

Ordained Servant

May 2021

The Importance of Elders



"The Ordination of Elders in a Scottish Kirk" 1891, John Henry Lorimer, National Galleries, Scotland

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CURRENT ISSUE: THE IMPORTANCE OF ELDERS

May 2021

From the Editor

A subcommittee of the Committee on Christian Education, Special Committee on Ruling Elders (Danny Patterson, Mike Shields, and Stephen Tracey), had been tasked

in consultation with the General Secretary to propose specific means for assisting in the education, training, and encouragement of ruling elders in the discharge of the duties of their office, both individually and collectively, and to present a preliminary report to the fall 2020 meeting of the CCE.

The committee observed that ample printed material is available in the archives of *Ordained Servant*. After considering several possible means of achieving this goal, such as a conference similar to the Committee on Diaconal Ministry's conferences for deacons or a video series, like the occasional webinars from the Committee on Ministerial Care, it was determined that a podcast for *Ordained Servant* to address the needs of the office of elder was most appropriate. When a sufficient number of topics addressing the education, training, and encouragement of ruling elders is complete, the podcasts will expand their subject matter for pastors and deacons, encompassing the entire mission of the journal.

Due to Danny Olinger's Covid illness, the launch, which had been scheduled for this month, has been delayed and will be announced when a new date is determined.

I am republishing my 2014 "Democracy and the Denigration of Office" in this issue due to its relevance to the ministry of elders. I am also republishing a slightly revised version of my 2007 article "Ordained Servants: The Importance of the Office of Ruling Elder," which was originally the foreword to the 1987 republication of Samuel Miller's *The Ruling Elder* (1832). Miller was one of the original professors of Princeton Theological Seminary, whose chapel is named after him. *The Ruling Elder* is still well worth reading today as we continue to build on our great Princeton Theological Seminary heritage. A PDF of the reprint is available [here](#).

Along with this theme I have reviewed a very important book by Kornelis Sietsma, *The Golden Key for Life and Leaders: The Idea of Office*. This is a republication of the 1985 translation by Henry Vander Goot, which was then simply titled *The Idea of Office*. It is a profound little book that helped me become a more consistent Presbyterian, coming as I did out of egalitarian liberal Congregationalism and the 1960s counterculture. A PDF of the original is available [here](#).

Alan Strange continues his "Commentary on the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church" with chapters 16–17. When complete this will be

published as a unique resource for church officers.

Danny Olinger brings us the first chapter of *The Writings of Meredith G. Kline on the Book of Revelation*, dealing with the structure of Revelation. Drawing from published and unpublished works to weave the elaborate tapestry of Kline's interpretation of Revelation, Olinger is developing a wonderful resource for interpreting this difficult book. Kline's oeuvre represents a significant development of his mentor Geerhardus Vos, who was the pioneer of orthodox biblical theology. Olinger recently wrote Vos's biography, *Geerhardus Vos: Reformed Biblical Theologian, Confessional Presbyterian*.¹

Stephen Magee reviews the latest book by Rod Dreher, *Live Not by Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents*, in which we are encouraged to cultivate Christian community in order to ward off the incursions of our "pre-totalitarian culture," a culture increasingly hostile to historic Christianity.

Ryan McGraw reviews *A Workman Not Ashamed: Essays in Honor of Albert N. Martin*, edited by David Charles and Rob Ventura. Martin has had a wide influence on Reformed Baptist and Presbyterian ministers across America as he helped revive interest in Puritan ministry, especially in preaching.

Finally, our poem this month is apropos to the idea of office—William Wordsworth, "Ode to Duty." How ironic that one of the chief Romantic poets of the nineteenth century should memorialize duty as a blessing and something to be pursued for a variety of important reasons. Tragic that it has become a curse word in the modern world. Wordsworth begins this poem with a quote from one of Calvin's favorite ancient authors, the Roman Stoic philosopher Luis Annaeus Seneca (c. 4 BC–AD 65). Calvin's first published work (1532) was a commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia* (on clemency). The soil in which Wordsworth's poetry grew was fertilized with the classics of the ancient world, including the Bible. He defended the Church of England although his choice of quotes from Seneca indicates a lack of appreciation of original sin in pursuing duty.

The cover painting is "The Ordination of Elders in a Scottish Kirk" (1891) by John Henry Lorimer, from the National Galleries of Scotland.

Blessings in the Lamb,
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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Ordained Servant exists to help encourage, inform, and equip church officers for faithful, effective, and God-glorifying ministry in the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its primary audience is ministers, elders, and deacons of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as interested officers from other Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Through high-quality editorials, articles, and book reviews, we will endeavor to stimulate clear thinking and the consistent practice of historic, confessional Presbyterianism.

Servant Thoughts

Democracy and the Denigration of Office¹

by Gregory E. Reynolds

Americans are not given to use the word *democracy* pejoratively. Hence, the title of this essay will be disturbing to some. In common usage the word loosely describes a system of government in which the rights of citizens are protected and their voices are given a fair representation in public affairs. Careful students of history, however, will be quick to make certain cautionary distinctions in order to remind us that majoritarian democracy, such as that found in Periclean Athens, and constitutional republicanism, which we often loosely refer to as “democracy” today, are quite different in many important respects.

Our present American system is, in fact, a corruption of the government of our Founding Fathers. While most may naively think of the popular franchise as the essence of the democratic ideal, we do well to remember that the essence of this form was a system of carefully defined, limited, and distributed federal powers designed to keep civil order and foster individual and corporate responsibility at the state and local levels. Furthermore, it assumed the internal constraints of true Christianity, which are now rapidly disappearing in the Western world.²

It is not, however, the purpose of this essay to reflect on democracy as a political system in its relationship to church government. It is democracy as a popular ideal, as a major strand in the fabric of the American mind, as that ideal impinges on the idea of church office, that is the subject of this essay. President Wilson encapsulated this American ideal in giving the rationale for our entrance into World War I with his slogan: “The world must be made safe for democracy.” This theme has been reiterated in President George H. W. Bush’s preachments about a “new world order.”

The popular imagination, increasingly disconnected as it is from its Christian and Reformation past, tends to read “democracy” as a cultural catchword which conjures up a series of narcissistic notions such as: “I have rights; my opinion is as important as anyone’s; I am equal to others in every way; I have a right to education, peace, prosperity, healthcare, and recreation; I may believe and say what I like; and I may do what I like as long as it doesn’t hurt anyone.”

It is not my intention to denigrate the democracy embodied in the founding documents and institutions of our nation or to dismiss all present popular ideas about democracy. It must not be overlooked, however, that in its contemporary popular

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=398&issue_id=91;
http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=403&issue_id=92. This essay is adapted from chap. 13 in Mark R. Brown, ed., *Order in the Offices: Essays Defining the Roles of Church Officers* (Duncansville, PA: Classic Presbyterian Government Resources, 1993) 235–55.

² Claes G. Ryn, *The New Jacobinism, Can Democracy Survive?* (Washington: National Humanities Institute, 1991), esp. 19ff. Here is an excellent primer on the points made in my first two paragraphs.

conception, the egalitarian instinct is destructive to the very institutions that have made our country great. But most importantly, the biblical idea of office has been denigrated in church and state by this idol of egalitarianism. As evangelical Anglican John Stott pointed out many decades ago: “There is much uncertainty in the modern Church about the nature and functions of the professional Christian ministry.”³ It is my contention that this uncertainty has in large part been fostered by a growing egalitarian mentality. Egalitarianism tends to equalize God with man and then man with man, and as a result, office of every kind is destroyed. Authority in all of its God-given forms is radically undermined. When it comes to the government of the church, we tamper with its God-given order at our own peril. Thus, I have chosen generally to use the word *egalitarian* to denote the negative, destructive aspect of the democratic mindset that I am concerned to expose.

My intention is to make a case for a view of church office which has been clearly articulated by Presbyterian and Reformed churches since the Reformation. The “three office” idea (minister, elder, and deacon), though substantially embodied in the standards of most American Presbyterian and Reformed bodies, has fallen on hard times in recent history. This is due in large part to the egalitarian ideal which pervades the American mind and its contemporary institutions. In order to correct this problem as it is manifested in the church, we need to appreciate the cultural forces which have undermined the proper biblical idea of church office. An example that reveals this mind-set can be observed in the way in which ministers are often sought. The process is referred to as “candidating.” In many churches the resemblance of this process to contemporary political candidating is striking and tragic. The prevailing “two-office” view (elder and deacon, for some Presbyterians this means there are two functions of elder—teaching and ruling) is a concession to the egalitarian agenda, even if there is no intention to compromise biblical principle. In fact, it is especially where this compromise is unintended that it must be reckoned with. The traditional three-office idea, on the other hand, properly understood and practiced, will help to overcome all of the deleterious tendencies of the democratic spirit, while promoting the full range of pastoral ministry envisioned in the New Testament.

No doubt both two- and three-office proponents will find a large measure of agreement in assessing the threat which egalitarianism poses to the biblical view of office. Those who claim the two-office view among Presbyterians are usually functionally three-office.⁴ They will also agree, in the main, on the function of church office. But beyond this it needs to be appreciated that the two-office view, especially in its pure form, is, wittingly or unwittingly, egalitarian in its conception and effect, and, therefore, tends to undermine the ministry of the church in our day.

The Historical Roots of Egalitarianism

It should be recognized at the outset that the fundamental spiritual and moral principle of egalitarianism is not equality but autonomy. Put another way, the primary motivation of this democratic spirit is found in its assertion of equality or identification with God.

³ Geoffrey Thomas, “The Pastoral Ministry,” in *Practical Theology and the Ministry of the Church, 1952–1984, Essays in Honor of Edmund P. Clowney*, ed. Harvey M. Conn (Phillipsburg NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1991), 74.

⁴ Larry E. Wilson “How Many Offices Are There? Practical Concerns” *Ordained Servant* (April 1992): 38.

Thus, egalitarianism has its roots not in the Enlightenment, but in Eden. Adam's assertion of autonomy in God's world is the ultimate cause of the democratic mentality in its contemporary expression. The Enlightenment of the eighteenth century is the proximate historical source, which gave egalitarianism its present form.

The word *office* comes from the Latin *officium*, a work or service performed. Biblically, office is a position of specific duty assigned to a person by the Lord through his church. Each believer has a calling to general office. The minister is called to be a servant of the Lord as his spokesman, a minister of his Word. Paul needed to remind Timothy of his office. "Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership" (1 Tim. 4:13–14). The teaching office is God's gift to the church. It is also commanded. Sietsma asserts: "The essence of office depends on the divine mandate."⁵

Man, created as *imago dei*, was given the office of a servant of God. Under God, Adam was called to be a prophet, a priest, and a king—a vice-gerent over God's creation. God's mandate was for his servant to cultivate all of the rich and varied potential of his creation to the eternal glory of God. In challenging the sovereign authority of God to define man's meaning and role in history, Adam forsook his office. He became the first egalitarian by declaring his equality with God in defining his own meaning and role in history. The modern manifestation of this problem should not surprise us. It is at the heart of the thinking and motivation of fallen man in whatever form it may be historically expressed.

At the beginning of our history as a nation, this spirit was clearly present. It must not be forgotten that our nation was born in the twilight of the "age of reason." As a true child of the Enlightenment, Thomas Paine confidently declared "my own mind is my own church." Paine's *The Age of Reason* was a virulent attack on the integrity and authority of Scripture. Several of the Founding Fathers held similar deistic ideas, however more subtly they may have stated them. Autonomy was on the march.

As sociologist Robert Bellah points out in his brilliant analysis of individualism, there are "three central strands of our culture—biblical, republican, and modern individualist."⁶ According to Bellah, the American quest for "success, freedom, and justice" comes to expression in each of these three strands throughout her history.⁷ Benjamin Franklin was the quintessential individualist of the founding era. He was the heroic poor boy made good, who pulled himself up by his own bootstraps and lived by the utilitarian interpretation of Christianity captured in his famous statement, "God helps those who help themselves." The moral maxims of *Poor Richard's Almanac*, such as, "Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise," were rooted not in God and his Word, but in personal utility.⁸ As with Thomas Jefferson, whose *Jefferson Bible* was an attempted reduction of Scripture to its purely ethical teachings, morality was loosed from its Christian moorings. Man was the measure as well as the master of reality and history. God and his Word became the servant of man.

⁵ K. Sietsma, *The Idea of Office*, translated by Henry Vander Goot (Jordan Station, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1985), 24.

⁶ Robert N. Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 28.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

Given this ascendant utilitarianism, it was not difficult for equality before the law, guaranteed by our constitution, to subtly become an equality of individual success. Enlightenment men like Franklin and Paine became exemplars of the American dream. Every man can succeed, given the opportunity and the will. With this shift toward a more anthropocentric view of life, the biblical idea of office began to disappear. Man lives for his own glory. He is no one's servant. He is a law unto himself.⁹ The Enlightenment notion that governmental authority is derived from the people was a secular distortion of the covenantal idea, in which the people of God were called to respond to the sovereign initiative of their Lord. When authority is delegated by God, both government and people have mutual responsibilities. But God's law is king, not the king or the people's law. As authority shifted to the people, the will of the majority became king, and God was simply invoked to bless the popular will (or the will of politicians, as we are reminded at every inauguration).

Though often billed as a reaction to the rationalism of the eighteenth century, nineteenth-century Romanticism was really its offspring, or at least its younger sibling. Men like Walt Whitman and Washington Irving despised the materialism of the Enlightenment-inspired Industrial Revolution. Autonomy, however, was as much at the heart of the romantic movement as it was of Enlightenment rationalism. Whitman's "Song of Myself" says it all in the first line: "I celebrate myself."¹⁰ The romantic poet and the rationalist philosopher-statesman were singing different parts to the same tune. The transcendentalist essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson echoed this theme when he asserted: "Trust thyself; every heart vibrates to that iron string."¹¹

Romantic man thought himself able to plum deeper than the Newtonian geometric-mathematical portrait of reality. The mysterious, emotional, and irrational element of man's nature needed to be appreciated. The logic of the scientist-philosopher was to be replaced by the genius of the artist. The precincts of calculation were to be transcended. Form was to be superseded by life. The authentic individual had to pursue Shelley's "desire of the moth for the star."¹² With man's reason having been set up as the final arbiter of reality and meaning, the romantic focused on the inner feelings, longings, and aspirations of the individual. In the nineteenth century, reason set out on a new voyage amidst the mysteries of life.¹³

It should not surprise us to see rationalistic science and romantic individualism appear together as brothers in the twentieth century. Squabble though they may, they are still kin. The internal combustion engine and the electronic impulse, consummate products of reason, have been harnessed to serve the individual in an unprecedented way. Timothy Leary, a leading proponent of the expansion of the individual consciousness via psychedelic drugs in the 1960s, applauded the new technology, called "virtual reality" (VR), commenting, "I hope it's totally subversive and unacceptable to anyone in power. I am flat out enthusiastic that it is for the liberation and empowerment of the individual."¹⁴

⁹ Sietsma, *The Idea of Office*, 40.

¹⁰ Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*, 34.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹² Crane Brinton, "Romanticism," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 7: 207.

¹³ Franklin L. Baumer, *Modern European Thought, Continuity and Change in Ideas, 1650–1950* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 283–301.

¹⁴ Glenn Emery, "Virtual Reality's Radical Vision," *Insight on the News* (May 6, 1991), 25.

This reminds us of President Clinton's recent assertion that the purpose of government is "empowerment" of its citizenry. As new technologies propelled by egalitarianism reshape our institutions, the individual is rapidly replacing the authority of God, his Word, his church, and the idea of office. As spontaneity and informality express people's devotion to the idol of egalitarianism,¹⁵ individual authority and expression assert themselves with increasing boldness in the church. It is thought by many that in the absence of such self-assertion the church as an institution lacks authenticity and is "morally hypocritical."¹⁶ Thus, the sadly prevailing sentiment is "There's nothing in it for me." Increasingly, the conviction that the church exists to "meet my needs" is held by ministers and people alike as they use the church as a vehicle for their own success.

