

The Church Order Commentary

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*A Brief Explanation of the Church Order
of the Christian Reformed Church*

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- Third Edition -



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A Brief Explanation of the Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church

By Idzerd VanDellen and Martin Monsma

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PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

The Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA) is pleased to present Van Dellen and Monsma's commentary on the Church Order of Dordrecht. Since its publication in 1954, this revised third edition has been accepted by Reformed and Presbyterian denominations as the standard for the interpretation and application of the Church Order.

Any organization with even a minimal degree of complexity requires a set of operating rules. This is eminently true of the church, which needs a book of order for its good government and for consistency. A correct understanding of the regulations contained in this book is also necessary, which was undoubtedly the motivation for the writing of this commentary. This intrinsic worth and necessity are at the same time the RFPA's reason for this publication: both the Church Order and the authoritative, time-tested commentary are of great value to the church.

In their preface to the third edition, the authors make a number of comments regarding various aspects of the Church Order. One stands out because it helps to explain the reason behind this republication. After asserting the importance of doctrinal and confessional purity, they comment: "A church that is not governed according to the word of God cannot remain true to the word of God. Impurity in church government fosters impurity in church doctrine."

It is no surprise that many churches have rejected the Church Order of Dordt as to both form and content. In contrast to the brevity of Dordt, they have multiplied rules, and have largely forsaken the biblical principles that form the foundation of the Church Order. Perhaps this republication will serve to remind such churches of what a proper church order should be. For those few who still use it, this reprint will serve to reinforce the value and promote the continued use of Dordt's Church Order.

Editorial changes to this revised edition of the commentary have been limited to those that improve readability. Dutch, Latin, and Greek words have all been italicized. In addition, the text has been re-typeset; font sizes, page margins, and line spacing have been increased. While these typesetting changes have significantly increased the length of the book compared to earlier editions, we trust the changes will benefit readers in their study of the Church Order.

May this commentary be a help and a blessing to all who read it and apply its principles.

REFORMED FREE PUBLISHING ASSOCIATION

April, 2021

INTRODUCTION

The esteemed authors of this Commentary on the Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church have asked me to introduce their book to its readers by way of a foreword. In complying with their request I need not pause to acquaint you with the Church Order which they felt impelled to explain. The instrument is well known and its provisions are familiar to all the office-bearers and to many members of the church that operates under it.

It may not be superfluous, however, to observe that the document, familiar though its text may be, is not above the need of interpretation. Mere reading of the Church Order leaves that impression without fail; while its study is well calculated to raise the question: understandest thou what thou readest? And to say no more, the execution of its several provisions on the part of the officers of the church, particularly on the part of those whose duty it is to administer the affairs of the church in its graduated series of assemblies, does not fail to bring home to them the need of a competent commentator. The extreme brevity of the Church Order and its predominantly archaic editorial cast are not unrelated to this situation.

The authors of the present volume must have prepared it under a sense of constraint. Each of them is crowded with pastoral labors as the regular Minister of a church. Moreover, both are engaged in journalistic activities. The book which they produced collaboratively is conclusive evidence that they took a far from inconsiderable burden upon themselves when they undertook to write it. True, they leaned heavily upon certain Dutch canonists whom they accordingly give due credit for aid rendered. But even so, their own labors as embodied in the sizeable book before you constitute ample proof of a fine measure of industry, perseverance and devotion.

I have not been so informed by the respected authors of this Commentary, but I feel wholly confident nevertheless that they would have

all their readers constantly bear in mind at least two pertinent facts as they turn to this volume for light. The first is that this is not an official, that is, synodically approved, commentary on the Church Order. It carries no more weight than the intrinsic correctness of the positions taken in the book will bear. And the second is that not all the views propounded by the authors command the assent of all who are able to judge of matters canonical.

A rather careful reading of this comparatively lengthy Commentary has convinced me that it will prove to be a very useful manual indeed, and that it will not fail to meet with the generous appreciation that it deserves. I cherish the desire that this Commentary may have a wide sale and that it may be consulted diligently and studied critically in the interest of soundly Reformed canonical theory and practice in the church which the authors dearly love and devotedly serve.

