

The Ruling Elder

HIS OFFICE AND HIS DUTIES

By

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Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath shade you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he bath purchased with his own blood.

—Acts 20:28.

I THE RULING ELDER IN THE REFORMED CHURCH

THE office of ruling elder is an essential part of the Presbyterian system. In 1638, Charles I, summoning the great Glasgow Assembly, instructed Presbyteries to send to it ministers only. The Tables, sitting in Greyfriars Church, Edinburgh, urged Presbyteries to disobey the royal command and to comply exactly with the Second Book of Discipline. Thus when the Assembly was finally constituted, 140 ministers and 98 elders appeared as commissioners. The Second Book said that ruling elders were necessary. Again, in 1643, when the English Parliament invited the Scottish Church to appoint some ministers to represent it in the Assembly of Divines sitting at Westminster, the General Assembly of that year named as its delegation six ministers and three elders. This it did because of a memorandum, prepared by Robert Baillie and submitted to the Assembly, proving that the addition of some elders was requisite if the delegation were to be of unquestionable validity.¹ Ever since it has been universally acknowledged that the ruling elder has a necessary place in the government and discipline of Presbyterian Churches.

THE NECESSITY FOR DISCIPLINE

The great Reformers were acutely conscious of the importance of the Church maintaining some control over the morals of its members. These were days of social upheaval and the lives of multitudes were lax. The leaders knew that, surrounded as they were by hostile eyes, every scandal among their followers must injure their cause. On the other hand those followers were rejoicing in a spiritual liberty unknown to their fathers. With freedom of thought they claimed freedom of action. Especially were they unwilling to place in the hands of Protestant ministers reins just snatched from the hands of Romish priests. Thus, in the first attempts at reconstruction, Luther and Zwingli turned perforce to the civil power. They taught that it is for the State, Christian and reformed, to uphold the authority of the Church. The Church may teach and counsel, but the State alone may enforce decisions. In Saxony and Zurich, ecclesiastical discipline became a matter of civil action.

The conflict of Church and State, however, had endured too long, was too deeply rooted, to permit of general acceptance of such a ready compromise. Almost immediately, Francis Lambert drew up a constitution for Electoral Hesse in which the management of congregational affairs and the exercise of discipline were to be committed to a Weekly Assembly. Because of the disorders of the Peasants' War and the greater disorders of the Munster Anabaptists, this extremely democratic form of Church government never had a trial, but it was published, had a wide circulation and exerted considerable influence. It helped to make plain the problem of reconciling Church authority with the newly won liberty of the individual Christian.

CHURCH GOVERNMENT IN GENEVA

The first great constructive step was taken at Geneva. There John Calvin was wrestling with the factions of the Libertines and Patriots. For that he needed the full support of the government of the Canton, but the simple expedient of Luther and Zwingli was impossible to him. He believed that, from the point of view of the Church, secular rulers can not exercise sufficient control over morals. Moreover he was firmly persuaded that, coordinate with the State and within its own sphere, the Church held authority immediately from God. He could not subordinate it to the civil power. Instead, by an ingenious device and as a practical measure, he linked together Church and State. A *Consistoire* was established consisting of six ministers and twelve magistrates and to this body all ecclesiastical government was committed. The ministers nominated the twelve, who were

¹ Baillie's Letters, Vol. 11, p. 478.

elected by the Little Council and held office for one year only, though eligible for reselection. To the Great Council of two hundred was reserved the right of imposing a veto on the choice of any individual, but the general membership of the Church was accorded no voice in the matter. The *Consistoire* was a close corporation, a serious departure from Calvin's expressed opinions. In another respect, however, he held tenaciously to his convictions. The twelve might be magistrates and elected by magistrates, but they might not act in the Church as officers of the State. Before they could sit in the *Consistoire* they had to be installed as officials of the Church. They became elders.

Neither the name nor the office was original with Calvin. Already elders had been appointed in a number of Zwinglian congregations, although largely inoperative there, but their appearance in Geneva attracted special attention and aroused some discussion. And the discussion was disquieting. It raised the whole question of the legitimacy of the office. The critics might be chiefly papal or prelatical, but they brought to light some of the issues involved. There was abundant mention of elders in the Bible, under the Mosaic dispensation, in the synagogue and in the Apostolic Church. Under current methods of interpretation, all these references were held as of equal authority and as implying divine sanction for a form of government of perpetual obligation. But criticism quickly pointed out that a common name did not always involve identity of function. Though John Calvin's elders might be according to the Mosaic dispensation, they did not conform to the requirements of the New Testament. They were not presbyters. Calvin himself admitted² that bishop and presbyter are synonymous. Of his elders he would only say that they were seniors chosen from the people and with a divine warrant to join with the presbyters in government, censoring morals and exercising discipline.

CHURCH GOVERNMENT IN OTHER REFORMED CHURCHES

Meanwhile a doctrine common to all Protestants was being published in every quarter, the universal priesthood of all believers. Taught by the Apostles and held at least until the time of Irenaeus, it was revived at the Reformation and was gladly received by the great body of Church members. These became conscious that they were not mere "laity", people with no religious significance. Called unto liberty, they had claimed part in the administration of the Church, and now found their claim justified upon scriptural grounds. Theirs was a spiritual rank. In places where government control failed, constitutions of Reformed Churches grew more and more liberal. Yet the leaders distrusted the popular vote. Although Calvin's device, limiting the eldership to the magistracy, was impossible outside of Geneva, other plans were tried. Thus, in a'Lasco's Congregation of the Foreigners in London, while the office was open to every rank and class, the actual election of new elders was a right reserved to those already in authority. The entire membership might nominate whom they would, and from those thus presented the ministers, elders and deacons chose such as should be admitted to the eldership. Practically that was the method followed under the French polity. The reverse of this procedure was adopted in Valerand Pullain's Congregation of French Refugees at Frankfort, the body with which John Knox was associated while minister of the English Church there. Pullain's polity provided that, for the choice of new elders, the ministers and elders should prepare a list of twice the number required, and that from among those thus nominated, and from them only, the entire membership should elect to office. Finally, with the Scottish Reformation in 1560, the liberal movement culminated in a really free election. The First Book of Discipline said simply, "How the votes and suffrages may be best received, so that each man may give his vote freely, every several kirk may take such order as best seems to them." At the same time, however, and without prescribing any definite procedure, the Book declared, "if any of those nominate be noted with public infamy he ought to be repelled; for it is not seemly that the servant of corruption should have authority to judge in the Kirk of God."

