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of
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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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NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

At the March 1993 meeting of the Committee on Christian Education certain actions were taken with respect to *Ordained Servant*. If you will take careful note of these items they should help us to better serve you.

(1) Please note the Editor's change of address (and phone number, which is now [712] 324-3467). Also, to expedite the exchange of material for *Ordained Servant*, we have a 24 hour per day fax line: [712] 324-3178. It is our hope that this will encourage your input!

(2) Sessions are requested to keep *Pleroma Press* informed of changes in the number of office-bearers in your church who should receive *Ordained Servant*. Also please take note of the following policy decision taken by the Committee on Christian Education: **"in the case of new officers, the CCE will pay for back issues for the current year, but not of previous years."** At present all back issues are available and the cost is \$3.00 for each issue. Please do not send requests for back issues to the editor. Send them directly to *Pleroma Press*.

NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

(3) The Committee requested *Great Commissions Publications* to include *Ordained Servant* in its listing of available resources, and decided to make it more widely known by running advertisements in certain Reformed periodicals.

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This issue of *Ordained Servant* begins with an address that Abraham Kuyper gave many years ago before the Presbyterian Historical Society. It came into my hands while I served in New Zealand and has always impressed me as one of the best things that I have ever seen on the subject of worship. If there is anything needed in our churches today it is, in my humble opinion, a better grasp of the issues and principles so powerfully presented in this long-forgotten lecture. May the Lord be pleased to use it to help us better understand, and then more firmly adhere to, these principles.

The second section of this issue presents the first half of a weighty article entitled "Pointers for Elders and Deacons" which first appeared in a Dutch publication called *DIENST* (Vol. 29, #1, Jan.-Feb. 1981). It was published with special permission in the Canadian Reformed Journal *DIAKONIA* in 1987 and is reproduced here, again, with permission. I cannot too highly recommend this.

We continue, in this issue, P. Y. de Jong's fine study of the primary task of the elders with chapter six of his now out-of-print book entitled *Talking Heed to the Flock*. In future issues of *Ordained Servant* we hope to reprint his equally fine study of the diaconal office (also out of print) entitled *The Ministry of Mercy for Today*. I am most grateful that Dr. de Jong has granted us permission to use the material in these valuable books. Both books were originally published by Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, (*Talking Heed to the Flock* in 1948 and *The Ministry of Mercy for Today* in 1952) and have been reprinted several times. They can sometimes be obtained from second-hand book shops.

I am grateful to the seemingly ubiquitous Pastor Jack Peterson for making time in his busy schedule to offer some helpful suggestions to young ministers for the conduct of Session meetings. This may sound like a small thing. But we know—from personal experience, and from the testimony of more than a few others—that it is precisely this sort of thing that many Seminary graduates have to learn the 'hard way.' I therefore hope that this will give some helpful 'clues' to those who are about to face the

awesome challenge of conducting their first Session meeting and to any others who may be seeking ways to improve the way they have been doing it.

When *Ordained Servant* first went into print there was a significant amount of feedback, most of it positive! However, as time has passed on there has not been very much. I do not see this as necessarily a bad thing! Knowing the Orthodox Presbyterian Church I would assume that I would at least receive a clear message from you if your reaction was strongly negative. Nevertheless, it would be of great help to me—in trying to serve *you*—if I had occasional comments and suggestions from more of our Sessions and Session members. How about it?

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"...how does biblical ethics compare with other systems in its teaching of what is the highest good? However they may differ in other particulars, all human systems of ethics are at one in this: they all find the highest good in something human. They differ vastly as to what human thing it shall be—whether the pleasure of the individual, or of the race, his or its conformity to nature, or even his or its virtue. And as they differ in their idea of the thing, what constitutes it, so too in what is fitted to gain it, even when they call it by the same name. But they agree in this: they rise no higher than man, than some human quality or possession, in the assignment of their chief good. Thus by them, one and all, the attention is centered on what is human; man is bidden look no higher than himself for his ideal, and the race is elevated just as much as the boy was able to lift himself by his trousers' straps...See, then, the immense superiority of biblical ethics! It takes man out of himself, and bids him seek the highest good in the glory, not of his pitiful self, but of his all-glorious God...With his eye set on glorifying his Savior and Maker, his idea of virtue is transfigured and purified from earthly dross, his notions of duty are ennobled, his motives become holy, and his whole life divine. In this one point we can see the transforming greatness of Christian ethics."

— B. B. Warfield

THE ANTITHESIS
BETWEEN
SYMBOLISM AND REVELATION

A Lecture Delivered Before The Presbyterian Historical Society
In Philadelphia, PA.*

by

Dr. Abraham Kuyper

MR. PRESIDENT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, Availing myself with much pleasure of the opportunity which your kind invitation puts in my way, to say a few words to your honored Society, it is not my design to give an elaborate lecture, but only to make a few remarks on a subject that falls within the limits of your interests and mine. This subject is the antithesis between Symbolism and Revelation, or the current of symbolical religion, which of late is becoming almost dominant in England, and now already in a considerable degree menaces our Calvinistic church-life.

The facts need hardly any proof. All over non-conformistic England there is no end of complaint, that so many of the children of the second generation are abandoning the paths of their fathers, and are publicly and earnestly declaring their preference for the Episcopalian services. In one general assembly after another one of the chief topics in order has been the ever-returning question: how to keep the rising generation in the fold. In so much as you have followed the debates on this question, and the resolutions taken, you also know in what way improvement at times has been looked for. The astonishing proposition to make non-conformism more attractive, by connecting with the church a dancing or boxing school, or a large room for indoor and a broad field for outdoor sports, speaks volumes. I remember that two years ago a Congregational minister touched a different chord, when he pointed his audience to the Calvinists in Wales and in Holland, who, in keeping more closely to their standards, had no difficulty whatsoever in kindling the love for their own churches in the hearts of their children. But his voice was a voice of one crying in the wilderness, and the uneasy feeling of an approaching ebb tide among Methodists and Congregationalists in England

is still on the increase. Even outside the churches in the daily press this reflux in the general spirit is watched so keenly, and this increasing sympathy for Ritualism is considered to be of so far reaching consequences, that liberal papers ascribe to it for a large part, the overwhelming majority which Lord Salisbury secured at the last elections. For three-quarters of a century, as they frankly acknowledge, non-conformism had been the stronghold of the Liberals, and it is this remarkable change in the public mind, which, religiously being more in favor of Ritualism, turns politically to the advantage of the conservatives and unionists. The interesting coming forward of the unionists under Mr. Chamberlain was no doubt incidentally brought about by Mr. Gladstone's persevering support of home-rule, but was countenanced, as they tell us, in no small proportion by this same ritualistic movement. In the long run our human mind cannot forsake its oneness of impulse. The track which it beats in matters of religion, is almost spontaneously followed in social and political affairs. So much to convince you that this symbolical movement, if it carries the day, far from being a mere trifle in church-life, is on the contrary impregnated by an energetic principle, which menaces to react upon our whole human existence and upon the whole history of the world.

The second stage of this movement (for I emphasize that ecclesiastically it has three stages) is to be observed in the Episcopal church itself. In the first period the thirst of the non-conformistic renegade after more artistic worship is duly satisfied by the plainest service conducted by a low-church minister. But for the church of England people, things are very differently conditioned. The same attraction which the low-church is exercising upon a faltering and wavering non-conformist, the Episcopalian himself undergoes from the so-called high-church movement. The common prayer book seems to them a dull sailing with quartering winds, or better still, a display of

* We have been unable to discover the date of this lecture or its publication by T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh.

the flag at half-mast. The thirst for symbolism once felt is not quenched by half measures. The more such a passion is indulged in, the more it is aggravated. Thus from the low-church they stepped over into the high-church, and here they found the clergy and the bishop almost constantly engaged in rivalry to go *still* higher on, the highest also in this ritualistic competition always having the lead. I visited England, and I attended the episcopal services, twenty years ago, and I found that what was considered very high a quarter of a century ago, is now already in some circles most disdainfully condemned as being behindhand, if not a derision of the sanctuary. Almost every year a new item is added to the overburdened services, and no one can foretell, where finally this display of ritualistic inventiveness will stop. Fully aware of the danger that lurks behind all these paraphernalia Sir William Harcourt made an impressive and cogent speech, as you know, upon this matter in the House of Commons, and recommended that it should be thwarted by government; as if a deep spiritual movement could ever be checked by the executive power, and as if in such a case anything short of the reaction of *the opposite spiritual principle* could change the mind of the people.

Now there is finally the third stage, which this ritualistic action must of necessity develop for itself; viz., *the going back to Rome*. According to the Roman Catholic weeklies every month more than one thousand church-of-England people are making the decisive step. And this is quite natural. In every race there being a goal, the human mind cannot rest before this goal is reached; and this goal in Ritualism is presented in the most harmonious and perfect form by the Roman Catholic Liturgical performances. There you find the ripe fruit of a ritualistic development, of more than a twelve centuries standing. At this point Rome is not to be surpassed. Every particular in which the high churchmen are indulging themselves, is stealthily borrowed from *her* treasures. With Rome is the original, theirs is the apery and mimicry. What I called 'inventiveness' in the second stage, here evidently appears to be nothing but mere imitation of the Romish pattern. or if you like another simile, the high churchman carries a ritualistic bouquet, but the ritualistic rose-bush buds and blossoms under the shade of the Vatican.

Such is the condition of things in England. In Scotland, in your Eastern States, in the Netherlands, in South Africa, in fact, wherever the spirit of Calvin won a more thorough, more absolute and more permanent victory, this movement still stumbles and totters in its first stage. The voice that speaks from the blood of the martyrs is not stifled at once. It would, however, be closing your eyes against the reality to deny that, as the white ant, it has succeeded already in piercing also our walls and com-

mencing its destructive work. Although very rarely, apostasies have occurred. Preaching, before all things, should be short. The differences between one denomination and another should be obliterated. In religious geology the dogmatical stratum should be underground and very thin. The common mind refuses to be wearied by such antiquated documents as confessions and catechisms. At this point the breach between parents and children is becoming wider and wider, with each succeeding generation. And especially among the more cultured classes the demand is more and more general for beautiful church-buildings, with lofty steeples and high spires, for dominating organ music, and for exquisite choirs and soloists. Here and there these artistic requirements in every particular of the service are even pressed in a much more urgent way than the soundness of the Apostolic truth.