S. VOLBEDA

Grand Rapids, Michigan

This third edition of *The Church Order Commentary* differs only from the second edition in that occasional typographical errors have been corrected, and two or three statements have been brought up-to-date. We are happy over the fact that a constant demand for this Commentary made a new edition necessary, and it is our hope and prayer that God may see fit to use also this issue for the coming of His Kingdom and the glory of His Name.

THE AUTHORS

August, 1954

PREFACE

In the following pages the authors have endeavored to give a brief exposition of the Church Order of Dort (1618–19) as amended by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Churches in the year 1914.

For the benefit of the uninformed it may be said that the Christian Reformed Church dates back to the year 1857. Some years previous (1847) a new migration movement from the shores of the Netherlands to the United States began. Those who left the homeland in large numbers and colonized especially in the regions of present-day Holland, Michigan, and Pella, Iowa, were of Calvinistic stock theologically.

Ecclesiastically they were, in the main, members of the Secession Church of Holland; (*Christelijke Afscheiden Kerk*). This Secession Church of Holland, dating back to 1834, was an offshoot of the Established or State Church of Holland (*Hervormde Kerk*) which had become corrupt in doctrine and had set aside the historic form of government as last ratified by the great Synod of Dort 1618–19.

As the reorganized and purified Churches of Holland had done in 1834, so the Christian Reformed Churches in 1857 restored the venerable Church Order of Dort as their rule and guide in matters of church government. In these church governmental rules of order, the founders of the Christian Reformed denomination found what they believed to be the correct biblical system of government for the Church of Christ on earth. In the Church Order of Dort, these Churches found a faithful reflection of church governmental principles as developed in Reformation days under the influence of John Calvin and other leading Bible students and Reformers.

But circumstances had changed considerably since Reformation and post-reformation days. The fundamental, basic principles of Reformed Church polity are drawn directly from Holy Writ. Even as the Bible is ever the unchanging Word of God for all times and lands, thus also—so the reorganized and purified Churches of the former century held—the

basic principles for church government drawn from the Bible are the same for all times and all lands. But the application of these basic principles will vary as times and conditions vary. New conditions demand new approaches and adjustments.

The Secession Churches of Holland (1834) were greatly enriched and strengthened by a second exodus from the corrupt State Church toward the close of the former century (1886). This second secession movement was largely under the leadership of the great Dr. Abraham Kuyper. The Churches joining this secession were known as *de Doleerende Kerken* (Latin, *doleo*, to be hurt; to be aggrieved). These *Doleerende Kerken* and the Secession Churches of 1834 united in 1892 and adopted the name, the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (*de Gereformeerde Kerken van Nederland*). Now these united Churches in the year 1905 revised several articles of the Church Order and brought this treasured set of rules up-to-date. And the Christian Reformed Churches here in the United States of America, did the same in 1914 (Synod of 1914, Roseland, Chicago, Illinois). It is this Church Order of Dort 1618–19, as amended in 1914, which we are seeking to explain in the present volume.

The name “Church Order” is of Dutch origin; it being a rendition of the expression, *Kerkenordening*. The first regular Synod of the Reformed Churches of Holland was held in Emden, Germany, in 1571. Persecution and hostility made a gathering in the homeland inadvisable. Since the year 1571, Synod met at regular intervals. By 1581 the fundamental principles of church government had found expression and application in various synodical pronouncements. The Synod of Middelburg 1581 gathered these into one document and called it in Latin, *Corpus Disciplinae*, and in Dutch, *Kerckenordeninghe*. The Synod of ’s Gravenhage 1586 called the document, “The Church Order of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands” (*Kerckenordeninghe der Nederlandtsche Gereformeerde Kercken*). This, although in simplified modern spelling, is still the official name of this body of church rules today. (*Kerkenordening van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*).

Note the plural *Kerken* in the name of this Church Order. This name, as just indicated, dates back to the post-reformation era. This plural form of the word Church in this title, is therefore not the invention

of the Doleantie leaders, Kuyper, Rutgers, and others, as some have thought; but it is found in the original name, altho the name was not used in toto for more than two and one-half centuries.

