

THE RULING ELDER

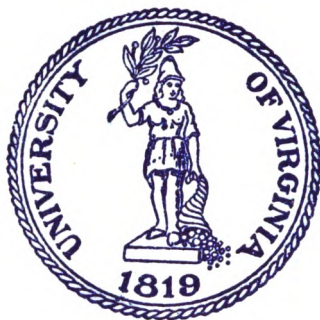
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THE RULING ELDER

His Duties and His Opportunities

By

CLELAND BOYD McAFEE

**PREPARED BY THE DIRECTION OF THE GENERAL
ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA FOR THE
BOARD OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION OF
THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
IN THE U. S. A.**

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The Origin of This Book

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF 1929, on recommendation of the Standing Committee on Polity, adopted as the expression of its judgment and will the following overture. The central ideas of the overture were conceived by Francis Shunk Downs, D.D., and in the form of an overture were presented to the Huntingdon Presbytery and adopted by that body. It was transmitted to the General Assembly with the concurrence of seventy-eight other presbyteries:

“Your Committee has considered an overture from the Presbytery of Huntingdon, concurred in by seventy-eight other Presbyteries, with regard to the training and equipment of elders before ordination.

“Your Committee recommends the following action:

“Whereas, the genius of our Presbyterianism calls for the equal recognition of the minister and ruling elder in the government of the Church, in the Presbytery every congregation being represented by a ruling elder, and in delegated Synods and the General Assembly there being an equal number of ministers and elders, while in the Session the minister is always outnumbered by the elders, and

“Whereas, the Church rightly requires of the minister that before ordination he shall have had four years of college and three years of theological seminary, or their equivalent, and must, by examination, satisfy Presbytery as to his qualification and fitness to be a minister before he is ordained as such, and

“Whereas, in spite of the high quality and devoted service of many of our elders, there is a deepening conviction in the

Church and a growing desire on the part of many elders that there should be training, preparation, and equipment before ordination, which should be of such a character as to fit the elders more adequately for the duties of their high office and for real leadership in the particular church over which God has made them overseers,

“Be it resolved, that brief but wisely chosen courses of study be selected, designed to prepare and equip the newly elected elder for spiritual, constructive, and fruitful service in his high office, and

“That small but carefully prepared textbooks be prepared on those subjects with which every elder should be familiar, such as the doctrine, government, and discipline of his Church, and such knowledge of evangelistic, educational, missionary, and other subjects as will more adequately qualify him for spiritual and practical leadership in the particular church of which he may be an elder, and

“That these courses and textbooks shall be uniform for all the Church, and that each newly elected elder shall pursue said courses in ways that may be most convenient to him, subject to the approval of the Session of which he is a member-elect, and in accord with the Form of Government of our Church, and

“That the Board of Christian Education be directed by the General Assembly to select the courses of study, prepare the textbooks, and devise the plan and arrangements for making this action known and effective in our Presbyterian Church, and

“That this action as to the training and equipment of elders be not retroactive, but shall become effective at such time as the General Assembly may designate, and shall apply to all the churches of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.”

— *Minutes of General Assembly, 1929, pages 130, 131.*

Introduction

WHEN the Board of Christian Education was directed by the General Assembly to prepare "brief but wisely chosen courses of study . . . designed to prepare and equip the newly elected elder for spiritual, constructive, and fruitful service in his high office," it was felt that so significant an undertaking was of vital concern to every local church and every Presbyterian minister and elder.

After coming to this conviction, personal and group conferences were held with pastors and elders in various sections of the Church. Following these conferences letters were sent out to several hundred pastors and elders in various types of church situations. These letters asked for a statement of:

1. The activities and responsibilities of elders in these particular churches.

2. The type of material which would be most usable in these churches in helping elders to a larger appreciation of the responsibilities of their office.

3. Methods by which these materials might be used most effectively in local church situations.

On the basis of the information and suggestions in replies to about one hundred of these letters, a questionnaire check list was prepared in which the following questions were asked:

1. What are the present official activities of elders in your church?

2. What are the items about which you think elders should be informed?

3. How does your session function in carrying out its responsibilities?

4. What, in your judgment, would be the most practical form for the issuing of materials for training prospective elders in your church?

5. What, in your judgment, would be the most practical plan for using these materials when issued?

Through the helpful coöperation of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly these questionnaire check lists were sent to one third of the pastors, with an additional copy inclosed in each case, to be handed by the pastor to a representative member of his session. In all, 2400 letters were sent out, each with two copies of the questionnaire check list, making a total circulation of 4800. The response revealed a very gratifying interest in the proposed plan for a book, or books, to help in the training of our elders for their places of leadership in our churches. Of the 4800 questionnaires sent out, more than 1400 were returned. Of these, 1376 were completely filled out and could be tabulated by the Board's Department of Educational Research. Of the 1376, 809 were from pastors and 567 from elders.

The returns came from 900 different churches, and in 91 cases in which no reply was made by the pastor a reply was received from an elder. Of the total number of replies, 600 came from churches of 200 members or less; 550, from churches with a membership between 201 and 800; and 130, from churches with more than 800 members.

The number of replies as compared with the normal expectancy of replies to questionnaires was significantly large, revealing a great eagerness on the part of the churches for that which is purposed in this overture, an eagerness manifested by both elders and pastors.

Upon the basis of the judgment of the 1376 persons replying, representing the practice and experience in 900 churches, this book of thirteen chapters was planned as a first step in carrying out the purpose of this overture.

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The present book has been written by Cleland Boyd McAfee, whose background for the service includes some years as a pastor and as a professor in the Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Chicago.

Before publication the manuscript was sent for consideration to a number of experienced ruling elders, whose suggestions have been of great value in completing its preparation for final issue.

The manuscript has also been read by the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, especially with a view to checking references to the polity of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.

The General Assembly of 1930 recorded the votes of the presbyteries authorizing the election of women as well as men to the eldership, whenever a church may so desire, and therefore the masculine pronouns throughout the book are used in the generic sense.

COMMITTEE OF THE BOARD OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION.

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CHAPTER I

THE RULING ELDER HIMSELF

THE PRESBYTERIAN SYSTEM provides for three ordained officers: ministers (teaching elders), ruling elders, and deacons. This book is concerned with the duties and opportunities of ruling elders. The official statement is that "ruling elders are properly the representatives of the people, chosen by them for the purpose of exercising government and discipline, in conjunction with pastors or ministers."¹ A much fuller statement would be needed to cover all that elders are expected to do in the government of the Church. Just now we are chiefly concerned with what an elder is expected to be in himself. The judgment of an earlier writer is that "there is no class of men on whom, under God, the prosperity of religion in our churches is more dependent than those who are invested with the office of the eldership. The person who is called to labor as an overseer in the house of God is placed in a position where he has it in his power to be extensively useful."²

I. Ruling Eldership an Office of High Honor

Any careful thought of the real service and honor of the eldership will explain why it holds to it so many strong and earnest men. It has solemn obligations, to be sure, and sometimes these bulk so large in a man's mind that he hesitates

¹ Form of Government, Chap. V.

² McKerrow, "The Office of Ruling Elder in the Christian Church," page 147.

about accepting the office. However, none of its obligations is prohibitive for a sincere Christian believer if he is rightly guided in his thought about them. Presbyterian eldership has a stirring and challenging history. Its present numbers include some of the leaders in Christian thought and action in the world. A figure of national importance in American history, President Benjamin Harrison, said that he had many honors which he held dear and to which he tried to be true, but of them all none could be rated higher than his position as a ruling elder in the Presbyterian Church. As he once said this in the presence of the great merchant, John Wanamaker, the latter turned to him eagerly and said: "And you feel that, too? I have felt and said the same thing for years."

The eldership is not an office for great men alone, but for any man invited to undertake it, who will try to fit himself for it. Dr. John Watson tells of seeing in a Scottish church at Communion a fine-faced elder, honored by all the worshippers, who served the elements with dignity and grace. The next day he saw the same elder working on the repairing of the highway, breaking the stone for a hole to be filled. Many a humble man finds his honor where the President of the United States found his honor — in being a Presbyterian elder. No one is too great for such an office; no one is too humble for it. But it ennobles all who occupy it worthily.

There is no distinct type of personality which may produce an elder while other types must be reserved for other offices. It is sometimes said of a certain man, "He is really of the trustee type and not of the elder type." This is a fictitious distinction. Any Christian can become an elder, since the necessary qualities, if they are not immediately natural to him, can be acquired. A man of the so-called "elder type" fits into the practices and attitudes of an elder more easily than do other types, but often the very best elders are not at all of that accepted type. The only absolute hindrance to

becoming an elder would be refusal to live or to attempt to live the personal spiritual life. No man can become an elder except by the wish and election of a congregation. This very wish indicates that others deem it possible for him to meet the requirements of the office. In his personal conduct he is to be what he believes Christ wants a man to be. That is all that his "example" means. An elder is not required to be anything which any sincere, devoted Christian is not required to be. His position makes his personal Christian character more influential but in no sense more necessary.

This means that no impossible standards are set for the eldership — none more impossible than the standard of the Christian life, which no man can attain except by the help of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul once reminded his friends that we have this treasure of our Christian service "in earthen vessels," II Cor. 4:7. There is always danger of setting up false standards and so robbing ourselves and others of our best service. Any man hesitates to appear as a Christian leader, or as an outstanding Christian in any sense, among his fellows, except as he and they understand that he is still one of themselves, having the common struggle to be his best and worthiest self. There is no magic or mystery about it. The earthen vessel must not prevent our accepting the treasure that is offered to us. Our own weakness ought to drive us back upon God, as the apostle suggests, whether we are elders or not. He only can enable us to live as we should in any capacity.

Some sincere men hesitate to accept the eldership because they are genuinely afraid of discrediting the Church of Christ by failing to meet all its requirements. But the Church is a pretty large and strong body, which can carry a good deal of weight if it must. The vastly larger probability is that any sincere man will be given such added strength by the office that he will make successful battle against his weakness. In-

deed, refusal to serve in the eldership may have a more adverse effect on young people or on the world around than acceptance would have. Of course, if it is certain in a man's own mind that he does not mean or care to stand before others as a loyal Christian, then he ought not to accept the eldership or any other office in the Church. He may know himself to be very defective and incapable of many acts which he would wish an elder to perform, but he must ask himself whether he is honestly willing that God shall give him strength to be the person he ought to become in order to help in this important office. No man ought to adopt standards for the eldership which will shut him out and at the same time shut out all sincere men. Expecting an elder to be perfect in the usual meaning of that word is another way of saying that there ought to be no elders.

II. Ruling Eldership a Scriptural Office

Presbyterian eldership is a Scriptural office, and we naturally look in the Bible to discover the qualifications of an elder.

The early Christian Church took part of its organization from the Jewish system. For that reason, we have no record of the introduction of the elder as an officer in the Church, since the Jewish system made much of "elders" both in the Old Testament and in the rapidly changing system between the Testaments. They appear throughout as appointed or chosen leaders of the people, probably receiving their title because they were really "older" men among the people. We do not know when the office was introduced into Judaism. When Moses went to Egypt to lead the Exodus, his first act was to call the "elders" of the people together to explain his mission, Ex. 4:29. Paul and Barnabas did a similar thing with the Christian elders when they reported their missionary journey, Acts 15:6. In the fuller organization of the desert world under the advice of Jethro, the officers were not called

elders, but the name came to be applied to them, Ex. 19:7, and at each period of the Hebrew history we find officials called by this name. They appear at the dedication of Solomon's Temple, I Kings 8:1, 3. Notice Ezek. 8:1 and 14:1-5, where they appear in the Exile and as leaders of the worship of the people. Elders appear also in the New Testament time. It was "the estate of the elders," Acts 22:5, who joined with the high priest in giving Saul his letters to Damascus for the persecution of the Christians, and the "elders" were present when Peter and John were tried, Acts 4:5. It was perfectly natural, therefore, that the early Christian Church, made up of Jews and meeting at first in the synagogues, should take "elders" for granted and introduce them into their system without explanation.

Hence we find them mentioned as appointed in every church on the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas, Acts 14:23, and even earlier; they are seen in Jerusalem as the ones to whom the relief funds were sent for the poor people of the famine time, Acts 11:30, the first considerable relief expedition on record. Presently we find them on a parity with the apostles in reference to Church leadership, Acts 15:2, 6, 22, 23; 16:4. They have become so important that Paul sends for the elders of Ephesus to give them a charge for the whole church at a critical time, Acts 20:17.

It appears that there were two kinds of "elders" — those who labored "in the word and in teaching," and those who ruled but did not labor in that way, I Tim. 5:17. From this distinction, the Presbyterian Church speaks of its ministers as "teaching elders" and its local church officials as "ruling elders," though common usage restricts the word "elder" to the latter group. These "teaching elders" are identified with the New Testament "bishops," according to Presbyterian understanding, the two words being used interchangeably. Notice the first verse in both II John and III John, where the

writer speaks of himself as "the elder" — not as one among many, as in most instances, but as having some marked position. In Presbyterian usage there are no bishops in the usual sense of the word, all teaching elders having the same rank and corresponding to the New Testament idea of bishop. The ruling elders are officials as truly as any minister, and are ordained as formally. It is doubtful usage to speak of them as "laymen," except for lack of a better term. In any alignment of Church people, the elders and deacons would belong with the ministers as ordained men, and not strictly as laymen.

The New Testament is not largely devoted to Church organization, so that the material for guidance in this matter is not abundant. But there is some discussion of the qualifications of an elder as needed in the early Church, and at least these qualifications are needed now, together with some others suggested by the more intricate life of to-day. Passing references occur in several of the letters, but it is naturally in the "pastoral epistles" to Timothy and Titus that the fullest statement is made. These two were young ministers, one sent to Ephesus, the other to the island of Crete, specially to establish order, to secure the appointment of elders, and to arrange other details as the churches might require. This duty led to a description of the kind of men who should be made elders and deacons, and the qualities of life and conduct which ought to mark them. The statements are found in I Tim. 3:1-7. with some material in ch. 5:17-19, and in Titus 1:5-9. As in every young movement, there was danger that self-seeking men might try to put themselves forward as leaders, and the apostle utters a warning on this point in I Tim. 5:22a, and Titus 1:10; 3:10, 11. All these passages deserve careful study. They constitute in large part the basis for any discussion of the qualifications of an elder for the present Church. The more fully the elders of the present can reproduce in their lives the qualities of their predecessors the stronger the Church will be.

III. The Traits of an Efficient Elder

One writer,³ analyzing these Scripture statements, makes a list of sixteen traits which an elder ought to have — a discouraging presentation unless one observes that many of the traits are simply those suggested by common sense for any helpful man. A more feasible analysis is that of a ruling elder of the Church in Scotland,⁴ who gathers up the whole list in five items:

1. The office and work being spiritual, it is necessary that elders be spiritual men. It is not necessary that they be men of great gifts, of worldly position, of wealth or high education, but it is indispensable that they be men of God, at peace with him, concerned more for the souls of others than for temporal interests. This is not immediately natural to some men, but it is wholly feasible for any man to center his interest on spiritual rather than temporal or passing things. It is difficult to keep the word "spiritual" in right proportions. It is often thought of as meaning otherworldly or impractical, more or less unreal. Of course, it actually means no such thing. It means being occupied with the things that really count in the field of religion, knowing that one's relation to God is most important, and that anything that helps in making and keeping this relation right is more important than anything else. That is what the Church is for — to serve the spiritual lives of men, dealing with men as creatures of eternity, and not merely of time. An elder may rightly be expected to be concerned especially for the chief business of the Church since he becomes a chief official in the Church. Spirituality is healthy-mindedness about the main business of the Church.

2. An elder should have a good knowledge of the Word of God, and be able to give a reason for the hope that is in him.

³ William H. Roberts, "Manual for Ruling Elders."

⁴ David Dickson, "The Elder and His Work."

At his ordination he declares that he believes the Bible to be "the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice." It is not necessary that he study theology, and it is not necessary that he know all that is to be known about the Bible. Otherwise, there would be no elders, or so few that the Church could not be run. But, if an elder does not find the Bible so clearly the Word of God that it challenges him at his mental best, he ought to turn his mind to it earnestly and frequently in order to catch its spirit. He is to be an adviser of any who need the advice of a friend and spiritual helper. This calls for his own growing understanding of the truth. In the Presbyterian ordination service, the elder declares that he accepts the system of doctrine in the Westminster Confession of Faith as expressing that of the Holy Scripture. He ought to inform himself about that teaching. The General Assembly of 1905 was asked by a presbytery whether the ordination of an elder was invalidated if it was found that he had never read the Confession of Faith. The Assembly replied that an ordination is not invalidated by this omission, but such an omission ought never to occur. This would seem fairly obvious. All elders ought to grow in their knowledge of the Word of God, and of that expression of it to which they are committed by their eldership, as well as in their power to impart this knowledge to others.

3. Elders should be men of common sense, knowing when to speak and when to hold their tongues. Even grace does not give common sense, a little of which would settle many controversies and heresies in the Church of Christ. "Men of points and pugnacity," says this Scottish elder, "are very annoying in a session or congregation, and they may rise to be the terror of presbyteries and other Church courts. A carping, censorious spirit is to be watched and prayed against by us all." No one can really define common sense, because it is common, but it would seem to be of vital importance in one who holds a high

office in the church among people of so many different types. Part of it surely is a sense of humor, which enables an elder to know when to take things seriously and when to pass them by as unimportant. An elder needs to be a compensating, balancing force among the various interests and influences of the church. He cannot afford to be a partisan except for the cause of the Church itself.

4. An elder should be consistent in his life and conversation. "We must be clean that bear the vessels of the Lord." "The usefulness of an elder will depend in the long run more on his character than on his gifts and knowledge." This is one of the difficult places in an elder's thinking. How far can he let his life be governed by the opinions of others, and how far may he assert his own opinion about the proper conduct of his life? There is no simple and obvious rule. It is clear for every Christian that Paul's position is unavoidable — one simply must regard the weakness of others and sacrifice pleasures or practices which injure others when this sacrifice will be of practical value to them. This is not merely for elders; it is for everyone who loves Christ and has learned from him to love other men. What are called "worldly" pleasures are sometimes so dear to a man that he feels that he cannot give them up, and yet that he ought not to be an elder and practice them. He thinks that they are not consistent with the life of an elder. Here he needs to ask a deeper question: Are they consistent with the life of a Christian at all? If so, may it not be his duty to claim the right of every Christian to use these practices, whether he be an elder or not? An elder is required by his office to be an example to the flock, but that is true of every mature Christian. An evil in any believer's life may become an excuse for the sin of a worldling. An elder is merely put on his guard to be all the more careful. He cannot appear before the church as a responsible Christian and act irresponsibly elsewhere. All of us fail so often that we long for more

and more men who make an honest effort to live consistently as Christians. Such men we want in the eldership—men whom we see honestly trying, however they may fail in accomplishing what they try to do.

5. An elder should be a man of deep sympathy — “not only having human kindness in our hearts, but that sanctified and consecrated.” It was said once about a certain man, “He’s a good man, but somehow he never reminds me of Jesus Christ.” The Church is not made up of perfect people; instead, the members are apt to be wayward and inconsistent. It is easy to be severe and harsh. Or, on the other hand, it is easy to become insensitive to wrongdoing on the plea that we must be gentle with the erring, considering ourselves, lest we also be tempted. Somewhere between those two extremes, every elder ought to take his stand. The suffering and sorrowing ought to find in him a constant friend. The sinning and penitent ought to know that in him they can find sympathy and understanding. This is a trait that can be cultivated. Hard, harsh, censorious men can become gentle and sympathetic if they honestly want to do so. Men who know the struggle for Christian character and spirit are apt to be the very best men in meeting and helping other men who need that spirit.

These five traits chosen by an elder — spirituality, knowledge of the Word of God, common sense, consistency, sympathy — sum up well the list of requirements of the apostle for the early elders. Many details are covered by the list. In the second century of the Church, the consecrated pastor, Polycarp, wrote to the church at Philippi: “Let the elders be tender and merciful, compassionate toward all, reducing those that are in error, visiting all those that are weak, not negligent of the widow and the orphan and him that is poor; but ever providing what is honest in the sight of God and man; abstaining from all wrath, respect of persons and unrighteous judg-

ment; being far from covetousness, not hastily believing a report against any man, not rigid in judgment, knowing that we are all faulty and subject to condemnation." This is an earlier way of saying what the Scottish elder has said.

In a later chapter the discussion of the duties of the elder will need to accent some of these traits, but as they stand here they are such qualities as would make any man finer in the sight of God, whether he serves as an elder or not. And they are exactly the traits which a wide inquiry among elders and nonelders reveals are desired by the Church to-day. There are many such elders now, and the Church is grateful for them.

THE QUESTIONS DISCUSSED IN THIS CHAPTER

1. What ordained officers are provided for in the Presbyterian system?
2. How are the high requirements of the eldership prevented from becoming prohibitive?
3. What is the Biblical basis for the eldership?
4. What are the principal characteristics which an elder should have and cultivate? How should the five listed in the chapter be arranged in order of importance?

SUBJECTS FOR FURTHER THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. The value and limitations of the popular idea of an "elder type." Is it better to have a small session of this general "type," or a larger group including men of other types? Is there any limitation on the size of your own session by reason of standards which only a few men can hope to meet?
2. The hesitation of some good men to accept the eldership: how far it is creditable; how far it should be recognized and accepted.
3. Spirituality in an elder—just what does it mean? How is it manifested in the best elders you know?
4. The duty of elders regarding what are commonly called "worldly" practices: how far they may be called upon to give up what other men do because some Christians object to certain practices.

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CHAPTER II

THE CHURCH

FEW WORDS are used in more senses than this word "Church." It may mean a building, or a period of worship, or a single body of believers, or a denomination, or the total number of believers. One thread of meaning always runs through the term and it is not necessary to define it narrowly here.

An elder is a Church officer, and the Church requires a great deal of his time and thought. Sometimes useless institutions demand time and waste it. Why do we have a Church? What does it do for the world which justifies the time and strength required of its office bearers?

I. The Origin of the Church

Some such institution is inevitable for a religion which has definite social or fraternal elements. As soon as a group of people find that they agree on some central thing and want to do anything about it, serving others with it, spreading it to others, strengthening each other in their convictions, they are bound to get together. When they get together, if there are enough of them, leaders will inevitably emerge, either by reason of temperament or by the choice of the group. The result is an organization more or less complex, but tending to grow more complex as its life develops.

When this naturalistic statement is made about the Church, it is objected by some that the Christian Church is of divine

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origin, as it certainly is. But whose is the order of nature? Who made man so that he inevitably joins his fellows in any reasonable endeavor and frames an organization? Is not this nature of things a real expression of God's will? The Christian Church is like other organizations and also very unlike them. The others are from first to last voluntary; the Church has an element of obligation about it for all who follow Christ. The terms used about it — "the body of Christ," "the pillar and ground of the truth," "the bride, the wife of the Lamb" — quite preclude its final classification with other organizations. And yet, from other points of view, it is a natural and inevitable outcome of such a religion as Christianity.

As "elders" were carried over from an earlier order into the Christian Church, so the idea of a Church came over from other orders. In his speech before his martyrdom, Stephen used the term regarding the Children of Israel in the desert — "the church in the wilderness," Acts 7:38. The same Greek word is used in Heb. 2:12, which is quoted from Ps. 22:22, to describe the gatherings before which a believer in God might bear his witness. Before the Christian Church had yet become a visible fact, our Lord spoke of the duty of offended people to use "the church" as a means for bringing about peace, Matt. 18:17, using a familiar term for the gathering of religious people. In Acts, ch. 19, where a riot in Ephesus is described, the town clerk dismissed the crowd on the ground that they had a "regular assembly" to which appeal might be made regarding any disturbing thing, and the Greek word for both the illegal gathering and the regular assembly is the word which the Christians used for their "Church," the word *ecclesia*, which some small denominations still use instead of the English word. It really means a group of people "called out" for any purpose and maintaining some kind of order in its procedure. The early Christians took it over for the permanent organization which their religion dictated, and which

their Master plainly intended to originate, Matt. 16:18. It is sometimes said that Christ did not establish the Church. The dispute is largely a matter of words. He could not have founded a religion such as he gave to his disciples without purposing that a Church should come into being. We can discuss how fully he intended to determine the particular form it might take, but we can hardly doubt that he knew it would take some form and intended that it should do so.

At any rate, very early in the Christian movement, the Church appears. In the earliest chapters of The Acts, the word for church does not occur. We are told that believers were "added" — to each other and to the Lord, Acts 2:41, 47; 5:14. The word "church" emerges in Acts 5:11 and thereafter it takes large place in the language of that book and of the rest of the New Testament. The first use of the plural, "churches," does not occur until Acts 15:41; until that point the Church is spoken of as if it were a unit, though its organization in local groups came much earlier, as is evidenced by Acts 14:23. There is a growing tendency to refer to "the church" of a given place; glance over Rev., chs. 2 and 3; notice also how the Epistles to the Corinthians are addressed in the first verses. Then notice the opening verse of Galatians and see the use of the plural when a whole province, Galatia, is in mind. In the opening of the Epistle to the Philippians, the officers alone are mentioned. In place of "the church" is simply the expression "the saints," plainly another way of mentioning Church members with the New Testament meaning of the word. A New Testament saint is not a perfect person, but one who belongs to God, is set apart to him. Hence all followers of Christ are thought of as "saints," though none of them is thought of as perfect. It seems to have been taken for granted that these "saints" would come together into some definite fellowship. Indeed, it is of the very essence of their faith that they should do so.

II. *The Nature of the Church*

Distinction is only rarely made between the people who made up the Church and the Church as an organization. "The church . . . in their house," Rom. 16:5, would be a body of believers gathering in some order or regularity there, but when Paul persecuted the Church, I Cor. 15:9, it was the members whom he persecuted. He "laid waste the church," implying a group scattered by his efforts, Acts 8:3; Ananias spoke of what Saul had done "to . . . saints at Jerusalem," Acts 9:13. In Acts 16:5 it is said that the churches were strengthened and increased in number — not in the number of organizations, but in the number and spirit of their members. It is difficult for us to make this distinction because it really ought not to be made. The organization is nothing except for the members of the Church, and the members are ineffective but for the organization. The elders are elders of the organization, but they owe their primary responsibility to the members of the organization. If it is worth while in this world to have Christians, it is worth while for the same reason to have a Church organization. The existence of elders is explained by the existence of Christians. Elders, or some officers corresponding to them, are a necessary outcome of the emergence of Christian believers. As soon as it becomes a self-conscious group, taking any definite form, we find elders chosen for each group, Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5.

It is not pretended that this body or organization has always been worthy of its real calling. The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chap. XXV, Sec. V, says frankly: "The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error: and some have so degenerated, as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless, there shall be always a Church on earth, to worship God according to his will." The history of the Church makes inspiring reading

for thoughtful men. It has had painful chapters, when reformation had to occur, but it is noticeable that the Church breeds its own reformers. Its reformations come from within, from men who love it and long to bring it again to purity and efficiency. What we call "the Reformation," which occurred in the sixteenth century, was the work of men who would gladly have given their lives for the Church. It was because they loved the Church of Christ that they felt that they must rebel against the errors in its existing form. From time to time earnest men have been so troubled by evils in the Church that they have gone out from it, meaning not to be involved again in any organization, meaning instead to live the free life of the Christian "without machinery and ordering." This program has never continued for long. Something both in human nature and in the nature of the Christian faith forbids the experiment. Believers imply a Church as the order through which they express their Christian lives, and by which they aid each other and maintain the truth of the gospel of Christ.