I do not want to exaggerate, and therefore I willingly add, that there are not a few important assets that counterbalance these liabilities. Christian liberality as it is exercised in our days was entirely unknown in the first half of this century. A spirit of reciprocal estimation has succeeded to the squabbles and jealousies of former days. The theological hatred, if not entirely put out and stifled, is glowing in mere embers. And, above all, there is an increase of personal and of combined activity in the missionary, the philanthropic, and the hospital domains, far exceeding what has been achieved in the most glorious days of our fathers. Gains so highly valuable in my eye that, were the symbolical sympathies outside the boundaries of our own churches an isolated movement, I should feel inclined to connive temporarily at the lack of love for the Truth, accepting the assets, which I mentioned, as the prognostics of better times to come, and as fully counterbalancing the black points.

This however is impossible. Two, three drops falling from a little cloud, passing just over your head, will not disturb you. But if lifting up your eye, you discern from all sides much thicker and darker clouds gathering on the horizon, now and then rent already by a flash of lightning, you feel at once the approaching danger, and the two little drops become a serious warning. So now it is here. There exists an undeniable affinity between the, as yet, feeble symbolical action in our own churches and the dark ritualistic cloud pending over Great Britain. Both have a common origin. They are, the one as well as the other, the issue of a remarkable change in the common sentiment. And without the least danger of being disclaimed by the events as a false prophet, you may predict, that what is now seen elsewhere, is only the true image of what is awaiting yourselves. The same cause, if allowed to exert its full energy, is always bound in the end to yield identical results. There are local changes, not affecting the world

outside. But as soon as, like here, a *universal* movement has set in, springing forward from the very entity of the human soul, you know beforehand that it *must* become general, and that it shall certainly find its way, digging its own bed like a torrent rushing down from the mountain-sides. In serious matters none of us here should like to be childish, and childish it would be, not to realize at once the inner connection between the general increase of love of the symbolical in literature, in painting, in sculpture, in service of worship outside our own churches, and the clearly distinguishable changes of religious appreciation by which no keen observer can keep from being impressed in our own circles. In spiritual things also there is an *atmosphere* permeating the whole of life. As in the days of our fathers this atmosphere was saturated with a strong *anti-symbolical* element, just so it is now impregnated by an ever more strongly distilled tincture of symbolism. A distinct change, which every thoughtful observer now already fully realizes, although the bulk of the people, soon accustomed to symbolism's peculiar fragrance, and themselves halfway intoxicated by it, are not in the least aware how far the scenes have been already shifted.

This ritualistic change, however, is not to be understood as a supplantation of the religious feeling by the esthetical. It is not *art* but *symbolism* (and I once more emphasize the expression) that took hold of the mind; and the true conception of the new movement lies in the acknowledgment of the fact, that of late indeed a *new religious tide has set in*. The difference between the dominating spirit of the end of the former century and of ours, is well marked, in Europe at least, both in Protestant and in Roman Catholic circles. A hundred years ago Voltaire, now de Brunetière, gives expression to the French mind in leading classes. And if in the days of the French convention statesmen and belletrists, scholars and politicians, were vying in strong *anti-religious* utterances, now on the contrary an increasing number of eminent men of paramount influence, both in the university and in governmental circles, are deeming it a point of honor, publicly to declare their *religious* sympathies and to proclaim their predilections for *mystical piety*.

Only it should be observed that this newly-risen predilection for the religious element is of a very peculiar kind. It is absolutely devoid of every personal and definite character. Both in the days of the Apostles and in the times of the Reformation the revival of spiritual life originated from a yearning of the heart after the living God, for salvation and for eternal peace. In both instances the cry of the troubled conscience was: What shall I do to be saved? Now, on the contrary, no such struggle of the oppressed soul is witnessed. It is not Augustine confess-

ing: *Inquietum cor meum donec requiescat in Te o Domine, i. e.: My heart remains unquiet until it can rest in Thee, o God.* It is not Luther creeping on the stairs of the vatican for the redemption of his soul. It is not Calvin, bidding every earnest man and woman not to rest before they had discovered the source of their personal redemption in God's good pleasure. Oh, no! In this new religious tide there is no demand at all for deliverance from sin; there is no longing whatsoever after redemption; nowhere the desire for a conscious personal reunion with the living God, our Father in heaven, declares itself. The adherents of this *new religion*, belonging almost all to the highly cultured class, are well satisfied with themselves and with their position in this world, leaving their future lot in the world to come, if there is such a one, an open question. Their watchword is the merging of the soul in the ocean of the Infinite; the after thrilling of the soul of the Cosmos in the vibrations of their own heart; the perception of an all-pervading power, inspiring them; and the coveting of an ever unattainable ideal. And if some of them are still appreciating some connection between the vocabulary of the old religion with their new sentiments, it is not the Father, and not the Saviour, whom they most fervently adore, but it is almost exclusively the Holy Ghost, not conceived as a personal God, but as an infinite, all-pervading Spirit. They borrow their choicest expressions more from the Indian Veda's than from the apostolic documents, and [there is] no doubt that pantheism, more than the adoration of the Triune God, is inspiring their songs and their pious utterances. Loosing themselves in an unfathomable divine Immanency, they are the most absolute Daltonists as to God's majestic Transcendency. And to resume it in one word, their constant endeavor is not to fear, to serve and to love the living God, their Creator and the Disposer of their destinies, but to enjoy fully the mystical titillations of a delightful religious feeling. Of course, the lower classes do not catch a suggestion of such religious delicacies. The movement therefore is a thoroughly aristocratic one. The persuasion however of the superiority of their own standpoint does not prevent these refined Buddhists from vouchsafing by a condescending altruism, the further use of the old Christian religion to the less cultured class, provided no attempt be made to urge it back upon their own mind, and the lead of society in every circle of life be guaranteed to their new born opinions.

Such is the general underlying religious stratum, in which Symbolism stands rooted, or to express it in another form, such is the background from which Symbolism is radiating its polychromatic beams, and projecting its mysterious shades. The new movement in itself is devoid of color and outline. But as soon as its beams

reach the existing churches, and pass through the prism of our Christian worship, the refraction sets in, and Symbolism, in its duly variegated forms, makes its influence felt. Therefore let there be no mistake, as if this new religious tide were related in some way or other to the Christian revival of the beginning of this century. The Christian revival, both in the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches, forever famous by the illustrious names of D'Aubignè and Vinet, of de Bonald and Chateaubriand, was the result of the horrors of the Napoleonic oppression, and led to the awaking of the Christian mind from its sinful lethargy. This was no religious *revolution*, but a *restoration* of what had been shamefully abandoned. A real coming back to Christ, and a longing for his salvation. With this revival therefore the new religious movement, from which Symbolism borrows its incentive, has no connection whatsoever; it boldly opposed it, and set fire to every field upon which its harvest was ripening. So much only can be granted, that both the Christian revival, and this new mystical religious movement, were a reaction against the ungodliness of the period of Voltaire and the low vulgarity of the so called "Illumination" of that time in Germany. But, except this general antithesis, the garments of both have no thread in common; and in order rightly to understand the inherent character of this new religious tide, we have to trace the threefold source from which it originated: The modern *philosophy*, the *historical school*, and the *esthetical* development of our times.

First there was the new *German philosophy*, from Kant to Schelling, which in its splendid enthusiasm for organic oneness and systematical conception, felt painfully offended by the disintegration to which the French revolution had submitted our entire life and thought. There was in the second place the rise of the famous so-called *historical school*, of Niebuhr and de Savigny, which in its deep reverence for the past, could not but scorn at the lightheartedness and flimsy superficiality, with which the French revolutionists cut off all historical process, and imagined themselves able by the whimsical utterance of the popular will of a single day to renew the face of the world. And in the third place there was the revival of *art life*, under the all permeating influence of Lessing and Goethe, which, in its adoration for the classical beautiful of the Greek world, must feel scandalized by the ridiculous extolling of uncultured nature, as was to the French revolutionists the real point of departure for their system.

At that time already the almost incredible defeat of Sedan has been prepared. The German mind, rising to its full height of energy, slew the French spiritually, before it annihilated the French army on the field of battle. The French revolution was a wild stroke of madness, border-

ing upon suicide. About the middle of this century France sank, Germany rose. In France since the second Napoleon came forward, we find only middling sized capacities; while in Germany a host of heroes and genii arose, and German thought, German science, German education ruled all Europe and took the lead in every department of science. The French by their insane upheaval had but roused the German mind and the German strength from their slumbers. In twenty-five years Germany worked itself up to the full measure of its grandeur, and then already it could have been prophesied that henceforward the combined spirit of the German philosophical, historical and artistic school should put its stamp upon the next period of our human culture.

Now in this threefold German movement there was one common trait: the going back from an uncongenial present to an attractive past, and in that past the attractive point was found not in the tragic cross of Calvary and the hills of Galilee, but in the Academy of Plato and in the studio of Phidias. It was one running back from weak and deadly pale Christianity to old Greece in the acme of its blossom. Luther translated *the Bible*, Schleiermacher *Plato's works*; and the fundamental idea of pantheism, borrowed from the Stoa, revived, remodelled and deepened, on the whole glittering philosophical line of great German philosophers. The artistic school followed in the track and supplanted the *Crucifix* and *'Ecce homo'* by the Apollo of Belvedere and the Venus di Medici. And finally the historical school came forward to justify this aversion to so sad a present, and to encourage a boundless admiration for the wisdom of the past. Moreover, you remember, how the *panta rei kai ouden menei* was once the watchword of the Stoa; and thus, by resolving everything in an uninterrupted historical process, this school joined the pantheism of the philosophical school; and the Infinite manifesting and developing itself in the successive stages of the finite, took hold of the mind as the leading thought, which had to direct our investigations. And all this was suggested and countenanced with such elaborate study, with such an overflowing treasure of detailed proof, in such a splendid style, and with such a logical cogency, that science itself, raised to the higher level of the *organic* conception, became almost identified with this pantheistic world-view. They who dared to oppose it, were simply deemed unscientific, and, if clever, men willingly insincere, and guilty deceivers of the people.