Realizing the foregoing may also help us to understand that the word “church” in “Church Order” is an adjective. It merely tells us that the document is an ecclesiastical order; not a political or a social order, for instance. That is, it is not a set of rules for a political organization nor for a social organization. The singular “church” in the name “Church Order” therefore does not indicate that we look upon our denomination as one large super-church. The full name of our Church Order in its original languages, Latin and Dutch, clearly indicates that our denomination is a federation of local Churches holding a common confession and form of church government, firmly united by the confessional standards and Church Order adopted. The Christian Reformed Church is therefore not a body or union of individuals, but a union or federation of Churches, each one of which is a complete manifestation of the body of Christ. It may be said in this connection that if the Synod of 1914 had adopted the title “Church Order of the Christian Reformed Churches” in harmony with the historic name of our Church Order, this would have helped to ward off misunderstanding on this score.

One of the characteristics of our Church Order is its brevity. There are only 86 articles and these are in most instances very brief. Our fathers purposely steered in the direction of brevity. They believed that the best interests of the Churches and the cause of God would be served by a limited number of rules. They feared “rule upon rule and precept upon precept.” They felt that multiple and detailed rules would bind the Churches needlessly. They loved their liberties, and believed that each Church group (Classis) or Church should retain as much of its inherent freedom as the true welfare of the Church of Christ would warrant. In this respect a different course has been pursued by many Reformed and Presbyterian Churches which have a large number of rules and regulations, going into great detail.

We are convinced that the brevity of our Church Order is one of its merits. More than once, for instance, numberless detailed and involved rules have been used by modernistic majorities at church assemblies,

against loyal minorities. Rules needlessly detailed always have a tendency to impede and hinder free action and development.

As to its nature, the Church order is a body of rules for the maintenance of good order in the Churches. As such the Church Order should not be confused with synodical or with classical decisions. The Church Order and ecclesiastical decisions by no means stand on par. A Church Order is a group of ecclesiastical rules, mutually adopted, and binding for all the Churches having so adopted these rules, i.e., for all the Churches of the denomination concerned; whereas ecclesiastical decisions are merely distinct applications of one or more of the general and basic rules of the Church Order.

The authority of the Church Order is based upon the biblical demand of subjection to duly appointed authorities. Children are instructed to obey their parents (Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:20). Romans 13 definitely enjoins obedience to lawful state authorities. Thus Holy Writ likewise attributes authority to office-bearers in the Church. “Jesus therefore said to them again, Peace be unto you; as the Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Spirit; whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained” (John 20:21–23). Acts 15:27–29 also very clearly reflects ecclesiastical authority, for we read in this passage: “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things.” Judas and Silas are delegated to convey the decision of the Jerusalem Assembly by letter and word of mouth to the various Churches. Furthermore, Hebrews 13:17 bids us, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit to them: for they watch in behalf of your souls, as they that shall give account; that they may do this with joy, and not with grief: for this were unprofitable for you.”

Ecclesiastical authority as exercised by the Churches, however, does not bind the conscience as is claimed by the Roman Church and by some of the Protestant Churches. The Word of God, however, does bind the conscience. And whenever the Church clearly reflects the Word of God, the decisions of the Church should also bind the conscience. But whether or not ecclesiastical rules repeat and apply the clear dictates of God’s Word—judgment on this question must, in the last analysis, be

left to every individual believer. Rules and decisions are binding and compelling only for those that are and remain under the authority of the Church. He who feels in conscience bound before God to refuse submission is free to do so. But such a believer cannot consistently remain under the authority of the Churches in question. That would make for disorder and confusion as well as for spiritual damage.

That church government is of very great import to the Church of Christ goes without saying. True, purity in doctrine, and therefore confessional purity, ranks first. But no Church being pure and true confessionally, will continue to be such except the Word of God is purely preached, and the sacraments are administered according to the Word of God. A Church that is not governed according to the Word of God cannot remain true to the Word of God. Impurity in church government fosters impurity in church doctrine. Form and content stand closely related also in this instant.

