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JOHN FOXE

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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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EDITORIAL

It is my conviction that the need of the hour, in North America, is a United Reformed Church of an ecumenical character. I say this, first of all, because we are so fragmented. There are still some who love the Reformed Confessions in denominations which no longer uphold those confessions corporately. And there are those who love the Reformed Confessions in various smaller denominations, separated from one another by

their own history and traditions. We are, in other words, a scattered and divided remnant. And it seems rather obvious to me that we ought to seek, as never before, to come into some kind of organic unity.

It is for this reason that we include in this issue of *Ordained Servant* a review of some of the history of a unique denomination—the

Reformed Churches of New Zealand. It is the only denomination that we know of that holds to both the Three Forms of Unity *and* The Westminster Confession of Faith.

The reason for this unique experiment is interesting in itself. Dutch immigrants began to come to New Zealand after the war. They found the 'main line' Presbyterian Church to be hopelessly modernistic. But they did not want to just import something entirely foreign. To the contrary, they made it very clear in the new country they had chosen that *if* the Presbyterian Church would return to a faithful upholding of the Westminster Standards *they* in turn would become part of the Presbyterian Church. When there was no response to this challenge the Reformed Churches were organized and—from day one—serious attention was given to the Westminster Confession. It was, after careful study, adopted as a standard of equal authority with the Three Forms of Unity. And to this day the Reformed Churches of New Zealand have upheld all four standards.

Was this easy? No. Was it always problem free? Again, no. How, then, did the New Zealand church work through these problems? The answer is: *by a re-study and re-evaluation of the traditions from both streams of Reformed and Presbyterian history, and then honestly trying to choose what was most biblical.* It was, and is, an exciting experiment. And it is our hope that something like this may yet take place in our North American context.

Our thanks to the Rev. Jack Sawyer—who served in two congregations of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand over the past decade—for the fine summary of this history. This material was written for a projected commemorative volume to be published in New Zealand, and is used by permission.

* * * * *

In the previous issue of *Ordained Servant* Jack J. Peterson ably defended his view of the proper fencing the Lord's Table and we think he did it as well as anyone could. Nevertheless it has aroused a question in the mind of the editor that will not go away. Here it is: if the spoken word is

not sufficient—by itself—as the means of fencing the Lord's table for the members of the congregation, then how can it possibly be sufficient as the sole means for those who are not members of the congregation? There have been plenty of times when I would have *wished* that the word alone would bring the desired effect with delinquent members of a particular congregation that I served. But it did not. But then, when the Session backed up the spoken word with the the other key of oversight and discipline, the desired effect was realized. Is this not the case? Is this not confirmed in your experience, as it has been in mine? Is it really possible, then, that when it comes to total strangers we can rely entirely on that key which, admittedly, is *not sufficient by itself*, in at least some cases, when dealing with our own church members?

Admittedly, at first sight, the slogan "the power of the Word" is very impressive. Surely we all believe in the power of the Word. But my point is that since our Lord gave us *keys* (plural, not singular) I am driven to the conclusion that reliance upon the spoken Word *as the sole means of fencing the Lord's Table* is inadequate. Am I missing something?

* * * * *

I would like to remind you office bearers of the OPC that contributions are needed from you for this publication. Have you written something that would benefit the whole church? If so we—(the editor and the sub-committee with direct oversight of this journal)—would appreciate your assistance. Your contribution does not need to be long. Indeed, the subcommittee is of the opinion that more brief articles sare needed, and that we need a greater variety of subjects. As the fashion of this world changes—and who can deny that it does, at least in the techological sense?—we need freshly nuanced application of the unchanging principles of the word of God. When you do send us material it would save us work if you would send it on disk, either in Macintosh or IBM format. We can't promise to use everything sent to us, but we do promise to give it prompt attention, and will return any material that you send if you will include a request for this when you send it. Please send it to the editor: G. I. Williamson, 119 Normal College Ave., Sheldon, IA - 51201-1318. Thank you.

A PROPOSED JOB DESCRIPTION FOR A DEACON by

Rev. A. G. Edwards III

Frame of Reference

The *general* frame of reference for the task of a Deacon is the view of the church as a visible, organized, live body, according to the teachings of Scripture and the summary in the Westminster Standards and the Form of Government, Book of Discipline and Directory of Worship of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

The *specific* frame of reference is the _____
(name of Your Congregation) _____.

Within these frames of reference the Deacon is looked on as a man called and equipped by God to be a servant of the Lord in the church, whose gifts and calling are recognized by the congregation through his election, testing and ordination. He is a servant entrusted with the special responsibility of the handling of the temporal affairs of the church, including the administration of temporal relief. A Deacon's task is a spiritual task, requiring him to be filled with the Spirit and wisdom in order to discharge it (Acts 6:3). The Deacon derives his office directly from the Apostles and not from Elders (Acts 6:1-6). He is therefore not an apprentice Elder, nor is his office to be considered as a stepping-stone to the eldership. However, because God has required that Elders be overseers of the flock, the Deacons are under their oversight and are responsible to them in the Lord (1 Peter 5:1-5). The qualifications of a Deacon are those set forth in Acts 6:3 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13. A Deacon must first be tested before serving in his office (1 Timothy 3:10). The attitude necessary to performing the office of Deacon well is that set forth by our Lord in Mark 10:42-45.

Within this framework the Deacon is expected to shoulder responsibilities within two broad categories:

1. Personal development and family relationships, and
2. Service responsibilities of his particular position.

I. Personal Development and Family Relationships

Objective A: A Deacon is to be a maturing disci-

ple of Jesus Christ, so that his life, private and public, is an example and encouragement to the flock.

Goal 1: He should read God's Word, meditate on it, pray and praise God daily.

Objective B: A Deacon is to be a faithful head of a Christian home, if married.

Goal 1: He should spend adequate time with his wife so as to combat her loneliness (Genesis 2:18).

Goal 2: He should have some time daily to pray with his wife.

Goal 3: He should have family devotions in the home daily.

Goal 4: He should spend adequate time with his children to be example and guide to them.

Objective C: A Deacon is to develop his spiritual ability gifts for more useful service to God.

Goal 1: He should seek to understand what his spiritual gifts are.

Goal 2: He should seek God's Wisdom in their development and use.

Objective D: A Deacon is to endeavor to maintain physical health and emotional stability.

Objective E: A Deacon is to undertake civil responsibilities falling upon him in due course as a citizen.

2. Service Responsibilities of his Particular Position

Objective A: A Deacon is entrusted with special responsibility for the handling of the temporal affairs of the church, including the administration of temporal relief.

Goal 1: The Deacons should divide among

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themselves the responsibility for the temporal affairs of the church, including the administering of temporal relief, so that the task is shared by each according to his abilities and interests. To do so the Deacons might organize themselves according to the following guidelines:

a. Officers

1. There may be a president, vice-president, treasurer and secretary.
2. The duties of the president may be to preside at meetings when the minister does not, to prepare a plan for the organization of the Board of Deacons, and to arrange for joint meetings with the Session periodical to discuss goals, personnel, and the work of the Board of Deacons. According to the Form of Government these meetings should be at least once a quarter.
3. The duties of the vice-president may be to keep in contact with the committee chairmen, to encourage them in carrying out their responsibilities, to help them as needed, and to see that each chairman has a report about his committee's accomplishments and plans prior to the monthly Deacon's meeting. This report should be brief and to the point. The vice-president should remind each member of the Board about the Deacon's meeting.
4. The duties of the treasurer may include the receiving, disbursing and recording of all the church monies, including the funds of the Committee on Benevolence, the forming of a group to study long-range plans, the preparing of the annual budget, and the keeping the officers, the Session and the entire congregation informed as to the financial status and trends of the church.
5. The duties of the secretary may include the taking of minutes at all meetings of the Board of Deacons, and of recording them in the record book only after they have been approved.
6. In selecting officers such as president and vice-president, it is generally a favor to the members of the Board not to nominate them for such service until they have had a chance to see how the Board functions.

b. Committees

1. Structure

- a. There may be six committees of the Board of Deacons, the committee on Benevolence, the committee on Building maintenance, the

committee on Ground maintenance, the Janitorial committee, the Finance committee and the Ushers committee.

- b. A Deacon should be chairman of each committee.
- c. A committee chairman may recruit from the Board of Deacons or from the congregation as a whole, people as needed to serve on his committee. If a committee has several major functions, sub-committees may be set up to be responsible for these. Anyone in the church may serve on a Deacon's committee.
- d. The Deacons' committees may meet as needed, some needing to meet every month, some not needing to. The committees should discuss their business in business meeting, make plans on how to carry it out, see that the work is done, and report their work to the Board of Deacons. If a committee has a problem on which it needs the advice of the whole Board, this problem, together with possible solutions, should be presented to the whole Board.