In this abstract form, however, this new leading thought could not radiate from the German to the Anglo-Saxon mind. The Anglo-Saxon, as such, is neither a born philosopher nor an esthetical fanatic. The German likes fluttering in the air and hovering on the wings of idealism; the Anglo-Saxon prefers to stand with both feet firmly on

the ground. Hence it came to pass that the Anglo-Saxon world remained almost unaffected by this new German development until Darwin gave it its *materia/basis*, in the abolition of real species and the uninterrupted process by which the plant was metamorphosed in the vertebrate, the vertebrate in a mammal, and the mammal in man. The idea of the Infinite becoming phenomenal in the finite, by means of a material process, adapted itself to the Anglo-Saxon mind; and from that moment on the modern theory of the pantheistic relation between the Infinite and the finite has mastered the public mind, and encompassed the rising generation all over the world, sweeping everything before it.

Now here is the very point at which the want of Symbolism announced itself. Every one who, moving in the finite, becomes aware of the existence of something Infinite, has to form a conception *of the relation that exists between both*. Here two possibilities present themselves. Either the Infinite reveals itself to man, and by this revelation unveils the *really existing relation*; or the Infinite remains mute and silent, and man himself has to guess, to conjecture, and to represent to himself this relation *by means of his imagination*; that is, in an artificial way. Now the first line is the Christian one. The Infinite at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in times past by the prophets, and in these late days has spoken to us by his Son—this Son being not a silent mystery, but the eternal, creating and *speaking Word*. Paganism, on the contrary, being destitute of revelation, wants the symbol, and creates it in its idols, “having mouths but they speak not, having ears but they hear not.” Symbol means a fictitious link between the invisible Infinite and the visible finite. It is derived from *sumballein*; i.e., bringing two different spheres together. Symbolism is the grasping of something outward and material, upon which the imagination may put the stamp of the unseen and unspeakable. The symbol is the middle link, being related from one side to what you can see and grasp, and from the other side to what you feel, fancy and imagine. As soon, therefore, as the consciousness of the Infinite revives in the public mind, in antagonism to a God-given Revelation, the demand for the symbol necessarily and immediately declares itself. So it was in the Grecian world, so it is now. Of course there exists also an unconscious, ever-changing relation between the Infinite and the finite in the actual phenomena of life; but this relation, being always partial, successive and momentarily gauged, cannot satisfy the soul. What she is longing after is a comprehensive impression of the Infinite in its totality, in its all-pervading and all-permeating action; and this sensation no finite phenomenon is able to stir in us, just because it is finite. What the soul want to realize is a

grasping of the Infinite as such; and such an infinite sensation *Symbolism* only can produce, just because it puts an invisible stamp upon a visible or palpable phenomenon. In the Freemasonry you see quite the same thing. Freemasonry aims at the Infinite, but rejects all revelation, and therefore it created from the very first, and still advocates, the most explicit and elaborated symbolism. Spiritism, on the contrary, is almost choked with thirst for revelation from the other side of the tomb, and consequently knows of no symbolical fancy whatsoever.

So *Revelation* and *Symbolism* are opposed one to the other by principle. Both have in view to establish a perceivable relation between the Infinite and the finite, but they are so diametrically opposed, that by the means of *Revelation* it is the infinite Being himself who unveils and stipulates the relation to be accepted by the finite creature *by faith*:— and that, on the other hand, on the field of *Symbolism*, it is the finite man who conventionally coins such a relation symbolically, to be grasped not by faith, but *by sensation*. Now the fact that German pantheism rejects and repudiates every supernatural revelation, no one will deny. From the very beginning its war has been waged against every dogma, every confession, and every divine authority ascribed to the Holy Scriptures. The idea itself of a God intervening in the process of history was absolutely excluded; yea, even thrust out and debarred. According to the *panta rei*, the Infinite, strictly bound to the revealing of its essence in the course of successive events, could only throb and pulsate in the arteries of the cosmos and in man’s soul. But, besides that, it had to be silent and mute as the idol. In the all-embracing antithesis between Revelation and Symbolism, therefore, the current opinion of the day could not but antagonize Revelation and side with Symbolism. And here Philosophy and Art found their natural alliance—*Philosophy*, by its oneness of systematical conception, raising the mind to the Infinite, and *Art*, by the wonderful power of its imaginative gifts, creating the corresponding symbols.

Such is the bifurcation of the way of life at the approaching close of this century. There are two crossing tracks. Pointing to the orient, there is the old track of faith in a God-given Revelation, excluding every “will-worship.” But this old track now is crossed by the new road of Symbolism, boldly exhibiting the word: *Will-worship* on every guidepost till its end. And such an all-important fact as the thriving of such a cross-purpose antithesis cannot stop its diverging result within the holy precincts. It must lead necessarily to opposite conclusions and issues, both for our social and political, our moral and scientific views. A fact which becomes self-evident by the simple observation that Revelation reveals not only holy mysteries, but also proclaims irrevocable principles and

immutable ordinances demanding obedience; and that, on the contrary, under the sway of Symbolism all principles are man's own contrivances, and all moral ordinances self-made and conventional. The jurist in the symbolical camp does not hesitate publicly to declare that there is no right except that which is stated by the promulgated law, and that, therefore, what was right today becomes injustice to-morrow, as soon as that law is repealed.

No doubt, therefore, this all important and dominating antithesis should clearly have been caught by every student, and Symbolism at once antagonized by every Christian man, if in our actual life it had made its appearance *in its absolute form*. This, however, was nowhere the case at the rise of such a new tide. Even Freemasonry borrowed its symbols from the then existing church building corporations, and took care to hide its real meaning behind the mysterious curtain of successively higher degrees. So Symbolism always likes to unfold its full blossom only in its esoteric circle, and exoterically prefers the life of the parasite, stealthily entering its radicles into the delicate rind of the Christian stem. Accommodation to existing religion has always been its leading thought, and this accommodation it achieved at once by taking as *poetry* what the church confesses as the highest *reality*, by attaching to the holy history the alluring character of the legend and the myth, and finally by interpreting its actions of worship as mere symbolical utterances. I still remember how once I felt shocked by the church performances of a distinguished adherent of the new system, who in private conversation made no secret whatsoever to me of his absolute apostasy of the old Christian faith, and whom three days later I saw mounting the pulpit, solemnly reading what in the Book of the Kings is written about Elias' miracles, and thereupon leading the collects of the common prayer. I confess frankly that I felt unable to explain such a bold contrast of personal conviction and outward performance. I thought it the essence of insincerity. But how greatly I was mistaken. "O, no, said he, there was no unfairness whatever. What do you think? Would it be unfair, if taking part in the play of your children, you performed, as earnestly as the little ones, the part of king which your boy had assigned you. What hypocrisy, then, could there be in one playing and singing with the children of God, as they call themselves, and of partaking in their worship? Of course if we ourselves considered all those performances as real, we could not join in them. But now, what, I ask you, could prevent us from enjoying your Christian high-styled poetry, or from ennobling our own feelings by partaking in your elaborate symbolics? Even the holy supper to me is a symbolical delicacy. It is these very church perfor-

mances that unite the more childlike existence of the ordinary people with the more conscious and cultured life of the scientists."

Hence the preference, which in the opinion of these modern symbolists, the Roman Catholic Church possesses above the Protestant, and among our various denominations the Episcopalian above the Presbyterian, in all its branches. Already in the first half of this century the so-called Romantic school in Germany led to the conversion of a great many famous Lutheran scholars and artists to the Church of Rome; and this can not surprise us. As with the solution of every vital problem, Rome's strength lies in her *compromise*. Rome understood perfectly well the two different principles involved in the antithesis between Revelation and Symbolism, and avoiding, as always, every absolute choice, kept to the Revelation in her confession, but at the same time indulged in Symbolism for her worship. So Rome possesses an elaborate dogmatical system, but without troubling the mind of the people by it. The church thinks for the people, their's is the "fides implicita" the implicit faith. In that "implicit faith" to adhere to the church is considered to be satisfactory for the laity. And thus the Revelation being secured, clergy and laity both are allowed to indulge in the most exquisite, most splendid, and most artistic symbolical worship. The impression of a high-mass performance in the Saint Peter's, or in the Cologne or Milan cathedral is indeed overpowering and overwhelming. But the shady side is obvious, and at the end of the middle ages, the lower as well as the higher class could witness, to what sad results both for the church and for society, this compromise between Revelation and Symbolism had led. I do not refer here to the abuse. From abuse every system has to suffer. I draw your attention merely to what, at the end of the middle ages, proved the downright consequence of the system itself. God's holy Word almost ignored by the people. An overflow of mystical sensations darkening the mind. A general bluntness and dullness, rendering both the conscience and the consciousness dim and obtuse; and the distance between the lower and the higher classes wide and sharp. The laity overruled by the clergy. All vital energy broken. And the spirit of liberty and independence quite crushed down.

