

PROPHETS, PRIESTS, AND KINGS: BIBLICAL OFFICES

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There are many areas of doctrinal disagreement encountered in the Christian tradition. But there is one article of faith virtually universally accepted: the belief in the headship of Christ over the church. It is not surprising that there is such unanimity of belief affirming Christ as the head of the church. It is a truth taught transparently in Scripture. The apostle Paul's testimony is especially clear. "He is the head of the body, the church" (Col. 1:18); "Christ is the head of the church" (Eph. 5:23b). The apostle Peter emphasizes the authority of Christ with reference to the church by using the figure of a building. Believers, says he, are "like living stones . . . being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5). Of this spiritual household, Jesus Christ is the cornerstone (v. 6), the stone that serves as the point of reference for everything in that spiritual structure. The church is not a private club with rules determined by those who are dues-paying members, but a community of faith ruled by Christ through His Word.

Agreement quickly evaporates, however, when attention is focused upon the manner in which Jesus Christ exercises His authority. How does the head of the church rule His church in the existential reality of a local congregation? Through whom does He exercise His Lordship? Are there identifiable agents who serve as undershepherds of the divine Shepherd of the sheep? Does the Bible support the need in the church for "officials" who are charged with the responsibility of speaking, teaching, and ruling on behalf of Christ Himself? If it

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does, how many offices are there, and what are their distinguishing responsibilities?

It is important to have a biblical understanding of the place of office in the life of the church in order to understand how leadership must be exercised in the name of Christ. Much confusion exists on the issue of who is in charge in a particular fellowship of believers, to the detriment of the spiritual life of the congregation and its witness in the world. Tensions mount as groups rally behind self-appointed leaders. Sometimes dictatorial pastors push their own agendas as though they are accountable to no one. Fickle church boards are often guilty of making decisions with tactless disregard for the consequences in the life of the church. Members of churches organized in a "democratic" manner sometimes act like stockholders who only need a simple majority vote to dump a pastor or other leader. Poor or ill-defined leadership often precipitates the trauma of church splits.

Contemporary literature on the subject of leadership in the church focuses attention almost exclusively on the qualifications and gifts of the pastor. We are told that a pastor must be creative, energetic, farsighted, and charismatic and must especially be a people motivator if he is to have a successful, growing church. The pastor should operate like the head of a corporation, it is said. Further, if a board of elders or deacons fails to promote the program recommended by the chief executive officer, they must be replaced.¹

The Bible offers much evidence for a high view of the office of pastor. But the scriptural pattern requires a plurality of offices that precisely avoids the danger of vesting authority in a single office or person. Each of these offices has a defined area of primary responsibility exercised in the name of Christ for the welfare of the church. Failure to rightly understand or apply the relevant passages of Holy Scripture have led the evangelical church today into confusion and compromise.

ECCLESIASTICAL OFFICE ROOTED IN CREATION

God created human beings, Adam and Eve, as divine image-bearers. Unique among the creatures in God's perfect world order, they lived in the reality of a conscious relationship to God. They, unlike the rest of creation, knew they were God-related beings. They communicated with God

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and therefore enjoyed communion with Him. While the rest of creation reflected the glory of the divine Artist, it did so passively, unconsciously, and robot-like, just as a mirror reflects a person's image or a painting reflects an artist's skill. Neither mirrors nor paintings are conscious of what they are doing. Human beings, by contrast, are.

Adam and Eve could respond to the divine initiative actively, deliberately, consciously, and, as it turned out, disobediently. They were "responsible," that is, response-able to the God who addressed them in personal encounters as well as through the creation of which they were a part.² The evidence of God's presence was everywhere. Everywhere the message was clear. "You are God's image-bearers. You are accountable to Him. Your special relation to Him makes you unique in the created order."