2. Duties

- a. The duties of the Benevolence committee may include ministering to the sick, needy and aged, the encouraging of members to visit the sick, needy and aged, a tape ministry to shut-ins, the arrangement of transportation to worship services for the aged and infirm, and the allocation of benevolent funds which funds may be disbursed through the treasurer.
- b. The duties of the Building maintenance committee may include the consideration of, carrying out or arranging for needed repairs, painting, remodeling, lighting-replacement in the church buildings, the making of a check and priority list of building maintenance work, and the encouraging of members of the church to help in the work of the committee.
- c. The duties of the Grounds maintenance committee may include the care of the lawns, the parking lots, the shrubbery and trees on the church property, taking care of necessary plantings, the making of a check and priority list of grounds maintenance work, and the encouraging of members of the church to help the committee in its work.
- d. The duties of the Janitorial committee may include seeing to it that needed janitorial supplies are secured, seeing that the custodial work is carried out satisfactorily, arranging for periodic house-cleanings in which the help of all the members of the church is secured, and the making of a check list of cleaning jobs that should be done weekly, monthly, quarterly, semi-annually and annually.

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<p>e. The duties of the Finance committee, of which the Treasurer may be chairman, may include the counting of monies received after worship service, long-range financial planning for the church, preparing of the annual budget for presentation to the Deacons and the Session, the informing of the Session of the financial condition, trends and needs of the church, and consideration and action on requests made by non-members for use of any of the facilities of the church.</p> <p>f. The duties of the Ushers committee may be to appoint, train and schedule ushers for the regular meetings of the church, and for special meetings when needed. The committee may also arrange with people in the church for flowers for church services. <u>Note:</u> With this proposed committee structure, members of the church who are not active Deacons can be enlisted to be on the various committees as needed. It should be recognized that, although the committee on Benevolence is considered as a separate committee, yet the work of benevolence is a work in which each Deacon should be active and take his part. Each Deacon should therefore consider himself an ex-officio member of the committee on Benevolence. The deliberations of the Benevolence committee may be directed, however, by a small steering group if so desired, which can consider the work and responsibilities in benevolence and distribute appropriate responsibilities to the several members of the Board of Deacons in benevolent matters.</p> <p>Objective B: Deacons should encourage members of the church to provide for those who are in want.</p> <p>Goal 1: There should be a Deacons' Fund for such purposes included in the church budget.</p> <p>Goal 2: Special needs judged to be of concern to the congregation, but for which the Deacons' Fund is inadequate, may be brought to the congregation for a special offering.</p> <p>Objective C: Deacons should seek to prevent poverty.</p> <p>Goal 1: The Deacons should seek to make themselves aware of needs within the congregation.</p> <p>Goal 2: The Deacons should cheerfully seek to take adequate steps either in discreetly providing financial aid or providing job opportunities or other such matters to help prevent members of the</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">congregation from coming to poverty. The Deacons should help those in need outside the congregation as there is opportunity.</p> <p>Goal 3:</p> <p>Objective D: Deacons should pray with the distressed and remind them of the consolations of Holy Scripture.</p> <p>Objective E: Deacons might assist, with the Elders, in the distribution of the elements at the Lord's Supper when asked.</p> <p>Objective F: A Deacon should consider serving on the Presbytery's or General Assembly's Diaconal Ministries Committees when asked, being careful to remember his first responsibility to his relationship to God, to his wife and family and to the congregation he serves.</p> <p>Objective G: A Deacon should with the other Deacons report to the Session at quarterly meetings designated for this purpose.</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>PROPOSED COMMITTEE STRUCTURE</u></p> <p><u>Benevolence Committee</u> Chairman: Members:</p> <p><u>Building Maintenance Committee</u> Chairman: Members:</p> <p><u>Finance Committee</u> Chairman: Members:</p> <p><u>Grounds Maintenance Committee</u> Chairman: Members:</p> <p><u>Janitor's Committee</u> Chairman: Members:</p> <p><u>Ushers Committee</u> Chairman: Members:</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p>Rev. Albert G. Edwards III served various OP churches in both the East and West before his recent retirement. Albert and Polly now live in Medford Oregon.</p> </div>
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Some Thoughts on the Abortion Issue

by

G. I. Williamson

I want to begin this brief article by clearly stating a few of guiding principles that I will adhere to.

- (1) I believe human life beings at conception (see Ps 139:13-16; and 51:6b).
- (2) Destruction of that life is a violation of the sixth commandment (Ex 21:22,23).
- (3) It is the duty of the civil magistrate to use his God given authority and power to seek to protect all human life—including the life of unborn human beings (Ro. 13:1-6). I use the phrase “seek to protect” here because I do not think civil authorities are to be held responsible for all illegal abortions of which they may not even be aware.
- (4) Since our highest duty is to glorify God we must therefore resist all humanistic thought systems which would make man’s welfare supreme.
- (6) We must be careful to critically examine even the most high sounding slogans to see if they have the warrant of Scripture.

Let me begin by a Reformation example. I refer to the acute problem that many Christians had because of the graven images which were to be seen everywhere in the churches of that day. Many people rightly saw these as an offense against God. They therefore embarked upon a kind of medieval ‘operation rescue.’ Since the civil authorities were not acting to remove these idolatrous objects, these highly motivated people took it upon themselves to do so. And who can

deny that they had a good motive? Why, then, was this kind of individualized solution to a great evil not countenanced by the Reformers? Well, the answer is that the Reformers did not find anything in the Word of God to authorize such a solution. What they worked for, and began to achieve, was a parallel civil reformation whereby “the powers that be” began to act as the church’s nursing fathers and mothers.

It was for this reason that Calvin, as we understand his writings, did not approve of an individualistic approach to civil reformation. It is proper—according to our understanding of this Reformer—for a prince to stand firm for truth and justice even if the king (standing over him) is in opposition to it. It is a well-known fact that what we would call local, or regional, civil authorities gave protection to the Reformers against the tyranny of national rulers who were subservient to Rome. But I know of no instance in which they sanctioned an individualistic solution to civil evils. And it seems to me that there are a number of things that are almost completely overlooked or ignored by those who support our present-day ‘Operation Rescue.’

Now it is certainly true that it is the duty of civil rulers to protect unborn children. This was exactly what the civil authorities used to do in the United States of America. But now, because of the apostasy of much of the church in our country, the salt has lost its savor. The old preservative influence is gone, and the result is that the ungodly feel more and more ‘liberated’ to do evil. And one of the evil things that they want to have conveniently available is the right to abortion. This is indeed a great evil. But we must not forget what

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the Bible says about the solidarity of the human race in both good and evil. When Adam sinned we sinned in him and fell with him. The result is that there really is no such thing as ‘an innocent baby.’ No, even before Esau was born he was hated by God, and he was hated because he was evil. That is why we read, in the second commandment, that God visits the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and the fourth generation. And that is also why the Bible teaches, over and over again, the inevitable involvement of children in both the sins—and the consequences of the sins—of their Fathers. This is clearly expressed in some of the so-called imprecatory psalms such as Psalm 109:9-13 (quoted by Peter with reference to Judas). It reads as follows:

“Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. Let his children continually be vagabonds, and beg; let them seek their bread also from their desolate places. Let the creditor seize all that he has, and let strangers plunder his labor. Let there be none to extend mercy to him, nor let there be any to favor his fatherless children. Let his posterity be cut off, And in the generation following let their name be blotted out. Without father be his children, may his wife a widow be. May his children beg and wander, driven from their ruined homes” (NKJV).

Though we do not read of the practice of abortion in Old Testament times we do read of something just as evil. I refer to the practice of sacrificing children—yes, even tiny infants—to the Ammonite idol called Molech. The law of Moses stipulated that “whoever of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel.. (gave) any of his descendants (seed) to Molech was to be put to death by stoning.” This death by stoning was not a vigilante operation. It was the culmination of due process under civil authority. We see, then, how heinous it was for Solomon to build “a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon” (I Kings 11:7,8).

Now the remarkable thing is that we never

hear the inspired prophets of God calling for God’s people to destroy these centers of ‘worship by murder’ through a kind of operation rescue. It is stated (in I Kings 11:9) that the Lord “became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the Lord God of Israel.” It was also predicted, at the time, that God would “tear the kingdom away from” Solomon (and this meant from Solomon’s son) and give it to his servant (v. 11). But we do not read that God was angry with the prophets for not inciting the people to rebel against Solomon, and we do not read that God was angry with the people for not taking the law into their own hands to get rid of this evil. And surely it must occur to any thoughtful reader of the Bible to ask ‘why?’