If this correction has been needed in the past, we may well expect it to be needed in the future. Individual churches will need it and the Church at large will need it. The Church cannot remain static in a moving, changing age. Its outlook needs to be frequently changed; its methods need to be revised; its positions need to be reexamined. This does not imply a new gospel or a new religion — quite the contrary. It implies that "the faith . . . once for all delivered unto the saints" must be made real to each age by the saints of that age who receive it from their fathers. One of the inevitable dangers of an institution or an organization is that it may grow stiff and unresponsive, treating its own age as though it were an earlier age rather than a fresh opportunity calling for fresh attempts with its unchanged gospel. One of the rich opportunities of an elder is this of keeping his church alive to the day in which it lives. Assuming that what has been in the past must go on

in the present or the future, without testing it by the spirit of Christ, would mean that the elders of the earlier day were in error when they challenged the customs of their own days and framed the new customs which are now our old customs.

We are not to identify any one form with the whole idea of the Church. The Westminster Form of Government, Chap. II, describes the "universal Church" as consisting of "all those persons, in every nation, together with their children, who make profession of the holy religion of Christ, and of submission to his laws." It goes on to say that "as this immense multitude cannot meet together in one place, to hold communion, or to worship God, it is reasonable, and warranted by Scripture example, that they should be divided into many particular churches," and it continues that "a particular church consists of a number of professing Christians, with their offspring, voluntarily associated together, for divine worship and godly living, agreeably to the Holy Scriptures; and submitting to a certain form of government." Of course, this implies that many other bodies beside Presbyterians are Christian Churches. Few Protestants would dispute this idea. It is strongly disputed by the Roman Catholic authorities, who believe that there can be only one true Church, and that all its members or parts must be directly connected with its earthly head as well as with Christ, its spiritual Head.

The importance of keeping this wider idea of the Church in mind lies in the fact that it requires a statement of all that all the churches do in order to state what the Church really does. If it should be found that some good work is not done by some church which one observes, it may still be true that that good work is done by the Church, and that a wider knowledge of the Church would reveal it. An observer might say of the churches in his locality that they are not worth the labor spent on them, and that the time and money it requires to keep them alive could be better used in some other way, and this may be

true. Yet it would be true that the Church is doing for the world what no other institution or agency is doing. The local churches need merely to become worthy members of the true Church as it exists in the world in order to repay all the time and thought and money spent on them.

III. The Service of the Church to the World

What, then, does the Church do for the world? What gifts does it bring which the world needs? The answer must lie in the religious field, for the Church is always an agency of religion. It may be expected to be concerned with anything that is the business of religion, but not with anything else, if, indeed, there is anything else. One of the perennial dangers is that so compact an organization will be attractive to men who would like to use it for other ends. This must always be resisted.

1. The Church gives to the world its sense of the reality of Christ and of what he means to life. There are many business enterprises conducted according to Christian principles, and many institutions which try to express his spirit, but there is nothing except the Church which has as its main business the maintaining and spreading of the fact and influence of Jesus Christ. Whatever the Christian religion is worth to the world, that the Church is worth. For, while it is not the function of the organized Church to apply the Christian religion to every interest of life directly, yet there is no hope for keeping that religion alive among men without the Church in some form. It is a brotherhood of believers whose very existence keeps the world assured of the fatherhood of God in Christ. The Church is often very faulty in this service, and sometimes disgraces its claim to be a brotherhood, but, if it fails, it is at least the best attempt that is made to maintain a brotherhood that will surpass all limitations. Some brotherhoods confine

themselves to men of the same trade or race or location, and often render this limited service well. The Church is never true to itself when it accepts any limitations or suggests that certain people or certain classes cannot properly be as truly part of it as other people or classes.

No area of the earth's surface has a definite or clear idea of Christ, nor is that idea maintained forcefully anywhere, without the presence and service of some part of the Christian Church. If this is worth doing, then it is worth any man's while to bear the burden of the church in his own locality as part of the Church everywhere. As soon as the sense of Christ develops in any land, even in the newest missionary group, it expresses itself in a Church which seeks to keep it alive and to remind the world around of what Christ means in life. So the Church is called the "body" of Christ, Eph. 1:23, the agency through which Christ makes himself real to his surroundings. That is what your own body does for you, giving your spirit a chance to express itself.

2. The Church maintains a body of religious truth which the world greatly needs. Of course, it can make nothing true in itself, but it does keep alive in the world certain truths which would be easily lost unless some such agency maintained them. It is called "the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth," I Tim. 3:15, suggesting that through it some truth is supported in the world. The pillars of a house do not make the house, but the house would fall without them. An argument does not create a conclusion, but the conclusion would lose force in the mind if the argument failed. No vote of the Church can affect the character or truth of the Christian religion, but the action and life of the Church will have much to do with the force which the Christian religion has in the world. It is the body of religious truth which the world needs. At the very heart of it is the revelation of the love of God in Jesus Christ and his atonement for

sin on the cross, with all the rich meanings of that saying. No other institution of any sort in the present world bears steady witness to this central and redemptive reality. The Church is incidental in itself and must always be corrected and tested by the truth which it is charged to maintain in the world. If it fails, the truth continues and presently demands another visible agency which will express it to men. Paul warned the Church that part of its duty is to "hold fast the traditions," I Cor. 11:2. Generally, "tradition" indicates something which is not well founded and therefore may be dismissed as unimportant. Here the word means exactly the opposite. It means the vital truths handed down from generation to generation, the material of the Christian faith by which it lives in history. The Church is the only agency that does this. But for it, or something that would correspond to it, the Christian faith would have died out in the early years. And it is at the point where this truth calls men to worship that the Church renders them a great service. "Worship" is "worth ship" — the recognition of something that has a value which ought to command us. Keeping the sense of God alive in men's minds, making righteousness and godliness a vital reality, reminding men that they are meant to look up — this is a task for the Church, and it has never performed it fully nor failed in it utterly. If there were no sermons and no instruction, the services of the Church would be well worth while simply for the sake of helping men to be quiet in the presence of God, to get their right proportions again after the self-importance and self-assertion that marks most of our days. No other institution in society attempts this; many social institutions move in the other direction, feeding our self-importance and making us feel greater than we are.

3. The Church is a center of association for Christ-minded people. In a social religion it is impossible for one believer to achieve his best life in solitude. He needs the society

of his kind, both for his own sake and for theirs. This is the largest single brotherhood in the world, and any deep divisions in it are injurious to it, no matter how devoted the leaders may be. The apostle used the figure of the body and its members with Christ as its Head, Rom. 12:4, 5; I Cor. 12:27. Believers are the members; they operate under the guidance of the Head, but in coöperation with each other. They are as defective when they are isolated as a hand or an eye when it is laid out by itself. The Church is a family center. One of its earliest forms was "in their house," Rom. 16:5, a gathering in the home of a believer, which emphasized the real family life of those who accept the fatherhood of God in Christ Jesus. It is still the best family center for religion, and any thoughtful parent knows that his children need what it brings. If in a particular case the Church does not bring this to children, then it is the duty of its mature members to make such changes in it as will make it effective. Its organization has always to be guarded against becoming oppressive instead of helpful. Even so high an authority as the Apostle Paul reminded his friends that his authority had been given him to build them up and not to destroy them, II Cor. 13:10. Every sincere Christian ought to be made to feel at home in any Christian Church, and anyone who can be a true follower of Christ ought to be available for membership in any true Church of Christ. It would be a sad shame if Christ had to look for any of his followers outside his Church, his own people having refused them welcome within it! Unhappily, it is no new thing for divisions to occur in the Church. They emerged in New Testament days, I Cor. 11:19, but they are none the less painful and regrettable. And when they prevent the Church from being a rallying center for all those who believe in Christ and follow him, the Church is robbed of part of its real glory. The service it renders in being a home of Christian souls makes the Church worth all it costs.

4. The Church gives the world a support for its best endeavors. It inspires its own people to their largest efforts in behalf of the world, and acts as a restraint on wrong efforts. A Presbyterian elder recently wrote: "The Church builds character, without which life on earth would not be worth living; property would have no value because it would have no protection, and all the protection possible or practicable to employ could not stop crime where character is lacking. Your title to your property is no better than the character of those governing the organization that guarantees it; character, therefore, is vital, and since the Church helps to build that character and helps to maintain it, the Church is a real friend and benefactor."¹ Does this statement seem too strong? Much is made in thoughtful circles of "the police power" of true religion. The Apostle Paul started a movement to stop needless litigations, I Cor. 6:1, and he pleaded frequently for obedience to the constituted authorities of society, Rom. 13:1. Very early such services were needed. A sincerely religious man will not do some things which seem entirely defensible to a nonreligious man. They are not necessarily vile things, but they are things which affect the peace and security of society. It is in Church connections that goodness is made to seem worth while. No such opportunity occurs for helping other people so widely and so sanely as through one's church connections. Church officers are often impressed with the appeals for aid that come to the church, based on the assurance that church people expect to help every good cause. A few years ago a great Church movement went to pieces because its leaders depended at a critical point on what they called "the friendly citizen," the non-Christian man who yet believes in good things and would doubtless be glad to aid in a good cause even if he were not himself a Church man. There proved to be too few such people to carry any part of the load of the move-

¹ E. Burton Davis, Immanuel Church, Los Angeles, 1930.

ment. Such a spirit is not bred outside the agencies of religion. Most people get their influences from within the Church, or they break down under the first serious strain.

The religious impulse is needed to keep any considerable movement for good advancing. The whole program of missions is an instance of this. To the non-Church man it is folly or arrogance to carry the gospel to other lands at such a cost of life and money as is involved. He asks what business it is of ours whether other people become Christians or remain in their earlier faiths. Have we not enough need here at home? He does not realize the spirit of self-importance and arrogance that lies back of this idea. If we have a really good thing, such as our Christian faith, can we keep it to ourselves, away from other people, without cultivating a bad spirit? Yet no agency except the Church keeps this wide spirit of human values alive in the world. Self-denial becomes a familiar habit to intelligent Christians. They do not ask what they will get out of what they may do or may give. They ask what others will get out of it, II Cor. 8:1-5; 9:1-5. What other agency is teaching this habit? The largest efforts made for human help around the world are the efforts inspired by and maintained by the Church. They reach more people and supply more kinds of need and serve more wants than any other efforts. When an emergency arises anywhere, the natural tendency is to apply to the Church, or to some agency which it has established and fosters. If anyone is ready to bring relief, it will be the Church and its people. And when the Church refuses, there is always the feeling that something is wrong with the plea or with the Church, for the genius of the Christian faith should be expressed under such conditions. A very suggestive Scottish writer says: "It is through the Church, with all her faults, that the inspiration to the highest Christian service has been mediated, and, whatever view we take of the divine institution of the Church, we shall find it

difficult, if not impossible, to separate the thought of the Christian gospel from that of a Christian society.”² It will be well for elders to think of this when conditions in their own churches seem adverse. The main business is being done, even though a single instance of church life is defective. Nothing could be much more tragic than for a ruling elder to lose his relation to the world-wide service of the Church because he is disheartened or preoccupied by purely local demands or complications. One reason the Church exists, one reason why his particular church exists, is that a world service may be carried on. Turning away from this is failing the gospel of Christ at its very center.

THE QUESTIONS DISCUSSED IN THIS CHAPTER

1. How did the Church of Christ originate? How is the word used in the New Testament?
2. Are the members of the Church more, or less, important than the organization?
3. How are the “particular” churches related to the “universal Church”?
4. What does the Church do for the world which no other organization does? How would you arrange the four points suggested in order to bring them to a climax?
5. How is the work of world missions involved in the theory of the Christian Church?

SUBJECTS FOR FURTHER THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. How the idea of “the Church” appears in the New Testament. (A good concordance will furnish the material; all the texts should be considered.)
2. Why a body like the Church should need “reformations”; how reformers may avoid seeming to be enemies of the Church. Consider the opinion that a reformation is needed to-day, and whether it is accurate; if so, what methods are open to believers who love the Church?

² John McKenzie, Editor, “The Christian Task in India,” page x.

3. The obligation of the Church regarding the collateral effects of the Christian religion; e.g., its effect on industry, war, temperance, and so forth.

4. How fully the Church (the churches) in your locality is doing the four things suggested in the chapter. A similar discussion may occur in connection with Chapter VI.

CHAPTER III

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

A PRESBYTERIAN ELDER is an officer in a particular church, and the church is part of a denomination. Each denomination tries to be to its members all that any Church needs to be, and in that sense any denomination claims to be the Church of Christ. No one of them would willingly admit that anyone needs to go anywhere else to find full Christian fellowship or the opportunities of the Christian life. Yet, the very word "denomination" implies that other similar bodies are part of the one Church of Christ. When we speak of the Presbyterian Church as a denomination, we mean "that part of the whole Church of Christ denominated, or called, or named, Presbyterian." In actual usage, the word "sect" is more exclusive and carries to most minds the idea of separation from others and an independence of them which the word "denomination" does not imply, and which the Presbyterian Church certainly does not intend.

Nevertheless the Presbyterian Church is a distinctive body among Christian believers. It belongs among what are known as the "Reformed" Churches, dating in recent history from the time of the Reformation of the sixteenth century. At the same time, any thoughtful adherent of the Presbyterian Church feels that he can trace his Church back to the apostles and Christ. When a Roman Catholic official asked a Scottish Presbyterian elder somewhat sneeringly, "Where was your Church before the Reformation?" the elder replied, "Where was your face this morning before it was washed?" Pres-

byterians believe that the great elements of their faith and practice are traceable directly to the New Testament, and they find constantly recurring instances of those principles down through history. Dr. J. Aspinwall Hodge says that "the three great principles of Presbyterianism — viz., government by elders, the parity of the ministry, and courts of appeals — have always been recognized in the Church of God. . . . The most ancient churches still extant, or of whose government we have information, were Presbyterian. . . . Calvin and the other Reformers derived their principles of polity and discipline from the Scriptures, and from these ancient churches."¹

The name "Presbyterian" describes a form of Church government. It is a Greek word, occurring often in the New Testament, and generally translated "elder." The Presbyterian Church is a Church of elders, magnifying that office both for its ministers, who are teaching elders, and for its more local officials, who are ruling elders.

But it would be a mistake to suppose that the only distinction of the Presbyterian Church lies in its form of government. Historically, the Church has always been marked by adherence to a certain type of Christian belief. Its creed has been as distinctive as its government. In later years this creed has been called Calvinistic, but earlier it was called Augustinian, and many would call it Pauline, though manifestly this would be questioned by many who accept Paul as devotedly as Presbyterians do, but do not count themselves Presbyterians. In addition, the Reformed Churches have been marked by their insistence on the thorough training of their ministry and by a certain severity of intellectual life which can hardly be defined. This has been difficult to maintain in some periods, but the Presbyterian Church has prevailingly tried to secure in its leadership the highest degree of training available at the time. For this reason, it has been a constant supporter

¹ "What Is Presbyterian Law?" pages 11, 12.

of education, in many instances founding its own colleges and in many others standing by institutions otherwise founded. In America it is not an enemy of the public school or of State systems of education. Indeed, the public school system of America can be traced directly to John Calvin. Still it has found it wise to maintain many institutions under its peculiar care but not in rivalry with the State. Many of its colleges were founded in order to raise up a godly ministry and to maintain and defend the purity and stability of the Christian faith as confessed among the people, but it has gladly cooperated with all agencies which seek to spread the blessings of education to people in general. Hence, on its mission fields it has established many institutions of various grades and has joined with all other Churches, where possible, in similar work.

There are three distinctive aspects of the Presbyterian Church — its government, its creed, its educational demand.

I. The Presbyterian Form of Government

The government of the Presbyterian Church is representative in type, under delegated authority, rather than purely democratic or aristocratic and dictatorial. The ultimate authority of the Church lies with the people who make up its membership. But these members elect officials in ways agreeable to themselves, and intrust to them the actual operating of the machinery of the Church. The three bodies of such officers have already been mentioned: ministers (teaching elders), ruling elders, and deacons. Where the civil law requires or permits, each congregation chooses for itself a body of trustees or holders of the temporal property of the church to aid in the administering of its temporal affairs, but under the law of the Church these civil officers are subject in their official relations to the property to the control of the elders, who are the highest officers of the local

church. The ministers, ruling elders, and deacons are all set apart solemnly in ordination, taking vows closely alike. For elders and deacons these vows are as follows:

“1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?”

“2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?”

“3. Do you approve of the government and discipline of the Presbyterian Church in these United States?”

“4. Do you accept the office of ruling elder (or deacon) in this congregation, and promise faithfully to perform all the duties thereof?”

“5. Do you promise to study the peace, unity, and purity of the Church?”

The first, second, and third vows are exactly the same for ministers, additional vows being adapted to the more distinctive work of the ministry. The entire ordained officary of the Church is thus bound together around one faith and one form of government. Such questions are never asked of the members of the Church. They are received on their acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Master and their promise to seek to live the Christian life. Anyone who can be a Christian at all is welcomed into the membership of the Presbyterian Church. Only its officers are asked questions of doctrine or government, and all are asked the same questions. They constitute the binding unity of the Church.

Since deacons are not governing officers in the Presbyterian Church, all the authority is committed by the members to ministers and ruling elders, who exercise their function of government in an ascending series of four courts:

1. In the local church, the ruling elders and the pastor or pastors form what is called “the session,” of which the pastor

of the church is, under normal circumstances, the moderator. He is without vote except in case of a tie or on a vote by ballot. This is the primary court of discipline for church members and is the controlling body in the total life of the church. All societies and organizations are amenable to it, and the people of the church control it by determining the number of its members, its personnel, and the duration of the term of service of each ruling elder. Ordination to the eldership is for life, but the actual service of a ruling elder is determined by the will of the congregation of the particular church. Any member of the church has the right to bring before this governing body any matter which concerns the interests of the church or any of its members. The rules governing the actions of the session are very general, and are framed in the interest of the unity of the Church as a whole, and of the peaceful progress of the gospel in the church and its community. Another chapter of this book discusses the duties and powers of the session in more detail. Few church bodies have larger local powers.

2. The next court above the session is "the presbytery," a body consisting of all the ordained ministers and one ruling elder from each congregation in a certain district. In this court the ruling elders have exactly the same standing as the ministers, and can occupy any office, serve on any committee, and render every type of service, save a very few technical services which are reserved for ordained ministers by constitutional provision or General Assembly enactment. Since there are often ministers in the district who are not in charge of churches but are nevertheless members of the presbytery, it works out that there are generally more ministers than ruling elders in a presbyterial meeting. In some Presbyterian Churches, other than the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, ministers without official duties cannot sit in presbytery, under which rule the membership of the body

would be virtually equally divided among the ministers and the ruling elders. The duties of the presbytery are not especially important for this discussion, but it is the initial court for all changes in the order or creed or discipline of the Church, and is in some sense the unit of the Church at large. Ruling elders have as large an influence in this body as they are willing to take. Each session selects the member who represents it, changing the representation as it pleases, but ordinarily the same elder must continue through any adjourned meetings. If a church has more than one installed pastor, it sends one elder for each pastor. When a minister is pastor or "stated supply" of more than one church, each church sends an elder to presbytery.

3. Next above the presbytery is "the synod," in some respects merely a larger presbytery, including the members of all the presbyteries of a given area or their elected representatives. In this body, under the theory of the Church, the ruling elders sit in equal numbers and with absolutely equal rights and powers with the ordained ministers. This will not actually work out except when the value and importance of the synod so impress ruling elders that they will attend in their full quota. The synod is a supervising body, charged with a series of duties — but this is not pertinent to our purpose just now. It is sufficient to note that in Presbyterian theory it expresses again the representative nature of the system, the representatives of the local church having equal voice with the minister and the representatives of other churches.

4. The highest court of the Church is the General Assembly, composed of representatives of all the presbyteries, with ministers and ruling elders in equal numbers — an expectation that is seldom disappointed, since the ruling elders find a pride in being present in such an obviously important gathering. In this highest court, again, ruling elders are on precisely the same footing as ministers, can occupy all its offices, administer

all its business, serve on or head any of its committees, address it on any subject. This General Assembly has supervision over all the affairs of the Church, with such limitations as conserve the liberty of each congregation in some matters and the independence of the lower courts in others. It maintains a permanent office and a staff headed by the Stated Clerk, who is elected for a term of years; its trustees are legally incorporated. In this sense, it is a continuing body with annual sessions. The general benevolent work of the denomination is under the care of the General Assembly, and for this purpose it establishes Boards of administration for missions and education and other interests, appointing to these Boards ministers and ruling elders and other representatives of the churches. As a matter of fact, the ministers on these Boards are now always largely outnumbered by ruling elders and laymen. In short, the Presbyterian Church reserves for its ordained ministers only the strictly ministerial services, allotting to ruling elders an equal standing in the administration and service of the Church.

In the primary court, the local session, the entire normal vote is that of the direct representatives of the members; in the higher courts these representatives have equal voice with ordained ministers. In this way, the Church tries to maintain the principle of freedom and also that of fellowship. The humblest member of the Church has the right of "complaint" or "appeal" from the first of these courts to the last on any important matter. When the final voice of the Church at large is heard, then he may either accept it or seek other relationships or set out openly to change the mind of the Church.

II. The Creed of the Presbyterian Church

The distinctive faith of the Presbyterian Church is expressed in a great document called the Westminster Confession

of Faith, and in two Catechisms, in which the same matter is broken up into simpler and more detailed statements. The name "Westminster" originates with the fact that the "Assembly of Divines" which framed these documents met in the Jerusalem Chamber of Westminster Abbey, London. The meeting began in June, 1643. During its progress, 120 ministers and 30 ruling elders, or other nonministers, were on its roll. The Directory for Worship was agreed to in 1645, the Confession of Faith in 1647, and the Catechisms in 1648. Each document has been revised in many points. With suitable changes the general system was adopted for the Presbyterian Church in America by the Synod of Philadelphia, the original organization, in 1729, and by the General Assembly at its first session in May, 1789.

Intelligent Presbyterians should be careful not to speak of the Confession under the name "Westminster"; the word is "Westminster," meaning the "minster," or place of worship or monastery, west of London City. The roots of "minster" and "minister" are entirely different. Presbyterian ministers sometimes fall into this error and ruling elders may do so.

In its main material, the creed is that of all evangelical ("gospel") Churches. The agreements among these churches are more numerous, and also more vital, than their differences, as might be expected of adherents of the same Christian religion. At the same time the differences are not immaterial or negligible. Dr. William Henry Roberts, long the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, has expressed what he calls "the general value of the Presbyterian system" in these terms:

"In its theology it honors the divine sovereignty without denying human freedom; in its views of human duty, while insisting upon obedience to God, it emphasizes human responsibility; in its worship it magnifies God while it brings blessing to man, by maintaining the right of free access on the part of every soul to him whose grace cannot be fettered in its min-

istrations by any human ordinance whatsoever; and in its government it exalts the headship of Christ, while giving full development to the activities of the Christian people. From its beginning to its close the system acknowledges God as Sovereign, and in its every part is affirmed to be in harmony with the teachings of God's Word. Its twin symbols are 'An Open Bible' and 'The Burning Bush,' burning yet not consumed."²

A much later writer says:

"Theologically speaking, Presbyterians belong to the Calvinistic branch of Protestantism. Their central tenet is the sovereignty of God. They believe that whatever freedom man possesses (and historically Presbyterians have held a high doctrine of human responsibility) it is consistent with the divine control."³

One of the largest contributions of the Presbyterian Church to Christian history has been its insistence on this body of truth, accenting the place of God in the universe and in human life. Such insistence makes for courage to undertake any enterprise which is seen to be part of God's will. It was natural for John Knox, with this assurance, to be "unafraid of the face of man." The early American Presbyterians threw themselves into the Revolutionary movement unhesitatingly because they were assured that God reigns. In his presence no one else seriously matters. This has never made for human indolence, as some observers reason it might do. "If God is Sovereign, why should we act?" — that is one way to speak. Intelligent believers say instead, "Since God is Sovereign, we may act with entire confidence in the outcome of our action."

Whatever Church unions may occur in the future, it will be an irreparable loss if the Presbyterian and Reformed groups do not carry into the unions these great assurances — the

² William H. Roberts, "Manual for Ruling Elders," page 20.

³ W. A. Brown, "Community Religion and the Denominational Heritage," page 97.

sovereignty of God and the responsibility of the individual. The famous and profound statement at the opening of the Form of Government quotes from the Confession of Faith and comments as follows:

“ They are unanimously of opinion:

“. . . That ‘ God alone is Lord of the conscience; and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in any thing contrary to his word, or beside it in matters of faith or worship’: Therefore, they consider the rights of private judgment, in all matters that respect religion, as universal and unalienable; they do not even wish to see any religious constitution aided by the civil power, further than may be necessary for protection and security, and, at the same time, be equal and common to all others.”

III. The Educational Position of the Church

This distinctive element in the Presbyterian system is more fully discussed in a later chapter. Here the accent is laid on its requirement of an educated and trained leadership. This is rooted in both the other elements. There will always be men of the most advanced training in the membership of the Church and it can hardly be expected that they will follow a leadership which cannot represent them fairly on the side of education and training. It is equally important with reference to the faith of the Church. The authors of the Westminster Confession of Faith make a clear declaration at this point. They believe:

“ That truth is in order to goodness; and the great touchstone of truth, its tendency to promote holiness; according to our Saviour’s rule, ‘ by their fruits ye shall know them.’ And that no opinion can be either more pernicious or more absurd, than that which brings truth and falsehood upon a level, and represents it as of no consequence what a man’s opinions are. On

the contrary, they are persuaded that there is an inseparable connection between faith and practice, truth and duty. Otherwise, it would be of no consequence either to discover truth, or to embrace it."

On this account, they add, it is necessary to raise up Church leaders who are well trained and can be trusted with the handling of difficult matters in the field of religion. Only well-trained men can safely hold a long and strong creed. Only such men can exercise true Christian forbearance with those who differ from them. Half-trained men are dogmatic and assertive. They can conceive no way of stating the truth but the one to which they are accustomed; they hold the truth narrowly and anxiously, thinking that in some way it depends on them and their defense of it. Every Church has suffered from such men, the Presbyterian Church included.

But the defense and assertion of the truth is not intrusted to ordained ministers alone. The ruling elders have their share in safeguarding the Church against error and in hindering the narrowing influence of poorly trained men. The Christian faith is always in danger from men who sacrifice its truth in the interest of what they count its freedom, and also from men who sacrifice its breadth and richness in the interest of what they count its truth. The Presbyterian Church seeks to steer its way between these two perils by demanding a truly educated ministry and also a high level of intellectual life among its ruling elders.

Such a Church makes a large contribution to the total Christian Church. Officers in it may become, if they will, determining factors in the advancement of the Kingdom of God and the spread and application of the Christian faith.

Presbyterian writers fall into two groups in their judgment of the relation of this Church, in government, creed, and practice, to the original Christian Church. The members of one group find the system so plainly taught in the New Testament

that they believe it to be the form which Christ intended his Church to have on earth; that the officers which mark the Presbyterian Church are the ones, and the only ones, found in the Apostolic Church — bishops, or teaching elders, ruling elders, and deacons; that there is no true Church without these officers; that additional or other officers are redundant and complicating. The members of the other group find the Presbyterian system in the New Testament, and hence feel it to be wholly consonant with apostolic practice, a true New Testament Church, but they are not willing to call it exclusive in this particular, especially in view of the earnest claims of other systems. It is important to note the underlying agreement of these two groups, both of them asserting the New Testament teaching of the system to which the Presbyterian Church is committed.