As divine image-bearers, Adam and Eve were appointed by God to be stewards of creation and accountable to God. They and their descendants were assigned as caretakers of God's creation. "The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Gen. 2:15). Furthermore, Adam was charged to "name" the animals, which was not simply to provide labels of identification. Rather, "naming" meant to recognize the unique role each animal was to play in the perfect order of God's world (Gen. 2:19-20).

The honor of serving as steward of the creation required Adam to be obedient to every word from God. Both God's positive commands as well as His prohibitive commands circumscribed and structured the life of obedience that would provide the perfect sense of fulfillment and purpose for human life. Adam and Eve and their descendants were responsible to live by every word that proceeded from the mouth of God.

Further, as God's image-bearing steward, Adam was required to honor the Lord as God alone. God was to be the supreme object of praise and delight. This we identify as the worship dimension of life as an obedient steward.

What we observe emerging from this understanding of man's God-relatedness as divine image-bearer is a threefold role. This threefold role or calling is best identified as prophetic, priestly, and kingly in nature. Man was created to live by the Word of God (prophetic calling), to worship God alone (priestly calling), and to be the responsible head or ruler of the created order on behalf of its Owner (kingly role). To be human,

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that is, a divine image-bearer, meant to be a prophet, living by and declaring the Word of God, a priest bringing praise and adoration to God on behalf of the whole created order, and a king, managing every resource so that its God-determined use and potential would be realized to the glory of its Maker.

Then came the Fall.

THE DIVINE IMAGE DISTORTED IN THE FALL

The Fall, in its essence, was man's declaration of independence from God. The devil's lie was designed to distract man from his true relationship of God-dependency and to substitute for it a brokenness of supposed self-sufficiency apart from God. The lure of autonomy was attractive. The worship of the creature in place of the Creator was desirable, infatuating, and self-glorifying.

As a consequence, all three roles or callings that flowed from the nature of man as divine image-bearer were distorted beyond recognition. Man no longer lived by the Word of God, no longer worshiped God alone, and no longer served as administrative steward of the creation. His image-bearing roles as prophet, priest, and king were so corrupted as to have been wholly unfilled were it not for God's gracious intervention. God determined to right the wrong of human rebellion by means of the plan of salvation. God would one day crush the head of the serpent, destroy the works of the devil, and redeem a people for Himself. These new creatures in Christ Jesus would have the divine image restored in principle during their earthly existence and would be fully restored as eternal fact in glory at the end of the age.

The Bible records the emergence of a community of faith after the Fall. It details the history of a people called into covenant fellowship with God. This community of faith was characterized as an expectant people anticipating the fulfillment of the promise of a Messiah. They lived and died in the assurance that the Seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. By faith in the promise of a Deliverer, though dimly seen, they enjoyed a reconciled relationship with the Lord that anticipated better things to come.

With the emergence of a community of faith there came also the recognition of leadership within that community. These early patriarchal

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leaders were models of faithfulness to God and examples of what each member of the community should be. They also served in “official” capacities. As prophets they were sensitive to and lived by the Word of God and instructed the faith community in the divine Word. As priests they were the worship leaders who brought sacrificial offerings to the Lord on behalf of the community. They were also the kingly figures who ruled in the name of the Lord, and by bringing tithes, they testified that God is really King of all that is possessed.

Noah provides a model of one who exhibits a threefold pattern of leadership. As a prophet he was obedient to the Word of God and declared that Word faithfully to his contemporaries. He also brought priestly sacrifices by way of worship, specifically thank-offerings by which he acknowledged God alone as his deliverer. Noah also served as a kingly administrator in charge of the people and livestock preserved in the Ark from watery annihilation. Ideally, Noah was to represent what all people should have been.

Abraham may be an even clearer example. He received, was obedient to, and declared the Word of the Lord to his extended family. As such he filled the role of a prophet. Wherever he relocated, he built an altar for the purpose of priestly worship. And his kingly authority within his believing household extended to both biologically related members as well as to servants, those “bought with [his] money” (Gen. 17:13). The sacrament of circumcision given to infant and adult males alike served as a mark identifying the special privilege enjoyed by those who live in an environment where God is honored and His Word obeyed.

