

ORDAINED SERVANT

Statement Of Purpose

Ordained Servant exists to provide solid materials for the equipping of office-bearers to serve more faithfully. The goal of this journal is to assist the ordained servants of the church to become more fruitful in their particular ministry so that they in turn will be more capable to prepare God's people for works of service. To attain this goal *Ordained Servant* will include articles (both old and new) of a theoretical and practical nature with the emphasis tending toward practical articles wrestling with perennial and thorny problems encountered by office-bearers.

Editorial Policy

1. *Ordained Servant* publishes articles inculcating biblical presbyterianism in accord with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and helpful articles from collateral Reformed traditions; however, views expressed by the writers do not necessarily represent the position of *Ordained Servant* or of the Church.

2. *Ordained Servant* occasionally publishes articles on issues on which differing positions are taken by officers in good standing in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. *Ordained Servant* does not intend to take a partisan stand, but welcomes articles from various viewpoints in harmony with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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EDITORIAL

In a recent issue of *New Horizons* I read an interesting article on preaching.¹ In this editorial I want to respond by giving my own reasons for dissent from its call for a change from expository to topical preaching.

1. "The End of a Rich and Noble Tradition," by R. Scott MacLaren, in the January 1992 issue of *New Horizons*. In this able article Mr. MacLaren argues for topical preaching and, if we understand him correctly, for topical preaching as something that ought to replace the expository method. It is with this contention that we take issue.

When I began my ministry some 40 years ago I tried the topical method. The result for me was frustration. It was not until I began to expound books of the Bible, *seriatim*, that I was completely liberated from it. Where, before, it had been a constant vexation to try to decide the next topic, it was now decided for me. I also found myself wrestling with the text, in context, in a way that I had not before. I was forced to consider things I would otherwise not have considered, and to preach about things I would have neglected. I was also driven to the conclu-

sion that the sermons of which we have brief summaries in the Bible are only that—brief summaries! Even these are not really topical in my opinion, but summaries that touch on several ‘topics.’ It is also my conviction that the sermons of the Apostolic age were more like our New Testament Epistles than what are usually called topical sermons today.

I can also say that I have seen nothing to equal expository preaching in terms of the benefits for God’s people. We live in a day of low biblical literacy. Nothing is needed so much today as for the members of the church to grasp—or rather to be gripped by—the whole counsel of God set down in the Bible. And I do not believe there is any method for achieving this end that can compare with careful and systematic exposition of the various books of the Bible.

I would like to add that in my own ministry there have been times when the topical method has seemed to me to be unavoidable. I remember, for example, that I was once asked to speak to a large group of foreign students at the University of Auckland. They wanted to know what in the world we Christians were talking about when we spoke of being ‘in Christ’ etc. So I spoke to them on the biblical concept of union with Christ. I could cite other examples to the same effect. But they all have a common denominator—speaking to people outside the fellowship of the local church. If I was standing on Mars hill, speaking to Greek humanists, I too would be topical. But I would preach in a very different way to my own congregation.

One of the treasured experiences of my ministry was a series of 101 expository sermons on the book of Romans. When I was about half way through the series I asked my session if they did not perhaps want me to break off from the series for a time, giving them—and the people—a rest. The answer, which really did surprise me, was that I was by no means to do such a thing but to faithfully complete what I had begun. And let me say that this is a phenomenon that I have observed in several congregations in two widely separated parts of the world. Preaching which is expository—if it is done with care—provides something that no other method of preaching can equal. It provides a much stronger sense of context. When you expound a particular part of the book of Romans, for instance—in such a series—the faithful hear it with a constantly increasing grasp of the flow of thought es-

sential to understanding.

Expository preaching has, in my view, two things of the greatest weight to commend it. The first is the fact that it sticks to the text, and the second that it does greater justice to context. And in my view these ought, as a rule, to be primary. Every now and then I too sit in the pew and listen to a preacher. As I do this one thing always concerns me above everything else: is this man showing me what the text of the Bible means, and does he show me from the immediate and wider context (of the whole Bible) that there is no question about it? I remember a preacher I used to hear many years ago who had a raspish voice—gesture mannerisms reminiscent of a wind up toy soldier—and other rather noticeable deficiencies. Yet I never heard him preach without being powerfully convinced and convicted. And it was his text that always stayed with me. The text was nailed down, as it were, so I never again could escape it.

We, as Orthodox Presbyterians, believe—and teach our congregations—that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16,17). But are we always ready for the consequences of this teaching? I, at least, will have to admit that I was not, because it led to a formidable challenge. Some of the people in my congregation came to me and requested an exposition of the Song of Solomon. I felt so unqualified at the time that I almost wished, for a moment, that I had never spoken as strongly as I did about the profitableness of every part of the Bible. But there was no escape. I had to put up or shut up. So I did it. I expounded this book. And God granted us all a wonderful blessing. I can’t see how anything like this could have happened apart from a commitment to expository preaching.

God has chosen the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. But the power is not in preaching per se, for if that were the case even the apostate preachers of our day would have it. The power is in the preaching of God’s truth as it is revealed to us in the inspired text of the Bible.

For me, at least, it has been through the hard work of expository preaching—this more than anything else—that I have been allowed to at least touch the hem of the garment.

Larger Catechism Q. 158 — How is the word of God to be preached by those that are called thereunto?

Answer — They that are called to labor in the ministry of the word, are to preach sound doctrine, diligently, in season and out of season; plainly, not in the enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power; faithfully, making known the whole counsel of God; wisely, applying themselves to the necessities and capacities of the hearers; zealously, with fervent love to God, and the souls of his people; sincerely, aiming at his glory, and their conversion, edification, and salvation.

WORKING WITH THE ELDERSHIP

by

Dr. Jay E. Adams

[used by permission]

Probably the first most significant achievement of any minister who newly assumes the pastorate of any congregation is getting to know his elders well and learning how to function smoothly with them. No time can be invested more wisely during the first year of his pastorate (when, as a matter of fact, much else cannot be done anyway) than the time he spends developing and cultivating a close relationship to his elders. This, he should do, both individually and corporately.¹ He must learn to know these men through and through, and he must be willing to expose himself as fully to them as well. A relationship founded upon truth and mutual trust must be built. All of this is essential so that when he tackles the large tasks and faces the crises that inevitably will come, the pastor will not have to do so alone. In many situations, without the full understanding, confidence and backing of his eldership, a minister will be left in a precarious position. His attempts to exert the authority of Christ will be undercut, his efforts to exercise church discipline for the benefit of an erring and contumacious member may be foiled, and his ability to move quickly and smoothly in emergencies will be seriously impaired.

It is important for the new minister not to discount his elders too quickly. It is my observation that this is a fault of many pastors. When one notes how zealously and patiently Paul labored with Timothy over his timidity, it shows (1) that all was not sweetness and light among the elders of the New Testament Church (it is quite wrong to idealize the situation),² and (2) that it is wrong to despair of a man with potential, even when he has some glaring faults. Encouragement, giving him the right kind

1. It is best to start properly upon assuming the pastorate; but at least you can begin correcting matters now if you did not previously.

2. The unrealistic way in which some apply the biblical criteria for elders and deacons not only discourages men with potential, but it seems quite foreign to the New Testament approach.

of task (one in which he is very likely to succeed), or a variety of other such efforts could make a great difference in the release and development of that potential.

The pastor should attempt to discover (1) whether there is potential (often gifts can be tested only by trying them out) and (2) whether there is a special reason for the elder's weakness (e.g., the former pastor did everything himself, was afraid of elders growing in power, they received no help or instruction, etc.).

In general, the pastor should expect much from his elders and should let them know so. He should assume that they are (or with proper teaching and encouragement will become) willing and able to accomplish great things. What he expects, he will communicate. What he communicates, he will get. If he gives them the impression that they are hopelessly inadequate, more than likely they will turn out to be just that; and he will be sure his judgment was correct! But also he should be clear about his own willingness to help them to become all that God wants them to be. It is no wonder that so little is done by many elders; when you hear how their ministers speak about them, you understand.

Frequently, elders enter upon their work with great enthusiasm and genuine dedication, only to have both cooled in short order by the fact that they are called upon to do nothing but attend meetings and never become involved in the actual work of ministering to their flock. Moreover, even if they are encouraged to take part in such ministry, they are given virtually no instruction about how to do so. If they are instructed at all, usually it will be in doctrine, possibly also in church government, but rarely ever in the principles and skills of personal ministry to human beings. Rather than excoriating them for failure to enter into such work, instead the pastor might inquire about previous expectations and past training. If he finds that these were inadequate, he would be better advised to set up an elders' training program (either formally or

informally).³ All of the exhortation in the world will not suffice when someone does not know how to follow it. Consequently, the pastor would do well to encourage his elders to sit in on counseling sessions with him, to learn how to conduct home Bible Studies with him, to make visits with him, etc. The training that most elders lack is discipleship, or on-the-job training. They need to be taught by example.

At first they must be given the opportunity working with the pastor to observe and to participate in such activities under supervision. Next, they may be encouraged to minister for a while on their own. After a time, they should gather others from the congregation who show promise, as their disciples, to train them in the same way that they have been trained. Some of these men eventually may develop into deacons or elders.

It is important, I have said, for a pastor to get to know his elders. That takes time but it also takes willingness on the part of the pastor to be warm, friendly, open and truthful to them. Inviting them over to his home, holding elders' retreats for planning, prayer and fellowship in spring and/or fall, and a variety of other elders' activities will be necessary to achieve closeness. Close relationships do not merely happen; they are built.

It is not enough to get to know your elders in the regular elders' meetings. They must come to know you and you must come to know them in a greater variety of contexts. And they need to come to know one another fully as persons too (rather than merely as "that guy who always votes on the other side of an issue"). If the eldership is to become a smoothly functioning body, exerting a powerful force for good in the congregation, its members will have to be molded together into a cohesive entity by effective pastoral leadership. Good leadership means—among other things—creative planning. Do some right away—with reference to your relationship to your elders (see the exercise for the pastor at the end of the chapter).