One reason for this—in my humble opinion—is that those who were willing to engage in this vile worship deserved what they got from it. And what did they get from it? The answer is that they got the termination of their own posterity! Yes, such is the amazing providence of God that they, because of their sin and by means of it, became the executioners of their own descendants. Is this not in line with the words of the Psalmist who asks that “his posterity be cut off...Pruned from earth their memory.” To acknowledge this and to see it as a part of God’s righteous judgment upon the wicked takes nothing away from the intrinsic evil of it.¹ That is why God sent His word of condemnation to Solomon through one of the prophets (I Kings. 11:11) but did not send any similar word of condemnation against the subjects of Solomon because they failed to take vigilante action.

And it is right here, in my judgment, that the “Operation Rescue” kind of response to the evil of abortion fails completely. The law of Moses makes perfectly clear the one who is to be seen as the primary culprit. It is “whoever.. .gives any of his seed to Molech” and it says “he shall surely be put

¹ We see the same phenomenon here that we see in the crucifixion of Christ—the greatest crime ever committed. The very means by which the Lord brought about the defeat of Satan and his agents was the crucifixion of the Son of God! (See Acts 2:23,24; 4:27,28 and I Cor. 2:8).

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to death” for it (Lev. 20:2). “And if the people of the land should in any way hide their eyes from the man, when he gives of his seed to Molech, and they do not kill him, then I will set My face against that man and against his family; and I will cut him off from his people, and all who prostitute themselves with him to commit harlotry with Molech.” Now let us be honest. If we could say that it is Biblical for the individual to intervene to stop abortion, then we would also have to say that this duty would involve the execution of all who make use of it. It might be that the abortionist, too, should be executed (I think so). But, for sure, the father or mother should be. And let me say that I believe this would be perfectly right and just. But I do not believe that anyone other than the civil magistrate, given authority and power by God, has the right to carry out such executions.

As it was in Ancient Israel, so once was in the history of the United States. When we had many Bible-preaching churches, we had many godly citizens. They were like the salt of the earth. Their influence was such that the nation had laws which were to a great extent in line with the Word of God on this issue. Abortion was (rightly) considered a form of murder. But now that large sections of the Christian Church are apostate, we have fewer and fewer godly citizens. And the salt has therefore lost its savor. It is therefore not surprising at all that the ungodly demand to be free to murder their children. And this is, indeed, a deplorable situation. But we fail to think Biblically if this is all that we see. And we fail to act Biblically if we think the solution is some kind of vigilante action. As a matter of fact there is a decided plus in the present state of affairs. The plus is the fact that it is largely the seed of the ungodly which is being cut off. Though it is through wickedness that this is being accomplished, yet we can thank God that even in this his sovereignty comes to effective expression. It is therefore the duty of the people of God to have children, and to give highest priority to the nurture of a godly seed.

While they—the modern worshipers of the ‘Molech’ of human autonomy—are killing *their* unborn children, we should not be endangering *our* children—born or unborn—by vigilante ac-

tions which would likely put is in prison and deprive our children of us. No, we should be home-schooling them—or paying to have them instructed in a real Christian School—doing everything we can to give them the heritage of the godly. And—above all—we should be building a church that is faithful to the word of God in the locality in which we live because the recovery will only come as God once again grants Reformation to the church. When *that* is granted, and there are once again churches in every city and hamlet that preach the truth of the word of God, then even the civil magistrate will again learn what his duty is, and do it.

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- **Tertullian**, A.D. 145-220 - Vol. III - of The Ante-Nicene Fathers, p. 25 — “In our case, murder being once for all forbidden, we may not destroy even the foetus in the womb, while as yet the human being derives blood from other parts of the body for its sustenance. To hinder a birth is merely a speedier man-killing; nor does it matter whether you take away a life that is born, or destroy one that is coming to the birth. That is a man which is going to be one; you have the fruit already in its seed.”
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- **Constitutions of the Holy Apostles**, A.D. ??? - Vol. VII of The Ante-Nicene Fathers, p. 466. — “Thou shalt not slay thy child by causing abortion, nor kill that which is begotten; for ‘everything that is shaped, and has received a soul from God, if it be slain, shall be avenged, as being unjustly destroyed.’ (Cf. Ex. 21:23 LXX)
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- **The Council of Ancyra**, A.D. 314 - Vol. XIV of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, p. 73 — “Concerning women who commit fornication, and destroy that which they have conceived, or who are employed in making drugs for abortion, a former decree excluded them until the hour of death, and to this some have assented. Nevertheless, being desirous to use somewhat greater lenity, we have ordained that they fulfill ten years [of penance], according to the prescribed degrees.”
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CHURCH GOVERNMENT BRIEFLY CONSIDERED

by

Dr. Greg L. Bahnsen

An Inescapable Issue

Questions about how the church ought to be governed are not hot topics of conversation in American Christianity. You don't hear much about the subject or read of it in the latest religious magazines. Positions which people take on the issues which are in vogue, however, are often strongly influenced by their view of church government (whether they know it or not).

Everyone has some notion about how the church should be governed—about who should make decisions, what procedures should be followed, the kind of authority that characterizes those decisions or procedures, etc. Just suggest that things be done your way in the church, and you will find out soon enough that others have their own ideas too!

Who determines how the church's contributions should be spent? When should we have a church dinner? Who should preach next Sunday? What should be expected in his (her?) preaching? How does the church pursue reconciliation between offended brothers? How are disputes between disagreeing parties resolved? Who should administer baptism? When? How? Who in particular makes sure the sick are visited or the needs of the elderly are met? Is there any voting involved in answering these questions? Who qualifies to vote on them? Practical questions like these and others cannot be avoided.

An Important Issue

You will hear people say, without much reflection, that the government of the church is a relatively trivial matter, not something over which loving Christians should worry or argue. But then on the other hand, if you take a hard look around you at what *actually happens* in various churches, you will notice that the most *prevalent* reason why people get upset and leave a congregation is not really because of doctrinal differences, but is tied in one fashion or another to the way that congregation was governed or disciplined (or not disciplined). People get fed up, disputes are not peacefully resolved, regular oversight and counseling are not pursued, congregations argue and divide—all because the biblical blueprint for government and discipline has been ignored.

Because many churches have not heeded the

Scriptures with respect to government and discipline, the history of the Christian church reveals abuses and disappointments in the administration of church affairs— from despotic unity to democratic chaos.

The question of how the church should be governed, then, is indeed important, whether ignored by modern believers or not. Today's indifference to issues of church government is at odds with the attitudes of the New Testament church. Just read its early history (Acts) and its correspondence (epistles).

During the early history of the church, for example, Luke found it relevant to relate that the money contributed to the church was under the control of its overseers (Acts 4:35). Later in Acts 15, Luke records a significant account of how the early church resolved a doctrinal dispute by convening a general assembly of its elders—and then authoritatively publishing their decision for the whole church (vv.22-29).

The author of Hebrews made an explicit point of exhorting believers to submit to the authority of their leaders as those who watch for their souls (13:17). Christ in Revelation 2:2 commended the Ephesian church for disciplining the congregation. John wrote that all churches should do likewise (2 John 10-11), especially with respect to false teaching.

If the church is to emulate the New Testament pattern, Christians simply cannot deny or ignore the importance of oversight in the life, activities, and affairs of the church.

Who, then, should have this oversight and leadership? Any Biblical answer must begin by stating that Jesus Christ is the Head of the church, its Lord and Savior (Eph. 1:22-24; 5:23-24; Col. 1:18). Ultimately, He is the one who governs and disciplines His church. All other authority in the church is delegated from Him and is, *for that very reason*, not to be ignored.

How does Christ direct and govern His church? After all, He is not bodily present to make decisions and give audible guidance. Moreover, special divine revelation is not provided every time we wish to visit the sick, resolve a dispute, determine questions of doctrine or buy a lightbulb for the church office.

Three Patterns of Church Government

How does Jesus Christ, the supreme authority in

the church, govern the day-to-day details of His body? Through the history of the church we have seen the development and constant reappearance of three basic patterns of church government: episcopalianism, congregationalism, and presbyterianism.