THE QUESTIONS DISCUSSED IN THIS CHAPTER

1. How is the Presbyterian Church to be regarded in relation to other Churches?
2. When does the Presbyterian Church as a distinctive fact appear in history?
3. What are the distinctive elements in the Presbyterian Church?
4. What are the four "courts" of the Presbyterian system? What is the place of elders in each?
5. What is the "Westminster" Confession of Faith? How are the Catechisms related to it?

SUBJECTS FOR FURTHER THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. The merits of the common complaint about denominations or sects; how far they imply real division in the body of Christ; how far they are functional and represent merely different ways of serving the gospel.
2. The fact that officers of the Presbyterian Church are subject to vows which are not required of members; whether this implies two levels of Christian belief, as is sometimes urged.

3. Why ruling elders tend to take small interest in presbytery and synod; the place of these "courts" in a consistent scheme of Church government.

4. In what sense the Presbyterian Church may be declared to be "the" New Testament Church; whether it should be counted merely "a" New Testament Church; how far this should be accented.

CHAPTER IV

THE ELDER'S OFFICIAL RESPONSIBILITY

A PRESBYTERIAN RULING ELDER is, of course, primarily a Church member like all the rest, and his primary duty is to be a worthy Christian in or out of office. The standards of personal Christian living apply to him as directly as to anyone else. No official position can alter this fundamental fact; it may even underscore it.

But he has been elected by his fellow believers to hold the highest office which they give to one of themselves, and has been set apart solemnly by ordination to that office. The vows he has taken are considered permanent and cover his life, though he may be in active service in a particular congregation for only part of the time. If he removes to any other congregation and its people desire that he serve them as an elder, he is not ordained again; he is merely installed in that church as an elder already ordained. The familiar saying is, "Once an elder, always an elder." If an elder is later ordained to the ministry, he ceases to be a ruling elder under the system in use in the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. Under that system a ruling elder must be a member of a particular church, while a minister ceases to be such a member and becomes a member of the presbytery instead. In some other branches of the Presbyterian group this rule does not hold, and ministers who are not in active ministerial service are allowed to become members of sessions upon the vote of the congregation.

I. How an Elder Receives His Responsibility

The process of making an elder in the Presbyterian Church is in three stages:

1. First, the church members elect some one whom they count worthy. The method of nomination is entirely at the wish of the congregation. Sometimes a nominating ballot is made; sometimes names are mentioned beforehand; sometimes the session or a duly appointed committee may suggest the names. In every case it is important that opportunity be given for any person in the congregation to make a nomination if he wishes.

2. After the election a reasonable time should elapse before the ordination and installation of the elder elect, though there is nothing in the law determining this. During this time the elder elect faces the conditions of the eldership, reads the Church Constitution and particularly the Confession of Faith and the Form of Government carefully, and considers the vows which he must take. The present volume for ruling elders was occasioned in part by the feeling of many presbyteries that the long training for the ministry should be matched by at least a brief training for the eldership, especially since ministers and ruling elders are under the same vows regarding their faith. The Confession of Faith is often a difficult document at first reading, and the elder will find help in reading also the "Brief Statement of the Reformed Faith" adopted by the General Assembly in 1902. This Brief Statement is not an official document, and is not "a substitute for, or an alternative of, the Confession of Faith," but it represents an interpretation which a General Assembly has put on the essential teaching of the Confession of Faith.

3. In the third step, if the office is accepted, the elder is ordained by the pastor, or other minister of the presbytery (not by the session), and is installed in office in the church

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which has elected him. The ordination is for life, but the installation is for the term of service which the church has chosen. This formal ordination and installation should occur at a regular church service, and should be much magnified. There is a widespread custom of marking the act of ordination by the formal laying of the hands of the minister on the head of the kneeling elder elect. After the ordaining prayer, his fellow elders give him immediately "the right hand of fellowship" in the presence of the congregation.

It may sometimes occur that a congregation elects an elder whose qualifications do not commend him to the pastor or to the other elders. But the rights of the congregation must be regarded in such a case. If the people have been obviously misled and the unfitness of the candidate is notorious, he can be frankly advised by the pastor or session not to accept the election. Or it may be pointed out to him that he cannot sincerely take the required vows. In case his unfitness is such that he is subject to discipline, the process of discipline should be begun at once, and this would prevent the ordination. If, however, he still desires to be ordained, the congregation may be called together again and told the mind of the pastor and session. Then, if the people abide by their previous desire, the ordination should occur. This is a natural application of the principle that the elder is elected by the congregation and not by the pastor or session.

Churches sometimes wish to show honor to an elder in a special way by electing him to a life term of service while most of the elders are on the term basis. The Assembly of 1911 ruled that this is irregular, as the law makes no provision for such exceptions to the prevailing rule in a particular church. When the Assembly was asked whether it is proper to elect an "elder emeritus," it replied that the position is unknown in Presbyterian practice. It is better to find some other way of honoring a worthy elder.

The question is often asked whether it is proper for the members of an existing session to take part in securing the election of their successors. The General Assembly has several times ruled that this is entirely proper, with the provision that it be done openly and with the due recognition of the congregation, arrangement being made so that the suggestions of the session are not obligatory upon the people. No group of persons should have the interests of the church more at heart than the members of the session, and, as the time approaches when others must succeed them or be added to their number, it is natural and right that they should canvass the congregation carefully and discover the persons best suited to the responsibilities and duties of the office. The elders may then guide the minds of the people toward these suitable persons, letting it be perfectly understood that they are doing so and that anyone else to whom the minds of the people may turn may be nominated for consideration as well. It is generally thought best that the nominating of candidates shall be done by others than members of the session, though some sessions find it wise to announce the names which commend themselves to them, either in the exact number to be elected, or in a larger number, so that selection may be made from among them. In some cases, the session appoints a Nominating Committee a few weeks before the election, including members in and out of the session, to present a list of suitable names for this office. In some churches provision is made about six weeks before the election for a nomination of desirable candidates by mail by any member of the congregation. These names are then assembled and those which lead the list are announced as nominated, provision being made also for other nominations at the meeting if desired.

It is never wise for the control of the session to be surreptitious or under cover, but no congregation will resent wise guidance from a body of men who have won confidence.

II. The Duration of Active Responsibility

Three methods are used in determining the term of service of elected elders:

1. Some churches call their elders to serve continuously during their residence in the congregation. New elders are elected only in case of the loss of an existing elder, or for the sake of increasing the number.

2. Some churches use what is called the "rotary system" of eldership, whereby the elected elder serves for a term of three years (the Church law requires three-year terms), subject to reelection at the will of the people. This often constitutes a life service by reason of regular reelections, but it gives the congregation occasion to determine at three-year intervals whether a particular elder shall continue in active service.

3. Some churches use the rotary system with the provision that after one or two terms of three years each an elder must retire from the session, at least one year intervening before his possible reelection. Each church decides its own method under the general law of the Church. It is probable that the largest number of congregations in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America follow the second method named, with a considerable and ever-increasing number turning to the third. Each of these methods is comparatively recent. The first is the oldest method and is probably in widest use in other parts of the Presbyterian and Reformed group.

Ruling elders sometimes object to a change from life service to term service, fearing a reflection on their faithfulness or suitability. Churches making the change need have no such thought in mind. As congregations grow larger there are naturally more persons available for this high office, and a certain amount of change brings into service a larger number of sin-

cere and devoted leaders. Either the sessions must be made so large as to be often unwieldy, or some members must be from time to time replaced by new material. It is true also that, not infrequently, particular elders may need to be replaced in the interest of better service. The method further results in the presence in the congregation of several people who know what the session can do and what it cannot do, and who can be a medium of understanding and interpretation for both the people and the session. Even a body of elders can become hardened into a routine which may need to be broken. It should be remembered that any elder in the congregation, whether in active service or not, may be called upon freely by the session to perform any duty in which his aid is desired, and that an elder not in active service may still represent his church in the higher courts at the wish of the session or the presbytery. Term service does not, therefore, deprive the church of its most experienced workers, and those who are desired are readily restored to the session if the year of retirement should be the rule. Nothing in this plan deprives a man of his standing as an ordained elder.

III. The Official Relationship of the Elder

It is of vital importance that every ruling elder shall establish and maintain right and intimate relations with his fellow elders. He must give them full trust and confidence, and should deserve the same from them. Any suspicion of division in the session is harmful. The closer the personal friendship among the elders, the better it is for the church. An elder should watch closely for the first beginnings of any divergence in sympathy or friendship between himself and any other elder and correct it at once. There is always a way whereby sincere Christian men can cooperate and support each other, if each of them is honestly eager to find it. An elder is fortunate when

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his finest friendships are found among his fellows in the session, and the church is fortunate in which this occurs, such friendships being almost inevitably on the definitely Christian basis.

Every elder, together with his fellow elders, carries certain responsibilities for the church in which he serves. The corporate duties and powers of the session, in which each individual shares, are discussed in Chapter V and need not be outlined here. But such large powers as belong to the session cannot be exercised peaceably and helpfully unless the individual elders keep themselves in close sympathy with the congregation as a whole. An elder needs to be approachable and helpful, so that no action of the session, performed in its wisdom for the good of the church as a whole, shall be resented by any group or any individual, because all will know that the elders have their interests at heart and are not ignorant of the actual life of the church. The more fully and helpfully the elders individually enter into this life, the easier it is for them to manage church affairs without friction and misunderstanding. It is not wise for any elder to be counted the special representative of any one interest; each elder thinks of and serves the whole church and has no concern for one section or part of it as over against another. But it is inevitable in larger churches that certain elders will be best known to certain groups, and this closer relation can be used to good advantage by a wise elder.

The particular duties of an elder can be learned in several ways. Some of them appear on the surface and are known before a man is elected to office. But no intuition informs a man concerning all his duties. How shall he find out?

1. The principles of the eldership are laid down in the New Testament, which every elder ought to study for this purpose. They are not simply those connected with the word "elder," though all these references are important, but also those which

tell what the Church is. The duties of a ruling elder are closely bound up with the very life and mission of the Church. The office roots back in the Old Testament eldership and it will broaden one's understanding of its duties to survey the service of elders under the old dispensation. A good concordance and a good commentary will be of aid here.

2. The distinctive present duties of the elder's office naturally appear in the official statements of the Presbyterian Church: the Confession of Faith, Chaps. XXV, XXVI, XXX, XXXI, and the Form of Government, Chaps. III, V, VIII-XIII, XXVII, with occasional helpful suggestions in the Book of Discipline and the Directory for Worship. It is important that every elder shall have in his possession the latest edition of the book containing all these documents, which is called "The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America." Revisions are often made; the older editions do not always cover the subject.

3. The Church has published the "Manual of Presbyterian Law for Church Officers and Members," a book which every elder, deacon, and trustee should possess. Some sessions study this Manual in their regular monthly meetings; some elders read it independently; some lead classes of young people in a study of the material which it contains. This present book may be used in the same way, and other helpful books are available. A list of some of these will be found in the Bibliography at the end of this volume. The more expensive and elaborate "Digest of the Acts and Deliverances of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America" would be of much interest to many church officers.

4. Elders' conferences show that many elders have learned their work by watching other elders in action. This observation sometimes serves as a warning, sometimes as an inspiration. Most elders have discovered in their experience some

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men who have come nearest to being the kind of elders they themselves would like to be. It is interesting to hear so many elders speak of their own fathers as such examples.

5. Of course, common sense is a good teacher, and most elders do not need to be told some things that apply to their office. All that is needed is an earnest desire to become the best elder one can become, in acknowledgment of the high honor of election to such an office.

An inquiry was recently made of elders and pastors in nine hundred churches regarding the things which they felt an elder ought to know about his work. They listed forty-four different items! However, the list proves less formidable when it is analyzed, for many of the items are merely those that belong to any intelligent Church member and are not distinctive to the office, such as the fact that an elder should know the purpose of the Church, the value of prayer, God and Christ, the soul's need of Christ, the demands of our Lord, the weaknesses of human nature, the Church catechism. Any intelligent Christian ought to know such things. But the first six items in the list of forty-four were named by a great many replies as significant, and these do belong directly to the knowledge of an elder. "An elder should know:

"The government of the Church.

"Presbyterian law.

"The Bible.

"Presbyterian doctrine.

"The duties and opportunities of the eldership.

"How to maintain the spiritual growth of the church."

Some of these can be learned from books; some must be learned through experience and patient study of the practices of the Church. Farther down on the list are such items as knowledge of the work of the higher courts of the Church; the duties of other officials; the actual state of one's own community; the technique of worship; religious education; the proper system

of financing for one's particular church; the value of Church music; the best literature of one's Church.

Obviously, an elder can render service without such details. They indicate merely the best preparation of an elder for his place. They cannot be acquired on the instant. In the nature of the case, the elder of experience has certain knowledge which a novice has not, but there is nothing impossible or even seriously difficult in any part of the long list of things desirable for an elder to know.

Nothing can take the place of personal knowledge of the congregation. Parish calling is becoming more and more difficult for pastors and for everyone else, but we have not yet found anything that really or fully takes its place in binding a congregation into a unity and making the people feel that the church is there to help them. In some Presbyterian Churches the elders do a great deal of parish calling. In one Reformed Church branch the pastor, accompanied by one elder, is expected to visit every family in the parish once a year, the elders taking turns in the rounds. In many churches the "group plan" is well developed, the whole congregation being cast into groups, for each of which an elder takes some measure of responsibility, with an organization of a simple sort under his direction. As churches grow in size, something of this kind becomes inevitable. It has the further advantage of restoring to the eldership that supervision which is part of its function. Every elder ought to have a section of the church to which he keeps especially near, whose needs he knows, and whose members would turn to him naturally in any time of emergency or stress. It requires time to exercise the functions of the eldership to the full, and, like every other duty requiring time in our crowded scheme of living, these functions tend to be neglected. The more they can be maintained, the better for the Church.

It ought to be noted that nothing can take the place of plain

downright faithfulness on the part of an elder to the obvious duties of a Church member. Attendance upon the services of the sanctuary regularly and steadily both on Sunday and during the week seems a duty too clear to be discussed. This will include a sincere zeal to develop the same faithful spirit in all the members. Elders cannot properly stand by and see congregational attendance dwindle, with professed believers disregarding their vows, without taking it to heart and setting forces in motion for its correction. This personal background is needed for all the public and official duties of an elder. Without it he is inevitably crippled in his service.

An elder is a member of the highest controlling body in the local church. All its members, all its other official bodies, all its societies and organizations, all the programs of all its agencies — all are amenable to the session. This is not by the desire of the elders; it is the constitution of the Presbyterian Church. The control or direction of such work must be exercised with great common sense and good judgment, or friction will surely occur. The deacons and trustees are generally men of the same ability as the elders, and it is not always easy to admit the higher power of the session. Societies often resent the expression of this responsibility in any form, but tact and abundant evidence of real sympathy and appreciation of the work of each society will help in a wise use of such authority as may be needed for the efficiency of the church.

Chapter XII of this book discusses the relation of the elder to the pastor. Here it is enough to say that among an elder's official responsibilities is the maintenance of the pulpit in its purity and power. He is not always a good judge of what a sermon should contain, and sometimes he lacks the training to determine the truth or error of a line of teaching, but an elder is responsible for the reputation and standing of the pulpit in the church and the community. He should know the truth or falsity of criticisms directed against the teaching

of the church, and should be the first to come to the defense of the minister when adverse reports circulate, or else the first to lay them before the minister as a Christian brother for their correction. At times it is a trying duty, but its terms are very clear. Ordinarily, an elder will be the chairman of the committee through whom a new pastor is secured, and always the elders are the first to welcome him and to give him his earliest counsel. This relation should never cease. The pastor is officially moderator, and as such is a member, of the session. All meetings and actions of the session must include him, and the relation between him and the elders should be as intimate as that among the elders themselves.

A ruling elder may find himself at any time responsible for taking intelligent part in any of the higher courts of the Church. The phraseology dealing with these relations has become fairly fixed and should be used accurately. An elder is a "member" of the session, becomes a "member" of presbytery, a "delegate" to synod, and a "commissioner" to the General Assembly. (The expression "board of elders" is seldom used in Presbyterian circles, though "board of deacons" and "board of trustees" are used; "session" is the accepted term for the elders as a body.) In these higher courts, as was said in an earlier chapter, the elder holds the same position as any minister. He ought to learn what the procedures are and why they occur. Sometimes presbytery meetings seem very irksome to elders and they refuse to attend with any regularity. This may be the fault of the presbytery. There may be a few members who are sticklers for fine points, boring everybody; or there may be important actions, whose bearings are not clear to casual attendants, on which the presbytery seems to spend too much time. Reasons may exist for procedures which puzzle elders. Their dislike of the proceedings does not lessen their obligation to take their places in the higher courts and to influence their actions. In more than one

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instance, ruling elders have required changes in methods and processes in the interest of better service for the Church and these changes have been made. Such efforts are reasonable only when the elders really know what is going on and keep themselves posted about the tasks and issues before the court. One constant difficulty is that the time available for the ministerial members of the higher courts and for the elder members is not always the same. This difficulty obtains especially in cities where meetings of presbytery must occur often. In rural sections the difficulty is to find a time of year when elders can arrange their business or other occupations to permit an absence of a few days for the necessary meetings. All such problems can be solved when ministers and elders take seriously their responsibilities in the higher courts of the Church. Sessions should note that it is not merely the right of each church to be represented in presbytery but its duty. There is an equal duty to provide representation in higher courts when this is called for. Elders ought to insist on such adjustments of the sittings of these courts as will make their attendance feasible, but they will need to make the same effort to fulfill this duty as they make to fulfill any other duty.

In recent years the increase in the business of all these higher courts has produced many committees or commissions or "boards" which meet between sessions of the main body. Ruling elders are always appointed to these interim groups and some of their finest service is rendered there. Indeed, in many of them ruling elders take the leading part.

THE QUESTIONS DISCUSSED IN THIS CHAPTER

1. How is the term of service of an elder determined? Does an elder cease to be an elder when he is not in active service?
2. What is the process of making an elder in the Presbyterian Church? May a pastor refuse to ordain a regularly elected elder?

3. May an existing session take an active part in securing the election of new members of the session?
4. How are the duties of an elder to be learned? What are the main matters which he should know?
5. What is the relation of an elder to the higher courts of the Church?

SUBJECTS FOR FURTHER THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. Comparison of the permanent and "rotary" systems of service in a session; whether the present tendency to rotation and also to a year out of office after a certain period is wise.
2. The best method of insuring wise selection of new elders; whether planning beforehand indicates less confidence in the guidance of the people by the Spirit of God; how far the method actually in use in your own church could be modified to advantage.
3. Whether elders have a direct responsibility for anything in the nature of pastoral calling; how the best contacts can be maintained between the elders and the other members of the church.
4. The duty of elders to the higher courts of the Church; how the church can be regularly represented in the presbytery; what objections exist to the procedure of presbytery; whether elders can bring about improvement in it.

CHAPTER V

THE SESSION'S DISTINCTIVE DUTIES

THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER discussed the duties of the individual elder. We now consider the duties of the elders sitting in a corporate capacity, when they are known in the Presbyterian system as a session.

I. The Constitutional Position of a Presbyterian Session

Under the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church the session is the highest authority in the local church, subject only to the authority of the higher courts, which operate according to this same Constitution. The expressions are very explicit.

“ The church session is charged with maintaining the spiritual government of the congregation; for which purpose, they have power to inquire into the knowledge and Christian conduct of the members of the church; to call before them offenders and witnesses, being members of their own congregation, . . . to receive members into the church, upon profession of faith in Jesus Christ, upon presentation of satisfactory certificate of church membership, or, in the absence of such certificate upon the part of persons coming from other churches, upon reaffirmation of faith in Jesus Christ; to admonish, to rebuke, to suspend or exclude from the Sacraments, those who are found to deserve censure; to concert the best measures for promoting the spiritual interests of the congregation; to supervise the Sabbath-school and the various

societies or agencies of the congregation; and to appoint delegates to the higher judicatories of the Church.

“ Subject to the provisions of the Directory for Worship, the session shall have and exercise exclusive authority over the worship of the congregation, including the musical service; and shall determine the times and places of preaching the Word and all other religious services. They shall also have exclusive authority over the uses to which the church buildings may be put, but may temporarily delegate the determination of such uses to the body having management of the temporal affairs of the church, subject to the superior authority and direction of the session.”¹

Chapter XXIII of the Form of Government says that particular organizations may properly be established voluntarily by members of a church, but adds that in all cases “ they shall be under the immediate direction, control, and oversight of the session of said church.” They may, of course, choose their own constitutions and officers, but even these are “ subject always to the powers of review and control vested by the Constitution in the several judicatories of the Church.” This is emphasized in an added section as covering “ the collecting and distributing of moneys for benevolent work,” which must always be under the review and control of the session, though it is done by any society in the church.

This same ultimate control resides in the session with reference to the other official boards of the church. The Form of Government, Chap. XXV, says:

“ The Board of Deacons shall report annually to the session upon all business transacted, and its minutes shall be reviewed at least annually by the session, subject to the supervisory authority of the presbytery.

“ The deacons may be entrusted in addition with the care and management of the temporalities of the Church, and when

¹ Form of Government, Chap. IX.

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so entrusted they shall report at least annually upon the same to the session, being subject also to the supervisory authority of the presbytery."

The relation of the session to the Board of Trustees is sometimes a very delicate issue, and friction has often developed at this point. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America in 1930 issued a clear statement regarding the relation between the two boards. It quotes Chap. XXVII of the Form of Government, which says, "The duties of trustees of a particular church corporation shall be confined exclusively to the management of the temporal affairs of said particular church corporation," adding that "the trustees are 'subject in their official relations to the property, to the control of the Session of the church,'" this fact having been "decided both in our ecclesiastical and civil courts." The Assembly warns against imperfect business methods which may produce friction, and advises frequent joint meetings of the session and trustees, each body retaining its official rights but finding a better understanding through interchange of ideas. "A detailed benevolence budget should be annually prepared and approved by the Session, and communicated to the Trustees for their information. A detailed current expense budget should be annually prepared and approved by the Trustees and submitted to the Session for approval." The budgets may well be submitted in this way at a joint meeting or may even be prepared at such a meeting.

"The benevolence funds should always be under the exclusive control of the Session and should never be deposited with current expense funds. . . . In particular it should be made perfectly clear that the sum for music shall be disbursed under the direction of the church Session." The statement makes the wise suggestion that elders and trustees should always cooperate in raising both budgets, neither body allowing itself to think exclusively of the budget over which it has

direct control. It notes with concern that many of the difficulties arise from personalities of a contrary sort and advises that when this is evident churches should not continue the disturbing persons in office. "No laws or regulations, ecclesiastical or civil, can take the place of or afford a remedy for the absence of Christian courtesy, consideration and coöperation."

The session may be expected to enter sympathetically and helpfully into the problems and difficulties of these other boards and of each society of the church, acting not as a brake on their wheels, but as a constant encouragement and inspiration to their efforts. Theirs is a more thankless task than that of the session and every effort should be made to show that the members of the session count the task essential to the well-being and spiritual power of the church. An experienced elder comments that at just this point lies the largest single peril of a session. It may become, as he puts it, "bump-tious," forgetting that its chief concern is for the spiritual life and power of the church and that it is expected to strengthen and sweeten the work of all other church agencies. Disturbing the spiritual life for the sake of carrying out a preconceived plan is only one degree worse than allowing wrong courses to continue for lack of courage to correct them.

The principle that the music of the church is the direct charge of the session grows out of its responsibility for the worship. There is always danger that church music will become an end in itself, with singers engaged or retained on the ground of their musical ability alone, although they may have no interest in the real purpose of their efforts. Sometimes the session may wisely depute much of the detail of such a matter to a carefully chosen committee, representing the congregation at large as well as the official boards of the church, but the Constitution requires that the matter be kept under direct sessional control. As a minister is not to be considered merely as an orator, while his oratorical ability will be a large factor

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in his power, so singers are not to be judged solely on the ground of their musical ability, though this is an essential element in their service. If the music does not contribute to the worship of the sanctuary, it is an intrusion and should either be changed or abandoned. This is the session's responsibility. In large churches it is often possible to have "a minister of music," that is, a musician who carries the responsibility for all the music in all departments. In any case, it is proper for the leader of the music of the sanctuary to make an annual report to the committee of the session regarding this part of the worship. In some churches this includes a full list of the anthems used during the year.

While the pulpit of a church having a pastor is not within the authority of the session, the elders should share with the pastor in responsibility for the pulpit. The Directory for Worship states clearly, "It is expedient that no person be introduced to preach in any of the churches under our care, unless by the consent of the pastor or church session."² This makes the session responsible in part for all free-lance visitors who want to present "causes" or make special appeals or ride hobbies of various kinds. It explains why many churches have a sessional Pulpit Supply Committee, to which a pastor may refer all such inquiries and through which he may make arrangements for vacation supplies. This part of the session's responsibility is fraught with much danger of misunderstanding and difficulty. Some elders feel that its wise use requires such extraordinary wisdom that it ought not to exist. They fear that it may involve interference with the work of a man called of God, who must be left to obey his own Master without human correction. Sessions can use it to hinder the freedom of a pastor in his preaching or to restrict the knowledge of the people to objects which chance to interest the elders. But this danger of misuse does not alter the fact of the responsibility involved.

² Chap. VII, Sec. VI.

II. Three Distinctive Duties of the Session

Three distinctive duties rest upon the session as upon no others:

1. The pastor and elders are responsible for the development of the spiritual life of the church and its members. No one officially shares this responsibility with them. They have full charge of the church roll and are expected to guard its purity by knowledge of the spiritual life of the people. Willful neglect of the sanctuary, ungodly living continued after rebuke, scandalous conduct, indifference to the obligations of membership, absence from the sacramental season, and all similar failures ought to lie on the hearts of the session as a continual burden of care. Of course, such care is impossible without frequent survey of the whole church. For this purpose it is of gravest importance that every session hold regular meetings at fixed times, once in each month naturally, when the necessary business of the church is transacted, followed by a careful consideration at each meeting of some one or more of the chief interests of the church, with an orderly review led by the pastor or clerk of the session of some part of the roll of the church or of the parish. In this way during the year every member of the church may well be considered in prayer and fraternity. Whenever this is done, the beginnings of neglect are quickly discovered and are checked before becoming complete failure. The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America suffers great losses each year through the placing of names on the "suspended roll." Sometimes such losses are unavoidable because the member is willful in his withdrawal, but more frequently the session keeps no careful watch over the membership and a member is not missed for two years. Then it is too late. If the supervision were constant and faithful, many of these lost members would be found in time to transfer them to the church of their present residence.

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This supervision can be made effective only when it is made persistently and regularly. The placing of names on the "suspended roll," which indicates that they have been lost to the active life of the church, should always be a matter of deep sorrow to the session and should always be accompanied by prayer that ways may be found for larger watchfulness on its own part that souls committed to its care shall not be allowed to disappear in such manner. It ought never to be a matter of relief. In itself such an action is generally a confession of failure, for when members join a church the church takes obligations as truly as do the members, and it is the duty of the session to care for all members.