The openness and honesty that must develop soon between a pastor and his elders is necessary for good

3. An excellent manual by George Scipione, designed to train elders (or potential elders), has been published. There is nothing else like it in print. This manual takes elders through all the biblical passages pertaining to their qualifications and work in a personal and thoroughly practical way. The book is broken into a series of lessons, each culminating in homework assignments. By all means get a copy if you have not seen it. The handbook, entitled *Timothy, Titus, and You*, is available from the Pilgrim Publishing Company, Phillipsburg, N.J.

communication (cf. Ephesians 4:25). The pastor can foster this by announcing (in his own words, of course) at the very first elders' meeting:

Gentlemen, I am a sinner, and I shall fail. At times you will be disappointed in me as well as in other members of the congregation. I will need exhortation and help now and then, as indeed, you will too. Therefore, you can expect me to be honest and straightforward with you. If I have any complaints or any concerns, you will hear them from me: you won't hear them first on the grapevine. And I expect to hear your concerns and your opinions directly too. I shall not allow your honesty or your frankness with me to separate us. Rather, I shall always encourage it as I consider it essential to the adequate communication that is needed to bind us together. I will appreciate you all the more for your truthfulness. So come to me; don't go to anyone else, whenever you have a suggestion or complaint.

It is important for a younger pastor not to allow age to separate him from the older men on the eldership. It is precisely those men who often will have the most valuable counsel for him. Yet, his tendency will be to drift toward those of his own age. The tendency must be overcome. If anything, special attention should be given to this matter. Ordinarily, these older men are even more easily approachable than some of the younger ones, and will be deeply appreciative of any efforts along these lines that he may make. Their counsel often will provide just the balance that a young impetuous man may need. As a general rule, a new pastor ought to give careful consideration to what they say and only for reasons of greatest weight disregard their counsel. The older men frequently provide a continuity with the past. By talking to them about things that have been from time to time, a pastor can understand better the things that are. Congregational attitudes, sensitivities, etc., that are otherwise inexplicable, become meaningful as he can place them in context.⁴

The elders of the people (as the Bible often describes them when speaking of their representative character) provide another vital link in the congregational communication chain. Through their eyes, and from their perspective the pastor can take more accurate soundings

4. Cf. *The Christian Counselor's Manual*, pp. 218-221 for an example of this.

from time to time. Perhaps there is no more important link to preserve and to strengthen. The congregational chain often is as strong as its weakest elder link.

In short, let this brief reminder of the necessity of establishing a firm relationship with the elders be heeded. There is no more vital relationship for the pastor to develop and maintain on the highest level possible.

Elders' business meetings ought not be held too frequently. Too many meetings is ordinarily indicative of a group that likes to talk, but achieves little. Setting a closing hour⁵ as well as an opening hour (a good practice for most meetings) keeps long winded discussions to a minimum, and tends to make deliberative meetings (as they should be) more decision/action oriented. The body has met to conduct business; that is what should be done. Other meetings for prayer, general discussion, etc., should be held.⁶ An elders' weekly prayer breakfast might be in order. A time for prayer and fellowship before the evening worship service, concurrent with the youth meetings, is another possibility. Typed agendas for business meetings

5. And be sure you stick to it.

6. Business meetings should be kept to a minimum. Instead, emphasize the prayer and fellowship meetings by holding them more frequently. It is possible to get along with regular monthly business meetings; other meetings might be held on a weekly basis. When times of prayer and fellowship predominate, the character of the business meetings will change too. Also much of the inconsequential small talk will disappear. And a good bit of congregational business will be settled informally by consensus outside of the business meeting (as it should be).

help to keep everyone on track, give an idea of how rapidly work is progressing toward the closing hour, etc. Mail or distribute agendas a week ahead and urge members to jot down questions and observations on these, and to gather data about the matters to be discussed beforehand.⁷ Too much business time is wasted on informing, asking last minute questions, and failure to do prior research. All such matters should be attended to as fully as possible before the meeting itself.⁸

7. But be sure to have extra copies on hand for the meeting. You can count on some members forgetting theirs.

8. The original included the following here:

EXERCISE

For the Student:

Report on the following.

- 1 — Interview several elders to determine what they know about their office, what they do as elders and what their attitudes about their work may be.
- 2 — Ask them what sort of training for the eldership they have had (if any).
- 3 — Ask the elders what lacks they most keenly recognize and what they think may be done about them.

For the Pastor:

Design a yearly program for getting to know your elders better. Be sure to schedule each element.

“Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.” — I Tim. 4:12-16

A LOOK AT THE
BIBLICAL OFFICES

by G. I. Williamson

In some Reformed textbooks ministers, elders and deacons are said to be a continuation of the Old Testament offices of prophet, priest and king. The minister—because he preaches—is seen as the New Testament counterpart of the prophet, the elder—because he rules—of the king, and the deacon—because of his ministry of compassion—of the priest. It is our conviction that this way of seeing the special offices of the New Testament is inadequate. In the discussion that follows we will endeavor to show why we think this conception is, in fact, somewhat artificial.

I - The Old Testament Preparation

God created man after His own image in knowledge, righteousness and holiness (Col. 3:10 and Eph. 4:24). It may be incorrect to say that Adam was a prophet, priest and king in a technical sense. The Bible never applies these terms to him. But it is clear that these offices were instituted, later on, because Adam—in sinning against God—lost his original knowledge, righteousness and holiness for himself and for all his posterity. When we speak of man’s total depravity this is what we mean: the whole nature of man (every aspect of his being) was corrupted by the fall. What we commonly call the mind, the heart, and the will were all affected. Man became ignorant, guilty and sinful with the result being that he had no ability within himself even to begin to remedy the effects of the fall.

It is our view that God allowed man to exist for a considerable time (in the earliest history of the world) without instituting the special offices of prophet, priest and king in order that man’s utter depravity and complete inability would be fully demonstrated. Thus, before the flood the relentless trend of human morality was downward. The human race sank to greater and greater depths of evil until, finally, “the earth was filled with violence” (Gen. 6:11). And “the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (6:5).

After the flood God began to separate a special people unto himself. This separation began with Abram who, by God’s unmerited favor, became Abraham. When his descendants became a multitude (at the time of the Exodus) God then instituted the three special Messianic offices of prophet, priest and king. We call these Messianic for two reasons: (1) For one thing, the word Messiah originally meant anointed. It was by the symbolic act of anointing the head with oil that the Old Testament prophets (on rare occasion), priests and kings (invariably) were set apart (1 Ki. 19:16, Ex. 29:7 and 2 Sam. 2:4). (2) For another thing, each of these offices was held by a long line—or succession—of office-bearers, and each of these lines led to the Lord Jesus (See Deut. 18:15-19, 2 Sam. 7:12-17, and 1 Sam. 2:27-36). With respect to each of these offices it was revealed in the Old Testament scriptures that the ultimate—the perfect and final prophet, priest and king—would come in the person of the Messiah. It is the fulfillment of this in the person and work of Jesus Christ which is confirmed in the New Testament. Our Savior is the anointed one—the final prophet, priest and king—the Messiah of Israel (see, for example, Luke 4:16-20). Because he is the Messiah he terminated these three special offices of the Old Testament, forever. He terminated them because he alone embodies all three in both his past earthly and present heavenly ministry, and because he lives forever and will never be succeeded.

II - The New Testament Realization

There is, then, a distinct difference between the manner in which Christ’s authority was administered in the church under the Old Testament, and the way in which it is administered today. In Old Testament times there were multiple mediators. The prophets, priests and kings were mediators. They stood between men and God. Now there is only one mediator between God and man (I Tim. 2:5). And because of the fact that he mediates an accomplished

redemption, all believers now have access to God the Father in a manner not known to Old Testament believers. We believe it was for this reason that our Lord said that even the lowliest member of the church today stands in a higher place than did John the baptist. For even though, “among them that are born of women there has not risen a greater than John the baptist, yet he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” (Matt. 11:11). The reason is that all believers are now prophets, priests and kings—all at the same time—and that was not true of Old Testament believers.

We can state the same thing in another way. Jesus said “all authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18). There is no other person who can say this because Jesus alone is the Messiah. As the Lord’s anointed he embodies within himself all mediatorial power. And since he said “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (28:20), it is self-evident that there will be no change in his supreme mediatorial position throughout the rest of this era. Therefore all other offices in the church today must be seen in terms of a subordinate relationship to his three-fold mediatorial office. And it is our conviction that all believers, in subordination to the Lord Jesus Christ, share in some measure all of these offices with him. We believe Paul had this in mind when he said “of his fullness have we all received” (Col. 1:19). For “the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal” (I Cor. 12:7). What this means is that the various offices that we find in the New Testament church differ in degree rather than kind. For “to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of the gift of Christ” (Eph. 4:7).