- 1. Episcopalianism** (or "prelacy") is the rule of the church by monarchical bishops. That is, one man may govern those under him (whether members or other elders), and he need not be chosen by the people to be their leader, but can be appointed by a higher agency. Authority thus rests in the one human priest at the top (a pope or archbishop), is then communicated to his subordinates, and extends from there over all of the congregations.
- 2. Congregationalism** (or better "independency") is the rule of the church by every member and the independence of every congregation from all others. Authority now rests with *the many* at the bottom. Technically speaking, for any given decision which the church may make, every member within the congregation has the same authority as every other; ruling boards are simply an administrative convenience (whose decisions can be overturned by the congregation as a whole). Moreover, no individual congregation is subject to external jurisdiction; associations of churches are voluntary and have no independent power over the internal affairs of their member churches.
- 3. Presbyterianism** is the rule of the church by multiple, elected elders—not the dictates of one man, nor those of the whole congregation. These elders must be chosen by the people from among themselves (men to whom they are willing to vow submission), but also examined and confirmed by the present governing board of elders in the congregation or regional body of elders (the presbytery).

All congregations are connected with each other under the jurisdiction of the presbytery, and all presbyteries are connected under the jurisdiction of the "general assembly" of elders from the entire church—thus allowing a system of graded courts for the purposes of appeal and redress of errors made in subordinate ruling bodies.

The Biblical Pattern

Christ directs his church through the Scriptures, His own self-revelation and authoritative guidance. Let me offer here a brief summary of the Biblical material which I believe is relevant to determining how Christ would have His church governed. The Bible is not silent on this matter.

1. There is no distinction between "elders" and "bishops" (Titus 1:5-7; Acts 20:17,28); these represent the same office and order.
2. Each congregation and center of leadership is to have a plurality of elders (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Phil. 1:1), not one-man rule.
3. These elders have oversight of the church (Acts 20:28; I Pet. 5:2-3) and are thus responsible to rule the congregation (I Tim. 3:5; 5:17; I Thes. 5:12; Heb. 13:7, 17, 24). They judge among the brothers (cf. I Cor. 6:5) and, in contrast to all the members, they do the rebuking (I Tim. 5:20). Christ calls them to use the "keys of the kingdom" to bind and loose (Matt. 16: 19; 18: 18; John 20: 23)—these keys being the preaching of the gospel (I John 1 :3), administering of the sacraments (Matt. 28:19-20; I Cor. 11: 23ff.), and the exercise of discipline (Matt. 18:17; I Cor. 5:1-5).
4. The elders are assisted in their ministry by "deacons" who give attention to the ministry of mercy (Phil. 1:1; Acts 6:1-6; cf. I Tim. 3:8-13).
5. The office-bearers in the church are nominated and elected by the members of the congregation (e.g. Acts 6:5-6), but must also be examined, confirmed and ordained by the present board of elders (Acts 6:6; 13: 1-3; I Tim. 4: 14).
6. Members of the church have the right to appeal disputed matters in the congregation to their elders for resolution, and if the dispute is with those local elders, to appeal to the regional governing body (the presbytery) or, beyond that, to the whole general assembly (Acts 15). The decisions of the wider governing bodies are authoritative in all the local congregations (Acts 15:22-23, 28, 30; 16:1-5).

In my opinion, the spectacular mega-churches of our day are rarely governed in the way mentioned in point 3 above. Points 1 and 2 do not comport with the practice of those churches with episcopalian patterns of rule (Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, etc.). Points 5 and 6 are neglected by independent congregations (Baptists, Fundamentalist Bible churches, etc.). It is in the essentials of presbyterian government, found today in various Reformed churches, that we find the above Biblical points coming to their best expression.

Dr. Bahnsen—Scholar in Residence at the Southern California Center for Christian Studies—is a member of the Pastoral staff of Bayview Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Chula Vista, CA. This article originally appeared in *Antithesis*, which has ceased publication.

THE NEW ZEALAND EXPERIMENT IN REFORMED ECUMENICITY

by

Rev. Jack Sawyer

Four Forms of Unity?

In 1965 the Moderator spoke these words concluding the Synod [of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand] of that year: *Whether we have been aware of it, or not, this has really been an historic Synod. For the first time in the history of Reformed Christianity—as far as I know—the full text of the Westminster Confession of Faith, as maintained by faithful Presbyterian Churches, has been adopted by a deamination also holding the three continental forms of unity.*

With these perceptive remarks by the chairman of Synod, a process of many years was indeed brought to its historic conclusion. He rightly points out the **unique blending** together of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) and the Three Forms of Unity. This decision, however, had not taken place overnight, but had required twelve years of patient study, reflection and discussion.

If we go back to 1953 we find that the Auckland congregation had already mentioned in their protocol, their “cordial acceptance of the Westminster Confession, a rich inheritance of the Reformation in England and Scotland, as a confession of our church.” Some reservations were noted. This was however only a local decision.

Then at the first Synod of our churches in 1953, and again in 1954, the brothers from the (Reformed) Presbyterian Church of Howick, by then seceded from the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand and a member of our federation, overtured Synod to give official recognition to the Westminster Confession as one of our doctrinal forms of unity. Not wishing to be rash, Synod chose the path of careful study and thus 1954 saw the first of an on-going number of study committees which would finally culminate in the decision of 1965.

Early on the study committees made Synod aware of a number of divergences between the W.C.F. and the other Reformed confessions. For example, they noted WCF 7:2 which mentions the covenant of works; WCF 10:3 concerning the salvation of elect infants dying in infancy; chapter 20:4 which defines the authority of the civil magistrate in matters of Christian liberty; WCF 24 regarding marriage and divorce; WCF 25 with its “scholastic distinction between the

visible and invisible church”, and WCF 31 dealing with the authority of synods and councils.

Sister churches in Europe and North America were approached for input and advice by subsequent Synods and by 1959 Synod was ready to give a mandate to the national publications committee to publish the WCF, albeit minus the divergent portions. It was only after the 1964 Synod, where the Auckland Presbytery presented a very substantial report, that the churches were finally convinced that the divergences between the Westminster and Continental Confessions were not contrary but rather correlative and thus fully able to be harmonized. It should be noted that at crucial points the Synods of 1964 and 1965 adopted the American revisions of the WCF which were borrowed from our sister church in the USA, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Thus began what, until now at least, has been a unique confessional joining together of the Continental and Westminster “streams” of Reformed Christianity. This theological cross-pollination, aided by Reformed and Presbyterian ministerial personnel,¹ Reformed and Presbyterian member churches and individuals from both “streams”, has proved to be a sturdy, vigorous hybrid. Mr. Williamson initially described the new doctrinal basis of the RCNZ as “concrete re-enforced with steel.” His remarks have proven to be an apt and accurate metaphor. Only something this strong, stronger than culture, nationality or language would suffice, as it always has been the case in church history, firmly

1. It is interesting to note that for whatever reason—apart from the Rev J A Scarrow and Rev. C A R Larson—the Presbyterian influence has largely come via the Orthodox Presbyterian Church of North America. Time and again a lasting working relation with doctrinally sound local Presbyterian ministers has failed. The OPCNA ministers have generally fitted in well with their Dutch Reformed brethren, while the New Zealand Presbyterian ministers have almost to a man chafed under the perceived yoke of our Reformed polity with its insistence that ministers and their pulpit ministry are under the oversight of the local elders. Given their background New Zealand Presbyterian ministers have been more inclined to see the pulpit as their domain, and perhaps even would have preferred only to be members of presbytery and not the local church. Of course, ministers do not have this option in the RCNZ. This subject warrants more reflection and discussion, and I hasten to add that this is only my personal view.

to bond together such disparate elements as those we have sketched out in preceding pages.* Only a common heritage in the faith, the Reformed faith, could be the glue that would hold us all together. Perhaps then the example of our churches may providentially prove to other Reformed and Presbyterian Churches around the world that organic unity can in fact be achieved between sincere brethren of both Reformed and Presbyterian background.

Confessional Subscription

But would these hybrid Reformed Churches remain faithful to their new doctrinal basis of “concrete re-enforced with steel?” From Christchurch Presbytery came an overture asking for clarification of the Form of Subscription so as to include an explicit binding to the Westminster Confession of Faith. This in turn prompted our churches to reflect on the precise wording of the subscription formula. Would we retain the traditional Continental wording? In this formulation, office bearer signees to the subscription formula state, “by this our subscription we heartily believe and are persuaded that *all the points and articles* [as taught in the confessions], do fully agree with the Word of God.” The other choice was the largely American Presbyterian wording (again a hybrid) that we would replace “*all the points and articles*” with the words, “*the whole system of doctrine.*” Synod decided in 1977 to make this verbal change, otherwise basically retaining the traditional Continental version of subscription.

