from heaven, it were no wonder if his sacred oracles were received by all ears and minds reverently and without delay. For who would not dread his present power? who would not fall prostrate at the first view of his great majesty? who would not be overpowered by that immeasurable splendour? But when a feeble man, sprung from the dust, speaks in the name of God, we give the best proof of our piety and obedience, by listening with docility to his servant, though not in any respect our superior. Ac­cordingly, he hides the treasure of his heavenly wisdom in frail earthen vessels, (2 Cor. iv. 7,) that he may have a more certain proof of the estimation in which it is held by us. Moreover, nothing was fitter to cherish mutual charity than to bind men together by this tie, appointing one of them as a pastor to teach the others who are enjoined to be disciples, and receive the common doctrine from a single mouth. For did every man suffice for himself, and stand in no need of another’s aid, (such is the pride of the human intellect,) each would despise all others, and be in his turn despised. The Lord, therefore, has astricted his Church to what he foresaw would be the strongest bond of unity when he deposited the doctrine of eternal life and salvation with men, that by their hands he might communicate it to others. To this Paul had respect when he wrote to the Ephesians, “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love,” (Eph. iv. 4-16.)

2. By these words he shows that the ministry of men, which God employs in governing the Church, is a principal bond by which believers are kept together in one body. He also intimates, that the Church cannot be kept safe, unless supported by those guards to which the Lord has been pleased to commit its safety. Christ “ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things,” (Eph. iv. 10.) The mode of filling is this: By the ministers to whom he has committed this office, and given grace to discharge it, he dispenses and distributes his gifts to the Church, and thus exhibits himself as in a manner actually present by exerting the energy of his Spirit in this his institution, so as to prevent it from being vain or fruitless. In this way, the renewal of the saints is accomplished, and the body of Christ is edified; in this way we grow up in all things unto Him who is the Head, and unite with one another; in this way we are all brought into the unity of Christ, provided prophecy flourishes among us, provided we receive his apostles, and despise not the doctrine which is administered to us. Who­ever, therefore, studies to abolish this order and kind of government of which we speak, or disparages it as of minor importance, plots the devastation, or rather the ruin and destruction, of the Church. For neither are the light and heat of the sun, nor meat and drink, so necessary to sustain and cherish the present life, as is the apostolical and pastoral office to preserve a Church in the earth.

3. Accordingly, I have observed above, that God has repeatedly commended its dignity by the titles which he has bestowed upon it, in order that we might hold it in the highest estimation, as among the most excellent of our bless­ings. He declares, that in raising up teachers, he confers a special benefit on men, when he bids his prophet exclaim, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace,” (Isa. lii. 7) when he calls the apostles the light of the world and the salt of the earth, (Matth. v. 13, 14.) Nor could the office be more highly eulogised than when he said, “He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me,” (Luke x. 16.) But the most striking passage of all is that in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, where Paul treats as it were professedly of this question. He contends, that there is nothing in the Church more noble and glorious than the ministry of the Gospel, seeing it is the administration of the Spirit of righteousness and eternal life. These and simi­lar passages should have the effect of preventing that method of governing and maintaining the Church by ministers, a method which the Lord has ratified for ever, from seeming worthless in our eyes, and at length becoming obsolete by contempt. How very necessary it is, he has declared not only by words but also by examples. When he was pleased to shed the light of his truth in greater effulgence on Corne­lius, he sent an angel from heaven to despatch Peter to him, (Acts x. 3.) When he was pleased to call Paul to the knowledge of himself, and ingraft him into the Church, he does not address him with his own voice, but sends him to a man from whom he may both obtain the doctrine of salva­tion and the sanctification of baptism, (Acts ix. 6-20.) If it was not by mere accident that the angel, who is the inter­preter of God, abstains from declaring the will of God, and orders a man to be called to declare it; that Christ, the only Master of believers, commits Paul to the teaching of a man, that Paul whom he had determined to carry into the third heaven, and honour with a wondrous revelation of things that could not be spoken, (2 Cor. xii. 2,) who will presume to despise or disregard as superfluous that ministry, whose utility God has been pleased to attest by such evidence?