Let us illustrate our thesis, first of all, by noticing the way in which the New Testament speaks about our Lord Jesus. He is, of course, the only one who is called “the Christ” or “the Messiah.” But he is also called by the other names that the Bible uses for New Testament offices. He is called an apostle (Heb. 3:1), a prophet (Acts 3:22), he does the work of an evangelist (Lk. 4:18, 7:22), he is our supreme bishop (1 Pet. 2:25), and he even acts as our deacon (or servant, Matt. 20:28, 23:11). So, in other words, he not only fulfilled (and terminated) the three great special offices of the Old Testament, but also encompasses within himself (and thus inaugurates) all the New Testament offices as well. Thus the Apostle Paul informs us that, when Jesus ascended to heaven “leading captivity captive” he gave gifts to his

people. He gave “some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers” (Eph. 4:11). In other passages (such as Ro. 12:4-8, and I Cor. 12:27-30) the same Apostle describes many of the gifts that Jesus bestowed on his people, no doubt to qualify them for these special offices. And while it may not be possible for us to understand all of these in detail, this much is certain: there were at least six distinct offices in the church in the time of the Apostles. These were: (1) apostles, (2) prophets, (3) evangelists, (4) bishops (or elders), (5) deacons, and (6) the other believers. And we do not think that these can be classified after the analogy of the Old Testament offices of prophet, priest and king. The Old Testament offices were rather sharply separated. No king (after the time of Melchizedek) could also serve as a priest. But this is clearly not true, in the same way, of the New Testament offices as can be seen from the following data. (1) Peter was an apostle (1 Pet. 1:1), and yet he also calls himself an elder (1 Pet. 5:1). Since there is no indication that he was ever separately ordained as an elder, his call and ordination (by Jesus) as an apostle must have included the eldership within it. (2) Paul was evidently a prophet (1 Cor. 13:2, and 2 Thess. 2) as was John (who wrote the book of Revelation). Yet there is no indication of any separate ordination of either of these apostles to the prophetic office. Evidently their apostolic office included within it the prophetic. (3) From the book of Acts it is clear that the apostles originally included within the scope of their office the work that was later assigned to evangelists and deacons (Act. 8:25, 14:7). (4) Again, we note that Timothy was an evangelist (II Tim. 4:5). But Titus, who evidently held the same office, was instructed by Paul to ordain elders in Crete (Tit. 1:5). Since Paul also says that ordination of Timothy was by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery—which means ‘a body of elders’—the evangelist’s office must have included within it the office of elder (I Tim. 4:14). From all of this it becomes quite clear that the offices of the New Testament do not differ from one another in the sense that one is priestly, another kingly, and so on. No, the difference is rather in the measure of the gift of Christ (Eph. 4:7). They differ as to the degree or extent to which they embody the delegated power and authority of the Lord Jesus who distributes “to each one individually just as he wills” (1 Cor. 2:11).

In the distribution of gifts of office, then, we find the following distinctions. (1) Offices differ in the measure of

authority. Some church officers were inspired. The apostles were inspired in such a way that they were enabled to write the inerrant word of God that we have today in the New Testament scriptures. The prophets were inspired in such a way that they were enabled to speak the same kind of inerrant truth in an oral manner. (2) Again, the New Testament offices differ as to the length of time that they were/are to continue. Some offices are permanent in the church (until Jesus returns) while others are not. As we will see later on, the office of apostle did not continue beyond the life-span of those who had been in direct contact with Jesus. It was, in the very nature of the case, a ‘once only’ and a ‘once-and-for-all’ office. The offices of elder and deacon, on the other hand, continue in the church today. (3) Finally, these offices differ in the sphere of authority and responsibility. Some church officers were given a universal authority/responsibility, while others were only given authority/responsibility within their own particular congregation. An apostle, for example, could authoritatively write to all the churches. The evangelist was probably the New Testament counterpart to our present-day missionary, being sent into new areas of the world with authority to preach the word as widely as possible. A bishop or deacon, on the other hand, had a particular sphere of labor within a congregation (unless, of course, he was given special delegated authority by a wider assembly [See Acts 15]). We could sum up the differences as follows:

The apostle was an inspired, temporary officer with universal authority and responsibility. No one could be an apostle unless he (a) had seen the Lord Jesus in his resurrected body with his own two eyes (1 Cor. 9:1, 15:8); (b) had been called by him directly (apart from all human intermediaries [Gal. 1:1]); (c) had received power to do signs and wonders attesting their authority and call (2 Cor. 12:12); and (d) possessed universal authority in the church as Christ’s infallible witness (II Cor. 11:28; 14:37; 16:1 etc.).

The New Testament prophet was an inspired, temporary officer with local rather than universal authority and responsibility. A prophet received (a) revelations (Acts 13:2, 21:10,11) and made predictions with respect to the immediate future. (b) but they did not write scripture, and they were subject to the supreme authority of the word of the apostles (I Cor. 14:37). An apostle could also function as a prophet, of course, but one who was called to this as

his special office could not function as an apostle.

The evangelist was an uninspired officer with a wider sphere of authority than a bishop or elder (Acts 21:8, Eph. 4:11, II Tim. 4:5 etc.). Some argue that this office has ceased, and that these men were appointed by the apostles for special tasks (men such as Titus and Timothy who were, in effect, apostolic assistants). Others have argued that this office continues today, and that the evangelist is virtually identical with what we commonly call a missionary—someone sent out by the whole church with authority to organize churches where such are not yet established. In this view the office is permanent. But even if we accept this view, it is clear that Timothy—who did the work of an evangelist (1 Tim. 4:5)—was ordained by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery (1 Tim. 4:14). And the presbytery is just the collective body of elders gathered from several churches in a particular region. This would mean that, in receiving his appointment from this body of elders, his own authority would therefore be essentially that of an elder. Thus, today—in our own church—the equivalent would be what we think of as a teaching elder who receives assignment as a missionary (either at home or abroad) from an assembly of elders (the Presbytery or General Assembly).

The elder/bishop (the terms are used interchangeably in the New Testament) is a permanent office, is not inspired, and has local authority and responsibility (except by way of special delegation by a wider assembly of elders [Acts 15]).

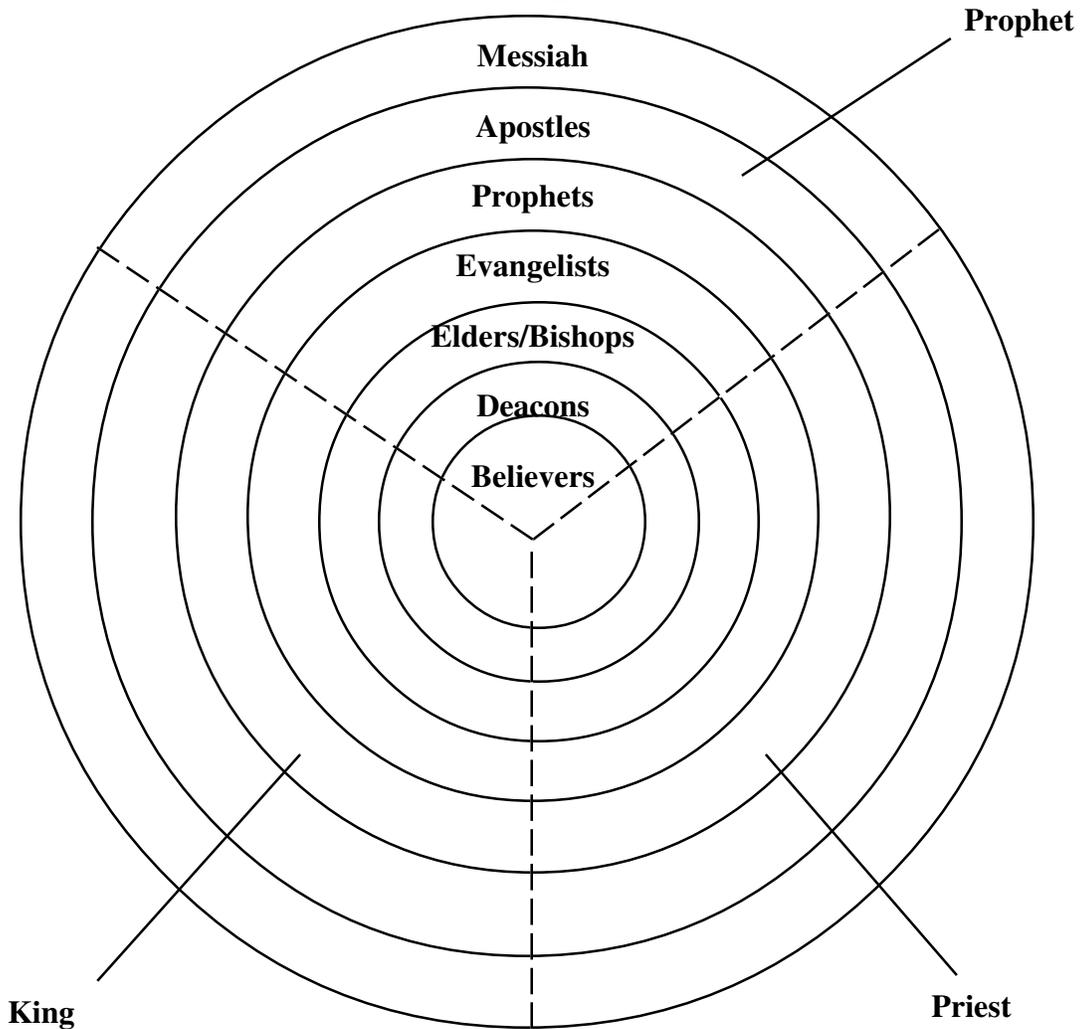
The deacon is a permanent, uninspired office with authority and responsibility only in the local congregation (unless appointed to some special task by a wider assembly such as Presbytery or General Assembly [cf. 1 Cor. 16:3]).

Summary

To summarize the discussion above I offer a diagram which follows on the next page. It is an attempt to show (1) the relationship of the various New Testament offices with each other, and (2) the relationship of all the New Testament offices—including the office of believer—to the three special Old Testament offices of prophet, priest and king (all of which came to their final fulfillment in the person and work of the Lord Jesus).

I - The Biblical Qualifications

The Diagram



If my analysis has been correct to this point there are two permanent offices in the church, the office of the elder (bishop) and the office of the deacon. Even if I was certain that the office of evangelist continues today, the very nature of the work which an evangelist is called to do would indicate that his office would have to be conferred by a wider assembly such as the Presbytery that ordained Timothy [I Tim. 4:14] or a General Assembly [Acts 15]. To put it in different words, ordination to this office would have to be conferred by a collective body of elders. So the office would still not essentially differ from the office of elder. As far as the local church is concerned, then, we need only consider the offices of elder and deacon.

