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THE QUALIFICATIONS AND DUTIES OF ELDERS.

The Church is a spiritual society composed of all who are, in Christ Jesus, and is embraced as a perfect whole, in the Eternal Purpose and Covenant of Jehovah. The Church Visible consists of those who profess the true religion, with their children. The word is applied in the New Testament to the _____ the _____, the called and gathered of any particular place, who avow their faith in Christ and obedience to Him, and who, separating themselves from the world, stately assemble for His worship and service. It is also applied to the aggregate of such assemblies throughout the country, or throughout the world. To enable this Church to secure the ends of her existence, office bearers exist by direct Divine appointment, to whom a variety of names, indicating diversity of work, is given.

The office of Teaching, being the most important, embraces within itself all the offices. Hence the names Pastor, Bishop, Presbyter, Deacon, are all given to the Teacher. After the Teacher, all the officers given to the Church are officers of administration. The word Pastor designates the officer whose business it is to take care of all the spiritual interests of the flock. The Greek word, _____, "overseer" or "bishop," represents the same office in its application to different kinds of work, as illustrated by its use in the Roman Empire. The term _____, elder, was the title of an officer which existed from time immemorial in the Jewish Church, subsidiary to the higher functionaries of the Temple and Synagogue, one to whom was committed the administration of ecclesiastical law throughout the community. As effective teaching is due largely to personal and authoritative administration, the Teacher must be invested with full power in this department also; and, therefore, he is not only Pastor, Overseer, Presbyter, but by reason of his higher office, he presides in the meetings of the Presbyters, and is called by way of eminence, the Pastor or Bishop of the congregation. But the single Teacher is never the sole ruler in any congregation, and his office of teaching confers upon him no superiority of rank or power in administration, over his fellow elders.

Specially is there needed a class of officers belonging to and mingling with the people, who shall exert, not merely a personal, but an official influence and power, as the appointed administrators of the law of Christ. Now this is just what the constitution has provided, when it requires the existence of a number of Ruling Elders in every congregation (see Rom.xii. 8., 1 Cor. xii. 28., 1 Tim. v. 17.) It is now conceded that the _____ and the _____ in the Apostolic Churches were the same, the words being used interchangeably. A number of these were ordained in every church and it was to the whole, in their joint capacity as a Session of Presbyters, that the power of government and the Pastoral oversight of the members were committed. Whether the teaching was stated or occasional, the provision for the exercise of discipline and the administration of affairs was, from the beginning, an integral and abiding part of the local

organization. Teachers at first came from without, as the messengers of the Churches—the ambassadors of Christ. When settled in a particular sphere, they became Pastors as well as Teachers. But even in their absence, the flock was not left without pastoral instruction—elders being selected, because they were "apt to teach," as well as fit to rule. All rule and administration in the Church involves a measure and kind of instruction, which, while it does not trench in the least upon the work of the official Teacher, is yet of the utmost value in giving character and efficiency to Church power. The late Baron Bunsen observes "The hypothesis of the Presbyterian Divines of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries, that the elders form both an officiating and ruling body is quite correct." (Hippolytus and His Age, Vol. III. 221.)

The recently discovered "Teaching of the Apostles," shows conclusively, that the organization and order sanctioned by the Apostles continued to prevail during the first half of the second century. Chapter XV is as follows: - "appoint therefore for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men meek and uncovetous and true and approved, for they too minister to you the ministry of the prophets and teachers. Therefore despise them not, for they are the honoured among you with the prophets and teachers." That the Elders continued to hold the same place of dignity and power during the later half of the second century and afterwards, despite the gradual encroachments of a clerical episcopacy, is admitted by Mr. Hatch. "It is clear from the exhortation of Polycarp to the presbyters of Philippi, that those presbyters had the supreme oversight of all matters of administration. It was their duty to visit the sick, to provide for the widows and orphans and poor, to turn back those who had gone astray from the error of their ways, to sit in merciful judgment on those who had committed wrong. The building in which they assembled came to be called a *Basilica* or court-house; the part of it in which they sat a *Tribunal* or judgment seat; they were chiefly courts of discipline. Nor does it appear that any of these duties ever wholly ceased to be the duties of the presbyterate. The Presbyters were, in theory, the Council of the bishop, even after the bishop had asserted a virtual autocracy." (Bampton Lectures, p. 66.)

Having thus shown the original design of the Eldership and the plane assigned to it, it will be the less needful now to enlarge upon its qualifications and duties; still, the following classified statements are submitted:—

I. QUALIFICATIONS. - 1. The *Personal qualificatios*, of the Ruling Elder must always be placed in the foreground. Whatever may be the rank, the affluence, the ready serviceableness, or complete self-confidence of the man, his personal character must form the ground work of the people's choice and of his own acceptance of office. The very name by which it has been known from the remotest ages is suggestive, of the ripened gifts and matured wisdom of hoary-headed men. Old age is not in itself a qualification, nor is it necessary that the Elder should be an aged man, for Solomon says, Wisdom is grey hairs. But the fixed principles, the sound judgment, and the developed graces of Christian character which encircle seniority with respect and influence, should in no case be wanting. The Elder must be known to be a man of God, whose life is in unison with the life of Christ, and who is in full sympathy with His people and cause. Standing clearly in advance of the average member of the congregation, he ought to be

"an ensample to them that believe, in word, in manner of life, in love, in faith, in purity." If he is to guide others, the lamp of true religion should burn brightly in his own hand and house. If he would stimulate the languid and strengthen the weak and minister to the spiritually diseased, he must sparkle with electric healing virtue. If he would comfort the sorrowful, his own consolations in Christ must be abundant and flowing. A Christless preacher, a blind guide, an infected physician, would be as worthy of selection as an ungodly Elder. "For a bishop must be blameless, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour."