THE OFFICES OF PROPHETS, PRIESTS, AND KINGS DIFFERENTIATED

Throughout the patriarchal period, right up to and including Moses’ time, the official leadership of the covenant community was vested in one person. Gradually, after the time of Moses, the three official capacities in which the leadership of God’s people was administered became differentiated. That is, each office was administered by a separate person, and no one person was allowed to function in more than one office. Moses was the last to serve in all three capacities, prophetically declaring God’s Word and will, ruling and judging the people in a kingly manner, and leading the worship life of the community by way of priestly sacrifices.

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The priestly office was the first to have a separate identity. Aaron was consecrated High Priest, and his sons and male descendants were designated as the ones who were to occupy this office. Succeeding generations of Israel's people would look to the tribe of Levi for candidates to serve as priests (Lev. 8). From among these priests the High Priest was appointed.³

But it was also during the Mosaic period that the kingly office began to emerge as an office occupied by persons who held no other offices. They were called "judges," and the revelational period from Joshua to King Saul is identified as the period of judges. They functioned in a ruling capacity, adjudicating civil matters and mobilizing the nation to defend itself in time of war. When kings, beginning with Saul, were investured, they each served as the supreme judge of the covenant nation, the one to whom the most complex or difficult cases were referred and who rallied the nation in time of war. Other judges in subordinate positions met "at the gate" to settle most cases.⁴

The prophetic office does not come into widespread prominence in the life of the Old Testament covenant community until the time of Samuel. But prophets were present during the time between Moses and Samuel. There were prophets in Israel from the very beginning of her residence in the promised land (Judg. 4:4; 6:8). The fact that Manoah, Samson's father, at first thought a prophet had appeared to his wife suggests that the prophetic office was not unknown or unexpected at that time (Judg. 13:8). A prophet rebuked Eli (1 Sam. 2:27), and Samuel became the bearer of God's message to Israel at a time in which "the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions" (1 Sam. 3:1).

This perspective on the biblical idea of office recognizes the emergence of three distinct "official" representatives of the Lord among His people. The differentiation of these offices is complete by the time of the kings shortly before 1000 B.C. So important was it to keep each office unique and separate that serious consequences followed when one person attempted to function in more than one office. Saul, a king, officiated in a priestly role at Gilgal prior to battling the Philistines. He was reprimanded by Samuel and told that his act disqualified his biological successors from occupying the kingly throne (1 Sam. 13:8-15). Azariah the priest clearly identified the burning of incense on the altar as a priestly prerogative: "It is not right for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD. That is for the priests, the descendants of Aaron, who have been conse-

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crated to burn incense” (2 Chron. 26:17-18). Uzziah’s punishment for blurring office prerogatives was to be a leper for the rest of his life.

The period of the Exile in the experience of Judah is instructive in regard to the importance of three offices within the believing community. Once Jerusalem was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar’s army (587 B.C.), the kingly office within the covenant community was interrupted. Without a temple, destroyed as it was with the rest of the city, the regular priestly functions related to altar and festival ceased. Indeed, prophets, priests, and kings alike were made captives and marched off to Babylon.

But unlike the kings and priests, the prophetic office continued to function during the Exile. Daniel and Ezekiel are the most prominent examples. They continued to declare the Word of the Lord, both the word of warning and the word of promise. This points to the indispensable place the proclamation of the Word of God plays in the life of the believing community. With neither king nor priest, the covenant community continued so long as the Word of the Lord was not completely silenced. In their most vulnerable condition, the hope of survival and renewal depended on obedience to the Word of the Lord proclaimed by God’s prophetic agents.