As you undoubtedly know, there has long been a

difference of opinion among Reformed people as to the number of permanent offices in the church. Some have held what has been called the ‘three office’ view. This view does not have reference to the office of evangelist, but sees the office of the minister of the word as distinct from that of the ruling elder and deacon. Others hold that these constitute just two offices—elders and deacons—but that within the office of elder there is a division of labor. I incline to this second view for two basic reasons. (1) If we adopt the three office view we face a formidable problem. Where do we find the qualifications for ministers in the Scriptures? And where do we find the qualifications for elders? In Timothy 3 and Titus 1 we have two lists of qualifications. These are for bishops (who are also called elders) and deacons. So the obvious question would be: why would the apostle only

give two lists of qualifications if, in fact, he knew that there were three offices. To put the question another way, if we hold the three office view then where do we find the qualifications for the third office? It seems self-evident to us that there are only two *lists* because there are, in fact, only two *offices*. (2) This is confirmed, as I see it, by I Timothy 5:17 which says: “*Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in word and doctrine.*” It seems to me that this text clearly shows that already, in the apostolic churches, there was a division of labor among those who were called elders and who, for that reason, were worthy of double honor. But there were also some who—in addition to ruling well—labored in word and in doctrine. They were to be ‘especially’ honored. In my judgment this indicates that (1) in the apostolic constitution of the church this was one office; that (2) nevertheless, within this one office there was, by divine sanction, such a division of labor as to constitute two sections of the eldership, namely the ‘ruling’ and the ‘teaching;’ and yet that (3) because the office was one there was no need for two sets of qualifications.

Having said this, however, I want to make it clear that I have no difficulty in living harmoniously with men who hold the three office view. I say this because we agree that there is a significant difference between those elders whose primary work is ruling and those elders whose primary labor is teaching. This is an important difference. For this reason I do not believe there is *necessarily* a wide difference—practically speaking—between the two and the three office views. On the one hand, we would agree that men without all the gifts and training needed for the public ministry of the word are *not* thereby disqualified from serving as ruling elders. And, on the other hand, we would agree that teaching elders have special functions and therefore should receive special training. I am not certain which view Robert L. Dabney would have claimed. But in an article entitled “*A Thoroughly Educated Ministry*” he shows how essential it is for those elders who labor in word and in doctrine to have the kind of education that Presbyterians have always insisted on. Dabney put it this way:

“1 Timothy 3:2, requires of the presbyter-bishop ‘aptness to teach.’ This cannot mean less than didactic ability to explain the gospel correctly; and we may

grant that this would be sufficiently conferred by fair general intelligence, perspicuous good sense, the gift of utterance, familiarity with the Scriptures of the New Testament, and a personal experience of gospel grace. The intelligent tradesman or mechanic in Ephesus might possess these. But ought not the modern pastor to possess this minimum qualification? Should he not be abreast, at least, of the Ephesian mechanic? Let it be remembered this Greek, now the classic ‘dead’ language, was then the vernacular. The educated Englishman must be no mean Greek scholar to have that practical mastery of the idiom which this mechanic had, granting that the mechanic had not the knowledge of the elegancies of Greek which the modern student may have sought out. But more than this: the events, the history, the geography, the usages, the modes of thought, the opinions, which constituted the human environment of the New Testament writers, the accurate understanding of which is so necessary to grasp the real scope of what they wrote, all these were the familiar, popular, contemporaneous knowledge of that intelligent mechanic in Ephesus. He had imbibed it in his daily observation, reading, and talk, as easily and naturally as the mechanic in Charleston has imbibed the daily facts about current politics, cotton shipments, familiar modern machinery, or domestic usages. But to us now all this expository knowledge is archaeologic! It is gained accurately only by learned researches into antiquity.”²

We fully agree with Dabney and therefore concur with our three-office brethren in adherence to the historic Presbyterian insistence on a thoroughly educated ministry. Whether we classify the offices under two heads, or three, in other words, I hold that the end result is much the same. More important than the way we *classify* these offices is the way we *define* them. On this, as I see it, there is no need for any basic disagreement.

Let us take a closer look at the qualifications for elders and deacons, then, by putting the three key New Testament passages beside each other.

The noted commentator, William Hendriksen, has

² Discussions Evangelical and Theological, Banner of Truth Trust, 78b Chiltern Street, London, W.1 1967. Vol. 2, p. 664

1 Timothy 3:1-7

This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the office of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous, one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Titus 1:5-9

For this cause I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you—if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

1 Timothy 3:8-13

Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be proved; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. Likewise their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

analyzed these qualifications as follows:

A. Seven are positive:

- (1) Above reproach in the esteem of fellow members;
- (2) A man of unquestioned sexual morality;
- (3) Temperate in living habits;
- (4) Mentally self-controlled (not impulsive);
- (5) A man who has a well-ordered life-style;
- (6) A friend to strangers (hospitable);
- (7) Well grounded in biblical truth.

B. Seven are negative:

- (1) Not given to [much] wine;
- (2) Not given to blows (belligerent);
- (3) Not jealous for self (one who can yield);
- (4) Not out for the almighty dollar;
- (5) Not a man who can't manage his own household;
- (6) Not contentious (of a quarreling nature);
- (7) Not a recent convert.

C. One is special:

- (1) Above reproach in the eyes of the surrounding community.

If our analysis has been sound, elders and deacons both embody the delegated authority of Christ. The measure of this gift differs, but there is a prophetic, priestly and kingly aspect or element in the work of both the elders and deacons.

IV - The Responsibilities of the Offices

1 - The Elder

In such texts as Act. 20:28, I Pet. 5:1-3 and Heb. 13:17 it is clear that the elders are (a) shepherds of the flock of God. They are to care for, guide and feed the people of God with the truth of his word just as good shepherds of sheep see that they have green pastures and adequate water. They are (b) watchmen who are responsible for the souls of men, being required to give account of their oversight. They must also be (c) examples for the Lord's people, rather than such as lord it over them (I Pet. 5:1f). Among the varied

particulars that we find mentioned in Scripture are the following: elders are to visit the sick (Jas. 5:14); they are to see to it that everything in the church is done decently and in order (I Cor. 14:37-40); they are to keep false doctrine out (Act. 20:28-30); they are to prevent fruitless disputes over mere words (2 Tim. 2:14); they are to exhort the people (Tit. 1:4); and together with elders from other churches they are to settle disputes that arise in their own congregation on the basis of the supreme authority of the Bible (Act. 15).

It is clear from this brief survey, and other similar texts, that the elder is primarily responsible to maintain an oversight of the particular members of the local church. I Pet. 5:2,3 suggests that each elder in the apostolic age was given a specific sphere of duty and authority. (Was it a district with several families committed to the particular charge of a certain elder?) He also had to concern himself with the welfare of the congregation as a whole. Was the corporate life of the church being kept true to the scriptures? Was the true gospel being faithfully preached, the sacraments rightly administered, and church discipline faithfully maintained? Was the doctrine, worship and government of the church maintained in a truly scriptural manner? Surely it is evident how artificial it would be to imagine that elders only have a kingly function!

In order to perform this momentous task it is obvious that a ruling elder today needs to be well grounded in the scriptures. He needs a good grasp of what we call 'biblical theology,' the understanding of the process of God's self-disclosure in history as it is set forth in the Bible. How can he protect the flock from the atomistic misinterpretations of the cults of the day if he does not know how to interpret a particular text of the Bible in the light of this unfolding of God's revelation? Again, he will need to have a good grasp of 'systematic theology.' Many difficulties that arise in the lives of believers are due to a lack of understanding of the truth of God as a coherent system. The result is that they lack the ability to distinguish the things that differ. How can elders help to alleviate this weakness if they themselves lack discernment? Here we also see the practical importance of at least a modest understanding of church history. Most of our modern problems are little more than re-tread versions of heresies and movements that the church has already had to contend with in the past. And, of course, the elders need to understand the principles of church government. We note these things, first, because we do not want any reader to think that we

minimize education. It is essential that *all* elders of the church be men well grounded in these things.

But having said this with emphasis, it is equally important to note that most of the qualifications for the office of elder are not academic in character. Here, in our view, is the basic weakness in our present system of training teaching elders. Is it not self-evident that the apostle, in setting down the various requirements for office in the early church, expected people to "choose out from among themselves" (Act. 6:3) men who met these requirements? Is it not equally self-evident that the people could only do this if, and because, they had sustained a relatively long-term relationship with the men they were evaluating? It is right here that we see a serious problem today. The present system of Seminary training does not provide for this sustained exposure on the part of those who desire to be teaching elders to the members of the congregation. Congregations often call men of whom they have little or no intimate knowledge. This was not always the case. In earlier times in American Presbyterianism pastors were often trained by pastors while they lived with the congregation. We believe it is time to seek for some way to restore this dimension. Perhaps the providential invention of means of communication whereby instruction can be given from a distance will help us overcome this gap. The people of God ought to know the men they call. They ought to know them well enough to determine their vote on the basis of all the qualifications listed by the apostle, and not just those that are academic.

2 - The Deacon

We now turn, briefly, to consider the task of the deacon. We believe the deacon also shares—in measure—in the three-fold task of prophet, priest and king. The task of the deacon is to minister in Christ's name. As Professor R. B. Kuiper put it: "In the name of Christ and actuated by the love of Christ, the church...dispenses mercy...through the office of deacon." While this ministry of mercy is first of all—or primarily—requisite within the household of faith (Gal. 6:10), it is also to be extended more widely as opportunity and means allow. Even a cup of cold water given in the name of Jesus teaches much. It often speaks louder than words concerning the reconciling mercy of God in Christ. It is truly a demonstration of his care and protection. True, deacons are not required to be 'apt to teach' in the way elders are. Yet who can deny that there is a teaching aspect to their work? They too must know the

scriptures in order to administer the mercy of Christ aright. And here, too, the knowledge of doctrine and of church history is of great value for wise stewardship. It is, in fact, our opinion that a serious weakness in Presbyterian and Reformed churches today is the neglect of this important office.