2. There are certain *Social qualifications*, which are needed to enhance the personal. No degree of literary culture, or social standing, indeed, can fit for the office a man who is not actuated by love to Christ and to the Church. On the other hand, the most burning zeal and unquestionable piety may be counterbalanced by blemishes in the past, the memory of which time has not yet been able to efface, by the taint of unhappy relationships, or by the pressure of inexorable circumstances. The humblest position in life is not, in itself, a disqualification. Religion is the most potent factor in the production of a true and noble manhood; the love of Christ the most prolific spring of the courtesies and amenities that adorn humanity. The meekness and gentleness of Christ will often secure an entrance to homes and hearts that might be closed against more pretentious visitors. Nevertheless it is fitting, that an Elder should have a recognised standing in the district, somewhat corresponding to the social position of the families of his charge. "moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach, and the snare of the devil." The command of time for frequent visitation, and the command of money for the relief of exceptional distress, would often add to his influence and increase his power for good. "The glory of a bishop," remarks one of the distinguished fathers of the Church, "is to relieve the poverty of the poor." Some familiarity with the ways of life, a regard for the proprieties of good society, and the grace of a fluent utterance, when he speaks of the things "touching the King," very desirable qualifications. If consciously inferior to others in the training and polish of the schools—as suggested in the ancient Coptic Constitutions—"Let him be in that case, full of gentleness and surpassing all the rest in love."

3. A due measure of *Governing qualifications*, must be deemed essential to an office which has been set, as we have seen, for "government" in the Church. The gifts of government are to be exercised in the way adopted by all free communities, of choosing qualified persons and investing them with full authority to act as the executive agencies of the body in all matters of administration. Thus the Church may be said to govern herself according to the law of Christ through chosen representatives, to whom she has voluntarily delegated her own power of self-control. Hence every member has a deep interest in the selection of duly-qualified persons to this office. It is obvious that such should be noted for self control, success in the management of their own affairs, and the possession of such gifts as may fit them to conduct the affairs of the Church. Practical wisdom, a sound and independent judgement, decision of character within the limits of law and courtesy, with a perfect command of the temper and the tongue, are the very efflorescence and fruitage of these gifts. To this must be added acquaintance with the principles and rules of ecclesiastical order, together with zeal for the peace, honor, and purity of the Church. The little kingdom of the home circle, where the father has such

unequalled opportunities for exercising his powers of guidance and general management, affords the best possible test by which to judge of his qualifications. The Apostle points to the state of a man's household as the proof of his fitness or unfitness for office; "One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity. For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the Church of God?"

4. There are moreover *Denominational qualifications*, that are not to be undervalued. The Church of the living God is one glorious Body. But in every part of this divided world, its existence is maintained by a visible organization, local institutions, and distinctive principles and characteristics. The only hope that the Church which is really one, shall become visible, rests therefore on the fact, that her Divine constitution will, in due time, reduce all eccentricities, regulate all consciences and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. In the meantime, as individual Christians must belong to some section of the visible Church, it is their duty to belong to that section which approves itself as being in closest accordance with the mind of Christ. In doing this, they not only hold fellowship with the Church universal, but they are laboring most directly to restore that Church to her original unity and simplicity. Human decrees, traditional practices and popular cravings should not be allowed to bias the judgement in a matter of such consequence.

When we look back to find a point at which we may identify ourselves with the Church universal, Presbyterians can find no resting place amid the anti-Christian usurpations that mangled and would have entombed the Church during the Middle Ages. Neither do they find rest amid the strange developments of the Second and Third centuries. They have been forced to go back to the Apostolic age and to the Great Master Himself, to find a resting place for their faith, and ground and reason for their worship and discipline. Having found and accepted these solid fundamentals of the Church, and borne witness in their behalf, they cannot afford to play fast and loose with them in the election and ordination of ruling elders. The Consensus of the Formularies of the Presbyterian Churches of the world attests the fact, that not only the form of doctrine and worship, but also the form of government is substantially regarded by them as of Divine origin and authority. Ruling elders hold their honourable positions and discharge their functions on the express ground of this Scriptural authority. The supremacy of their Ring and the authority of His Word, are involved in the issues. It behoves the Church therefore, to select for the eldership only such men as are possessed of a competent measure of Presbyterian qualifications, and at the same time, to ask that the Lord may be "for a spirit of judgement to him that sitteth in judgement, and for strength to them that turn the battle to the gate". Attached to their own Church, as the visible embodiment to them of the Church of Christ on earth to which they have pledged their fealty and service, elders should seek such acquaintance with her principles and history as may enable them to inform and confirm the faith of others; and in the spirit of loving and loyal consecration, they should stand prepared for whatever effort or sacrifice her welfare and honour may claim at their hands.