But by then the question had already been raised at Synod in 1969 by the Rev Fred Channing, of what then precisely constitutes “*the system of doctrine*”? Is the “system” coextensive with all the doctrines of the confessions or do only some doctrines **within** the confessions make up the *sine qua non* of the system of doctrine? Mr. Channing very perceptively warned our churches (see Acts 1060) that if we chose the latter understanding we would in effect place ourselves on the same slippery slope as had the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand with its Declaratory Act of 1901.

The main point of this 1901 Act reads as follows.

“.... diversity of opinion is recognized in such points of the Confession as **do not enter into the substance of the Reformed Faith**, and full authority to determine what points fall within this description is retained for the church.” (Emphasis added)

The historically observable effect of this Act was to allow the assemblies of the church to permit increasingly significant deviations from the express doctrinal propositions of the Westminster Confession, until at last the Westminster Confession in reality ceased to have any binding authority as a subordinate standard of the church. Ministers and Presbyteries, even Gen-

eral Assemblies could steer their own “free” doctrinal course.²

From the days of the Arminian controversy in the seventeenth century, faithful Reformed churches have repudiated the “free” approach to confessional subscription. By God’s grace our R.C.N.Z. would decide to stay on the old path. Following Mr. Channing’s advice our churches adopted in 1971 very special guidelines (see appendix to this chapter) to the Form of Subscription. While later retaining the phrase “the whole system of doctrine” our churches made it very clear that office bearers “subscribe to ALL the doctrines set forth in the confessions, as being doctrines which are the teaching of the Word of God,” and that:

“the subscriber, so subscribes to all those doctrines, be they understood in the eyes of men as being MAJOR or MINOR doctrines of the Christian faith, without any reservation on his part and that he confesses these doctrines to be his own understanding of the teaching of the Word of God, desires to main-

2. In 1729 American Presbyterians had already embraced a similar position called the Adopting Act. A Princeton theologian of this century pointed out “the unfortunate ambiguity of its crucial phrase”: “essential and necessary articles.” For in time, the Adopting Act also allowed local presbyteries to determine if a candidate for the ministry and his personal views fell within or outside of the essential and necessary articles of “the system of doctrine.” This in turn led to widely diverging views from one presbytery to another as to what exactly was within “the system of doctrine.” Arminianism, and later the tenets of German Biblical Criticism, began to be tolerated in pulpits and Seminaries. This precipitated the suspension from the ministry of the eminent J Gresham Machen in the 1930s, as well as the establishment of Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, and the founding of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Perhaps the American experience provides a salutary warning to us of the peril of the phrase “system of doctrine.” History clearly shows that the phrase can be made into a “wax nose” which will shelter individuals who deviate from the Westminster Confession at any number of vital points, and thus are able to promote every wind of doctrine. Confessional subscription via this phrase always begs us to answer the question: “Yes, well and good—but tell me just what is the whole system of doctrine contained in your confession?” It is therefore absolutely vital to define precisely the terms of reference in our confessional subscription formulae. In this writer’s opinion the Continental “all the points and articles” is far more precise than “the whole system of doctrine” wording unless it is accompanied by explanatory guidelines, such as those adopted by the R.C.N.Z., which close tightly its inherent loopholes. The reader is referred to the book *The Broadening Church, A Study of Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church since 1869*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1954, by Prof Lefferts A; Loetscher, pp. 2-4.

tain such, and rejects all other teachings which would contradict the same.”

So the question is explicitly answered in these affirmations.

The system of doctrine in our Four Forms of Unity is to be considered as coextensive with ALL the doctrines set forth in them. Ministers, other office bearers, and even the broader Assemblies are not free to pick and choose for themselves which doctrines make up “the substance of the Reformed Faith” or “the whole system of doctrine.”

It was further re-specified in 1971 that any office bearer who comes to question a doctrine of the confessions must still follow the procedure spelled out in the Form of Subscription itself: namely, he pledges that “he will neither publicly or privately propose, teach or defend” his own views, until these sentiments have first been examined by session, Presbytery or Synod. Refusal to follow this orderly procedure of study and appeal incurs automatic suspension from office.

History has proved that no form of subscription is a foolproof protection against the inroads of heresy. If office bearers lack basic integrity, and if the churches are casual, not vigilant, in earnestly contending for the faith once for all delivered to the saints, then sound doctrine will be lost. Then history also shows that the one “like a son of man...who walks among the seven golden lamp stands” will come and remove our lamp stand from its place among His churches (cf Rev 1-3).

Therefore we must remain vigilant. It is imperative that our office bearers heed the warning so long ago issued by the Apostle Paul to the elders at Ephesus:

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God which He bought with His own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Eph 20:28-30

Dare we, in light of this apostolic injunction, confuse, as so many are prone to do in our day, concern for doctrinal fidelity and precision with a loveless, dead orthodoxy? No, we dare not.

Consequently, our Reformed churches have endeavored through the years to insist that office bearers, meant to be the **loving shepherds** of Christ’s sheep, must *ex animo*—with spirit, with vigorous sincerity—adhere with all their hearts to the pattern of sound words, worthy of full acceptance, the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ and His Apostles.

Believing our Creeds and Confessions to be an accurate summary of this teaching, we dare build our churches on no other foundation. God helping us, we desire most earnestly to be preserved in this course alone; not distorting, and certainly not adding to or subtracting from the Word of our only Lord and Master.

Doctrinal Controversy

Now that our churches had settled on a doctrinal basis, and a form of subscription to that basis, there remained of course the task of applying these tenets to the providentially unfolding challenges of history. As our churches encountered doctrinal differences, and even deviant, heretical teaching, would they continue to listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd, speaking in His Word? How would they react?

Would they retain the Confessional character they sought to establish in the beginning? We turn to a few representative examples to try to answer these questions.

Sabbath or Lord’s Day?

Almost immediately after the decision to embrace the Westminster Confession of Faith, there came a protest from the Reformed Church of Dunedin, regarding WCF 21:7,8. These paragraphs of the WCF contain teaching regarding the Sabbath day and its observance, its origin in creation, the “law of nature,” and its subsequent change from seventh to first day of the week after the resurrection of Christ. The Dunedin gravamen was in itself a reaction to a previous 1964 proposal for our churches to aid in the establishment of a society for promotion of Lord’s Day observance. The protest alleged, in effect, that the Heidelberg Catechism L.D. 38 and WCF 21:7,8 presented two contradictory views of the Sabbath, and that our Synod must clarify which was binding in our churches.

This matter provoked vigorous, lengthy debates in the Synods of 1965, 1967 and 1969 before it was finally settled in 1971.³ Then Synod acted to deny the Dunedin gravamen and applied for the first time the new guidelines to the Form of Subscription. Our office bearers would be bound to ALL the doctrines of the WCF, including 21:7,8 on the Sabbath.

The study committee which proposed this course to Synod sought, to Synod’s satisfaction, to harmonize L.D. 38 and WCF 21:7,8. It is curious to note that our first “Gereformeerde” ministers, in originally spelling out divergences between the Continental and Westminster Confessions had not seen a divergence on

3. The debates, overtures, reports, motions and decisions are too lengthy to reproduce here. The reader is referred to the Acts of 1962, 1964, 1965, 1967, 1969 and 1971.

the Sabbath question, but had on other points of doctrine. The 1971 Synod essentially endorsed their view.

The Infallibility of Scripture

During the late 1960s and early 1970s our churches were also confronted with subtle assaults on the doctrines of Scripture, creation and predestination. These matters were crucial because they concerned the faculty of the Reformed Theological College where our young ministers were largely being trained. The faculty members allegedly promoting disputed teaching were Prof. K. Runia from the Netherlands and Principal of the R.T.C. and later Prof. S. Woudstra on loan to the College from the C.R.C.N.A.

From within our New Zealand churches some members began to assert that our churches were giving tacit support to these men and thus our churches were growing soft in their allegiance to the Reformed Confessions at the disputed points. Their allegations were vigorously disputed.

Even so a number of our founding members withdrew themselves from our churches.⁴ Later they would become members of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Christchurch (today the Evangelical Presbyterian Church) and also the Protestant Reformed Church of Lower Hutt-Wainuiomata. This latter church has called an American minister, the Rev. R. Miersma, from the Protestant Reformed Churches in North America, which were founded largely through the impetus of the late Herman Hoeksema.

Stung by these allegations and defections, our churches saw fit to provide a clear reaffirmation to the Reformed world of our continuing fidelity to Reformed truth. This decision was taken in 1971. (See Acts, Art. 43) It reads as follows:

The Reformed Churches of New Zealand hereby unanimously reaffirm, **in spite of certain allegations** that they maintain the Doctrine of the Infallible Scripture as summarized in the Confessional Standards.