4. Those who preside over the government of the Church, according to the institution of Christ, are named by Paul, first, *Apostles;* secondly, *Prophets;* thirdly, *Evangelists;* fourthly, *Pastors;* and, lastly, *Teachers;* (Eph. iv. 11.) Of these, only the two last have an ordinary office in the Church. The Lord raised up the other three at the beginning of his kingdom, and still occasionally raises them up when the necessity of the times requires. The nature of the apostolic function is clear from the command, a Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature,” (Mark xvi. 15.) No fixed limits are given them, but the whole world is assigned to be reduced under the obedience of Christ, that by spreading the Gospel as widely as they could, they might every where erect his kingdom. Accordingly, Paul, when he would approve his apostleship, does not say that he had acquired some one city for Christ, but had propa­gated the Gospel far and wide—had not built on another man’s foundation, but planted churches where the name of his Lord was unheard. The apostles, therefore, were sent forth to bring back the world from its revolt to the true obedience of God, and every where establish his kingdom by the preaching of the Gospel; or, if you choose, they were like the first architects of the Church, to lay its foundations throughout the world. By *Prophets,* he means not all inter­preters of the divine will, but those who excelled by special revelation; none such now exist, or they are less manifest. By *Evangelists,* I mean those who, while inferior in rank to the apostles, were next them in office, and even acted as their substitutes. Such were Luke, Timothy, Titus, and the like; perhaps, also, the seventy disciples whom our Saviour appointed in the second place to the apostles, (Luke x. 1.) According to this interpretation, which appears to me con­sonant both to the words and the meaning of Paul, those three functions were not instituted in the Church to be per­petual, but only to endure so long as churches were to be formed where none previously existed, or at least where churches were to be transferred from Moses to Christ; al­though I deny not, that afterward God occasionally raised up Apostles, or at least Evangelists, in their stead, as has been done in our time. For such were needed to bring back the Church from the revolt of Antichrist. The office I nevertheless call extraordinary, because it has no place in churches duly constituted. Next come *Pastors* and *Teachers,* with whom the Church never can dispense, and between whom, I think, there is this difference, that teachers preside not over discipline, or the administration of the sacraments, or admonitions, or exhortations, but the interpretation of Scripture only, in order that pure and sound doctrine may be maintained among believers. But all these are embraced in the pastoral office.

5. We now understand what offices in the government of the Church were temporary, and what offices were instituted to be of perpetual duration. But if we class evangelists with apostles, we shall have two like offices in a manner corre­sponding to each other. For the same resemblance which our teachers have to the ancient prophets pastors have to the apostles. The prophetical office was more excellent in respect of the special gift of revelation which accompanied it, but the office of teachers was almost of the same nature, and had altogether the same end. In like manner, the twelve, whom the Lord chose to publish the new preaching of the Gospel to the world, (Luke vi. 13,) excelled others in rank and dignity. For although, from the nature of the case, and etymology of the word, all ecclesiastical officers may be properly called apostles, because they are all sent by the Lord and are his messengers, yet as it was of great importance that a sure attestation should be given to the mission of those who delivered a new and extraordinary message, it was right that the twelve (to the number of whom Paul was after­wards added) should be distinguished from others by a pecu­liar title. The same name, indeed, is given by Paul to Andronicus and Junia, who, he says, were “of note among the apostles,” (Rom. xvi. 7) but when he would speak properly he confines the term to that primary order. And this is the common use of Scripture. Still pastors (except that each has the government of a particular church assigned to him) have the same function as apostles. The nature of this function let us now see still more clearly.