CHURCH GOVERNMENT IN SCOTLAND

The First Book of Discipline was prepared hurriedly. Redundant in parts, it yet omitted much that was necessary for the framework of a national Church. Moreover, as it stood, it was not wholly consistent with

² Institutio, IV, 3, 8.

itself. It was of "highly composite origin."³ The authors of the Book evidently looked to the Lords of the Council to supply what was lacking in their plan, only being careful to stipulate that nothing should be admitted "which God's plain word shall not approve," and that the "liberty" of the kirk should be maintained. They expected the warm co-operation of all classes in the realm, but in this they were bitterly disappointed. Neither the Court nor the greater part of the nobility would accept the Book. Some of the Council stigmatised it as a "devout imagination." For years the government adopted toward it an attitude of resistance, usually passive, sometimes active, so that, while different Assemblies ordered it to be observed in various particulars, it never received legal sanction. The Kirk was left to complete and harmonize its own polity. First undertaken in 1563, this work was prosecuted with the utmost deliberation and publicity, issuing in 1578 in the adoption of the Second Book of Discipline. Of this it has been well said, "The general principles which it maintains deserve to be kept in view as the fundamental and constitutional laws of our . . . Church."⁴ At last, after prolonged friction between the Church and the Crown, the essential provisions of this Book were incorporated in an Act of the Scottish Parliament, never repealed. Thus, in 1592, the Church acquired a legal establishment, but not peace.- It had still to endure well-nigh a century of strife and tribulation before it attained quiet security. The great defect of the First Book was due to inexperience. Without precedents to guide them, the authors were engaged in sketching a Presbyterian polity for a national Church. So, while -at one end of the line they laid down rules for the administration of parishes, and at the other assumed the existence of a "whole councell of the Kirk," they could only suggest vaguely the necessary intermediate units of organization or supply their place with temporary expedients. As a natural result there was steadily mounting strife. One party in the Government was bent upon maintaining a mongrel episcopacy as a means of "milking" the ecclesiastical revenues. Another sought to transform the provisional office of superintendent into a genuine prelacy. Both were united in opposition to the popular and representative element in Presbyterianism, the eldership. The Court was well aware that, while ministers dependent upon the State for their maintenance might be bribed or coerced, it was quite another matter to overawe office-bearers drawn from every rank and including among their number some of the most powerful nobles. The place and the legitimacy of the eldership afforded an abiding field of conflict. Thus it was that not only did the Second Book develop Presbytery as an efficient substitute for the diocesan bishop; it set the eldership upon an unassailable scriptural foundation. It did this by appealing to I Corinthians 12:28. "In this our division, we call these elders, whom the Apostles call presidents or governours." At first sight this may not seem to be a very ambitious claim for the once, but Paul's word, *kubernesis*, director or pilot, may well imply the exercise of the most important functions. At least, after all the confused argument as to presbyter-bishops, the statement of the Second Book did much to clarify the situation, and to vindicate the right of the Presbyterian ruling elder. In doing this it performed a service of inestimable value, Says the Duke of Argyll: "We are to remember by the great institution of the eldership, there was no space of separation left between the clergy and the laity.... It was under this name, and in this character, that all orders of the community were represented in the assemblies of the Church. Thus in Scotland, the Church became a real power, not a name—not a privileged Order—not a priestly superstition—but a tangible, intelligible thing—a living and active community."⁵ So well did the Second Book do its work that, when King James restored episcopacy in the Church, he did not venture to abolish the eldership. At the establishment of the Court of High Commission in Scotland, the royal Directions could only express the King's hostility to the office and leave the institution to operate unchecked, "Considering that Laick Elders have neither warrant in the Word, nor example in the Primitive Church . . . nottheless it is expedient that some be appointed to assist the Minister."⁶ Throughout the entire period of prelatical ascendancy, Kirk-sessions continued to function, and to be centres of popular resistance to reactionary tyranny.

THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY

While the Second Book of Discipline found for the office of ruling elder a definite scriptural warrant, it was not so happy in its detailed treatment of the topic. In this there was something of confusion and obscurity. There

³ MacGregor, *Scottish Presbyterian Polity*, p. 132. 4. Lee, *History of the Church of Scotland*, Lect., XIV.

⁴ Lee, *History of the Church of Scotland*, Lect., XIV.

⁵ *Ecclesiastics History of Scotland*, . 47.

⁶ Spottiswoode, *History of the Church in Scotland*, Ed. 1668, p. S15.

were even some ideas incompatible with the basic claim which had been made. The complete development of the Presbyterian doctrine of the eldership was left to the Westminster Assembly of Divines. By an ordinance of the Lords and Commons, 1643, 121 ministers of the Church of England were named as an extraordinary synod to advise Parliament, "that such a government should be settled in the Church as may be most agreeable to God's Holy Word, and most apt to procure and preserve the peace of the Church at home, and nearer agreement with the Church of Scotland and other Reformed Churches abroad." Although some members of both Houses and eight Scottish commissioners sat with them as assessors, the members of the Assembly were all clergymen of the Church of England and representative of all shades of opinion. The action of King Charles, however, declaring the Assembly illegal, prevented Archbishop Ussher and moderate Episcopalians of the royal party from attending, and their absence had a decisive influence on the course of the Assembly. It left Presbyterians in the majority, but those Presbyterians were such only by personal conviction or choice; they were still Anglican clergymen, without practical experience of the system they would adopt. As a consequence, while many of their debates appear detached and theoretical, even doctrinaire, the results reached were usually very definite and logical. Alike in polity and doctrine, the statements of the Westminster Assembly have been its enduring monument, acceptable to the great majority of Presbyterian people for three hundred years. When the Assembly came to consider Church government, the first stumbling-block encountered was the eldership, its place and authority. Writing to Holland in 1643, Robert Baillie reported: "The next poynt whereon yet we stick, is ruling elders. Many a verie brave dispute have we had upon them these ten days. I profess my marvelling at the great learning, quickness and eloquence, together with the great courtesie and discretion in speaking, of these men. Sundrie of the ablest were flat against the institution of any such officer by divine right . . . All of them were ever willing to admitt elders in a prudentiall way; but this to us seemed a most dangerous and unhappie way, and therefore was peremptorie rejected. We trust to carie at last, with the contentment of sundrie once opposite, and silence of all, their divyne and scripturall institution. This is apoynt of high consequence; and upon no other we expect so great difficultie, except alone on Independencie."⁷

A few weeks later he wrote:

"We have, after verie manie dayes debate, agreed, *nemine contradicente*, that beside ministers of the word, ther is other Ecclesiastick governours to joyn with the ministers of the word in the government of the Church; that such are agreeable unto, and warranted by the word of God , especially the 12th Rom. 8 ; 1st Cor. 12, 28; that in the Jewish church, the elders of the people did joyn in Ecclesiastick government with the Priests and Levites, according to 2nd Chron. 19,8. How manie and how learned debates we had on these things, in tweve or thirteen sessions from nine to halfe twe, it were long to relate."⁸

It was not an easy matter to bring the Westminster Assembly to a unanimous decision as to the place and authority of the ruling eldership. It could be done only as a definite line of demarcation was drawn between pastors, who are presbyter-bishops, called by the Holy Spirit to the ministry, and these "other Church governors" who are representatives of the people. The office was declared to be the ancient Jewish office, continued in the Christian Church by the will of Christ, who confers special gifts and authority to exercise them upon those who are called to the office by the Church. Further it was agreed that the powers possessed by these officers were conjunct, only exercised with the ministers; they did not confer a separate or independent jurisdiction. Finally, the popular usage, calling them elders as of old, was formally recognized.