This includes:

- a. That we maintain the historicity of the details **as they are recorded in Genesis 1-3**, e.g., Creation, Adam and Eve as the first created man and woman, the Fall through disobedience and the subsequent promise of divine redemption in Christ;

4. The actions of *some* of those who left our churches can be described in no other way than schismatic. To this day they refuse to be reconciled to the R.C.N.Z. even though our commitment to the Biblical doctrines they supposedly left us over has been repeatedly demonstrated.

- b. Furthermore we maintain that the **whole teaching** of the canons of Dort (including divine election and reprobation) is in complete agreement with the infallible Word of God.

Consequently we require **anyone** who speaks, writes, teaches, preaches or counsels on behalf of these churches to do so in accordance with this statement.

This decision, together with the return of Prof Runia to the Netherlands and the dismissal of Prof Woudstra from the staff of the R.T.C. brought the controversy to a close. It may be noted that subsequent history brought the R.T.C. back to a more careful adherence to the Reformed standards, and that the concerns of our churches were addressed and our support for the College therefore did not slacken.

One further historical postscript will demonstrate R.C.N.Z. commitment to these Biblical doctrines. This was the case of candidate Rinnie Westra. After study at the R.T.C. and further postgraduate work in the U.S.A. his theological examination was not sustained by Wellington Presbytery in July 1970. The point precisely at issue was the question, "Will you reject the teaching that God used an animal in the creation of man?" Candidate Westra could not conscientiously provide an answer which faithfully reflected the Scriptural and Confessional teaching. He therefore was not approved for ministry in our churches, and shortly thereafter left our federation to seek ordination in the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand where his views on creation were acceptable.⁵

Pentecostalism

The great doctor of the ancient church, Aurelius Augustine, pastor of the church of Hippo in North Africa, expressed these sentiments in his homilies on First John,

In the earliest time, the Holy Ghost fell upon them that believed and they spoke with tongues, which they had not learned, as the Spirit gave them utterance. These were signs adapted to the time. For there behoved to be that betokening of the Holy Spirit in all tongues, to show that the Gospel of God was to run through all tongues over the whole earth. That this was done for a betokening and **it passed away.** (Emphasis added).

5. A church's history displays to all the world her true character. I believe these incidents display the sincere adherence of our people to the Belgic Confession, Art/ 2-7 concerning the doctrine of Holy Scripture and the historic Christian doctrine of creation ex nihilo. Cf. Belgic Confession Art. 12 and 14, and Heidelberg Catechism L.D. 19.

In this brief exposition⁶ Augustine propounded what generally has become the *orthodox* consensus of Western Christianity through the centuries.

Of course, this Pneumatological consensus has been variously contested by false, egotistical views of the Spirit and His gifts. We think of the Montanist heresy of the second and third centuries, Anabaptist excess of the 16th century, the Irvingite disturbance of the 19th century in Great Britain and finally the so-called Charismatic or Pentecostal awakening of our own day.⁷

The onset of this modern movement has swept across many denominational frontiers. It is therefore no surprise that Reformed Churches worldwide have been forced to reflect on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and His on-going relationship to the church.⁸ The Reformed Ecumenical Synod expressed concerns in the mid-1970s about the present understanding of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Studies were commissioned.

In light of the R.E.S. resolution, our churches also felt it wise to undertake a fresh study and assessment of the modern Pentecostal movement with particular reference to the New Zealand setting. The result was a lengthy study report tabled in 1977. Subsequently studied by sessions, it was finally received by our churches at the Synod of 1980 in Palmerston North.

One can look back and happily note that the authors of the report upheld the traditional Augustinian/Reformed Pneumatological consensus. Their report faults the Pentecostal movement (in general) as

6. Augustine, "Ten Homilies on the 1st Epistle of John," trans. H. Browne, Vol VII of *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1888, VI, 10).

7. Luther once complained of the fanatics of his day, their disdain for the written Scriptures and their proud confidence in a higher spiritual guidance, by saying that they had "swallowed the Holy Spirit feathers and all." See Roland S. Bainton, *Here I Stand, A Biography of Martin Luther*. For an excellent treatment of the Irvingite "renaissance" of Apostolic charismata see Arnold Dallimore, *The Life of Edward Irving*, published by the Banner of Truth Trust. As a personal note, members of my congregation have repeatedly been told that they and our Reformed Church are bereft of the Holy Spirit because we do not speak in tongues.

8. The purile accusation is sometimes made that there is little or no real emphasis on the Holy Spirit in Reformed Church life. Such accusations are groundless and especially ironic when made by church leaders who ought to know better. The Heidelberg Catechism alone mentions the person and work of the Holy Spirit in 24 Lord's Days. This does not take into account the WCF, Belgic Confession or Canons of Dort. It is far more accurate to say that in the Reformed theology, Biblical Pneumatology is most clearly affirmed.

being "in danger of separating Christ and the Spirit," by its emphasis "upon the baptism of the Spirit as a distinct and subsequent experience after regeneration." The committee report also categorically states "the firm opinion that these gifts (miracles, prophecy, tongues) are not operative in the church today."⁹

They conclude by stating:

...We do believe that God's Word of Special Revelation in the Holy Scriptures leads us to believe and expect that these gifts ceased with the passing of the Apostolic Age, and will not occur again until the restoration of all things. We can only conclude therefore, in our assessment of the modern day Pentecostal phenomenon, that their claims to possess the gifts of miracles healing, prophecy and tongue speaking are false.

Theonomy and Postmillennialism

Another issue which has constrained our churches to "test the spirits" is the Theonomy debate and its logical corollary, Postmillennialism.

In 1976 the book *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* was published by the American scholar and O.P.C. minister, Dr. Greg L. Bahnsen. In this book and in subsequent books and articles, Dr. Bahnsen espoused the thesis that,

...the Christian is obligated to keep the whole law of God as a pattern of sanctification and that this law is to be enforced by the civil magistrate where and how the stipulations of God so designate. (*Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, p. 34.)

In this thesis, we find the basic tenet of a modern movement known as *Christian Reconstructionism* which is also espoused by scholars such as R. J. Rushdoony and Dr. G. North, both of who strongly advocate a postmillennial expectation of Gospel prosperity and the end times before Christ's return.

Our churches became involved in controversy when a number of Dr. Bahnsen's students became ministers in our churches. Though not intentional, their espousal of Theonomic tenets brought about tension among the corps of ministers and our church members. Most of these were from a more or less "Kuyperian background" which, while it emphasized political involvement toward Christian transformation of society, made much less of the normativity of Old Testament Law and was largely a-millennial in eschatological outlook. These feared our churches would be led astray down a path of potentially Judaizing

9. See the Westminster Confession of Faith I:1 and I:10.

legalism, into a false political activism and to embrace an unwarranted and unconfessional, triumphalistic view of the church's victory over the world.

The theonomic proponents, on the other hand, saw their position as clearly within bounds of Scripture and confession. They vigorously rejected any idea of a return to types and shadows of the Old Testament, thus placing a yoke upon believers other than that of Christ their Lord. It was their contention that they were merely upholding the confessional position of the WCF, chapter 19. Differences between "post-mil" versus "a-mill" they saw to be brotherly, intramural differences which fell within confessional boundaries. Since both positions affirm one bodily return of Christ, who will resurrect the dead to judgements of life or damnation and reign for ever in a sinless new heaven and earth, there would be room for both views in our churches.

1980 saw an initial overture request a study committee to evaluate these matters. The committee barely scratched the surface of its mandate and had no report for the 1986 Synod. This Synod appointed another committee which came back to the 1989 Synod of Silverstream with a lengthy report which is summarized in another part of this book. Here we may simply note that our churches again demonstrated a willingness to reach out to one another. A middle way was found and the whole controversy turned out, thankfully, to be a tempest in a teacup. The 1989 Synod unanimously endorsed a number of theses which put to rest any hint even of strife.¹⁰ The Westminster and Continental streams still flowed together.

Marriage and Divorce

Another issue which our churches have dealt with on and off since 1954 is the matter of divorce and remarriage. Perhaps the rising incidence of divorce-broken homes in our modern times has forced our churches to look at the matter seriously.

"The 1980 Synod, in answer to an overture from the churches of Tokoroa and Kerepehi, appointed a committee which was charged, to provide pastoral guidelines for our churches taking into account the further erosion of the sanctity of the marriage state in present times and proposed legislation in our nation... This committee also (was to) consider whether in

10. The reader is referred to Acts of Synod 1989, Report 1. Its authors are to be commended for their moderation, the conciliatory nature of their language, and the Biblical, confessional consensus they helped achieve. As far as I know, our R.C.N.Z. thus became the only Presbyterian or Reformed Church worldwide to forge a Synodical position *vis-a-vis* what has been in other parts of the world a very vexing issue.

light of Scripture the Westminster Confession, Chapter 24: 5,6 needs further specification."