Since the spiritual life develops in part by its exercise, the session should survey the roll from time to time to discover whether the members are engaged in helpful forms of Christian service. An inactive church ordinarily indicates an inactive session. Some people can be trusted to seek out the work which they may do or to have good reason for doing nothing distinctive, but most people need guidance here as in other ways. The session is the forward-looking body of the church and will know what needs to be done and how the members of the church can help in doing it. It should avoid the spirit of mere fussiness, wanting people to be doing something when the thing proposed is not really important. But it is part of the spiritual responsibility of the session to secure an adequate activity as an expression of the Christian life. This is discussed more fully in Chapter VII.

There is a growing custom of grouping the church members in some natural order, making each elder responsible for personal knowledge of a group. Such groups can be small enough in any church to prove a bearable burden for even busy elders.

2. The second distinctive duty of the session is the reception and dismissal of members. Under the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church the vote of the session determines both

these results. The custom of the public welcome (sometimes called "reception") of new members is almost universal, and may well become so, but this is only a public recognition of what the session has already done. Since the Church requires that a member be baptized before union with the Church is complete, a vote to receive an unbaptized person is incomplete until the baptism is administered, but the baptism merely completes the action of the session and is implied in that action. The Presbyterian Church recognizes the baptism of other churches, provided it is triune or trinitarian baptism (that is, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit), whatever mode is used. If question arises as to whether a candidate coming from another fold has been truly baptized, the session is the determining authority, but subject to the principles of the Church. These principles assume the validity of any sincere act of baptism, administered in any Church in the triune name, and discourage anything in the nature of a repetition of it. No one is ever rebaptized in the Presbyterian Church; the former act is to be considered no baptism if the session should so decide. If for any reason a new member is not present when the public reception occurs, this does not in any wise affect the validity of his membership in the Church. That is established when the session approves his application by vote. In this detail the Presbyterian Church differs from the Congregational system, where the people vote to receive or dismiss a member. In the Presbyterian Church the people merely welcome the members whom the session has received through the authority vested in it by the Constitution of the Church.

In the same way the session dismisses members without the vote of the congregation. In many churches the power to grant letters of dismissal to members in good standing is given to the pastor and clerk by vote of the session, and the names of those dismissed in this way are reported at a formal session

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meeting for the sake of record. The dismissal of members should always be reported in some way to the people for their information. In some churches this is done annually, in others monthly, in others immediately after it occurs. There is no rule of the Church requiring such announcement, but, for the sake of friends who may wish to follow the movements of their fellow members, it seems wise that it be made.

It is in the reception of new members into the Church that the elders show their own spiritual quality most clearly. Most pastors have what are called "communicants' classes" preceding the regular times for celebrating the Lord's Supper and receiving new members, for the sake of giving young people some definite instruction in the meaning of the Church and its membership. But there are generally applicants for membership who are older and have not had this training. It is expected that in all cases the candidates meet with the session as a body at some appointed time. Some sessions meet so irregularly that it is difficult to know when the opportunity to meet them will come. Many sessions, on the contrary, have definite weekly times of meeting, after a regular service on Sunday or during the week, with the public announcement that candidates for membership will then be received. Immediately before the time of the sacrament these meetings are increased in number and emphasis is placed on them. It is seldom wise to delay until the actual time of the sacrament if a number of persons are to be received. Always it is better to magnify the event by giving to each person a good deal of attention. Some sessions allow only one person at a time to come before them, the other applicants waiting in an ante-room. This gives an opportunity for more friendly and intimate talk and for clearer understanding of the spirit of the candidate and his fitness for the step he seeks to take. At the same time, there is the risk of making the reception an awesome event rather than a joyous occasion, as it should be,

but this may be avoided by a warm-hearted pastor and session who can let an applicant feel that he is sincerely welcomed in the new step he is taking. The elders should give the impression that they are eager to open the door to real believers, not that they are on guard lest too many people, or even the wrong people, get in. The purpose of the session is to receive believers, not to discourage them. For this reason the "examination" ought to be of the friendliest and most encouraging type. New believers ought not to be expected to have the full Christian experience of the elders. Difficult questions of faith or of understanding are out of place at such a time. Elders who are sticklers for fine points of doctrine or behavior ought to exercise their zeal on their fellow elders instead of on candidates. Church membership is intended for growth in grace and in the knowledge of Christ, and a candidate is at the beginning of growth, not at the end of it. All that a session needs to know is that a candidate, young or old, is sincerely seeking to accept Christ as Saviour and Master and purposes to follow him and to practice the Christian life.

In the "examination" of candidates for membership it is ordinarily wise for the minister to ask the principal questions, though it is entirely proper for any elder to ask such questions as seem to him pertinent. The elders render better service as a rule in speaking to the candidate some helpful word of guidance or experience, perhaps clearing up some cloudy matter or opening some new line of thought. Children are often helped in this way by an older person. Many sessions carefully avoid voting on the reception of a member in his presence, excusing him from the room while the vote is taken. After the reception of each person, a prayer should be offered, preferably by an elder, asking divine grace for the new relationship. Then each elder extends a hand of fellowship to each new member. Some sessions find it wise to recommend that a

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candidate have a brief interview with one or two elders before appearing before the session as a whole, or to furnish all members of the session, in advance of a meeting for the reception of members, with the names of all expected candidates. Other sessions depend entirely on the pastor for this preparation. Some sessions have a blank application for membership which each candidate must fill out. It gives the personal data needed for the records of the church.

At the time of the public welcome in the main sanctuary, it is well for one elder to come forward with the new members, to show them their places and save them from every embarrassment, and to indicate by his presence the friendship and fraternity of the Church. If the pleasant custom obtains of making the following week-night prayer meeting a time of welcome to the members just received, the elders would naturally be present in full force to manifest their continued interest.

3. The third distinctive duty of the session lies in the administration of the Lord's Supper. This is the most explicitly Christian action of the Church and it is well that the elders are so largely in evidence in connection with it. Any such service has a good deal of machinery about it if it is well done, and the elders can make or mar it for the worshipers. The mechanical details must be so well arranged that their existence does not obtrude anywhere. For this reason, it is of large importance that every elder shall know his own part or place without any fumbling or consultation when the service begins. Ordinarily, this is arranged by the committee of the session charged with this responsibility. Each elder should know the seat he is to occupy when he comes forward for the sacramental service, when he is to rise to receive the bread and the cup, exactly where he is to serve the elements, where he is to wait for the other elders before returning to the table, what he is to do with the plate or the cup when he brings

it back, and when he is to be seated again. These seem such matter-of-course details to well-trained sessions that they do not need mentioning, but it would be a shock to such sessions to see the way in which the Communion is administered in some churches. In recent years, the celebration of the Lord's Supper at the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America has set a standard for this service, which is changing the practice of many churches in the interest of real order and dignity. It cannot be properly administered without careful preparation of its details. Even the garb of the elders can be made helpful. Squeaking shoes and negligent or extreme attire seem minor details, but they can take much of the meaning out of the sacrament for sensitive worshipers. Stumbling movements and vague indirection will spoil it for many. A stately dignity and careful co-operation on the part of all concerned — minister, choir, elders — will not be realized by the worshipers in detail, but they will be helped by such a service more than by the hit-or-miss method of some churches.

Of course, none of this care displaces the chief concern of the session — to preserve at all times the real spirit and meaning of the sacrament. This is the Lord's table and its Host is the Lord, and not the session. Yet he has committed its maintenance to his Church, and each session is responsible for proper care regarding those who come to it. In the old days many churches forbade anyone to come who had not been considered beforehand as to his spirit and state of heart. Sessional and pastoral calls during the preceding week left metal "tokens" with the accepted communicants, who were expected to present these tokens before receiving the elements. It would not be wise now to "fence the table" in this way, but sessions should surround it with such sense of reverence and rich meaning as to challenge every life that comes to it. Once in a while, in cases of known recalcitrancy and un-

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worthiness, the session will need to advise careless people not to come to the table until they repent and wish to come for new strength for the new life. It is for all who have the sense of need for the communion with Christ symbolized by the challenging symbols of his broken body and poured-out blood. No man is to be shut out because of his sin; else no one could come. Only the willful, rebellious, unrepentant, should be made to feel unwelcome or strange. It is the joyous privilege of the session to make all penitent persons at home at the table of their forgiving, redeeming Lord. The General Assembly of 1872, in answer to an overture, said that the "invitation" to the table should imply some form of membership in an evangelical Church.

In a few Presbyterian churches the actual distribution of the sacramental elements is done by the deacons, themselves ordained officers, the elders remaining at the table with the pastor. There is nothing irregular about this practice, but it is so unusual as to be noticeable. The General Assembly has several times ruled that it is entirely proper for the deacons to distribute the elements of the sacrament, saying definitely in 1877, "Inasmuch as we have no rule in relation to this subject, the matter is referred to the discretion of the sessions of the churches."

THE QUESTIONS DISCUSSED IN THIS CHAPTER

1. What is the constitutional authority of the session?
2. What is the relation between the session and the Board of Trustees? the responsibility of the session for the music?
3. What is the share of the session in the reception and dismissal of church members? What is the "suspended roll"? How are new members "examined" by the session?
4. What is the duty of the session regarding the administration of the Lord's Supper?

SUBJECTS FOR FURTHER THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. The necessity for centering so much authority in any one body; how its unwise use might endanger the peace of the church; how its wise use may safeguard the church.

2. The relation between the spiritual life of the church and its financial demands; how the session and the trustees can cooperate in the best way.

3. The attitude of the session toward negligent members, especially those who remove from the parish and pay no heed to their religious duties; a feasible method in your own church for following these negligent members.

4. A careful study of the methods actually in use in your own church in the receiving of members by the session and the welcoming of them by the congregation: are they the best methods possible or where can they be improved?

5. A similar study of the method of administering the Lord's Supper as it is actually done in your own church: how it may be made more impressive and helpful.

6. The possible value of calling the deacons into a more spiritual service by having them distribute the elements of the Lord's Supper while the elders remain at the table with the pastor.

CHAPTER VI

THE WHOLE PROGRAM OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

BESIDES PERFORMING some distinctive duties, the ruling elders of a Presbyterian church are to supervise and direct all the activities which may properly be expected of a body of professed Christians in the community. In case the work of the gospel at any point in the program is not being done, it is the duty of the session to study the condition and see that the necessary remedy is attempted. The broad principle is that the Christian Church is in the world to do for humanity whatever Christ wants done for humanity, or to see that it is done. There are many agencies which contribute to the good of men, to their worthier and happier living, and to their complete characters. The Church claims no monopoly of the total task. Its part is essentially that of religion. But it is impossible to draw the line within human life and to say that on one side of the line is religious need while all other needs are on the other side of the line. There are no permanent lines where religion ceases. Instead, religion is an attitude of the whole life and its needs may be served by any institution or agency. It is not the duty of the Church to do everything. There are many things which it merely inspires or safeguards, and if other agencies are doing such things the Church is glad not to do them independently. Once it had to carry the whole load of public education; it no longer does so. And yet it may be the duty of a church to watch the public schools of its community to see that their work is well done and

that a maximum of good influence issues from them. Once the Church carried the burden of the sick and afflicted; it no longer needs to do so in most cases. The State has developed hospitals and other institutions for such care. But it may be the duty of a church to see that the work is well done and to reënforce the hands of those who do it and need help. So it is with amusements of various sorts. In a desolate situation, it may be the duty of the church to provide clean and inspiring amusements for the community — playgrounds, concerts, socials, plays, contests. But in the very best communities, where many agencies may be caring for this human need, the church can never be exempted from seeing to it that the work is rightly and helpfully done, and that a minimum of harm comes from commercializing the supply. All human interests could be listed in the same way. They are not the primary duty of the Church but, since they represent real human need, they are the concern of the Church. Religion touches all these things, and the Church is the chief agency of religion in human society.

The session must endeavor to provide a program which will meet human need. This should cover the familiar fields of worship, evangelism, stewardship, education, missions, and many others; somewhere each church ought to be carrying out a program that supplies what human life needs. If this calls for the old ways, then they should be followed; if it calls for new ways, then they should be adopted. Each session ought to face its own surroundings and be sure that it is leading in aggressive and constructive plans. There is not so much danger of the church's going astray as of its not going at all. An elder comments on "the placid lack of thinking" which he notes among sessions with which he comes in contact. Of course there are rich exceptions to any such generalization, for there are many elders who bring their minds at their best to the service of the Church.

I. The Program as Inclusive

There are four parts in the total program of a local church:

1. Its service to its own members. This is discussed in this chapter and the two following.

2. Its service to the community, which extends to the larger locality with which it is connected, the city or the state, and even the nation. This is discussed in Chapter IX.

3. Its service to the world in Christ's behalf — its place as an agency of the Kingdom of God throughout the world. This is discussed in Chapter X.

4. Its service to the denomination of which it is part — accepting and performing its fair share in any plans of the denomination and, through it, coöperating with the entire Christian Church. This is discussed in Chapter XI.

This means that the typical Presbyterian church faces outward. It does not exist chiefly for its own members, but chiefly to develop them for a large and wide program of service which the world needs and which Christ desires. The members of a church need to render the service as definitely as the world needs to have it rendered. No session can serve the actual needs of the members by looking chiefly at those needs. If an elder decides that there is enough work to do in his own parish and that his church ought not to be asked to take part in anything outside, he fails the members at a point of their most critical need. They never can be local Christians without missing the full value of a religion which is inescapably universal. It ought to be the pride of a session to create the largest possible number of connections between the church and the total program of human good. No good thing ought to be allowed to go on in a community, nor in the Church at large, in which the church does not have its fair share, furnishing workers and support in even the smallest measure. No church can do its whole work by giving money;

some of its members must give their time and strength and lives. Otherwise they are robbed of their best opportunities.

Most church programs are too narrow; they do not furnish so many opportunities for Christian service as are really needed. Often it is difficult to find workers for particular pieces of work, while yet there are many unused workers. For example, each church will have a Church School, with its Sunday School session at the usual time, and for this it will need teachers and other workers. There are many people who could do something else well who cannot or will not render this service. If there is no chance for service other than the regulation program, they will either remain idle or they will go into other agencies to keep themselves occupied as Christians. In this latter case, the program of the church may need to be interpreted more widely, and these workers be led to feel that they are doing church work when they are serving in these unusual ways. The Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations in most places ought to be considered so definitely branches of the church that workers in them are counted church workers and not left to feel that they are failing the church because they do not work within its four walls. A teacher who conducts a Bible class in such a place, or manages a club, or heads a committee, ought to be carried on the church record as a church worker as truly as one who works within the church building. There are many other such agencies which the church may wisely include in its circle, urging its members to render their service precisely as they would if everything happened in the church house. One of the dangers of all good enterprises is that they come to be thought of, and to think of themselves, as apart from the Church, carrying on their work independently. They ought to be kept in close relation to the Church. When their workers find themselves counted out because they are not doing their work inside the church building, or find their work thrown

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under suspicion because it does not bring people to the church building more frequently, the situation is apt to become strained. Moreover, most Christian people have time and strength for only a limited number of ministries, and if they give them to a collateral agency of the Church they can seldom give them as adequately to the Church. They can be ruled out or included in the church program. It seems much wiser to count them in, and to have it understood that the church program includes all such agencies, and that work done in them is church work in every sense of the word.

Such a widening of the program provides for a much larger force of workers. The conduct of many church programs requires only a small number of workers, and those of a fairly limited type. Most of the people are counted out and form the habit of inaction. Some are naturally helpful and will go elsewhere and get into something, if nothing more than the various service clubs now so widely formed. An elder sometimes finds people of his church heading important committees or difficult projects of a service club in his city while the church has never offered them any real opportunity to use the same energy in the name of Christ. They ought to be made to feel, however, that they are working as Christians as definitely as if they were leading prayer meetings or teaching Bible classes, which they would probably refuse to do.

But even this widening of the program will not place everyone where he belongs. Many sessions have devised ways whereby each member can state what line of helpful service he feels he can follow. Sometimes a booklet of the church's activities is furnished and given to every new member, so that he may indicate where he will fit in the whole program. But this and any other device will fail unless the session takes its responsibility seriously and provides for following up the plans. It is helpful when a committee of the session or some other group appointed by it becomes a right hand to the

pastor in his leadership. Sometimes a pastor is compared to a general of an army, but it is a poor comparison, since his right to command is so limited. The elders are the true leaders in such service. It is they who can distribute the tasks, piling up work to the breaking point on no one but bringing everyone in for his fair share.

The work of the church is thus partly indirect — the inspiring and appreciating of efforts made outside its ranks. This requires a careful and vital survey of the situation which surrounds the church and an analysis of the agencies which are supplying real needs. The leaders of the church know the Christian ideal for a human life — what it ought to contain of service and duty, of education and pleasure and fellowship. They can survey their community and determine whether opportunity is really offered to men for these things. They can determine whether the right life is needlessly difficult, and how the difficulty can be lessened without destroying the virility of the people. Then they can lay plans for serving the whole need of the community, doing some of the needed work themselves through the church, encouraging others in collateral plans, inspiring still others to begin efforts not yet attempted. Some churches find it best to call to their aid for this study some one who has made it a specialty, so that they may not waste effort. They want their efforts to fit all the people of their community for eternal life with God, but one way to accomplish this will be to fit them for a temporal life with their fellows. It is possible to lose the ultimate and large aim in devotion to some subsidiary and near-by aims or methods, but this danger does not preclude the effort to serve both the near-by and the ultimate ends of human life. A community whose people are fitted to live together on the highest and best terms is apt to be a community where it is easiest to accept the finest and best terms of relationship to God.

II. The Program as Coöperative

No one church in a community, if there are other churches there, can attempt the whole needed program. There ought to be some definite relationship between all the churches which will reveal the unity of their purpose. A Presbyterian church is fitting men for right relation to the same God as the God whom a Methodist church serves. The Christian ideal for human life is the same for Baptist and Congregational churches. They ought to carry the load together, guarding against excess in one particular and neglect in another. If the physical needs of the young people are being served by one church, there is no good reason why all the others should proceed at once to equip themselves with the same devices for serving the same needs. It is no part of Christian strategy to lay plans to keep young people from going to other churches which serve the same Master, merely for the sake of keeping them in one's own church. Nor ought any one church to think of its ministry as intended to draw people away from other churches. It ought gladly to serve these other churches with any equipment it may have, unifying the program of the Christian Church rather than isolating its own small section of that program. One large Presbyterian church in a central-western city, in process of erecting an excellent church building, had to decide whether a certain space should be used for one purpose or for another, each of them inherently good enough. The plans were of the conventional type, the use of the space which one might expect because it was the practice of other churches. But the session decided to have the community looked over to see how that particular need was already being served, and discovered, to its surprise, that there was already quite sufficient equipment in that line available, whereas in the other there was a serious lack. The plans were changed and a quite different use was made of the space.

There is no good reason why one church should do everything, but there is good reason why it should see that everything is being done, and then make use of anything that its people need for their best training in the Christian life and for the service of the Christian gospel. Church federations or local groupings can be arranged so that rivalry between churches is eliminated and the observing world gets no impression that any one of the churches thinks of itself as alone in the Christian program.

III. The Program as Extensive

1. The total program of the local church must provide something for all classes and ages of people. As most people grow older they build around them more relationships and feel less need for certain services from the church. But some of these services are deeply needed. It is natural and proper that the young people should be largely considered by the session in laying out the church program. They are still in the period of training, and also in the more active stage of life when opportunities are attractive and important. In any educational program they come into the foreground. But mature and older people need the church quite as really, and if the church program does not supply what they need they become engrossed elsewhere and drain off a considerable power which the church could well use. Organizations of men and of women, sometimes separately, sometimes together, have a place in any real program. Their form and their immediate purpose ought to be determined by the actual conditions which the church faces. It should not be assumed that because one church has found a certain kind of organization or program suitable, every other church can use the same plans. The efforts of the men of some churches to maintain a men's club of the sort which they do not need and do not want, merely

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because some other church does it, are often pathetic. Meanwhile, in that very church there is some unsupplied need that a little study would reveal, which could be served by the right kind of men's grouping. Certain fundamental activities of women have come to be recognized, in the fields of missions and church helpfulness, but even in these the kind of provision to be made in a given church may be very different from the proper provision in another church. Some plans can be transplanted; some can not. A session has always to be on guard against thinking of its own church as being peculiar and not prepared for aggressive plans or such plans as have become acceptable widely among other churches. It is sometimes only the leaders who are peculiar; the people would gladly use these plans if they were encouraged to do so and given the right guidance. Churches are more alike than they are different, but each church is apt to think of itself as peculiar in comparison to other churches.

2. The total program of the local church must, of course, include a fair share in the general, outreaching programs of the whole denomination or of the entire Christian Church. The gifts and lives that go out from the locality are often the most enriching elements in the work of any local church. Religion confined to one place always stagnates. It is like water — it must run if it is to keep fresh. Some churches take such good care of themselves that they are weakened. They would be much richer if they did not treasure their resources so carefully. The elders especially may be expected to take an intelligent interest in what the religion of Christ is doing around the world and to see to it that the church finds its adequate place in that work. There is great possibility of sheer waste in this part of the program. Attractive speakers often stir up enthusiasm for a pet project which holds no rational place in the total work and often drain the resources of a church from the really vital things. A sensible session is the greatest safeguard of a church

at such times. The project of the Christian religion is so large, and its burdens so heavy, that not an ounce of strength ought to be recklessly expended when a church lays down its program. But even this waste is better than such a caution as robs a church of its right to share in the project at the proper points.

Most churches will welcome a really intelligent, well-thought-out program, moving toward definite objectives and well articulated. And any session is capable of making such a program if it will set itself to it. An active elder writes that in his judgment much unsettlement and distress occur among churches and ministers because of "the failure of pastor and session to clarify their functions, fix their responsibilities, analyze their needs, define their objectives, and properly project, organize, and correlate their annual program." He adds that "an undefined program goes directly toward confusion and dissatisfaction." Another elder writes that "the average session is willing to permit the pastor to outline his program with very little assistance on the part of the session and perhaps a too ready willingness on its part to criticize when the results are not as expected." There seems no doubt of the weakness of many churches in that they do not know exactly what they are trying to do and therefore have no very explicit way of doing it. A program of the right sort does not come unsought. It has to be thought out and then worked out. At certain points this will not be the direct duty of the session, because many details can be committed to others, but the work as a whole and its coming into unity as one plan is the work of the session in which elders and pastor join. No one else leads in it so naturally.

It ought also to be an accepted part of every session's creed that by the grace of God any church can do what it ought to do and can serve every need which is really before it to serve. When a body of believers has really put itself at the disposal of God, he is able to do with it all that he expects it to do. If

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any church can lay out and execute a really suitable and adequate program, then any other church can do it.

THE QUESTIONS DISCUSSED IN THIS CHAPTER

1. How are the distinctly religious duties of the Church involved in a wider program? What would constitute a full program for a church?
2. How ought the program of one church to be related to the programs of the other churches in the same community?
3. How are the number and type of organizations in a particular church to be determined? What is the responsibility of the session in this matter?
4. What is the responsibility of the session regarding the general work of the denomination?

SUBJECTS FOR FURTHER THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. The duty of the session regarding matters which have political aspects; whether action can be taken on them without involving the church in disputed political issues; whether there can be an active interest in the church in an election when moral issues are involved in political issues.
2. The best form of coöperative organization with the other churches of the community; what issues need attention which could be more wisely dealt with by coöperation than by single churches.
3. Practicable methods of coöperation with non-Church agencies in the community, especially in cases where the specifically religious elements are not conspicuous except under a very wide definition of religion; how the church can avoid being "unequally yoked with unbelievers."

CHAPTER VII

THE SESSION IN LEADERSHIP OF THE CHURCH'S PROGRAM

WHEN A CHURCH finds its program, there remains the task of carrying it out. Here the session must take leadership in a peculiar sense.

I. Personal Attitude of an Elder Toward the Program

An elder ought to do a full share of Christian work. On this point elders fall into two groups, described in an elders' conference as "the holdbacks and the pullers." The members of one group count it necessary to safeguard their church from too much demand from the Church at large. They declare that their church cannot do more than it is doing; they do not see how it does so much; they think that if other churches would do as well as their own, all would be well; their people, they say, are hard hit, finding it difficult to pay their own bills without having any large allocation from outside to meet; or else they complain that the people are not interested and will not respond. The members of the other group always insist that their church will do its full share, but it still has untapped resources of life and money which can be found for Christ and his work; they believe that it can be so stirred as to undertake its large portion of what the Kingdom of God requires. In the main, one group thinks of the single church as a unit, to be considered by itself; the other sees the single church as an item in a larger whole. Both types are needed: one to pre-

vent folly and extravagance in planning; the other to escape cowardly caution. When an elder faces the regular demands of his church, made from within or without, three emotions are possible for him:

1. He may rejoice to have his church take its full share in the work of the Church at large.

2. He may feel sorrow if it must decline a full share, as may be necessary because of conditions which occur in a business depression or similar limitation. What others count the share of the church, the elder knows is beyond it, but he does not resent the proposals which must be declined as though they were merely the whims of some one overhead who has no sympathy with struggling churches; his feeling is often coupled with hope that the early future will change the limitation.

3. He may feel regret if the church fails merely for lack of adequate plans or deep consecration to the will of God.

Joy, sorrow, regret—there are no other emotions for an elder in presence of a taxing church program. Officers are more in danger of believing too little in their churches than of expecting too much from them. Most churches do less than would be good for them if sensible and statesmanlike plans were made for developing their intelligence about the work of Christ and their consecration were deepened in stewardship of life, time, and possessions. Elders are leaders, not restrainers, in the work of the church.

II. The Session Meeting as an Element in Leadership

It has already been urged that the session hold its meetings regularly at a set time which the people know. This should certainly be as frequently as once a month, with any special meetings that may be needed. Every church has business enough for such a meeting if the congregation is really cared for. In the larger churches a docket is often sent to the elders

beforehand, with the main items of business listed, time being left for any matter to be presented by any member of the session on his own initiative. In smaller churches the session might agree on an order to be followed in the meetings which would insure the consideration of the various responsibilities of the body during the year. It is bad leadership on the part of pastor and session when meetings are held only "when we have business to do," for a session has perennial business to do if it takes its work seriously. There are always phases of the work which should be considered, members to be thought about and prayed for, conditions in the community to be faced and planned for, problems of church life to be solved, reports from organizations or societies to be heard and considered. In short, the care of the spiritual life of the church is always a duty of the session.

When the session convenes, the pastor is the moderator *ex officio*, and in his absence, with the consent of both pastor and session, another minister may be invited to preside. If business must be transacted which cannot be postponed without serious consequences and a minister cannot be secured to preside, the session may proceed without a moderator. The invited minister must always be a member of the same presbytery as that of the church, which means that no minister of another denomination can moderate the session, no matter what his relation to the church. In rare cases, where a minister is in charge of churches which lie in two presbyteries, he can be authorized to moderate both sessions, but it is necessary that he receive definite authority from the presbytery of which he is not a member. He must be a member of one of the presbyteries. In case of a pastoral vacancy, the presbytery appoints a minister as moderator—generally a minister requested by the session, unless a rule of the presbytery appoints some executive officer as moderator regularly under such conditions. The presbytery is the pastor of a vacant church.