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA

By the Basis of Union, 1875, the Westminster Form of Presbyterian Church Government is included among the Standards of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. As such it is part of the constitution of the Church and, while older works like the Second Book of Discipline are still useful as illustrating principles, the Basis of Union is the only statement of polity having creedal authority. It is well, therefore, at this point to insert in full the exact text of its article on the eldership. This is as follows:

⁷ Baillie's Letters, Vol. II, p. 110.

⁸ Ibid. p. 116.

OTHER CHURCH-GOVERNORS

As there were in the Jewish church elders of the people joined with the priests and Levites in the government of the church so Christ, who hath instituted government, and governors ecclesiastical in the church, hath furnished some in His church, besides the ministers of the word, the gifts for government, and with commission to exercise the same when called thereunto, who are to join with the minister in the government of the church. Which officers reformed churches commonly call Elders.

II THE BIBLICAL ORIGINS OF THE ELDER'S OFFICE

Nowadays one may cite the organization of the Apostolic Church only with reserve. Our knowledge of the period has expanded too rapidly for due appreciation of details. Indeed we are even told that in that Church we are to see but an organism—not an organization—an organism, living, growing and ever adapting itself to its environment. Definite ecclesiastical organization, it is said, lies beyond the limits of the New Testament; there we find not office and office-bearer, but one Spirit manifesting Himself through diverse personalities. So say many recent historians. While there is a measure of truth in this, to the present writer it would appear that here historians exaggerate the fluid condition of the primitive Church. Anyone familiar with pioneer communities knows how swiftly personal leadership may transform itself into official authority. An organism, however inchoate, must exhibit some organization, however rudimentary.—As a living community the Christian Church must have possessed organization from the beginning. Some things may be assumed as incontrovertible. The Christian Church came out of Judaism, the Judaism of the synagogue. The first believers did not formally secede from the synagogues with which they were connected. Believing office-bearers did not resign their charges. Instead they continued among their unbelieving brethren, observing the customary hours of prayer, etc., until the progress of events compelled their separation. When that hour came in Jerusalem, they must have gone out not as individuals, but as little groups of faithful followers of Christ, closely associated, and having among them officers long recognized and obeyed. The first local officials of the Church must have been elders continued from the synagogue and accepted by their brethren. This alone explains the eldership appearing everywhere in the Church, and from the earliest times, without a suggestion being offered anywhere as to the origin of the institution.

THE ELDERS OF ISRAEL

The elders of Israel were the representatives of the people. Thus, at Sinai, when Jehovah entered into covenant with the house of Jacob constituting them a "holy nation," He said unto Moses: "These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel." Then we read: "And Moses came, and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the Lord commanded him."¹ It was certainly the elders who received the covenant upon behalf of the congregation, and apparently the elders who made the answer which, as the words of the people, Moses returned unto the Lord. This representative character of the elder's office appears in various passages, notably Leviticus 4. There it is provided that, where a single Israelite has sinned through ignorance, he is to bring a young bullock as a sin offering, lay his hand upon the bullock's head, and kill the bullock "before the Lord." Where, however it is the whole congregation who have sinned through ignorance, the congregation are to bring the bullock: "And the elders of the congregation shall lay their hands upon the head of the bullock before the Lord."² In both cases the priest was to bear the blood into the tabernacle and sprinkle it before the veil. In other words, what the individual Israelite did for himself, in dedicating his sin offering, the elders were required to do for the whole congregation. Theirs it was to act for the people in a most solemn ritual. Representatives of the people, elders were also governors of the tribes and communities among which they dwelt. As such they are mentioned together with the "anointed" priest and the "separated" Levite. It may be said that their judicial functions were civil, rather than religious, and some difference was undoubtedly made between "matters of the Lord" and "king's matters"; but in a theocratic state such distinctions are well-nigh meaningless. Moreover duties definitely religious were laid upon them. Thus, in the Book of Deuteronomy (31:9) Moses is said to have commanded the priests, Levites and elders, "Thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the

¹ Exodus 19:7.

² Leviticus 4:15.

words of this law."³The last passage is of especial significance, for with it we enter the era of the synagogue. Whenever it may have received its finished form, Deuteronomy is undoubtedly the Book of the Law found by Hilkiah in the House of the Lord.⁴ Josiah's reformation was an attempt to conform to its requirements, and it was in an especial sense the law carried by the exiles into the Babylonian captivity three-quarters of a century later. There its repeated injunctions to study and teach the commandments of Jehovah coloured the whole life of the Jewish community, whose labours produced the completed codes which Ezra bore back to Jerusalem. Possessing the written Word the nation became emphatically the People of the Book. Whereas an altar can have but one place, a book may find many homes. Naturally and inevitably the synagogue system arose and developed.

THE ELDERS OF THE SYNAGOGUE

One great change was involved. The activities of priests and Levites were confined to the Temple, and the political course of Eliashib and his successors had deprived the priesthood of much of its prestige. The synagogue was left to the third class of rulers under the Mosaic dispensation, the local elders. Every synagogue was governed by its board of elders. Under their chief, the *archisynagogos*, these took charge of the sacred building, books and implements, oversaw public worship, appointed almoners to care for the poor and a schoolmaster to teach the children of the town, above all exercised discipline over all members of the community. Such was the synagogue our Lord knew and countenanced. In Nazareth He accepted the invitation of the elders, received from their officer the roll of the prophet Isaiah and spoke to the people. His followers might well feel that they had His approval when, separated from official Judaism, they still adhered to the organization and customs received from their fathers. Continuing among them the eldership, theirs was a government by representatives, exercising spiritual authority, and charged with the maintenance of the truth.