In congregations newly established—or while congregations remain relatively small—there may not yet be an urgent need for deacons. This appears to have been the case in the earliest period in the apostolic churches. The reference in Acts 14:23 (“And when they had appointed elders for them in every church...”) and Titus 1:5 (“For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you...”) would seem to confirm this. The appointment of elders was regarded as essential even for the smallest, or newest congregation. We do not find any like statement with respect to the appointment of deacons. It also appears, from Acts 6—if this is an account of the first appointment of deacons—that it was only when the church had grown to the place where the multiplied duties became too much for the apostles (acting in their capacity as elders) that these men were chosen to assist them.

One of the great heresies of the church has been a wrong view of the relationship between what we call ‘the natural’ and ‘the spiritual.’ What a great work of teaching and edification the deacons can perform if they will only lead the church to see how false this dichotomy is. If we are to be ‘the salt of the earth’—‘the light of the world’ that penetrates the darkness around us—then one of the urgent needs of the hour is for men who can show us how we can do good to all men, and especially those who are of the household of the faith. In order to provide the needed leadership for this in the Lord’s congregation He gives some to be deacons.

V. Candidates for Office

If my analysis has been sound up to this point it will be evident that a basic principle is this: the offices (including the general office of believer) do not differ in kind so much as degree. The qualifications for the office of elder, set down by the apostle in Timothy and Titus, should not be seen as desirable for elders alone. To the contrary, as much as possible these qualifications ought to be seen as desirable for all the men of the congregation. Or, to put it in different words, these qualifications will not be attained by a sudden leap but rather by a process of

sustained growth. In every well-taught and well-disciplined congregation there will be men who are growing up to the stature of elders. And it should not be seen as a problem, but as a great blessing, when—in a particular congregation—there are more men than are needed who are qualified to be elders.

We are all familiar with the long-standing debate between the proponents of ‘term’ eldership, on the one hand, and ‘life’ eldership, on the other. In my view these are inaccurate and even misleading terms. I do not see that a Session (or Presbytery) is competent to prophesy the future. When they ordain a man they ordain him as one who in their honest judgment possess the qualifications for office that the scripture prescribes. I have known men who were ordained to the ministry in the same way, and at the time, that I was. But they only served for a time and then left the ministry. Yet our ordination was exactly the same. In other words, it is not a certain kind of ordination that determines the length of our tenure in office. No, that is determined by whether or not we neglect the gift that is in us, which was given with the laying on of the hands of the elders (See I Tim. 4:14). As we see it, then, this classic debate will remain inconclusive because neither the one side or the other is entirely correct. As we see it the church should not attempt, in advance, to determine the length of a man’s tenure as an elder or deacon. That ought to be determined by the sovereign working of the holy Spirit within the man, and therefore also by his own diligence in ‘stirring up the gift of God which is in him’ (II Tim. 1:6) as he seeks to develop it more and more fully.

To Sum Up

It is clear, then, that these offices—properly instituted, and functioning in a biblical manner—are of very great importance to the well-being of the church. No ordinance of God can be omitted, or neglected, without some harm to the church. But conversely, where scriptural ordinances are reverently honored and maintained in the church, great blessing will follow. In earlier times it was an aspect of the glory of the Reformed churches that they restored and magnified, once more, these scriptural offices. If we will but strive anew to measure up to the apostolic standard in our own generation, I believe that our churches, too, will be greatly blessed.

May the Lord be pleased to work in us—his ordained servants—first, and then in all the members of the church—to will and to do of His good pleasure.

HOW MANY OFFICES ARE THERE?

Practical Concerns

It's no secret that Presbyterians have a long-running debate about whether there are "two offices" or "three offices" in the church. The debate probably reached its zenith during the Nineteenth Century when James Henley Thornwell championed the "two-office" position and Charles Hodge championed the "three-office" view.

If you're not familiar with the debate, the basic issue is: how do you classify the offices in biblical church government? Are there two offices — elder and deacon? Or are there three offices — minister, elder, and deacon? In specific, how sharp is the distinction between the *minister of the Word* (teaching elder) and the *ruling elder*? Are these two functions within one office (the "two-office" view), or are they two distinct offices (the "three-office" view)?

I hope you don't expect me fully to resolve the debate. Frankly, I can't. If you push me to the wall, I'll identify myself as a "three-office" man.¹ But I doubt that it will be very helpful for us all to push each other to the wall on this issue. The Westminster Assembly couldn't fully resolve it either.² To me, this implies that we had better tread very carefully.

Both sides plead exegetical concerns. But as I try to dissect this debate, it appears to me that each side emphasizes two major *practical* concerns, both positive and negative.

On the one hand, the "three-office" position is concerned, *positively*, to guard the faithful ministry of the Word (by maintaining its necessity, distinctiveness, and importance). *Negatively*, the "three-office" position is concerned not to undermine the office of "church governor" or "ruling elder" (by disqualifying men without gifts or training for publicly teaching the Word from serving as ruling elders).

On the other hand, the "two-office" position is concerned, *positively*, to guard the parity (equal authority and joint rule) of the governing officers in leading the church. The *negative* concern is its corollary, to avoid hierarchicalism in the church.

It strikes me that each of these practical concerns is biblical, and that in order to avoid abuse we must emphasize all four simultaneously. I don't say this to advocate irrationalism. I'm advocating humility.

In fact, this is what the Orthodox Presbyterian Church does. Certain elements of the *Book of Church Order* clearly guard the "three-office" concerns; other elements reflect the "two-office" concerns. That's why some say that the OPC affirms a "two-and-a-half office" position.

This is also our intent for Ordained Servant — not to toe either the "three-office" or the "two-office" line — but rather faithfully to advocate the above biblical, practical concerns without getting sidetracked by the formal debate.

As G.I. Williamson says, "More important than the way we *classify* the offices is the way we *define* them." We can each stand instruction on how better to biblically define the offices and duties to which we are called. In the meantime, do we agree that the ministry of the Word is necessary, distinct, and vital to the well-being of the church? Do we agree that men may serve as ruling elders without the gifts and training for publicly teaching the Word? Do we agree that the authority of teaching elders and ruling elders is equal and jointly exercised? And do we agree that, therefore, there is to be no hierarchicalism in the governing of the church? Then, let's roll up our sleeves and together get back to work.

Larry E. Wilson
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¹ Along the lines suggested in Edmund P. Clowney, *A Brief for Church Governors in Church Government* (N.D.); and Robert S. Rayburn, 'Three Offices: Minister, Elder, and Deacon,' *Presbyterian*, Vol. XII, No. 2 (Fall 1986), pp. 105-114.

² See Ian Murray, 'Ruling Elders — A Sketch of a Controversy,' *The Banner of Truth*, No. 235 (1983), pp. 1-9; and Clowney, *Op. Cit.*

TAKING HEED TO THE FLOCK

A Study of the Principles and Practice of Family Visitation

by

Peter Y. de Jong, Ph. D.

Chapter II

The History Of Family Visitation

“Any church which forsakes the regular and uniform for the periodical and spasmodic service of God, is doomed to decay; any church which relies for its spiritual strength and growth entirely upon seasons of ‘revival’ will very soon have no genuine revivals to rely on. Our holy God will not conform His blessings to man’s moods and moral caprice. If a church is declining, it may need a ‘revival’ to restore it; but what need was there of its declining?”

— T. L. CUYLER: RECOLLECTIONS.

“The student is to read history actively and not passively, to esteem his own life the text, and books the commentary. Thus compelled, the muse of history will utter oracles as never to those who do not respect themselves.”

— EMERSON: ESSAYS.

During the first years of the Protestant Reformation the struggle for establishing the true Biblical religion was fierce indeed. Among the bitter calumnies which the reformers had to endure, there was none more contrary to the truth and more grievous to their own hearts, than that they were subverting the good order of Christ’s church by insisting upon innovations.

In his beautiful essay on *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, presented to the Imperial Diet at Spires (A. D. 1544), Calvin’s facile pen gives the lie to this accusation. He writes, “*Therefore, let there be an examination of our whole doctrine, of our form of administering the sacraments, and our method of governing the Church; and in none of these three things will it be found that we have made any change upon the ancient form, without attempting to restore it to the exact*

standard of the Word of God.” [Calvin’s Tracts, Vol. 1, p. 146]

This attempt has been at once the glory and the strength of the Reformed churches.

More than any other Christian group which arose in those turbulent years, the Reformed sought consciously and consistently to model their church life after the apostolic pattern. Thus in distinction from almost every other party in Christendom they have also maintained and defended the practice of family visitation throughout the years. By pursuing this course of contact with the families of the congregation, the ministers and elders insisted that they were not introducing something new but rather reviving a practice which dated back to the early church. Therefore it is profitable for us, too, to give some

attention to the origin and roots of this common practice among us.

Supervision in the Early Church

Already very early in church history we meet with a practice which in some respects may be considered the antecedent of our Reformed family visitation.

Both Clement of Alexandria and Cyprian in their writings offer proof that in their days the officers of the churches visited the members in their homes with some degree of regularity. So too the Apostolic Constitutions, when describing the work of the bishop, mention specifically the duty of taking heed to the flock, which included not only seeking those who had gone astray but also encouraging those in the faith who had given no offense because of public sins.