6. When our Lord sent forth the apostles, he gave them a commission (as has been lately said) to preach the Gospel, and baptize those who believed for the remission of sins. He had previously commanded that they should distribute the sacred symbols of his body and blood after his example, (Matth. xxviii. 19; Luke xxii. 19.) Such is the sacred, inviolable, and perpetual law, enjoined on those who succeed to the place of the apostles,—they receive a commission to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments. Whence we infer that those who neglect both of these falsely pretend to the office of apostles. But what shall we say of pastors? Paul speaks not of himself only but of all pastors, when he says, “Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God,” (1 Cor. iv. 1.) Again, in another passage, he describes a bishop as one “holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and con­vince the gainsayers,” (Tit. i. 9.) From these and similar passages which everywhere occur, we may infer that the two principal parts of the office of pastors are to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments. But the method of teaching consists not merely in public addresses, it extends also to pri­vate admonitions. Thus Paul takes the Ephesians to witness, “I kept back nothing that was profitable to you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” A little after he says, “Remember, that, for the space of three years, I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears,” (Acts xx. 20, 31.) Our present purpose, however, is not to enumerate the separate qualities of a good pastor, but only to indicate what those profess who call them­selves pastors, viz., that in presiding over the Church they have not an indolent dignity, but must train the people to true piety by the doctrine of Christ, administer the sacred mysteries, preserve and exercise right discipline. To those who are set as watchmen in the Church the Lord declares, “When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand,” (Ezek. iii. 18.) What Paul says of himself is appli­cable to all pastors: “For though I preach the Gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me if I preach not “the Gospel,” (1 Cor. ix. 16.) In short, what the apostles did to the whole world, every pastor should do to the flock over which he is appointed.

7. While we assign a church to each pastor, we deny not that he who is fixed to one church may assist other churches, whether any disturbance has occurred which requires his presence, or his advice is asked on some doubtful matter. But because that policy is necessary to maintain the peace of the Church, each has his proper duty assigned, lest all should become disorderly, run up and down without any certain vocation, flock together promiscuously to one spot, and capriciously leave the churches vacant, being more solicit­ous for their own convenience than for the edification of the Church. This arrangement ought, as far as possible, to be commonly observed, that every one, content with his own limits, may not encroach on another’s province. Nor is this a human invention. It is an ordinance of God. For we read that Paul and Barnabas appointed presbyters over each of the churches of Lystra, Antioch, and Iconium, (Acts xiv. 23) and Paul himself enjoins Titus to ordain presbyters in every town, (Tit. i. 5.) In like manner, he mentions the bishops of the Philippians, and Archippus, the bishop of the Colossians, (Phil. i. 1; Col. iv. 17.) And in the Acts we have his celebrated address to the presbyters of the Church of Ephesus, (Acts xx. 28.) Let every one then, who under­takes the government and care of one church, know that he is bound by this law of divine vocation, not that he is astricted to the soil, (as lawyers speak,) that is, enslaved, and, as it were, fixed, as to be unable to move a foot if public utility so require, and the thing is done duly and in order; but he who has been called to one place ought not to think of re­moving, nor seek to be set free when he deems it for his own advantage. Again, if it is expedient for any one to be trans­ferred to another place, he ought not to attempt it of his own private motive, but to wait for public authority.

8. In giving the name of bishops, presbyters, and pastors, indiscriminately to those who govern churches, I have done it on the authority of Scripture, which uses the words as synonymous. To all who discharge the ministry of the word it gives the name of bishops. Thus Paul, after enjoining Titus to ordain elders in every city, immediately adds, “A bishop must be blameless,” &c., (Tit. i. 5, 7.) So in another place he salutes several bishops in one church, (Phil. i. 1.) And in the Acts, the elders of Ephesus, whom he is said to have called together, he, in the course of his address, desig­nates as bishops, (Acts xx. 17.) Here it is to be observed, that we have hitherto enumerated those offices only which consist in the ministry of the word; nor does Paul make mention of any others in the passage which we have quoted from the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians. But in the Epistle to the Romans, and the First Epistle to the Corinthians, he enumerates other offices, as powers, gifts of healing, interpretation, government, care of the poor, (Bom. xii. 7; 1 Cor. xii. 28.) As to those which were tem­porary, I say nothing, for it is not worthwhile to dwell upon them. But there are two of perpetual duration, viz., govern­ment and care of the poor. By these governors I understand seniors selected from the people to unite with the bishops in pronouncing censures and exercising discipline. For this is the only meaning which can be given to the passage, “He that ruleth, with diligence,” (Rom. xii. 8.) From the be­ginning, therefore, each church had its senate,[[3]](#footnote-3) composed of pious, grave, and venerable men, in whom was lodged the power of correcting faults. Of this power we shall afterwards speak. Moreover, experience shows that this arrangement was not confined to one age, and therefore we are to regard the office of government as necessary for all ages.