4. To give expansion and completeness to the character of the Ruling Elder, he should possess, moreover, a due proportion of *Catholic qualifications*. The Church in any

one place or country, or any one section of the Church, is not the one Church of God on earth. It is but a branch, though it may esteem itself the topmost branch, of the mighty tree that springs from the root and fatness of the good olive. Such can marshal in its ranks only a section of that great army of the Captain of the host of the Lord, which is to subjugate the world. Every section should, however, strive to realize and set forth in the most perfect manner the ideal marks and attributes of the one true Church. Members and office-bearers may feel assured that in striving for the advancement of such a Church they are consecrating themselves in the best possible way to further the great ends for which the Church has been established. The commission put into the hands of every disciple is—"Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." Can any one Church, ignoring the others, affect to undertake the burden and the responsibility a service? The servants of Christ should look over their own boundaries into the great harvest field of the world, and take note of the efforts made by Churches with whom they may have scant sympathy, that they may learn to emulate their sacrifices, while honoring their devotion. The more conscientious an elder is in the discharge of his duties, the more humble and distressed will he feel at the shortcomings of his own denomination, and, instead of restricting his sympathies within its narrow circle, he will expand himself in agonizing earnestness over the whole field, as Elisha stretched himself upon the dead child, and draw heaven and earth together with the cry, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is done In heaven." It is because he loves so fervently the whole redeemed Church, and longs so ardently for its universal diffusion, that he delights to spend himself and to be spent through the various channels and agencies that his own Church brings so urgently to his door.

II. THE DUTIES OF THE RULING ELDER. - No Christian should shrink from accepting the Eldership because of the duties connected with it. These duties are but the regular outcome of the gifts and graces God has bestowed upon him for use in the Church, and he is bound to exercise them to the utmost of his ability, whether in office or out of it. Besides, in ministering to others, he is walking in the King's highway—the best and the shortest way for arriving at perfection in holiness. This office has been immensely depreciated in value and stripped of almost all its attractiveness, by those who would restrict its actions to the exert else of judicial functions in Courts of the Church. Ruling, no doubt, is its distinctive characteristic. But rule as it exists in the Church, is totally different from that which prevails in civil society. Church power is exerted upon the conscience and is for edification, not for destruction. The Elder is not a mere "lay counsellor" or "assessor" to the Pastor, in the court of judgement. He is joint pastor and overseer of the flock. The Teacher has no superiority over the Elders in matters of administration. One is their Master, even Christ. When Peter the Apostle, who ranks himself as also an Elder, was exhorting the Elders to follow close in the footsteps of their great Example, he appends an assurance that ought to more than counterbalance all the discouragements of earth—"And when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."

The one great object of the Teaching office, is the perfecting of the saints, the building up of the body of Christ. Ruling Elders are engaged in promoting the same objects as the Teaching Elder, in the more private and ordinary ways of administration.

One practised sower may furnish employment for many cultivators and many reapers. Less elaborate training and skill may suffice for this latter class, but it is not the less necessary to a full and garnered harvest. There is harmony, completeness, and efficiency in our Presbyterian organization. The large wheels are indispensable to transmit the power and moderate the velocity of the machine, but the lesser wheels are also necessary to distribute the power to multiply the results. The nature and duties of this office have been admirably stated in the "Second Book of Discipline of the Church of Scotland," 1578, chapter vi.:—

"The Eldership is a spiritual function, ~e is the ministry. Their office is, as well severally as conjunctly, to watch diligently upon the flock committed to their charge, both publicly and privately, that no corruption of religion or manners enter therein. As the Pastors and Doctors should be diligent in teaching and sowing the seed of the Word, to the Elders should be careful in seeking the fruit of the same in the people."

Spiritual superintendence, analogous to that of an under shepherd, over the portion of his Master's flock committed to his care, may comprehend in a single phrase, the duties of the ruling elder. This superintendence we separate into the four departments of vigilant oversight, helpful ministrations, faithful correction, and effective leadership.

1. The elder is required to exercise a *Vigilant Oversight* of the flock. When Paul sent from Miletus to Ephesus, and called to him the elders of the Church, this was the burden of his charge:— "Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which he hath purchased with His own blood." First, they were to watch over themselves, lest by negligence, self-indulgence, or pride, their consciences should be hardened or their spiritual vigilance abated. Then they must "watch for souls, as they that must give account." A time is coming when to every under shepherd the question shall be addressed, 'Where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock?' In anticipation of such a reckoning, it behoves the elder to keep a careful register of the families and individuals of his charge, and to maintain a cordial and confidential relationship with each. This can be done only by regular and frequent visitation at their homes. To show his solicitude on their behalf, he must often wrestle, not only for them, but with them, in prayer and holy exhortation. In every congregation the number of elders should be proportionate to its membership and territorial extent. A well-defined district, containing a limited number of families, should be assigned to each, and a report of its condition required by the Session at stated periods. For this purpose, a district roll-book, accurately and regularly filled up with the results of every fresh visit, will be found to be invaluable.