From these and other examples it is evident that the first fathers of the churches did not deem the public instruction given in the church at the time of worship sufficient to meet the demands of spiritual life. They sought to supplement the preaching with a type of spiritual care in which the members were contacted in their homes. Although because of the situation which obtained in those days the emphasis soon fell almost exclusively on the work of discipline, many examples of pastors who took a deep and abiding interest in the needs of their people may be mentioned.

After some centuries the church began to shift the emphasis in the spiritual nurture of the flock. The sacraments were stressed as the chief means of grace and in connection with this a new view of the significance of the visible church arose which did great damage to the work of visitation. Yet for some centuries the two views continued side by side.

Chrysostom, the most distinguished Christian orator of Constantinople, insisted that in spite of the many difficulties which this task worked, it was essential to the welfare of the churches. Many, he realized, desired such visits by the officers of the church only because they flattered personal pride. Yet in spite of the danger of ministering to and feeding such sinful desires, he felt that all the members should be contacted in their homes. Gregory the Great also understood the value of having the pastors know the conditions and needs of all the members of the flock. In his writings Ambrose of Milan placed a high value on the work, claiming that by giving such guidance to individual souls the priest is fulfilling

the work which he began at the administration of the sacraments in public worship. One of the chief regrets of Augustine, the best-known of all these early church fathers, was that he had not given more consideration to pastoral duties, particularly those of shepherding the souls entrusted to his care.

Decline among the Roman Catholics

Soon after Augustine's day a new theory of the church and the sacraments made rapid headway.

These novel theories concerning the means of grace taught that grace could be wrought in the soul in a mechanical way through a faithful external use of the sacraments. Such a conception naturally left no place for the spiritual care of the members of the church. Thus this work gradually came to be entirely neglected. The glory and power of the mother church rather than the spiritual development of the members was the paramount aim of the priests. The method which was deliberately chosen to attain this goal was the private confessional, by means of which the church was better able to make her members obedient sons and daughters.

The early church, as has been demonstrated conclusively by those who have made careful study of the matter, knew of no private confessional. Indeed, its discipline required a type of public confession of sins and penance, but this differed radically from the practices which became current during the Middle Ages.

Private confession to a priest had its beginnings in the monasteries and cloisters, and only gradually did it force its way into the churches. Nowhere did it receive more wholehearted support than among the Irish monks who as early as the sixth century extended its use to the laity. Here we find also traces of the earliest penitential books, in which proper satisfactions were assessed for certain sins committed.

In many quarters the opposition to this novel practice continued for years. During the reign of Charlemagne there were many places in France which opposed it vehemently. However, the growing influence of the monks presaged the final victory for such private confession. By 1215 the practice had become well-nigh universal, so that the Fourth Lateran Council was able without any significant opposition to legislate on the matter. When once it became canon law, the domination of the priests over the people became an accomplished fact.

As a result of this new practice every Roman Catholic manual on pastoral theology speaks at length of the confessional and its place in the life of the church. It is the heart of the spiritual care which the church exercises over the lives of her members. Everyone is obliged to use the confessional as one of the necessary means of grace. There must, of course, be the reasonable assurance that the individual member is ready and willing to confess all, that he is moved by a genuine repentance and that he purposes to mend his ways. Thereupon, either by listening to the penitent or asking him certain questions, the priest receives the confession. After this is accomplished, he must be competent to judge on the matter of the seriousness of the sins confessed as well as on the restoration which the sinner must make to God, his neighbor and the church. After all this is done, he may by virtue of the juridical authority vested in him pronounce the absolution and impose the penalty. The last consists generally of fasting and prayers and giving alms. At first the aim of this new method of spiritual care was the development of the spiritual life of the believers, but gradually the emphasis fell on the church's prerogative of governing the lives of the members. To execute this matter properly many directives and manuals have been issued during the last centuries which have tended to simplify the work and lighten the responsibility of the individual priest.

Pastoral Care Among the Protestants

For the many hundreds of thousands who during long years had been in spiritual bondage to this system, the Protestant Reformation was the dawn of a new day. Indeed, the reformers did not introduce anything essentially new. Their aim was to purify the church of all the excrescences of the Middle Ages and thus to return to the faith and practice of the apostolic churches. In doctrine, government and worship they broke radically with the deformations which had characterized the life of Christendom for centuries and brought a real measure of spiritual liberty to the people of God. This work was begun by Luther and his disciples and reached its richest development under Calvin and those who followed him.

In many respects the Lutheran Reformation was still partial and inconsistent. As spiritual leader Luther himself sought to retain as many of the forms and traditions as possible by merely removing the vicious elements and

improving what remained. The question which he and others raised was not whether the practice under discussion enjoyed solid Scriptural foundation but rather whether it could contribute to the spiritual edification of the church. This approach was also taken when considering the question of the pastoral care of God's people. As a result private confession was retained, although it differed widely from the form current in the Roman church. Early Lutheran confessional writings make mention of it repeatedly and insist that the individual must know whether or not he enjoys the absolution.

During the period of the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), when most of Germany was hopelessly divided and tragically devastated, the Lutheran churches experienced a period of spiritual poverty and decline. At that time private confession fell into disuse and never again occupied a place of importance in the churches. However, the public service of confession was still continued as part of the proper preparation for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Although many early as well as later Lutheran pastors set a worthy example in their faithfulness in visiting the sick and needy, the church never introduced official family visitation. The chief cause for this neglect must be undoubtedly sought in the Lutheran neglect of the office of ruling elder in the congregations.

Family Visitation Among the Reformed

At the outset the Reformed churches under the able leadership of John Calvin broke completely with the system of confessional and the sacrament of penance. They returned to the time-honored practice of visiting the members in their homes. This they also developed to a much higher degree than ever before in the history of the Christian church, no doubt as a result of carefully maintaining the office of the ruling elders in every congregation.

Already at an early date Calvin emphasized that pastoral work included far more than official preaching of the gospel. He insisted on faithfulness on the part of all the pastors in visiting the members of the church, since he realized how beneficial this work was for the development of spiritual life and the edification of the church. Those Reformed leaders who came to Geneva during that time and saw the progress which had been

made began to follow the same pattern of church care. Thus the practice of family visitation became current wherever Reformed churches were established.

In Geneva the work was carried on with great regularity. Four times a year, before each celebration of the Lord's Supper, all the members were to be visited in their homes by the ministers and the elders. Special attention was given to the young people, in order that they might prepare themselves for profession of their faith and thus receive the right to use the Lord's Supper. Some have argued that all this was merely part of the iron-clad discipline which Calvin imposed on the town. However, this assertion rests upon a double misunderstanding. First of all, family visitation was regarded as definitely part of the church's calling towards her members. It had little if anything to do with the civil government of the city. Then too, the reformers made a careful and judicious distinction between family visitation and church discipline. The purpose of the former was never to pry into the hearts of the individuals but rather to exhort and

stimulate the believers to a life of sanctification in all its parts. Especially the churches in the Netherlands and Scotland have sought to follow this same practice diligently, in some groups to our very day.

It is therefore a mistaken notion to argue that our Reformed fathers, having rid the churches of the confessional, felt the need of some substitute and hence introduced family visitation. In no sense of the word is the latter a substitute for the former. Rather, in their heroic attempt to purify the church of Christ of unscriptural practices they returned to the Bible and found there a solid foundation for this type of spiritual work. Too long had the church through its leaders ignored an important aspect of her calling. And only by restoring and maintaining the proper spiritual contact between the church's officers and her members were they able to rejoice in an evident revival of spiritual life in the congregations.

(Next issue: *The Spiritual Purpose of Family Visitation*)

"When I first entered upon the work of the ministry among you, I was exceedingly ignorant of the vast importance of church discipline. I thought that my great and almost only work was to pray and preach. I saw your souls to be so precious, and the time so short, that I devoted all my time, and care, and strength, to labour in word and doctrine. When cases of discipline were brought before me and the elders, I regarded them with something like abhorrence. It was a duty I shrank from; and I may truly say it nearly drove me from the work of the ministry among you altogether. But it pleased God, who teaches His servants in another way than man teaches, to bless some of the cases of discipline to the manifest and undeniable conversion of the souls of those under our care; and from that hour a new light broke in upon my mind, and I saw that if preaching be an ordinance of God—that two keys are committed to us by Christ: the one the key of doctrine, by means of which we unlock the treasures of the Bible; the other the key of discipline, by which we open or shut the way to the sealing ordinances of the faith. Both are Christ's gift, and neither is to be resigned without sin."

— Memoir and Remains of Robert Murray McCheyne, Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, Edinburgh and London, 1913, p. 73.

REFORMING THE DIACONATE

by

Rev. William Shishko

Part 1

DEFINING THE DIACONAL TASK

In the previous issue of “Ordained Servant” Dr. C. Van Dam of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches presented a rich overview of the diaconal task, focusing on the deacon’s task of “maintaining and providing for the fellowship (i.e. the congregation) in the joy of the Lord.” In this article and the two to follow I would like to focus in on the more “nuts and bolts” aspects of bringing our Boards of Deacons into line with the practical dimensions of Holy Scripture.

It is tragic indeed that in many of our congregations a Board of Deacons is either non-existent or virtually non-functioning; and in many of the situations in which a Board of Deacons meets regularly it does so with little awareness of its Biblical and church constitutional responsibilities. This was very much the case over a decade ago in the congregation I presently pastor. For years the Session and Board of Deacons has worked carefully to reform both of these groups of officers, and it is from that reforming process that I would like to draw for these articles. My hope is that lessons from our experience will be helpful for you in your particular situation. For ease in presentation, and for maximum helpfulness I will offer these lessons under a series of practical exhortations:

I. GO BACK TO THE DIRECTIONS!

In my office as a Teaching Elder I took several months to preach a series of messages on “The Well-Marked Church”, based on Psalm 48:13. That series dealt with the meaning of church membership as well as the qualifications, calling, and functioning of church officers. That gave the entire congregation the opportunity to receive a full-orbed presentation of, among other things, the work of deacons in the church. The apostle Paul included such material as part of that which was necessary “that you may know how it is necessary for you to conduct yourself

in...the church of the living God, which is the pillar and ground of the truth.” (I Tim. 3:15). Ministers should have no hesitation in doing the same in their preaching. Reformation always comes when driven by the preaching of the Word of God.