9. The care of the poor was committed to deacons, of whom two classes are mentioned by Paul in the Epistle to the Romans, “He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity “he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness,” (Bom. xii. 8.) As it is certain that he is here speaking of public offices of the Church, there must have been two distinct classes. If I mistake not, he in the former clause designates deacons, who administered alms; in the latter, those who had devoted themselves to the care of the poor and the sick. Such were the widows of whom he makes mention in the Epistle to Tim­othy, (1 Tim. v. 10.) .For there was no public office which women could discharge save that of devoting themselves to the service of the poor. If we admit this, (and it certainly ought to be admitted,) there will be two classes of deacons, the one serving the Church by administering the affairs of the poor; the other, by taking care of the poor themselves. For although the term *διαχονία* has a. more extensive meaning, Scripture specially gives the name of deacons to those whom the Church appoints to dispense alms, and take care of the poor, constituting them as it were stewards of the public treasury of the poor. Their origin, institution, and office, is described by Luke, (Acts vi. 3.) When a murmuring arose among the Greeks, because in the administration of the poor their widows were neglected, the apostles, excusing themselves that they were unable to discharge both offices, to preach the word and serve tables, requested the multitude to elect seven mon of good report, to whom the office might be committed. Such deacons ns the Apostolic Church had, it becomes us to have after her example.

10. Now seeing that in the sacred assembly all things ought to be done decently and in order, (1 Cor. xiv. 40,) there is nothing in which this ought to be more carefully observed than in settling government, irregularity in any respect being nowhere more perilous. Wherefore, lest rest­less and turbulent men should presumptuously push them­selves forward to teach or rule, (an event which actually was to happen.) it was expressly provided that no one should assume a public office in the Church without a call, (Heb. v. 4; Jer. xvii. 16.) Therefore, if any one would be. deemed a true minister of the Church, he must *first* be duly called; and, secondly*,* he must answer to his calling; that is, under­take and execute the office assigned to him. This may often be observed in Paul, who, when he would approve, his apostle­ship, almost always alleges a call, together with his fidelity in discharging the office. If so great a minister of Christ dares not arrogate to himself authority to be heard in the Church, unless as having been appointed to it by the command of his Lord, and faithfully performing what has been intrusted to him, how great the effrontery for any man, devoid of one or both of them, to demand for himself such honour. But as we have already touched on the necessity of executing the office, let us now treat only of the call.

11. The subject is comprehended under four heads, viz., *who* are to be appointed ministers, *in what way, by whom,* and *with what rite or initiatory ceremony.* I am speaking of the external and formal call which relates to the public order of the Church, while I say nothing of that secret call of which every minister is conscious before God, but has not the Church as a witness of it; I mean, the good testimony of our heart, that we undertake the offered office neither from ambi­tion nor avarice, nor any other selfish feeling, but a sincere fear of God and desire to edify the Church. This, as I have said, is indeed necessary for every one of us, if we would approve our ministry to God. Still, however, a man may have been duly called by the Church, though he may have accepted with a bad conscience, provided his wickedness is not manifest. It is usual also to say, that private men , are called to the ministry when they seem fit and apt to dis­charge it; that is, because learning, conjoined with piety and the other endowments of a good pastor, is a kind of prepara­tion for the office. For those whom the Lord has destined for this great office he previously provides with the armour which is requisite for the discharge of it, that they may not come empty and unprepared. Hence Paul, in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, when treating of the offices, first enumerates the gifts in which those who performed the offices ought to excel. But as this is the first of the four heads which I mentioned, let us now proceed to it.

12. What persons should be elected bishops is treated at length by Paul in two passages, (Tit. i. 7; 1 Tim. iii. 1.) The substance is, that none are to be chosen save those who are of sound doctrine and holy lives, and not notorious for any defect which might destroy their authority and bring dis­grace on the ministry. The description of deacons and elders is entirely similar, (see chapter iv. sec. 10-13.) We must always take care that they are not unfit for or unequal to the burden imposed upon them; in other words, that they are provided with the means which will be necessary to fulfil their office. Thus our Saviour, when about to send his apostles, provided them with the arms and instruments which were indispensably requisite.[[4]](#footnote-4) And Paul, after portraying the character of a good and genuine bishop, admonishes Timothy not to contaminate himself by choosing an improper person for the office. The expression, *in what way,* I use not in reference to the rite of choosing, but only to the religious fear which is to be observed in election. Hence the fastings and prayers which Luke narrates that the faithful employed when they elected presbyters, (Acts xiv. 23.) For, under­standing that the business was the most serious in which they could engage, they did not venture to act without the greatest reverence and solicitude. But above all, they were earnest in prayer, imploring from God the spirit of wisdom and discernment.