Following the defeat of the Chaldeans (Babylonians) by the Medo-Persians, the victorious emperor Cyrus decreed that those exiles who so desired could return to their ancestral homeland. Upon their return, the restoration of Judea and Jerusalem required reestablishing the official positions of leadership within the community. Haggai and Zechariah occupied the prophetic office, and Zerrubbabel, as a descendent of King David, the kingly office. Under their leadership the temple was rebuilt. But the threefold leadership circle was not complete until Joshua, son of Jehozadak, was officially installed as High Priest to function in the newly rebuilt temple. With his ordination, as well as that of the whole company of regular priests, the restoration from exile was complete (Zech. 3). The threefold office pattern was once again in place, and leadership roles were reestablished within the community of believers.

JESUS CHRIST: OUR CHIEF PROPHET, ONLY HIGH PRIEST, ETERNAL KING

We observed earlier that the official representatives of God in the midst of His people, office-bearers, served as reminders of what all humans should be as divine image-bearers. All were created to live by the Word

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of God, to worship God alone, and to administer all their talents and possessions as stewards of the Divine Monarch. These human officials were, of course, imperfect reminders of the true calling of every divine image-bearer. Their very presence therefore was an anticipation of the perfect image-bearer who was to come—He who is the perfect image of the invisible God, He who is the radiance of God’s glory “and the exact representation of his being” (Heb. 1:3).

In this regard it is quite easy to understand why some post-Reformation creeds testify of Jesus that He is our chief Prophet, our only High Priest, and our eternal King. This designation of our Lord appears in the Westminster Shorter Catechism in Question 23, and each “office” is specifically elaborated in the three questions that follow. Similarly the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) asks: “Why is He called Christ, that is, anointed one?” The answer?

Because He is ordained by God the Father and anointed with the Holy Spirit to be our chief Prophet and teacher, fully revealing to us the secret purpose and will of God concerning our redemption; to be our only High Priest, having redeemed us by the one sacrifice of His body and ever interceding for us with the Father; and our eternal King governing us by his Word and Spirit and defending and sustaining us in the redemption He has won for us.⁵

Indeed. How appropriate for our Lord to be identified as prophet, priest, and king. He is the only begotten of the Father. He is the incarnate Son come to live in perfect obedience to the Father, as mankind was originally intended to do. As prophet, He lived and proclaimed the Word of God, for He was the Word become flesh. As priest, He was both sacrifice and sacrificer in His atoning work on behalf of His own. In His person the Kingdom has come. The rule of God over every challenge to that authority is assured because of King Jesus. The divine image is in principle restored for all who are in Christ and will in fact be realized for all believers in glory.

ECCLESIASTICAL OFFICES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

We observed early in this essay that God created image-bearers whose calling was to live by every word of God (prophetic calling), to worship

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God alone (priestly calling), and to exercise a dominion of stewardship over all the natural and spiritual resources that God has provided (kingly calling). The Fall distorted human life in all of these God-ordained callings. But God graciously intervened with the promise of a Seed of a woman who would crush the head of the serpent. By way of fulfilling His redemptive intentions, God chose a people to serve as the agency through whom the promised Savior would come. These "chosen people" were served by leaders or office-bearers who were imperfect reminders of what human beings were originally intended to be.

Let us suppose that the threefold office pattern is granted for the Old Testament leadership provision within the community of faith. We must still ask whether there is biblical warrant for a threefold leadership structure for congregational life in the New Testament church. Certainly there are differences between the household of faith in the Old Testament and the New. The two revelational epochs present some rather strong contrasts. The Old was geographically and ethnically restricted; the New is for the nations and all people groups. Believers in Old Testament times anticipated the coming of a promised Savior; New Testament believers are commissioned to proclaim the good news that He has come and that all nations must now be challenged to repent and believe. We could go on to mention many other contrasts.

But the necessity for leadership within the community of faith is clearly demanded in the New Testament as well as in the Old. And since the church, like the Old Testament covenant people, is comprised of divine image-bearers called to be God's faithful people, is it too much to expect that leadership positions within the church would be similar to Old Testament patterns? That a prophetic office with primary responsibility for declaring God's Word would be required? That a kingly office would be identified to exercise spiritual oversight? That a priestly office would be charged with the responsibility of receiving the offerings (no less) from God's people to be dedicated as pleasing sacrifices to the Lord to advance His Kingdom and to aid the sick and destitute? Let us look at the New Testament evidence of such a pattern.