The Effects of Egalitarianism on Church Office

The immediate precursor of the American War of Independence was the Great Awakening. Despite the spiritual good it generated, it has proved to be a major influence in kindling the egalitarian impulse. Revivalists within the Presbyterian Church of that period were mostly a "force battering at the ecclesiastical structure."¹⁷ The Rev. John Thompson, an Old Side Presbyterian, opposed itinerancy by positing the federalist idea that ruling elders fairly represented the people.¹⁸ But this idea stood against a tide of unrestrained leveling.

One of the plainest popular manifestations of egalitarianism is anticlericalism together with its offspring, anti-intellectualism. Ever since the Reformation, the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers has been misinterpreted by the radical wing of that movement, the Anabaptist (referring to their rejection of infant baptism). During the Great Awakening, revivalist Herman Husband, glorying in his lack of learning, confirmed the anti-revivalists' worst suspicions by boasting, "My Capacity is not below them of the first and greatest Magnitude."¹⁹ Some, according to anti-revivalists, even claimed to be "abler divines than either *Luther* or *Calvin*."²⁰ In claiming the right to question and judge all, the extreme revivalists denied the idea of special office altogether. A genuine experience of God's grace was, for them, the only prerequisite for preaching. James Davenport's "repentance" during the Awakening consisted of burning his books and his clerical garb. He encouraged the laity to assume ministerial authority.²¹

In a well-intended effort to assert the priesthood of all believers and genuine religious experience over against the rationalistic elitism of some of the New England clergy, revivalists, in many cases unwittingly, undermined the authority and integrity of biblical office, especially the teaching office. The tendency to find the source of spiritual authority in the individual rather than in God-ordained office was present in American

¹⁵ Cf. Charles Dennison, "Report of the Committee on the Involvement of Unordained Persons in Worship Services," *Minutes of the Fifty-eighth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (1991), 290.

¹⁶ Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*, 64.

¹⁷ Alan Heimart and Perry Miller, eds., *The Great Awakening: Documents Illustrating the Crisis and Its Consequences* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967), xxx.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 113–14.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 646.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 150.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 260.

Reformed churches from the earliest times. Men like Jonathan Edwards, along with his Calvinistic contemporaries and forefathers, carefully rejected the egalitarian impulse in the Great Awakening, without denying the authentic work of God's Spirit in that movement. Charles Dennison, late historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, summed it up cogently:

The new tone sounding from the Presbyterians harmonized well with the spirit in the new nation in which the democratic ideal blended with the rising evangelical movement. The evangelicals traced themselves straight back to the charismatic aspects of New Testament worship (Ilion T. Jones, *A Historical Approach to Evangelical Worship* [1954], 150). Their perspective had been promoted in part by the Great Awakening and more conspicuously by the triumphs of Methodism. . . . With most, there was a deliberate attempt to keep ministers and layman on the same plane (Jones, 155).²²

In the nineteenth century, this tendency simply spread. No one exemplified it in Presbyterianism better than Charles Grandison Finney. He was a member of the New School party from his conversion in 1821 until 1836, when he became a Congregationalist. "Finney and his colleagues had drunk deeply of the new ideals of democracy and sought to devise new means to reach men like themselves."²³ Finney's "new measures" focused on the individual decision of seekers. Others gave more attention to the emotions.²⁴ New School author Albert Barnes, in opposing the doctrinal strictness of the Old School, had great zeal for "freedom of the spirit."²⁵ But the net result was the same: the individual was king.

Old School Presbyterian Thomas Smyth saw the dangers of the "democratic form" in congregational churches:

Experience, however, proved, as it still proved in Congregational churches, the inexpediency of such a course, its impotency and inefficiency on the one hand, and on the other hand its tendency to produce parties, schisms and disturbances, and even tumults and open ruptures in the church.²⁶

The egalitarian spirit, however, did not find Presbyterianism to be the happiest of hunting grounds, due to the latter's strong and clear view of the importance of special office. Through the office of ruling elder, the laity already played a prominent role in the government of the church. Furthermore, the priesthood of all believers was taken seriously and insured each member a vital part in the worship and edification of the church without giving quarter to egalitarianism.

Presently, however, the power of the democratic ideal in the American mind threatens to overwhelm all institutions which dare to stand in its way. In the church a distorted

²² Dennison, "Report of the Committee on the Involvement of Unordained Persons," 290.

²³ Julius Melton, *Presbyterian Worship in America* (Richmond: John Knox, 1967), 47.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 62.

²⁶ Thomas Smyth, *Complete Works of the Reverend Thomas Smyth, D.D.*, ed. J. William Flinn (Columbia, SC: R. L. Bryan, 1908), 4:18–19.

version of the priesthood of all believers has been reinforced by interpreting Ephesians 4:12 to refer to ministers of the Word equipping church members for ministry. T. David Gordon presents a convincing exegetical argument against this prevailing interpretation:

To sustain such a translation, three things must be proven: (1) that the three purpose clauses, so obviously parallel in their grammatical structure, have different implied subjects (thereby disrupting the parallel); (2) that *katartismos* is properly translated “equip” here; and (3) that *ergon diakonias* refers not to acts of service, in the general sense, but to the overall “Christian ministry.”

If any one of these three is not proven, the entire argument unravels, for the “lay ministry” translation of this passage requires all three conclusions.²⁷

Gordon concludes,

Further, insofar as these “gifted ones” are appointed for the edification of the body, it is detrimental to the health of the body to diminish or otherwise alter the role of the gifted ones. That is, it is a sin against all three components of Paul’s metaphor, not merely against one, to diminish the role of the gift. It diminishes the thanks that are properly due the Giver for his gracious provision. It diminishes the range and degree of edification that the body might otherwise experience. And it diminishes the honor that ought to be given to those we are commanded to honor doubly.²⁸

In his recent impassioned and witty plea for America to return to the behavior and ideals of its WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) heritage, Richard Brookhiser unintentionally made a very important point about egalitarianism. In commenting on the power of WASP America to assimilate a wide variety of nationalities and viewpoints, Brookhiser noted:

It is one of the pleasant surprises of the Irish experience that Catholicism adapted so well. The reason is plain. The Catholic Church in America became Americanized—that is, WASPized. The Catholic Church arrived as the one true faith, outside which there was no salvation, and it became a denomination. It was still the one true faith, of course, but then so were all the others.²⁹

Here is the power, not of the WASP, who is living off borrowed capital and about to declare bankruptcy anyway, but of egalitarianism aimed at religion. All religions are created equal. It is not a big step from that assertion to declare that because all church members are created equal, the idea of office is rubbish—or, worse, that, because it stands in the way of equality and self-fulfillment, it must be abolished altogether.

Where office formally exists in church and state, it is often used more for personal aggrandizement than for service to God or man. The celebrity has replaced the servant as a major mentor in our culture. Every man has the potential to be a star. If that fails,

²⁷ “‘Equipping’ Ministry in Ephesians 4?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37/1 (March 1994): 70.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 78.

²⁹ Richard Brookhiser, *The Way of the WASP* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 23.

watching TV will provide vicarious stardom. In the church, this translates into the mistaken notion that participation in worship requires a spotlight on the individual. So special music and “sharing times” proliferate. Why should the preacher own center stage? Thus, church office often degenerates into a stage for the display of one’s gifts, rather than a means of ministering God’s grace to God’s people. When it comes to opinions and ideas, many people feel that their thoughts have not been “heard” until they have been heeded. As Christopher Lasch rightly concludes, the value of self-restraint has been replaced by that of self-indulgence.³⁰ This is egalitarianism come into its own. Whether one worships in church or in the woods, the individual prevails.

While the view that diminishes the distinction between the pastor and the ruling elder, known as the two-office view, may not be the lineal descendent of egalitarian thinking, it is significant that it was first explicitly articulated in American Presbyterianism in the romantic nineteenth century. Furthermore, it is no coincidence that this view is predominant in our egalitarian present.

If egalitarianism is in the business of leveling distinctions, particularly where authority and office are involved, the two-office view falls prey to this instinct by obliterating the distinction between ruler and pastor. Its tendency is to bring down, not to elevate. At its worst, the preacher is thought merely to be paid to do full-time what the elder does for free. Thus, whatever distinction remains, it is not qualitative and official, but quantitative and practical. But then, ironically, this equalizing instinct brings down in order to elevate itself. In true *Animal Farm* fashion, “Some are more equal than others.” Pure egalitarianism always opens the door to pure dictatorship.

The defenders of the three-office view in the nineteenth century were quick to pick up on this irony in the two-office view. Charles Hodge pointed out that as a consequence of the two-office view, “we are therefore shut up by this new doctrine to abolish the office of ruling elder; we are required to make them all preachers.”³¹ The very people the two-office theory purports to help are deprived of the putative pastoral connection. Hodge continues:

This doctrine is, therefore, completely revolutionary. It deprives the people of all substantive power. The legislative, judicial, and executive power according to our system, is in Church courts, and if these courts are to be composed entirely of clergymen, and are close, self-perpetuating bodies, then we have, or we should have, as complete a clerical domination as the world has ever seen.³²

As Edmund Clowney asserts, to limit rule to those with teaching gifts creates a distance between church officers and the church, and it denies the use of men who are gifted to rule.³³ So, while the three-office idea is often billed as clericalism or elitism, it turns out actually to be just the opposite.

³⁰ Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Norton, 1978), 177.

³¹ Charles Hodge, *Discussions in Church Polity* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1878), 269.

³² *Ibid.*, 129.

³³ Edmund P. Clowney, “A Brief for Church Governors in Church Government” (unpublished paper, 1972), 17.

A further irony lies in the fact that where the two-office view prevails, the plurality of elders in a congregation tends to diminish the importance and therefore the quality of the teaching office. This was not lost on one of Hodge's mentors, Samuel Miller, whose classic work *The Ruling Elder* set the agenda for the nineteenth-century debate on the eldership. He lamented that the effect of the two-office view

would be to reduce the preparation and acquirements for the ministry; to make choice of plain, illiterate men for this office; men of small intellectual and theological furniture; dependent on secular employments for subsistence; and, therefore, needing little or no support from the churches which they serve.³⁴

The two-office idea, then, in its purest form, ends up denigrating both the teaching and the ruling offices. The biblical system requires both as separate offices in order to preserve the full range of ministry mandated in the Scriptures. In fact, most two-office proponents in Presbyterian churches do hold to a distinction between teaching and ruling elders, as species of one genus. This is often popularly referred to as the "two-and-a-half-office" view. But does this not really represent a transition from the three- to the two-office view? As Iain Murray noted of Thornwell and Dabney in the nineteenth century, "When in writing on the call to the ministry they make plain that they are *not* discussing ruling elders—a position hardly consistent with their case" (i.e., for the two-office view).³⁵ The logic of the two-office position is bound ultimately to do away with any distinction between the pastor and the ruling elder.³⁶

The Restoration of Church Office

No doctrine can be properly restored to the church's mind without careful definition. The three-office view is no exception. Distinctions made in the nineteenth-century debate are helpful in focusing the definition. In fact, it was the lack of proper distinctions that characterized the two-office theory for Hodge. The point at issue, he maintained, is

the nature of the office of the ruling elder. Is he a clergyman, a bishop? or is he a layman? Does he hold the same office with the minister or a different one? According to the new theory, the offices are identified. . . . This new theory makes all elders, bishops, pastors, teachers, and rulers. . . . It therefore destroys all official distinctions between them. It reduces the two to one order, class, or office.³⁷

The focus of the question, from an exegetical perspective, is clearly stated by Iain Murray:

³⁴ Samuel Miller, *An Essay on the Warrant, Nature, and Duties of the Office of the Ruling Elder, in the Presbyterian Church* (New York: Jonathan Leavitt; Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1831), 187.

³⁵ Iain Murray, "Ruling Elders—A Sketch of a Controversy," *The Banner of Truth Magazine*, no. 235 (April 1983): 9.

³⁶ Instructive in this regard is the transition made by G. I. Williamson from a two- to three-office view. G. I. Williamson, "A Look at the Biblical Offices," *Ordained Servant* (April 1992): 30–37; "The Two- and Three-Office Issue Reconsidered," *Ordained Servant* (January 2003): 5–6. See also Mark R. Brown, "Why I Came to a Three-Office View," *Ordained Servant* (January 1995): 17–19.

³⁷ Charles Hodge, *Discussions in Church Polity* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1878), 128.

The question which arises is how this Presbyterian distinction between ‘ministers’ and ‘elders’ is to be justified from the New Testament. Upon what grounds should such a title as ‘pastor’ be restricted to one if the word in the New Testament is descriptive of all elders?³⁸

If presbyter is used uniformly in the New Testament to refer to a single office, then the distinction between the ruling elder and the pastor cannot be maintained. But, as Clowney cautioned:

In 1 Timothy 5:17, those who engage in rule are distinguished from those who also labor in the word and doctrine. Again, the fact that both groups can be called πρεσβύτεροι by no means demonstrates that their office is identical.³⁹

Hodge made a crucial exegetical point in recounting the essence of a debate he had with Thornwell:

This is the dilemma in which, as we understood, Dr. Thornwell endeavoured to place Dr. Hodge, when he asked him, on the floor of the Assembly, whether he admitted that the elder was a presbyter. Dr. Hodge rejoined by asking Dr. Thornwell whether he admitted that the apostles were deacons. He answered, No. But, says Dr. Hodge, Paul says he was a δίκονος. O, says Dr. Thornwell, that was in the general sense of the word. Precisely so. If the answer is good in the one case, it is good in the other. If the apostles being deacons in the wide sense of the word, does not prove that they were officially deacons, then that elders were presbyters in the one sense, does not prove them to be presbyters in the other sense. We hold, with Calvin, that the official presbyters of the New Testament were bishops; for, as he says, “[For to all who carry out the ministry of the Word it (Scripture) accords the title of ‘bishops.’]” But of the ruling elders, he adds, “[Governors (I Cor. 12:28) were, I believe, elders chosen from the people, who were charged with the censure or morals and the exercise of discipline along with the bishops.]” *Institutio, &c.* IV. 3. 8.⁴⁰

Some defenders of the three-office view, such as Thomas Smyth, held that ruling elders were never referred to in the New Testament “under the term presbyter or elder, which always refers to the teacher or bishop solely.”⁴¹ Like Calvin, he found his warrant for the office of governor or ruling elder in passages such as 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Romans 12:8. He understood passages such as 1 Timothy 3; 5:17; Titus 1; Acts 20 as referring only to ministers of the word. On the other end of the exegetical spectrum of three-office defenders, Samuel Miller understood the above passages to refer to both

³⁸ Iain Murray, “Ruling Elders—A Sketch of a Controversy,” *The Banner of Truth Magazine*, no. 235 (April 1983): 1.

³⁹ Edmund P. Clowney, “A Brief for Church Governors in Church Government” (unpublished paper, 1972), 15.

⁴⁰ Hodge, *Church Polity*, 130. (Battles's English translation in the Library of Christian Classics is substituted for Hodge's quotation of Calvin in Latin.)

⁴¹ Thomas Smyth, *Complete Works of the Reverend Thomas Smyth, D.D.*, ed. J. William Flinn (Columbia, S.C.: R. L. Bryan, 1908), 4:26.

offices together. Miller, nonetheless, clearly held the three-office view.⁴² In fact, Hodge declared himself to be in complete agreement with Miller as to the nature of the ruling office, only differing with him in the method of establishing its biblical warrant.⁴³ Exegetical uniformity is not required in order to base the view clearly on Scripture.

