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LAYING ON OF HANDS.

West Virginia.

DEAR BROTHER RUSSELL: – From the TOWER for Nov. 15, '95, I was gratified to find that your mind and investigation upon the subject of "Order in the Church" coincides so exactly with our own. Before seeing anything from you at all on the subject, the Church here realized the necessity of more order, and was forced to examine the whole subject with the result you state.

There is one item, however, that you seem to have overlooked or thought not necessary to discuss, upon which I greatly desire to have your opinion; that is, in regard to the custom of "laying on hands."

I agree with you heartily in its being the best to follow the "pattern" as closely as possible, and in doing so I cannot avoid the conclusion that the recognition of God's gifts is expressed by the solemn formula of laying on hands of the presbytery. Now, if my conclusions are erroneous, [R1957 : page 69] please help me out. If in your understanding they are wrong, please explain the following texts: Acts 6:6; 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22. Are the terms "bishop" and "elder" synonymous?

I am aware that in this ordinance the early Church conferred no special power, that it set up over them no ruler or lord; but did not this formula make the "elder" or "bishop" a representative or servant of those who lay on hands? We hope that your opinion, which we greatly respect, may help us out on this question.

We have appointed three "elders" – one who takes oversight of the work at this place and two who work in the adjacent localities, I being one of the latter. I say appointed, but no hands have been laid on us; but the question is now being discussed by the brethren, and comes up for final settlement shortly.

With fraternal love for you and yours, I remain,

C. A. McCLUNG.

[REPLY: – According to the Scripture use of the term the word "presbytery" signifies a "company of elders," the word coming from the Greek word which signifies "old man." The word "bishop" signifies "overseer," and is used with reference to elders in Acts 20:28, and is evidently another name for the elders mentioned in Phil. 1:1. The reference of 1 Tim. 5:22 may possibly be to ordination by laying on of hands; but this is uncertain.

With regard to the laying on of hands of the presbytery (that is, the eldership) upon Timothy: the eldership in this case probably referred to the Apostles who were still living. Timothy was chosen by Paul as his successor to carry on the work which he began, and he evidently desired that the Apostles in general should recognize Timothy. Besides it was the custom in those days for the Apostles to lay hands upon all who believed, and thus to communicate to them a gift of the spirit. Paul reminds Timothy that he had received such a gift. In evidence that only the Apostles could confer these gifts we recall the fact that Simon Magus offered the Apostles money in exchange for the power that they possessed, so that upon whomsoever he might lay hands he would receive a gift of the spirit. We remember also the case mentioned in Acts 19:6, also Acts 8:12-19, in which it is shown that although Philip (the evangelist) had preached Christ to the Samaritans, and they had believed and been baptized, yet Philip did not lay hands upon them nor communicate the holy spirit, but sent word to Peter and John who were apostles, and who went down and prayed with them and communicated the gifts of the spirit.

All of this seems to indicate clearly that only the apostles had the power to communicate these gifts of the spirit, although the apostles might very properly be called, and did call themselves, elders or presbyters. But since they are no longer living there are none who can

convey the gifts of the spirit by the laying on of hands. [R1957 : page 70]

But notice that in the early Church the laying on of hands was used also to indicate *consent*; as, for instance, in the case of the Church at Antioch when it chose Paul and Barnabas to be its missionaries and representatives in Gospel work. This congregation fasted and prayed and laid their hands upon Paul and Barnabas, and thus sent them away. The laying on of hands in this case did not imply the communication of any gift, but merely denoted representation, as in the case of the priests of old, when the offerer laid his hands upon the animal before it was slain, it represented that the animal or person upon whom the hands were laid was thenceforth recognized as the representative of the person who laid hands upon it or him. Thus the congregation at Antioch sent forth two from their midst as their representatives in the work. No doubt they also furnished them money for their travel, and after they had performed their journey Paul and Barnabas returned to the Church at Antioch and gave them a report of the work done as their representatives as well as the Lord's representatives. – See Acts 14:26,27; Also 15:3.

Applying these things to the present time we would say: In Europe and America the custom of laying on hands to indicate representation is no longer followed, just as kissing among men is no longer a custom, although both customs are still in vogue in the far East. We suggest, therefore, that in our judgment the choosing and fasting and prayer are still the proper acts in connection with the congregational recognition of the elders – whether local or traveling; but that the laying on of hands, which could communicate no gift of the spirit, and which in the custom of our country no longer indicates representation, is no longer the proper thing. Indeed, we consider it the improper thing in view of the customs and practices in general, because it would be liable to be misunderstood, and to give the impression that the users hold the theory in common with many that an apostolic succession has been continued with power to authorize and commission and to imbue the subjects with supernatural abilities; for instance, as do the Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics,

Episcopalians, Mormons and to a lesser extent nearly all other denominations.]