13. The third division which we have adopted is, *by whom* ministers are to be chosen. A certain rule on this head can­, not be obtained from the appointment of the apostles, which was somewhat different from the common call of others. As theirs was an extraordinary ministry, in order to render it conspicuous by some more distinguished mark, those who were to discharge it behoved to be called and appointed by the mouth of the Lord himself. It was not, therefore, by any human election, but at the sole command of God and Christ, that they prepared themselves for the work. Hence, when the apostles were desirous to substitute another in the place of Judas, they did not venture to nominate any one cer­tainly, but brought forward two, that the Lord might declare by lot which of them he wished to succeed, (Acts i. 23.) In this way we ought to understand Paul’s declaration, that he was made an apostle, “not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father,” (Gal. i. 1.) The former, viz., *not of men,* he had in common with all the pious ministers of the word, for no one could duly perform the office unless called by God. The other was proper and peculiar to him. And while he glories in it, he boasts that he had not only what pertains to a true and lawful pastor, but he also brings forward the insignia of his apostleship. For when there were some among the Galatians who, seeking to dispa­rage his authority, represented him as some ordinary disciple, substituted in place of the primary apostles, he, in order to maintain unimpaired the dignity of his ministry, against which he knew that these attempts were made, felt it neces­sary to show that he was in no respect inferior to the other apostles. Accordingly, he affirms that he was not chosen by the judgment of men, like some ordinary bishop, but by the mouth and manifest oracle of the Lord himself.

14. But no sober person will deny that the regular mode of lawful calling is, that bishops should be designated by men, since there are numerous passages of Scripture to this effect. Nor, as has been said, is there any thing contrary to this in Paul’s protestation, that he was not sent either of man, or by man, seeing he is not there speaking of the ordi­nary election of ministers, but claiming for himself what was peculiar to the apostles: although the Lord in thus select­ing Paul by special privilege, subjected him in the meantime to the discipline of an ecclesiastical call: for Luke relates, “As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them,” (Acts xiii. 2.) Why this separation and laying on of hands after the Holy Spirit had attested their election, unless that ecclesiastical discipline might be preserved in appointing ministers by men? God could not give a more illustrious proof of his approbation of this order, than by causing Paul to be set apart by the Church after he had previously declared that he had appointed him to be the Apostle of the Gentiles. The same thing we may see in the election of Matthias. As the apostolic office was of such importance that they did not venture to appoint any one to it of their own judgment, they bring forward two, on one of whom the lot might fall, that thus the election might have a sure testimony from heaven, and, at the same time, the policy of the Church might not be disregarded.

15. The next question is, Whether a minister should be chosen *by the whole Church,* or only by *colleagues* and *elders,* who have the charge of discipline; or whether they may be appointed by the authority of one individual?[[5]](#footnote-5) Those who attribute this right to one individual quote the words of Paul to Titus, “For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city,” (Tit. i. 5;) and also to Timothy, “Lay hands suddenly on no man,” (1 Tim. v. 22.) But they are mistaken if they suppose that Timothy so reigned at Ephesus, and Titus in Crete, as to dispose of all things at their own pleasure. They only presided by previously giving good and salutary counsels to the people, not by doing alone whatever pleased them, while all others were excluded. Lest this should seem to be a fiction of mine, I will make it plain by a similar example. Luke relates that Barnabas and Paul ordained elders throughout the churches, but he at the same time marks the plan or mode when he says that it was done by suffrage. The words are, *χειροτονήσαντες πρεσβυτέρους κατ᾿ ἐκκλησίαν*, (Acts xiv. 23.) They therefore selected *(crea­bant)* two; but the whole body, as was the custom of the Greeks in elections, declared by a show of hands which of the two they wished to have. Thus it is not uncommon for Roman historians to say, that the consul who held the comitia elected the new magistrates, for no other reason but because he received the suffrages, and presided over the people at the election. Certainly it is not credible that Paul conceded more to Timothy and Titus than he assumed to himself. Now we see that his custom was to appoint bishops by the suffrages of the people. We must therefore interpret the above passages, so as not to infringe on the common right and liberty of the Church. Rightly, therefore, does Cyprian contend for it as of divine authority, that the priest be chosen in presence of the people, before the eyes of all, and be .approved as worthy and fit by public judgment and testi­mony, (Cyprian, Lib. i. Ep. 3.) Indeed, we see that by the command of the Lord, the practice in electing the Levitical priests was to bring them forward in view of the people before consecration. Nor is Matthias enrolled among the number of the apostles, nor are the seven deacons elected in any other way, than at the sight and approval of the people, (Acts vi. 2.) “Those examples,” says Cyprian, “show that the ordination of a priest behoved not to take place, unless under the consciousness of the people assisting, so that that ordination was just and legitimate which was vouched by the testimony of all.” We see then, that minis­ters are legitimately called according to the word of God, when those who may have seemed fit are elected on the con­sent and approbation of the people. Other pastors, however, ought to preside over the election, lest any error should be committed by the general body either through levity, or bad passion, or tumult.