Hodge summed up the three-office position robustly:

This is the old, healthful, conservative doctrine of the Presbyterian Church. Ministers of the word are clergymen, having special training, vocation, and ordination; ruling elders are laymen, chosen from the people as their representatives, having, by divine warrant, equal authority in all Church courts with the ministers.⁴⁴

Much study of this question needs to be carried out by Presbyterians. The integrity of the offices of both ruling elder and minister is at stake. And while we need to take seriously the warning of Thomas Smyth that our devotion does not “terminate on the outward form, order, ministry or ordinances of any church,”⁴⁵ we must not forget that the proper biblical form of office will best serve the Lord who ordained it. This is true of both offices.

The 1941 edition of the *Form of Government* of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church began the chapter “Of Ministers”: “The office of the minister is the first in the church, both for dignity and usefulness.” But this phrase was deleted from the chapter describing the office of minister in the 1978 revision, as an accommodation to the two-office view. The chapter title was also changed from “Of Ministers” to “Ministers or Teaching Elders.” Interestingly the sentence remains in the chapter on “Ordaining and Installing Ministers” (23.8, 14). However, its omission in the description of the ministerial office is unfortunate because ultimately the centrality of preaching is at stake. Calvin said it well: “God often commended the dignity of the ministry by all possible marks of approval in order that it might be held among us in highest honor and esteem, even as the most excellent of all things.”⁴⁶ It is not the privilege of persons, but the dignity of God’s Word which is being upheld. Egalitarianism, lacking any real conception of office, tends to see all official distinctions as tools of oppression. A biblical servant, however, will see such a distinction as a tool of ministry and himself as an instrument of God’s grace.

The three-office doctrine also preserves the ruling function of the eldership. As both Hodge and Clowney pointed out, the two-office view creates a gap between the clergy and the people. As every faithful minister knows, the oversight of the flock is impossible to maintain alone. The three-office position allows ruling elders to focus on the application of what the minister teaches from God’s Word. The three-office position, rightly understood, alone preserves the true dignity and effectiveness of the ruling office.

Only a careful distinction of offices will ultimately preserve the proper functions of each. Historically, the two-office scheme leads to the disappearance of the ruling elder and the atrophy of lay leadership. In some circles, the teaching function has been

⁴² Samuel Miller, *An Essay on the Warrant, Nature, and Duties of the Office of the Ruling Elder, in the Presbyterian Church* (New York: Jonathan Leavitt; Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1831), 28.

⁴³ Hodge, *Church Polity*, 129.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁴⁵ Smyth, *Works*, 4:26.

⁴⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, LCC, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 4.3.8:1055.

demeaned, but this seems to be the case more where the “no-office” idea prevails, as in Brethrenism. When everyone is a minister, no one is. The egalitarian impulse, by its very nature, erodes the idea of office to the great harm of the church.

The benefits of the three-office view are manifold. First, the parity of rule protects the church from tyranny. The minister does not rule alone. There is a balance of power—a system of checks and balances. As Miller noted, the ruling elder has “an equal voice. The vote of the most humble and retiring Ruling Elder, is of the same avail as that of his minister.”⁴⁷ Sietsma observed, “It must be remembered that office is the only justification and the proper limitation of any human exercise of power and authority.”⁴⁸ The three-office view brings this idea into its own. Egalitarianism allows power to fall into the hands of the domineering and gives voice ultimately to the loudest mouth.

Second, the three-office doctrine provides leadership. The minister, as a scribe of the Word, is a leader among the rulers. He is normally the moderator of the session, a first among equals. A ship cannot sail without a captain. As Geoffrey Thomas pointed out:

Where plural elders are in existence, the principle of single leadership is necessary. Nowhere in the Scriptures do we find leadership exercised by a committee with one man acting as a kind of chairman, although that is the consequence of the concept of parity among plural elders in many cases today.⁴⁹

In preventing ministers from lording it over the elders, the two-office view tends to leave a vacuum of leadership. Smyth declared, “Ministers are like the head from which proceeds the stimulus, guidance, and direction, which are essential to the vitality, the activity, the dignity, and the harmony of the system.”⁵⁰ Egalitarianism engenders lordship, not leadership.

Third, the three-office view allows the minister to focus on the ministry of the Word, unhindered by the multitude of concerns that only the group of elders can attend to with him. How many of the pulpits of our land suffer because of the inordinate demands made on a minister’s time? Jethro’s advice to Moses is as pertinent today as it was over three millennia ago: “What you are doing is not good. You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone.” (Exod. 18:17–18). The apostles put this principle into practice in the calling out of deacons in Acts 6. Egalitarianism leads not only to tyranny but to burnout.

Fourth, this view allows for the proper and effective implementation of discipline, which the minister could not appropriately or practically provide on his own. Egalitarianism leads to moral chaos.

Finally, the three-office idea provides for the needs of all of the people. Miller beautifully depicted this full-orbed ministry:

⁴⁷ Miller, *The Ruling Elder*, 197.

⁴⁸ K. Sietsma, *The Idea of Office* (Jordan Station, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1985), 15.

⁴⁹ Geoffrey Thomas, “The Pastoral Ministry,” in *Practical Theology and the Ministry of the Church, 1952–1984, Essays in Honor of Edmund P. Clowney*, ed. Harvey M Conn (Phillipsburg, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1991), 78–79.

⁵⁰ Smyth, *Works*, 4:28.

In every department of official duty, the Pastor of this denomination has associated with him, a body of pious, wise, and disinterested counselors, taken from among the people; acquainted with their views; participating in their feelings; able to give sound advice as to the wisdom and practicability of plans which require general co-operation for carrying them into effect; and able also, after having aided in the formation of such plans, to return to their constituents, and so to advocate and recommend them, as to secure general concurrence in their favor.⁵¹

There are several things which need to be done to promote a more biblical view of office in our churches. First, people need to be instructed about the nature and dangers of egalitarianism. Most people are unaware of the democratic assumptions that are part of the fabric of the worldview in which they have been nurtured as Americans. To the extent that these assumptions are unbiblical, church officers, especially ministers, must foster the transformation of people's minds, so that they will not be conformed to this world (Rom. 12:1–2).

Second, pastors and elders need to encourage each other to fulfill the ministries to which God has called them. This means that each must be aware of the biblical requirements, duties, and limits of the offices of pastor and ruler. In particular, each must understand what is specifically expected of them in the local congregation. The strengths and weaknesses of each officer should be openly discussed in the privacy of the session. Special strengths and gifts should be appreciated and cultivated so that the wide variety of needs in a given congregation will be met.

Third, a good working relationship should be cultivated among elders and ministers. This means developing biblical communication and conflict-resolution skills. The session must see itself as a team. This means that the individualist instinct must be suppressed in ministers and elders. Matters under discussion must be kept confidential. When decisions are made, the dissenter should keep his disagreement to himself unless it involves moral or doctrinal absolutes. Then the proper means of discipline should be judiciously used to deal with sin and heresy.

One of the greatest temptations presented by the democratic mentality is the idea that the ruling elder is a sounding board for congregational discontent or an agent for special interests. Smyth was aware of this danger already in the nineteenth century, when he warned:

Remember, however, that while you are the representatives of the people, you represent not their WISHES and OPINIONS, but their DUTIES and OBLIGATIONS, THEIR RIGHTS AND PRIVILEGES, as these are laid down in those heavenly laws to which you and they are both alike subject, and which no power on earth can either alter, modify, abridge, or enlarge.

Because pride enhances this temptation he added, "Seek not popularity at the expense of fidelity."⁵²

The idea, rightly emphasized by Hodge and others, that ruling elders are "representatives of the people" can easily be misused in order to pit the minister against

⁵¹ Miller, *The Ruling Elder*, 311–12.

⁵² Smyth, *Works*, 4:31.

the people, as if the pastor did not sympathize with their concerns. Frustrated preachers must not treat their elder as Absaloms. Annual sessional retreats, together with a wise and regular system of visitation by elders and minister, will do much to prevent such abuse.

The session must present a united front. This means that a wedge should never be allowed to be driven between a pastor and the elders. The pastor must be teachable and humble, never demanding his agenda. But it also means that the ruling elder must protect the pastor from the power of destructive criticism. Criticism itself is healthy, but the Devil, the original egalitarian, is a master at inspiring unjust criticism and using just criticism divisively to ruin churches and drive good men from the ministry. The wise elder will try to answer the criticisms and concerns of members on the spot or bring the matter directly to the pastor (with the critic, if necessary). It is crucial that elders support the pastor, especially when they disagree with him. Berghoef and DeKoster have an excellent section on this subject.⁵³ This would be a superb book for sessions to work through together. Finally, ministers and elders will serve the Lord and promote the godly government of his church best by being servants of God and his people. The three-office view, by itself, will not restore true ministry to the church. Only if those who fill the offices have the mind of their Master, the mind of a servant (Phil. 2:5–11), will egalitarianism be kept at bay and the kingdom of God built. The individualist will use the office for his own personal fulfillment and thus denigrate the office. The servant will seek the glory of his Lord.

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⁵³ Gerard Berghoef and Lester DeKoster, *The Elder's Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Christian Library, 1979), 160–62. Cf. Lawrence Eyres, *The Elders of the Church* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1975), 17–18.

Servant Work

Ordained Servants: The Importance of the Office of Ruling Elder¹

by Gregory E. Reynolds

A friend and colleague in the ministry recently told me that he resigns every Monday morning—mentally, that is. I believe this conveys both a true sense of the intensity and difficulty of our calling—that is the nature of the ministry itself—but especially the unique difficulty of the ministry in our times. Luther said something like, “If anyone had told me about what the ministry was really like, ten wild horses could not have dragged me into it.” Paul reported that, “apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches” (2 Cor. 11:28). Some things never change. I was reminded near the beginning of my own ministry of this, when in the early 1980s a retired Reformed minister named John Piersma told Bill Shishko and me that he did not envy us entering the ministry in the late twentieth century, because, he maintained, there is little respect for the ministerial office in the modern world. I would add to this that alongside, and partly responsible for spawning, this egalitarianism is the dramatic rearrangement of social space and consciousness by the electronic environment. This combination of influences has made our world an extraordinarily challenging place in which to minister. The presence of ruling elders in the church is God’s way of helping the minister and the congregation to wisely deal with the modern environment.

This is the world in which we, as servants of the risen Lord, have been ordained to serve. It is essentially the same sinful, confused, rebellious world in which Paul ministered. Above all, it is the world in which the risen Lord Jesus Christ is gathering his elect from among the nations to join him in inheriting the glorious kingdom over which our Lord is presently the monarch.

The Importance of the Eldership²

One of the great causes of the contemporary church’s weakness is its failure to understand, accept, and implement the biblical form of church government. An essential element of that form is found in the scriptural office of the ruling elder. While it has often been thought that the word “Presbyterian” in the name of a denomination or local church

¹ This article first appeared in *Ordained Servant* 16 (2007): 9–11; *Ordained Servant Online* (Jan. 2007) http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=31. It has been modified.

² Based on the “Forward” to *The Ruling Elder* by Samuel Miller. Dallas TX: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1987 (Reprint of 1832 edition) iii-vii. © Copyright 1987 by Gregory E. Reynolds. The text of this edition was taken from the second edition of Samuel Miller’s *An Essay, on Warrant, Nature and Duties of the Office of the Ruling Elder, in the Presbyterian Church* (New York: Jonathan Leavitt; Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1832).

obscures the biblical witness of that church, it should be remembered that the word itself is preeminently biblical. “Presbyterian” comes from the Greek word πρεσβύτερος (*presbuteros*), which means “elder.” (In various forms πρεσβύτερος, *presbuteros*, occurs seventy times in the New Testament.) Since good ordering of the church was important to the New Testament church, we must take church government seriously. It is an important means of spiritual formation. To lament the low state of doctrine and morals in the church today, while simultaneously neglecting and, perhaps, even disdaining one of the chief means which God has appointed to correct these problems, is reprehensible and foolish.

Not only does Christ, as the head of the church, have the *right* to institute an office such as the ruling elder, but, as the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for the flock, he has done so for the spiritual health and welfare of his people both now and forever (Heb. 13:17).

Why, then, has this good office been largely abandoned by the church in our day? I believe that there are two major reasons.

First, in battling the theological liberalism over the past century, orthodox Christians have minimized doctrinal differences and theological precision in favor of a broad coalition based on certain “fundamentals.” It, thus, becomes convenient to dismiss biblical doctrines which are not under attack as unimportant or even “divisive.” This reduction of the church’s confession of its beliefs has been aided and abetted by the anti-intellectualism of modern America, leading to an emphasis on emotion at the expense of clear thinking.

Pragmatism has never been a friend of careful thought, and the modern church often seems more interested in getting things done than in considering the biblical warrant or theological foundation for a given activity. Why waste precious time discussing church doctrine when souls are going to hell? Besides, assuming that evangelism is the central task of the church, rather than the careful oversight and feeding of the flock, doctrine might get the church off track. Hence, it has become generally accepted by religious leaders and laity alike that church government is not only secondary to but also outside the scope of biblical and pastoral concern.

Second, the minimizing of doctrine has combined with another unbiblical ingredient—radical individualism, which is the logical result of egalitarianism—to thwart the exercise of biblical church government. The spirit of the Enlightenment has blossomed in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Each man is his own master, accountable to no one but himself. In the church this individualism translates to: “All I need is my Bible and my God. Anything and anyone else are a threat to my freedom.” Pastors may preach, but they had better not meddle. The idea of a body of ruling elders overseeing and shepherding the flock of God has fallen on hard times.

It is incumbent on elders and ministers of the Word to identify this autonomous instinct for what it is: rebellion, not an inborn right. It is perhaps somewhat understandable that secular man in Western democracies should overreact to the spread of totalitarianism in our century. What is sad, though, is that Christians often fail to realize that both totalitarianism and individualistic egalitarianism are children of the same diabolical parent: autonomous freedom. To live in absolute independence from God has been the agenda of fallen man ever since his rebellion in Eden. This autonomous freedom is the essence of secularism. In fact, pure democracy and the resultant chaos of everyman rule have often paved the way for totalitarian control, as seen in the French revolution.

The “one-man show” syndrome in most Baptist churches offers a case in point. At its worst this instinct, fueled by modern technologies, levels all of reality to the horizontal—the human—eviscerating human experience of all transcendence.

The other side of this secular cycle is revolution against the dictator or ruling class. Strict Plymouth Brethrenism, in which there are no officers, along with the general disdain for official authority in the church at large are cases of this reaction. Resisting the concept of church membership and walking away from problems and conflicts are both symptomatic of this pernicious spirit.

Both the abuse of God-ordained authority and the failure to respect that authority are, of course, equally unbiblical. Only a biblical view of eldership will enable the church to avoid this Scylla of dictatorship and Charybdis of radical individualism. The church will steer a safe course in this and every area only if she consciously charts that course according to the inspired map and compass of Scripture.

Positively speaking, when delegated authority in the church is respected by the people and exercised faithfully by the officers, it will bring glory to God and good to his flock (Eph. 4:11–16). In the church, unlike the world, authority is exercised in service, not to self, but to God and his people. The ruling elder is called to be an undershepherd of his self-sacrificing Lord (Acts 20:28). His regard is chiefly for the glory of his Lord and the welfare of his blood-bought flock.

In the present climate of the tyranny of cults, the impersonal manipulation of the mega-churches and mass-media ministries, the therapeutic individualism of the emergent church, and the general malaise of the average church’s leadership, a return to biblical church government is desperately needed. The doctrine of the ruling elder must be a keystone in any reform.

Today, the church must remember her true identity. In returning to her biblical roots, she will do well to consult the men who have best guided her in the past. In the area of church government, Samuel Miller’s *The Ruling Elder: On the Warrant, Nature, and Duties of the Office of the Ruling Elder in the Presbyterian Church*, should be among the first on the list. There are many other useful sources in our tradition.³ Here are a few:

Bibliography on the Eldership

I have given the latest printings of the following books.

