

His letters were written to the Churches of the Ephesians, the Magnesians, the Trallians, the Romans, the Philadelphians, and Smyrneans. In these epistles he exalts the office of a bishop. These epistles make it perfectly clear that at that time Episcopacy was firmly and generally established. Ignatius was put to death about the year 117, and had ruled his Church at Antioch for nearly fifty years. So that he had been Bishop of Antioch during the lifetime of some of the apostles.

In the light of these witnesses, it seems to me that there was not time for the development of such a well established system of government from the pre-byterial order. It would naturally take a much longer time to develop and firmly establish such a system of Church government. There would have been places where it would have been resisted. Yet on the evidence of Gibbon, who cannot be accused of unduly favouring the Church, Episcopacy was established in the first century. He says, "The Episcopal form of government . . . seems to have been introduced before the close of the first century," and again he says, "after we have passed the difficulties of the first century we find the Episcopal government universally established, until it was interrupted by the republican genius of the Swiss and German reformers."

We see in the New Testament the existence of an order including men like Timothy and Titus, who received their authority by the laying on of Apostolic hands; who had the power to ordain presbyter-bishops and deacons, and to rule over the portion of the Church committed to them; we see before the first century closes, an order generally in existence, exercising similar powers of ordination and rule, who were set apart for their work by those claiming apostolic authority. Dr. Salmon has said that when we see a train entering a tunnel, and in due time we see a train emerging from the same tunnel, we are justified in concluding that it is the same train. So when we see in the New Testament an order of the ministry in existence, and then when Church history takes up the record, we find universally in the Church a similar order, claiming the same authority and exercising the same functions, we are justified in concluding that it is identically the same order which has existed between the time the New Testament references close and Church history begins.

From this order our bishops have received their authority, and by that authority hold office in the Church. As they have ever done, they hold rule, and they ordain. But in ordination a bishop associates with him his presbyters, who with him lay their hands upon the head of the candidate. Thus bishop and priests are associated together in the perpetuation of the orders of the Church.