During that series and in the discussions among the officers which followed we settled on several basic convictions regarding the diaconate:

1. It is our view that Acts 6:1-7 describes the inauguration of the diaconal office.¹ The context of this passage is remarkably like that in which the eldership was inaugurated in the Old Testament (compare Acts 6:2 with Exodus 18:17ff.). The frequent use of “diakonia” (vss. 1, 2, 4) to describe the function in view cannot help but draw one to the conclusion that the term describing the seven officers is appropriately “deacon.” Further, if this passage is not a description of the origin of the diaconal office, one wonders both why there is a reference to ordination and authority in vss. 3 and 6, and where one would find the origin of the office so obviously assumed in I Timothy 3:8-13.

2. It is also our view² that “ministry of mercy” is only a specimen of the work of the diaconate as put forward in Acts 6:1-7. This, quite frankly, is a different emphasis than that of the OPC Form of Government (Chapter IX) which makes “relief of the needy” the prominent work of the deacons, while “other forms of service may also be committed to the deacons” (section 4). The apostles had directed “relief work” prior to this, and actually continued to be involved with “ministry of mercy” even after the diaconate was instituted (II Corinthians 8,9). The thrust of Acts 6:2-4, however, is that the officers to be called out here would function in such a way that the apostles might be given over to prayer and the ministry of the word. The elders, and particularly the teaching elder, are now given that task (I

Timothy 5:17). Deacons, in our view, continue their role of serving the congregation in any and every way that frees the elders to most fully do the work of praying, ruling, and teaching according to the Word of God.

3. The specific functions of the office are somewhat fluid, and always functional. What official functions may deacons perform which will relieve the elders of responsibilities other than those most immediately connected with their primary duties? Elders oversee everything in the church...but elders cannot do everything. Deacons are placed over (cf. Acts 6:3) those spheres of responsibility which demand official (i.e. deacons are officers: they are ordained and installed) involvement. We began by adding a category simply called “temporalities” to the regular “ministry of mercy” previously carried out by the deacons. Over the past several years we have built on these basic convictions. You also must formulate your convictions from the Scriptures...not from tradition.

II. GET TO WORK!

Preaching must be applied in corporate church life, or congregation members will never believe it is to be applied in their individual lives. A wholesale revision of our church By Laws followed the sermon series and discussion among the officers. We sought to reflect our Biblical convictions on paper, had informal “hearings” with the congregation to discuss the proposed changes, and finally proposed a new Constitution and By Laws which were overwhelmingly adopted by the congregation. Do your local church documents reflect your biblically forged convictions? An exercise like the one our officers went through (which took almost a year and a half!) would be eminently worthwhile for officers and congregations still functioning with church documents that may be formed far more by thoughtless pragmatism than Biblically formulated principles.

You must get to work with a reforming view of the diaconate. The work which was formerly given to a “Board of Trustees” was given to our Board of Deacons. The Session communicated with the Board of Deacons on a monthly basis regarding needs and problems which the deacons could help the elders with. Our twice yearly joint meetings were filled with plans that served both to free the Session members to devote themselves to their work, and also to broaden the diaconal role making it far more visible and influential in church life. The fruit of this has been an expansion of our overall ministry which has made us better understand and appreciate

what happened after the first Board of Deacons was constituted and set to work: “And the Word of God spread, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly...” The point is: You must apply the principles of the Word of God!

We also reformed our procedure for training prospective deacons. We’ll cover that in the next article, and then follow it up with a look at our present practices...and some warnings.

1. This is confirmed by such Reformed theologians as John Owen (“...the reason of the institution of this office was, in general, to free pastors of the churches who labor in the word and doctrine from avocations by outward things such as wherein the church is concerned...”, [WORKS, Vol. XVI, p.147].) and James Henley Thornwell (“It must be perfectly obvious to every candid mind that the entire secular business of the Church was entrusted to the Deacons.” [Collected Writings, Vol. IV, p. 201].

2. I am thankful for the increasing emphasis on the work of the diaconate among evangelical and Reformed people today. I am not convinced, however, that the “social service” orientation of most of these modern emphases actually lines up with the emphasis of the Scriptures. A brief examination of Acts 6:1ff. should confirm my point.

I presuppose at the outset that Acts 6:1-6 does present the origin of the diaconate as a distinct and uniquely New Testament office. The persistent use of the Greek term “deaconing” (serving) in verses 1,2 and by implication in verse 3, as well as the obvious inauguration of this work by the solemn act of ordination (vss. 5,6) provide, to my mind, sufficient proof that this is the case. Remember, too, that the qualifications for those set apart as “deacons” given in I Timothy 3:8-13 are like garments hung in mid-air if there has not been some previous introduction of a diaconal office. Where else would this be but in Acts 6?

The seven called out to serve as the initial deacons of the Christian church have a specific responsibility entrusted to them. They are “appointed over” or “given charge over” the work of making impartial provision for the basic needs of the widows (demonstrating the possession of official authority in a particular sphere). This social obligation has its roots in Old Covenant community standards (Ex. 22:22, Deut. 24:19-22; 26:12-15, etc.). It is this “social work” aspect of the diaconate which has received the emphasis today. Without for a moment questioning that they had responsibility for the poor of the congregation, I would question whether this was the heart-throb of their official role. “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables” (vs.2) was the Apostles’ reason for instituting this new office. Not “social ministry”, but ministry of the word of God (now carried on by teaching

and ruling elders) was the paramount concern in adding to the official laborers of the Church (Exodus 18 provides a fascinating parallel). The diaconal commission, while clearly linked with ministry to the poor and needy, was primarily to relieve those entrusted with the ministry of the Word of God from necessary responsibilities which detracted from that most important work of the Church.

Such a perspective on the nature of the diaconate has, I believe, multiple practical implications for our church life. Foundationally, it should make us re-orient many of our popularly acquired views of the work of the diaconate. Granting that the Session of a local church has final responsibility for all of the church’s affairs (OPC FOG, XIII:7), why do we not regularly ask the question, “How are the Deacons functioning to relieve the church Elders of service works which detract from their time spent in prayer and in ministry of God’s Word?” Along with caring for the truly needy of our ranks, could not the Deacons also “take charge of” (cf. Acts 6:3) the church budget and matters connected with the church building? Many will answer, “Our Trustees do all of that!” But who are our Trustees? Why should not your Deacons serve in this capacity? Is this not a legitimate contemporary way of using that office? Perhaps this is why our own Form of Government clearly provides, “Other forms of service for the church may also be committed to the deacons” (XI:4).

Sadly, both teaching and ruling elders today are saddled with too many things which combine to detract from their primary work. Prayer time at Session meetings (and in the pastor’s study) is squeezed out, time for preparation for teaching and preaching is swallowed up, and needed evenings of “house to house” ministry of the

Word (Acts 20:20) are eliminated because of social projects, committee meetings, church activities, assistance in job hunting, arranging for moving crews, and countless other things—worthwhile in themselves—but not the primary task of Elders. And then we wonder why our churches seem so limp in comparison with what we read in the pages of the New Testament. What are we doing with our Deacons? Perhaps we should all take another look at Acts 6—and the diaconate.

“But we must be careful,” someone will say. “If you press this view we will neglect the care of the poor and needy.” Indeed, we must be careful. It is easier to make detached decisions about budgetary items than to give time and sympathetic assistance to our needy. I would submit, however, that if our Elders were freed for their primary work of prayer and the ministry of the Word, and if they were using their new found time to best advantage we would have more poor and needy in our midst for our Deacons to really assist! In fact, we would have more people, period! The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16), and the freer course the Gospel has in the work of our churches the more our churches will have the poor as well as the rich, the needy as well as those who can help supply that need. In fact, if we really make a full application of our perspective on Acts 6:1 ff., I believe we will greatly expand the kind of ministry presented in II Corinthians 8,9 as typical of the work of our Deacons. We will also do it in such a way that the church-centered thrust of our diaconal work is enhanced.

But more about that in the next installment.

“Minister therefore with a kind mind, not murmuring nor mutinying; for ye do not do it on the account of man, but on the account of God, and shall receive from Him the reward of your ministry in the day of your visitation. It is your duty who are deacons to visit all those who stand in need of visitation. And tell your bishop of all those that are in affliction; for you ought to be like his soul and senses—active and attentive in all things to him as to your bishop, and father and master.”

— From the Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, Book III, as found in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. VII, p. 432 published by Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co. Grand Rapids, MI. (Despite a growing tendency to unduly exalt the bishop, and admit women to the office of deacon, much of the original integrity of the office remained in the early second century).

F E E D B A C K

Dear Pastor Williamson,

I was delighted to receive copies of the new O.P. publication 'Ordained Servant.' A few months ago I talked to Ross Graham about the need of such a publication. He told me at that time that something was in the works. I didn't expect something this soon.

...I am convinced...that the O.P.C. has much need for improvement in this area. I am shocked and many times ashamed (since I am a ruling elder) that my own company provides more oversight or direction to me than we do to those in the church. They continually remind me of what is expected, where the company is headed, what is and isn't acceptable, rewards for performance, etc. How those in the church need direction from God's chosen leaders!

Let me commend you, Tom Tyson, and the rest of the committee regarding your efforts. I am convinced it is desperately needed. I will pray for your work in the following ways: (1) that our O.P.C. elders and deacons will "study" and "apply" this valuable information; (2) that our (O.P.C.) people's respect for those offices will grow; (3) that our churches will grow spiritually as well as numerically; and (4) lastly that this work will continue indefinitely to encourage Christ-like leadership...