* Available in PDF by this link

³ Presently, we need to reach back into our Presbyterian heritage. A good place to start is Samuel Miller’s *The Ruling Elder*. It was originally published in 1831 and proved seminal to all subsequent debate on biblical eldership. Though Miller’s work was an American first, he saw himself building on a rich tradition of teaching on church office. For example, Miller demonstrates that the essential idea of the office of ruling eldership is not a New Testament innovation but harkens back to Mosaic times. Neither is eldership the ecclesiastical invention of John Calvin. It was recognized by the earliest sixteenth-century reformers; and, in turn, they simply rediscovered and amplified what the ancient church had once known. It should also be pointed out that some of Miller’s exegesis tends toward a two-office view. For example, he understands 1 Timothy 3 to apply to both elders and ministers, despite the fact that he along with most of his colleagues held a three-office position. As a man of his age, Miller was not entirely free of a few unbiblical customs then current. The most glaring example of this fault concerns his approval of the practice of allowing non-communicating, unbaptized tithers to vote in the election of elders. He believed this was a practical necessity, the abuse of which would be safeguarded by the jurisdiction of presbytery. Fortunately, due to the lack of salary, the election of ruling elders was not subject to the same corruption of patronage as was the salaried teaching eldership. The book, however, is remarkably free of this sort of anachronism.

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Servant Truth

The Writings of Meredith G. Kline on the Book of Revelation: Chapter 1—A Study in the Structure of the Revelation of John” (1945)

by Danny E. Olinger

Meredith Kline in his “A Study in the Structure of the Revelation of John” took issue with the interpretation of Revelation by the Reformed expositor William Hendriksen. Kline agreed with Hendriksen that a recapitulationist reading, that is, a structural principle of parallelism, is necessary for a proper interpretation of Revelation. Still, Kline judged that Hendriksen—in his insistence that there are seven parallel sections in Revelation that span the era between the first and second comings of Christ—had sacrificed a proper emphasis in the final chapters of Revelation for the sake of establishing a symmetrical arrangement. Kline said, “It is perhaps the greatest single weakness of Hendriksen’s view” that he is compelled to make the mere applicability of the text concerning the seven Asian churches to the church throughout the New Testament age “the entire basis for the parallelism of this division with the others.”¹ According to Kline, Hendriksen had not applied adequately Hendriksen’s own belief that there is progress in eschatological emphasis in Revelation, especially in regard to the final judgment in his sixth (Rev. 17:1–19:21) and seventh (Rev. 20:1–22:21) divisions.

But, despite these criticisms of Hendriksen, Kline was thoroughly committed to the recapitulationist position. He stated, “Whatever may be its dangers of being abused, however, this structural principle of synchronism or parallelism or recapitulation is valid and necessary to a proper interpretation of Revelation.”² His stated thesis of the study was to enhance this hermeneutic by dealing with certain objections to the recapitulationist reading, by exegeting the climaxes of the main divisions in the text, by contrasting the church imperfect in the world with the church perfect in heaven, and by showing the centrality of Christ’s person and work.

Objections to the Recapitulationist Reading

Kline first engaged the objections raised against a recapitulationist reading by David Brown in his 1891 book, *The Structure of the Apocalypse*. Brown, professor of theology at Free Church College of the University of Aberdeen, advocated understanding Revelation as a presentation of successive events in history where the kingdom of God is oppressed by

¹ Meredith G. Kline, “A Study in the Structure of the Revelation of John” (Master’s thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1945), 20.

² *Ibid.*, 1.

hostile world powers. In particular, Brown maintained that Revelation shares the same sequence of historical empires found in the book of Daniel.

Kline answered that the idea of the world's hostility to the kingdom of God is true enough, but the concept that successive periods of history are required to interpret Revelation correctly is erroneous. In Daniel, the coming of God's kingdom in Christ, the stone smiting the image (Dan. 2), does away with world powers, but, in Kline's words, "we do not—cannot—interpret this literally."³ It is a spiritual outlook of the state of affairs brought about by the coming of Christ that John in Revelation shares with Daniel.

Brown also objected to the recapitulation interpretation on the grounds that it fails to present a sufficient motive for the composition of Revelation. Kline responded that it was close to presumption on Brown's part to judge what constituted a proper motive for God's including any specific form of revelation in his Word. Not only is such a consideration highly subjective, but also it disparages those recapitulationist readers (such as Kline himself) who find Revelation to be "the fairest gem in Scripture, uniting in a fitting consummation of the Divine Word the most precious themes of the Bible."⁴ The Apocalypse illumines the prophetic element of the Old Testament, elaborates and unifies New Testament eschatology, and provides an inspiration by its solemn majesty that is not found so impressively anywhere else.

Outline of Revelation

Having answered Brown's objections of an introductory nature to the recapitulation view, Kline then proposed an outline that built upon Hendriksen's recapitulation scheme⁵ but recognized the eschatological progress inherent in Revelation. He wrote,

The divisions which commend themselves to me are these:

Introduction 1:1–8;
The Church Imperfect in the World, 1:9–3:22;
The Seven Seals, 4:1–8:1;
The Seven Trumpets, 8:2–11:19;
The Deeper Conflict, 12:1–14:20;
The Seven Bowls, 15:1–16:21;
The Final Judgments, 17:1–21:8;
The Church Perfect in Glory, 21:9–22:5;
Conclusion, 22:6–21.⁶

Kline acknowledged that "some demonstration seems required" for the variance between his "Final Judgments" division, Revelation 17:1–21:8, and Hendriksen's sixth,

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁵ Hendriksen divided Revelation as follows: "1. Christ in the midst of the seven golden lampstands (1–3). 2. The book with seven seals (4–7). 3. The seven trumpets of judgment (8–11). 4. The woman and the Man-child persecuted by the dragon and his helpers (the beast and the harlot) (12–14). 5. The seven bowls of wrath (15, 16). 6. The fall of the great harlot and of the beasts (17–19). 7. The judgment upon the dragon (Satan) followed by the new heaven and earth, new Jerusalem (20–22)." William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (Baker, 1998; originally published in 1939), 21.

⁶ Kline, "Structure of Revelation," 3 (line-by-line arrangement of quoted text).

Revelation 17:1–19:21, and seventh, Revelation 20:1–22:21, divisions. Kline noted that the main characters previously introduced in Revelation—Babylon and the beasts, Satan, unbelievers, and overcomers—reappear in Revelation 17:1–21:8. In these chapters, they are dealt with in respect to their final destinies. Babylon and the beasts appear in Revelation 17:1–19:21, Satan appears in 20:1–10, unbelievers appear in 20:11–15, and overcomers appear in 21:1–8.

For Kline, this unity of theme was typically disregarded but appeared to him in the narrative to be decisive. He then listed three considerations to confirm this conclusion. First, he noted the significance of the internal marker “Come hither.” Revelation 17:1 begins with one of the seven angels of the seven bowls series saying to John, “Come hither.” The angel then promises to show John the judgment upon the harlot-Babylon⁷ with whom the kings of the earth and earth-dwellers have cast their lot. Revelation 21:9 begins in the same manner with one of the seven angels of the seven bowls series saying to John, “Come hither.” The angel then promises to show John the bride, the wife of the Lamb. According to Kline then, the “come hither” repetition combined with a change in the focus of the content is a strong clue that Revelation 17:1–21:8 should be seen as a unit.

Second, if Revelation 17:1–21:8 is a unit, then Revelation 21:8 (“But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death”) is an apt conclusion to the theme of judgment that predominates.

Finally, if the division is made at Revelation 20:1 as Hendriksen recommended, then Hendriksen’s resultant division of Revelation 20:1–21:27 would be the only one not marked by a clear formal boundary. In Kline’s judgment, it would not avail to maintain that Satan’s appearance in Revelation 20:1–10 constitutes a new major theme. As Kline explained, “Just because a red horse gallops forth at the opening of the second seal, nobody will claim the second seal is a new theme since the preceding and following seals introduce difference horses. The seals unify all. So Satan is introduced to develop the same theme of Final Judgment which both precedes and follows 20:1–10, and unifies all.”⁸

Climaxes of the Major Divisions of Revelation

Kline had little patience for those outside the recapitulationist camp who maintained that the visions from Revelation 4:1 forward are to be understood as chronologically successive. He clamored, “Futurists who claim that 4:1 on deals with the final segments of this age only, usually torture the seven letters into the form of an historical succession leading up to the end, but to no avail.”⁹ Rather, the textual fact is that the climaxes to the seals, trumpets, and bowls series all picture the end of the gospel age. Consequently, the visions are not chronologically successive, but parallel in their temporal scope. Kline proceeded to show exegetically how each of the major divisions from Revelation 4:1 onward pictures the end of history.

⁷ Kline freely interchanged the terminology “Babylon” and “harlot-Babylon” not only throughout this paper, but also throughout his writings on the book of Revelation as a whole.

⁸ Kline, “Structure of Revelation,” 3–4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

The Seven Seals, Revelation 4:1–8:1

In the “Seven Seals” division, Revelation 4:1–8:1, Kline maintained that the seals reach the end of the age already in the sixth seal, Revelation 6:12–17. The biblical understanding of “great day” in Revelation 6:17 confirms this deduction. When the Old Testament prophets Joel and Malachi, and in the New Testament the Apostle Paul, refer to “the great day,” the consummation of all things is in view.¹⁰

Against those who argue that Revelation 6:17 points to national-societal decay toward the end, but does not reference the end of history itself, Kline said, “Fatal to this is the obvious fact that 6:17 is no longer in the first person as 6:16’s ‘Fall on us, and hide us.’ It is the inspired comment of the Seer on what has preceded, and cannot possibly be construed as the mistaken notion of the terror or conscience-stricken.”¹¹ As there was no exegetical escape from interpreting “great day” in a non-climactic fashion, Kline declared emphatically that “the case for the non-recapitulationist absolutely breaks on Revelation 6:17.”¹²

Since the sixth seal introduces the great day of God’s wrath, Kline then asked, “what are we to expect in the seventh seal?” According to Kline, how one answers this question is “probably the most crucial single point of the book for an understanding of the structure.”¹³

In answering the question, Kline turned to Frederick Düsterdieck as a foil. Düsterdieck, a nineteenth-century Tübingen scholar who had written an influential commentary on Revelation, advocated a telescopic structure of Revelation where the seals, trumpets, and bowls series evolved out of the preceding series. He reasoned that if the seventh seal was limited to Revelation 8:1 (“there followed a silence in heaven about the space of half an hour”) as the recapitulation reading maintained, then the expectation of a final catastrophe following the events of the sixth seal is not met. This expectation is met, however, if the trumpet series and the rest of Revelation flow out of the seventh seal.

Against Düsterdieck’s proposal, Kline responded that the sixth seal does not lead to the expectation of a final catastrophe. Rather, it is the final catastrophe. “Beyond the cosmical cataclysm and the unspeakable terror of eternally lost souls in the presence of the wrathful Lamb and the throne of God revealed in the sixth seal, what final catastrophe is there that needs to be considered with any fulness of contents?”¹⁴

Moreover, Kline believed objections from Düsterdieck and others that the “silence” of Revelation 8:1 cannot be the content of the seventh seal were misguided. Thundering noise is symbolic in Scripture for God’s judgments going forth; silence in Scripture stands for God’s judgments completed.¹⁵ Kline said, “Surely if we put ourselves in the Seer’s place in the midst of these tremendous visions and especially at this point when the air has just been

¹⁰ See, Joel 2:10–11, Mal. 4:1, and 1 Thess. 5:2–3.

¹¹ Kline, “Structure of Revelation,” 4.

¹² Ibid. Kline at this point added an observation that would mark both his understanding of Revelation and his theological writings as a whole. He stated that the characteristic of wrath seen in Rev. 6:12–17 is not appropriate during the time when the sincere offer of salvation in the Lamb slain is being made to sinners. It is appropriate at the end of history when the day of salvation is past and those who have rejected the Lamb receive their due.

¹³ Kline, “Structure of Revelation,” 4.

¹⁴ Ibid., 5.

¹⁵ Kline noted that the wicked in Isa. 47:5 and 1 Sam. 2:9 are assigned to the silence of darkness, consequent to the vengeance of God. Ibid.

filled with the shrieks of the lost and praises of the saints, we must acknowledge that a period that seemed like an half-hour of purest silence would make and leave an indelible impression.”¹⁶ The proper interpretation of the cycle of the seals is that it brings the reader to the judgment at the sixth seal and into the eternal state in the silence of the seventh seal. Kline allowed the Scottish theologian Patrick Fairborn, principle of Free Church College, Glasgow, to have the last word on the meaning of the silence in Revelation 8:1. Quoting Fairborn, Kline wrote, “The struggle of conflict is over, the noise and tumult of war have ceased, and the whole field lies prostrate before the one sovereign and undisputed Lord.”¹⁷

The Seven Trumpets, Revelation 8:2–11:19

Kline then examined Albertus Pieters’s interpretation of Revelation 8 and the relationship of the sixth and seventh seals. Pieters, professor at Western Theological Seminary and author of *The Lamb, the Woman, and the Dragon*, saw this portion of Revelation as borrowed from a Greek drama. In quoting Pieters, Kline inserted his own parenthetical commentary: “ ‘In Scene 3 of this Act (see program) men begin to be aware of the gathering storm’ (the removal of the heaven as a scroll, Pieters apparently considers a gentle spring zephyr).”¹⁸ The mocking tone of the parenthetical comments, however, turned to scorn when Kline considered Pieters’s opinion that the silence was “purely a dramatic touch, having no prophetic or doctrinal significance in itself, but placed here because the principles of dramatic arc require it.”¹⁹ Kline asserted,

Such extreme insistence on the resemblance of “Revelation” to a drama cheapens the Divine Word as much, if not more, than classifying Biblical Apocalyptic on a mere par with, and as of one cloth with other early apocalypses which Pieters is careful to guard against. It is asking too much of us, to require us to cease comparing Scripture with Scripture to determine Scripture’s meaning, in favor of comparing Scriptures with the devices of the Greek stage!²⁰

Kline’s high view of Scripture, however, was anything but a mechanical view. He commented on the seamless transition in Revelation 8:1 and 8:2, the two blending together literarily in the movement from the seventh seal to the seven trumpets. The Revelation 11:19 transition at the end of the division on the trumpets is so smooth that

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 6.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid. Although Pieters was operating within the model of comparative studies in the New Testament, Kline’s remarks early in his teaching career upon the two dangers that confront orthodox Old Testament scholars when dealing with comparative studies seem appropriate. Kline said, “One [danger] is to ignore or underestimate the value they have for our understanding of the Bible by revealing to us the world in which the Old Testament church lived, more particularly, the world against which the church was in deadly conflict and into the snares of which, both theological and ethical, apostatizing and backsliding, the church often fell. The other danger is to be so captivated by the many attractive formal parallels to the Bible which appear in the life, liturgy and literature of the ancient Near East, as to ignore or underestimate the significance of the fact that the Bible is absolutely unique as an embodiment and the record of redemptive supernaturalism. The significance of the fact is that the Bible is its own best interpreter.” Meredith G. Kline, review of *God Spake by Moses*, by Oswald T. Allis, *Westminster Theological Journal* 15, no. 1 (November 1952): 48.

exegetes argue whether it belongs to the start of the next chapter. Kline said, “In so subtle a way the Revelation is even in its formal-arrangements made a living, moving organism, rather than a row of detached blocks of material.”²¹

But Kline was careful to note that from a formal viewpoint there is no warrant to consider the cycle of trumpets as evolving from the cycle of seals. The phenomena, which appear in Revelation 8:5 and are repeated in Revelation 11:19, clearly mark off the trumpet cycle as a formal unit. The declaration of Revelation 11:15 (ASV), “The kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ,” that follows the sounding of the seventh trumpet depicts the close of history. The same is true of Revelation 11:17, 18a, “We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged.”