Jesus is our chief prophet, only High Priest, and eternal king. He appointed apostles who, like the patriarchs of old, constituted a unique fraternity and functioned in a threefold official role as representatives of Jesus, the Lord. They proclaimed the Gospel, they adjudicated issues

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related to the teaching and practice of the churches, and they collected offerings and tended to the needs of widows and the poor, even to the point of serving tables. They served in roles that we have identified as those of prophet, priest, and king.

Before the death of the apostles, provision was made for the differentiation of distinctive offices in the church. The first was the office of deacon. Acts 6 records the election of deacons whose ministry of compassion to the needy defined the character of their responsibility. Like the priests of the Old Covenant, the deacons were required to receive gifts and offerings from the Lord's people to support the ministry of mercy. Widows were their special concern because, given the lack of provision for them in that culture, they represented the most needy. Like the priests of the Old Covenant who isolated the sick, such as lepers, from the larger believing community and guaranteed their restoration when healed, so deacons were to be responsible for the material and physical provision for the sick and needy. Theirs is a ministry of compassion in the name of Christ, the head of the church.

Next the prophetic office appears to emerge in the New Testament record. Acts 13 records the ordination of Barnabas to the task of gospel proclamation. Paul, called to be an apostle by direct revelation, served in a unique role. But Barnabas was "set apart" by the church as a minister of the Word. Later Timothy was challenged by Paul to be "a good minister of Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 4:6), sound in doctrine, faithfully engaged in the public reading and teaching of the Scriptures, and godly in his personal life. It is interesting to note that Timothy is never referred to as an elder. It appears that administrative oversight, which is the primary responsibility of elders, should not interfere with the prophetic calling to declare the Word of the Lord. In the case of Timothy a prophetic message qualified him for his ministry (1 Tim. 4:14), which suggests the close connection between the prophetic proclamation and the pastoral office.

Elders are required as soon as a believing community emerges in response to the preaching of the Gospel. Examples include the elders of the church of Ephesus to whom Paul gave a moving farewell address (Acts 20:17-35). Also, Paul reminds both Timothy and Titus of the importance of elders in every congregation (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). The listing of their responsibilities in these two passages emphasizes the task of general oversight over the affairs that define the believing com-

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munity of faith, a role similar to that of elders of the Old Testament people of God.⁶

QUALIFICATIONS FOR OFFICE-HOLDERS

Careful attention to the listing of qualifications that Paul gives to Timothy for office-bearers supports a three office understanding. Careless attention leads to compromise and misdirection. First Timothy 3:1-7 sets forth the qualifications for elders who are entrusted to "take care of God's church." Then follows in verses 8-13 a careful description of qualifications for those ordained to the office of deacon. The apostle writes in the third person while enumerating the qualifications for both elders and deacons. But in chapter 4 the apostle addresses Timothy in the second person, calling him "a good minister of Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 4:6-16). Timothy is then challenged to devote himself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and teaching. Paul, it seems, is distinguishing the unique role of Timothy, the pastor, from the primary duties of elders and deacons. In addition, as already mentioned, Timothy (and Titus as well) is never called an elder.

First Timothy 5:17 is often quoted in support of a view that pastors are "teaching elders." "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching." The pastor, in this view, is a "double honor" elder, a cut above, presumably, a non-teaching elder. Since *elder* implies oversight or "ruling" authority, what we would have in the church then are "ruling rulers" and "teaching rulers," the latter of whom are worthy of greater honor than the former, perhaps implying a hierarchy among church offices.