From what precedes it follows that the Church Order should not be considered to be a legalistic document, a book of laws in the civil sense. The Church Order consists of rules and regulations mutually agreed upon, and that by common consent (Art. 86). It does not force and compel after the fashion of a civil law. It is not superimposed upon the Churches, demanding unreasoned and legalistic obedience. The Church Order guides and directs, in order that all things may be done “decently and in order,” for the furtherance of the Church of Christ, even as the Bible enjoins (1 Cor. 14:40). However, as will appear from the pages following, the authors firmly believe that every one of our Churches and every member of our Churches is in duty bound to respect the authority of the Church Order, and to show constant loyalty to its provisions.

As might be expected, we have sought to base the contents of this book exclusively on Scriptural principles and historic facts.

Special mention should be made in this preface of the fact that the authors owe much to the church governmental labors of Dr. F. L. Rutgers, (1836–1917) one time professor in church polity at the Free University of Amsterdam, Netherlands. Not only have they often consulted the published works of this authority, but the unpublished class lectures on church government of Dr. Rutgers were also in their possession. We would also gratefully acknowledge the work of Rev.

Joh. Jansen, a student of Dr. Rutgers, whose *Korte Verklaring van de Kerkenordening* has been of great help to us in the preparation of this Commentary.

May the King of His Church abundantly bless our labors!

THE AUTHORS

PREFACE

TO THE SECOND EDITION

The authors of this Commentary are grateful to God for the favorable reception which the first edition of this work received. The first edition had been out of print for some years, and we were happy to learn that the publishers desired to put a second, somewhat revised, and up-to-date edition of our Commentary on the market at this time. May God's blessing also attend this second edition.

Our readers will appreciate the fact that the text of the Church Order appears consecutively and separately in this new edition. We have made it a point, in this reproduction of the Church Order, to give only the official text, amended to the year 1950.

THE AUTHORS

June, 1949

THE CHURCH ORDER
COMMENTARY

ARTICLE 1

For the maintenance of good order in the Church of Christ it is necessary that there should be: offices, assemblies, supervision of doctrine, sacraments and ceremonies, and Christian discipline; of which matters the following articles treat in due order.

PURPOSE AND MAIN CONTENT OF CHURCH ORDER

1. Concerning the purpose of the Church Order.

No Christian can observe and study life and the world in which we live without seeing that God loves order. The seasons of the year, our own bodies, and all things created tell us, in spite of the marks and scars of sin, that the great Creator of all things is a God of order. The Bible, God's special revelation, tells us the same thing emphatically.

Now God is ever true to Himself. Sublime harmony and order mark His triune being. Consequently God can do nothing in a haphazard, slipshod fashion. That would militate against His very essence. That would be ruinous in its effect upon His creation.

For these reasons the Church at Corinth is also admonished: "But let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40). And it is for the maintenance of good order in the Church of Christ, and for the promotion of its true welfare, that "offices, assemblies, supervision of doctrine, sacraments and ceremonies, and Christian discipline," have been instituted. For these same reasons our fathers of Reformation days accepted a limited set of rules regulating these several matters. These rules comprise our Church Order.

By maintaining well organized Churches with their, "offices, assemblies, etc." we vary definitely from certain mystical, inner-light groups who neglect all these important matters and even stand opposed to them. Our fathers definitely disagreed with the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century

on this score, and felt persuaded by Holy Writ to sponsor well organized Churches.

At the same time it should be remembered that it is not the purpose of the Church Order to force the Churches to walk its beaten path with arbitrary, fettering and chafing compulsion. The Church Order means to be regulatory. It means to regulate ecclesiastical life reasonably and with full maintenance of the rights of every congregation and of the individual members of the Churches. The Church Order is moral in character, not judicial. It is a regulatory set of rules, not a legalistic set of laws.