There is nothing after Revelation 11:19 that is called the third woe or seventh trumpet. On the other hand, there is every indication that the greatest woe has been announced in these verses, namely, the destruction of the destroyers in the final judgment. In view is not historical succession but redemptive-historical fulfillment for “the vision which these verses contain consummates in the revelation of the ark of the covenant in the temple of God in heaven; this is no mere preparation for more historical events, but signifies that the whole Covenant is now fulfilled through the grace of our faithful God.”²²

The Deeper Conflict, Revelation 12:1–14:20

In the next major division, the “Deeper Conflict,” Revelation 12:1–14:20, the closing verses in 14:14–20 again picture the end of history. Kline said that any uncertainty about this is settled by a simple comparison of the vision with Matthew 13:39, 41 (“and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels . . . The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all cause of sin and all law-breakers”) and Matthew 24:30, 31 (“Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other”).

The Seven Bowls, Revelation 15:1–16:21

The end of the world comes again in Revelation 15:1–16:21. The seventh bowl poured out in Revelation 16:17–21 produces a devastating judgment with points of marked

²¹ Kline, “Structure of Revelation,” 7. This statement reflects the shared view of Kline’s supervisor, Ned Stonehouse, and Stonehouse’s mentor, Geerhardus Vos, on the progressive nature of Scripture. For an explanation and defense of Vos’s view that Scripture’s structure is not one resembling a dogmatic handbook, but that of an organically unfolding process of a maturing organism, see Geerhardus Vos, “The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline,” (7–22) and Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., “Introduction,” (xvi–xx) in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980). For Stonehouse’s view of the unity and diversity of Scripture, see Moises Silva, “Ned B. Stonehouse and Reaction Criticism (part one),” *Westminster Theological Journal* 40, no.1 (Fall 1977): 77–88.

²² Kline, “Structure of Revelation,” 8.

similarity to the visions of the sixth seal and seventh trumpet. The perfect tense of the Greek verb, *gegonen*, the “It is done!” eloquently describes “God’s redemptive plan as fully executed and now followed by the predestined state of eternal blessedness accruing from that finished work of the Redeemer.”²³

The Final Judgments, Revelation 17:1–21:8

The “Final Judgments” division, Revelation 17:1–21:8, again brings one to the end of history. But, at history’s last hour, when Satan is loosed from the abyss and the anti-Christian powers are marshalled for the last conflict with God, why does the Beast’s attitude towards Babylon change so that the Beast hates and destroys Babylon? Why should Antichrist scorn any anti-Christian agency’s help at such an hour? For Kline, the only sound basis for explaining the Beast’s change towards Babylon was the seeking of self-deification. He said, “During the Gospel Age, Satan tolerates any false-gospel or religion or apostate church pointing men to some sort of being or principle of benevolence beyond. But when the last hour of intensified conflict has come, Satan endeavors to concentrate the energies, efforts, might and worship of the whole world in his AntiChrist.”²⁴

In support of this assertion, Kline appealed to 2 Thessalonians 2:4, Daniel 7:25 and 11:36, and Revelation 13:7–8. In 2 Thessalonians 2:4, the man of sin opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, takes his seat in the temple of God, and proclaims himself to be God. In Daniel 7:25, the little horn of the fourth beast speaks words against the Most High and wears out the saints. This is unto the end put forth in Daniel 11:36 that the little horn shall exalt himself and magnify himself above every god. In Revelation 13:7–8, the last form of the Beast is given authority that all on earth shall worship him.

Conclusions from the Exegesis of the Division Climaxes

Despite the exegetical proof that each of the formal divisions from Revelation 4:1 to 21:8 brings the readers to the close of history, opponents of the recapitulation interpretation sought to escape the force of the argument. They claimed that these divisions are sidelights and interludes, anticipations and introductory summaries. It did seem plausible on the surface, Kline admitted, that the futurists were right that John had been given by God an anticipation of the end to sustain his spirit through the coming tribulation in the visions of Revelation 7:9–17, 11:1–3, and 14:1–5. Such plausibility, however, does not have exegetical support. Kline pointed out that each of the three parenthetical visions occurs in close connection with the conclusion of their cycle of seals, trumpets, and deeper conflict, where the final triumph of God’s kingdom is depicted. Rather than having a forward reference, it is more likely that the assurance contained in these parenthetical visions has primarily a backwards reference to the calamitous judgments described in the earlier stages of their cycle. “Thus,” Kline said, “they corroborate the interpretation of the division

²³ Ibid., 9. Kline explains the perfect tense of the verb in Rev. 6:17, and even sets off an underlined space for its inclusion, but he did not fill in the blank. Every clue in the context suggests that *gegonen* is the missing word.

²⁴ Ibid., 11.

climaxes as being actually climaxes of what has preceded rather than anticipations of what is yet to come.”²⁵

What further raised Kline’s ire in the use of this “anticipation” evasion in regard to climaxes of the divisions was the arbitrary way its proponents used it exegetically. This was especially the case since it required “an instance of exegetical violence impossible to defend” in interpreting the sixth seal in Revelation 6:17. Consequently, for Kline, “the suspicion is hard to avoid that the preconceived notion that the end of the age cannot be presented before the end of the Apocalypse determines the interpretation of all the major climaxes” by futurists.²⁶

Furthermore, Kline continued, what would be John’s need in having so many anticipations? Is he doing it because he is afraid that he is going to lose the attention of the reader unless he keeps reminding the reader that great things are coming? But, if that is the case, then wouldn’t the reader be disappointed to find out that the real thing at the end doesn’t have much more to add. The result is that the book of Revelation becomes grotesquely futuristic.

Excursus on Milligan’s View

Kline moved on to what he labeled an excursus on William Milligan’s view of the relation of the structure of Revelation to Matthew 24 and the Gospel of John. Kline seemingly respected Milligan, a nineteenth-century Church of Scotland theologian who had written extensively on Revelation. According to Kline, Milligan “did well to point out the use of recapitulation in Matt. 24 which prepares the mind to expect the same in the prophecy of Revelation.”²⁷ Kline even said that in spite of Milligan’s questionable route²⁸ in arriving at his conclusions regarding the formal structure of Matthew 24, the conclusions “seem well taken.”

Particularly, Kline supported Milligan’s contention that the theme of Matthew 24:23–28 is the apostate church of the New Testament. The misstep that Milligan took here was failing to establish that the supposed corresponding subject in Revelation, the vision of the bowls, shares this theme of the false church. Still, Kline affirmed that Milligan was “on the right track” in his assuming that Babylon in Revelation symbolizes the apostate church.²⁹

But the suggestion from Milligan that really caught Kline’s eye was Milligan’s proposal that the structure of Revelation is related to the life of Christ presented in the Gospel of John. It is not that the logical structure of John’s Gospel and Revelation agree in any striking way as Milligan maintained.³⁰ But, for Kline, as instructive as it is attractive is the truth epitomized in Milligan’s quotation-statement, “As thou didst send Me into the

²⁵ Ibid., 13.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 16.

²⁸ The questionable steps Milligan had taken were connected to his interpretation of Matt. 24:15–22, which he matched with the vision of the trumpets in Rev. 8–11. Milligan maintained that the Matthean verses speak to God’s judgment on the world. Kline maintained that, with their reference to the fall of Jerusalem, these verses speak to God’s judgment on the apostate church of the Old Testament.

²⁹ Kline, “Structure of Revelation,” 17.

³⁰ Ibid.

world,—that is the Gospel;—Even so sent I them into the world,—that is the Apocalypse.”³¹

With the treatment of Milligan, Kline rested his case in support of the subject of recapitulation. He lamented, “If these features of Revelation do not recommend the synchronous structure to the student of this book, it is not likely that the consideration of any other passages would.”³²

Christ and His Church-Bride

Kline believed that the instructive and attractive truth Milligan had intimated—Christ preceding and then at work in his church—stood central to the message and movement of Revelation.³³ But, even more than sending his church into the world, Christ is at work through his Spirit transforming the church into his image to be his bride for eternity. The visions of Revelation work toward this goal, even the visions of judgment and woe. In fact, it is through such judgments that Christ not only makes the enemies of God his footstool, but also purifies his church from every defilement.

The intimate connection between Christ and his church-bride also explains Kline’s determination that any proposed structure of Revelation reflect this movement found in the text. He stated, “This process of cleansing, this transformation of the Church, a pilgrim below, into the Church at home in the Father’s glorious mansions above, is adequately introduced and concluded, only if the contrast of these two terminal main divisions of ‘Revelation’ is recognized.”³⁴ Revelation 1:9–3:22, the first terminal division, the church in the world, pictures the church as imperfect. Revelation 21:8–22:5, the second terminal division, the church in heaven, reveals the church as perfect. Kline commented, “Only when the Church on earth, partaking of the sin and imperfection of this world, and the finished glorious creation of God’s redemptive program are thus presented in all their contrast, are the ways and the wisdom of God in suffering His people to trod their persecuted path through this life, justified to men.”³⁵

This seminal insight was why Kline challenged the last two divisions of Hendriksen’s outline of Revelation. In Hendriksen’s outline the crowning vision of the church in Glory presents the same type of conclusion as in the previous sections. But, according to Kline, if Revelation 21:9–22:5 is merely on par with the other sections, then one’s understanding of John’s specific purpose in writing could be blurred. Kline subsequently set out to “defend the construction adopted here, especially since this affords the opportunity to confirm the contrast between the seven letters’ picture of the Church and the last vision of the redeemed in glory, as being the author’s specific intention.”³⁶

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Fifty-six years later, in his treatment of Zechariah’s third night vision, Kline included an observation about the relationship of John’s Gospel and Revelation that demonstrates that he still held to Milligan’s suggestion. He wrote, “What John began to do in his Gospel demonstrating that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, by rehearsing his sign-works (John 20:30, 31), the apostle continued to do in the Book of Revelation.” Meredith G. Kline, *Glory in Our Midst: A Biblical Theological Reading of Zechariah’s Night Visions* (Overland Park, KS: Two Age Press, 2001), 88.

³⁴ Kline, “Structure of Revelation,” 18.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

Although the subject matter of Revelation 21:1–8 and Revelation 21:9–22:5 is similar, Kline noted a distinction between the two texts. In Revelation 21:1–2, John sees the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. The vision in Revelation 21:3–8 regarding the future of the saints is auditory. In contrast, the entirety of Revelation 21:9–22:5 is visionary.

Kline noted that in the introduction to the vision of Revelation 21:10, the angel carries John away “in the Spirit” to see the holy city. This might seem to some to be an insignificant or superficial construction, but Kline believed that it carried great significance. Each time “in the Spirit” appears previously at Revelation 1:10, 4:2, and 17:3, it indicates the start of a new division. More importantly, “in the Spirit” also provides a basis for contrast for the church imperfect in the world throughout Revelation with the 21:9–22:5 section where the church is in Glory perfected. Kline explained the “in the Spirit” contrast:

In 1:10ff., the Church is in the World;
in 21:9ff. the Church has been taken out of the world.

In 4:2ff., the Church is in conflict with and overcome of the World;
in 21:9ff., the Church is at peace having overcome the World.

In 17:3ff. the Church apostate appears transformed into the World;
in 21:9ff., the Church glorified appears perfectly purified from the World.³⁷

Kline then drilled deeper into the contrast between the two main terminal divisions of Revelation 1:9–3:22 and Revelation 21:9–22:5. He listed how the imperfections of the earthly church in the letters to the seven churches in the Revelation 1:9–3:22 division are conspicuous by their absence or attended by their opposite characteristic in the heavenly church in the Revelation 21:9–22:5 division (in roman below). He also provided parenthetical citations to verses regarding the positive relationship between those who overcome in the seven churches and the blessings found for the saints in the New Jerusalem (in italics below).

Church in Ephesus and the New Jerusalem

In Revelation 2:2, there are false prophets in the church in Ephesus.
In Revelation 21:14, New Jerusalem has walls founded on the Lamb’s true apostles.

In Revelation 2:5, the church in Ephesus serves as a lampstand in the world.
In Revelation 21:23 and 22:5, in the New Jerusalem there is no need for light of lamp or sun, for the Lamb is the lamp and the Lord God is the light.³⁸

In Revelation 2:7, those in the church in Ephesus who overcome shall eat of the tree of Life.

In Revelation 22:2, the tree of life yielding its fruit every month appears in the New

³⁷ Ibid., 19 (line-by-line arrangement of quoted text).

³⁸ Kline also noted that Rev. 2:7, where those who overcome shall eat of the tree of life, should be compared with Rev. 22:2, where the tree of life appears in the New Jerusalem. Ibid., 19.

Jerusalem.

Church in Smyrna and the New Jerusalem

In Revelation 2:8–10, those in the church at Smyrna face persecution.

In Revelation 22:2 and 22:5, in the heavenly city the overcomers receive the promises and the saints reign forever.

In Revelation 2:9, there are false Jews in the church of Smyrna.

In Revelation 21:12, the gates of the New Jerusalem have the names of the true Israel.

In Revelation 2:11, those in the church in Smyrna who overcome will not be hurt by the second death.

In Revelation 21:27, the saints in the New Jerusalem are those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Church in Pergamum and the New Jerusalem

In Revelation 2:12, Satan's throne is in the church in Pergamum.

In Revelation 22:1, the church dwells where God's throne is in the New Jerusalem.

In Revelation 2:14–15, the church at Pergamum is filled with uncleanness and heresies.

In Revelation 21:16, 18, 21, 27, the church in the New Jerusalem is patterned after the Holy of Holies, marked by purity, and the absence of anything unclean.

In Revelation 2:17, overcomers in the church in Pergamum will be given a white stone with new names written on it.

In Revelation 22:4, the members of the New Jerusalem have God's name written on their foreheads.

Church in Thyatira and the New Jerusalem

In Revelation 2:20, the church at Thyatira is filled with impurity and spiritual fornication.

In Revelation 21:16, 18, 21, 27, the church of the eternal day is holy and excludes he that makes an abomination and a lie.

In Revelation 2:26–28, those in the church in Thyatira who conquer and keep the works of God will be given authority over the nations and the morning star.

In Revelation 22:5 and 21:22–22:16, saints in the New Jerusalem reign with Jesus, the descendent of David, the bright morning star, and by his light the nations walk.

Church in Sardis and the New Jerusalem

In Revelation 3:1, many are dead in the church at Sardis.

In Revelation 21:27, in the New Jerusalem are those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

In Revelation 3:2, the church in Sardis is filled with imperfection.

In Revelation 21:18, 21, 27, the church in the New Jerusalem is marked by purity and does nothing false.

In Revelation 3:5, those who conquer in the church in Sardis will be clothed in white garments and their names will never be blotted out of the book of life.

In Revelation 21:27, nothing unclean enters the New Jerusalem, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Church in Philadelphia and the New Jerusalem

In Revelation 3:9, there are those in the church in Philadelphia who lie.

In Revelation 21:18, 21, 27, those in the New Jerusalem do not do detestable things.

In Revelation 3:9, false Jews are in the church in Philadelphia.

In Revelation 21:12, the names of true Israel are written on the gates of the New Jerusalem.

In Revelation 3:10, the servants of God in the church in Philadelphia face persecution.

In Revelation 22:3, 5, in the New Jerusalem the overcomers receive the promises of God and reign forever.

In Revelation 3:12, those who overcome in the church in Philadelphia will be inscribed with God's name and that of the New Jerusalem, made pillars in the temple of God, and never excluded from God's presence.

In Revelation 21:10 and 22:4, the holy city Jerusalem coming down from heaven is the habitation of the saints who bear the name of God on their foreheads.

Church in Laodicea and the New Jerusalem

In Revelation 3:16, the church in Laodicea is filled with liars and those who are lukewarm.