2. There are many *Helpful Ministrations* of a separate and personal kind that fall within the range of the elder's office. When the Apostle enjoins the elders "to feed the Church of God," he is careful not to use the word *κλῆρονομήω*, which would express and emphasize the special business of the teachers, but *ποιμαίνω*, because it includes so many ministries of care and tenderness - indeed "the whole office of the shepherd, the entire leading, guiding, guarding, folding of the flock, as well as the finding of nourishment for it" (Trench's New Testament Synonyms). Mixing familiarly with the people, will find many opportunities of ministering lovingly and efficiently to their

recurring wants. A word of brotherly recognition and sympathy would often encourage their hearts. Laggards will be gently stimulated, stragglers warned of their danger, and wanderers followed, that they may be led back to "the footsteps of the flock," and induced to "feed their kids beside the shepherd's tents." A kindly hand timeously extended, may prevent some from falling into pits of darkness, or becoming the prey of evil beasts. When, gusts of controversy or waves of excitement sweep over the Church, his voice will generally succeed in directing them to a secure refuge; and, as they toil along through worldly cares and distractions from one Sabbath to another, he will provide some resting-place into which they may gather for one hour's intercourse with each other and with God.

The currents of Church life are so rapid and powerful at present, that nothing short of the best organised and most systematic action will suffice to regulate and control them. Elders must be prepared to utilize such Associations as are permitted to spring up within the Church. Sabbath schools are now an indispensable institution, not for relieving Christian parents from any part of their obligation, but for teaching the untaught, and of training up the youth of the Church to become the teachers and workers of the future. Elders should take a prominent part in the efficient working of such schools, and by taking charge of advanced classes endeavour to prepare the members for early transference into the garden of the Lord. It is thus, that the problem of the relation of the Sabbath school to the Church is most likely to be solved.

Again, the week day meeting for prayer and Christian fellowship should not, even in this busy, bustling age, be permitted to disappear from the position it has so long occupied, as the refuge and nursery of spiritual life. "The fearers of the Lord" still need "to speak often one to another." The congregational Prayer meeting is too much a reproduction of an ordinary Sabbath service to supply the felt want of God's people, or to allure sufficiently the working classes. Elders might supplement this by Cottage meetings, eliciting the devotions and practical observations of godly men, so as to reach a lower strata and beget a more wide spread desire for the revival of true religion. The practice and improvement of Sacred Music is another want of the Church. The presence of elders at meetings for this purpose, might promote their success as a counteraction to worldly amusements and tend to make them really subservient to the psalmody of the Church. In the same manner, Bands of Hope and Temperance Meetings should be encouraged and controlled. These have at length secured a place of real power and importance in the community. No ruling elder can hope, in the present day, to retain, not to say extend, his influence, and turn his official power to best account, who withholds his sympathy and support from the Temperance Reformation.

But there are two sections of the community to whom the ministrations of the elder ought to be constantly directed. "Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the Church." This implies, that elders recognize it to be their duty and privilege to respond to every call, to pray with and comfort the afflicted. The bereaved, the destitute, and the orphan, will be the objects of special solicitude, remembering that "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction." There is another class whose condition has become a scandal and a

danger of portentous magnitude. Vicious indulgences have alienated a large proportion of the population of Christian lands from the restraints and amenities of Divine worship. The urgent duty of seeking to arrest the process of deterioration and of preventing Church members from becoming involved in the widening vortex, lies on every Elder and by every consideration of judgment and of mercy, for time and for eternity, he should undertake it. Like Aaron with the smoking censor in his hand, he should stand between the living and the dead, that the plague may be stayed. A few sentences culled from the "Apostolical Constitutions" will show how the functions of the Presbyter were traditionally regarded in the third and fourth centuries. "Thou, then, line a shepherd who is full of love and solicitude for his flock, count thy sheep; seek those who are gone astray; go after that which is lost; restore that which has wandered. Remember that the Good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep; and that He carries the weak ones in His arms."

3. *Faithful correction, or the right administration of ecclesiastical Discipline*, is an essential and important part of the duty of the Elder To the Elders constituted in the name of Christ are committed "the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven." Representing, and acting on behalf of the brethren at large, they exercise the power of Christ in the admission and exclusion of members, and for these reasons they are called "the Church." If an offender will not listen to private, brotherly remonstrance, then says Christ, "tell it unto the Church; but if he neglect to hear the Church let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matt. xviii., 17, 18.) Such power must be strictly regulated by the precepts and precedents of God's Word, and should be exercised under a solemn sense of its far reaching issues. As the Church has not yet adopted any means for the special training of elders, it behoves these to study and make themselves familiar with the Books of Discipline and Order. They ought to be punctual in their attendance at meetings of Session and of the superior courts to which they may be commissioned, give and take their full share of responsibility, prayerfully seeking to be so guided as that their decisions shall give expression and effect to the mind of Christ.