Regarding the expression “Church of Christ” in Article 1, it should be remarked that the Church Order sometimes speaks of “Church” in the singular (*Kerk*). Now the word “Church” in the Church Order always refers to a local congregation viewed as a definite organization. The plural “Churches” (*Kerken*) refers to a number of organized congregations. Usually it refers to all the Churches belonging to the denomination. The expression “Church of Christ” (*Gemeente van Christus*) is used to indicate the body of believers living in a certain region or country. It designates the body of Christ from its non-organizational aspect, and as scattered in various localities. And finally, the name “congregation” (*de gemeente*) is used to designate a definite group of believers living in one communion and organized into one particular church, although the term “congregation” in the Church Order also refers to the Church from its non-organizational aspect.¹ Concisely the matter stands thus as to Church Order usage:

Kerk—Church—Organized or instituted Church.

Kerken—Churches—Denomination or Federation of organized Churches.

Gemeente van Christus—Church of Christ—Sum total of believers living in various localities.

De gemeente—the congregation—definite group of believers living in one locality.

It is evident therefore that Article 1 thinks of the believers as found in various localities when it speaks of the Church of Christ, and

¹ Joh. Jansen, *Korte Verklaring van de Kerkenordening* (1923), 3–4.

more specifically of the believers belonging to our Christian Reformed denomination.

The Church Order considered from the aspect of its purpose may be said to fill a real necessity. To be sure a Church can exist without a Church Order but it cannot flourish and thrive properly without it. Furthermore, denominational harmony and cooperation require a definite set of rules, inasmuch as all cooperation requires an expressed basis. Besides, the Church Order is a constant guardian against wilfulness and abuse of power, which evils are ever ready to creep in to disturb the peace and progress of the Church.

2. Concerning the main content of the Church Order.

Article 1 declares that for the maintenance of good order in the Church of Christ it is necessary that there should be: offices; assemblies; supervision of doctrine, sacraments and ceremonies; and Christian discipline. The things here enumerated constitute the subject matter of the Church Order. Every article of the Church Order deals with matters which may be listed under one of the four heads indicated.

Concerning the first head, the offices (Art. 2–28), it is noteworthy that the Dutch text speaks of *diensten*, which as the Latin *functiones* in the original text, stresses the element of service to be rendered, rather than authority to be exercised. The word “ministrations” or “services” would be more exact translations for *diensten* than the present “offices.” But there are objections to the suggested word also. “Ministrations” is rather cumbersome, and “services” is too vague and has too many other meanings in the English language. The term “offices” is wholly satisfactory, just so we bear in mind that the primary emphasis in this case falls on the element of service; altho the element of authority should not be ignored.

The Bible clearly stresses this element of service for office-bearers. 2 Cor. 8:4 speaks of “the fellowship in the ministering to the saints.” Eph. 4:11–12 tell us that God gave the various offices “for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ.”

Ecclesiastical offices are not merely beneficial to the Church of Christ, but they should be termed indispensable, inasmuch as they were instituted of God. Were not the Apostles sent forth by Christ, vested

with His authority? (Matt. 28:18–20; John 20:21; 2 Cor. 5:18–21). And does not the Bible offer abundant evidence for the contention that the offices in the Church, both special and regular offices, are ordained of God? 1 Corinthians 12:28 tells us that “God hath set some in the church; first apostles, secondly prophets...” Romans 10:15 asks, “And how shall they preach, except they be sent?” In 1 Thessalonians 5:12 the apostle says, “But we beseech you, brethren to know them that labor among you, and are over you in the Lord...” Confer also Ephesians 4:11–13; 2 Timothy 2:2; Titus 1:5.

Furthermore, subjection to such as minister as office-bearers is also urged in Matthew 10:40; “He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth Him that sent me.”; and in Hebrews 13:17, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit to them.”

Secondly, Article 1 mentions the assemblies (Art. 29–52). Almost needless to say, the Church Order does not refer in this article to the “assembling together” (Heb. 10:25) of the believers on the Lord’s Day for worship. Article 1, when speaking of assemblies has reference to ecclesiastical assemblies, i.e., consistory meetings, classical meetings and synodical meetings (Art. 29).