At that critical period God sent as a saving angel, what we all still shall honor as *the Reformation*, and this powerful reaction against Roman symbolism, partly checked in the Lutheran, and more so in the Episcopalian church, has been wrought out fully only along the Calvinistic line, in the non-conformist churches. These churches therefore took a fully opposite stand. Instead of relying upon feeling and sensation, they appealed to Faith, and faith here meant both the *understanding* of the Revela-

tion and its personal *application* to the soul. They denied absolutely the necessity of connecting the Infinite with the finite by symbols. God *had* revealed himself, *had* revealed the mysteries of salvation, *had* revealed his ordinances for every sphere of our existence, and according to what Jesus declares, eternal life was not to have agreeable sensations, but “*to know* Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” Not symbols but the “*wisdom* of God” was the preaching of the Cross. “I speak as to wise men, judge ye what I say,” interpreted the apostolic method of teaching, expounding not to the clergy alone, but to all the saints, the mysteries of justification and redemption. — Here, therefore, lies the fundamental difference between our old Calvinistic churches with their bold confession, and Rome with its compromise. Of course there is the mystical working of hidden potencies in our mind, there is the perception of God in the conscience, there is the emotion in prayer, and there is the communion with the indwelling Holy Spirit. But these are the mystical gifts, and the aim of God’s Revelation is not to abandon us to shady and dim perceptions, but to declare to us the truth, to lift us up to its understanding, and so to enable the children of the kingdom of heaven to kindle the pure and serene light of the Gospel, to become confessors of a sound and clear confession, and if necessary to shed their martyr blood not for mystical sensations, but for the inviolability of God’s Revelation. Hence the circulation of their Bible among all social classes; the well defined confessions, which they unfolded as their banners; the substantial Scriptural content of their preaching; their purified and simplified liturgy; and finally their submitting of every creature to God’s holy ordinances. So standing before the dilemma of feeling or faith, they choose for *faith*. Standing before the dilemma between sensation and understanding, they declared themselves distinctly for *understanding*. And as to the fundamental dilemma between Revelation given to us by God, and Symbolism conventionally coined by man, they firmly antagonized the symbolical system, and stood up for the all pervading authority of *God’s holy Revelation*. This was the nerve of their strength, and to this staunch defense of Revelation over against Symbolism, they owe their imperishable glory in history. For it was by thus decidedly turning the wheel of life, that the human mind was roused from its slumbers, that the hidden energies of humanity came forward, that the direct union of the soul with God was restored, and that the liberty of conscience, the liberty of worship, and as its immediate consequence, the social and political liberties, were reconquered for every nation, following in their track.

The remarks thus far suggested to your attention, I trust, fully elucidate my assertion, that the symbolical tide

of our days is undermining in the most dangerous way the very foundation of all Calvinistic churches. The principle of Symbolism and that of Calvinism are just the reverse of one another. An abyss is gaping between them. Symbolism in the holy precincts stuns, blunts and stultifies the organs of understanding, and checks their function agnostically. Our churches, on the contrary, did not cease to pray, with St. Paul, and “to desire that all the people of God might be filled with the *knowledge* of his will in all *wisdom* and spiritual *understanding*.” Symbolism throws us back to that lower stage of religious development, which could but stir the feelings and intoxicate the senses of the masses. Our churches, on the contrary, raised the religious life to that much *higher* level, which leads every believer personally to what St. John confessed, “that the Son of God has come and has given us the *understanding* that we might *know* him.” And so also Symbolism subjects the laity to the mysterious performances of the clergy and hereby fosters aristocratic sympathies. Our churches, on the contrary, united both laity and clergy in one brotherhood, and thereby laid the foundation for the democratic pre-eminence of modern times.

Let therefore no one retort, that whatsoever catastrophe may be menacing elsewhere, neither Ritualism, nor Symbolism proper, has thus far made any noticeable intrusion into our Calvinistic services. May the fact be beyond question. But do you not know, that no good arithmetician will cast up the *positive* figures only, leaving out the negative ones. Now, in our case the positive is the intrusion of sensual worship, but here is also the *negative* item, viz., the darkening of the understanding and the slipping in of confessional indifference. Symbolism always begins by silencing the voice of the confession, by instilling some slight aversion toward the dogma, so digging out the bed in which the glittering ritualistic stream is to flow. And now, as I am a foreigner here, you know your own churches better than I do. But are you sure, that this *negative* action of Symbolism is nowhere operating among you? Is the danger that the love for the banners which your fathers unfolded, be drowned in mere practical work and beautiful services a chimerical one? And if not, if really among you also the fervent attachment to the revealed Truth is abating, and to a certain amount a share of confessional indifference here also moistens already, and thickens the spiritual atmosphere, then let the watchman of Sion mount the belfry, for then the gate stands ajar, and Symbolism lies in wait in the trenches before it. As little as the sailor can conjure the gale that hunts his vessel, but by keeping to his helm, so little can you check this symbolical current, if you do not emphasize your own church principle. For such a current is an all-permeating elementary power, to be

checked only by the equivalent power of your attachment to the revealed Truth. Let us not deceive ourselves. Philosophic Agnosticism, Rome's "fides implicita," Ritschl's anti-dogmatical school, the new school of Sabbatier in Paris, Rome's concealing of the Bible, as well as the dethroning of it by higher criticism, and so also the increasing confessional indifference, are all moving on the same line, and the terminus of that line is no other than sensual worship and dim symbolical adoration.

Meanwhile let there be no misunderstanding. Pointing to the serious danger with which Symbolism menaces the future of our Calvinistic Church life, and pleading for a decided return to our principle, and for a firm and staunch devotion to our holy vocation, I don't mean to lay all the fault at the door of our antagonists, and to exculpate ourselves entirely. There have been and there are abuses among us also. In the heat of the battle our fathers more than once became guilty of one-sidedness and exaggeration. Our own church life was often far from being well balanced, and I at least should hesitate to assert that, without any further essential development, perfect harmony of the different elements in our worship could be attained. The appreciation of the sound understanding of the Truth has often led to an offending narrow-mindedness, to an odious quarrelsomeness, and to a self-conceitedness of the ignorant, by which Christian love was wounded and the Holy Spirit of God grieved. Assurance of faith, resting on the dogmas of election and of the perseverance of the saints, more than once has been asserted in such a cool and outward way, as to bring down the mystical union with Christ to the freezing point. Justification by faith alone too often has become an excuse for the uncharitable and lazy to abstain from, if not to jest at, Christian works. And in our holy services both the ear and the eye were, and are still, frequently offended by such a neglect of what is beautiful and sublime, solemn and dignified, as if Christian faith and a fair and melodious utterance were antipodes. God in His Revelation always recommends the Beautiful. Even of Christ it is said: "Thou art *fairer* than the children of men."

Our decided opposition to Symbolism, therefore, should never silence the liturgical claims. Calvin with his musical friends, Goudimel and Bourgeois, tried the utmost to make the singing—not of a choir, but of all the people—thoroughly melodious and pure. And as to the Liturgy, let me draw your attention to a more elaborate Calvinistic Liturgy of a mixed Dutch and English character, which I had the privilege of republishing forty years ago in the works of John a Lasco. The Dutch Calvinists in the middle of the sixteenth century, were persecuted to death by Spanish cruelty, and then sought refuge under King Edward VI in London. There John a Lasco became their minister, and this sagacious man predicted to

Cranmer now more than three hundred years ago, all the pernicious results to which the common prayer book is now effectually leading, and in every point proved himself to be as sound a Presbyterian as you or I can be. And that same man composed for his Dutch church in London such a splendid, touching, solemn and elaborated Liturgy, published in Latin (thus enabling every Calvinistic minister to read it) under the title *Forma ac Ratio*, that we have only to return to our old treasury in order to have at hand just the model we want. Let us never forget that what John a Lasco, by his rare penetration of mind, prognosticated in his time, is so much more true in our days. We *may* not always keep to the beaten track. Three centuries of increasing civilization have refined the public taste in such a remarkable degree, that it should be an unscriptural disregard of the inner relation between natural life and the life of grace, if our churches did not discern these signs of the times. He who debars all equitable liturgical demands, and even deems it a point of honor to banish all that is solemn and harmonious from our services, may presume to oppose symbolism, but indeed it is he who makes its highway straight. All this, however, refers exclusively to the reform of *abuses*, to the balancing of what is one-sided or exaggerated, and to the harmonizing if you like, of discordants, but it leaves *the principle* itself, untouched and untried. Symbolism replaces Revelation and makes us fall back from *conscious* to *unconscious* religion. Calvinism always places Revelation in the foreground, and tolerates no other performances than such as are able to echo it and remain carefully under its sway.

And now if finally, for I must come to my conclusion, you ask me, how we can discern the pernicious influence of the Symbolical, which we should antagonize, from the pure love for Liturgical reform, which is to be encouraged? See here, then, my answer. In case you have to deal with a gentleman or a lady, who pleads enthusiastically for splendid music, brilliant singing and richly decorated churches, but to whom the confession for which our martyrs died, is immaterial; not caring a bit for the most fundamental points of our confession; and almost refusing to give an answer, if a reason is asked of the hope that is in them,—then know that the symbolical blood-poisoning has commenced, and try to save them with meekness and fear. But if, on the contrary, the man who warmly and even with cogency vindicated the rights of a more dignified liturgical worship, becomes threefold more earnest and eloquent, as often as the foundations of the divine Truth are assailed, then do not be afraid, such a one has no drop of symbolism in his life-blood. In him speaks the true Calvinist. And, rather than mistrust him, you might better correct your own lack of obedience to the law of the Sublime and the Beautiful, which God has ordained.

POINTERS FOR ELDERS AND DEACONS

Part 1 of an article from

DIAKONIA

translated from the Dutch language

1. Introduction

Office-bearers come and go; that happens to be the custom of our church-life. As a consequence 'green' elders and deacons begin their work in many congregations at the beginning of the new season. As a rule these men approach their task with some trepidation. Questions such as: What is expected of us? How shall we go about it? are on their mind.

For that reason alone it would be good if each consistory would organize an instruction day or at least an evening at the beginning of each new season. On that occasion office-bearers could talk with each other about their work and the best method and approach to it. That way the new-comers would have some idea of what to do and how to go about it. For that matter it would also be instructive for the seasoned elders to re-examine their way of doing things through mutual discussion. In that way Art. 73 of the Church Order, which states that office-bearers "shall exhort and kindly admonish one another with regard to the execution of their office" is honored.