In Revelation 21:27, the church in the eternal day has nothing unclean or detestable in it.

In Revelation 3:21, overcomers in the church in Laodicea will sit with Christ on his throne.

In Revelation 22:1 and 22:5, the throne of God and the Lamb is in the New Jerusalem where the saints will reign forever and ever.³⁹

³⁹ Drawn from text at p. 19 of Kline, "Structure of Revelation."

After presenting the list, Kline exhaled, “To make this analysis is practically to exhaust the content of both divisions. So exhaustive a contrast is not a coincidence.”⁴⁰ It was confirmation to Kline of what he had set out to prove, that John’s specific intention is to contrast the seven letters’ picture of the church and the vision of the redeemed in the glory of the New Jerusalem.⁴¹

Structure of John’s Apocalypse

From the preceding textual examination, Kline concluded that in Revelation there are five synchronous sections—Seven Seals, Revelation 4:1–8:1; Seven Trumpets, Revelation 8:2–11:19; Deeper Conflict, Revelation 12:1–14:20; Seven Bowls, Revelation 15:1–16:21; and, Final Judgments, Revelation 17:1–21:8—that range over the whole gospel dispensation and climax with a definite presentation of the eschatological finale.

These five sections are bounded on the front, Revelation 1:9–3:22, and the back, Revelation 21:9–22:5, by a section that does not cover the whole New Testament age. The final section, Revelation 21:9–22:5, does not point back to the beginning of the New Testament age. The seven letters of the churches in the opening section, Revelation 1:9–3:22, do not present a definite picture of the eschatological end. In Kline’s judgment, then, these terminal sections in Revelation 1:9–3:22 and 21:9–22:5 are not synchronous with the central five sections, but at the same time, they do not harm the symmetry of Revelation. Rather, the terminal sections enhance the symmetry formally by grounding and crowning the logical development in the book.

Kline then made clear the theological significance of such a structuring for the reader of John’s Apocalypse. He wrote,

As the Lord who bought her endured the contradiction of sinners against him and the pain of the cross before entering into the glory and joy that was set before him, so the Church must carry the cross of affliction from within and from without until she is rewarded at length with the crown of life. This fundamental contrast and the progress inherent in it is made prominent in the opening and closing divisions of Revelation—the Church imperfect and suffering in this evil world, and the Church perfect and triumphant in that holy city Jerusalem which cometh down out of heaven from God.⁴²

Apostate Church, the World, and Satan

Kline then argued that these contrasts make apparent Revelation’s teaching that opposition to the true church exists. The apostate church, the world, and Satan seek to destroy the church. Apostatizing influences (see Rev. 2 and 3) were within the seven churches and could be seen working their leaven increasingly.⁴³ The world, the imperial

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 18.

⁴² Ibid., 20.

⁴³ The destruction of the apostate church is described in Rev. 14:8, 16:19, 17 and 18, a destruction that seemingly affords more delight to the hosts of heaven in Rev. 19:1–5 than the fall of any other foe of the church. Kline juxtaposed this observation with the reaction of John in Rev. 17:6 where Babylon’s “plain and

power, increasingly persecutes the faithful in the churches. The mere presence of Christian martyrs reflects the world's manner in receiving the good news (Rev. 6:9–10).

According to Kline, nearly indistinguishable from the imperial power of the world is secularism, “man’s prophethood gone astray, the wisdom of this world which genders materialism, false science and philosophy and buries the souls of men in the interests of this world.”⁴⁴ The baneful effect of secularism’s drag upon the church appears throughout Revelation—the loss of the Ephesians first love (Rev. 2:4); the spiritual deadness of the Sardis church (Rev. 3:1–2); the lukewarmness due to their dependence upon their riches and the things of the world that prevailed among the Laodiceans (Rev. 3:15–18); the wisdom of the world that makes the prophet’s experience bitter in bringing the good news to the nations (Rev. 10:10–11); and, in Revelation 18 the wisdom of the world that causes merchants and kings to lament the destruction of Babylon, that is, false apostate religion. Kline judged, “This worldly propaganda is seen for what it is, a fellow-beast of the imperial agent of Satan, deceiving men by its lamb-like features but enslaving them to the first beast by its dragon-like claims.”⁴⁵

Satanic opposition to Christ and his church also escalates in Revelation. Present in the churches of Asia in Revelation 2 and 3, it intensifies in Revelation 12 when Satan is revealed as the unseen source and strength behind the Beast and False Prophet. Satan also is not to be separated from his agents as their fall in Revelation 19:20, and his fall in Revelation 20:10, are one.⁴⁶ Bounded by these two visions of Satan in Revelation 19:20 and 20:10, “the intervening careers of the Beast and the False-Prophet are forcefully portrayed as Satanic in their source, character and end; and thereby all is eloquently climaxed.”⁴⁷ Each hostile character—the apostate church, the world, Satan and his agents—is dealt with in such finality in the Final Judgments section of Revelation 17:1–21:8 that none of them ever again darken John’s vision.

The Eschatological Perspective of Revelation

In the last major subsection of his thesis, Kline addressed the eschatological perspective of Revelation. He praised Milligan for finding in Revelation three great ideas—conflict, preservation, and triumph. The first two are correlative and contemporaneous, and issue into the third at the appearance of the Lord. As with his previous interaction with Milligan, however, Kline believed that the main point was well taken, but that Milligan had oversimplified the data. That is, there is the preserving of the elect in their conflict with the world, and there is the triumph of the church in the final overthrow of its persecutors at the manifestation of Christ in flaming fire, but there is also the repeating feature in the visions of a great crisis by the Satan-controlled enemies of God’s people. The presence of this crisis

full manifestation in that wilderness where he had last seen the radiant woman occasions the Seer more surprise than any other revelation.” Kline, “Structure of Revelation,” 21.

⁴⁴ Kline, “Structure of Revelation,” 21.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴⁶ In a parenthetical comment in this section, Kline returned to the previous analysis of the inadequacy of the chronological succession view. He wrote, “If national imperial power as such is utterly and finally uprooted from this world, i.e., the Beast is cast into the lake of fire, at 19:19, how can Satan still be using the nations as his agents of hostility against the saints in 20:8 if chronologically this is a thousand years later? He can’t; the author has recapitulated between these points.” *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

period before the ultimate triumph of the elect is what Milligan did not recognize. Kline argued that the historical sequence in Revelation is first a long period where the church is preserved as it witnesses to the world about Christ. This is followed by a short period controlled by the Satanic hosts, after which they are destroyed and the saints are vindicated at the second advent.

For confirmation of the long period and short period sequence, Kline turned to Revelation 11. There, the two witnesses, symbolic of the church, are given 1,260 days to prophesy. Once the 1,260 days are completed, the witnesses are slain by the Beast that comes out of the abyss and lie dead for three and a half days. In Revelation, “1,260 days” denotes the entire period of the church’s protection from the world’s hostility. The inference in Revelation 11:7 is that the gospel has been preached by the two witnesses to the uttermost parts of the earth. When the church’s testimony reaches its completion, the end must come (Matt. 24:14). The fact that there are those who are terrified and give glory to God in Revelation 11:13 is not sufficient to alter this proposed interpretation. Their frightful reaction heightens the effect of the judgment, and their giving glory to God is best understood in light of a passage like Proverbs 1:24–28. Their calling on God is too late.

The parallels between Revelation 11:1–3 and 20:1–10 also support the eschatological view of a long period, short period, and final destruction at the coming of Christ. As the two witnesses were given 1,260 days to complete their mission, Satan is restrained for a thousand years as the church takes the gospel to the ends of the earth. The difference in symbolism is a difference in vantage points. In Revelation, whenever 1,260 days or three and a half times appears, earthly history is the vantage point. When a “thousand years” is used, the reference is to the spiritual realm.⁴⁸

In Revelation 20:8–9, Satan comes up from the abyss after a thousand years for a little season to paralyze the efforts of the saints as the Beast had done in Revelation 11. Kline stated that Hendriksen adequately accounted for the symbolism of these verses in *More Than Conquerors* when he wrote, “The meaning then is this: the era during which the church as a mighty missionary organization shall be able to spread the Gospel everywhere is not going to last forever, not even until the moment of Christ’s second coming.”⁴⁹

Jesus Christ: Prophet, Priest, and King

Kline believed that the eschatological outlook in Revelation is also seen in Jesus Christ perfectly fulfilling the three-fold office of prophet, priest, and king on behalf of his people. Christ’s prophetic office is exercised in revealing to John the contents of Revelation, as well as more specifically in the seven letters and the opening of the seven-sealed book. His priestly office appears in the recurring symbol of the Lamb slain, the casting out of Satan (Rev. 12:7–10), his arraying the saints with the robes of his righteousness (Rev. 6:11; 7:9, 14), his purchasing the elect (Rev. 14:4), and in his service and presence in the heavenly temple (Rev. 21:22–23 and 22:1,3). His kingly office is exercised in conquering all his foes and those of his people (Rev. 5:2, 16; 12:5; 17:14; and 19:11).

⁴⁸ Earlier, in detailing Satan’s judgment, Kline added, “We do not detain ourselves with a full discussion of the question of Chiliasm, but would merely add that in the symmetrically synchronous structure of the entire Revelation as propounded in this paper a millennium understood in the pre-millennial school’s sense would stick out like a very sore thumb.” *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 25 (quoting Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 194–95).

In Christ's foes—the first beast (false kingship), the second beast (false prophethood), and harlot-Babylon (false priesthood)—one beholds the prostration of man's three-fold office. Man as priest was to dedicate the world to God, but in the harlot-Babylon, man has dedicated the riches of creation and civilization to himself. This is why in Revelation 18:14–16 there is a detailed account of the goods of the world employed for the arraying of the harlot. All false religion, and especially the apostate church, fall under the harlot-Babylon. Instead of leading the nations to Christ, they cause the nations “to drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication” (Rev. 14:8 ASV).

The proper exercise of man's prophethood would have led to wisdom, but in the False Prophet such efforts are aimed at ignorance and deception. In leading others to worship the Beast, the False Prophet leads not to truth, God himself, but into the chaos of creaturehood—“six hundred and sixty and six” (Rev. 13:18 ASV). This is why the appeal in Revelation 13:18 (ASV) to those who are in Christ exercising the office of prophet rightly (“he that hath understanding”) is to see through the False Prophet's deception.

The description of the Beast in Revelation 13:2 derives from the prophecy of Daniel 7, where the beasts represent world empires. According to Kline, this “puts the burden of proof on the interpreter who denies that unregenerate man's kingly activities as displayed in governments and building of empires are symbolized by the Beast of Revelation.”⁵⁰

The Beast has already suffered a death stroke in connection with the decisive victory of Christ (Rev. 12:7–9), but God gives it authority to continue during the gospel age (Rev. 13:5). The activities of the Beast and his False Prophet in Revelation 13 occur during the long period, but there is nothing that would prohibit these activities issuing into a climax in a last great crisis for the church. “In fact,” said Kline, “such an end-time crisis is demanded by a comparison of 13:7, 15 with 11:7 where the making war, overcoming and killing of the saints was after the 1,260 day—or missionary—period.”⁵¹

Har Magedon, Revelation 16:16

Fittingly, and in anticipation of his future theological writings on Revelation, Kline closed the eschatological aspect section with an explanation of Revelation 16:16. Leading up to the bowls series, everything points to a final crisis clash, but this does not appear in a clearly defined hour of trial in the first two series or heptads, the seals and the trumpets. In the third series of the bowls, the hostility is open as men have the mark of the Beast and worship his image (Rev. 16:2). These blasphemers are unrepentant (Rev. 16:9–10). The scene is set for the climax of this worldly opposition, which appears in the sixth bowl. The kings of the earth gather to war in the great day of God the Almighty at the place that is called in Hebrew Har-Magedon (Rev. 16:14, 16).⁵² The battle is the same as that of Revelation 19:19 and 20:8. “The Church which has faithfully proclaimed the Word to the wicked as God visited judgments upon these wicked through the long Gospel Age, is tested in a final Har-Magedon of distress, but is again seen triumphant in Christ, as we survey these three heptads.”⁵³

⁵⁰ Kline, “Structure of Revelation,” 27.

⁵¹ Ibid., 28.

⁵² The Scripture citation is given as “6:14, 16” instead of the obvious and accurate 16:14, 16.

⁵³ Kline, “Structure of Revelation,” 30.

Historical Manifestation and Ministry of the Eternal Son of God

Kline admitted in closing that to leave the matter with the eschatological would display the plant with the budding flower, but would deprive it of its source of life. The source of life was the historical manifestation and work of the eternal Son of God, the Lamb of God slain before the foundation of the world. The book of Revelation presents Christ as its central focus from its beginning to its end.

The opening vision in Revelation 1 presents the glorious figure of the “one like unto a son of man” who says “I am the first and the last and the Living one; and I was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. Write, therefore!” (Rev. 1:17–19 ASV, exclamation added). Everything in Revelation that the Spirit reveals to John to see, the things that are and the things that shall come to pass, unfold as the consequence of the historical career of Christ.

The Christ-centered focus continues in Revelation 2 and 3 with the seven letters to the churches. After the letters have been delivered, and the visions proper to be disclosed are prefaced in Revelation 5 by the disclosure of “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David” (Rev. 5:5). He is the one who has overcome, even the “Lamb standing, as though it had been slain” (Rev. 5:5, 6). All the heavenly host and every created thing in heaven, on earth and under the earth, adore him in union with the One who sits on the throne. The message is clear, let the last days proceed for he has overcome.

In Revelation 12:1–14:20, the heart of Revelation, the historical manifestation of Christ and his ministry passes for review. The time of Christ’s authority is said to have come—the man-child victorious over Satan. In his concluding sentence of the thesis, Kline proclaimed,

Because Jesus Christ lived, died and rose again, there is the Church with a testimony for the nations, there is a hatred which will one hour reach a climax on the part of the unbelieving, unrepentant world which refuses his kingly call, and these will be a final and everlasting triumph for God and His Redeemed.⁵⁴

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⁵⁴ Ibid., 30–31.

Servant Standards

Commentary on the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Chapters 16–17

by Alan D. Strange

Chapter XVI Congregational Meetings

1. Meetings of the congregation shall be called by the session. A stated meeting shall be held at least once annually to consider the affairs of the congregation. Other meetings shall be called when the session deems it to be for the best interests of the congregation or when requested in writing to do so by one-fourth of the communicant members of the congregation in good and regular standing. Only those and all those persons who are communicant members of the congregation in good and regular standing shall be entitled to vote. Voting by proxy shall not be permitted, nor shall anyone be allowed to vote except when the vote is being taken.

Comment: Given that the session is the governing body of the local church (see FG 13), meetings of the congregation are and can be called only by the session. A congregation may not meet by its own determination to do so, as only a judicatory of the church (session, presbytery, or general assembly) may: the congregation is not a judicatory and thus is dependent on the session as the judicatory having jurisdiction over it. The session must call at least one congregational meeting a year to consider “affairs of the congregation,” commonly to hear reports of the pastor(s) and various committees, to approve budgets, elect elders and deacons, and the like. This annual congregational meeting is likely what most people think of when they hear “congregational meeting.”

Other meetings of the congregation to deal with matters outside of the annual meeting may be called by the session, either upon the session’s initiative or by a request of at least one-fourth of the communicant members of the congregation “in good and regular standing.” That designation (“good and regular”) means that those eligible to request a special congregational meeting must be members who are not under judicial censure of any sort, “good” meaning that their standing is not bad and “regular” meaning that their standing is according to the rule, the meaning of regular. Only communicants with such good and regular standing will be able to vote in any such meetings (regular annual meetings and called special meetings). And, as noted at earlier points, only those present for the deliberations in a meeting are properly ready and eligible to vote. This is why the OPC prohibits all proxy voting: to vote in a meeting, one needs to be present, to hear all the discussion/debate, able to enter into such if needed or desirable.