In the interest of orderly procedure, there should always be available for the moderator the latest edition of the official law books of the Church, already named in Chapter IV, especially "The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America," the "Manual of Presbyterian Law for Church Officers and Members," and if possible at least Volume I of the "Digest of the Acts and Deliverances of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America." These may often be needed and when the need does arise it is very real and should be supplied at once. Of course, there is a "clerk of session," who performs the usual duties of that office. These duties are not perfunctory, for the clerk is generally next to the moderator in his direction of the affairs of the session. He keeps the minutes of the meetings, maintains the roll of the entire church, prepares reports for the higher courts, encourages the faithful performance of committee duties, and is, in general, the uniting bond for the entire work of the session. There must be a quorum present for an official meeting, the number being determined in part by the size of the session. The rule is that "two elders, if there be so many, with the pastor, shall be necessary to constitute a quorum; unless the elders number nine or more, when one third of the elders, with the pastor, shall be necessary to constitute a quorum." A meeting is officially called when notice of it is given at any regular service, the assumption being that every elder receives due notice in this way. These "regular" services are understood to be the two Sunday services and the mid-week meeting. Also, a session meets on adjournment without definite notice to its members, or at its regular monthly date. For any other meeting it is required that notice be sent to every member in the accepted way; a notice by mail in ample time for it to be received and acted upon before the meeting is counted proper.

The meetings would naturally be opened and closed with

prayer, though the General Assembly has left it to the discretion of the session to alter this procedure upon occasion. The minutes of the meetings must be approved by the session itself and the record book must be sent once a year to the presbytery for review. Full instructions for clerks are available in the office of the General Assembly, and every effort should be made to make the minutes the actual record of the church. While the records would naturally show only the actions of the session, it is often well to describe the use of all the time of the meeting, and the subjects discussed, whether action was taken or not. Also, the records must contain the minutes of the annual meeting of the church, in the form of a report submitted by the clerk of that meeting to the session. Such a report would be inserted in the session records with an introduction of this sort: "The following minutes of the annual [or special] congregational meeting of [date] were [presented by the clerk of that meeting and were] received and ordered spread on the minutes of this meeting of the session." Thus they appear as a report. Some sessions have official "files" and protect them as they do their own records, and they may then order such documents placed in these files. It is obvious that this must be more than a mere form or the law of the Church will be violated.

Session meetings should not be unduly prolonged. Elders are apt to be good friends and it is easy for meetings to degenerate into mere talk without definite objectives. Each regular meeting should include some elements of spiritual supervision, the survey of some part of the church roll, or the analysis of some agency of the church which needs care and support. Sessions ought to keep clearly before them their spiritual responsibility; they are not running a mere institution; they are supervising a body of Christian believers. In no other relationship do they come nearer the living realities. Mere mechanism is less desirable here than in any other place of service.

III. The Session Organized for Leadership

The organization of a session for effective work is a matter of great importance. Wide inquiry shows that sessions operate in three ways:

1. Some do all their work as a whole. These are probably the smaller sessions, not large enough to divide into committees, which hesitate to commit responsibility to single members. Such sessions ought to think carefully whether they are apt in this way to accomplish all that the church may fairly ask of them, but there is no merit in appointing committees merely for the sake of having them.

2. Some sessions assign responsibilities to single members of the body, having virtually committees of one. This practice has its difficulties, and is probably not adequate for the larger or even the medium-sized churches.

3. Most sessions operate through committees of two, three, or more, expecting monthly reports of their work, each committee securing from the session authorization for anything out of the ordinary which needs to be done. It is of first importance that, when such committees are appointed, their work shall be actually left to them and definite reports regularly called for.

Of course, some sessions do not operate at all, leaving everything to the pastor and clerk. This is highly undesirable and could be justified only by such anomalous conditions as can hardly be set down in a book. Elders are elected to take the leadership in the church, and if they cannot do so they ought to tell the congregation, and let the people elect men who can do it or else decide that they do not care to have the affairs of the church administered in the Presbyterian way. It is poor leadership when the pastor is willing to do all the responsible work, even though the elders are willing that he shall do so.

Committees for session work may be such as the following:

1. **Music:** with power to add members from the trustees and the congregation to act in an advisory capacity, an elder being always the chairman.

2. **Christian Education:** to establish and maintain the session's relationship with the Council of Religious Education, if there is one (as described in the next chapter), and with the various educational organizations and agencies of the church, but in any case paying close attention to the Sunday School and the Young People's Societies.

3. **Stewardship and Finance:** to coöperate with the trustees; to advise the treasurer; to receive and consider requests for grants of funds from the session treasury which the session may be asked to order; to represent the session in plans for the Every Member Canvass; to frame the benevolence budget, to develop the spirit of stewardship among the people, the treasurer of benevolence being a member *ex officio*.

4. **Sacraments:** to prepare the elements and make other detailed provisions for the Lord's Supper, assigning the elders to their places in administering the sacrament; to care for the instruments of the Lord's Supper and baptism; to see that suitable and early announcement is made of the approach of the sacraments; to study better ways of administering them. The chairman of this committee is apt to be the elder who assists in the administration of baptism, unless the senior elder does this.

5. **Pulpit Supply:** to aid the pastor in planning the services of the church; to confer with the pastor regarding absences and occasional or vacation supplies; to confer regarding requests for the use of the pulpit by various agencies.

Many other committees may be formed and the work of a normal church can be supervised only if these six committees expand their field. For example, the Committee on Christian Education would cover missionary education, which in large

churches needs a committee for itself. Some committee would coöperate with the men's club in any work it does. A Committee on Community Conditions often combines men's work with its other duties. The pastor and clerk might be a committee to whom the women could come with matters needing to be brought before the session, though every elder should be approachable for such matters and many churches would need no special committee for the purpose.

Such a list of committees and duties suggests the need for careful consideration of the number of elders a church should have. There is no rule about this. The average Presbyterian session numbers about five elders, but some sessions are very large, while a number of churches have only two or three elders. The principle would be that the session should be truly representative of the church and able to supervise its work. Two elders can hardly do this, even in a small church. Many observers count four elders a minimum desirable number. But a large session unorganized and undirected may be a source of trouble. In the large churches there might be one elder for each one hundred persons on the roll, in addition to the elders assigned to special duty, such as the clerk, the treasurer, and the Sunday School superintendent, if he is an elder. In a later part of this book advice is given that among the elders there should always be some distinctively young men, partly to train them for future service and partly to maintain a sense of youth in the session. This practice does not violate any sound Presbyterian traditions, but has been in use from early days.

The organization of the church on the "group plan," already mentioned, involves session organization of the same sort. By this plan the membership is divided by some system, determined by the conditions, into groups of one hundred or less, with an elder placed at the head of each group and responsible for a knowledge of the persons on the roll. Such groups have

occasional meetings which the pastor attends but which the elder arranges; the elder keeps the pastor informed about any special needs within the group. Ordinarily a woman of the group is chosen as a secretary, and there is a Visiting Committee and a Lookout Committee to watch for new members within the circle of the group or its community. The purpose of such grouping is to insure the service of the church for all its members. Absentee or nonresident members are often placed in one group and are followed up by the responsible elder, using any office staff a large church may have or any other aid that may be available. It is the duty of the session to have such absentees take their letters to local churches unless there are good, and not merely sentimental, reasons for continuing in the home church. Absentee members are expected to contribute to the support and benevolences of the church unless good reasons prevent. The pastor is merely the director in all this plan; he ought not to be asked to carry its details. These belong to the session or to a staff which it secures in coöperation with the pastor.

The matter of organization ought to concern elders in medium-sized and small churches quite as much as in large churches. Indeed, the larger churches are often better cared for than the smaller churches, because of better organization.

It is often necessary for one elder or for one coöpted person to serve on more than one committee appointed by the session, but it is not wise for any one elder to carry many offices. There is always some material overlooked within the congregation which might take over some of the duties which a willing but overburdened elder tries to perform. If there is intelligent organization to carry out a real program of work, there needs to be a fair-sized session. If nothing is to be accomplished except routine matters, anyone will do. On the other hand, a church can adopt impossible standards which shut out all but two or three persons from the eldership and

thus encourage the feeling that "the church has no more elder material," a feeling which is seldom justified except by arbitrary standards.

IV. The Distinctive Business Elements in Church Life

The actual operating of a church calls for patience and understanding. A church cannot be run on the principles that operate in big business. In a church the service is largely voluntary and workers cannot be discharged and replaced at will. Its pastor is not "hired" as a lecturer might be hired for a luncheon club. Its volunteer workers cannot be marshaled and ordered about like clerks and errand boys. The church is a money-spending, not a money-making, institution. Its products cannot be footed up at the end of the season; its real books cannot be balanced. Its teachers are not on the same basis as are day-school teachers. There are never enough trained teachers to supply the Church School, and some excellent teachers who seem poorly equipped intellectually must be gladly used while some better trained teachers seem less able to do what needs to be done. Such a situation ought never to raise the question about the value of thorough training for all teachers of religion; that is to be considered entirely proved.

Of course, the business affairs of a church ought to be run on the same principles of honesty and care that govern all honest business. The treasurer's books ought to be audited scrupulously. But it must be remembered that the funds of the church are gifts and cannot be demanded except on that basis. They are owed to the Lord but not necessarily to any session, and the session must make it plain that they are being used for the Lord's work. The people must be inspired to give; they cannot be dragooned into giving. The individual elders must set the example, giving according to their ability as others are asked to do. They must know enough about the use that

is made of the money so that they believe in it thoroughly and can explain it to the people.

A church requires financing at three points:

1. *For its support.* The trustees carry this responsibility, but they deserve the unqualified support of the session in both the raising and the use of the funds, and no shadow of collision ever needs to occur between their work and that of the outgoing life of the church in its benevolent gifts. It is to be recalled that the music of the church is under the direct care of the session, though the items for it are within the budget of the trustees.

2. *For its benevolence.* This is directly under the care of the session and should include a small percentage for a "session fund" which can provide for unavoidable emergencies that may arise demanding gifts or exceptional outlay, unless this is included in the support budget. The congregation should be fully informed about the needs to be met by the benevolent gifts and it should be made clear that the most important money the church raises is its benevolence, because this is most characteristic of the Christian faith, essential as the funds for church support are.

3. *For and through its agencies.* All the societies must be supported and each of them has its special benevolent activity for which money is needed. The expense of the Sunday School ought to be paid out of church funds and never by itself, and its gifts should go to causes fully explained and illustrated before the school. The Young People's Society, the Women's Missionary Society, the Men's Club, and all other types of societies will have their own methods of raising and distributing money. All are under the ultimate supervision of the session, and at times it may be necessary for the session to act upon some project. Such occasions may make serious trouble if the session committee has not kept in close relation with the society at all times.

The session has a real task in preventing financial appeals from being magnified until the people are annoyed by them, but no session should "protect" the people so carefully that the work of the Kingdom of God suffers for their convenience. The final responsibility lies with the session, whatever methods are adopted for securing the needed money.

In recent years there has been a marked growth of the "budget" system of financing both the church and its benevolences. This involves one annual appeal and an annual subscription properly secured by an "Every Member Canvass," the money to be paid during the year in regular amounts. The danger of the system is that giving may become regular and easy but neither intelligent nor sacrificial. The missionary and educational movements of the Church are never stationary, so that they can be described in February or March for the whole year. Each session should see that the people are informed about the work which they are helping to support and also should leave them free for direct giving when need arises. Emergencies can occur in the church as truly as in a family or business or nation, and there ought to be no red tape preventing access to the generosity of a congregation. Reaction from multitudinous appeals tends to harden the system of benevolences too much. One of the problems of the session is the blending of spontaneity and regularity in giving. It should be the constant ambition of the spiritual officers of a body of Christian believers to develop a deeper and more sacrificial loyalty to the cause of Christ, expressed in increasing gifts for the outreaching work of the Church.

The General Assembly has several times advised that at least one special offering, in addition to the annual subscription to the budget, shall be made for each of the major agencies or Boards of the Church. This will modify the promise sometimes made to the people that no further financial appeals will be made after the annual subscription.

THE QUESTIONS DISCUSSED IN THIS CHAPTER

1. What shall be the attitude of an elder toward the general demands on his own church from the denomination as a whole?
2. What are the values of the monthly meeting of the session? What is the method of conducting it?
3. How is a session to be organized for effective service? What committees does it need? What are their duties?
4. How large should a session be?
5. How does the session deal with the finances of a church in their various aspects? What is the budget system? What are its advantages and its dangers?

SUBJECTS FOR FURTHER THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. The quotation from an elders' conference, grouping elders as "holdbacks and pullers" — how far justified in experience; if elders say that they "must protect the people," the problem of the things from which they need to be "protected"; whether the denomination itself is a danger.
2. The monthly meeting of the session: how it can be made really valuable and effective; an examination of the actual procedure in your own church.
3. The organization of your own session: whether it is sufficient or overelaborate for the actual demands of the parish; how it compares in efficiency with other organizations to which the elders belong.
4. How far purely business practices can be applied to church control and procedure; whether the church is more like a business or a family; the voluntary element in it.
5. Whether there has been recently a fair survey of the duty of your church to the community; whether you really know its needs and have made your church program serve those needs. If not, how this defect can be supplied.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SESSION AND THE CHURCH SCHOOL

THE MOST PRESSING single phase of the session's duty to the local church is that of inspiring and supervising the training of its members for better Christian living and service. This is the function of what is now commonly called the "Church School."

I. The Church School

This term is wider than the familiar "Sabbath School" or "Sunday School," because it covers activities on other days of the week, and includes all organizations having educational functions; it is also wider than the term "Bible School," because it includes subject material which has been produced under the inspiration of the Bible since that book was written. It does not disparage either of the other terms. Sunday is still the great day of the Church, its true Sabbath, and the Bible is still the incomparable Book of the Church. But both the day and the book lead out into wider fields where the Spirit of God works to develop the characters of Christian believers. A high authority in this field uses this language:

"The term [Church School] is used here . . . to indicate the specific and complete educational system which the church maintains for its children and youth, and it is so used to emphasize the fact that the church must maintain such a specific and complete educational system, in addition to the Christian education given in the family and in the church, and the fact

that there must be a unity in this specific educational system. There ought to be but one Church School, however many sessions that Church School may have, and however comprehensive its program."¹

Sessions should realize that the changed name of familiar organizations for training in religion represents merely an effort to do the work more fully and to be more loyal to the needs of humanity. What was formerly called "The International Sunday School Association" is now "The International Council of Religious Education," because its workers are trying to serve the whole need of religious training, not only for children and young people but also for adults, on the theory that "education never ends." This interdenominational organization does all the work of the old Sunday School Association, supplying outlines for the Uniform Sunday School Lessons and Group Graded Lessons, curriculum plans, and educational standards, and holding training schools for teachers and leaders with far more thorough courses of study than ever before. This same widening of service has led to the use of the name "Church School."

The purpose of this school is the development of Christian personalities, and it will use any means that will serve this end. It does not involve any less need for conversion and is no substitute for evangelism and appeals for definite acceptance of Christ. But it is recognized that what is usually meant by "conversion" is often entirely unconscious and that children can be trained "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" without being conscious of the time or occasion when they give their allegiance to Christ. Most Christians are unable to locate any such time, though they are well aware of their present relation to him. But all Christians do need development and culture and all that real religious or Christian

¹ Dr. Harold McA. Robinson, in "The Work of the Pastor," by Charles R. Erdman, D.D., Chapter VI.

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education means. No one agency can be asked to accomplish all that is needed, but a unity can be established among the several agencies which have educational possibilities. The idea that education is for the young alone has been surpassed long ago in all intelligent circles. No church has done its duty when it has provided for the few years of youth and adolescence, if it has left unprovided the further years of development to the very end. Its whole life must serve educational purposes in the fullest and best sense. The best methods of rendering this enlarged service are to be learned from those expert and technical agencies established by the Church in its Board of Christian Education — methods which change and improve as the years pass along. Few sessions can maintain full connection with all the agencies which are available to them, and this is why special committees or councils or other means need to be established for this purpose.

II. The Church Council of Religious Education

The General Assembly of 1911 spoke earnestly of the necessity of making religious education a major function of each church, adding that it must be intelligently and fully supervised in order to be effective. It added: "This business of supervision belongs to the pastor and session. Where the session is willing and able to give to this work the time and attention it must have, it may be willing to attend to it rather than to entrust it to another body, but no session should feel justified in refusing to do both, for it ought either to do the work itself or to commit it to some one else." The wisest counselors think that a session as a whole is seldom able to assume entire responsibility for the actual direction of the educational program of the church and that this is more wisely committed to a Church Council of Religious Education, in which the session as well as the various educational agencies of the church and

the congregation are represented. The ablest educators of the church are often outside the session, and by erecting a distinct body for the purpose a whole new group of workers will be brought into the work of the church. The Council should never lose its assurance that the session supports it unqualifiedly, and it should make reports to the session from time to time to insure intelligent coöperation at all points. Of course, members of the session would be on the Council in various capacities. Guidance in the organization and conduct of educational councils is available in the Board of Christian Education, where many streams of experience are always depositing new materials to modify and improve the scheme. The Board's "Bulletin No. 2" is devoted to this particular interest and is issued in fresh revisions as new knowledge develops from growing experience. The Council is not a plan for large churches only; it operates as well in small and medium-sized churches. Of course, no plans would be made either for such a Council or by it after it is organized without the full understanding and approval of the session. On the other hand, the session needs to take responsibility for its work with great seriousness. It does not do for a session to consult merely its own opinions or the notions of the most hesitant elders, holding back from progressive plans of religious education because of objection to some details. The session has committed to it the souls of men for whom it must some day give account, and it must think of them primarily, rather than of itself, and serve their real needs as in the sight of God. Especially in situations where personal training is neglected is the session responsible for making good what families and day schools fail in giving. The church of to-day must furnish a far more comprehensive program of Christian education than its predecessor needed to give, or see that this program is carried out by family and school influence where it is in danger of being neglected. In larger churches it is common to secure a trained

worker as director of religious education to supervise the whole task. In smaller churches this is often done by an unsalaried worker, operating under the Church Council of Religious Education or as its head. A minister needs such training as will enable him to do this work in a small church and to be intelligently sympathetic with it or even to supervise it in a larger church. While this is a vital part of a minister's work, he cannot rightly give all his time to it. His whole work must be kept going.

III. The Wider Program

1. The session will realize that the pastor is a chief educational factor in the program and that he must be sustained in every way, both as a preacher of instructive sermons and in his own plans for the study necessary to enable him to hold up his head among other educational workers. His teaching is part of the responsibility of the session, and the elders should safeguard his time so that he has hours free from interruption in order to present in the pulpit material which comes from Spirit-guided meditation and study. They are not to be detectors of error, but they are to counsel him regarding the instruction which he gives as the chosen teacher of the whole body of the Church. Every sermon ought to face some real need of the parish, some weak place in its intelligence or devotion or ethics, and as the years run on the whole round of Christian truth ought to be surveyed. No pastor is allowed in the Presbyterian system to become a specialist, always harping on a few favorite strings, and a specializing session is, if anything, worse still. When elders insist, as a price of peace, that a minister thrash away on the things they like to hear, without due consideration of the whole range of truth, they hurt the cause of Christ in any congregation.

2. The extension of the educational program beyond the Sunday School does not lessen the importance of that agency.

The session, through its relationship to the Church Council of Religious Education and by occasional visits, should keep in close connection with the various Sunday gatherings of the Church School. If elders can be teachers and leaders, so much the better. Any radical change, such as the establishment of new departments in the Church School; the organization of new societies, clubs, or other groups; the adoption of different courses or other "helps" or hymn books; or the change of time of meeting of the major educational agencies, should be made with the cognizance and approval of the session through its representatives or committee. A tender point sometimes develops here. The elders generally know less about the details of a good Sunday School and most other agencies than do the teachers and officers and leaders of these bodies, and when they introduce their opinions it must be done with care and excellent feeling or there is apt to be trouble. The only thing that will save the situation is for the session, both individually and through its committee, to keep in close relation with the school at all times.

It is more important to have the right person as superintendent of the Sunday School than to have a wrong person who chances to be an elder, but it is a very pleasant thing when an elder heads the school. It is seldom wise for the session to elect the officers or appoint the teachers directly, but it will be helpful if all names proposed for the various offices are submitted to the session for careful consideration and approval. Sunday School workers are generally capable of choosing their own leaders. For the sake of the few times when the session may need to exercise authority, it is well that its sympathetic and intelligent interest in the Sunday School shall be assured at all times.

Intimate relation needs to be maintained also with the Young People's Society and other educational organizations of the church for the sake of aiding their essentially educa-

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tional program. Plans are now common which align the Sunday School work with the work of the Young People's Society and other organizations. These plans will be part of the responsibility of the Church Council of Religious Education, or a similar body, reporting to the session. Work by young people easily becomes sporadic and disconnected, contributing nothing to the real development of the members. No one ought to attempt to rule it, especially among the more mature young people, but it can be guided through interested coöperation with leaders of the group.

3. There is a growing custom of observing what is called a "church night" during each week, when the various church bodies transact their business and gather for devotional service as well. This "night" is under the jurisdiction of the session and is made part of the educational program of the church. During one or two seasons of the year it becomes a time for a "school of missions," when an intensive study is made of the major missionary aspects of the church's duty, a spring period being given to foreign missions and a fall period to national missions, or with reversed periods or in combined sessions. Sometimes these periods are formally placed under the care of distinctive missionary agencies, but the session, through its proper committees or directly, is the controlling factor. Chapter X discusses this matter more fully.

4. Any thoughtful session will realize that the brief time allotted on Sunday for training in religion is wholly inadequate and cannot possibly meet the full need of Christian lives. Every test reveals that it has not done so. Attention should be given in each church, therefore, to the possibilities of week-day instruction, an hour or more on some chosen day for real study of the Christian religion, comparable to the best that is done in any day school. In many places school boards excuse children and high school pupils from regular classes in order that they may attend classes for religious instruction con-

ducted by the churches. This is not always practicable for a single church, because of the expense and because it seldom has a large enough proportion of the young people of a school area to claim their time. But even when all the churches unite in the plan, it requires the loyal support of the individual session and some degree of supervision of the work. The plan for week-day instruction does not necessarily depend on time concessions by the school board or on public school credits. In some cases, when parents and young people are sufficiently interested, classes are held before or after school hours. This is made increasingly difficult, however, by the crowding of the school curriculum and the addition of duties and privileges out of school hours. If the churches of any locality take the matter earnestly and believe in week-day instruction as part of the necessary training of their young people, they can ordinarily secure such concessions as are necessary to accomplish the purpose. The session ought to think the matter out thoroughly and be prepared either to lead or to uphold those who lead in executing a suitable program. This can be made more technically scholastic than the Sunday session, but its religious elements should not be minimized, nor should the educational elements of the Sunday session be discounted.

5. A further extension of the educational program of the church appears in what was formerly called the "Daily Vacation Bible School," now generally called among Presbyterians the "Vacation Church School." Some sessions think of a Vacation Church School as necessarily intended for poor children, whereas it makes its appeal to all kinds of people. The summer finds many young people in every town available for such training as is difficult in the crowded months of the year. Such a school is the responsibility of the session, either directly or through the Church Council of Religious Education. Its details should be determined by the needs of the particular community. In some cases it may be best to have purely Bible

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training; in other cases a wider scheme is wholly proper, though a church should have no educational plans which do not keep the Bible central. There are often excellent workers who find a real joy in helping to conduct such a school, though it is seldom wise to attempt it without one or two workers who can be recompensed in part for their time and strength. Many pastors are now so skilled in such work that they like to manage it themselves, but they need the warm support of the session at all points. The small cost of such a school should be included in the budget of the church. Plans for Vacation Church Schools are always developing and should be learned in their latest form from the Board of Christian Education.

6. The session has a further responsibility to develop and maintain throughout the church a wide intelligence regarding the Kingdom of God. The ignorance of many church members regarding Church work outside their own boundaries is painful. Most homes have no Church paper and no way of knowing what is being done or discussed in the Church at large. Women are often informed through their missionary societies as to certain forms of Christian progress, but most men and many women know nothing about the real movements in the Church except what they read in the daily press or in occasional magazine articles. Such articles never deal with the ordinary life of the Church and careless readers often gather an impression of retrogression or the spread of error. They never see the other side, which is the main side, of the Church's life. There is no substitute for a real weekly Church paper, bringing news of the churches, the ministers, the Boards, the missionaries, and the discussions in the Church, and the plans for its advance movements.

This is a session responsibility. An ignorant and uninformed church is a reflection on the zeal of the session. Any session can increase the circulation of informing and helpful Church literature if it makes a faithful effort. A large committee,

chosen from all over the church, can carry out projects to deepen the interest and widen the intelligence of the members. No educational program is quite complete without such an element. Probably it cannot be achieved if elders have too many whims about what they think people ought to read or if they suppose that the people expect them to indorse everything a paper contains. But if the matter is taken as sensibly as elders take their ordinary life and reading, there is no real difficulty in making this a forceful element in the educational program of the church.

THE QUESTIONS DISCUSSED IN THIS CHAPTER

1. What is meant by the "Church School" ? What is its purpose?
2. Why is the session responsible for it? How do most sessions exercise the supervision required? What is a Church Council of Religious Education?
3. What is the official relation of the session to the educational organization and work of the church?
4. What is the plan of "week-day religious instruction" ? of the Vacation Church School?
5. What is the relation of the session to the general religious intelligence of the people of the church? How may its responsibility be met?

SUBJECTS FOR FURTHER THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. The value of a Church Council of Religious Education; whether there is any other plan which will unify and direct the whole educational program of the various agencies of the church; how far this unification is desirable.
2. What the actual condition of religious education is in the church; a survey of the agencies at work and their methods and results; the desirability of a conference conducted by the session's committee with all these agencies.
3. The value of a "church night," when the organizations of the church can be gathered, either taking the place of the usual mid-week meeting or supplementing it.

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4. The value of week-day religious instruction in your own community; how it could be carried on; the kind of instruction needed and the lines to be followed.

5. The need for a Vacation Church School; how it may be conducted; the lines of instruction needed and desirable.

CHAPTER IX

THE SESSION AS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CHURCH IN THE COMMUNITY

THE DUTY OF THE CHURCH to its own members is coupled with its duty to the community. It can hardly be "the salt of the earth" or "the light of the world," Matt. 5:13, 14, without influencing the lives nearest to it. As residents of the general community, elders may be expected to know its condition so well that they can guide the church in its service. Sometimes a church exists in a community without apparent consciousness of it, the community in turn living its life with only slight attention to the church. The church may be well kept up while the community runs down in preventable ways. Or, the church may become unkempt while the community develops favorably.

A whole new order of "community churches" has appeared, which seek to belong to their communities in such sense that they maintain no one denominational connection lest it limit the interest of people with other denominational proclivities. In a sense, every Presbyterian church ought to be a community church. Any follower of Christ, of whatever name or order, should be at home in it, and every needy person ought to be free to bring his need there in assurance that some effort will be made to supply it. Even a small church in a small town ought to have on the church building a sign which tells its name and gives directions for finding the pastor or some church officer to whom a passing need may be referred. This has long been the custom of city churches, but everyone who

has occasion to go through the countryside or through villages must have observed how often church buildings stand entirely unmarked. If anyone comes to them with need for the aid they might give, it is impossible to reach the real supply. Every church building ought to be a center in the community for any kind of service which the church can render. In addition, it ought to be a place where other lines of supply for other needs can be indicated. A large business house invites all inquirers to come to it, saying, "We do not sell everything but we know where everything is sold, and we will help anybody with any purchase." This is precisely what an active community church ought to be able to do.