GIFTS OF GOVERNMENT IN THE CHURCH

A second thing which may be assumed as incontrovertible is the rapid advance of the Apostolic Church in spiritual apprehension. For example, it required only short years for disciples, to whom at Pentecost Jesus had been the Suffering Servant made Lord, to see in Him the very image of the invisible God, in whom all fullness dwells. Parallel with this was their realization of the manifold grace in which they themselves lived. There was an experience of divine life and power through the abiding presence of Christ, a presence made manifest by the gifts of the Spirit. Those gifts, *charismata*, were witness that they were in Christ, and bore fruits in every department of their being. Daily they became more and more conscious of the infinite variety of the powers bestowed, and began to discern between gift and gift. Every form of Christian service depended upon the possession of a chasm, and for a time the detailed enumeration of such gifts grew greatly. From the beginning a broad distinction had been drawn between the ministry of the word and a ministry of tables.⁵ Soon we read not of apostles and elders, but of apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, helps and governments, and diversities of tongues,⁶ a suggestive, rather than exhaustive, list of gifts enjoyed. Later it is apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers,⁷ which sounds more like a roll of officers all being of the ministry of the word, and the last two of the local Church. By that time, however, we may trace a tendency to halt the further recognition of distinctive gifts, as there arose a felt need for their classification and arrangement. Before the New Testament closes we have definite evidence of the organization of the local Church taking form. Already, in the first days of the Church in Jerusalem, we find the Apostles fully conscious that theirs was a special call to prayer and the ministry of the word. Elders might care for, and administer the affairs of the little Christian synagogues, but public worship was the peculiar function of the Apostles. With the widening mission of the Church, others, like "Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven," were called to the work of proclaiming the gospel. To these were soon added prophets, men believed to be specially taught by the Holy Spirit. As missionaries set apart for

³ Deuteronomy 31:9.

⁴ II Kings 22:10.

⁵ Acts 6:2-4.

⁶ I Cor. 12:28.

⁷ Eph. 4:11.

the extension of the faith, theirs was an itinerant ministry, and not tied to any one place. The congregations, ever increasing in number, were centres for Christian fellowship and service, and remained under the government of elders, now distinguished one from another by the diversity of gifts possessed and exercised: but for a while their meetings for worship remained very much as in the beginning, gatherings for spontaneous expression in praise and prayer, and religious converse. Only when a prophet happened to be present could there be authoritative exposition of the Scriptures, instruction and exhortation.

THE GROWTH OF ORGANIZATION

Such a condition could not continue indefinitely in a Church growing in numbers and experience. From time to time, and for personal reasons, a prophet might settle down in a particular community, and, giving his services to the local congregation, receive of their support. Such occasional assistance would only make plain the exigency of the hour. Speculative vagaries, soon to run riot, were making their presence known. Instruction, both systematic and widely diffused, was necessary, and that could be provided by a settled ministry alone. In the Pastoral Epistles we can see that ministry in its earliest development. The point of importance is that the development was not the appearance of a specialized function among the existing office-bearers of congregations. It was the introduction, under place limitations, of an office already long established in the Church, the ministry of the Word. Throughout the first Christian century, local churches retained in full measure the liberties with which they began. The establishment among them of the ministry of the Word did not change that for many years. Acknowledging the unity of the whole Church in a common allegiance to one Lord and dependence on one Spirit, and accepting the guidance of the Apostles, they remained self-governing bodies, administering their own affairs. Elders, spoken of or alluded to under many names, rulers, helps, governments, guides, etc., sometimes chosen deliberately, sometimes accepted because of seniority' influence or even kinship, are to be found throughout the entire New Testament. There, "ministers of the word" and representatives of the people, or "other Church governors," appear side by side, not as holding one office and sharing between them specialized duties and powers, but as one government, composed of two offices distinct in origin and function.

III TEACHING AND RULING ELDERS

Presbyterians are agreed that Christ has instituted in His Church a ministry, to which he calls men individually, and which is essential to the existence of the visible Church. They are further agreed that this ministry is, by Christ's commission, vested with a divine power, but not lordship. They believe that, according to the liberty wherewith He has made His people free, Christ bestows upon the Church men having gifts of government, which they may lawfully exercise, in conjunction with His ministers, when called of the Church. All branches of the Reformed Church admit the ministry to be a sacred office, but do not regard it as constituting a spiritual order. Only in a very loose and popular way may any in those Churches speak of clergy and laity. While, however, they do not allow the ministry to be a separate order in the Church, they do teach, in evangelical form, what others call "the grace of orders." It is only the mechanical *opus operatum* of Romanism which is rejected. Thus the Westminster Confession says: "Unto this catholic visible Church Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God . . . and doth by His own presence and Spirit, according to His promise, make them effectual."¹In other words, just as "by the blessing of Christ and the working of the Holy Spirit" the sacraments become "effectual means of salvation," so the ministry. Called of God to a divinely appointed office, a minister enters upon his work with the promise of a special blessing. The Presbyterian position is correctly stated by Dr. Van Dyke:²

"God honours His own ordinance, in the very act of ordination, in answer to prayer, and with the laying on of hands, He bestows not only the formal investiture of the office, but the inward and spiritual grace needed for the performance of its duties."

Quoting Paul's exhortation to Timothy³ he adds:

"The only thing to which the Apostle's words can be applied without doing violence to the laws of language is the special grace of God for the performance of his official duties, given to him in the act of ordination. Is it going beyond the recorded facts to call this charism 'the grace of orders' in the same sense that the benefits received in baptism and the Lord's Supper may be called 'sacramental grace'? While we avoid the popish error which links God's spiritual gifts mechanically with the mere performance of outward ceremonies, we should be equally careful to avoid the greater, because the more unbelieving, heresy, which makes the performance of His appointed ordinances a mere outward form, and divorces them from His efficacious blessing upon those who rightly use them."

THE TEACHING ELDER

Holding such doctrine, Presbyterians cannot view the ministerial office as a profession co-ordinate with worldly callings. A minister's pastorate is never a hiring nor is his stipend pay. From time to time there crops up evidence that some regard their minister as the hired man of the congregation. That ugly perversion receives no countenance from the Standards or forms of procedure. In the call and settlement of a minister everything is done to guard against it. There is no legal contract. In their call, the congregation simply engages to contribute to the minister's "suitable maintenance as God may prosper us." The call is accompanied by a guarantee of stipend, but that guarantee is addressed to the Presbytery, and is in consideration of the Presbytery sustaining the call and settling the minister. It is supposed to remain in the possession of the Presbytery. All that the minister receives is a copy. Even so, the guarantee is carefully worded to avoid any implication of a definite contract. It is based on an "estimated revenue," and simply promises the Presbytery that the congregation will pay a certain stipend from such revenue "as it is collected." To this end they engage to use their utmost diligence. And that is all. The minister is not an employee of the congregation, and his stipend is not payment

¹ Westminster Confession of Faith, chap. XXV.