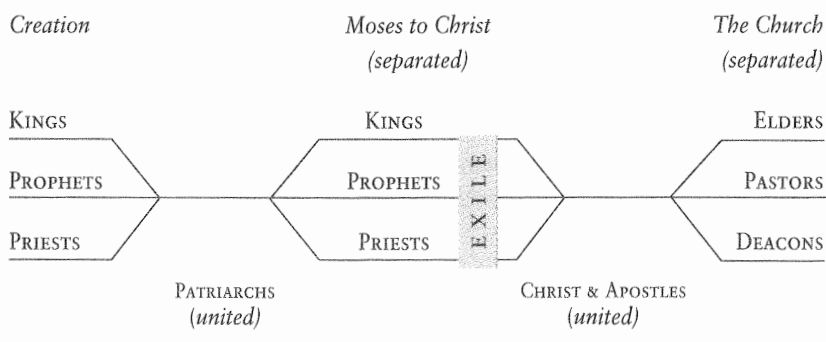
A better way to understand this verse is to recognize that elders represent Jesus Christ in His kingly authority. Their primary responsibility is to exercise governance over the affairs of the church, including everything related to the faith and life of the congregation. If in addition to their primary work there are elders who can preach and teach, they are especially valuable to the church. As a matter of fact, preaching and teaching per se are not unique to any single office. Philip, a deacon, taught the Ethiopian eunuch to understand the Scriptures (Acts 8:26-40). Stephen, another deacon, publicly taught the Scriptures and suffered mar-

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tyrdom for his work (Acts 6:8—7:60). We conclude from these examples that those ordained to the prophetic office—pastors, as specialists in the Word—must preach, while elders and deacons may preach and teach as their gifts allow.⁷

Understood in light of the foregoing, the offices in the church represent Jesus Christ in His threefold mediatorial office. Each office includes a unique primary area of responsibility, but also allows for service in additional capacities as God-given gifts allow. The pastoral office is held by the minister of the Word who, as a specialist in the Scriptures, not only proclaims the Word but expounds its teaching for doctrine and the requirements of piety and Christian witness. But, like the prophets before them, they exercise no ruling authority beyond that inherent in “thus says the Lord.” The diaconal office provides for a ministry of mercy as deacons give priestly attention to mobilizing the church’s sacrificial offerings for purposes of a compassionate ministry to the sick and needy. And the kingly office provides a ministry of oversight as the elders take responsibility for the supervision over all the affairs of the church, especially the soundness of the doctrine confessed by the church and the disciplined Christian lives that believers in Jesus should be living.⁸

THE HISTORY OF OFFICE IN SCRIPTURE



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF OFFICE IN THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

One might be tempted to question whether this matter of office in the church is really so important in view of the church’s commission to evangelize the world and edify believers. Certainly there have been examples

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of one-office and two-office leadership structures that have “worked.” Or there have been three-office patterns where one office, usually the pastor, has served in a primary role while the other two functioned in subordinate roles.

The proper organization of every fellowship of believers is important to fulfill its God-given mission. This is particularly true if there is a discernible pattern to be observed in Scripture for congregational organization. It then becomes a matter of obedience to follow that pattern regardless of whether we fully understand the reasons why.

Further, the offices established within the redeemed community of believers serve as constant reminders of what each member was created to be. As image-bearers of God, our purpose for existence is to live by every word of God, to worship Him alone, and to be stewards of all we are and have in gratitude to God. Godly candidates who meet the biblical standards for service as office-bearers are then examples to the rest of the flock of Christian piety and service.

Also, lines of authority and decision-making are well defined. As rulers in the name of the church’s ascended King and as undershepherds of the great Shepherd, the elders are overseers of the total life of the congregation. They are mutually accountable to each other for the discharge of their office and must promote the faithful discharge of the offices of pastor and deacon. While pastors and deacons will, of course, advise the elders in detail regarding their areas of ministry, the elders must assume final responsibility for whatever is approved if the church is to function well.⁹

Continuity in the ministry of a local congregation is one of the major benefits of faithful elder leadership. Too often the varied ministries of a local church are wholly dependent on the leadership and coordination of the pastor. Sometimes the pastor aggressively takes control, and perhaps just as often the board of elders shirks its oversight responsibility, forcing the pastor to take control by default. In such situations the loss of a pastor has devastating effects on the continued ministry of the congregation. However, when elders take their oversight responsibility seriously, pastors may come and go with far less negative consequences for the work of the church. Even while a pastor is present, faithful elder leadership will go far toward freeing the pastor of supervisory distractions so

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that the primary task of proclaiming, teaching, and applying the Word will not be compromised.