In its own community each church has two special lines that are part of its essential task.

I. Evangelistic Service to the Community.

Each church tries to bring the people of the community to Christ. This is generally called its "evangelistic" task, but the word has come to be used in many circles for special forms of effort. It ought to mean the effort to make the gospel (evangel) of Christ vital to individuals. No session can evade this duty. The central concern is that people shall find Christ and then the Church. Obviously, unless people somewhere join the Church because of their new relation to Christ, the Church will die out in one generation. We sometimes speak of a church as "holding its own." In the nature of the case, it never does that. Its "own" keep moving away, going to heaven, disappearing in various ways. Forty years from now the people who are now the church's "own" will mostly be gone. It must keep gathering in other people or it will soon die. Sessions sometimes overlook this solemn fact. They need to maintain steadily the agencies and movements which seek new believers in their own community. It will not

do to depend on believers moving in from other communities unless the church is willing to be a mere receiver of the fruits of the labor of other churches. Additions by letter always represent some other church's faithfulness in winning men to Christ.

The session needs to watch these three things carefully:

1. The spirit of the church and the efforts of its pastor, officers, members, teachers must be maintained. This is perennial. The "doors of the church" are to be always open to receive new believers. It is generally bad policy in even the smallest churches to reserve this opportunity for the Communion periods alone. It should be understood that the session is ready at any service and on any day to receive a confession of faith and to welcome a new member. In many churches the notice is given that the session meets after each regular service for this purpose, or after each midweek meeting. When such a method is used, it encourages teachers and parents and friends to appeal for public profession of Christ at any time. The session should see that the confessions are as intelligent as possible. Hence the plan of communicants' classes is to be encouraged, though these are generally held at special times in the year. But churches large or small ought to make it possible on any Sunday or, indeed, at any other time, for a new Christian believer to find a welcome.

For this same purpose the session should persistently direct the minds of people of the community to this vital matter. Dwight L. Moody at one time planned to speak for Christ to some nonbeliever each day; many less prominent men have adopted the same rule; it is the habit of many pastors. Whatever stress may be laid on special occasions or seasons, the session must keep a watchful eye on the constant spirit of the church as a soul-winning agency. It ought to be clear to any mind that this involves continuous "personal evangelism." One of the deepest privileges of an elder is the right he has

by virtue of his office to approach any man for Christ without apology or defense. What could be more natural than that he, as a spiritual officer of the church, should ask others to take their right attitude toward Christ as Saviour and Master?

2. There are special occasions or seasons for accenting this duty. It is a growing custom to magnify the pre-Easter period for this. Classes are especially arranged in the Sunday School, or for its members, with careful instruction in the meaning and requirements of the public profession of faith. The pastor often leads such classes, but others, in and out of the session, can help. The midweek meetings may be made suggestive for the same purpose. Lists of people who should be definitely approached for their confession of faith can be wisely given out to proper workers.

Sometimes a church arranges for a series of special meetings led by a visiting pastor or evangelist or by the pastor himself. At these times the session is under peculiar obligation. Such meetings sometimes become intense, and decisions are made under pressure which are regretted when the pressure is removed. This danger ought not to minimize the readiness of the session to have such experiences if the church really needs them. A great many church leaders have come to Christ at just such times, making their decision in an evangelistic meeting when the atmosphere was right for frank facing of duty. The session needs to be exceedingly watchful regarding the man who may be invited to lead in special meetings. There are always ways of finding out whether a professional evangelist is one who can be trusted to leave a real blessing. The same care should be used regarding methods, though the session must realize that when a man is invited to lead he must be given large liberty in his methods. If he is to do only what the church normally does, there is no reason for his coming at all. It must be remembered also that methods which bring some men to decision leave other men entirely untouched.

The fact that an elder does not personally like a certain way of making the appeal does not mean that some other man will not come to Christ under it. The spirit of work of this kind is ruined when church officers take an adverse attitude toward it. For this reason elders should arrange or agree to such plans only after careful consideration, with full understanding of what they imply and with some large purpose in them.

3. The third line of evangelistic effort involves coöperation with other churches or with an entire community. This is much more complicated because an individual session cannot control all that occurs and may find itself involved in methods or costs or teachings which it would not choose. Nevertheless, such coöperation is often the undoubted duty of the session. Elders should enter into it as whole-heartedly as possible and without a spirit of undue criticism or suspicion. It is a grave responsibility to keep a church out of a concerted movement for the conversion of men, even though there are details which do not commend themselves to the session. It is not enough to say that the church will not oppose the movement; often failure to coöperate is the heaviest form of opposition. A session must frankly face every such program and enter it or not, and its decision should be clearly understood by the people of the church for which it is responsible. Always, some members will wish to enter the movement; some will not. The session should seek to command the respect and understanding of both groups.

A serious duty falls to the session regarding all the persons brought into Church membership in any of these ways — the duty of integrating them into the life of the church and its agencies of service and growth. New members generally come into the church as “babes in Christ,” needing development and care, no matter what their physical age may be. If the “group system” is used, each new member is at once assigned to a group for whose members an elder is already responsible;

the duty is then easily performed. If there is no such system, then an early meeting of the session should give careful and personal attention to each case, seeking the wisest ways of leading the new member into the real life of the church. It does not do to trust to the natural ways of integration unless the session is sure that these ways are really operating. The educational program, already discussed, is clearly required for this work.

II. Social Service to the Community

Each church has a duty to bring Christ to the people of its community and to all phases of the community life. This is generally called "social service," and is sometimes set over against evangelistic work, an entirely mistaken contrast. The redemption of Christ is intended for the whole man and for all of his life. It is an old saying that a man cannot be a worthy Christian on Sunday and something else on the other days of the week. But if he must be a Christian on all days, then the things he does on those days must be open to the influence of Christ as truly as is his church service. The church cannot be indifferent to any of the conditions under which its people or its community must live and work. Bad housing and bad education and bad economic conditions affect spiritual life, and spiritual life is the constant concern of the church and the session.

It is sometimes said that the Early Church did not attempt this general work but contented itself with reaching the souls of men and bringing them to Christ. This is a strange mistake in the reading of history. Many of the finest services of our Lord were in this very realm — feeding the hungry, helping the sick, cheering the distressed. He sent one man to the established courts for the relief he wanted, exactly as the church must often do, but he added wise words of spiritual guidance which would cure similar evils if they began to arise. He chose

as the "second Commandment" a rule of loving one's neighbor; and this law surely means that whatever one would wish his own life to contain he must be ready to protect in another man's life when he can do so. One of the earliest acts of the Christian Church was the sending of a relief fund to the people who were suffering from a famine in Judea. Paul was a leader in the scheme. The writer James scoffs at a Christian who wants other people fed and clothed but will do nothing about it, James 2:15, 16; can this apply less to a body of Christians? He speaks also, ch. 5:4, 5, of labor trouble, sharply condemning employers who hold back proper wages, saying that God will hold them accountable; can this be a matter of indifference to the Church whose Head is Christ? How far shall such a passage as Heb. 13:1-3 be allowed to go? Strangers, the oppressed, the burdened, are to be under the care of Christian believers; does this mean only individuals, or must it include any whom the Church can help?

It is true that the Early Church could not do what it is perfectly feasible for us to do. It had no power to correct the causes of the troubles of men; we have such power as a Church. The Good Samaritan could not clear the Jericho road of robbers; he could only rescue the robbed victim. If that was his duty and he is to be commended for it, is it not our duty to take steps to clear the road of the robbers who make many victims? The Early Church used all the power it had to help men with the gospel of Christ. That is all we are asked to do — to use all the power we have in behalf of the gospel. We cannot work the miracles of our Lord. He used his great power for it. We can use our smaller power in the same spirit. He said that his followers should do greater works than he had done; by his gracious power they have done so. Many of Christ's servants have presented the saving gospel to larger multitudes than he ever met in his earthly ministry. Many Christian physicians have brought health and sight and hear-

ing to more crippled people than he healed. He has kept his word and enabled his followers to do the greater works. We cannot hide behind his example while we fail to serve all the human needs of the community in which we live. We have a gospel adequate for all needs, a Saviour great enough, and a living Holy Spirit mighty enough to empower and guide his Church. No session has done its full duty until it has surveyed its own community, determined the duty of the church, and led in the doing of it.

In this community service three lines emerge, all of them marked by distinct Christian opportunity:

1. The organizations within the church have some opportunities. It is often difficult to make a men's club seem worth while because it has no real work to do. Such work is apt to be found in some form of community service, safeguarding some interest of human life or advancing some program of human good in the name of Christ. The Young People's Society can often be saved from wreck or ineptitude by a similar honest effort to spread the influence of the spirit of Christ to the lives of the less fortunate in the community or to the support of some enterprise on which the community is dependent. This is equally true of other church organizations. When the session has measured the life of its community by the standards of Christ, and has found it defective here or there, or has found that it needs help for this or that advancement, it will then look to see whether any existing agency can wisely care for the need or whether a new agency should be formed. When a need lies in the immediate community of the church, it is often the part of wisdom for the single church to carry the load of its supply. A neighboring hospital or similar institution can often be taken on as a special responsibility of the church for the cheer or other help of its inmates. Such work is always the concern of the session, though it will naturally be done by the agency appointed for it.

2. Much work is done in coöperation with the other churches of the community. Generally they are organized into some form of federation or alliance, though this is not necessary. It is quite as important for small communities or even rural sections to develop this kind of work as for the larger groups to do so. There are important matters on which the voice of a single church is apt to be less effective than that of the whole Christian body. The session of a Presbyterian church ought never to allow such organizations to function without its steadying or inspiring influence. No Presbyterian church can afford to be out of these united movements for community good. If a church is not willing to coöperate even in methods which it would not of itself choose, then it must stay out of most things that are done, but this is not a normal position for a Presbyterian church.

3. A far more difficult and complicated matter arises when the session faces the community service of nonreligious or non-Church bodies in which some church members join and for which the active support of the church is asked. Each case must be settled by a session on its own merits but on such terms that the people of the church can understand the grounds of its action. The same problem arises with reference to public matters which have a political aspect. No one suggests that the Church ought to "enter politics" in the usual meaning of the term. It is a bounden principle of the Presbyterian Church that the State and the Church are distinct and should not conflict with each other. But the principle is easier to state than to apply. Many issues have political and also spiritual elements. The Church leaves all the political aspects to the State, but who is to look after the moral and spiritual aspects? The political aspect of law observance is one thing, but the moral and spiritual aspects of the same issue are too close to it to be left outside the concern of the Church. Prohibition as a legal matter is one thing, but the man who is ruined by drink

and the family who suffer from liquor are exactly the persons for whom the Church is concerned. The line is hard to draw, but the Church is always untrue to the saving gospel when it allows its fear of politics to prevent its sincere effort to take the wise course of helpfulness. Each session ought to consider carefully whether the body of believers for whom it is responsible are being led into the fullest service of the gospel in such matters. How a church shall act will always be a serious question but its seriousness does not change the duty of answering it. There is no adequate and permanent motivation for effective community service which does not come out of essentially religious inspirations, and the surest way to defeat some helpful plans for good is for the church to withhold its support. It involves no alliance with the world on the world's terms; it is rather a recognition that Christ has won to himself some worldly agencies with which his Church can coöperate. If these agencies are engaged in services which are equally the tasks of his gospel, then they cannot be allowed to do their work alone.

THE QUESTIONS DISCUSSED IN THIS CHAPTER

1. What is the right relation of a Christian church to its own community? What are "community churches"?
2. What is the "evangelistic" task of a church? How is the spirit of the task to be maintained? How are special periods and coöperative efforts under the supervision of the session?
3. What is the "social service" task of a church? How is the Early Church connected with it?
4. What is the relation of the session to coöperative movements, especially those in which non-Church agencies are involved?

SUBJECTS FOR FURTHER THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. Conditions that may exist in a church which make it unavailable for some members of the community; conditions that must obtain in a real "community church."

2. The wisdom of "evangelistic meetings" in your own community; whether "union meetings" are desirable; whether the pre-Easter period could be more effectively used.

3. How the principles of our Lord lead to a wider social service than was possible for the Early Church; whether the parable of the Good Samaritan limits the duty of present-day Christians to the work of rescue or opens the way to the work of prevention.

CHAPTER X

THE SESSION AND THE MISSIONARY TASK OF THE CHURCH

THE DUTY OF THE SESSION extends, as the work of the church must always extend, beyond the community and the membership of the local church, until it takes in the outreaching work of the Church at large. The General Assembly has several times made definite declaration that the Presbyterian Church is itself a missionary society, charged with the duty of extending the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth. In 1903 a new chapter (XXXV) was added to the Confession of Faith in which this section occurs:

“ Since there is no other way of salvation than that revealed in the gospel, and since in the divinely established and ordinary method of grace faith cometh by hearing the Word of God, Christ hath commissioned His Church to go into all the world and to make disciples of all nations. All believers are, therefore, under obligation to sustain the ordinances of religion where they are already established, and to contribute by their prayers, gifts, and personal efforts, to the extension of the Kingdom of God throughout the whole earth.”

This implies that every elder is an officer in a missionary society and may naturally be expected to take an intelligent and active interest in its work. No elder has any option about “ believing in foreign missions ” or in any other work of extending the knowledge of Christ. The only question before any session is as to the best methods of bringing the particular

church into line with the work of missions at home and beyond the sea.

I. The Ground of Missionary Obligation

The ground of this obligation is fivefold:

1. Obedience to Christ — not merely to a specific command, but to the whole personality which he manifested. It is quite incredible that such a One as Christ could be intended for a limited number of people or that he could have meant to reach and help only the people of one geographical section of the world.

2. The nature of the Christian religion. This simple table is beyond dispute:

The Christian religion is

Good for All	}	If for Any
Intended for All		
Necessary for All		
Available for All		
Effective for All		

There is no idea of the Christian religion which we could exempt from this statement. Such a religion could know no limitation, in the nature of the case. It seeks no racial or geographical peculiarities to make it applicable.

3. The universal need of men. The appeal of the Christian faith is to the deepest need of men — the need to be set right with God and with each other. Men differ according to their races and locations, but in the essential facts of being moral and having failed in the sight of God, and thus needing the redemption and new life of Christ, they are all alike. If men anywhere need what Christ has to offer, then men everywhere need it in the same way.

4. The need of nations and of the world for a spirit of brotherhood which can be learned from Christ. It is true that

Christians have failed to represent Christ fairly at just this point, but their failure does not change the ability of Christ to make a world brotherhood and to establish a Kingdom of God into which all nations and all their citizens can be gathered. Nothing is so directly set toward this world change as the Christian religion. Every church may be challenged to take its fair share in the task of extending a religion which has such large plans for the world.

5. The need of every Christian believer to express his faith in the largest way. The Church has always suffered from narrow plans; individual Christians have suffered even more. A local Christian is a defective Christian. If there were no results whatever from the missionary work except the enlargement of heart and life which it brings to every sincere supporter, it would be well worth while. A Presbyterian leader says that the very purpose of religious education is to make a missionary person, one who thinks in large terms of the meaning and application of the gospel of Christ.

A church without an intense and intelligent missionary interest fails to interpret and apply the gospel which it professes to hold. The session is properly called to maintain and develop this saving interest in the larger meaning of the gospel. Failure here can result only from lack of knowledge of the purpose and work of the Church or from spiritual apathy. None of the usual excuses of uninformed people regarding mission work ought to go unchallenged by thoughtful elders who know their duty to the church.

II. The Extent of the Missionary Enterprise

The missionary enterprise is the most widespread and demanding and resultful phase of the Christian movement to which every Presbyterian church is committed. It covers the whole territory of the United States in National Missions and

extends beyond this territory to the less Christian parts of the world. No one pretends that the work is complete anywhere; there are no fully Christian nations. There is no place where more work cannot be done in behalf of Christ. But this has always been true, and if it had been taken as an argument the Christian faith would not have spread at all. It was not universal in Jerusalem before it spread to Judea and Samaria, Acts 8:1b, and before finishing there it started toward "the uttermost part of the earth," Acts 13:3, 4. It has never finished anywhere, but it has an irresistible tendency to move on. Each church works in its own community, but it sends its influence and aid to the surrounding communities, to the rest of the nation, and then to the world at large. No session can delay this movement without injuring the church over which it is made overseer. Any restriction of the outgoing of a church's life is like parental refusal to allow a child to pass beyond first-grade studies because there are some things he does not yet grasp. He will grasp these more readily as larger subjects unfold before him. Any church is better able to carry its local and community work when it carries also a goodly share of the outreaching work of the Church.

Elders sometimes overlook the magnitude of mission work. It is said that the Church has been long at the task and yet it does not seem to be nearing completion. But this overlooks the fact that the work has actually not been long under way in our modern sense of the words. There was a long stagnant time when the Christian faith was not sent out aggressively by its believers, and it was not until the modern movement began with the Moravians and then with William Carey and his friends in India (1793) that a real effort was made to reach the whole world with the Christian gospel. The results during these years have been very great, the more remarkable when the almost insuperable difficulties are considered. There are more Christian believers in India now than there were

in all the world a century after the birth or the ascension of Christ. The first Christian believer in China was baptized in 1827 and for a long time he was alone, but in the midst of much recent disturbance and upheaval the Christian forces in China have revealed their strength as equal to that of the entire Christian body after a hundred years of Christian history. At the present time there are only a few places on the surface of the earth where the movement has not at least made a beginning, so much of a beginning that no church can afford to deny itself a share in advancing it. The next chapter will discuss the methods available for doing this. Every session ought to see that these methods are used in the way that will serve the spiritual needs of the church most fully.

It should be recalled that each generation has to be approached anew on the mission fields at home and abroad exactly as in the familiar church community. The people to whom the missionaries appeal to-day are not those to whom the missionaries went sixty years ago. A wholly new population is to be gained for Christ and the Christian faith. The work grows as the population of the world grows. There are many more people in China and India and Japan than there were when missions began in those lands, and while there are many more Christians than there were, the task before them, in which they need our help, is vastly larger than it was before.

The mere list of countries where the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America is conducting foreign missionary work is challenging to thoughtful elders: Mexico, Central America, South America, Philippine Islands, Japan, Korea, China, Siam, India, Iran, Irak, Syria, Africa. It conducts a wide variety of missionary work in all parts of the United States, in Alaska, and in the Caribbean area, besides aiding many Protestant groups in Europe. It is inconceivable that any elder really informed about such a work could be content

to allow his church to be indifferent to it or to pretend to be so occupied with its local work as to allow this wide field to be unaided. Congregational indifference is hurtful enough, but sessional indifference is worse. Leadership, not hindrance, is to be expected from elders.

III. The Needs of the Missionary Enterprise

Missionary work requires aid from each local church at four points, each of which is within the responsibility of the session:

1. It needs intelligence among Christian believers. This is a natural phase of the religious education for which the session is responsible. It may be administered through the Church Council of Religious Education, which would naturally have a special church Missionary Committee and probably a director of missionary education. The director is ordinarily an un-salaried worker, man or woman, who will keep a watchful eye on the opportunities for presenting missions to the people, in coöperation with the committee and with the constant support of the session.

Missionary intelligence is spread in Presbyterian churches generally through six agencies:

- a. Societies exist directly for that purpose in most churches, such as the Women's Missionary Society. The session is concerned with all the efforts of such societies, though of course it claims no detailed knowledge of their work. It sometimes happens, however, that lack of interest and support on the part of the other leaders of the church makes the way of these societies hard.

- b. A large amount of missionary literature is available. The problem of the session is to find ways in which it can be made really effective. Getting it read is more difficult than merely getting it. Many plans have been devised for this

purpose and they can be learned by the proper committee without difficulty.

c. Mission study in various forms has become almost universal in the Presbyterian Church. Any church which does not have mission study classes or a school of missions is simply behind the other churches, and its session should become concerned at once. The textbooks are of a quality and thoroughness which the uninformed have not even guessed. It cannot be assumed that any Christian knows the actual condition of the missionary enterprise without recent study and reading. The movement is very rapid and many figures and opinions which are good at one time are of no value within a year. Books pass out of date except as they deal with vital and permanent principles of the work. Intelligent students of missions are often amazed at the naïve ignorance of current critics of it, critics whose writings often deeply disturb the uninformed.

d. It is a frequent custom for Presbyterian churches to maintain what used to be called the "Monthly Concert of Prayer for Missions," using one of the midweek meetings each month for concerted or united prayer, information, and inspiration, regarding some field or phase of the enterprise. For this, of course, the session, together with the pastor, would be directly responsible.

e. Missionary information is introduced in the Sunday School and all other agencies of the church so that missionary work may become an integral part of the thinking of the members. Often there is a committee for this purpose in each society or agency. The presentation includes pictures—stereopticon, moving, and printed; lectures; and any interesting knowledge that may be learned. It is of supreme importance that missions shall seem the deeply interesting thing it really is and never be allowed to become dull or dry.

f. Missionary sermons and addresses are a regular part of

any complete church program. Ministers sometimes complain that their missionary sermons are preached under protest, even from the session, on the ground that they are "not interested" in missions. Such elders are not living up to their vows in caring for the flock over which they are set. A Presbyterian elder cannot be intelligent and also uninterested in so large a part of the work of his Church. Every minister is expected to keep alive in the minds of his hearers the undoubted duty of world-wide missions, beginning at the side of the parish but stopping nowhere until the uttermost parts of the earth are reached. His elders ought to be his strongest supporters in this pulpit program.

These sermons or addresses are often presented by visiting missionaries. Here the session has a large opportunity. The visit of a missionary ought to be a notable event in a town. He is always a man who has traveled farther than almost anyone else in the place. He knows intimately the life of another type of people and can tell what no one else in the town knows. At such a time, it is out of the question for elders to be indifferent or to keep themselves out of the way. Such a man ought to be magnified and his presence ought to be used to center the mind of the community on the church. In large cities the community life is less compact, but even here the people of the church ought to recognize the special opportunity that comes with the presence of a missionary from the field. If this missionary is the one who is supported by the church, the claim is doubly strong. In that case he should be magnified in all the societies and agencies, invited to homes and clubs and business offices. His very presence ought to widen the horizon of a church, and will do so if the right methods are devised by the session. If the elders are indifferent, a missionary may come and go without leaving an impression, and then some one will remark on how uninteresting missionaries are! If the elders are sensitive to the work, the missionary

leaves a deep impression because he is given an opportunity to do so. Without their aid he has no real chance to do his best work during his visit.

2. Missionary work needs from each church a volume of earnest and constant prayer. Intelligence is named first because few Christians can pray persistently and helpfully when they are ignorant of the work for which they pray. Some prayers offered for missions reveal at once that the one who offers them has not the remotest idea what he is praying about. But it must not be supposed that intelligence takes the place of prayer. Sessions may well be the leaders in the necessary intercession for the work and the workers. A veteran Presbyterian missionary in China was asked by a wealthy man in America what he most wanted for his work. He replied that he was almost afraid to say lest he seem affected, but the truth was that he would rather have this friend's constant and persistent remembrance in prayer than any other one thing. Most missionaries would say this. As they stand before the actual needs of their fields they are hopeless except for their faith in God and in his loving purpose for the people. Prayer is God's chosen way of linking his people to himself and to each other in his great enterprises. Nobody has to have a logical theory about prayer in order to pray. It is enough for him to know that this is God's call. Missions can be regularly remembered in the public prayer of the church; much prayer can be offered at the regular monthly prayer meeting for missions; there can be circles of prayer formed for specific needs, such as disturbances in China and conditions in India and Turkey; the various agencies of the church can be called to prayer; individual and private prayer can be encouraged.

3. The missionary movement needs from each church a measure of life. The missionary force in all lands has constantly to be recruited from the supporting churches. Any church is better for having some of its sons and daughters in

the mission field in America and across the sea. It ought to be understood by all the young people of the church and by their parents that the elders count it an honor when they can send a messenger of the gospel into the field. All the workers now in the missionary force have come from churches just like their own and there is no good reason why some should not come from their church. More would come if sessions kept the assurance alive that this is a natural and expected step. When it is made a nine days' wonder for a young man to give himself to Christian service it is no wonder that so few do so, and when young people are actually discouraged from making the offer of their lives it is still less wonder that some churches have never had a representative in the missionary force at home or abroad. Sessions ought to see to this as part of their duty to the people of the church and to the cause of Christ.

4. The missionary enterprise needs from each church a fair share of financial support. Money is stored-up personality. No church can reach the uttermost parts of the earth except through prayer and gifts, and it will not pray intelligently without wanting to give money for the object of its prayer. The idea that the missionary movement is always asking for money is largely exaggerated. Every good movement asks for it and must have it. But the missionary movement asks for the hearts of Christian people everywhere. It is Christ's movement and Christian believers owe him everything they are and have. The money is a quite incidental thing, essential as it is for the work. Sessions ought to take sensible attitudes toward such a common-sense fact as the need for missionary money. There is every reason to suppose that the needs will increase as the years pass, and missionary giving will need to be larger and larger for at least another generation both for national and for foreign missions. All skimping of gifts now simply delays the work and prevents the approach of its consummation.

Nowhere is the session more responsible than in the guidance of the church in wise distribution of missionary money. The mission field is heavily sprinkled with wrecks of bungling efforts or with their present confusion. Earnest people have set out on unconnected and unorganized projects for which they have made appeals in homelands and have made them seem so worthy that givers have diverted their funds to them and have allowed the steady, ongoing work of the missionary enterprise to be hindered. The essential "faith" element in the whole missionary enterprise is overlooked when this is made the central element in some plan for evangelizing a section. The fact is that no Mission Board of any Church goes into its year with its funds assured. It always appropriates a schedule of expenditures for which it has no guarantee but the devotion of God's people. It moves by faith. But this element is not the only one in its program. Indeed, it is hardly conceivable that the God who has made so orderly a world intends that his servants shall proceed without order.

In the Presbyterian system the General Assembly has long borne responsibility for the conducting of the missionary work of the Church as a whole, and each judicatory — session, presbytery, and synod — will naturally conduct its missionary efforts in harmony with the General Assembly's agencies. It is not open to any session to divert missionary gifts from these agencies for which the members of the church are the responsible supporters. Support of independent agencies, local or general, is not to be approved until the church has done its duty as a Presbyterian body in the support of those workers and agencies which properly look to it for support.

Sessions should be on their guard about sporadic appeals which have not been investigated and verified — not because the speakers are untruthful or deceptive in any sense, but because they are often unbalanced in their estimate of the work they are presenting.

This will be especially true in the relation of the session to the young people. Every cause has to develop its constituency in each new generation, and each new generation is more easily appealed to by new enterprises than by old. It is natural that young people in their societies and their group meetings should be attracted to new schemes and want to put their gifts into them, especially if they are sponsored by young people's agencies.

THE QUESTIONS DISCUSSED IN THIS CHAPTER

1. What are the grounds of the missionary obligation? What is the relation of the Presbyterian Church to this obligation?
2. What is the extent of the missionary enterprise? How is its expansion justified in view of the evils that remain in all parts of the world?
3. How is the apparently slow progress of the enterprise to be viewed? How far is it fair to count it slow?
4. What is a Presbyterian church expected to do in the missionary enterprise? Which of the four points suggested is to be ranked first in your own church?
5. To what extent is missionary work dependent on faith?