² The Church: Her Ministry and Sacraments, p. 118.

³ I Tim. 4:14 and II Tim. 1:6

for services rendered. He is a servant of the Lord, and the congregation, as the people of the Lord, contribute to the maintenance of the servant and his work.

No man is ordained as a minister of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. He is ordained as a minister of the Church of Christ. His commission is to preach the gospel to every creature. In that there can be no denominational distinctions, and the requisite qualifications must be those acceptable to the Church throughout the centuries, vocation, training and ordination. A candidate must be fully persuaded in his own heart that Christ is calling him to the work of the Gospel ministry and must show a life in outward conformity to his profession. The Church, by its competent authority, (in Presbyterian Churches a Presbytery) being satisfied with the reality of the candidate's vocation, must judge of his sufficiency, by education and religious experience, for the work to which he is called. In this judicial action, all the conditions surrounding an ordination and the legal decisions making it valid belong to the whole court, and every member has his part in them. The ordination itself, however, is not part of the legal procedure. It follows that procedure as a consequence, solemn, spiritual, apart. It is the duty of the ministers of the Church, in obedience to the recorded decision, to engage in an act of public worship, in which, with the imposition of hands, they pray over the ordinand. In that prayer there are two essential petitions, first, that God will "fit him with His Holy Spirit," and second, that He will "give him to fulfill the work of his ministry in all things." Such a religious service is strictly a ministerial function. The newly ordained minister becomes a minister of the Presbyterian Church in Canada as he is given the right hand of fellowship, and admitted to all the rights and privileges of his office in that Church. According to the Westminster Standards, ordination does not of itself confer governmental power in the Church as it is ordered and settled. The ministry is appointed for "the gathering and perfecting of the saints," and for that work a minister has plenary license. Should the providence of God send him as a missionary to the heathen, or to labour in some place where there is no organized Church body, he would have apostolic authority to preach the word and administer the sacraments, admitting to, or excluding from, baptism and the Lord's Supper at his discretion. When, however, the Church is once gathered, he must conform to the example of the Apostles and confine himself to the role of counsellor and guide. The Westminster divines allow him but one place of authority in the Church. "He hath also a ruling power over the flock as a pastor." Called and settled in a pastoral charge, he is clothed with judicial and administrative functions in the Church, but he does not thereby divest himself of the duties and rights which are his under Christ's commission to His minister. Only he must perform those duties and claim those rights within the limitations of a Kirk-session, where they may pose the most important, and certainly the most delicate, of questions, and where he meets the ruling elder, who may make or mar all his ministry.

THE RULING ELDER

As revived at the Reformation, the office of ruling elder was designed expressly to be a vehicle for popular participation in the government of the Church. That he has been called to it by the voice of the congregation to which he belongs is the sufficient warrant for a man undertaking its duties. Unlike those entering upon the gospel ministry, he need not feel that he has a vocation. Neither does he require any special training. Whatever he may think of his own fitness, the call of his fellow members lays upon him a responsibility not to be lightly avoided.

QUALIFICATIONS

In the Presbyterian Church in Canada, the only statutory requirements for the office are that a man be twenty-one years of age at the least, and a member in full communion of the congregation electing him. Other qualifications are biblical. These, especially as in the Pastoral Epistles, James and I Peter, are all personal, and alike for minister and elder. Above everything, such should be distinguished by a piety which is exemplary. Each should be "of good behaviour," "sober," "not covetous," but "given to hospitality,"⁴ "not self-willed,"⁵ "an

⁴ 1 Tim. 3:2-3.5.

⁵ Tit. 1,7.

example of believers in conversation, charity and purity."⁶ As one who is to be a governor in the Church, he should be "one that ruleth well his own house,"⁷ "just" and "patient," "vigilant" but "not soon angry,"⁸ "gentle unto all men."⁹ In religious attainment and knowledge of the truth, he should be "not a novice,"¹⁰ but, "holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught," be "able by sound doctrine to convince gainsayers."¹¹ Also, because indispensable to the moral power of the Church, each should have "a good report of them which are without,"¹² and be known as "a lover of good men."¹³ Further it is said that he should be "apt to teach"¹⁴ and able for prayer,¹⁵ but as included in the passages quoted, these do not imply that every office-bearer must be ready to occupy a pulpit or lead in public worship. They are only the gifts looked for in every Christian, who should "pray without ceasing"¹⁶ and "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh a reason of the hope" that is in him.¹⁷ Equally with all his brethren the elder is called upon to exercise such gifts as have been graciously bestowed upon him, but his one official duty is to rule well, and happy is the congregation having a Session distinguished, in the discharge of that duty, by the high character set forth in Scripture. The glory of Presbyterian Churches has long been not the ability of some, but the marked integrity evinced by the great body of the eldership.

ELECTION AND ORDINATION

The newly elected elder must be approved by the Session, (or where there is as yet no organized Session, by the Presbytery of the bounds.) Then, at his ordination, he must profess his faith in Scripture, as "the Word of God, and the only infallible rule of faith and manners." For the doctrine, government and worship of the Church, he must declare his acceptance of the Westminster Confession and of Presbyterian Church government, "as founded on and agreeable to the Word of God," promising "to adhere faithfully" to the Confession, and "to maintain and defend" the government, at the same time acknowledging the purity of worship in the Church and pledging conformity to it. Finally, in accepting office, he must engage "in the strength and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ," to perform its duties, watching over the flock of which he is to be an overseer, and showing himself to be a pattern of good works. Although chosen by the people, and as their representatives, ruling elders do not exercise what may be designated "lay" functions. Their office is declared to be "spiritual as is the ministry." They are, with the ministers of Christ, those to whom "the keys of the kingdom of heaven are committed, by virtue whereof they have power respectively to retain and remit sins, to shut that kingdom against the impenitent, both by the word and censures; and to open it unto penitent sinners, by the ministry of the gospel, and by absolution from censures, as occasion shall require"¹⁸ Those powers, inherent in their offices, are of the utmost importance to the welfare of the Church. To open and shut the doors, to receive into, or exclude from, the visible Church constitutes the gravest responsibility, which can lie upon mortal men, and for the faithful discharge of that responsibility, they are directly answerable to Christ, the great King and Head of the Church. Having been approved, the newly elected elder must be publicly ordained, "in the presence of the congregation, and preferably upon the Lord's Day." The officiating minister is, in virtue of his pastoral office, the minister of the charge in which the elder is to serve, the ordination is with prayer. Usually there is no imposition of hands. The Church, however, has never pronounced on this. In 1560, the Scottish Reformers declared that, "the miracle having ceased," the laying on of hands is no longer necessary in ordination. Eighteen years later, they revised their position and enjoined prayer, the imposition of hands and fasting. This was done to avoid misunderstandings with other Churches, and not because of any change in their opinions. Other

⁶ 1 Tim. 4 :12.