The admission of persons to the membership of the Church, with their previous training and examination, is the most interesting duty that Elders are required to perform. This should be discharged a manner befitting its solemnity and importance. But the judicial removal of unworthy persons is not less necessary, if the body of Christ is to be preserved from injury and reproach. On their not "suffering His covenant and the seals thereof to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders," as the Westminster Confession expresses it, depends more than on any other official act, whether the life blood of the Church is to be kept pure, healthful, and stimulating, or is to become corrupting, impoverished, and diseased. Such discipline is necessary, moreover, as the Westminster Confession declares, "for preventing the wrath of God, which might justly fall upon the Church." In the Third Book of the Apostolical Constitutions the following rules are laid down. "Rebuke those that sin, admonish those that are not converted, condemn the guilty person with authority, afterwards try to bring him home with mercy and compassion and readiness to receive him."

It was the thorough and rigorous discipline of the early Church, that consolidated the power before which the Roman Empire succumbed in less than three centuries. It was by their strict discipline, that the Waldenses and the Bohemian Brethren survived their persecutions and proved in the face of Papal Europe that the Church of Christ is indestructible. The marvellous coherence and indomitable strength displayed by the infant Churches of the Reformation, and their sturdy, vigorous development when first planted in the large outfield of America, must be mainly attributed to the same cause. Calvin declared from the pulpit in Geneva, " I will die sooner than this hand shall reach the symbols of the Lord's body to any one who has been found a despiser of God," and submitted to expulsion from the city rather than compromise the purity of the Church's fellowship. John Knox in the same city, boldly added to the two marks of a true Church, which had been accepted by both the Lutherans and Reformed, a third in the following terms: - "Ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered as God's Word prescribed, whereby vice is repressed and virtue nourished." This was afterwards embodied in the Scotch Confession, and practised with unflinching fidelity while Presbytery was rooting itself in Scottish soil.

A thorough revival of spiritual life that shall purge out all extraneous elements, is the real want of the age, and no Church in Christendom stands so fully equipped and ready to take advantage of such times of refreshing as does the Presbyterian. Possessing the simple ordinances of Divine Worship, an educated minister in every pulpit, and an ordained eldership in every congregation, what but the power of the Holy Ghost does she need, that she may be strong and do exploits?

4. It only remains to mention that the duties of *a skillful and effective Leadership* belong to the office of the Ruling Elder. The shepherd goes before the sheep, and they hear his voice and follow him. The most successful overseer is the skilled and experienced workman, whose fidelity and power in stimulating others have marked him out for the foremost place. The last testimony that can be borne to his influence is to have it said of those under his immediate care— "The people had a mind to work." Three times in the last chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Ruling Eldership is designated by a word— μ —which is used to give prominence to this idea of leadership. In some sections of the Church this is the name by which the Elder is known. We have already seen that in the Sabbath School, the Prayer Meeting, and meetings for Scriptural Temperance, he has opportunities for forming the sentiment and directing the activities of the Church. There are other measures essential to her prosperity, in which he should take an equally prominent and leading part. Let it suffice to indicate two of a prominent character, that must ever rise in importance as the Church rises to the consciousness of her high vocation—the support of the Ministry and the extension of the work of Missions.

The Church has suffered immensely, through all her interests, by the shameful neglect or half-hearted performance of the first of these duties. This has arisen from an inadequate sense of its immediate bearing on the very life of religion, and of the reflex spiritual benefits it is certain to produce. This ordinance of Christ must be restored to its

honourable position, before the Church can enjoy the full measure of blessing contained in her other institutions. No more important field could be offered to the leadership of Ruling Elders than this. Their skilful teaching and generous example would soon elevate the Church to a loftier plane, and secure a vantage ground for the prosecution of larger and more catholic projects. Once initiated into the divine arts of “Systematic Beneficence,” the humblest toilers in the Church will covet earnestly the best gifts—“Remembering the word of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Successful in rousing the Church to the right discharge of this primary obligation, elders will find little difficulty in leading her on towards perfection in grander fields of Christian enterprise. This world has been given to the Son as His covenanted inheritance. To the redeemed Church, bound up with Him in the same covenant and baptised by the same Spirit into one body, has been given the task of conquering and taking possession. The springs of Christian liberality seldom fail in an emergency or disappoint the calculations of an enterprising Church. Trumpet peals from the pulpit and the Press, uttering the bitter cry of the perishing, will not be enough. God Himself gives the word, but the 102,000 elders in our Presbyterian churches must pass it into circulation. Heroic champions and bold defenders of the faith in days of persecution, they must now prove equal to the crisis, as the Church moves on to final victory and rest. If the Church is to move in compact phalanx, securing every position that is won and pressing forward her forces to still greater achievements, then the influence of the eldership must be brought into requisition, even as it has been from Egypt until now. Passing from house to house, they must spread the message, diffuse information, kindle enthusiasm, regulate zeal, enlist all classes in the work, and marshal the ranks for united action. Having at length fully emerged from the dreary wilderness, let the officers of the host catch the assurance of God's faithful Word, and transmit it as an inspiration and a pledge to others. Then, sooner than eve dare to anticipate, great voices in heaven may be heard to proclaim—“The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever.”

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Appendix V

REPORT ON THE ELDERSHIP.