The committee returned to the 1983 Synod with a voluminous report which perhaps may be summarized as an attempt to demonstrate how our Lord's teaching on marriage and divorce in Matthew 5 and Matthew 19 was but a reaffirmation and re-specification of Moses' teaching in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. This was followed by extensive guidelines and attempts to apply the report's exegesis to WCF 24:5,6.

While the report certainly represented a valiant effort to fulfil the committee's mandate, it would be fair to say its sheer volume and technicality frustrated many sessions in trying to come to grips with its contents. This in turn severely limited its usefulness as a pastoral guideline for churches to use in individual cases.

Thus the matter was referred to committee again at the Synods of 1986 and 1989. Finally, in 1992, the churches opted for (provisional) adoption of a far more simple statement on divorce and remarriage. This report appears to be an attempt to apply the principles confessed in WCF 24:5,6 in a general enough way to provide some guidance to sessions which will be faced from time to time with very complex pastoral situations, virtually impossible to anticipate and legislate for at a Synodical level.¹¹

Thus the 1992 Synod, in effect, reaffirmed the simple declarations of the WCF 24: 5,6 and declared it within the jurisdiction and competence of the local office-bearers to deal with each individual case.

Apart from the guidelines themselves, the importance of this matter, historically speaking, will be to show the hesitancy of our churches to legislate beyond the confessions in a complex, much disputed area of Christian doctrine and ethics. Wisdom was shown (in my opinion) in pulling back from the extensive report of 1983, which was in reality almost an attempt to establish a book of "case law" precedent to deal with a wide array of conceivable divorce and remarriage scenarios.

11. The interested reader is referred to Report 16 of the 1992 Synod for the text of the guidelines.

Rev. Jack Sawyer is now pastor of the Westchester Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Mount Vernon, New York. Before coming to his present charge he served two congregations of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand.

WHY I CAME TO A THREE-OFFICE VIEW

A Personal Testimony
by
Rev. Mark R. Brown

Many readers of this magazine rightly hold the memory of Bob Atwell in high regard. In 1978 the venerable Mr. Atwell asked me a church government question as part of my presbytery ordination exams: “Do you hold to three offices or two offices in the church today?” I answered naively that I was not yet sure to which position I held. Because of very limited exposure during seminary days to the issues involved in this debate, I had not yet come to any firm convictions on this subject. As I began my church planting labors in Hollidaysburg, PA, I used the few modern booklets on Presbyterian officers that were available and taught the popular two office view. Only later as controversy erupted in the session would I come to realize that some elements of the current literature were in conflict with our Orthodox Presbyterian Church Form of Government.

The works of Thronwell are highly respected in conservative Presbyterian circles. He said “Presbyterian-ism stands or falls with the distinction between ruling and teaching elders.”¹ All Presbyterian two office views recognize some distinction between preachers and other presbyters. That is why Presbyterian two office views are often labeled 2½ office views because they recognize two different functions (teaching and ruling) within their office of elder.²

Tensions developed at Westminster Orthodox Presbyterian Church Hollidaysburg PA when

several of our elders pushed two office views that allowed for no distinctions of function within the office. I had always taught parity in governing; now these men took it to mean equality in all functions. To recognize distinctions in calling and functions between the pastor and other elders was seen by them as evidence of clericalism, hierarchy, and arrogance. For example, the dissident elders were offended when I would encourage young men to consider a call to the ministry. To them this was a put down. They felt I was falsely assuming ministerial prerogatives to myself. They wanted a rotating pulpit, and the right to baptize, administer communion, and bless the people on the basis of their calling as elders. They were offended that a pastor must be present to conduct session meetings. They preferred to talk of the eldership rather than the session (consisting of a pastor and the ruling elders). I was to be seen as one of the elders. We were all the elder/pastors of the church.³

As our session studied the Orthodox Presbyterian Church Form of Government the opposition of the dissident elders to Presbyterian views hardened. They presented this false choice to the whole session: “Are we going to follow the Bible or the Form of Government?” Our session tried very hard to bring compromise and resolution by using Larry Wilson’s excellent article from *Ordained Servant* entitled “How Many Offices are There?” It clearly sets forth the Presbyterian boundaries of office. The dissidents would not agree that preach-

ing was distinct from ruling. They would not agree that ruling elders could serve who did not teach publicly. They wanted all elders to be preachers. In essence their position was similar to the Plymouth Brethren. They created a new office of local lay preachers and rulers all simply called elders. Of course, this view falls outside the bounds of our presbyterian standards since it disposes of both our preachers and rulers. A helpful analogy to this situation comes from the field of eschatology. Reformed churches allow for pre, post, and a-millennial interpretations while rejecting the dispensational premillennial view as being outside the bounds of the Reformed confessions. In like manner our Orthodox Presbyterian Church Form of Government allows both a teaching elder/ruling elder and a minister/ruling elder framework within our standards while the lay eldership view is clearly beyond our bounds.

Why did this spirit of envy and rivalry develop in our session? I am convinced that it is due to the current confounding of the offices in popular Presbyterian presentations. Where the offices of minister and ruling elder are not clearly defined and distinguished, tensions do develop within sessions. There has been controversy throughout Presbyterian history about the precise relation of the ruling elder to the minister.

The 2½ office view is a mediating view that is both inconsistent and ambiguous. The strict two office men here rejected it as merely a variant of the three office view. In trying to respond to the objections of these two office men, I found solid answers as I discovered the historic three office position. Charles Dennison encouraged me to gather a book of essays on this subject for the benefit of the whole church. That is the genesis of the new book: *Order in the Offices - Essays Defining the Roles of Church Officers*. In addition to some 19th century reprints from Campbell, Smyth, and Hodge, the book consists of new essays by eight Orthodox Presbyterian Church and two Presbyterian Church of America ministers. Our conclusion is that the classic three office Presby-

terian structure of ministers, elders, and deacons better expresses the Biblical framework of church office than does the current two functions within an eldership view.⁴

We often hear the popular phrase that “all Christians are ministers”. Of course, we do not believe that all Christians are preachers, rulers, or ministers of mercy. The word minister (deacon) has both general and special usages. So does the word elder (presbyter). The great mistake of the two office people is in making an across the board equation of the word elder (presbyter) with the ruling elder in all the Biblical passages. Elder sometimes refers to an older man, sometimes to a governor or elder of the people, and sometimes to a bishop or pastor. Many in our day just assume an equation between the ruling elder and the bishop. Do not most Presbyterians today read ruling elders into Acts 20 and I Tim. 3? That is not the view of Calvin and other classic Presbyterian interpreters as Steve Miller and Jeff Boer point out in their essays in *Order in the Offices*.⁵

The question of ordination is highly relevant to the number of offices. The word office itself is not a Biblical term. In common parlance an office is either a function or a position. It can be either a task or a role. By either definition our standards are three office in orientation, as are the standards of the Presbyterian Church of America.⁶ Our form of government defines an office as “a publicly recognized function” (p.17). Note that in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church men are not ordained to the eldership. They are ordained to an office: deacon, ruling elder, or minister (p.73). I have never been good at math, but I count three offices there. The sacred office (position) and the work of preaching the gospel (function) are not equated with the eldership. The ministry of the gospel is not a sub-division of the eldership but is a distinct calling common to all Protestant denominations. The minister is not an elder who teaches but a preacher who also governs. Our standards present three discreet ordinations with three special gifts: teaching, ruling, and serving

(p.17). There are three ordinary offices for the ministry of the Word, rule and mercy. (p. 18).

To speak of two offices within the office of the eldership is an illogical use of language. But, as Dr. Clowney reminds us, the essence of the matter is not the number of offices but whether all who rule in the church must have gifts for public ministry of the Word. Three office views prevent clericalism and preserve the importance of the office of ruling elder in all the courts of the church. Nothing I have said is in any way meant to demean the godly, wise, and respected men who have been called to the office of ruling elder in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (p. 34). I highly value the many godly ruling elders who share in the government and discipline of the church. With Thomas Smyth I would say:

“...ought not ruling elders to be very thankful to us for defending them from the imposition upon them of clerical titles, clerical office, clerical duties, and clerical responsibilities? We think so for who among them could endure to be clothed with the pastoral office without education, fitness, desire, or opportunity for it—without, in short, a call to the ministry.”⁷

In our congregation (and in many others with whom I am familiar from correspondence, both within and without the Orthodox Presbyterian Church) the ambiguous two office view leads to tensions and strife among the officers. May I encourage you to take some time to read Calvin’s Commentaries on the key office passages, Charles Hodge’s three essays on office, and above all Thomas Smyth’s “Theories of the Eldership I and II.” Smyth is to the subject of church officers what Geerhardus Vos is to Biblical theology.