⁷ 1 Tim. 3, 4.

⁸ Tit. 1, 7.

⁹ II Tim. 2, 24.

¹⁰ I Tim. 3:6.

¹¹ Tit. 1:9.

¹² I Tim. 3:7.

¹³ Tit. 1:9.

¹⁴ I Tim. 3:22.

¹⁵ James 5, 14.

¹⁶ I Thess. 5:17.

¹⁷ I Peter 3:15.

¹⁸ Confession of Faith, XXX, 2.

Churches, however, were interested only in ordination to the ministry. For the elders, the Scottish Church was left free to follow a custom already begun, and even the pronouncement of the Westminster Assembly did not alter it. It is a striking example of the manner in which Presbyterians have always regarded rites and ceremonies as of secondary importance.

TERM OF OFFICE

An elder is installed to serve *ad vitam aut culpam*. The Canadian Church does not allow of any term-service. Nevertheless an elder may demit the active exercise of his office. He may resign for sufficient reason, and he must vacate his place when removing to another congregation. He may also be removed by the Presbytery, on petition by the Session, when he is found to be no longer helpful to the congregation. But he continues an elder for life, though not in office, and, if elected in the same or another congregation, must be installed without further ordination.

AUTHORITY

No elder has any Church authority of or by himself. Powers vested in persons are marks of an Episcopal polity. The government of Presbyterian Churches is by courts, Sessions, Presbyteries, Synods and Assemblies, and it is only when sitting in such a court, lawfully constituted, that an elder is clothed with authority. Every elder, however, may, indeed should, have something transcending all official prerogatives. The Church is not an artifact, operating through a technic of legal rights and duties. It is the household of Christ, a brotherhood which, in its fellowship and work, is impelled by spiritual forces defying analysis. As the chosen representative of his brethren an elder stands in a place of honourable precedence and instead of authority, possesses influence, an influence which may at times amount to positive ascendancy in a congregation. With meekness and in humble dependence upon his Lord, he should employ that influence for the good of the whole body.

DUTIES

That he may have a fruitful field for its exercise, the Church has directed that every elder be assigned a district a definite portion of the congregation, wherein he may cultivate acquaintance with his fellow members, fears their needs, and afford them guidance and assistance. As appointed an overseer of the flock, he should strive know and understand the people specially committed his care, by word and example strengthening them in Christian living, while sympathizing with them in their difficulties and comforting them in their sorrows. As one charged with superintending the instruction of youth, he should diligently seek the friendship of the young, ever remembering that it is from their number the chief growth of the Church must come. As one privileged to counsel and aid the pastor in his labours, he should be vigilant to detect prejudicial opinions and practices in his neighborhood, bring them to the attention of the minister, and by active interest encourage or, where necessary, by practical wisdom restrain, his efforts to overcome the evil. In short, by character and reputation, open opposition to the wrong and fearless support of the good, ever governed and tempered by the shrewdness of mature experience, an elder may exert an influence which is more than official power, and which must make itself felt both in and without the Church, at once a source of inspiration to all Christian people and an unimpeachable witness to the world. In the ruling eldership, a spiritually minded man, intelligent and energetic, may, by the grace of God, hold a place of opportunity unexcelled in the service of Christ.

IV THE ELDER IN THE KIRK-SESSION

A Kirk-Session consists of the minister or ministers and ruling elders of a congregation, and the minister seeing as pastor of the charge is its moderator *ex officio*. The Presbyterian Church in Canada declares, indeed, that only a minister may act as moderator in any of its courts. For that a word of explanation would seem to be in order, since the necessity of the rule is scarcely self-evident. No one would claim that presiding in a Church court, and that as a judge of order alone, is exclusively a ministerial function. Moreover some Presbyterian Churches now allow elders to be elected as moderators of all courts except Kirk-Sessions. In Scotland, for a hundred years after the Reformation, elder-moderators, though comparatively few, were not unknown in all courts. As late as 1658, thirteen years after the adoption of the Form of Church Government, the Kirk-Session of Aberdeen elected one of their own number, George Meldrum, to be moderator during the long illness of their minister, Andrew Cant. Even the Westminster Assembly did not definitely forbid such an appointment. All it would say was, "It is most expedient that, in these meetings, one whose office is to labour in the word and doctrine, do moderate in their proceedings. "It is not difficult, however, to understand why, after the Westminster Assembly, elder-moderators disappeared for many generations. The Scottish Church had been imbued with the opinion that ministers and elders were alike presbyters, holding the same office, ministers being simply those specially charged with preaching and administering the sacraments. The ambiguous statement of the Second Book of Discipline did not alter that opinion materially, and at Westminster, the Scottish commissioners argued strongly in support of it. Even after their views had been rejected, George Gillespie pleaded with the Assembly at least itself to call the "other Church governors" elders. And the Assembly refused. It would only consent to say, "Which officers Reformed Churches commonly call elders." Adopting the Form of Presbyterian Church Government, the Church of Scotland accepted its theory of the eldership—It was part of the price paid for uniformity between the two kingdoms—and recognized the limitations it imposed. The judicial powers of the eldership are neither original nor independent. They are exercised in conjunction with the ministry. The whole task of the Church is to proclaim the gospel of Christ and to secure its fruits in the lives of men. Every question which can engage the attention of the Church, every agency for work, every form of busyness among its members, is legitimate in the Church only as it may sense that end. And to this all-embracing task, ministers have been expressly called and commissioned by Christ. For the government of the Church, says the Confession¹ "the ministers of Christ, of themselves, by virtue of their office," may meet, Further, it says, "they, with other fit persons upon delegation from their Churches, may meet together in such assemblies ;" and never has the Church determined, by formal decree, who must preside in those mixed gatherings*. That, for a hundred years, and as a fixed, unquestionable custom, only ministers were elected moderators was entirely due to the felt reverence of men for the work of the ministry as the whole mission of the Church. It was not because of any idea of "honourable precedence" or "wider usefulness." It was solely because of a feeling for the sanctity of the office, a feeling begotten of a conviction that Christ's commission to His Church, apart from which the Church is nothing, is just to preach the gospel. It is not strange, therefore, that since the great Methodist revival with its vogue for lay preaching, at a time when men have lost much of their former appreciation of the solemnity of the preacher's mission, they should look upon a moderator as simply the president of a Church court, a notion which never occurred to the early Reformers. Most unfortunately, they have also come to think of the Church itself as an instrument for securing many social and cultural gains, which contribute but slightly or indirectly to the advancement of the kingdom of Christ.