16. It remains to consider the form of ordination, to which we have assigned the last place in the call, (see chap, iv., sec. 14, 15.) It is certain, that when the apostles appointed any one to the ministry, they used no other ceremony than the laying on of hands. This form was derived, I think, from the custom of the Jews, who, by the laying on of hands, in a manner presented to God whatever they wished to be blessed and consecrated. Thus Jacob, when about to bless Ephraim and Manasseh, placed his hands upon their heads, (Gen. xlviii. 14.) The same thing was done by our Lord, when he prayed over the little children, (Matth. xix. 15.) With the same intent, (as I imagine,) the Jews, according to the injunction of the law, laid hands upon their sacrifices. Wherefore, the apostles, by the laying on of hands, inti­mated that they made an offering to God of him whom they admitted to the ministry; though they also did the same thing over those on whom they conferred the visible gifts of the Spirit, (Acts viii. 17; xix. 6.) However this be, it was the regular form, whenever they called any one to the sacred ministry. In this way they consecrated pastors and teachers; in this way they consecrated deacons. But though there is no fixed precept concerning the laying on of hands, yet as we see that it was uniformly observed by the apostles, this careful observance ought to be regarded by us in the light of a precept, (see chap, xiv., sec. 29; chap, xix., sec. 31.) And it is certainly useful, that by such a symbol the dignity of the ministry should be commended to the people, and he who is ordained, reminded that he is no longer his own, but is bound in service to God and the Church. Be­sides, it will not prove an empty sign, if it be restored to its genuine origin. For if the Spirit of God has not instituted any thing in the Church in vain, this ceremony of his appoint­ment we shall feel not to be useless, provided it be not superstitiously abused. Lastly, it is to be observed, that it was not the whole people, but only pastors, who laid hands on minis­ters, though it is uncertain whether or not several always laid their hands: it is certain, that in the case of the deacons, it was done by Paul and Barnabas, and some few others, (Acts vi. 6; xiii. 3.) But in another place, Paul mentions that he himself, without any others, laid hands on Timothy. “Wherefore, I put thee in remembrance, that thou stir up the gift of God which is in thee, by the putting on of my hands,” (2 Tim. i. 6.) For what is said in the First Epistle, of the *laying on of the hands of the presbytery,* I do not under­stand as if Paul were speaking of the college of Elders. By the expression, I understand the ordination itself; as if he had said, Act so, that the gift which you received by the laying on of hands, when I made you a presbyter, may not be in vain.

1. Latin, “quasi vicariam operam.”—French, “les faisans comme ses lieutenans;”—making them as it were his substitutes. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See on this subject August, de Doctrina Christiana, Lib. i. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Latin, “senatum.”—French, “conseil ou consistoire;”—council or consistory. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Luke xxi. 15; xxiv. 49; Mark vi. 15; Acts i. 8; 1 Tim. v. 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See chap. iv. sec. 10,11; chap. v. sec. 2, 3. Also Calv. in Acts vi. 3, and Luther, tom. ii. p. 374. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)