SUBJECTS FOR FURTHER THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. The argument for the universal application of Christianity; how to deal with objections that each religion is good for the people who adhere to it.
2. The opposition to missions based on the prevalence of evils in the "sending countries"; whether it would be well or possible to refrain from missionary activity until American life is entirely corrected.
3. Practicable ways of developing intelligent interest in missionary work; how to get missionary literature read; the duty of the session in the matter.
4. The wisdom of securing missionary visitors; wise methods of using them when they come; whether the reluctance of Christian people to receive missionary messages is in any sense reasonable.
5. The best method of securing recruits for the mission field in your own church; whether your membership is adequately represented on the mission field.

CHAPTER XI

THE SESSION AND THE SERVICE AGENCIES OF THE CHURCH

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH is a very active, working body. Each local church has its tasks, sometimes badly neglected but generally actively done. From the local center each church reaches out into wide fields of service, not standing by itself in the effort, but combining in work with the entire body. One by one the wider tasks have been undertaken, each as it emerged, and for these tasks the Church has organized service agencies suited to their needs. Such agencies become essential when the work is too large or too intricate to be carried on with the spare time and strength of any local pastor or session, when it requires the full time and strength of a chosen group. Most of the agencies came into being through no definite foresight of their founders but simply through a desire to accomplish something for Christ and his gospel. No single church is capable of doing all that needs to be done in any of the great ministries of the Christian faith. If it refuses to join with others, for any reason whatever, it also decides that it will do less effectively everything it tries to do in the wider field of the gospel.

The detailed story of these service agencies in the Presbyterian Church is not important now, but it can be said that in every case when a new agency was established it was directed toward a task which had recently come into the consciousness of the Church. For one reason or another it did not prove practicable to lay the added burden on any existing agency,

and presently an entirely new organization was in operation. Every one of these agencies served a real need and every one laid wide plans for its work.

Of course this soon produced confusion, for few persons can bear in mind a multitude of causes or agencies which may be equally their responsibility. Before a radical reorganization of the system occurred, there were many faithful elders who could not have named all the definitely Presbyterian agencies through which the Church tried to extend the gospel. No one doubted the value of each of them and no one intelligently blamed them for their existence or wanted to see their plans narrowed or their demands reduced. Instead, there were many who counted each cause so important that any combination of agencies seemed to threaten the actual service rendered through it.

I. The Present Organization of Church Agencies

In 1923, however, after a number of years of analysis and discussion, the General Assembly combined all the existing Presbyterian agencies into the following: "Office of the General Assembly," with five departments; "General Council"; and four "Boards." This emphasized what sessions may need to remember, that these four Boards are the creatures of, and subject to, the General Assembly alone. Failing them is really failing the entire Church. They are not created by any session or presbytery or synod and are answerable only to the General Assembly, but they are completely under the control of that body. Their members are all elected by the General Assembly, one third each year, with some limitation on the terms of office; all of them could be changed in any one year if the General Assembly so ordered. They are not independent bodies, though they are required to be legally incorporated to hold the trust funds and property which are necessary to their

work. Their articles of incorporation make it very plain that they are creatures of the General Assembly and subject to its direction in all things.

The membership of the four Boards differs in size, ranging (1939) from forty-eight in the largest Board to seventeen in the smallest. They are composed of men and women, the women constituting about one third of the membership. The other two thirds are about equally ministers and ruling elders or unordained men. This puts ordained ministers in a very small minority. The members of the Boards receive no salaries, and except when their expenses are a serious item they pay their own bills. The members are chosen by the General Assembly, according to the kind of work expected from the Board. In some cases it is wise for a Board to be chosen from all parts of the Church, but in those cases it is evident that the Board itself cannot do the regular work and must commit it to a smaller Executive Committee, so located that its members can come together frequently without too much cost of time and money. Boards organized in this way naturally meet only two or three times a year and become advisory, determining only the major policies to be followed, all details being left to the smaller group who can meet regularly. If Boards are to meet frequently and to be the actual executants of their own policy, their members must be chosen from a fairly limited area so that they can be expected to gather often. For example, the Board of Foreign Missions meets once, often twice, each month, using one whole afternoon. It is impossible to expect many members to come from a great distance with any regularity, both because they are busy people occupied with their regular tasks and because of the expense of travel which either they or the Board's treasury must meet. The Board of National Missions, on the other hand, meets only twice a year and its members are gathered from across the entire country, at modest expense and yet at such cost as

could not be sustained for frequent meetings. This condition must be kept in mind when it is objected that the membership of any Board seems to be gathered too much from any one locality and that it would be better if the whole Church were represented in it. Choice must be made between a Board plan whereby the members of the Board gather often and carry out their own policies, and a Board plan whereby the members of the Board meet seldom and commit the carrying out of all policies to a smaller body necessarily located within convenient distance of some one point. The General Assembly has not thought a unified policy on this matter necessary, and uses both plans in forming its present Boards.

The work of each Board requires a considerable staff of employed and salaried workers. Anyone who doubts the need for this should inform himself of the real work of any one of the Boards. No volunteer staff could possibly conduct its affairs. Sometimes "faith missions" explain that they are conducted without cost, a quite impossible claim. Some one must pay postage and transportation charges for money sent to the foreign or the home field. Some one must support the person through whom all this is done—the virtual secretary or treasurer. Of course he may have money enough to support himself, in which case he spends it on his living instead of giving it to the work directly. Or a church may permit its pastor to use the time for which he is paid by the church to conduct the correspondence necessary; in this case the church pays the expenses. But it is mere juggling with facts to suppose that any wide enterprise can be carried on without cost to somebody, both money cost and time cost. In a great enterprise such as that carried on by the Presbyterian Church, there must be a considerable number of persons who give all their time and strength to it in various capacities and who must live by it.

The principle of missionary and benevolent salaries is that

the amount shall be enough to provide a reasonably comfortable living in the place where the work is done. The actual figures of the salaries will vary in different places, while the salary itself serves the same end in all places. It is a constant study by responsible persons how to maintain this salary level under changing conditions. There is no wisdom in grinding down the servants of the Church with financial anxiety, and of course it is not wise to provide for needless ease of living. No one knows the real facts about Church service who does not realize that the former danger is much more serious. Many men are compelled to leave their Church connections and their service with the Boards because they cannot conduct their lives worthily on the stipends which it seems wise for the Board or the Church to give its workers. Such work is never to be compared with commercial work; it is always less remunerative in money. Yet the workers must live in the midst of those who are recompensed on the commercial basis. This often makes difficulty in adjustment.

The staff of a Board will range from executive, responsible secretaries or treasurers through all the grades of service to messengers of all sorts. In addition, each Board is responsible for field work in which many workers are needed. These are not "agents" of the Boards; they are doing the very work for which the Board exists. Such are national missionaries, foreign missionaries, partly supported home pastors, teachers in schools and colleges, leaders in religious education, superintendents of various kinds, writers, editors of publications — the number would be impossible to catalogue. Each Board tries to secure the workers it needs in whatever line. And when a worker lives by his work, the same salary principle is applied. In no case is the salary considered payment for the work, as in a bank or a store. In all cases it is intended to be a way whereby the worker can live while he does the work. Because of this, the General Assembly has required each Board

to enter the Pension Plan of the Church for the members of its staff, the regular salary not offering adequate provision for later years. This places them on the same basis with other Church workers, whose salaries are calculated on the same principle of living rather than payment. Individuals on a Board staff are seldom paid salaries equal to those received by individuals of comparable ability and location outside the Church or by comparable workers in local churches. Elders in local churches ought to be posted regarding such things in order to meet the criticism of those who think of Church workers as being too highly paid. No judgment is ever to be based on the figures that are used, until the conditions under which the work is done are also considered. In case elders are troubled in their own minds, they ought to take up the troublesome matter with the officials of the Boards or other agencies and find out what the essential facts are. If the complaint is justified, the wrong can always be righted.

Besides the four distinctive Presbyterian Boards, the Office of the General Assembly, and the General Council, there are several agencies through which the Presbyterian Church works in coöperation with other Churches. This Church has no agency of its own for publishing the Word of God; instead, it operates through the American Bible Society, to whose support all Presbyterian churches are asked to contribute. Wide use is made of such agencies as the American Tract Society, though direct giving for it is less common. The Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America and such local Church councils or federations as commend themselves to local churches are part of the program of the denomination. The American Mission to Lepers and a number of boards of trustees for Christian institutions in mission lands are representative of agencies which are used by Presbyterian churches or individuals. In any case of question about an agency and its desirability and reliability, a session need never

move blindly and should never move impulsively. It is never right or Christian to waste the resources of the church, and therefore it is seldom wise to divert them from the organized channels over which the Church maintains a watchful control. Elders can always learn definitely about the standing of any agency by writing to the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, Witherspoon Building, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and ought to do so unless they are sure they have reliable information about the agency to which the people are asked to give. Plausible and eloquent and emotional advocates are by no means to be denounced as insincere, but they are often unreliable in their facts and their inferences and the session should safeguard the church against being drawn away from its chief responsibility, which is to support its own agencies of service.

II. The Administrative Agencies

1. The Office of the General Assembly, the official headquarters of the Church, is in the Witherspoon Building, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, an excellent structure owned by the Church through the Board of Christian Education and the Board of National Missions. While the Assembly meets only once a year, it is a continuing body in that it has an office with a continuing head (the Stated Clerk) and staff, an official seal, a treasurer, a Board of Trustees, and a contractual power. It is proper, therefore, to speak of "the" General Assembly and also "a" General Assembly, the second referring to an annual session of the body, the former referring to the fact that it has a continuing life. This life is expressed in part in the powers committed to a General Council, though the Council has no such wide powers as the General Assembly itself. A trust company serves as the treasurer of the General Assembly, and the support of the General Council is received

from the Boards according to a schedule approved by the General Assembly. The Minutes of the General Assembly, Parts I and II, which are always in the hands of every pastor, contain a full financial statement of the Church and all its agencies, both as to its trust funds and as to its current accounts. Elders are always welcome to make the most rigid examination of these audited statements and to make the most explicit inquiry regarding any questioned items. There ought to be no sense of concealment in any of the transactions of a Christian Church. No elder needs to live in a spirit of doubt or criticism regarding the Presbyterian Church. He can always learn at first hand even the most adverse facts or the correction of mistaken opinions and he ought to do so. The people have a right to an informed and intelligent eldership.

2. The General Council is charged with carefully limited and defined administrative duties between sessions of the General Assembly. It is composed of twenty-three members. Of these fifteen are elected directly by the General Assembly, one third each year. The eight remaining members of the Council are the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, a permanent official elected for a term of five years and subject to reëlection, who is secretary of the General Council; the Moderator of the General Assembly and his two immediate predecessors; and a representative of each Board nominated by the Board and elected by the General Assembly. The Moderator of the General Assembly each year is its chairman and serves as a member of the Council for two more years, bringing to its service his knowledge of the whole Church. The Council has supervision of all the work of the Boards and especially of their movements for securing financial support. It passes on their annual budgets and receives monthly reports of their condition. It has a small salaried staff, but all the members of the General Council serve without salary, only the expenses of their gathering being paid.

III. The Benevolence Agencies

When the many agencies were combined into four Boards, it was on the principle that the Church is obligated to education and missions and the care of its workers. For this reason, the Boards became

The Board of National Missions,
The Board of Christian Education,
The Board of Pensions,
The Board of Foreign Missions.

The names of these Boards carry their own explanation, with the further word that educational work on the foreign field is maintained by the Board of Foreign Missions, and that the Board of Pensions carries only American workers in foreign mission fields on its rolls. Because of the more permanent relation of the Church in Alaska and the West Indies to the American Church, the Board of Pensions extends its protection to nationals of those areas engaged in ministerial or other explicitly Church service. No detailed account of the work of these Boards ought to be given here, for they are living agencies and their programs must change year by year. The annual report of each Board is in the hands of every pastor and may be fully consulted by all sessions. It will be a surprise to uninformed elders to see how wide and varied the work actually is. These reports give detailed statements of the operating expense of each Board and of the number of workers engaged in its program.

The Church owns, through these agencies, two excellent buildings, occupied in part by the Boards themselves and also serving as headquarters for other benevolent agencies. One is at 156 Fifth Avenue, New York City, where the main offices of the Boards of National and Foreign Missions are located, together with certain offices for the work of the General Council in connection with the Every Member Canvass and the Central

Receiving Agency, and a Sales Agency of the Board of Christian Education. The other is the Witherspoon Building in Philadelphia, where is the Office of the General Assembly, constituting in some sense the headquarters of the Church, the office of the General Council, and the main offices of the Board of Christian Education and the Board of Pensions. Each of the four Boards maintains one or more offices located in other cities, as Pittsburgh, Chicago, St. Louis, San Francisco, whose staffs are in general on a parity with the headquarters staff, the force and location varying as need may indicate.

1. In the case of National Missions and Christian Education there is a close relation between the Boards and many local movements. All the large cities have Presbyterian Boards of Church Extension, and all the stronger synods have their own organizations for conducting mission work within their own borders. All these are in close relation to the Board of National Missions, giving help to it and receiving from it such help as may be possible. The Board is a member of the Home Missions Council, the interdenominational agency which seeks to maintain a Christian coöperation among such Boards, and across the entire country the tendency of Presbyterian groups is to coöperate with rather than to rival other Church groups. What is called the "Field Staff" of the Board of National Missions includes the workers of these local organizations, in order that there may be as little duplication of effort and expense as possible. This leaves a large area of national-mission work which the Board alone can undertake.

2. The Presbyterian Church has always claimed to be an educational body. It has not entered largely into general publishing work, but has always maintained a selected series of publications, centering very closely around its program of education in religion. Its "helps" for Sunday School sessions and other Church gatherings are of a high order and a wide variety. Elders should consider with great care before they

divert their churches from the guidance of their own Church in this important matter. The same educational interest has led to the forming of many colleges across the country, but the Church is also deeply engaged in Christian work on university campuses. In addition, there are local movements for religious education conducted by presbyteries or synods in coöperation with the Board of Christian Education. Effort is made to keep all these movements and all Presbyterian groups in alignment so that a real and effective service can be rendered to the future Church and the nation. For the Presbyterian Church all this work, however varied it may be, focuses in the Board of Christian Education. One of its officials gives a list of eleven distinct lines of service which it follows, all in the field of Christian education. This Board is also a member of the Council of Church Boards of Education and tries to bring to other Churches and receive from them whatever expert knowledge may be available. The Board also coöperates with other denominations through the International Council of Religious Education, whose effort is to maintain the best methods of training for teachers and students of religion. The plans of the Board begin with the family and the youngest child and continue to the end of any human life, inasmuch as training in Christian living and service can never cease. Some of the publishing of the Board is done under the imprint of "The Westminster Press."

3. The oldest form of organized effort in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America — it was begun in 1717 — was the effort to establish what in modern times would be called a pension system. For more than two centuries this effort to care for aged and disabled ministers, their widows and orphan children, was confided to the "Board of Ministerial Relief." To this Board was afterward joined the Sustentation Fund, and the result was the Board of Ministerial Relief and Sustentation. All of this earlier work was on the basis of a

noncontributory pension. The pensioners paid nothing and received only what the Church saw fit to supply.

In 1927 the Church changed the title of this Board to the Board of Pensions and inaugurated a contributory Pension Plan built on actuarial principles and surrounded with all the safeguards of a modern insurance plan. The Plan calls for an annual contribution of 10 per cent of each worker's salary, 2½ per cent of which is paid by the worker and 7½ per cent by the Church or other salary-paying organization. The pension is available upon retirement from active service after attaining the age of sixty-five and becomes due and payable just as any life insurance policy would, thus eliminating every suggestion of charity or gift. Already about 90 per cent of the pastors of the Church are covered by this Plan and it is hoped that the Relief Department may soon disappear.

To the Board of Pensions also the Church has committed a certain measure of oversight of various forms of philanthropy which appeal to benevolent Presbyterians, such as homes for the aged, orphanages, hospitals, and similar institutions, which exist in large numbers but which are under local control and depend for support on local contributions. The Board of Pensions maintains four homes for aged ministers and their widows in different sections of the country and a cottage for the care of tubercular patients in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

4. The Board of Foreign Missions is responsible for the entire work of the Presbyterian Church in non-American lands and in the Philippine Islands. The Board is a member of the Foreign Missions Conference of North America, composed of more than sixty Mission Boards of American Churches, which in turn is a member of the International Missionary Conference, which has headquarters in London and New York. These agencies help to prevent or correct duplication of effort and rivalry in what should be a joint work. The work of the

Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions is very widespread and is operated through many lines of service. The purpose is not to reproduce Presbyterian churches everywhere, but to proclaim the saving Christian gospel, with the assurance that the Holy Spirit will guide each new Christian group into the form of organization and activity best suited to its own need. Every world condition recorded in the daily press affects in some wise the missionary enterprise, but elders ought to keep themselves from panic when trouble is reported from any section of the world, remembering that the world has many sections and that much work goes on undisturbed by anything that may occur. Indeed, most of the disturbances are heavy arguments in favor of missionary work. The Church is not doing this work at the request of the world but under the command of Christ, and a Church that gets its great impetus from Calvary cannot be daunted by such trouble as comes to it anywhere in the world.

It is important to realize that these Boards are not independent agencies, needing support on their own account. They need money only because they are appointed by the Church to carry on forms of work which the Church is obligated to do in some way. These Boards are the way by which the Church has chosen to do the work. Sometimes donors think to punish the Boards by withholding money from them or diverting it to other channels. This cripples, not the Boards, but the work of the Church. If any Board should need to be rebuked or corrected, the way to accomplish this is wide open — the General Assembly can completely change or even destroy the Board. No appeal to the General Assembly regarding the condition or action of its Boards goes unnoticed. The Boards are really the disbursing agencies of the Church and they are charged with responsibility for the wise use of money. Beyond them stand the workers who are supported under their responsibility, the institutions and the programs which carry

out the task of the Church. Failing the Boards is failing this host of workers and this vast volume of work. Supporting the work involves supporting the Boards, and it is for this that they make their appeals to the Church. So far as the benevolences of a church are concerned, the first responsibility of the session is to see that the agencies established by the Church are supported, before gifts are diverted to other agencies, no matter how attractive these may be. Christian freedom provides that each trustee of the Lord's money may direct its distribution according to what he believes is his Lord's will, but so long as certain agencies exist as part of his Church's program for the work of the gospel throughout the world, he takes a heavy responsibility when he weakens them on account of some arbitrary decision against them.

After these accepted agencies are supported, there will be enough support for all other worthy agencies which can make their proper appeal to the church. The session is the best judge of their worth and should take without hesitation the responsibility of approving or disapproving them.

THE QUESTIONS DISCUSSED IN THIS CHAPTER

1. What are Church Boards? How do they originate? To what official body are they related in the Presbyterian Church?
2. From what area are the members of the Boards drawn? What is the determining principle?
3. What is the principle that determines the amount of salary normally paid to missionaries and similar Church workers?
4. What constitutes the "staff" of a Board?
5. What is the General Council? Who is its head? its clerk?
6. What are the present "Boards" of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.? Where are their headquarters located? How are they connected with the agencies of other Churches?

SUBJECTS FOR FURTHER THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. The value and danger of organized Church Boards for benevolent purposes; the question of "overhead"; an analysis of the

Annual Report of each Board on its financial side; an analysis of each Report on its actual work.

2. Under what conditions a session would be justified in diverting gifts or interest from these organized agencies of the denomination — are there any such conditions?

3. The attitude of the local church toward nondenominational or interdenominational agencies; how far such agencies ought to be expected to meet the wishes of the local church before it will take part with the denomination in aiding them.

4. The Pension Plan of the Presbyterian Church; the principles on which it operates; the duty of the local church with reference to it.

CHAPTER XII

THE SESSION AND THE PASTOR

MOST PRESBYTERIAN PASTORS would join in grateful testimony to their sessions. The service of the Church would be impossible without them. They have stood by the minister through thick and thin and have upheld his hands as did Aaron and Hur for Moses on the hill, Ex. 17:12. Nothing but the wedded relation is closer and finer than the relation between pastor and elders when it is well maintained.

Of course, when there are so many pastors and so many elders, it may be expected that this testimony will not be universal. One of the tragedies of the Church is the occasional feud or difficulty which occurs between session and pastor. There is apt to be blame on both sides. Elders do not always know the duties and demands of the ministry. They have had no such training as the minister is expected to have before he can enter the ministry, a training which inevitably gives him a larger view of his privileges and obligations than he might otherwise have. It should work in him also a kind of humility and retiringness which does not always appear, so that when a trained minister comes into a church situation and finds things done in a chaotic and disorderly way, he will often cause trouble in attempting to make the necessary correction.

On the other hand, sessions are apt to feel that their knowledge of the actual needs or conditions of the church is clearer and more consecutive than that of the minister, who has recently come or whose many tasks may hide from him some salient facts. There may be some stubbornness on both sides

and an undue sense of personal or official rights. Anything of this kind will spoil what is often the closest fellowship among men. No law can cover the case. The pastor has rights, each elder has rights, the session has rights, but there is only sorrow in claiming them and pressing the claim against others in the one intimate group. The word of Abraham to Lot applies here as well — if people like ourselves cannot get along together, let us separate rather than strive in the presence of the unbelieving world, Gen. 13:8. Quietly and without strife, a pastor or an unreconciled elder ought to leave the relation in which either cannot maintain the Christian spirit of love and loyalty. Such a break of the relation is almost never necessary, and it ought to be made only with a deep sense of shame and sorrow that two who have made their peace with God through Christ cannot make and keep peace between each other. The world can never understand such failure and ought not to be asked to interpret it. Cases are known wherein one elder has refused to speak to another elder or one elder has declined to come to the church or to speak to the minister. Anything of the kind is, of course, deeply unworthy, and is set down here so that anyone who is in danger of such failure may see how it looks when it is put in cold type.

Happily, there is little need for warning about such an obviously unchristian course, and yet the beautiful relation between pastor and session does need to be developed and safeguarded. It may be well to note the legal aspects of the relation.

I. Technical Relationships

1. In the Presbyterian system the elders are the representatives of the people in certain things, but calling, installing, and dismissing a pastor are not among those things. Only the people themselves can call a minister; the utmost a session can do is to arrange for occasional or more stated supply of

the pulpit, and it can do this only with the consent or authorization of the presbytery. When the people have called a minister, it is the presbytery, and not the session or the congregation, which installs him officially in his pulpit and his leadership of the church. The session has no authority over him in his distinctive work as pastor. Meanwhile, the people have elected the session for work which belongs to it and the pastor has no authority over it in these distinctive things, except where, because of the call he has received, they belong jointly to him and to the session. If for any reason it is desired that the relation between pastor and people shall cease, the session has no more to do with the fact than has any other group in the church, save that the members are representative leaders and that it is in the session's power to call a meeting of the congregation. But not even the congregation can dismiss a minister; only the presbytery can do this. He is in the pulpit at the request of the people but by the act of the presbytery, and he is taken out of his pulpit at the wish of the people by the presbytery alone. This is so fully the case that the presbytery itself is properly the pastor of a church when it has no installed pastor. The session is given the power to secure supplies for the vacant pulpit for a limited period under a moderator appointed by the presbytery. Large liberty is always allowed a church in the search for a pastor for a vacant pulpit, but the law of the Church gives authority to the presbytery to supply the pulpit regularly after a vacancy has continued for twelve months, on the ground that there must be some fault if within that time any church cannot find and call a suitable minister.

Elders should learn and should use the prevailing nomenclature of the Presbyterian Church. A man is a "minister" when he is regularly ordained to the ministry, and he does not cease to be a minister when he is without a pastoral charge or when he goes into business, unless he goes through the formal

process called "demitting the ministry," a process which is comparatively rare. Until he does this, or is deposed from the ministry by disciplinary processes, he has all the technical and legal rights of a minister. A college president who is an ordained minister has not "left the ministry" in order to become a president; he is still a minister. No one is a "pastor" except a minister who has been definitely installed in a church. There is no such person as an "acting pastor," nor is it proper to speak of a visiting minister as "our pastor for to-day." A pastor is a permanent church official. His position is not to be reconsidered annually; it is permanent. A "stated supply" is a minister who occupies a pulpit with the approval of presbytery for some definite time but without installation. An occasional occupant of the pulpit is to be spoken of as "the minister for to-day," "the preacher for to-day," or in some similar phrase. In some circles the word "pastor" has become such an official word that elders like the word "minister" instead, but it is not wise to abandon so excellent a term as pastor, when it merely emphasizes the idea of a shepherd; which is the meaning of the word.

During an interim between pastorates the session has a serious responsibility — that of maintaining the spiritual life and interest of the church and of keeping the work in such condition that the coming of a new minister may not be needlessly complicated. Ordinarily the session is the leading influence in seeking a new minister and in keeping before the church the real requirements to be maintained in the search. It is this body which realizes the spiritual needs of the church and insists that a candidate must show power to supply these needs. In the search for a new pastor the session should establish close relations with the appointed committee or official of the presbytery charged with this responsibility. Serious mistakes have been made when sessions have acted without counsel, pursuing plans of their own instead of cooperating

with the existing plans. The committee or official of the presbytery can inform the session regarding the established methods of securing a new pastor, and can give information regarding names suggested in various ways to the church. When it is recalled that the presbytery is ultimately responsible for the pastoral relationship when it is established, it will seem perfectly logical for that body to be consulted at all stages in the securing of a pastor and for it to maintain its constitutional rights in the process.

The process of securing a pastor in a Presbyterian church should be as follows: (a) At a congregational meeting a committee is appointed, or its appointment arranged for, whose duty is to canvass the situation and, in conference with the moderator of the session appointed by the presbytery and in accordance with the provisions of the Form of Government and the rules of the presbytery, to decide upon a minister whose name can be proposed to the congregation at a meeting called for that purpose. This minister is to be selected by inquiry and, whenever possible, without asking him to preach in the vacant pulpit, and the committee should be reasonably satisfied that he will be a suitable pastor if he is called. For this reason, it should not establish impossible standards in its inquiry, nor make undue delays in order to canvass a great many names. It is widely agreed that it is more confusing than helpful to have a number of candidates under serious consideration at the same time. Experience suggests that names should be carefully and candidly considered one by one and disposed of favorably or unfavorably. (b) If the congregation is willing to call the minister whose name is presented, a formal "call" is voted in terms definitely set down in the Form of Government, which is signed by those whom the congregation authorizes to sign it and is certified by the moderator of the meeting, who is always to be a minister of the presbytery of jurisdiction unless this is so inconvenient as

to be virtually impossible, in which case a ruling elder of the congregation may preside. (c) The call is presented to the next or a called meeting of the presbytery by the commissioners appointed for that purpose by the congregation. (d) The presbytery, if it approves it, places the call in the hands of the pastor elect, and if he signifies his acceptance of it, arrangements are made for the formal installation at such time and with such participants as the church may desire and the presbytery can arrange. The installation occurs in the place where the congregation is accustomed to worship. Until this formal installation occurs, the minister is a "pastor elect," and until he becomes a member of the presbytery to which the church belongs he cannot yet moderate its session. Of course, he must be a member of the presbytery before he can be installed, and upon his installation he becomes moderator of the session without further action by presbytery, displacing the moderator appointed for the vacancy.