THE MINISTER IN THE KIRK-SESSION

¹ Cap. XXXI. 2.

In 1705 the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland published a collection of "Overtures concerning the Discipline and Methods of Procedure" etc., in which appeared the statement that "The Moderator is always to be a Minister:" but the Assembly pointed out that the collection "is not to be looked upon as the deed of the Church of Scotland yet it may be very useful for advice and direction, though not as a binding rule."

A minister in a pastoral charge is never a member of the congregation, but he is most emphatically an integral part of the Session. Indeed, apart from him or another, minister acting for him, elders cannot form a Church court at all. By the teaching of our Standards, they can act only in conjunction with the minister, and that, not because he is their moderator, but because he is commissioned of Christ for his office. To that office, he is inducted by the Presbytery, representative of the whole Church, and for the due discharge of its obligations is answerable to the Presbytery which installed him, and not to the Session on which he serves. As he is a pastor, a minister is indeed an elder and is invested with a share in the government of the congregation, but he is always, and in every aspect of his work, much more, and because that work is spiritual, it can never be defined and limited by the exact prescriptions of law. Only in the free intercourse of Christian brotherhood can it kind a fruitful held of service, and minister and elders alike must ever seek to live and labour in the charity which "believeth, hopeth, and endureth all things," the charity which alone "never faileth."

CHURCH PROPERTY

In so far as a Presbytery exercises pastoral care over an assigned area, its executive is the individual minister in charge; in so far as it is a judicatory for the administration of the Church, it is the Session; and relations in the former sphere are much less susceptible to exact regulation than are those in the latter. Thus, for example, subject to the Presbytery, a Session has control over the Church edifice and all other buildings belonging to a congregation. Only the Session may grant the use of these to agencies or persons not members of the congregation, and, if careful in the exercise of their trust, ever remembering that it is theirs to guard the good name of the Church, may frame for themselves the most meticulous of rules. So, too, it is theirs to adjust such conflicting claims for accommodation as may arise among the various societies and organizations of the congregation, and in doing so they may follow policies almost equally dear. But they are under obligation to permit the pastor the fullest use of Church premises for his work, and there only grace and good will may direct them, for suds work can never follow surveyed paths or keep to narrow boundaries.

PULPIT SUPPLY

The most important place in the Church to be occupied by a minister is the pulpit, and, as has been said by some one, the authority of a Session stops at the pulpit stairs. It might even be said that the authority of all men stops there, for the jurisdiction of the Presbytery itself is chiefly negative. A minister enters the pulpit as an ambassador of Christ, and no Church court may enjoin what he shall say, or stipulate precisely how he must order public worship, the prayers to be offered or the praise to be used. His Presbytery may sit in judgment, after the fact, upon what he has actually said, and condemn teaching inconsistent with the doctrinal Standards or restrain the practice of some novelly endangering the peace of the congregation— and for such a review of his course any member may petition directly. A minister has likewise full liberty in supplying his pulpit from time to time, but the Standards recognize as supply only ministers duly ordained. Thus, in the freedom of Christian fellowship, he may invite to the pulpit not only Presbyterians, but any ordained minister, in good standing, in any recognized branch of the Church of Christ. Further, the Directory suggests as desirable occasional services by students preparing for the ministry with the sanction of some Presbytery and such services are equally at the pastor's discretion. Beyond these, however changed customs and the necessities of the Church have led to the employment in religious work of many unordained men. As the Church at large makes use of them, a pastor is also entitled to avail himself of their assistance. Yet before doing so, since they are of many kinds and have no legal status, he must secure permission from his Session. The elders may have to stop at the foot of the pulpit stairs, but at least they are there at the foot of those stairs, and have a right to be satisfied with the qualifications, official or personal, of all who ascend them.

THE SABBATH SCHOOL

Another place of peculiar responsibility and liberty for a pastor is the Sabbath School. He cannot enter the School merely as a visitor. It is a most important part of his charge. His commission from Christ is, "Feed my lambs." The Church enjoins every Session to organize one or more Sabbath Schools in a congregation, appoint

superintendents and teachers, and to take special care for their efficient. It is the duty of the Session adequately to equip and maintain the Sabbath School, and they are charged with its oversight. In this they should ever guard against any inclination to view the School as an independent unit in the life of the Church. It is only an instrument in the hands of the pastor for the better prosecution of his work, and alike superintendent and teachers should think of themselves as his voluntary assistants, sharing his responsibilities. Experience has shown the great danger of the Sabbath School to be a tendency to separate the child from the main current of Church life. Every teacher should aim continually at impressing upon each scholar the conviction that his place is in the Church, that attendance on the School is not a substitute for attendance on public worship, and that the lessons inculcated are only a preparation for larger usefulness in the service of Christ in and with the Church.

SPECIAL SERVICES

Probably in nothing does the average minister indulge with greater freedom than in announcing special services one kind or another; yet the appointment of any public service whatever lies strictly within the jurisdiction of the Session. Even for the usual diets of worship on the Lord's day, it is theirs to determine when and how many they shall be. So, too, it belongs to the Session to appoint Communion seasons, with all services in preparation for, or thanksgiving after the celebration of the Lord's Supper. All these are at the appointment of the Session, much more others such as services of evangelism, rallies of youth, anniversaries and observation of special days like National holidays or days of popular appeal like Mother's Day. In this the members of the Session hold their jurisdiction as the representatives of the people who are expected to attend. It might be said that, if a minister be willing to undertake some special service, he should be at liberty to do so for those desiring to be present. Presbyterians, however, have always taught that it is when the members of the Church are "all with one accord in one place" that spiritual power is most manifest. Where services are too numerous they become burdensome, and it is not a mere coincidence that, in a time of multifarious activities in the Church, attendance on the Sabbath does not improve. For any and every service, it is the duty of the Session to consider prayerfully how far it may be profitable. They should ever remember that the test of a Christian life is not to "mount up with wings;" it is to "walk and not faint."