At the Meeting General Council of the Alliance of the Reformed Churches, held at Philadelphia on the 27th of September, 1880,

Inter alia:

It was resolved—"That a Committee be appointed to obtain information in regard to the election and ordination of Ruling Elders in the various branches of the Reformed Church connected with the Alliance; the Formulas subscribed by such Elders; and the functions and duties pertaining to the office as set forth in the Polities, or implied in the usages of the Churches, and to report to the next General Council."

The Committee appointed by the Council was as follows:—Rev. Dr. Knox, Belfast, Chairman; Rev. Dr. Fisch, Paris; Hon. Judge Strong, Washington, D.C.; and James Croil Esq., Montreal.

Touching the office and functions of the Eldership, at least three distinct theories are entertained.

(1) That while the New Testament recognises but one order of Presbyters, in it there are two degrees or classes, known as *Teaching Elders* and *Ruling Elders*. In accordance with this theory are the remarks in Hills' View of the Constitution of the Church of Scotland—p. 37, 38 - "In teaching, in dispensing the Sacrament, in presiding over public worship, and in the private functions by which he ministers to the comfort, the instruction, and the improvement of the people committed to his care, a pastor acts within his own parish according to his discretion; and for his discharge of all the duties of the pastoral office he is accountable only to the Presbytery from whom he received the charge of the parish. But in every thing which concerns what is called discipline—the exercise of that jurisdiction over the people with which the office-bearers of the Church are conceived to be invested—he is assisted by lay-elders. They are laymen in this respect, that they have no right to teach, or to dispense the Sacraments; and on this account they form an office in the Presbyterian Church inferior in rank and power to that of the pastor. Their peculiar business is expressed by the term 'Ruling Elders.'

(2) A second theory contended for by Principal Campbell in his treatise on the Eldership, and by others also, is that there is no warrant in Scripture for the office of the eldership as it exists in the Presbyterian Church; that the "Ruling Elder" is not, and is not

designed to be, a counterpart of the New Testament elder; in other words, that he is not a Presbyter, but only a layman chosen to represent the laity in the Church Courts, and permitted to assist in the government of the Church.

(3) A third theory is advanced by Professor Witherow and those who hold with him that the modern elder is intended to be, and should be, recognised as a copy of the Scriptural "Presbyter." Those who take this position hold that "in everything, except in training, and the consequences of training, the elder is the very same as the minister." This view is based on the fact that the terms "Overseer" or "Bishop," "Presbyter" and "Elder," are used interchangeably throughout the New Testament. It is consistent with this theory to argue the absolute parity of ministers and elders, conceding to all "Presbyters" equal rights to teach (if they can), to rule, to administer the sacraments, to take part in the ordination of ministers, and to preside in Church Courts.

From the reports placed in the hands of the Committee, it appears that the practice generally followed in the Presbyterian Churches of the present time is in accordance with the first-named theory, namely, that while the functions of teaching and ruling both normally belong to Presbyters, yet the Scriptures countenance a distribution of these duties among them, making it the special duty of some to rule and of others to teach.

The returns are twenty in number: six from the Churches of Great Britain and Ireland; six from the United States of America; four from the Continent of Europe, and four from Colonies of Great Britain. The information which they contain is conveniently arranged as follows:—(1) Qualifications for the Office; (2) Duties and functions of the Eldership; (3) Modes of Election; (4) Examination and Subscription; (5) Ordination; (6) Term of Service.

1st—Qualifications - These are substantially the same in all the Churches. The name itself—especially in the form which it assumes in the Waldensian Church, "Les anciens" - suggests maturity in respect of age, religious experience and wisdom. Not that old age is requisite: what St. Paul said to Timothy, a Presbyter and ruling elder, is applicable to all competent Presbyters—" Let no man despise thy youth."

As a rule, Elders must be twenty-one years of age, and communicants in good standing. The Moravian Church requires them to be thirty years old. It forbids father and son, brothers, father-in-law and his son-in-law from acting as Presbyters in the same congregation at the same time. In the Church of Scotland the rule is that "no person shall be chosen or nominated for in the eldership unless he is a man of good life and conversation, tender and circumspect in his walk, punctual in attendance upon ordinances, strict in his observance of the Lord's Day, and regularly keeping up the worship of God in his family . . . one who will be careful of his flock, and an example unto them in sobriety, meekness, and holiness; abstaining from all appearance of evil." In the Free Church of Scotland, elders "must possess more or less of all the qualifications described in the New Testament, as needful for persons exercising spiritual oversight in the Church, "whether such persons be designated in our translation by the term " Bishop,"

or by the term “Elder”, These qualifications are, with slight changes in the phraseology, identical with those required by the Church of Scotland.

An ordained minister who from any cause not involving Church censure is without a pastoral charge, is eligible as a ruling elder in the congregation to which he belongs, in the Church of Scotland, the Free Church of Scotland, the Presbyterian Church in Canada, and in others of the Churches, but not universally. In the Presbyterian Church of the United States (North) ministers are not permitted to serve as elders, except in emergencies on missionary ground.