Please express my thanks to all the members involved in this work. I know it will be a blessing to me and to many others. May our Sovereign Lord use it to equip his officers to build up and equip his saints.

In your Service,

*Tim Cummings,
Ruling elder Lakeworth, Florida -*

We greatly appreciate this 'feedback' from one of

our ruling elders and also invite others to speak up. We do not expect that everything we receive will be as easy to take as this was. But that doesn't matter. What matters is that our elders 'tell it like it is' (or speak the truth in love, as elder Cummings does in his telling comparison). It is my opinion that no Church in North America has as great a potential as we have in the eldership of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. It is also my conviction that the number one thing that will improve the quality of the life and witness of our Church is an effective exploitation of that potential. If this letter is any indication of what is 'out there'—and I believe it is—there is reason to be optimistic.

Dear G. I.,

"Must officer candidates be married (since they are to be "the husband of one wife" and "one who rules his own house well")?"

I believe the Apostle's concern is to make it quite clear that men with a plurality of wives cannot lawfully serve as elders/bishops. This I take to be the force of phrase translated "the husband of one wife." The other phrase was probably directed against the already emerging tendency to elevate the celibate life to a status of super-sanctity (I Tim. 4:3). As Calvin wisely observed "whatever may be the admiration commonly entertained for celibacy...yet wise and thoughtful men are convinced, by experience, that they who are not ignorant of ordinary life, but are practiced in the duties of human intercourse, are better trained and adopted for governing the Church" (Commentary on 1 Tim. 3:4). It may be prudent to give the preference—for the eldership—to married men. I have certainly seen that bachelors do often lack development in inter-personal relationships that can weaken their ability to function well as elders. Yet there certainly are exceptions. Anyone who had the privilege of working as a fellow presbyter with the late John Murray, as I did, will understand why I also add that there are notable

exceptions to any generalization we might be tempted to make. And besides, you never know when one of these bachelors will surprise everyone and get married, demonstrating once and for all the full possession of these other biblical qualifications. What a pity it would have been if the Orthodox Presbyterian Church could not have profited by the presbyterial gifts of Professor Murray until he finally got married!

Dear G. I.

When a family joins the church with children who have never been baptized, should all the children be baptized, regardless of age or willingness?

This is a question that most pastors have to struggle with at one time or another. I know I have. The first thing I want to say, therefore, is that there is no easy solution. I would also say that there is no general rule that will work in every situation. Having said this, however, I find the following Scriptural teaching helpful. God commanded Abraham to circumcise Ishmael even though (1) God had not elected him to eternal life (Ro. 9:13), and (2) Ishmael was already 13 years old (Gen. 17:25). Of course we do not know if Ishmael had already begun to openly manifest his reprobate nature before his circumcision. But this hardly seems likely. When Ishmael did reveal his opposition to God's plan Abraham, in obedience to God, excommunicated Ishmael. It should also be noted that the sign and seal of the covenant was administered on that memorable day of its first institution [Gen. 17] to all the males in Abraham's household. All males living under the God-given authority of the patriarch, in other words, were therefore given the sign and seal on the same day that he himself received it. (It also seems clear that this was the model for subsequent generations [Ex. 12:43-49]).

Following this model it would seem evident to me that all children (the New Testament extends the privilege of the covenant sign to women), natural or adopted, who remain under the God-given authority of the father (and mother) of the home ought to be baptized.

If there is any doubt in the minds of the parents—or any of the elders of the church—then this ought to be cleared up before the time of the baptism. If there is a son or daughter living at home who is not willing to acknowledge the spiritual authority of the head of the house, then it is my view that the father ought to be instructed and encouraged to exclude that daughter or son from the privilege of living in that household. To some, today, this will sound very harsh. But I can testify that in cases which have arisen in my own pastoral experience God has blessed those who have done this. The older children should be informed that they only have a right to receive the sign and seal if they are in submission to the God-given spiritual rule of the father (and mother] . As I understand Genesis 17 the privilege of receiving the covenant sign and seal was never granted merely on the basis of biological descent. This is proved by the fact that most of those who received it on the very day that it was instituted were not Abraham's physical descendants.

One further remark should perhaps be made. We are easily tempted—when difficult cases of church discipline arise—to wish for such a fool-proof method of admitting people to the church that such cases would never arise in the first place. It is my conviction that we must resist the tendency to think this way. The Lord in his perfect wisdom gave us two keys to the kingdom. One is the key of faithful church discipline. It is evident from the fact that this gift has been given that it will sometimes be needed. It is a serious error, in other words, to imagine that we could ever devise a system of admitting people to the church that would eliminate the need for the use of this second key. We are not suggesting that we are as careful as we should be. But our point is that even if we admit people to the church in an entirely biblical way there will still be vexing cases that arise in which we will have to exercise discipline. Sometimes it may even have to be exercised against our own flesh and blood. When that happens we can draw encouragement from the example of Abraham. For he too had to do the right thing at both ends of this equation, giving Ishmael the covenant sign because that was what God had commanded, and then, later on, excommunicating him because—once again—that is what God commanded.

We wish to thank those of you who have sent in questions. We invite more of you to do this. If you have light to shed on any aspect of one of these difficult problems please write. And may the Lord enable us to sharpen one another, as iron sharpens iron, in our work as Ordained Servants.

History of the Westminster Assembly of Divines, by William Maxwell Hetherington. Still Waters Revival Books, 4710-37A Ave. Edmonton, AB Canada T6L 3T5. A Numbered Collectors Edition. \$34.95 (Canadian). Reviewed by the Editor.

The 350th anniversary of the convening of the Westminster Assembly will soon be upon us. And it is interesting to note that plans are being made for a commemorative gathering in the Jerusalem chamber at Westminster Abbey where much of the work of the Assembly took place. We (a ruling elder of our church here in Carson and I) were able to gain entrance to this chamber a few years ago, by special request. But those in authority at Westminster Abbey seemed almost annoyed. We got the impression that requests of this kind are very rare. I am therefore all the more encouraged to see a revived interest in what took place there three and a half centuries ago. And for part of this revival we can thank Still Waters Revival Books.

It has been my joyful privilege to at last have Hetherington's History. As one who has sincerely subscribed to the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, I found it intensely interesting to read a balanced and detailed account of the issues, the tensions and the resulting (majority) consensus that we have in these great documents. Two were of particular interest to me: the Congregational minority often referred to as the 'Dissenting Brethren;' and the Erastians, who wanted to deny to the church the exclusive control of the keys of the Kingdom. This book reminded me again that the great accomplishments of the past, in the advancement of God's Kingdom, did not come without struggle. The wonder is that through it all God uses frail instruments—yes, imperfect and sinful men—to serve His honor and glory.

There was wide diversity in the Westminster Assembly. But the sharp differences only served to stimulate tremendous effort, and powerful debate. What a wonder it must have been to hear the young Scottish representative, George Gillespie, as he refuted by his mighty exegetical skill men who had already spent a long career building up a defense of an erroneous concept of church government. There is, of course, no 'magic time machine' by which we can go back to hear him. But with Hetherington's help we can—in a sense—recapture the sense of drama and excitement.

Still Waters Revival is republishing several books related to the Westminster Assembly. We intend to review these in future issues. But we put this one first because we believe this is the place to begin. One of the things we need in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church is a renewed sense of what it means to be a Confessional Church. A Confessional Church—among other things—is a Church that truly respects its official doctrinal formulations. It is my conviction that the Westminster formulations are worthy of the highest respect (not, of course, ever to be placed on a par with the

Scriptures—as the Confession itself is careful to teach us). One of the things that will help us to have this high respect is a study of this History by the ruling and teaching elders of our church. The book can be ordered from Great Christian Books (at a considerable discount), or direct from Still Waters Revival.

The Westminster Assembly and Its Work, by Benjamin B. Warfield. Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company 1959; Still Waters Revival Books reprint edition (Numbered Collectors Edition) September 1991. 399pp. \$34.95 [Canadian]. Available from Still Waters Revival Books 4710-37A Ave. Edmonton AB Canada T6L 3T5. Also available from Great Christian Books at a considerable discount. Reviewed by Ruling Elder Richard Finn of the Providence Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Denver.

One of the most important assemblies of divines in the history of the church is that which convened at Westminster from 1644 to 1649. Dr. Warfield has left us an invaluable resource to better understand what happened at that assembly, and perhaps just as important he describes the events leading up to it.

The opening chapter covers the rift between the King and Parliament. Scottish aid was secured on the basis of religious uniformity in a Calvinistic and Presbyterian faith. The Assembly accordingly switched from merely revising the Thirty-nine Articles to the serious work of writing a new Confession, Directory of Worship, and Catechisms. Present were several of the noted catechists of the day, and the Confession itself drew much of its form from the Irish Articles (A.D. 1615).

Chapter two discusses the decrees of God. Drawing from a wealth of sources, Warfield paints a picture of the supra- and infralapsarian debates, and of the men involved.

The third and fourth chapters describe the doctrines of Holy Scripture, and of its inspiration, formulated by these divines. Particularly refreshing in this age of supposed new revelations and multiperspectivalism is the emphasis on the completeness of Scripture, and the fact that Scripture has but one sense and should be interpreted by the analogy of faith in the more difficult to understand areas.

Chapter five details the printing of the Confession and tells us that the Confession we use comes from a copy brought to Scotland by George Gillespie which differs significantly from that passed by Parliament. The changes reflect a more independent than presbyterian concept of government in the church.

While this is a superb volume and must reading for all those who love creedal Christianity, it does have a flaw. The book ends in the middle of a sentence on page 399 during the final chapter dealing with the first question of the Shorter Catechism. Yet even this omission seems to serve a purpose. One tends to feel he hasn't finished the book and wishes there were even more.

Highly recommended.