ADMISSION TO THE LORD'S TABLE

It is the duty of a minister personally to examine everyone who would come to the Lord's Table for the first time. It is part of his pastoral office to instruct and catechize, and he may not delegate it to another. The elders have a right to be present at such an examination, and to share in it inasmuch as it is preliminary to admission to the legal status of a member in full communion in the Presbyterian Church in Canada with all its rights and privileges. It is only by the formal vote of the Session that such admission can be granted, and, although the elders may accept the report of the minister should they desire to do so, they are entitled to satisfy themselves as to the fitness of any applicant before they vote. The qualifications for membership are few and simple. The Presbyterian Church be a denomination; it is not a sect; and no Session may demand of a candidate adherence to any of its distinctive doctrines. The only requirements for admission are scriptural, a declaration of faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, an intelligent appreciation of what is implied in that profession such as may evince an ability to discern in the sacrament the Lord's body, and a life in outward conformity with it. As the applicant is to be admitted to all the privileges of full membership in the congregation, the Session have also the right to ask for his promise to submit to the lawful government of the Church, to contribute to its maintenance as God may prosper him, and to study its peace and welfare.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

Beyond appointing the time of its observance, providing for its orderly administration, and determining judicially who may or may not partake, the Session, as a Session, has no part in the celebration of the Communion. It is a common mistake, due to a misapprehension of the functions of the eldership, to constitute the Session before the service and to adjourn formally after the congregation has been dismissed. The elders, however, are present as members and not as officials of the congregation. The Reformers insisted upon actually

seating the communicants around a table. The minister, having "fenced the tables," came down from the pulpit, and took his place at their head. There, having consecrated the bread and wine by prayer and ritual act, he handed them to the nearest communicant in obedience to Christ's word, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves," and the communicants passed them from hand to hand among themselves. The elders attended to collect the tokens and to see that people approached or withdrew in seemly quiet. Only when communicants began to partake while sitting in pews did it become necessary to arrange for some to assist in distributing the bread and wine. Then, the simplest and most orderly way in which to meet the need was taken as the elders performed the duty themselves, but it was as members of the congregation, and not as elders that they acted. Should it be desirable at any time, a minister may distribute the elements himself, or call for the assistance of some members present. Around the table of the Lord, men and women meet as members of the mystical body of Christ, and not as office-bearers and members of an ecclesiastical organization.

OVERSIGHT OF THE FLOCK

At the ordination of an elder in the Presbyterian Church in Canada his office is expressly said to be that of an "overseer of the flock," a statement far removed from the wording of the Westminster symbols. Indeed it would almost appear as though, in the Directory and the Form of Church Government, the Assembly of Divines deliberately avoided speaking of an "overseer" at all. Moreover even when they speak of one whose duty it is privately" to admonish, exhort, reprove, and comfort," it is the minister whom they in mind. They would seem scarcely to have thought of the elder other than as a judge seated in a Church court. The Church of Scotland, however, had had ample experience of the possibilities of the Presbyterian system, and, in adopting the Directory, took care to reserve to themselves the right to follow all the practices appointed by the Books of Discipline, and not otherwise ordered by the Directory. And among those practices none was of more importance to the Kirk of that day than the use made of the eldership. In 1648, just three years after adopting the Directory, the General Assembly instructed all Kirk-Sessions to "let every elder have a certain bounds assigned to him, that he may visit the same every month at least." The rule, while not introducing a practice before unknown, made it general and was aimed directly at a more efficient policing of the parishes. It was due to the disorders attendant upon civil war, and the elders were to report not only upon abuses within their bounds; they were to report especially upon persons entering without testimonials (letters testifying to good character issued by the Sessions of the parishes they had left) a species of domestic passport required by the law of the day. In Scotland popular opinion had long looked upon the elders as supplying the place of a rural police force. By an Act of Parliament, all fines levied in a parish were payable to the Kirk Session for pious uses or relief of the poor. Upon many Sessions magistrates sat as elders. In parishes where there were none, under another Act of Parliament, the Sheriff of the county might appoint a Session-bailie. In point of theory, the Church censured a misdoer for his sins; the magistrate sitting in the Session immediately fined him; and as promptly the Session collected the money. Apparently, however, little attention was given to the niceties of the situation, and in many a landward parish the Session constituted the whole civil administration. The elders were even compelled to act as local constables. The law held them responsible for the good order of the parish, and for years it was necessary to appoint some to "perambulate the clachan," especially at ten o'clock when taverns closed, a duty still recalled by the phrase "elders' hours". The Church of Scotland did not accept its position without some remonstrance. It was at least partly aware of the danger of confusing civil and ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and of a practice exposing it to a charge of commuting moral offenses for money payments. The system, however, had popular support, and occasional protests and petitions went unheeded. Those were crude and rough days when, as contrasted with the savage brutality too often shown by royal justices, the more humane and deliberate action of Church courts might well seem attractive. A petty malefactor, summoned before a Kirk-Session, almost a jury of his neighbours, must often have felt himself fortunate in that he was not Wing haled before some arbitrary justice of the peace. Even standing in the joughs, at the kirk door, under the watchful eyes of the elders, must have seemed preferable to being seated in the stocks on a village green, exposed to the tender mercies of the rabble. Certainly it was not until after the Revolution, in a time of milder manners and improved social conditions, that real criticism of the system arose. Then, at the first signs of popular disapproval, it began to disintegrate, and before long failed altogether. Even in its heyday, however, the system did not answer to the ideal set forth in the Second Book of Disciples. Lacking the logical precision of the Westminster symbols, the

Second Book agreed with them in funding a scriptural warrant for the eldership in the "presidents and governors" of the Apostolic Church, and in declaring that "their principal office is to hold assemblies with the pastors . . . for establishing good order and execution of discipline; " but it went beyond them in offering a detailed survey of forms of service open to elders, "severally and privately." An elder, it was said, must watch diligently lest corruption enter among the flock, and also seek to foster the spiritual life of all the members, personally warning each of his duty under the gospel, and correcting, by private admonition, such faults as may be discerned. Only as a last resort when counsel and rebuke have alike failed, should an elder bring anyone to the authoritative judgment of the whole Session. In its section on the eldership, the Second Book sought to depict one who is truly a spiritual overseer, but in doing so did not see, as the Westminster divines saw, that the work of such an overseer can never be official, or find a fit place in a statement of law. Oversight, which begins by being official, usually ends by being merely officious. Only God given grace, flowering in wisdom, sympathy and tact, can fit a man for such a task. Defective as it was, however, the Second Book of Discipline has always constituted a challenging ideal, which has borne rich fruit in the devoted labours of many a faithful servant of the Lord. Preserved by the proviso of 1645, the Book keeps its place as a Standard of the Church of Scotland, and is part of the heritage of daughter Churches. As such it is ours, and the Presbyterian Church in Canada has a right, prayerfully and hopefully, to call upon every elder ordained in its service to prove himself veritably a spiritual overseer, an *episkopos* in very truth. It does not lie within the scope of this short essay to follow the elder into the superior courts of the Church. There, as the work becomes increasingly legislation and administration and less pastoral care, differences of office tend to disappear, and ministers and elders sit side by side in complete equality. Only the rule requiring a plurality of ministers in the quorum of a court (two in Presbytery and Synod and twenty-one in an Assembly) senses as a reminder that ministers still sit in virtue of their office and elders in conjunction with them.