As to representative elders, sometimes called “Commissioners” to the Supreme Courts, there is diversity of Practice. The Scottish Churches, the Presbyterian Church in Canada, and others, allow ministers, including principals and professors in Theological Colleges, to be elected as representative elders. In not a few instances such elders have been elected as Moderators of Synods and General Assemblies. The choice of Commissioners to the Supreme Courts is not necessarily restricted to the Congregation or Presbytery to which they belong, but in many of the Churches elders may be chosen as representatives from any part of the Church, and this is frequently done, in order to secure the assistance of laymen, whose experience and aptitude for business makes their presence desirable, as well as for other reasons.

2nd. - Duties and Functions. - According to the First Book of Discipline of the Church of Scotland, 1560, "Their office is to assist the minister in the execution of discipline in all great and weighty matters. They shall watch upon all men's manners, religion and conversation, that are within their charge, correct all licentious livers, or else accuse them before the Session. They should take heed to the doctrine, diligence and behaviour of their minister and his household, and, if need be, admonish them accordingly."

The following enumeration of the duties required of the eldership in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland most nearly represents the general consensus of opinion on this subject: - "The duties of the Ruling Elders are - (1) To sit in session and assist the minister in the administration of discipline and of the ordinary affairs of the Church. (2) Have a careful oversight of the people in relation to doctrine and practice—their attendance upon ordinances, and the duties of personal and family religion—to superintend the religious instruction of the young, and see that the wants of the poor are duly provided for. (3) Promote the formation of fellowship meetings, superintend them, and take part in the exercises. (4) They should likewise visit periodically families and members in the district assigned to them, it being proper that a particular district of the congregation, containing a specified number of families, should be assigned to each elder for supervision and visitation. On the spiritual state and circumstances of these he should always be prepared to report to session. He should keep a regular record of his visits for this purpose. (5) Attend punctually upon meetings of Presbyteries and Synods according to appointment. (6) To assist at the dispensation of the Lord's Supper, by carefully judging of the character and qualifications of those who seek admission to it—receiving from them tokens of admission, and distributing among them the sacramental elements."

It belongs to the Kirk-session to regulate the appointment of deacons. Ruling elders are *ex-officio* members of the Deacon's Court.

In the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Church the elders, or "leaders," occupy a higher platform than in Presbyterian Churches generally. As the ministry in that Church is still in a great measure itinerant, and as many of the churches are too weak to support a minister, these are frequently under the sole care of elders; "though it is felt that such a state of things in our days is a source of weakness and danger." Many of these elders are "exhorters," occupying the place filled elsewhere by local preachers, by their teaching, though not preaching formally. It is competent for elders in this Church to preside in church courts. "Many of them have acted as chairmen of public meetings and Presbyteries. One of the most highly respected of them was chosen last year as Moderator of the Quarterly Association; but he, being of the wisest as well as most highly respected, declined the honour "

In the Synod of Otago and Southland, owing to the scarcity of ministers and the scattered nature of the congregations in the new settlements, elders connected with city congregations often, and in some cases regularly, conduct Divine service in the rural districts for the benefit of those who cannot conveniently attend the services of a stated ministry. They also frequently conduct the services at funerals.

In Belgium the elders take an active part in Sabbath Schools, and preside at prayer meetings, in the absence of the pastor, agreeably to the usual practice in Presbyterian churches.

In the Free Church of Italy the elders are of two classes:—"(1) Those who excel in gifts of preaching: (2) Those who are inferior in point of gifts or aptitude to teach and preach." The former are elected for life, and take the place of the minister in his absence; the latter are elected for one year but may be re-elected annually. Both classes assist equally in the government of the Church.

In the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (North) elders have no power to preach or administer the Sacraments but in certain cases in which it is impracticable, without great inconvenience, to procure the attendance of a minister, the Session may proceed to business without a minister—one of the elders presiding. In the Presbyterian Church of the United States (South), when there is no pastor, one of the elders may convene a Session. In the Scotch and Colonial Churches it is not competent to hold a meeting of the Kirk-session without the presence of a minister as Moderator.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada has found it expedient to employ elders as evangelists or Catechists in the North-West territories, where the people would otherwise be deprived of ordinances during a considerable portion of the year.

The instances in which ruling elders have been elected Moderators of Presbyteries are comparatively rare. Since the days of George Buchanan it is not known to this

Committee that a layman has acted as Moderator of a General Assembly or other Supreme Court in the Presbyterian Church. The election of Dr. Bruce as Moderator of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of England in 1881, is improperly claimed as an exception to this rule. Dr. Bruce, though unordained, was a licentiate of the Church. The existing practice seems to be founded upon use and wont, and courtesy, rather than explicit enactment. A reason for it, however, is given in Hodge's Presbyterian Law p. 498 - "Although the word 'minister' is not used in describing the Moderator of the Higher Courts, several ministerial duties are required of him, such as preaching a sermon, offering the ordaining prayer, and pronouncing the Apostolic benediction. In the Assembly the Moderators have always been ministers."

The right of ruling elders to join in the act of ordination is generally disallowed, although it is affirmed by some on the ground that they are presbyters, and that the power of ordination, as an act of government, belongs to these as a class, and without distinction. But there is no evidence in these reports that ruling elders, as such, take any official part in the ordination of ministers.