In order to give such an instruction session some direction, it would be advisable to prepare an essay or paper of limited length on some pertinent topic which would be studied by the participants beforehand. The following constitutes such a paper. In view of my limited experience as office-bearer and because of the relative value of various methods, no one should expect final answers to all practical questions. It is my intention to give some pointers, hoping that with the help of these everyone can arrive at a good plan of action as an office-bearer.

When an instruction session is held my paper or essay can be used as follows:

The chairman gives a short summary of each section, supplemented if needed, by his own insights and experi-

ences. The summary of each section should be followed by a discussion. In all probability certain sections, particularly those dealing with the principles of being an office-bearer, will raise few questions. Other points, such as the opening of house visits, the subjects to be discussed and perhaps the ward division, will elicit much discussion. It might be good if the chairman tables worked-out proposals regarding these points so that the meeting can come to well-founded conclusions. It would be useful to review the adopted decisions and methods to see if they are workable, if not during the year, then certainly at the end of the season.

2. An Overview of the Proposed Discussion.

In 1.3 I will deal in greater detail with the common position of both elder and deacon in connection with the form for the ordination of elders and deacons.

In II some aspects of the work of elders are related. That essay corresponds in structure and in sub-division 3 and 6 with what is said about the deacons in III. That parallel is not to be seen as a shortcut, but what is said about the one office also applies to the other.

In III some aspects of the deacons' work are related. This is intended for discussion on a deacons' meeting. It is a revision of the article "What do deacons actually have to do?" (Dienst, 27-2, March/April, 1979).

3. The Common Position of both Elder and Deacon

If office-bearers are to view their work correctly, they must above all be aware of their position vis a vis the congregation. We are inclined to think that elders and deacons are elected by the congregation under the guidance of the consistory. That is, of course, correct. However, a crucial factor has been left out, for as the form states, behind

the election by the congregation stands God Himself. So in the final analysis the office bearers are called to their task by Him.

When we say that, we must take into account that God concerns Himself with the congregation via Christ, who is the head of the Church. As such He rules over her, but He does not do so directly. That is why the form for ordination says more, for not only are the office-bearers called by God, but they are also appointed by Christ. According to Eph. 4:8,11 we may see them as gifts from Christ to his congregation.

The office-bearers may never see themselves as the bosses of the congregation who are only accountable to their colleagues. They should deport themselves humbly, for they are only executors of the Lord's will for His congregation. That is why they may never impose their own will on the congregation. The opposite is true; they have to realize that their work is subject to what God considers beneficial for His children.

That means at the same time that office-bearers are never to be viewed as errand boys, appointed and accountable to the members who elected them. They are in fact in the service of God and of Christ. Aware of that, they can work boldly in the congregation and if necessary oppose those who try to dictate to them. Not the likes nor the dislikes of the congregation but the instruction of their Divine Commissioner is determinative.

The conduct of the office-bearers in the congregation is then determined by two things. They are to be humble, for their significance derives only from the fact that they are God's servants. At the same time they ought to be bold, because their task consists of doing God's will. In all this the office-bearers strive to make the congregation grow towards Christ. It is therefore important for them to test their actions constantly in light of all scriptural teachings.

II. SOMETHING ABOUT THE WORK OF THE ELDER.

1. The task of the elder in general.

We can follow here the form for the ordination of elders. This form is in fact the instruction to the elders and as such gives a broad survey of what their task is.

1.1 The Elder as Shepherd

The form states that elders (together with the minister)

are shepherds, who in the name of the Good Shepherd feed the flock. The form borrowed that comparison from the New Testament, for both the apostle Paul (Acts 20:28-35) and Peter (I Peter 5:1-3) make use of that image. In doing so they are in line with the Old Testament, where not only God Himself but also the leaders appointed by Him are called shepherds (See Ezk. 34:1-23). Now a true shepherd cares for his sheep. He leads them to green pastures, brings back the strays, binds up the wounded and heals the sick (cf. Ezk. 34:14,16). The implication of this for the leaders of God's people is clear: as shepherds under God they must devote themselves to the faithful entrusted in their care. For elders this means very concretely (according to the form) that they must make sure that the members of the church confess the true biblical doctrine and live accordingly. In order to fulfill that task the elders have to visit church members in their homes. During such visits they should comfort, instruct and/or correct the people with the help of God's own Word.

That is a difficult task. In ordinary life we associate for the most part with people that are compatible with us. That can be because they are sympathetic, because they have the same interests, or because they occupy a similar social position, etc. As an elder, however, you will have to associate with all kinds of people, regardless of your attitude towards them. Put more strongly, you as a shepherd must care for them. That is why you may not let them go even if their attitude is negative towards you and your Divine Commissioner.

That is difficult, but at the same time beautiful. Elders in their contact with church members may not confine themselves to the usual polite chit-chat. They have to pass on God's promises and, for that matter, His commandments and His threats. With them they must support or guide church members in their choice for or against God. No effort should be too much. Shepherds devote themselves with all their power to the sheep entrusted in their care.

1.2 The Remaining Work of the Elder.

The form for ordination mentions still more when it comes to the task of the elders.

a) Their correction of church members can lead to the application of discipline.

b) Furthermore, they will have to take care that everything in the church happens in an orderly fashion. From this phrase one may conclude that the consistory may not

act arbitrarily, but only with forethought in order that the church members always know where they are at. In the first place we can think here of the calling of office-bearers, but there are many other matters which also demand a systematic approach, which in turn promotes mutual harmony.

c) Finally, the elders must assist the minister. In view of that they must see to it that he doesn't go wrong in his opinions and behavior. They must prevent the minister from adversely influencing the congregation. According to the form, this means that they are to pay attention to his visits and preaching, and to see that they indeed edify the congregation. This underlines the importance of a regular discussion of his preaching during consistory meetings. Such a point should be on the agenda.

Perhaps the minister, fearing criticism, hesitates to put it on the agenda. That being the case he will have to learn to listen and to deal positively with critical remarks. That is beneficial for both him and the congregation. He should therefore be prepared to urge the office-bearers to make their critical remarks and their praise (for a minister needs that also), truthfully known.

To give such a discussion some direction, we do well to make a distinction between form and content.

With reference to the matter of *form*, the following could be discussed:

- How is the sermon structured? (Does it develop logically?) Is sufficient or insufficient use made of repetition? What about linguistic usage and how is the sermon delivered? (Does he speak too loud, too soft, or is he boring? Are his gestures functional?)

With reference to the matter of *content*, the following should be discussed:

- How does the minister deal with the text? (Does he remain faithful to the whole of the Bible and the confessions? Does he explain enough? Does he remain superficial or is he too profound) and

- How does the minister approach the congregation with the text? (Does he deal with the concerns of the congregation or does he leave the situation for what it is and avail himself only of the usual clichéd applications? Does he make an effort to let the chosen text speak in light of the situation today?)

To be sure, it is extremely difficult to criticize in such a way that it becomes useful for the minister in the preparation of his sermons. Don't expect the minister to act upon all sensible criticism either, for as it is, each of us has his own character and capabilities. The intent of all criticism then is to help the minister reach the maximal development within

his own limits, for the sake of the growth of the congregation toward Christ.

1.3 The Elder over against Himself

The form of ordination mentions one more task for the elder, not over against the congregation, nor over against the minister, but over against himself. It is stated that in order for the elders to be able to fulfill their task they must study the Bible diligently and train themselves in serving God. In agreement with that the final task, to be examples to the flock, is impressed upon them.

In it the necessity for elders to live close to God is indicated. There must not be a conflict between an elder's official function and his private life. This is something which can happen quite easily. You might do what you can to keep the flock within the fold, meanwhile your own faith is found wanting. The busier you are, the greater that danger. For that reason the apostle Paul remarks in I Cor. 9: 27, "*I beat my own body and make it my slave so that after I have preached, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.*" Office-bearers, therefore, must make sure that their own faith keeps pace with what they tell the church members. They must pay attention to their own bond with God, and for that reason must busy themselves with God's Word. Then there will be harmony between their personal opinions and behavior and what they have to say and do as office bearers.

1.4 The Elder and the Minister

Until recently the minister alone was denoted among us as the shepherd. When a church became vacant, it was called shepherdless. This terminology arises from an unscriptural over-estimation of the minister's task. Not only he but all elders are shepherds. The new form for the ordination makes this clear.

At the same time it means that an elder absolutely cannot unload the visiting on the minister. Of course, a minister has been freed from non-ecclesiastical work, so that he can devote himself to the congregation all day long. That is primarily because of his teaching function, which requires much study and thus much time. You may expect too that pastoral work, which requires extra time, effort and skill, will be pre-eminently his domain. For the rest the minister and the elders are equal. Both are to involve themselves intensely with the sheep.

2. QUESTIONS TO WHICH THE ELDER

SHOULD TRY TO GET ANSWERS.

In what follows I will leave what has been said under 1.2 and 1.3. It is not so much my intention to deal with the enforcement of discipline, nor with the task of the elder over against the minister and himself. Above all I wish to give pointers for the ordinary work in the congregation. Therefore, I will deal in detail with his task as shepherd. It has already been determined in 1.1 that he has to comfort, instruct and/or correct the congregation. If he is to do that effectively, he must be well-informed about someone's relationships. That will bring about all sorts of questions.

I will mention a few. In parenthesis I have added some practical remarks, which are intended to help the elder to speak about cases in question (much of what follows can be discussed with children from age ten and up, it is good therefore, that they are present at the beginning of a house-visit). The questions an elder must ask themselves are related to:

2.1 The External Circumstances

- How long has someone lived here and where did he originally come from? (This can be of importance for getting to know the person); What type of a job does he have (or has he had) and how can he be a Christian in it? (because of the time and energy jobs demand they often mark a person. In addition the cares and the joys one experiences while working have everything to do with being a Christian. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance to talk about it as an elder.)

- What is the make-up of the family and how do the children view the church? (It is also important to ask if there are children who have left home. In that case they are outside of the direct concern of the visiting elder, however, it stands to reason that their welfare plays an important, if not dominant role, in the parents' life); What kind of education are the children who are still at home receiving; are they going steady? (information about that can lead to a separate discussion with the children).