It should be noted that telephone and video conference presence should not be considered any sort of proxy so long as all participants can hear each other and take part in discussion/debate, all voting together at the time the vote is taken. *Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised* now recognizes such, and it would be good and fitting for local by-

laws to make proper provisions for this.¹ It would also be fitting, arguably, for this church order to be amended to reflect the legitimacy of such more clearly in order to avoid needless, endless debates about this. Even without such amendments, however, electronic meetings can take place within the bounds of the current book. It is fatuous to argue that the current FG forbids electronic meetings. It simply makes no specific provisions for them, and they are permissible insofar as they can accommodate all that the FG requires for regular meetings, particularly of the smaller bodies (sessions and presbyteries). Whether a general assembly could practicably meet electronically seems dubious to this writer.

2. The provisions of Section 1 of this chapter shall apply to a mission work which may hold a congregational meeting in its area when duly called by its session or presbytery. Such a congregational meeting may be held when at least one member of the session is present and when a quorum of communicant members of the mission work as designated by the session is present.

Comment: Mission works are congregations not yet organized and self-governing. Consequently, mission works do not yet have their own sessions. However, when the overseeing session or presbytery of a mission work (some mission works operate under the authority of the session of their planting mother church; others, under the authority of the presbytery, usually a committee thereof) deems it necessary, they can call for a congregational meeting of the group that forms the mission, in the location of the mission work ordinarily. The overseeing body of the mission work (session or presbytery) shall have at least one of its ministers or ruling elders present at the meeting. The quorum for the meeting shall be determined by the body having proper oversight of the mission work.

3. Public notice of a meeting of the congregation shall be made at the worship services on the two Lord's Days prior to the meeting or by circular letter at least ten days prior to the meeting. When the meeting is called for the transaction of specific matters of business no business shall be conducted except that which is stated in the notice.

Comment: Public notice of a meeting of the congregation is to be given sufficiently in advance of the meeting. There are two ways to give such notice: either by announcement at the worship services for the two Lord's Days before the date of the meeting or by a letter sent to the congregation by mail at least ten days prior to the meeting. This is the present rule and must be adhered to, though more up-to-date forms of digital communication might prompt amendments to this FG that would allow a meeting on shorter notice if needed. Such would need to be adopted, however, and the rule in place stands.

When the meeting is other than the annual congregational meeting, which deals with general matters, that is, when a congregational meeting is to be called for a specific purpose, only the specific matters of business having to do with that specific purpose may be considered. Often calls to such meetings, in addition to specifying the matter(s) of business to be on the agenda, include a notice that "matters germane" may also be considered. This means that while the meeting is to stick to what the call to the meeting

¹ *RRONR* (12th ed.) "Appendix: Sample Rules for Electronic Meetings."

specified as the business of the meeting, things clearly and closely related to it may be considered, though those particular items were not enumerated or specified in the call itself. It is important that the meeting adhere to the terms of the call and not address matters not in the call. Only matters in the call are in order and properly before the body. For a special meeting of the congregation to treat matters not stipulated as before it, is a potential abuse of power, especially since all need to be notified as to what the proper subject matter of the meeting is, especially if they deem it important and wish/need to rearrange their schedule to be there to engage in debating and voting.

4. The moderator and the clerk of the session shall serve as moderator and clerk respectively in congregational meetings. In the event that it is impracticable or inexpedient for either or both of these to serve, the session shall appoint others from among its number, or request a minister or ruling elder of the presbytery to serve.

Comment: The first sentence needs no exposition. The session's moderator is the congregation's; this is also true for the clerk. It is the case that the session may ask someone else to serve as moderator, clerk, or both when it is "impracticable" or "inexpedient" that either or both of them serve. Inclement weather, for example, on the night of the congregational meeting may make it impracticable for the clerk of session to attend the meeting and prevent him from serving as the congregational meeting clerk. The session may appoint another of its members (or request a minister or ruling elder from the presbytery) to serve as the clerk *pro tempore*. As to the matter of inexpedient, it would be inexpedient, e.g., for the pastor, as moderator of the session, to moderate a congregational meeting that was called for the purpose of asking the pastor to resign. Again, the session may ask one of its other members to moderate or, and probably best in this example, ask a minister or ruling elder of the presbytery to preside at the meeting.

5. The clerk shall keep a correct record of all the business transacted at the meeting and preserve it with the records of the session. Minutes of the congregational meeting shall be approved by the congregation before the close of the meeting.

Comment: The clerk of session is to act as clerk at meetings of the congregation and, as such, is to take minutes of congregational meetings. These minutes are to be preserved in the same book of minutes in which the session keeps its minutes. Approval of the minutes of congregational meetings is to take place before the close of the meeting. This is different than the minutes of sessions or presbyteries and is more like the minutes of general assemblies, the approval of which takes place before the close of the assemblies. This is because congregational meetings occur more rarely and may be so differently constituted that the minutes of a particular congregational meeting should be approved in that meeting of the congregation by those present at that meeting.

6. When the laws of the state require, the congregation shall transact business as a corporation. All other business shall be conducted in the congregational meeting.

Comment: This section reflects that congregational meetings, certainly the typical annual congregational meeting, may also involve meetings of the corporation. The corporation is the local congregation organized as a legal entity so that it can conduct necessary business in broader civil society. The laws of the state, for example, may

require a congregation to transact business in its corporate capacity when buying or selling property, constructing or modifying buildings, getting needed permits, etc. Entities that have a legal corporate existence also have a board of trustees that acts as the ordinary interface with the civil authorities in carrying out the will of the corporation, serving, among other things, as authorized signatories for the corporation. This is described later in this Form of Government in Chapter 32.

Most civil entities require those acting as part of a corporation to have attained their legal majority. In such corporation meetings, only those members in good and regular standing and eighteen years of age or older are eligible to vote. This contrasts with the vote in the congregational meeting (for officers, e.g.) in which all communicants in good and regular standing enjoy the right to vote, regardless of age.

7. A congregation may withdraw from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church only according to the following procedure:

- a. Before calling a congregational meeting for the purpose of taking any action contemplating withdrawal from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the session shall inform the presbytery, ordinarily at a stated meeting, of its intention to call such a meeting, and shall provide grounds for its intention. The presbytery, through representatives appointed for the purpose, shall seek, within a period not to exceed three weeks after the presbytery meeting, in writing and in person, to dissuade the session from its intention. If the session is not dissuaded, it may issue a written call for the first meeting of the congregation. The call shall contain the session's recommendation, with its written grounds, together with the presbytery's written argument.
- b. If the vote of the congregation favors withdrawal, the session shall call for a second meeting to be held not less than three weeks, nor more than one year, thereafter. If the congregation, at the second meeting, reaffirms a previous action to withdraw, it shall be the duty of the presbytery to prepare a roll of members who desire to continue as members of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and to provide for the oversight of these continuing members.
- c. The presbytery shall be given the opportunity, at any congregational meeting at which withdrawal is being considered, to dissuade the congregation from withdrawing.

Comment: It is, of course, not the case that the OPC, as a rule, would want any of its congregations to withdraw from the denomination. We would rather that any disaffected congregation work through the difficulties that it believes confront it in being a member congregation of the OPC. To that end, both the presbytery and the denomination more broadly (the assembly and its agencies, especially) should do what it can to reconcile the differences between the entities in question so that the congregation contemplating leaving will not find it necessary to do so.

For a congregation to leave without good reason, such as “the OPC has departed from Scripture and Confession,” or the like, savors of schism. This assumes, it should be noted, that the allegation of doctrinal departure is baseless. If the allegation is true, all persons of good will should take all available administrative and judicial steps to restore the church to fidelity. In general, all parties should do all within their respective places and powers to insure that congregations that have matters that make remaining within the OPC difficult (ones that do not indicate infidelity on the part of the OPC) should endeavor to resolve such. Perhaps even outside organizations that promote reconciliation could beneficially be called in when a congregation proposes to leave the OPC in an attempt to help all the parties attempt to reconcile their differences.

In any case, the FG does provide an orderly procedure for a congregation seriously contemplating leaving the OPC to follow. When a session wants to leave with sufficient resolve to do so, wanting to call a congregational meeting for the purpose of urging the congregation to vote to leave the OPC, it ought to notify its presbytery of its desire in this regard. Such notice shall normally be communicated to the presbytery not at a special meeting, ordinarily, that would likely have a lesser compliment of commissioners, but at a stated meeting, which would, more likely, have a full complement of ministers and elders from the regional church. In communicating to the presbytery about its desire to leave the OPC, the session in question should provide the presbytery its grounds for its determination.

The presbytery is not to drag its feet in this matter but should respond to the statement of intention to leave with the furnished grounds no later than three weeks after the adjournment of the meeting of presbytery. The presbytery should appoint several representatives from among its members both to write a letter seeking to dissuade the session desiring to leave and to meet in person with the session to press home the reasons that the session should desist in its course of seeking to leave the OPC. If after such communication and meeting the session remains adamant in its intent to leave, the session may proceed and call a first meeting of the congregation for the purpose of its considering leaving. The call to the meeting shall include not only the session's statement of its desire to leave but also the grounds for such, together with the communication of the presbytery seeking to dissuade the session from recommending that the congregation withdraw from the OPC. The presbytery has the right to have representatives present at this or any subsequent meeting of the congregation considering withdrawal in order to seek to dissuade the congregation from voting to leave the OPC.

If the congregation votes in the majority to leave the OPC at this first meeting, a second meeting shall be called not more than a year, and not less than three weeks, from the first meeting. If at this second meeting the congregation votes to leave the OPC, the relevant presbytery shall prepare a roll of members from the leaving congregation of those that wish to remain in the OPC. These members remaining in the OPC will be placed either on the rolls of the regional church or another church of the presbytery acceptable to the session of that congregation and the members who desire to remain. Again, the whole process presupposes that the OPC does not want a congregation to leave and that the presbytery will seek to dissuade it from doing so. If the congregation persists in its desire to leave, the FG at this point provides an orderly process for its withdrawal.

Chapter XVII

Congregations without Pastors

1. A congregation without a pastor shall continue to meet on the Lord's Day for the purpose of prayer, the singing of praises, and the hearing of the Word of God. When a minister or licentiate is not available the session shall be responsible for the conducting of services. A sermon or exhortation in accord with the standards of the Church shall be presented by reading, recording, or oral delivery to the congregation.

Comment: A congregation without a pastor continues to meet as it did when it had a pastor, customarily securing pulpit supply. The congregation needs to have prayers offered, praises sung, and the Word of God preached in its worship service, whether or

not it has a pastor. If a minister or licentiate is not available to preach in a congregation without a pastor, the responsibility for bringing the Word falls on the session, which may have someone deliver an exhortation, read a sermon, or have a sermon presented by recording. This means that the Word of God is to be presented or proclaimed in some fashion in every service of worship.

2. The presbytery may supervise a church that is without a pastor through a ministerial advisor (cf. Chapter XIII, Section 6) or a committee. Such supervision includes cooperation with the session, or with any authorized committee of the particular church, in the supply of the pulpit and in the seeking and securing of a pastor.

Comment: A church without a pastor shall not be bereft of pastoral guidance. Every such church shall enjoy presbyterial oversight, either through a ministerial advisor or a committee, with the session's approbation (FG 13.6). The supervision includes working with the particular church, its session or a duly authorized committee of the church, in supplying the pulpit and in the pastoral search process. While a congregation and its session needs freedom to search for and call as pastor a man of its own choosing, it is my opinion that local congregations without pastors, especially if they have no other local associates or teachers on site in the absence of a pastor, could do well with more presbyterial guidance in its pastoral search. In too many of our churches, congregations without pastors are left to "fend for themselves" and could often use more assistance from the presbytery in the process of pastoral search and call.

3. Under ordinary circumstances only ministers and licentiates of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church shall be employed as regular supplies in congregations without pastors. However, other ministers or licentiates may be employed as regular supplies upon approval of the presbytery.

Comment: Generally, only ministers and licentiates of the OPC shall serve as regular supplies in congregations without pastors. Note that the FG does not define what a regular supply is. One might surmise that any particular person regularly engaged to preach, say monthly or more, would properly be considered regular supply. The qualifier "under ordinary circumstances" recognizes that someone may be secured regularly who is not of the OPC (perhaps an area PCA minister without call), but such irregular arrangements (not an OPC minister or licentiate) should ordinarily occur only upon the approval of presbytery. A NAPARC minister (in one of the other member denominations) may be employed, for instance, as a regular supply, with the approval of the presbytery.

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ServantReading

The Idea of Office

A Review Article

by Gregory E. Reynolds

The Golden Key for Life and Leaders: The Idea of Office, by Kornelis Sietsma, David H. Schuringa, ed. NL: North Star Ministry, 2019, 123 pages, \$10.00.

During the early years of my ministry, while working on the report of the Committee on Women in Office, I discovered the earlier version of this volume, published by Paideia Press in 1985, simply titled *The Idea of Office (TIOO)*, by K. Sietsma. In this original book, what is called the “Introduction” is actually a foreword by the translator, Henry Vander Goot. Then what is titled the “Foreword” is actually the author’s introduction, as it appears in the present volume. The new edition simply more correctly titles this “Introduction.” While Vander Goot does not tell us much about Sietsma, he offers an excellent apologia for the importance of office in the modern context. “Office, then, is service indeed, but always service in a specific work. . . . Far from being a consequence of having gifts, office is that delegated and limited authority God has apportioned to each area of life” (*TIOO*, 11, 13). It is unfortunate that this section is eliminated in the new edition and the translator, Vander Goot, is only acknowledged in the new edition on the copyright page.

The Foreword by David T. Koyzis in the new edition (*TGK*, 7–10), however, is valuable because he provides important biographical information about Sietsma. In 1942 Sietsma was arrested by the Nazis at his home in Amsterdam, where he was a pastor. Soon after he was executed in Dachau at the age of forty-six for helping the Jews. His final sermon on Jesus’s temptation in the wilderness, from Luke 4:1–13, emphasized the temptation that comes with power (7). This makes his teaching on the nature and limits of office all the more poignant.

Sadly, the final chapter, “The Office of Believer and Ecclesiastical Life,” has been eliminated, no doubt to appeal to a broader audience as well as to view the idea of office in a broader sense. It is replaced by a brief epilogue by the editor, H. David Schuringa. Ecclesiology is the weakest link in the Western church today. The new Foreword focuses on the importance of office in general, whereas Sietsma moves from the general biblical concept of office, to office in various spheres of life, and concludes with three of the six chapters in the original by dealing with office in the church, both special and general.

The six chapters of the original could be divided into, chapter 1–3: “The Biblical Idea of Office in General,” and chapters 4–6: “The Biblical Idea of Office in the Church.” Sietsma tellingly begins chapter 4 by observing that in “a discussion of the office that the believer holds in the church, we shall touch upon those matters which, in our view, are most neglected” (*TIOO*, 56; *TGK*, 67).

There is still much value in this slightly abridged edition. But here is the [link to the PDF version](#) of the original.

The new edition has reformatted the text in block paragraphs. Otherwise, the first five of the six original chapters are faithfully reproduced. The editor, David Schuringa, has added several informative footnotes. In two places he adds a subheading for clarification (28, 38).

I often summarize each chapter of a book in a review article in order to save time for busy pastors, elders, and deacons, who may not be able to read the book under review. In this case I shall only offer some hors d'oeuvres to whet your appetite because the book is both brief and very important. It should be read by every church officer. What follows is from the new edition (*TGK*).

In the Introduction Sietsma describes the two ecclesiological poles he seeks to navigate: “In church affairs it has been the domination of the hierarchy or the triumph of the enthusiastic leader, the extremes of clericalism or Montanism,¹ which have damaged our sense of office and official relationships” (11). God’s sovereign control over all earthly authority and scriptural data inform Sietsma’s idea of office. The New Testament brings out the riches of the idea of office, focusing on office, especially in the church as service to God—stewardship of a God-given task (18–19).