3rd—Election— The Kirk-Session usually judges of the expediency of adding to its membership. In the Church of Scotland it is held that the election is, legally, with the Session, but it is not uncommon to give the congregation the right of nomination. In the Free Church of Scotland, the Presbyterian Church of England, the Welsh Calvinistic Church, the Reformed Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian Churches of the United States—North and South—and the Colonial Churches, the elders are elected by the votes of the communicants of the congregation. In the United Presbyterian Church of North America, the Session nominates and the communicants elect, but it is competent for the latter to make additional nominations. In all cases the Session judges of the fitness of the persons nominated, and the communicants have the right of objecting in nearly all cases.

4th—Examination— Elders are solemnly admonished in respect of the duties of their office prior to ordination. It is customary to require answers to a series of questions similar (*mutatis mutandis*) to those put to candidates for the ministry. Further than this there is no examination, properly so called, except in the case of the United Original Seceders, Scotland, where the practice is that "the elders elect are examined by the Session in regard to their religious knowledge, the government and discipline of the Church, and the duties of their office.

The *Formula*, where one is prescribed, differs in no important particular from that which ministers are required to assent to. Subscription to it is not required in most cases—it being held sufficient elder elect declare his willingness to sign when he is asked to do so.

5th—Ordination— Elders are admitted to office by the Kirk Session, in the presence of the congregation—usually by prayer and exhortation, and receiving the right hand of fellowship from the other members; or, by prayer and the imposition of the hands of the Session, as in the Reformed Church of Ireland, the United Presbyterian Church of North America, and the Presbyterian Church in the United States, South. The Scottish

Churches do not impose hands. Before the division of the Ref. Pres. Church in the United States, the Assembly, in 1833, declared that "as the imposition of hands was plainly in accordance with apostolic example, it is the opinion of the Assembly that it is proper and lawful. They conceive that every Church in this respect may with propriety be left to adopt either of those two modes as they think suitable and best." In 1851 the " Old school Assembly left it to the discretion of each Session to ordain by imposition of hands or otherwise."—(Hodge's Law, p. 288).

6th—Term of Service— At the first, Elders were elected in nearly all the Reformed Churches annually. In most Presbyterian Churches at the present time, however, the tenure of office is *ad vitam aut culpam*. "If they demit their office, the congregation should be very cautious in again calling them to exercise it."—(Canadian Book of Polity, p. 45.) In the Reformed Church of the United States the term of office is determined by each congregation, but it is usually for two years, the parties being eligible for reelection. In the United Presbyterian Church of North America it is provided — (1) "That it is the imperative duty of the Elder to resign whenever his influence is so impaired from any cause that he cannot exercise his office efficiently in the congregation in which he is installed; (2) "That when it is evident that an Elder has become unacceptable and inefficient in a congregation, it is the privilege of that congregation to ask him to resign; and if the end be not thereby accomplished, in conjunction with the Session, may lay the matter before the Presbytery for their action."

In the Presbyterian Church of the United States, North, it was enacted in 1875 as follows, — "If any particular Church, by a vote of members in full communion, shall prefer to elect Ruling Elders for a limited time in the exercise of their functions, this may be done." But in this case the *office* is held to be perpetual though the exercise of its functions may cease. The elder whose term of office has expired is eligible for reelection. If not re-elected, he is still an elder. Such elders, by due appointment of the Session or Presbytery, may become members of any of the Courts of the Church above the Sesson. (Hodge, A. 297.)

Whatever views are entertained respecting the authority upon which the Eldership is established, it is a fact that there is an order of office-bearers in the Presbyterian Church, rightly or wrongly called elders—a very numerous order—computed to number not less than one hundred thousand.

In theory, the office of the eldership is admirable, and in practice it has been found useful; but in point of efficiency, it is unquestionably defective. The Churches are deprived of the counsels and assistance of not a few of their most gifted, influential, and pious laymen, either because the nature and duties of the office have been misunderstood, or because its responsibilities have been so magnified as to deter them from accepting office. On the other hand, few elders have been carefully and systematically instructed as to the discharge of their duties; hence many of them have no practical knowledge of questions which they are called upon to discuss and determine, and, consequently, elders as a class come far short of that ideal which pronounces the eldership, — "The glory of the Presbyterian Church."

The Committee believe that the time has come for raising the eldership to a higher plane than it now occupies, not by flattering concessions as to their status, but by a suitable course of training that would enable them to fill the office more efficiently, not only in their own congregations but also in the capacity of representatives, when they have to consider the welfare of the whole Church. The fact that elders sit and deliberate in the higher courts of the Church as equals with the ministers, and vote upon matters of the greatest moment, is sufficient reason for claiming attention to this subject—one which seems to be regarded as of greater importance by Presbyterian missionaries in heathen countries than by pastors of congregations in Christian lands.

Recommendation — The only practical suggestion which the Committee venture to make in closing this report is, that provision might be made by Presbyteries, with special reference to the instruction of the eldership, for an occasional course of lectures on the distinctive principles of Presbyterianism, the practice and proceedings of ecclesiastical courts, and the government and discipline of the Church.

Respectfully submitted in the name and on behalf of the Committee.

JAMES CROIL.