When the minister is called to become the pastor, at once the elders become in a special sense the representatives of the people in preparing for him and in arranging for his installation and reception. They should accompany him in a body into the church sanctuary when he is installed and should be the first to take the vows in the act of installation. It should be from the session that the pastor gets his first and his most reliable information about the church and its problems and opportunities.

If it should be necessary for the relation to be severed, it is the duty of the session to be cognizant of it and to manage all the details. If the severance is because of unfitness or unsuitability, the session can ease the dismissal immeasurably. An interview should be had with the pastor in which the facts are fraternally and frankly set forth. This will be perfectly possible if the relation has already become close and intimate, as it should be. If there is an estrangement between session

and pastor, this will be a painful process, but it may be none the less necessary. In the interview the pastor is told that it would be wise for him to seek a new location, but it is fatal to demand instantaneous action except for causes that should lead to charges before the presbytery. A minister without a church is placed in a very trying position and he ought always to be allowed time for suitable relocating; this may require some months under the system of the Presbyterian Church. Whether the congregation shall know of this action or not is a matter which the session should decide definitely; it should see that the best interests of the church and of all Christian people concerned are properly conserved. "Snap judgment" in such a matter is unworthy of the fine relation of pastor and people.

If the time should come when a pastor's usefulness has so clearly ceased that he ought no longer to remain even nominally in the pastorate, then the session should make this known to him in all brotherly love, without harshness or bitterness. It must consider carefully whether the church will be drawn together by definite action for severing the relation or possibly divided in sentiment. When it becomes evident that action must be taken, under Presbyterian usage the session calls a meeting of the congregation, when the pastor's resignation is presented and the usual formalities are gone through, including a request that the presbytery dissolve the pastoral relation. If a pastor should not accede to a request for his resignation, the session can ask the congregation to send a request to that effect to the presbytery, which is the sole and final authority in the situation. The presbytery can either require the resignation to be presented or can aid in correcting the conditions which seem to demand its presentation. The session should realize that at all times it has a right to the counsel and guidance of the presbytery in any complication, especially regarding the pastoral relation or duty, though such counsel should be sought only in the most vital situations without the

cordial coöperation of the pastor himself. While the presbytery may be expected to keep the interests of the minister always in mind, yet presbyteries normally think primarily of the church rather than of the minister, sacrificing the minister rather than the church where a choice has to be made.

2. The pastor is a member of the session. He votes whenever a ballot is used. If any vote proves to be a tie, he may give the casting vote, if he thinks best; or he may call for the vote a second time, and if it is again a tie and he is not willing to cast the vote, he declares the motion lost. Gatherings of the elders are not session meetings if the pastor has not been notified and has not had an opportunity to attend. If such gatherings are held the members of the session do not appear as ruling elders but merely as church members. The meetings cannot be recorded, nor can their actions or decisions be official in any sense. Conferences held surreptitiously generally indicate either some specially generous and kindly plan that the pastor is not yet to know or else some regrettable cleavage between pastor and people, which is quite certain to be widened by this method of dealing with it. Perfect and complete frankness is the price of real peace in a church.

The pastor is moderator of the session and, under normal conditions, of all congregational meetings, not by his own desire or by vote of the church, but by the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church. When it seems best, he is permitted to call some other minister of the same presbytery to moderate a particular meeting, preferably with the approval of the session. Under no circumstances should the moderator determine the course of the meetings themselves or the actions of the session. Nor should he preclude full consideration of any matter that comes up, on which the session may claim the right to a judgment. Even the guidance of a moderator should be scrupulously open and admitted.

This moderatorship does not apply to those meetings where

the temporal affairs of the church are being considered, with election of trustees and similar business, unless the civil law requires it, as is seldom the case. The practice of most Presbyterian pastors is to absent themselves from these meetings, which are properly known as meetings of the corporation. The corporation follows its own practice in calling a presiding officer to the chair—sometimes the chairman of the Board of Trustees, sometimes an elder or some other member of the corporation. The pastor is naturally concerned for the temporal affairs of the church, as for all its affairs, but it is wiser for him to refrain from much effort to control them. He cannot refrain, however, if they are being bungled or neglected. In this the session has clear responsibility, and only when it fails does the pastor come into the picture.

Most churches commit the payment of the pastoral salary to the trustees. Since, however, under the Constitution of the Church the session has a supervisory relationship to all trustee actions, this matter is also under its purview, and should be watched over with care. The salary should be promptly paid and, as necessity arises, should be increased from time to time. The session is near enough to the pastor's actual life to know his needs in such matters. The Church law is that "no change shall be made in the amount of salary stipulated in the call without the consent of presbytery, unless both minister and congregation agree thereto; and only the congregation, regularly assembled, shall have power to bring such a question to the attention of presbytery." This means that sessions and trustees have no power to increase or decrease the pastor's salary. If there is a manse, frequent attention should be given to its condition. Churches are sometimes poor landlords.

II. Personal Relationships

The extralegal relation of the elders to the pastor can be expressed in four terms:

1. The elder is a follower when the pastor leads. Of course, the pastor is called to the church for the explicit purpose of "taking charge" of it. He cannot be its boss, nor is he its menial. He is its chief servant, as the word "minister" really implies, but he serves it best by leading it into its largest and best service. In this he is quite helpless if the church will not follow, and the members of the session should naturally be the foremost leaders. The pastor may be expected to have plans and a program, which he discusses with the session. In a kindly-spirited session, the presumption is with the pastor's plans and never against them, and if they can be adopted and followed the session is glad and the elders are the first to commit themselves to them. Sometimes the session counts itself a necessary brake on the activities of the pastor. If he has proved an unsafe leader this may be explained, but unless this has been proved, such a spirit is one of the tragedies of ministerial life. Often earnest ministers complain of the "conservatism" of their sessions, which really means their unwillingness to have anything new attempted and any change made. Sessions sometimes have reason to complain of the ruthlessness of their pastors in changing everything and accomplishing nothing. Between these two extremes the work of the church must move by the leadership of the pastor and the following of the session as the leaders of the church, nearest both pastor and people. Reference is made in III John 9 to a certain Diotrephes, "who loveth to have the preëminence." He has been the father of a large tribe, and when one of his spiritual descendants becomes an elder or a minister it is apt to cause much distress among his associates. Such a man seldom deserves the preëminence which he desires.

2. The elder is a companion of the pastor. He is under the same ordination vows regarding the church. The spiritual care of the people is committed to both pastor and elder. A familiar sign in some churches is: "Remember to pray for our

pastor; he is the only person in the church who has no pastor." When there is a devoted session, the pastor really has the best kind of pastoral care, for a number of men watch over him. There is great comfort in looking down from the pulpit on Sunday and noting a body of men scattered over the church who have become one's intimate friends and on whose prayer and fellowship one may count without limit. A leading Presbyterian pastor has said often, "But for my elders, I should break under this load." He feels that the shoulders of his session have been slipped under his burden. This companionship is peculiarly intimate when any need for discipline occurs in the congregation. Such a condition creates the severest strain on the spirit of both pastor and session. They must keep their ideals in harmony, and must take every step with full understanding of each other. No movement of discipline ought to be made without a virtual unanimity among the elders, and then it should be carried forward by all of them, except in the tragic instance where an elder is himself the subject of discipline. But the session cannot lay the load of the care of the spiritual life of the people on the pastor alone. The duty of prayer and guidance and affectionate solicitude rests on every elder.

3. The elder is a defender of the pastor. No minister can be an aggressive and helpful preacher of the gospel and pastor of the flock without sometimes saying and doing things which are mistakes or which can be misunderstood. Elders are not to be blind to the actual faults of their fellow mortal in the pulpit. They ought not to defend what he does when he does the wrong thing, but they can defend *him* in the midst of regretting his mistakes, because they have reason to believe in him and his genuine desire to be right. They can always refuse to take part in any movement to undermine the pastor or to spread criticism of him. An elder ought to be a graveyard of rumors and gossip, a place where all such things are

instantly buried. He hears criticism and considers carefully whether it should be laid before the minister for his safeguard and warning, but he never retails it or lets anyone think that he is party to it. Persistently a good elder interprets the minister on the best terms and never on the worst. If there are two ways of understanding an action or an expression, one of which is suitable and proper while the other is unworthy and mistaken, his mind automatically moves toward the better way. He takes the goodness and Christian earnestness of his minister for granted as long as honesty will permit him to do so. A minister of such a session knows that the people who will desert him last are his elders.

4. An elder is an adviser of the pastor. He knows that even a young minister is trained in some things beyond the eldership, and he does not settle such things even when they do not please him. In other things he knows that he can help his pastor because of closer acquaintance with certain situations. The matter becomes most delicate as a session feels responsible for the preaching or teaching of the minister. Elders are not always good judges of what ought to be said in a given sermon, but of course they are entirely capable of recognizing when a prevailing divergent line is being followed. Sometimes a dominant or "leading" elder likes to have certain things stressed and is not content until he has the kind of minister who will stress them. He will sometimes arrange with the session or the congregation for a privately constructed set of doctrinal questions or tests which a possible occupant of the pulpit must face before he can be called to the church—a practice which is quite beyond the prerogatives of individual Presbyterian congregations. Such brethren should be reminded that no local Presbyterian church is permitted to frame its own creed or establish its own arbitrary tests of either membership, pastorate, or preaching. The Presbyterian Church works under an established system, in which its creed

for both pastors and members is settled by the body at large and never by an individual church. A Presbyterian minister is under vows to preach the gospel of Christ as fully as he can, and he must not be forced to narrow his gospel to any of its details, great as these may be. If, however, any elder feels that erroneous things have been said or that vital matters are being omitted, his immediate duty is to confer with the minister in loving frankness. He is not to grumble as he goes down the aisle, nor to discuss the matter with his friends of similar mind, nor to stay away from the sanctuary where he is under solemn vows, nor to broadcast charges against the minister. If he has really caught the spirit of his office, he will go over the whole matter with his minister, perhaps in the regular session meeting, having made sure that his own heart is right and that he speaks with love and not with arrogance or with any suggestion that he alone is wise and devoted. He will gladly accept explanations which clear the difficulty and he will let the rest of the people know of them.

In church work an elder is an indispensable adviser of the pastor. He hears complaints which should be answered in some way. He learns of needs to be supplied. He hears the favorable words which so cheer a pastor's heart. He can lay the desires of the church before the pastor, knowing that desires are not always the same as needs and may sometimes have to be denied.

But no elder can do these helpful things, nor hold this helpful relation to the pastor, merely on occasion. If he waits until the need becomes pressing he will ruin his influence. To come near a pastor only when he is to be criticized and condemned is to make nearness impossible. The intimacy must be formed early and kept alive continuously. In such a case every form of aid is possible and natural. In a conference one day a pastor spoke regretfully of the fact that though he had been in his church for several years his elders had shown him no per-

sonal courtesies; they seemed to think of him merely as a man paid so much to do his work. He had been honored by election to the General Assembly, but his session had allowed him to pay personally for the supply of his pulpit, though he was away on official business. When his father had died he had been away one Sunday and they had expected him to pay for a supply. None of them seemed to think of anything else. It indicated a poor relation between elders and pastor.

This chapter is written for elders, and the possible failure of pastors is not therefore accented. Some ministers have failed to accept or adopt the principles taught in their courses of training; some lack tact; some lack common sagacity. If the chapter were written for ministers this would need to be stressed, but elders should realize that they have to get along with only one pastor, while pastors have to get along with several elders!

THE QUESTIONS DISCUSSED IN THIS CHAPTER

1. Why do misunderstandings arise between pastors and sessions? What is Christian duty under such conditions?
2. What is the relation of the session to the calling and installing of a pastor? What is the difference between a "supply," a "pastor," and a "minister"? When does a man cease to be a "pastor"? How does he cease to be a "minister"?
3. How is a mistaken pastoral relation severed?
4. Of what meetings is the pastor moderator? When is he not the moderator? What is the relation of the session to his salary?
5. What are the extralegal relations of the elders to the pastor? How far are they responsible for his sermons?

SUBJECTS FOR FURTHER THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. Thinking over any unfortunate church trouble you may have known, what was the point and the method whereby it could have been prevented or ended? Let there be a discussion of this.
2. The permanence of the pastoral relation — its values, its dan-

gers; whether frequent changes of pastoral relations are helpful or hurtful; how they can be prevented or accomplished.

3. The possibilities of service in frank criticism of the pastor by the session; on what lines criticism is apt to be most helpful; how far the doctrine of the pastor should be criticized by the session.

CHAPTER XIII

THE ELDER A SPIRITUAL LEADER

IN THIS CHAPTER should be found the enabling power of all suggestions in the other chapters. When the requirements of the eldership are faithfully presented, a thoughtful man is apt to feel that he ought not to accept the office. In our familiar translation of II Cor. 2:16, the apostle exclaims, "And who is sufficient for these things?" and we feel that he is saying, "No one!" But our later and more exact translations express it in this way: "But who is adequate for this undertaking? I am!" Of course Paul explains that his adequacy comes, not from himself or his ability, but from his gospel message and the grace of God given him in the Holy Spirit. If any man is asked whether he can be an adequate Presbyterian elder, meeting the requirements and rendering the service of this high office, he may easily exclaim, "Who can do it?" But as he thinks farther and realizes the power that is offered to any man who sincerely seeks to serve the cause of Christ, he may well say, "Why not I, since I have given myself to Christ for his service?"

I. Maintaining the Personal Spiritual Life

Before an elder can be a spiritual leader, he must be a spiritual man, a man to whom the things of religion are really dear. He may manifest his spirituality in ways which are not natural to other men, and their ways may be equally unreal to him, but spirituality must not be identified with any par-

ticular way of manifesting it. Some men are highly and beautifully emotional; other men would find emotional piety unreal. Some men are strongly intellectual in their bent, reasoning things out and glorying in their logic; other men find that method cold and forbidding, wanting to see truth directly and without argument. All may be equally and truly spiritual, giving highest place to the spiritual life and its values, however much time they spend on other things. No man who holds the souls of men cheaply should become an elder. No man can be a suitable elder if he thinks that the spiritual relations of men — to God and to each other — are negligible interests. On the other hand, this spirituality ought not to be peculiar to elders, for it is of the very essence of being a truly religious man at all. It is never a good thing when all elders in a session are alike in their ways of showing spiritual interest. If a man is asked to enter a session and finds that he is not like the prevailing type of men in that body, he may ask whether this is not an argument for his accepting the invitation. Religion is not a condition in which all men are alike, but a richly varied life, in which men differ widely while all have the same essential concern for spiritual things.

This suggests that an elder ought to consider whether he is maintaining the practices which keep spiritual interest alive. Nothing in Presbyterian rules requires that an elder lead in public prayer. Many earnest and godly men do almost nothing in public and they can hardly be expected to utter their prayers before others. Some very helpful elders feel that they cannot do it. Once in a while a man declines to become an elder for this reason. It is not a good reason for declining, since it is no requirement for ordination. At the same time, every elder ought to ask himself very seriously whether he should not develop the power to utter petitions in the presence of the people. One difficulty is the language ordinarily used

in prayer — “thee” and “thou,” “wilt” and “canst,” and the like. It seems almost a strange language to a beginner, yet prayer without it seems stranger still. Somehow speaking to God as “You” sounds peculiar, no matter how reverently it is meant. But hesitant men may reassure themselves by the knowledge that very brief practice will do away with this difficulty. The accustomed language of prayer is as regular in its forms as is the common speech and it is the familiar usage of the Bible. The best preparation for helpful public prayer is to saturate oneself with passages from The Psalms or similar portions of the Scripture. Of course it would be better for a sincere man who really wants to lead in prayer to make verbal blunders than to keep silent. It is often said that when Dwight L. Moody led in his first prayer, his pastor advised him not to try it again because of his poor phrasing. The same thing is told of Robert E. Lee. Leadership in public prayer is not an essential in Christian service, but it is a helpful spiritual service and no man ought to abstain from it unless he really must. If an elder is sure that it is not in God’s will for him to do this, then he must not allow himself to be disturbed by the desire of other men that he shall do so, nor allow a mistaken standard of sessional duty to unsettle his mind. “To his own master he standeth or falleth.” But he must not allow the difficulty of it to hinder his valiant effort to gain the power of such leadership. The General Assembly has suggested to pastors that they might sometimes call an elder into the pulpit to lead in the church prayer.

An elder’s spiritual leadership is greatly enhanced also if he can speak with other men frankly and helpfully about Christ. He may do this in semipublic meetings or only in private. Most churches have one or two — sometimes many more — elders who are exceedingly helpful in midweek meetings or in the intimate gatherings of the church, and at times they occupy the pulpit. Those who have this gift may be a

cause for discouragement to more timid men who cannot do so well. But the eldership is not a talking office, and the power to speak in public is quite incidental, a kind of extra endowment of some men. Many excellent elders, who serve with complete fidelity and blessing, cannot add this service to the others. It is still true, however, that personal testimony can be borne by very hesitant men, and that halting words by one who is not gifted in public speech are often more effective and weighty than eloquent words by an easy speaker. When an elder attempts to gain some one for Christ by speaking with him personally the effect is often more forceful than when a trained man does it. Probably one reason why speaking on religion is so difficult is that it is the one great interest for which public speakers are fully trained, as in the ministry. Laymen and elders are in the presence of such men all the time and the best that they can do often seems poor when compared with the fluent words of these trained speakers. But an elder often speaks nearer to the hearts of the people in these more intimate groups than does the minister. It is a mighty arm of spiritual service and a man ought to be very sure that he cannot acquire the ability to take at least some part in such leadership before he abandons the effort. This is peculiarly the case in the matter of spiritual appeal to individuals. The pastor of one large Presbyterian church states that no Communion service has come for some years when at least one new believer has not appeared through the efforts of a quite unimpressive and unobtrusive man who is always watching for a chance to make his Christian appeal to individuals.

An elder ought to examine himself regarding faulty habits which might cut him off from certain lines of influence. There are practices which are not wicked but which some Christians do not approve. These Christians sometimes insist that no elder should adopt these practices. In such cases the elder

makes his own decision. He cannot allow other people to lay out his life for him, and especially he cannot allow himself to be limited by mere notions. At the same time he must ask himself carefully whether the disputed practices do enrich his life through the pleasure they bring. Is he a better servant of Christ because of them? Let him claim his liberty so far as other people are concerned, but let him be sure that it is liberty in Christ that he claims. Partly as an elder, partly as an older believer, he is inevitably thought of by some observers as having the highest Christian standards, and he cannot be indifferent to the dangers that come from even seeming to lower his standards for the sake of any disputed practice. This is not a matter for elders alone; it is a matter of Christian influence anywhere and all the time.

II. *Caring for Spiritual Life in Others*

The elder is a spiritual caretaker, watching for the souls of other men.

1. His spiritual power is tested most severely when he sees people of his church following wrong paths and failing in Christian duty. Church discipline is by no means a thing of the past. Trials and prolonged processes are not frequent and that is probably just as well. But personal and sessional inquiries and corrections are not nearly so rare as some observers suppose. They are not public and their results are not announced. But so long as the Church is a true brotherhood, there will be times when older or more experienced brothers will labor with erring ones in behalf of the better life. This is peculiarly the duty of the session.

The errors with which elders have to deal are seldom those of belief and creed. The Presbyterian Church sets no standard for these items before its communicant members. All its doctrinal standards are for its ordained officers alone. Many

people who could not be elders because of their doctrinal views can be excellent Church members in spite of such views. Hence, the errors of Church members are those of conduct and character, and these are far more subtle than doctrinal heresies. The Book of Discipline of the Presbyterian Church is quite explicit as to details of procedure when the case must come to formal process, but it is always to be hoped that this need not occur and that the session and pastor may bring offending members to a better condition by personal and fraternal methods which do not involve what most people mean by "discipline." Here the spirit of the session is of vast importance. In times of excitement or in the presence of some notorious wrong, it is easy and natural to take drastic action, to cut off the offender, nominally for the sake of the Church. This is always a mistake unless the offender is impenitent and recalcitrant. No one is to be cut off from the Church for its defense. That can be left to God. The eye of the Church is on the offender, not on its own safety. And sin must never be allowed to break the Christian brotherhood; only impenitence does that. If sin did it, we should all be cut off — pastor, elders, everybody. But the Church is a home for penitent sinners. Its "purity" is maintained by its attitude toward sin, not by its attitude toward sinners. This is especially to be remembered when the sinner is notorious and when the world sneers at the Church for harboring such a one. The session must satisfy itself that the offender is recalcitrant and impenitent before it acts against him. The Church is the one institution that is strong enough and brave enough to keep its hold on a sinner when all the rest of the social order casts him off. If he is defiant and rebellious, impenitent and bitter, he may well be put out of the fellowship — not for its sake, but for his own; not because the other members of the church need to be protected from him, but because he shows by his own wish and action that he desires to leave

the brotherhood. Even then he is cut off in the hope that this may bring him to repentance, and not with the thought that the church must punish.

All this is clearly impossible except as the session maintains a strong spiritual life in the presence of the church. Otherwise the elders will be counted merely too cowardly to cut off a member, or too indifferent to care about the quality of the membership. A definitely spiritual session takes the edge off any sneer of worldly observers that the Church is willing to have offenders in its ranks. If the church is not to harbor penitent sinners, where are they to go? Some men criticized Jesus for mingling with publicans and sinners, Luke 19:7, but his disciples came to know him so well that when he talked with a common woman in a public place they did not complain about it, John 4:27. The Church will never be injured by being friendly to penitent sinners, even though their sin has been notorious. A sincere session can eschew any criticism of this sort. Elders are exactly the men who ought to befriend sinners and the Church should be made a natural home for them.

2. In other lines of service the elder needs adequate spiritual vigor. The increase in the size of churches makes pastoral calling more and more difficult for any one man, and the increase of staff in a large church is apt to make it too professional or technical. There is need for an increase of old-fashioned visiting among church people, especially in hours of personal or family need. When elders help in this service, remembering the sick and the bereaved, the poor and the distressed, it makes a much finer church life. No elder will do this unless he cares genuinely for the souls of others. Even in the earliest day Paul found only a few helpers who did this, Phil. 2:20, 21. Most elders, like most other men, are hard driven by their duties in and out of the church, and it is difficult to find time for these deeds of kindness which bring so much

cheer to needy people. There is no magic about doing it and there are no secrets of finding time for it. The only secret is to allow such ministries to loom larger than other things. The time for them can then be frankly taken from less important things.

Every elder is a richer servant of his Master if he has even a small list of people whom he visits as an elder and as a friend for Christ's sake. Many pastors can testify to the blessing which such elders bring to a church. In some Reformed churches this session duty is carried much farther, and the pastor is expected to call in regular rotation on all the families once a year, in each case accompanied by one or more of the elders. Besides this, each elder has a group for whom he is responsible, including those who are shut in or in deep trouble, as well as the aged and infirm. As the church grows larger, this annual visitation of every family may become physically impossible, but the responsibility of the session is not changed, and the recompense of such service is so great that its increase is to be strongly urged. It will not be done unless elders maintain a real spiritual life whereby their hearts go out sincerely to others in their need or loneliness.

A similar spiritual leadership can be expressed in an elder's attitude toward young people. It is a mistake to suppose that young people object to true spirituality. No group is more sensitive to its presence or more contemptuous of its pretense. If it appears as mere pious talk or as shocked protest against youthful practices and inclinations, or if it is coupled with inconsistency or religious arrogance, most young people will detect its falsity at once. But when a friend is truly spiritual, and cares for them in the most important elements of their lives, young people welcome it. No relation of an elder counts for more than does his connection with young people, not only because of themselves but because of their parents and companions. When young people feel at home in

the church, especially on the terms of real spiritual relationship, the strongest type of church develops. Committees often look for a pastor who can draw and hold the young people, but a session has great power in this regard. The elders have to be sympathetic with the life of young people, ready to guide when guidance is needed. Every session needs two or three men who are the young people's natural points of contact with the church. They need not be young men themselves, except in spirit. In one church this natural friend of the young people was the senior elder, well in his eighties, but any young person would have gone to him as naturally with a suggestion for the session as if he had been a member of the Young People's Society. A deeply spiritual life is not forbidding or restraining to others if it is warm and winsome. Such a life may not be natural to some elders and may need to be developed; but it is a constant blessing to a church.

In this relation to young people the session cannot be too watchful. A most helpful way of insuring a right attitude is to have among the elders a fair number of really young members who have been brought into the session earlier than would seem natural in order that they may catch the traditions of the high office and be thoroughly ready for its full responsibilities as they grow older. This is no new custom. Several elders have celebrated their fiftieth anniversary in the eldership and yet have barely turned seventy, which indicates that they were ordained when or before they were twenty — and this happened fifty years ago! Depending on the size of the session, there should be from one to three really young members, not to "represent" the young people, but to maintain the youth of the session itself and to prepare for the future. But if they are brought into the session, they must be treated as real elders, not as youths to be disciplined by their fathers in the faith. They should be given responsibilities and reckoned as worthy of honor as the oldest of their colleagues.

The elder is a spiritual leader by virtue of his obligation to the church. His life is in some sense a thermometer, indicating the spiritual temperature of the people. The session determines the warmth of devotion and consecration of those who put its members in office. If the elders are cold formalists or mere dead-and-alive Christians, then the church is apt to be of the same sort. If they are earnest, spiritually minded men, devoted to Christ and his cause, the church is quite certain to be of the same sort. There is opportunity here to set the pace for the whole church, to guide its spiritual development, to maintain its religious standards. Any man might covet the opportunity even though he trembles at the responsibility. No man himself is adequate for it, but any man who will sincerely put himself at the disposal of the Spirit of God, to be made fit for it and maintained in it, can rightly accept its heavy burden and expect to render its full service. He must first of all see himself as one set for spiritual leadership — no unnatural or unreal human being, but a genuine and unqualified follower of Christ to whom the Spirit of God may give wisdom and strength. For this purpose he must guard his own spiritual life in his home and elsewhere. It was an elder who said: "I can give you a prescription for the cure of all the sick churches in the world; it will raise any church from the dead. Here's the formula: one chapter of the Bible and one fervent prayer; mix, and take each morning after rising, and each night before retiring, in the home, with the family gathered around." Elders are naturally the ones to lead in this in their own lives and homes, and in all the practices which make a vigorous Christian life, and in doing so they receive the greatest reward. No men are more honored in the church than they, and none more generally deserve the honor they receive. The strength of the Presbyterian Church lies in a marked degree in its eldership. As the elders advance in spiritual power it gains power for its great mission.

THE QUESTIONS DISCUSSED IN THIS CHAPTER

1. How does an elder become fitted to so high an office? What is meant by being "spiritual"? Are there any inherently unspiritual men?
2. What are the practices which an elder needs to cultivate? Are there practices which he should avoid?
3. What is the duty of the session in the matter of discipline? Where are the rules governing discipline to be found? How is the "purity" of the Church revealed?
4. What is the duty of an elder with reference to young people? Are young elders desirable?
5. When is an elder honored in the church? What are his chief rewards?

SUBJECTS FOR FURTHER THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. Church discipline: whether it should be increased; what attitude the session should take toward notorious sinners or members who flout the Church and their membership in it.
2. Standards of conduct suitable for an elder; whether it is necessary for him to avoid practices which are commonly accepted in the circles in which he lives.
3. How far an elder can be required to take public part in the church, leading in prayer, speaking in meetings, and the like.
4. How spirituality can be developed and maintained; the difficulty of making standards for it by which other men can be measured; the necessity that each elder find the way in which his own life can be made most worthy of so high an office.

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