I believe Robert Rayburn is right when he says that the two office view is the opinion of the majority in our circles today. However, many have never studied a positive defense of the classic three office position. *Order in the Offices* is the

first major book length presentation of the three office view since the works of Hodge and Smyth over 100 years ago. Before you reject our classic three office Presbyterian heritage, please give it some thoughtful consideration. I would also be glad to personally respond to correspondence from any of you on this subject.

¹ *Thornwell’s Works*, Vol 4, p. 125.

² Thornwell and Dabney are actually much closer to classic three office views than to contemporary two office views. See the Annotated Bibliography of *Order in the Offices* for references to their views on office.

³ See Greg Reynold’s essay in *Order in the Offices* and Nathan Hatch’s book *The Democratization of American Christianity* on the development of egalitarian views about American church officers.

⁴ All readers of *Ordained Servant* may obtain a copy of *Order in the Offices* at the special price of \$10. postpaid from Classic Presbyterian Government Resources, 807 Peachdale Lane, Duncansville PA 16635.

⁵ Steve Miller writes on “the New Testament Warrant of the Minister of the Word” and Jeff Boer writes on “Calvin’s View of the Teaching Elder-Ruling Elder Distinction.”

⁶ See Robert S. Rayburn’s essay on “Ministers, Elders, and Deacons” in *Order in the Offices* for evidence that the Presbyterian Church of America as well as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church is basically three office in orientation.

⁷ From the essay “The Forgotten Thomas Smyth,” p. 116 in *Order in the Offices*.

Mark Brown is presently serving as pastor of the Westminster Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania. He edited the recent symposium on *Order in the Offices* referred to a number of times in this article.

DEACONS AND/OR TRUSTEES?

by

Rev. Roger Schmurr

I. The Question: Should unordained persons handle the finances and physical upkeep of church property?

II. The Biblical Teaching:

A. In the OT, the Levites and priests handled all contributions and materials used in the worship of God. (Cf. Hodge, What Is Presbyterian Law? for much of this material.)

Exodus 38:21 Priests kept track of everything connected with the building of the tabernacle; of course they utilized non-Levites(22,25)

Numbers 1:50-53 The Levites carried the tabernacle and took care of it.

Deuteronomy 26:12-15 It is difficult to determine if gifts to the poor were handled individually or if the Levites handled these funds as they did others.

I Chronicles 9:26 Levites handled the treasuries for the new temple.

I Chronicles 23:4,5 The Levites oversaw the building of the first temple.

II Chronicles 24:5 Priests collected money for repairs to the temple.
:12 Priests hired people to repair the temple.

II Chronicles 29:16 Priests cleaned the temple.

31:11,12 Priests collected the tithes.

34:9 ff Levites collected and distributed money for repairs of temple and houses (v. 11) which needed

repair. Levites utilized non-Levites in the work (vs. 10-13).

Ezra 3:8,9 Priests and Levites oversaw actual rebuilding of the temple upon return from exile.

Ezra 8:24-30,33 Levites and priests in charge of gifts of money and materials for the new, rebuilt temple.

B. The synagogue example (Cf. Hodge, p. 61)

There were three officers:elders who conducted the public worship (a pastor); rulers who preserved order (or ruling elders); and attendants who managed the finances of the congregation, had charge and oversight of all things belonging to it (our deacons). The person mentioned in Luke 4:20 appears to be such an attendant.

C. Finances appear to be always handled by ordained men.

Acts 6 Seven men were appointed by the Apostles to help them in the work; the work of helping the poor, handling finances, etc. was definitely seen to be spiritual; therefore, the qualifications for this position are spiritual. The NT church took over the structure of the synagogue's government in setting up the diaconate.

Acts 11:20 When the church in Antioch sent money to the Christians in Jerusalem to help in famine relief, ordained men were used to carry the money—Barnabas and Paul. More importantly, note that or-

ordained men received the money in Jerusalem—the Elders.

I Timothy 3:8 ff Paul instructs Timothy to ordain two types of officers who were to take charge of the churches: elders and deacons. No unordained equivalent of a Trustee was mentioned. Philippians 1:1 Evidently deacons now are appointed to help overseers (same as elders, Titus 1). Cf Rom. 12:7, I Pet. 4:11

D. Conclusions

1. Finances and building upkeep were always handled by ordained men.
2. Such work was seen to be spiritual work, requiring men with spiritual training and qualification.

III. The Experience of Churches in this Matter

- A. In What Is Presbyterian Law? J. A. Hodge says that the role of deacons “to take care of the poor, and to distribute among them the collections which may be raised for their use. To them also may be properly committed the management of the temporal affairs of the church... The temporal affairs of the church would include all money raised for the support of the ordinances of the church and for the erection and preservation of the buildings belonging to it. All this may properly be committed to the Deacons.” (p. 63)
- B. Hodge cites the Church of Scotland which makes provision for Deacons to do this.
- C. Hodge also cites the then Presbyterian Church in the USA’s ruling of 1833: “The temporalities of the church generally may be committed to their (the Deacons’) care.” The constitution of that church in 1953 read, “The Dea-

cons may be entrusted, in addition, with the care and management of the temporalities of the church, and when so entrusted, they shall report at least annually upon the same to the session, being subject also to the supervisory authority of the presbytery.” E. C. Blake gave his interpretation of this as Stated Clerk: “If it is desired by the session and the congregation, it is proper and possible for the deacons to be elected the trustees of the church and to be entrusted by the session with the care and management of the temporalities of the church.” (Presbyterian Law for the Local Church, ed. E. C. Blake, Board of Christian Education of the Presbyterian Church in the USA, 1953, p. 54.)

- D. The Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, makes provision for this: “Since the ministry of these deacons is a temporal one, it has been thought appropriate in some churches to delegate to the deacons the office of trustees, an office required of every corporation by the state, to represent the corporation before the state, particularly in holding and maintaining property.” (Biblical Government, K. A. Horner Jr., p. 31).
- E. The Presbyterian Church in the US (Southern) has used its deacons for trustees for years and found it to work successfully. Their book, Chosen to Serve: the Deacon spells out in detail how it all works.
- F. The Form of Government for the OPC makes provision for the ordained men to perform the tasks normally associated with trustees; in fact it assumes that this normally will be the situation: “The board of trustees of a particular church shall ordinarily consist

of the acting ruling elders and the deacons, or the acting ruling elders, in that church, but other communicant members of the church may be elected as trustees if it is desirable, provided, however, that the number of such members shall be less than one-half the total membership of the board. Its duties shall be confined to the discharge of the business described in section 1 of this chapter.” (Property and temporal matters) Form of Government, Ch. 25, S. 3.

IV. The Benefits of Having Ordained Men Handle “Trustee” Functions

- A. You would then have men trained in the doctrine of the church leading the congregation in matters financial. It would be especially beneficial to have men trained in the doctrine of the church handling the budget planning. When decisions must be made about spending for missions and/or local needs, you will have men trained in what the function of the church really is.
- B. The work of the “trustees” will be seen for what it really is—a spiritual work and thus extremely important. Too often, such work is thought to be “secular”, separated from the spiritual function of the church. Little thought is then given to any spiritual qualifications for the office. Emphasis upon the spiritual nature of the work will encourage people to do those tasks often thought of being second-rate in the kingdom. (What would you have thought of the Levites if they were slow in keeping up the temple? Would you have excused them for not fulfilling a “secular” task, or would you have encouraged them to fulfill their spiritual ministry?)

- C. There will be less competition between ordained men of the session and unordained men of the trustees.
- D. Having this type of church government will cut down the number of organizations one belongs to and the number of meetings one must attend.

V. Possible Questions

- A. Would this limit the number of men participating in the life of the church? No, for just as the Levites employed unordained men in the various tasks around the temple, so too the deacons would employ anyone with helpful gifts. It’s simply that the oversight is in the hands of men who have been trained for such oversight.
- B. Would the pastor have to moderate such deacon meetings? Our form of government would require this, at least part of the time. However, some church deacons’ boards elect a president who alternates with the pastor in this duty.
- C. What would be the role of the elders on such a board of trustees? They would be members (see quotation from Form of Government above); but it would be understood that they would not be over-burdened with this job. For as Acts 6 would teach, such men need to be relieved of such (important) tasks in order to spend time in study and prayer, etc.

Rev. Roger Schmurr is presently serving as the editor of Christian Home & School, a publication of Christian Schools International in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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