Chapter 1, “Office Lost and Restored,” explores the nature of office and the damage sin has done to it since the fall. Human beings exist in official relationship to God, but now because Adam walked away from his calling, office and the idea of office have been corrupted. Hence, born in sin, we are all by nature office-breakers (30).

Chapter 2, “Christ the Office-Bearer,” begins: “The restoration of man to his rightful office has come into being in and through Christ” (31). This rich chapter shows how Christ as the Second and Last Adam has restored the office to his redeemed people (39). We are prophets, priests, and kings in him.

Chapter 3, “Office in the Various Spheres,” explores the idea that “office involves institutional authority granted by God” (41). Office is present in every sphere of human life: family, church, and state. Obedience to the authority assigned in each of these arenas is never blind, but it must be exercised with the wisdom of the community (46–47). Power and authority do not ultimately reside in the leader or the people, but in God. This alone is sufficient to counter revolutionary ideas. “No single human being has the natural right to rule over another except in his capacity as office-bearer. . . . The idea of office stresses the authority of the office-bearer even as it sets limits on that authority” (51–53). And then this relevant gem on the practical consequences of the idea of office:

One such consequence is that we honor, obey, respect, and support bearers of the office, even when they are not the representatives of our choice.

If we hurl defiant and dishonoring words at our office-bearers, if we think it right to advance our own views by undermining the authority of those who have been clothed with the office of government by God’s providence, then we have not understood the idea of office. We are still under the spell of personalism, of glorying and trusting in persons . . . (52–53)

¹ The movement, led by the late second century self-proclaimed prophet, Montanus, who claimed direct revelation, resembling the present day Charismatic movement.

How poignant this is coming from one who knew the extreme abuses of power in the Nazi regime, and who himself would be executed by the same.

Chapter 4, “Office in the Church,” is nicely summed up by Sietsma: “the office-bearers are called primarily to *administer* the Word of God and the Rule of Christ to the congregation” (72). He affirms the importance of the office of elder by insisting that “the congregation errs when members would rather see the pastor than an elder at their door” (68). The congregation must obey its officers because they minister God’s Word. The officers in turn must make sure that God’s Word is the basis of their words and deeds (73–74). The last part of this important chapter deals with the difference between person and office and reasons for declining office. The high spiritual quality of Sietsma’s exposition is exemplified when he observes that “The office encourages modesty” (80).

Chapter 5, “The Office of Every Believer,” explains in very practical terms that every believer has the office of a servant of God dutybound to be a vital part of the visible church. Each believer is an office-bearer, clothed with the dignity of their chief office-bearer, Christ, and must treat each other accordingly. Sietsma supports this by quoting a portion of Belgic Confession, Article 28, dealing with the duties of believers to and in the church (87). This is similar to the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 26, “Of the Communion of Saints,” which asserts our duties to Christ the head of the church and our fellow believers.

Chapter 6, from the original version only, “The Office of Believer and Ecclesiastical Life,” stresses the importance of church attendance and “participation in worship” (97–101). One cannot imagine a more relevant chapter on the topic of the idea of office. This is the end toward which the entire book is aimed, and yet oddly omitted from the new edition.

Hearing God’s Word is not only an activity of the first order but the only activity befitting humans in relationship to their God. A relationship of equality never exists between God and His people; however, that fact in no way detracts from the dignity or office of the believer. Therefore, when in the administration of the Word, this relationship between speaking God and listening man shines forth, then the office of believer is most beautifully displayed and exercised. (99)

There is in every area of life an idea and the embodiment of that idea. As Sietsma asserts, the idea of office “extends to the whole of a Christian’s life” (13). This is why the original title is so valuable to church officers. When I asked a retired Christian Reformed pastor, John Piersma, how to control emotion while conducting funerals, he said, “Remember your office.” This I never forgot, and it proved an enormous help in many aspects of my pastoral ministry. Sietsma’s little book cultivated this idea in my heart.

The dowager queen Mary in the Netflix series, *The Crown*, has some profound advice for the newly crowned Queen Elizabeth II. The letter is a fictional addition in the series, but it accurately expresses the Windsor idea of royal duty. The letter addresses the new queen while she is still grieving the loss of her father the king:

You must put those sentiments to one side now. . . . Duty calls. . . . your people will need your strength and leadership. I have seen three great monarchies brought down through their failure to separate personal indulgences from duty. . . . And while you

mourn your father you must also mourn someone else—Elizabeth Mountbatten—for she has now been replaced by another person—Elizabeth Regina. The two Elizabeths will frequently be in conflict with one another. The fact is: the crown must win, must always win.

While the series tends to view the monarchy and its sense of duty as repressive (witness the free-spirited portrayals of Elizabeth's younger sister Margaret and Prince Phillip), and while it is true that office, and the power and authority connected with it, can be abused, it is also true that office is often denigrated and even despised in Western democracies, to its own hurt. As Vander Goot, in the original edition, observes,

Modernism must be opposed to the idea of office. Modernism realizes that no human being has the right to exercise authority over others *by nature*, but it concludes from this that *by nature* every person is essentially the same and that office is at best a functional idea. Hence modernism replaces the concept of difference with the concept of sameness, the notion of equity with the idea of equality; whoever has the ability has the right to rule. (*TIOO*, 10)

The humility, maturity, balance, and spirituality of Sietsma is displayed in his final sentence: “With respect to the special dignity of the three offices instituted by Christ and His apostles, they [the Reformers] nevertheless maintained the principle of the priesthood of all believers” (101).

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ServantReading

Live Not by Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents, *by Rod Dreher*

by Stephen C. Magee

Live Not by Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents, by Rod Dreher. New York: Sentinel, 2020, 240 pages, \$27.00.

Those who benefited from the bestselling book by Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option*, have no doubt heard of his new volume, *Live Not by Lies*. The subtitle of this 2020 publication, “A Manual for Christian Dissidents,” reveals the author’s perspective that we are in for some difficult years ahead in a culture that has become more openly hostile to historic Christianity.

Dreher has a varied spiritual background. Once an evangelical Protestant, and then a Roman Catholic, he is now following the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Given his current spiritual home, he is particularly aware of the struggles of Christians and churches from Eastern Europe during the years of Soviet totalitarianism. Beginning in 2015 he began to hear from people that had firsthand experience with persecution in that setting. They were noticing developments in Western countries reminiscent of the early stages of oppression that they lived through decades earlier.

Dreher believes that we are currently living in a “pre-totalitarian culture” (21). His easy-to-read book is not an invitation to panic, but a diagnosis of our societal condition and a plan for survival and even flourishing in these challenging days. In particular, Dreher encourages sincere believers to “value nothing more than truth” (97). This is not only a prescription for the theological mind but an invitation to a life lived well in the midst of a hostile world.

The author gives us the tested advice of people who suffered through the darkest years of communism in countries like Romania and Czechoslovakia. He shows a deep regard for divinely ordained community in both the family and the church, emphasizing role models who were able to face their trials with courage and joy. He recommends practices that enable interested neighbors and younger family members to learn truth and to value the heritage that they receive from those who have come before them.

Quoting from one of the heroes of the twentieth century Christian resistance, Dreher makes the case that we are facing something more than the trials of living under powerful demagogues. “Dictatorship can make life hard for you, but they don’t want to devour your soul. Totalitarian regimes are seeking your souls” (136). This distinction ends up being important for those of us who understand our duties as guardians of sacred truth. Our needs may change to some degree when the church knows the real possibility that we might be unjustly detained for our faith. We devote ourselves to memorizing Scripture, not only because it is helpful for our sanctification, but because it provides a “strong basis for prison life” (154).

For those of us who serve as officers in churches of less than 150 souls, we can resonate with the author’s appreciation for “the importance of small communities” of faith (169). In such

environments we learn to love God with the people we actually know. It is in the small church that we may readily find ways to “join our grief with the grief of others,” helping us to bear heavy burdens together (178).

Live Not by Lies is not a depressing book, but I found it useful to combine it with another account of how evangelical churches are working together for good in places where any kind of connection with the broader community might seem implausible. This second book, *Unlikely* by Kevin Palau, tells the amazing story of how churches in Portland, Oregon found practical opportunities for holy service that led to new relationships and solid evangelistic fruit. Reading both books at the same time gave me what I hope was a balanced perspective concerning how we might work together with other churches who hold to historic Christian doctrine, ethics, and experience. The Palau book teaches us to ask those who live around us, “How can I help?” and then to follow through with deeds of love. *Live Not by Lies* prepares us to be ready for the arrival of that day when we must finally say, “Judge for yourselves whether it is right for us to obey God or you.”

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ServantReading

A Workman Not Ashamed: Essays in Honor of Albert N. Martin, David Charles and Rob Ventura, eds.

by Ryan M. McGraw

A Workman Not Ashamed: Essays in Honor of Albert N. Martin, David Charles and Rob Ventura, eds. Conway, AR: Free Grace, 2020, 163 pages, \$30.00, paper.

Over the past several decades, Al Martin's preaching and pastoral ministry has influenced many pastors across denominational lines. His power and presence in the pulpit and his gift at imparting pastoral wisdom to the next generation have marked a fruitful ministry. Honoring Martin's contribution to the church today, the essays in this volume focus primarily on preaching and pastoring. These essays show the carry-over of Martin's ideas to a new generation of pastors, helping those interested in the ministry to stay on the right track with the Spirit's help.

The topics included in this volume are relatively divisible into preaching and ministry. While the contributors are mostly Baptists, they include one Presbyterian, plus a bonus chapter by eighteenth-century Baptist, John Gill, a foreword by Joel Beeke, and a biographical sketch of Martin's life (lifted from volume 1 of his *Pastoral Theology*). Related to preaching, the authors cover Peter's Pentecost sermon (ch. 1), how and why preachers should prepare new preachers (ch. 2), the witness of the martyrs (ch. 4), the content of the gospel (ch. 6), the Spirit's work in preaching (ch. 7), and "the deeper Protestant conception and preaching" (ch. 11). Regarding pastoral ministry more broadly, authors explore Christian ministry in the church (ch. 3), shepherding the flock (ch. 5), the administration of Baptism (ch. 9), and the "form and substance" of worship (ch. 10). Michael Haykin's intriguing and useful historical biography of William Kriffin (ch. 8) does not fit neatly into either category. While the order and organization of the book could be clearer, the targeted issues reflect the core aspects of Martin's legacy. Chapter 10 is the most "Baptist" in content, arguing that the Baptist application of the regulative principle of worship is traditionally stricter than the rest of the Reformed world regarding the form that elements of worship take. Most of the chapters, however, reach across denominational lines, touching on genuine (and sometimes urgent) needs in the church today.

Some highlights stand out. Conrad Mbewe's challenge to seminaries and churches in chapter 2 to pursue a model of pastors training pastors, instead of those with no pastoral experience filling academic positions, is particularly pointed and apt, even if readers do not agree with every detail. Regardless of how this point affects the process of training ministers, in light of Mbewe's scriptural evidence, it is hard to reject his conclusion that

“pastors should realize that they are the main instruments in God’s hands to prepare the next generation of pastors” (47). As a seminary professor (and minister), I find that this issue arises often when elders send students to seminary in order to let the seminary find out whether or not they are called to the ministry. My standard reply is that this is the job of the church and not of the school. While it is my view that such professors should be experienced pastors, seminaries are servants not substitutes of the church in training pastors. Additionally, chapter 4, treating the place of martyrdom in Scripture and the church, is particularly stirring and thought provoking. Jeffrey Riddle’s affirmation of the administration of baptism by ministers in the visible church is also timely in the aftermath of the modern patriarchy movement (117–18).

Yet there are a few drawbacks to this volume. The tone of the book is a bit too colloquial at times, and highly academic at others, making its general audience somewhat unclear. This makes the quality of the material a bit uneven. Sometimes major themes are missing as well. For example, Rob Ventura stresses that in order to understand the Spirit’s work in preaching we need to understand that he is both a person and divine (96–97). While this is undoubtedly true, it is also vital to remember that the Spirit is the third person in the Trinity. This means that he not only comes to us personally with divine power but that his works reflect the order of the Godhead. He aims to glorify Christ because he proceeds from the Father and the Son. As Christ declares to us what he receives from the Father, so the Spirit declares what he receives from Christ. This is why the Spirit’s work in preaching, and in anything else, always directs us to Christ’s glory. This means that the Spirit as the power behind preaching and Christ as the content of preaching are wedded. A fuller Trinitarian ontology can better shape a practical responsibility. We not only need to understand who the Spirit is and what he does but why he does so. Otherwise, we run the risk of the detaching the work of the divine persons from each other, rather than integrating them. This point by no means implies that the content of this chapter is not sound and orthodox. It merely points out that the eternal relations between the divine persons strengthens the grounds on which we understand their temporal missions.

Lastly, Scott Aniol’s call for Baptists to become stricter in recovering seventeenth century Baptist principles regarding the minutiae of the forms of worship (132) runs a dangerous risk of promoting sectarianism in otherwise unified churches. In spite of such things, the book as a whole contains some solid material here to help readers meditate on important truths.

I have benefited greatly from Al Martin’s preaching over the years as well as from his solid counsel on pastoral theology. It is fitting that some of his friends and students have honored him in this volume. The editors note that, “By design, no new ground is broken in these chapters” (5). Old issues presented from Scripture continue to press upon new situations we face. The church continues to need Spirit-filled preachers who are compassionate and diligent pastors. As such, this book is one link in the chain of church history, showing the Lord’s faithfulness in sustaining gospel proclamation one generation at a time.

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ServantPoetry

Ode to Duty

By William Wordsworth (1770–1850)

Jam non consilio bonus, sed more eo perductus, ut non tantum recte facere possim, sed nisi recte facere non possim"

“I am no longer good through deliberate intent, but by long habit have reached a point where I am not only able to do right, but am unable to do anything but what is right.” (Seneca, *Letters* 120.10)

Stern Daughter of the Voice of God!
O Duty! if that name thou love
Who art a light to guide, a rod
To check the erring, and reprove;
Thou, who art victory and law
When empty terrors overawe;
From vain temptations dost set free;
And calm'st the weary strife of frail humanity!

There are who ask not if thine eye
Be on them; who, in love and truth,
Where no misgiving is, rely
Upon the genial sense of youth:
Glad Hearts! without reproach or blot;
Who do thy work, and know it not:
Oh! if through confidence misplaced
They fail, thy saving arms, dread Power! around them cast.

Serene will be our days and bright,
And happy will our nature be,
When love is an unerring light,
And joy its own security.
And they a blissful course may hold
Even now, who, not unwisely bold,
Live in the spirit of this creed;

Yet seek thy firm support, according to their need.

I, loving freedom, and untried;
No sport of every random gust,
Yet being to myself a guide,
Too blindly have reposed my trust:
And oft, when in my heart was heard
Thy timely mandate, I deferred
The task, in smoother walks to stray;
But thee I now would serve more strictly, if I may.

Through no disturbance of my soul,
Or strong compunction in me wrought,
I supplicate for thy control;
But in the quietness of thought:
Me this unchartered freedom tires;
I feel the weight of chance-desires:
My hopes no more must change their name,
I long for a repose that ever is the same.

Stern Lawgiver! yet thou dost wear
The Godhead's most benignant grace;
Nor know we anything so fair
As is the smile upon thy face:
Flowers laugh before thee on their beds
And fragrance in thy footing treads;
Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong;
And the most ancient heavens, through Thee, are fresh and strong.

To humbler functions, awful Power!
I call thee: I myself commend
Unto thy guidance from this hour;
Oh, let my weakness have an end!
Give unto me, made lowly wise,
The spirit of self-sacrifice;
The confidence of reason give;
And in the light of truth thy Bondman let me live!