

**COMMENTS ON THE PRACTICE
OF
CONTEMPORARY POLITY
IN THE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA**

**Buswell Library
Covenant Theological Seminary
12330 Conway Road
St. Louis, MO 63141**

Donald J. Mac Nair
Adjunct Professor, COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

and

President, CHURCHES VITALIZED

C Copyright

BX
8968.56
.M36
1995

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|---------|
| STATEMENT ON POLITY | PAGE 1 |
| CONCEPTUALIZING THE CHURCH | PAGE 27 |
| CONNECTIONALISM | PAGE 32 |
| PCA HERITAGE | PAGE 36 |
| SUBSCRIPTION | PAGE 40 |
| DANGERS, STRENGTHS AND A PROPOSED RESOLUTION FOR TENSIONS FLOWING FROM DIFFERENT VIEWS ON SUBSCRIPTION | PAGE 57 |
| APPENDIX A: POWER IN THE CHURCH | PAGE 67 |
| APPENDIX B: PLACE OF THE STATED CLERK | PAGE 70 |
| APPENDIX C: ACCOUNTABILITY AND SUBMISSION | PAGE 72 |

7.75
11

CHURCH POLITY, February, 1995

CTS PT551

This course is based on the government of the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA. It will be taught in such a way that the student, whether or not he is a member of the PCA, should be benefited by a comprehension of the structure and the areas of strengths and those that might be strengthened which are evident in this particular Church.

THE OBJECTIVES FOR THE COURSE

To enable the student to relate the concepts of the Church of Jesus Christ to the local, particular church.

To provide the student with a basic knowledge of the governmental documents of the Church.

To enable the student to understand how the various parts of the organizational structure of the Church relate to each other in order to support the life (organism) of the Church.

To enable the student to have a grasp of at least the major issues now shaping, possibly controlling, the PCA.

FINAL

Those taking the course for credit will be given a final exam within two weeks after the completion of the course. It is an honor-exam.

You may use any books or notes that you care to use. You may return it to my box (Administration Building) any time, but not later than two weeks before final exams begin.

However, you may not discuss the exam with anyone until the week of final exams. You must finish the exam in one and one half hours.

Please type the exam. Do not be concerned about minor corrections. Be sure to put your box number on the paper.

STATEMENT ON POLITY
of the
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

INTRODUCTION

The PCA was founded with the vision to be a truly biblical Presbyterian Church, unique in its commitment to the Scriptures; to experiential love for the Lord, and to dependence upon the Holy Spirit to bond all the relationships within the body. Its members also had a healthy fear that leadership could (probably with ease) again bring authoritative power lording over its men and organizations by individuals and organizations. That fear was well grounded in its immediate past experience. However, to be controlled by fear rather than to learn from it while proceeding to harness the zeal for its vision leads to draining the life out of the organism. We believe the Church has not yet given up some of the negative (controlling) aspects of that fear, but it can and must be done.

The PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA's vision is totally dependent only on one dynamic: that the organism will keep alive, vital and vision-driven so long as it depends on the Holy Spirit to enable it to maintain spiritual emphasis in its life and ministries. This comes with learning to be Spirit-driven and with having biblical concern to benefit from the lessons of the past on the one hand while operating without fear of permissible flexibility and diversity on the other hand.

We believe that the Holy Spirit's leading has guided the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA to develop both conceptual polity which governs all of its life and ministries and the operational polity by which it structures them. Together they provide this balance.

Through understanding and applying both of these sets of polity the dynamic of the Holy Spirit's leading is and will continue to be the dynamic determining the parameters of its permissible flexibility and diversity and thus provide the guidelines that will enable the Church to exercise and enjoy that balance.

The PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA can be a Church with shepherd oversight and sensitivity to hurting people, a Church not afraid to maintain itself as the pillar and foundation of truth in a pluralistic world suffering from the emptiness of modernity. It can be the powerful presence of the Lord Jesus that we long to see in this needy world.

EXPOSITION: CHURCH POLITY

The PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA affirms that the presbyterian form of government is the "scriptural form of church government" (BCO 1-1). By this we mean that Jesus Christ, as King of the Church, has given us offices through which he governs his Church, according to his Word. It is revealed that these same officers - elders and deacons - should be elected by the people whom they serve and that the extent of their powers is only ministerial and declarative. God has also demonstrated in the Scriptures how the various churches are to be formally connected in broader courts for the purpose of unified praise and fellowship, mutual edification, theological reflection, church discipline, ministries of compassion and world evangelism.

The PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA is a particular Reformed Church, living and serving in a particular culture and moment of history. There are aspects of our polity that are unique in Reformation Church history. This is due, partially, to the fact that the America church/state relationship and the pluralistic nature of the American culture present unique demands and opportunities. We are absolutely committed to remaining faithful to the unchanging truths of God's Word by being true to our confession. Thus we shall honor our historic presbyterian principles of church government yet shall always remain open and eager to change those aspects of our polity that should be influenced by our ecclesiastical and cultural contexts.