Most importantly, the three-office leadership style we have been advocating reflects the mediatorial work of the great Shepherd of the sheep, Jesus Christ. He is the Living Word who serves as the theme of the preaching of every faithful minister of the Word. He is the One whose offering of Himself serves as payment in full for the sins of all who trust in Him. And He is the King of the church whose loving mastery is always exercised on behalf of the spiritual welfare of His own.

Divine image-bearers were created, and the church exists to live by the Word of God, to worship God alone, and to be thankful stewards of everything we have and are. The offices of the church serve as reminders of what we were created to be. Therefore, great care should be taken that those who are appointed to such positions meet the biblical qualifications. They should be sincerely conscious that, in the exercise of their offices, they represent the Lord whose will, and not their own, must be their sole motivation. The affairs of the church should not be committed to the spiritually immature.¹⁰ The honor of the Lord and the welfare of souls is at stake.¹¹

NOTES

1. At a leadership conference I attended, a prominent television minister emphasized the necessity of getting rid of church board members who failed to "get with the program."
2. The late Professor Troost of the Free University of Amsterdam described humans as "response structures" since they are the only beings in all creation who are able to respond to the Creator. By virtue of their image-bearing nature, humans must respond, whether positively or negatively, to the divine address. All other structures in creation are passive in relation to the Creator. Only humans are morally accountable.
3. The tendency is to identify the priestly office with the daily ministrations of altar and temple. But Leviticus 13—15 details the important role of the priests in regard to the sick in the community and the control of disease.
4. Deuteronomy 25:1-10 provides an example of the elders in a particular locale who served as judges in specific cases.
5. *The Book of Confessions* (New York: UPUSA, 1970), Paragraph 4.031.
6. Two Greek words are used in the New Testament to identify the ruling office in the church, *presbuteroi* and *episkopoi*. The former is usually translated "elder" and identifies the position such an office-bearer holds. The latter is

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often translated “bishop” and identifies the task such an office-bearer performs—namely, oversight.

7. In this regard, K. Dijk makes a helpful observation. He notes that teaching and evangelism are really important concerns of all three offices. He identifies them as the Ministry of the Word, teaching and evangelism, the Ministry of Mercy, teaching and evangelism, and the Ministry of Oversight, teaching and evangelism. *De Dienst Der Kerk* (Kok: Kampen, 1958, Chapter 4).
8. The parallel with the Old Testament setting seems so obvious. The faithful prophets communicated the Word of the Lord to the people but had no coercive authority to enforce obedience to it. They repeatedly appealed to the ruling kings to clear the land of idolatry and to use their kingly power to insist on obedience to the Word of the Lord. No matter how earnest the prophets were, without the cooperation of the king, reform was impossible.
9. It is significant that every reference to the office of elder in a specific location appears in the plural form. Each congregation needs a plurality of elders where mutual accountability can be practiced to avoid domination by any one person.
10. V. S. Poythress emphasizes the appropriateness of having both mature and less mature believers in the organized church. But he insists that Christian maturity is required for leadership roles, especially for elders. “Indifferentism and Rigorism in the Church,” in *Westminster Theological Journal*, 59 (1997):13-19.
11. Our focus here is upon the essential nature of the offices in the church through which Christ’s authority is exercised. For practical guides covering the duties of elders and deacons see G. Berghoef and L. DeKoster, *The Elders Handbook* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Library Press, 1979) and *The Deacons Handbook* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Library Press, 1980).