- What about a special ecclesiastical task? (e.g. office-bearers, organist, care-taker, committee member; such a task often demands a great deal of the person concerned and his family, while the appreciation for the work done is often not forthcoming. Interest shown in the work done by the visiting elder contributes to a greater pleasure in that work.)

- Are there certain needs present? (For a detailed

summary of possible needs I refer to section III-2. It is primarily the task of the deacons to care for those who are single, old, sick, or find themselves in financial distress. But elders too should keep an eye open for those whose external circumstances are difficult. In the first place because of the interest one has in the church member in question, but also to be of service as long as it is remembered that it is the deacons' task to do so in depth).

2.2 Living with the Bible.

- Is the Bible read at the table according to a system? (Passages arbitrarily chosen for reading leave much of the Bible a closed book; if one is busy with the O.T. it is recommended that it be alternated daily with the N.T. Singles too, should make Bible reading a regular habit.)

- Are certain parts skipped? (The reading of Gen. 38 and Song of Songs could be a good starting point for sex instruction and may promote a relaxed attitude towards sexuality).

- Do the parents and older children read the Bible privately with or without study-aids; do the parents encourage their children to do so? (Most people have to force themselves more or less to study the Bible, but for the sake of our personal bond with God we cannot do without it).

- What is done for the younger children? (In this connection an appropriate children's Bible can be of great help.)

2.3 Prayer

- Do the parents pray aloud at the table; is regular attention paid to family circumstances, everyone's daily work, the church and her members, those who because of their faith are in distress, the government etc.; are the children allowed to lead in prayer as well? (This is of great importance in training children to pray, and it strengthens the common bond with God)

- Besides meal time prayers, does one pray extensively at other set times? (It is much better to do so at a set time rather than deciding every time when to pray. To such an extensive prayer belong praise and thanks to God; the recognition of one's sin and the request for forgiveness, the petition for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and for all that you need to do your work and prayer for others. To keep your attention focused it is perhaps advisable to do as the people did in Bible times, namely to whisper or to speak the words aloud.)

- Do the parents discuss with their children whether or what they pray? (It does happen that adolescents still use their children's prayer or even omit their personal prayer. This is often so because they do not notice that God answers prayers and how. For that reason there is much work here for the parents as well.)

- How do the parents deal with the younger children on this point? (It seems sensible to me that parents say or sing an evening prayer for the one and two year olds; with children of three years it can be expected that they will begin to participate in the prayer, and occasionally they could be prompted to pray for certain people and matters.)

2.4 Church Attendance

- Do we attend church twice if possible, or do we skip once in a while e.g. to receive visitors or to go visiting? (Because a church service is a dialogue between the two parties in the covenant, God and His people, we cannot remain uncommitted. The more since according to Heb. 10 non-attendance and contempt for Christ's redemption work naturally follows, one from the other. In Lord's Day 38 we recognize that faithful attendance is a command of God.)

- Do we attend the church we belong to? (Regular weekend recreation is harmful for the bond with our own local church and for involvement in church life. Simply attending church twice somewhere is not in keeping with the command for faithful attendance. In our going to church we strengthen the bond with the community in which we live.)

- Are we actively taking part in the worship service, by singing and praying along and by listening intently to the sermon. Are we open to the preaching in order to be changed or strengthened by the Word of God? (In listening your attention may come to a halt because you find the form of the sermon uncomfortable or you object to the application.)

- Do we think and speak about the sermon; do we restrict ourselves to the superficial side of the sermon, or does the Word of God receive full attention? (You can neutralize the beneficial effect of the sermon for yourself and/or others by keeping silent or by tearing the sermon apart.)

2.5 The Attitude towards the Office-bearers.

- Do we see the office-bearers in the right light? (It can happen that in them we only see weak fellow church

members. With all their limitations they must be recognized as people whom Christ uses and through whom He concerns Himself with the congregation).

- Do we pray (at the table) for the office-bearers and their work; do we prepare ourselves in prayer for the church services and house visits? (Important for the children as well, for he who prays, promotes in himself, and in others, a correct attitude towards office-bearers, church services and house visits).

2.6 The Place in the Community.

- Do we go out of our way to do something for fellow church members; in other words, do we visit them, and if necessary, do we do things for them (shopping, little jobs, baby-sitting); do we pray for them? (Complaints about lack of contact within the congregation are often a sign that we don't do anything ourselves. Do not ask: "What are others doing for me", but "What am I doing for others?" Of course you cannot be everybody's friend, but you should feel responsible for those to whom you are especially related, e.g. those of the same age, those that live close by or those you especially can help. You will have to emphasize constantly that together with the other members you belong to Christ and commonly share in His gifts. This aspect must also have the attention of the deacons).

- Do we attend ecclesiastical meetings, such as congregational meetings, mission evening, annual meeting, etc. (It is contradictory if we pray, for instance, for the local church or mission work but fail to attend the meetings where information about these activities is given. In addition, meetings such as these strengthen mutual bonds).

2.7 The Giving and Receiving of Instruction.

- Do the parents free themselves or make any effort to talk with the children about the service of God today? (This for example in connection with a certain incident, a book, a T.V. program, a particular question asked by someone, etc. It is not enough for parents to command and forbid, or just to say "because it is that way", or "because I say so". You will have to give children and especially young people arguments based on the Bible. It should be noted here that the most important part of upbringing takes place at home, not in school or in catechism classes).

- Do the parents pay attention to the education their children receive in school, notably the ideological subjects and the literary works they read and have to read? (In case

of non-reformed education corrections may be necessary. Even if the education is reformed, the interest of the parents is indispensable).

- Are young people stimulated by their parents and/or peers to be active members of a study society; do the parents show interest in what the young people do there? (Parental involvement promotes the interest of the young people).

- Concerning those twenty years old and up: Are they members of a Bible study society and do they study beforehand? (Many remain on the side lines saying "I am not a society-person". In the meantime it is a fact that a systematic, private Bible study often fails. By going prepared to a study meeting you force yourself to be busy with the Bible on a regular basis. In addition you receive the opportunity to learn from others and/or to serve others with your insights).

2.8 The Further Life of a Christian

- Do we make an effort to read Reformed magazines and Reformed books about parts of the Bible and Biblical doctrine; do the parents stimulate their children to do so? (It is remarkable that many church members have a color television and/or an extensive collection of modern novels, while they have hardly any books about the Bible and Biblical doctrine. What then is the value of recognizing the Bible as God's Word?)

- Are we conscious of the fact that in the matter of money we are stewards of God's possessions; do we donate a proper percentage to the church, mission and various (charitable) organizations in and outside the church community? (This again is an area which pre-eminently falls within the domain of the deacons. In case the deacons have not adopted the new procedure elders can busy themselves with these matters as well. This also applies if the member

in question, despite the efforts of the committee of administration, continues to donate little or nothing to the church).

- Do the parents speak openly about sexual matters with their children? (Today young children have to be informed plainly about such matters; it is also necessary to give concrete directions for sexual behavior based on Biblical norms).

- Have young parents any problems with starting a family? (Many have difficulty in dealing with that matter and would like to talk to someone they trust. Others, who are not experiencing any problems in that respect, are rather selfish in their approach to the subject and are, therefore, in need of counseling.) How do the unmarried experience their status? (Because of their personal difficulty with it and their possible mistaken view regarding the single life, many of them would experience relief in a discussion of their situation.)

- What is the relationship of young people going steady? (Do they recognize the fact that physically they must exercise restraint? Do they talk enough with each other about matters of substance and principle? In a society dominated by sex the danger is great that the physical side of a relationship begins to dominate, while the spiritual dimension of the relationship remains superficial.)

- Does one make an effort to be known in the neighborhood or at work as a Christian ?

(Most of us tend to hide those aspects of our Christianity which an outsider finds unacceptable. Furthermore many of us do not make use of opportunities to witness because of uncertainty or even fear. Everyone of us must therefore learn to witness unashamedly, when the right moment presents itself. The person who does that will notice that he is strengthened in his choice for God.)

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TAKING HEED TO THE FLOCK

A Study of the Principles and Practice

of Family Visitation

by

Peter Y. de Jong, Ph. D.

Chapter VI

THE REQUISITES FOR FAMILY VISITATION

We have said that love to Christ does not impose on all His disciples the duty of a shepherd; showing itself rather in by far the larger number in simply hearing the shepherd's voice and following him, and generally in a willingness to be guided by those who are wiser than themselves. We must add that all who are animated by the spirit of love to the Redeemer will be either shepherds or sheep, actively useful in caring for the souls of others, or thankfully using the provision made for the care of their own souls."

— A. B. BRUCE: THE TRAINING OF THE TWELVE

In the stirring days of Oliver Cromwell there was great concern on the part of many for the reformation of Christ's church in England. During those years the highly esteemed pastor and preacher Richard Baxter published his work on *The Reformed Pastor* which to this very day is still an invaluable guide for those who have the oversight of the flock of the Savior.

"We must have a special eye upon families," so he wrote, "to see that they are well ordered, and the duties of each relation performed. The life of religion, and the welfare and glory of both the Church and the State, depend much upon family government and duty. If we suffer the neglect of this, we shall undo all. What are we like to do ourselves to the reforming of a congregation, if all

the work be cast on us alone; and masters of families neglect that necessary duty of their own, by which they are bound to help us? If any good be begun by the ministry in any soul, a careless, prayerless, worldly family is like to stifle it, or very much hinder it; whereas, if you could but get the rulers of families to do their duty, to take up the work where you left it, and help it on. what abundance of good might be done! I beseech you, therefore, if you desire the reformation and welfare of your people, do all you can to promote family religion."¹

Much of the effectiveness of this type of work, however, will depend upon the manner in which

¹ Baxter: *The Reformed Pastor*, p. 91

it is accomplished. Therefore we do well to consider some of the basic requisites for family visitation. These may be reduced to three which are the most comprehensive and important. If any congregation is to derive spiritual benefit from it, the work must be done officially, regularly and with due regard for its purpose.