CONCEPTUAL POLITY
GOVERNING THE UNDERSTANDING AND APPLICATION
OF ALL THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF THE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA:

SECTION 1. THE CHURCH VISIBLE

ARTICLE I:

WE AFFIRM that the PREFACE and the PRELIMINARY PRINCIPLES of the BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER governs the interpretation of all PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH in AMERICA polity.

WE DENY the validity of any interpretation of PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH in AMERICA polity or any conclusion drawn from it that does not conform to all the tenants of these documents.

RATIONALE; The Westminster Assembly Divines forged a unique and courageous set of governing principles for the church. These principles reflect God's providence in bringing these men together in the first place for such a long period of time. They also reflect His providence in forcing them to pray, think and make

decisions in the context of immense political pressures and very sharp differences in personal convictions.

The national trauma under "Bloody Mary", the events that followed and the fact that many in the Parliament wanted to exercise their authority over the church forced hard praying and decision-making.

The impact of the Puritan movement, the dogmatic attitude of the Independents and the ever present force of the state-control (Erastian) group of members further forced hard praying and decision making.

The basic concepts were forged there.

At the 1788 Assembly in our country, under the leadership of John Witherspoon, extensive revision was effected. The American Church adopted its governing polity and has continued to use it.

Our statement of PREFACE, and of PRELIMINARY PRINCIPLES has already passed through the fire, has been used with great blessing and should continue to be used as providentially provided principles to govern our application of church polity.

ARTICLE II:

WE AFFIRM that the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH in AMERICA is in the historic stream of true Presbyterianism, and is a branch of the visible Church of Christ.

WE DENY that the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH in AMERICA fails to be a branch of the true Church of Christ by not being a so-called 'main-line' denomination..

RATIONALE: The PCA, although relatively young for a denomination, has since its inception maintained the historic Reformed characteristics of the Church as structured in the Apostolic period.

SUPPORT:

GENERAL SUPPORT:

1. BCO PREFACE I: Jesus Christ is the Head and King of the church;
2. WCF I-2 & BCO 19-3; 21-5 (1); 25-4 (1)"; II Tim.3:16 "...Scriptures...to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule and practice" ;

REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT SUPPORT:

1. Acts 1: 13-26; BCO PREFACE I: All offices in the church take origin from the Lord Jesus;
2. Acts 1: 13-26; TITUS 1; 5: BCO PRELIMINARY PRINCIPLES (6); Officers are chosen by the people;
3. Acts 14: 23; Acts 20: 17: Each church has a plurality of elders;
4. Acts 8: 17; Acts 19:6: Ordination is the act of a plurality of elders (Presbytery)(I Tim. 4:14);
5. Acts 15: Difference may be referred to assemblies of elders, with the results bearing upon the lives of the churches;
6. Mt. 28: 19-20; BCO 14 - 1 (3): "...the work of the Great Commission is one work..."

EXPOSITION

It is a very dangerous thing for any Christian to neglect or hold the church in contempt of the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom has been given the keys of the Kingdom and the ordinances of God. Divine authority was given to the Church by God's Word for our good.

Of all forms of church government, the presbyterian form most nearly conforms to the government of the church in the New Testament. The seeds of episcopacy were sown in the post-apostolic Church by the mid-second century. As time progressed, the influence of the senior ministers of the Churches of Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, Alexandria and Constantinople increased as means of maintaining orthodoxy and increasing efficiency. With the legalization of Christianity by the Edict of Milan in A.D. 313, the Church took on more of the structure of the civil government.

One of the reforms effected by Calvin in the Reformation was the restoration of presbyterian government to the Church. But even within presbyterianism there were different perspectives of the details.

Presbyterianism in America began with the sense of total equality, which well-suited the American experience with a disestablished Church, but over the years it evolved into a patrician model. The PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA at its founding in 1773 reintroduced the equality model (see the "grass-roots" position of the 14th General Assembly (1986) in THE PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR PCA STRUCTURE). Its presbyterianism ensures that no church can usurp the powers reserved in our constitution for the

other church courts (BCO 11-4). No higher court can act for a lower court in a 'civil' function nor can it resort to the civil court to enforce its decision against a lower court.

ARTICLE III:

WE AFFIRM that the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH in AMERICA believes in and practices biblical connectionalism.

WE DENY that biblical connectionalism permits congregationalism.

RATIONALE: Biblical connectionalism is based upon two premises.

First, each congregation of the denomination is specially arranged by God (I Cor. 12:18) as to the mix of people and gifts it has. Therefore, the identity and integrity of each congregation must be maintained in its connection with the other churches of the Presbytery. The freedom of voluntary membership in the Church and the sole ownership of its own properties go far in enabling each church to maintain its identity and integrity.