These assemblies have been instituted and these gatherings are being held for the purpose of governing the Church or Churches aright; to assist each other in difficult cases; to help each other in the maintenance of doctrinal purity; to maintain the offices ordained of God, and to promote order and congregational worship.

Next, supervision of doctrine, sacraments and ceremonies, are mentioned (Art. 53–70). Supervision of doctrine is very necessary inasmuch as purity of doctrine is to the Church of Christ what a good foundation is to a building. Without purity of doctrine the Church of Christ fails and falls (Acts 28:28–31; Gal. 1:8, 9; 2 John 10).

Supervision regarding the sacraments is necessary because these are the signs of God’s saving grace in Christ, and the sealing ordinances of His covenant to His people. Abuse and corruption regarding the sacraments is a very serious matter. Indeed, desecration of the sacraments merits the wrath of God over His congregation (1 Cor. 11:17–34).

The ceremonies mentioned in Article 1 include the installation of office-bearer, the solemnization of marriage before the Church of God,

and other ecclesiastical solemnities. “Let all things be done decently and in order.” 1 Corinthians 14:40 also pertains to these solemnities of congregational worship.

Finally, this first article mentions Christian discipline. Christian discipline concerns first of all the profession and conduct of all church members. Secondly it concerns in a special way the profession and conduct of office-bearers in their capacity as office-bearers. Discipline as it pertains to church members as such, consists of admonition and ultimately, if need be, of excommunication. Discipline regarding office-bearers in their capacity as office-bearers consists of admonition, and furthermore, if need be, of suspension and deposition. The right and the duty of the Churches to exercise discipline cannot be questioned by anyone who acknowledges the Bible as God’s own Word. Matthew 16:19, “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of Heaven...” Matthew 18:17, “...If he refuses to hear the church also, let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican.” Titus 3:10, “A factious man after a first and second admonition refuse” (see also John 20:23; Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:3–5; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14, etc.).

ARTICLE 2

The offices are of four kinds: of the Ministers of the Word, of the Professors of Theology, of the Elders, and of the Deacons.

THE OFFICES

1. Ecclesiastic offices three in number.

All ecclesiastical offices find their origin in Christ, the Church's only Head and Supreme Ruler. No office-bearer in the Church has any authority in himself. All the authority which any ecclesiastical office-bearers possess is delegated authority, authority given to them by Christ and to be exercised by them for Christ. Christ is the Church's chief Prophet, only High Priest, and Eternal King (Heidelberg Catechism Q. 31). Consequently, the offices as they have been ordained for the organized Church here on earth are nothing but extensions and continuations of Christ's threefold office. Again, back of all authority, also all ecclesiastical authority, standeth God, the Triune, absolutely sovereign God. Through the second person of the Trinity, Christ Jesus, He governs and blesses His church. Our fall into sin is threefold. We fell as prophets, priests, and kings. We lost true knowledge, holiness, and righteousness. As rational thinking creatures we lost true knowledge and fell from our prophetic office; we became prophets of falsehood, of the devil's lie. As moral creatures (capable of choice, desire, and devotion) we lost true holiness; i. e., love and consecration to God, and we fell from our priestly office; we became priests unto Satan and sin. As executive creatures (capable of rationally and morally conditional activity) we lost true righteousness, and fell from our royal office; we became kings of unrighteousness. We repeat therefore, our fall into sin was threefold, in keeping with man's essential being as God's image-bearer. Consequently, we must be saved in a threefold sense, and restored in a threefold sense, i.e., as prophets, priests, and kings. From the foregoing it follows that the Saviour also

holds a threefold office. He is the second Adam and as such the Prophet, Priest, and King of His Church.

For this reason the Old Testament knew three primary offices; no more, no less: Prophets, Priests, and Kings. They were representatives of the Christ to come. For this same reason the New Testament period has three primary offices; no more, no less: Ministers, Deacons, and Elders, representing Christ respectively as Prophet, Priest, and King of His Church.