The Official Character of This Work

Although we have already touched on the official nature of this work, it requires some broader and more detailed consideration now.

The Reformed churches, in contrast to many other Protestant denominations, have always esteemed the offices highly. Although they reacted vigorously against the usurpation of power of which the Romish hierarchy had made itself guilty during the centuries immediately preceding the Reformation, they refused to fall into the opposite extreme. In fact, the Reformed fathers saw much more clearly than the Roman Catholic church authorities the value and use of the New Testament offices.

By a careful study of the several parts of the New Testament these leaders saw that the good government of the church of Christ required three types of officers—the ministers of the Word, the elders and the deacons. Each in its own way represented some aspect of the triple office of the Savior, who as Head of His church remained the final seat of all authority and the source of all power in the life of the congregations.

This power which He delegated to His representatives was defined as regulative and spiritual. Although the officers were clothed with authority, this was not inherent in their persons, and therefore they were to regard themselves as shepherds and servants of the flock of Christ. As a result abuses of power could not creep into the church easily, if it was aware of and safeguarded its right. Abraham Kuyper in his work on Calvinism remarks on this matter as follows: "This government, like the church itself, originates in heaven, in Christ. He most effectually rules, governs His church by means of the Holy Spirit, by whom He works in His members. Therefore all being equal under Him, there can be no distinctions of rank among believers; there are only ministers, who serve, lead and regulate; a thoroughly Presbyte-

rian form of government; the Church power descending directly from Christ Himself, into the congregation, concentrated from the congregation in the ministers, and by them being administered unto the brethren. So the sovereignty of Christ remains absolutely monarchical, but the government of the Church on earth becomes democratic to its bones and marrow. ."¹

The Requisites for Family Visitation

This idea of the officers as pastors who serve the flock is thoroughly Scriptural. However, it was felt at once that certain distinctions had to be made for the sake of good order. When speaking of pastors, the Reformed fathers used the term in two ways. First of all, they might use the word in a more restricted sense, when they designated the work of the ministers of the Word to whom fell the task of preaching and teaching the Word. But they could also speak of it in a broader sense and thus hold that all spiritual work by the officers is pastoral in its nature. All three offices are bound to the Word, and the purpose of each is to show the members how to conduct themselves as sheep and lambs of the flock.

Thus the work of the elders, too, is definitely pastoral. The power which is delegated to them is for the purpose of ministering to the spiritual needs of the people.

This ordinary office in the New Testament church, in distinction from the work of the apostles, prophets and evangelists, was of a permanent nature. Elders were to be appointed in all the churches, in order that the work of the gospel might go forward even when the apostles and their helpers fell away. These men were called by two names: presbyters or elders, and bishops or overseers. Both terms are self-explanatory. The first refers chiefly to the dignity with which the office was clothed, and the second to the specific work which was enjoined upon those who were called to it. These men were to take heed to the whole flock of the Lord, carefully supervising both the doctrine and conduct of all the members. In order that this might be done adequately, it was deemed necessary by the Reformed churches at the very beginning of their history to visit the members in their homes at stated times. By a frank and free discussion of the

¹ Kuyper: *Calvinism*, p. 77

nature and development of spiritual life with the members, the elders could instruct and comfort and admonish as need required.

Indeed, it was recognized cheerfully that upon many other occasions spiritual life could be discussed profitably. The members by virtue of the office of all believers were to help and comfort and admonish each other. Likewise, both minister and elders could upon special occasions visit the members for the same purpose. Even in the execution of their tasks the deacons were to remember the pastoral nature of their calling. However, none of these instances could relieve the elders of their responsibility. They, as watchmen upon the walls of Zion and shepherds of the saints, were to know the needs of all and help them from time to time.

When therefore the elders come into the homes of the members, they come in the name of their Exalted Savior. Instead of seeing only the persons of the elders, the members should recognize the presence of their Savior and Lord in the ministrations of men.

It may be asked, What is the place of the minister of the Word in family visitation? This question is proper, especially in view of the fact that in many churches most of this work is expected of him. Too often many of our members labor under the misconception that the office of the minister is higher in rank than that of the elders and deacons. Anyone who carefully studies the New Testament texts which refer to the offices will be able to point out the fallacy of this idea at once. Although his office differs from the other two in kind, it is in no way inherently superior. Thus when he accompanies an elder at family visitation, he too comes as a ruling elder of the church.

It has generally been recognized in the Reformed churches that the minister of the Word labors in a double capacity. He has two offices which he must discharge. Not only is he to labor in the official teaching of the Word, but he is also appointed to assist the other elders in the ruling of the church. This is plain from the *Form for the Ordination of the Ministers of God's Word*, where his several duties are outlined in great detail. There we read, "Fourth: the task of the ministers of the Word is with the elders to keep the Church of God in good discipline, and to govern it in such

a manner as the Lord has ordained; for Christ, having spoken of the Christian discipline, says to His apostles: Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven (Matt. 16:19) And Paul would have the ministers know how to rule their own house, since otherwise they can neither provide for nor rule the Church of God. This is the reason why in Scripture the pastors are also called stewards of God and bishops, that is, overseers and watchmen; for they have the oversight of the house of God, wherein they abide, to the end that there everything may be transacted with good order and decency; and that they may open and shut, with the keys of the kingdom of heaven committed to them, according to the charge given them by God."

Thus the members of the consistory, when calling upon the families to discharge their office of supervising the flock, should be regarded with honor. They come in the name of Christ, and for the purpose of ministering to the needs of His people. Their call should be announced beforehand, in order that the whole family may be present. When we feel the need of medical or legal aid, we do not hesitate to make and keep appointments with physicians, dentists and lawyers. Can it then be considered improper that official appointments are made for this spiritual work? Only in so far as the work is properly respected can it be effective in the life of the church.

The Need of Regularity in the Work

Another requisite for the proper conducting of family visitation is regularity. During past years much has been said and written about its frequency. In discussing the matter we ought to guard against two dangers. It may be carried on so infrequently and irregularly, that the membership of the church loses sight of its spiritual nature and necessity entirely, with the tragic result that family visitation degenerates into a social call. However, it may also be done so often that the elders and members fall into meaningless repetition.

It is very significant that already at the first broader assembly of the Reformed churches of the Netherlands (Convent of Wezel in 1568) this question was discussed, and as a result it was decided that all the families of the churches should be visited by the elders once a week. The decision is not at all strange, when we consider the need of

those days. At this assembly the first Church Order by which the congregations were to govern themselves was drawn up. Only shortly before many of the members had left the Roman Catholic church, where weekly confession to the priest was a general practice. Moreover, many of these new members were quite ignorant of the rule of the gospel. Family visitation, then, provided the elders with a wonderful opportunity for instructing and admonishing the members. Without a doubt, where this was done properly, rich spiritual blessings accrued to the churches. Some time later the present reading of Article 23 of our Church Order was drawn up, in which it was stipulated that these official visits should be made to all the members "before and after the Lord's Supper, as time and circumstances may demand."

All are agreed that it is no longer necessary to conduct this work weekly among the whole congregation. Not only would this be practically impossible in all of our churches, but both members and elders would fall into endless repetition after a few times. Actual supervision of the members does not require knowledge of all the details of individual spiritual life. On this basis the Reformed churches have as a general principle repudiated the practice of inquiring into all the details of the believer's relation to God and his fellow-men, as was so often done in the Roman Catholic confessional. The church as the mother of the faithful is required to assist with counsel and comfort instead of lording it over the lives of her members.

With these facts in mind we can understand why the churches have adopted the custom of conducting family visitation in such a way that all are contacted at least once a year. This ought to be considered a minimum requirement. If longer periods are allowed to lapse between the official visits, there is great danger of ineffectiveness. The confidence of the members in their officers will greatly suffer, and the elders on their side can hardly claim to know the needs of the congregation as a whole, if two or three years expire between visits. That large congregations because of their size make it extremely difficult to conduct the work systematically each year has often been advanced as an excuse for not adhering to the custom of annual visitation. However, if both ministers and elders are convinced of the importance and necessity of the work, they will take the

necessary time. It is significant that often elders in the large congregations are fully as conscientious about this part of their calling as those in smaller churches. Indeed, the minister in a congregation of more than two hundred families cannot possibly visit every family annually without neglecting some other part of his work. Yet, if we but remember that this is part of his work as ruling elder rather than as minister of the Word, we will realize that he is not required to do much more of this work than the other elders in the consistory. And should the complaint be heard that family visitation is effective only when the minister calls on the members, the solution to this problem lies not in the direction of visiting the congregation less frequently (say, only once in two or three years in order that the minister may be present at every visit) but rather in the direction of training our eldership for its own peculiar work.

Keeping Its Purpose in Mind

One other requisite for family visitation demands our attention. The work, if to be done effectively, must be conducted purposefully. The officers should be able to give a clear account of their calling, when they visit the families, and thus give direction to the conversation in which they engage the members.

We have reacted strongly against what has often, but improperly, been called the "inquisitorial" method of family visitation. By this is understood the method of direct questioning in order to stimulate conversation on spiritual matters. It cannot be denied that the elders are often rather shy about directing such questions and prefer to allow the conversation to take whatever course it will. As a result some of the most important matters are conveniently dodged.

In opposing such a desultory way of carrying on the work let no one think that we are defending those individuals (and there have been such!) who because of the dignity of their eldership have deemed it their prerogative to inquire into every secret of the believer's life. Those who so "lord it over the flock" forget that they are servants for Christ's sake.

However, we may not forget that the elders are clothed with spiritual authority. It is therefore their duty to see to it that spiritual matters are

discussed at family visitation. And should there be those who try to steer the conversation, whether consciously or unconsciously, in another direction, the elders must remind themselves and the members of the purpose of their call. Of course, this must be done as unobtrusively and charitably as possible. Only when it is apparent that the individual who is being visited deliberately refuses to speak about his relation to God and his fellowmen should he be rebuked, and even then in the spirit of love and kindness.

How can we do justice to the demand of purposeful family visitation? Because we resent the use of any stereotyped set of questions, it is not easy to answer this question. Spiritual life is organic and must always be approached with this knowledge in mind. It is therefore so dangerous to classify the members into groups depending upon the level of spirituality. As in the realm of nature no two snowflakes are alike, so in the kingdom of grace we find an infinite variety among the believers. Yet a few general remarks are not out of place here.

First of all, we should lament the fact that family visitation too often has degenerated to mere routine in our churches. Once a year all the members must be visited. Thus long lists of calls are prepared in advance. The more calls made in one evening, the sooner the work is finished. Thus there is danger that the work loses all spontaneity and naturalness. Those who do the calling should remember that every visit is a challenge. As believers differ from each other, their needs and wants will vary. It is the business of the elders to know

and understand these needs, as well as the gospel of Christ which alone can satisfy the requirements of the spiritual life of His people.

Thus, too, it is essential that the elders themselves be spiritually equipped for their work. This cannot be done without prayer and study. To fulfil this part of their calling they must enjoy the constant guidance of God's Spirit. Only when consciously and completely leaning upon Him will they receive the words which they are to bring to the people.

Whenever possible, the elders ought to know the particular needs of the families which they are to visit. Thus it is profitable that the consistory (in strictest confidence, of course, and prompted only by the purest motives) discuss the spiritual condition of the several families in so far as these are known to the elders. This allows for noting the changes which take place, whether for good or ill.

But above all both elders and people must be constantly reminded of the goal of the work—the spiritual equipment of the congregation to serve God in singleness of heart. Many opportunities for doing this will present themselves during the year. In public worship and catechetical classes remarks on the nature and purpose of the work are often in place. An announcement from the pulpit or in the bulletin at the time family visitation is carried on, will often prove effective. The more clearly the purpose is understood by all, the easier it will be to cherish high hopes that also this arduous spiritual labor will benefit consistory and congregation alike.

“We must have a special eye upon families, to see that they are well ordered, and the duties of each relation performed. The life of religion, and the welfare and glory of both the Church and the State, depend much upon family government and duty. If we suffer the neglect of this, we shall undo all. What are we like to do ourselves to the reforming of a congregation, if all the work be cast on us alone; and masters of families neglect that necessary duty of their own, by which they are bound to help us? If any good be begun by the ministry in any soul, a careless, prayerless, worldly family is like to stifle it, or very much hinder it; whereas, if you could but get the rulers of families to do their duty, to take up the work where you left it, and help it on, what abundance of good might be done! I beseech you, therefore, if you desire the reformation and welfare of your people, do all you can to promote family religion.”

— Richard Baxter

"HOW DO YOU RUN A SESSION MEETING?"

by

J. J. Peterson

A very important part of the work of the ordained officer is the session meeting. The session is the elders of the local church, ruling and teaching, gathering to review and plan for the work of the church. You elders, have the responsibility of ruling the church. You are God's appointed responsible servants of the Lord to exercise rule in the church.

It is extremely important that you realize your appointed place – under the Lord, the CEO if you will, servants appointed to rule. Under the Lord – you rule according to his rule–book, the Bible. His will over yours. We are an apostolic church, and the Word of the Lord given through his apostles, is the standard that you rule by. Servants, you serve the Lord and his people. He is the most important, then the people of God, the congregation, the whole congregation, children, women and men – you serve them – I repeat: you serve them! And your ruling in the church is to serve the Lord and his church. Don't be overlords (1 Peter 5:1–4).

The session must choose its own moderator. It is sometimes the case that a ruling elder can moderate a meeting far better than the teaching elder. Choose the one who moderates best – one who doesn't have to talk all the time, one who is fair, one who is willing to listen, and one who will see to it that every elder says what he wants to.

It is important that everyone has his say. No elder should leave a meeting convinced that he was cut short or not allowed to speak. All of the elders should be sensitive to each other so that an atmosphere is created that says, “they want to know what I think about this issue”. So learn to listen. You don't have to talk all of the time. Don't interrupt! Let the man speak. I have begun a speech, only to be interrupted! Fifteen minutes later I will resume with these words: "If I may now continue what I was saying

when I was interrupted..." A teaching device to help those who love to interrupt.

And, a word to the teaching elder, you don't have to set forth your position first so that the others know how to vote. In the session meeting you are just one among many – let the others speak. The deliberative process in which each elder has the freedom to say what he feels he must say, really works. It is far better to make decisions by consensus – coming to agreement through discussion – than to pass a motion with a one or two vote majority in which the minority feels short changed.

Should Robert's Rules be followed? A lot depends on the men involved. Most of the sessions that I know do not need to use Robert except in extreme situations. The need to second a motion if there are only two on the session is obviously not practical. In our Session meetings with five elders, we do not require a second to a motion.

A DOCKET

The meeting works best when the moderator prepares a docket. That docket should reflect the ministry committed to the elders. (A sample docket is found as an appendix to this article). Let me make a comment on several things that should be included.

1. EVENTS TO NOTE should include past and coming events. This is a chronicle of the history of your church. Fifty years from now, the session should be able to read your minutes and get a feel for the life of the congregation as you are living it from week to week. This includes everything from the dates of the celebration of the Lord's Supper to when you had to cancel services because of a snow storm; from the Ladies meetings to the fellowship dinners; from the baptism of a child of the congregation

TAKING HEED TO THE FLOCK

to the pulpit supplies when the teaching elder is on vacation or on assignment by the church.

2. SHEPHERDING is the work of the elder as a pastor, a shepherd of the flock under the great shepherd. He is to provide tender, loving care of the sheep. The members of our congregation are assigned to the individual elders. The elder is responsible in a particular way for the sheep under his care. He serves them. He talks with them on the Lord's day and at other times. He notes when they are sick or in need of counsel or just need someone to care. If there are special needs that require special attention, he reports that to the session under the shepherding category.

This item also includes our shut-ins, those unable to attend services due to age or infirmity or both. It further included several who are not living locally and do not attend service with our body. Mostly, these are military members. We keep contact with them. Some receive tapes of our services and worship with us, albeit a week later. The congregation writes them. We are for them.

As moderator I supply each meeting with copies of the current roll, the shepherding list and the attendance record to date.

We also talk about our visitors and their needs. Elders are assigned to them to be sure they understand our message, to ascertain their commitment to Christ and his church, to discuss with them their need and invite them to unite with the body of Christ.

Under this heading we also cover our responsibility to our presbytery's mission work in Corpus Christi (we are the closest congregation to them).

We also discuss candidates for office in the church.

3. INTERNATIONAL MINISTRY is special for our church. It is a ministry of at least 25 years to military personnel who come to San Antonio for language study at the Air Force base here.

4. WORSHIP is the most important work of the body of Christ. It is good to have a docket item dealing with the worship service and the preaching. This is not a time for 'roast preacher' but for helpful suggestions.

5. OUTREACH is part of the great commission. This item would include anything from an evangelistic outreach program to the telephone ad in the yellow pages.

6. REPORTS includes a monthly report from the Deacons including a financial statement for the month and a report on giving for year; reports from the Ladies of Grace, our ladies group, concerning their meetings; reports on the Sunday School and plans that need to be made; the Friday night Bible study.

7. CHRISTIAN SCHOOL includes our long range goal of a Christian day school. It also includes our home-schoolers and their needs.

8. CORRESPONDENCE includes everything that comes to the church for sessional information and/or action.

9. PRESBYTERY OF THE SOUTHWEST. The involvement of the church in the work of the presbytery and the general assembly are important. Some of our congregations function almost as independents. Get the elders involved in the work of the regional and national church. Report not only to the session but also to the congregation, orally and in print, of the work of the church at all levels – local, regional, national and international.

10. THE FALL CONFERENCE ON THE REFORMED FAITH, THE WINTER RETREAT and THE MARRIAGE SEMINAR are special events in the life of our church and require long range planning which is reviewed at each meeting.

11. MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS is self-explanatory.

When the meeting of the session is over, edit the docket and insert into it the actions taken, print it up and give it to the elders on Sunday, with their individual assignments noted so that they can do what they were asked to do.

How long is a session meeting? It depends. Sometime weighty matters require much time. A shepherding report may lead to judicial discipline—and that is time consuming. The age of the elders may require a cut off time.

APPENDIX
A Sample Docket

1. CALL TO ORDER – Scripture reading – Prayer
2. ROLL CALL
 - A. Present –
 - B. Absent –
3. MINUTES
 - A. of the regular meeting of
(or) of the special meeting of
(or) of the congregational meeting
4. EVENTS TO NOTE:
 - A. Past events
 - 1) Lord's Supper was celebrated ...etc.
 - B. Coming events
 - 1) Lord's Supper is scheduled for... etc.
5. SHEPHERDING
 1. Shepherding list,
 2. Attendance, [these are current]
 - 3 Roll,
 - A. Shut-ins
 - B.
 - D. Out of town members.
 1. Military:
 2. Others
 - H. Anything else arising from shepherding?
re membership:
 - I. Corpus Christi [a mission work] – worship: ... [who is preaching there...etc.)
 - J. Candidates for office
6. INTERNATIONAL MINISTRY – Elder _____, Coordinator
7. WORSHIP
 - The worship service
 - The preaching
8. OUTREACH
 - A. Outreach Committee
 - B. LIFEWAY drug abuse program
9. REPORTS
 - A. Deacons
 - 1) Financial statement for March and giving for year
 - B. LOGs met 5/8 [our ladies group]
 - C. Sunday School
 - D. Friday night Bible study
- 10 CHRISTIAN SCHOOL
11. CORRESPONDENCE
12. PRESBYTERY OF THE SOUTHWEST
13. FALL CONFERENCE ON THE REFORMED FAITH
14. WINTER RETREAT
15. MARRIAGE SEMINAR
16. MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS
18. ADJOURN after prayer by _____