It should not be forgotten, however, that particularly during the transitional period of the Church of Christ on earth, for some time after Christ's ascension to Heaven, the threefold office of Christ did not stand out clearly. Various temporary offices and circumstances somewhat obscured the facts set forth above. But as the formative period of the New Testament passes (and with it the special and inclusive apostolic office, the temporary prophetic offices, etc.) and conditions assume a more permanent aspect, the threefold office of Christ in His Church also begins to stand out with greater clarity. The office of the Ministry of the Word is spoken of or alluded to in 2 Corinthians 5:18–19; Ephesians 4:11–12; 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:9; Hebrews 13:7. The office of the diaconate or deaconship finds Scriptural expression especially in Acts 6:1–7; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8–12. Of the office of the eldership we read especially in Acts 14:23; Romans 12:8; Ephesians 4:11–13; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9; Hebrews 13:17–24.

2. Why Article 2 mentions four kinds of offices.

But if there is Scriptural warrant for but three permanent New Testament offices, why then does our Church Order mention four? There is a historical explanation for this fact. In Ephesians 4:11 we read: "And He gave some to be apostles and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers." Now the offices of apostles, prophets, and evangelists, it is generally agreed, were temporary offices which God did not mean to continue, and which passed away when the Churches were fully established. As to the latter expression of Ephesians 4:11, "and some pastors and teachers," some of the Reformers believed that it referred to two distinct offices in the New Testament Church, namely

that of the Ministers of the Word, and that of the Teachers of Theology. Calvin himself gave this interpretation of Ephesians 4:11 (Calvin, *Commentary on Ephesians*).

As a result of this interpretation the Church Order, already in its first redaction gave four permanent New Testament offices. Today it is generally realized that the expression “and some, pastors and teachers,” of Ephesians 4:11, refers to the single offices of the Ministry of the Word. If this were not the case, then in keeping with the whole passage the expression should and would read as follows: “and some pastors; and some, teachers;” note the difference in punctuation and its significance. It is true that the Bible clearly speaks of the duties of teachers of Theology (cf. f.i. 2 Tim. 2:2), but this task is but a specialized duty of the Gospel ministry. Professors of Theology as far as our Churches are concerned, are Ministers of the Gospel (Form for the Installation of Professors of Theology).

The separate mention of Professors of Theology in Article 2 is confusing, and rests upon a misunderstanding of former years. In fact, the original expression used in Latin was *Doctor*, which simply means teacher or instructor. And this term *Doctor* was applied to all teachers of religion also in State universities, though these teachers held no ecclesiastical office whatsoever. Do not forget in this connection that there was a very close bond of union between the Government and the Churches in these early days. Our fathers sought the sponsorship and special, if not exclusive, favor of the Government. And the Government often insisted on a definite measure of control over the Churches. It is not unlikely that this situation, which time and a further removal from Rome would correct, influenced our fathers to view matters on this score as they did.

It is agreed by many that it would have been far better if in 1914 we had simply rendered Article 2 as follows: “The offices are of three kinds: of the Ministers of the Word, of the Elders, and of the Deacons.” Now our redaction of 1914 still reads: “*De diensten zijn vierderlei: der Dienaren des Woords, der Doctoren, der Ouderlingen, en der Diakenen.*” And in our English translation of 1920 we have conveniently substituted “Professors of Theology” for the expression *der Doctoren*.

The Reformed Churches of Holland have to this day also retained

the old redaction on this point. The Rev. Joh. Jansen, one of Holland's outstanding authorities in Church Order matters, attributes this fact to ecclesiastical conservatism in the evil sense of the word.

Almost needless to say, the fact that the actual offices in the Church of Christ are limited to the three indicated, does not mean that there is no room for various assistants. The Levites, for instance, were assistants to the Priests. Their work and authority belonged to the primary office of the priesthood. 1 Corinthians 12:28 speaks specifically of "helps." Paul refers to assistants and helpers repeatedly. Student exhorters, Catechism teachers not holding office, organists, Sunday school teachers, Sick visitors, Gospel workers. Finance Committees, Collectors. Building and Ground Committees, Ushers, Janitors, etc., all these (when they are appointed and controlled by the consistories) may be considered to be "helps." They all fill a useful and necessary place in our churches.