Secondly, connectionalism provides necessary strength and blessing each congregation must have to be fully developed. The relationship with these other (sister) churches benefits each congregation by affording them accountability, fellowship, opportunity to rejoice in the overall work of God in the area, and by providing opportunity to assist the other churches in a variety of ways, and to participate with them in accomplishing the work of the Great Commission more effectively than any one church could do.

These two dynamics are the basis for the commitment that the churches "...have a mutual relation so that every act of jurisdiction is an act of the whole Church performed by one of its appropriate organs." (BCO 11-4). Note that this places every act except jurisdiction as a mutual relation-oriented act, whereas acts of jurisdiction is an act of the whole Church.

SUPPORT:

- BCO 11-4: exercising exclusive original jurisdiction for each church court;
- BCO 11-4: the lower courts are subject to the review and control of the higher courts;
- BCO 11-4: each court is an independent tribunal;
- BCO 11:4: they have a mutual relation and every act of jurisdiction is the act of the whole church performed through the appropriate organ.

SECTION 2. THE CONGREGATION AND THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
AS LIVING SPIRITUAL BODIES

ARTICLE IV:

WE AFFIRM that the members of each local congregation are that particular mix of people and gifts arranged by the Holy Spirit to be the unique visible body of Christ for that place in that time.

WE DENY that to be a healthy denomination, the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA may have no permissible flexibility and diversity of practices among its many churches.

RATIONALE: Unity is not the same as unification. To insist that every PCA congregation is to be structured according to one approved model (which equals being 'cloned' into unification) is anti-scriptural.

SUPPORT:

- I Cor. 12:18; I Cor. 12:7; I Peter 4:10
- I Cor. 3:16; I Cor. 12:12-27;

ARTICLE V:

WE AFFIRM that the use of church government is essential for a congregation to be a healthy organism and that Presbyterianism is biblical.

WE FURTHER AFFIRM that biblical church government is the ordinary means used by the Holy Spirit to rule and teach "...by the ministry of men...mediately exercising His own authority and enforcing His own laws, unto the edification and establishment of His Kingdom" (PREFACE TO THE BCO) .

WE DENY that any church can exist without the use of church government, and that non-biblical forms serve the body by strengthening it to become a vital, spiritual organism.

RATIONALE: (See ARTICLE II).

ARTICLE VI:

WE AFFIRM that the bonding of members into a vital, vibrant organism of spiritual nature and power comes through the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in each congregation.

WE DENY that charismatic leadership, marketing-oriented growth planning or organizational structure brings biblical bonding.

RATIONALE: See RATIONALE for ARTICLE VII)

ARTICLE VII:

WE AFFIRM that the bonding ministry of the Holy Spirit, which makes the congregation the organism which is the dwelling of God in our midst ("...the dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit..."), the presence of Jesus Christ in our world now, is ordinarily accomplished by using godly servant/leader elders to motivate and guide in his bonding ministry.

WE DENY that men taking the oaths of ordination without understanding them and being morally convinced of them are capable of being godly servant/leader elders.

RATIONALE: See ARTICLE 1X.

ARTICLE VIII:

WE AFFIRM that elder leadership must be responsive to the Holy Spirit for guidance to lead the congregation into a growing, wholesome understanding of and commitment to using the Reformed system of doctrine, in the context of pure love and grace, as the basis upon which their world-life view is developed.

WE DENY that the pastor and elders of any congregation are leaders who are properly responding to the Holy Spirit, if they lead the church to adopt as its primary focus the perception that

doctrine apart from evident love or who substitute as primary administrative or constitutional matters are the ways the Holy Spirit uses to make a vital, vibrant organism of believers with the biblical world-life view.

RATIONALE: See ARTICLE IX.

ARTICLE IX:

WE AFFIRM that elder leadership, which is responsive to the Holy Spirit, will seek his guidance to engage the members in meaningful decision-making in all areas of the church's life and ministries which are not mandated by the BCO for the Session to accomplish.

WE DENY that all decision-making being done by elders (with no participation by non-elders wherever the BCO does not mandate the elders to make the decisions) and/or massive numbers of activities and programs for the membership can be considered guidance by the Holy Spirit as substitutes for the necessary input of the membership which God arranged to make up that particular congregation.

WE FURTHER DENY that such leadership will enable the church to be the presence of Christ in our world now.

RATIONALE - ARTICLES VII, VIII & VIX: The Bible states directly that the work of bonding is the work of God (I Cor. 12:24). He calls on the elders to lead the church well (I Tim.5:17). He ordinarily uses participation in the sacraments, prayer, sharing, fellowship, jointly serving in his Kingdom, and enjoying the benefits of his blessing in various serving experiences lived under the elders' leading as His means for bonding.

The church is warned to take into account that it is not called to a "...mountain that can be touched and is burning with fire...", but to "...the heavenly Jerusalem...You have come to God...See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks."

These affirmations and denials demonstrate that godly leadership, expressed in the context of natural servanthood and humility coming from the perceived importance God places on the local church by way of his love for it (Rev. 21:2) and its place in his present economy (Eph.2:22; 3:10), is that which is used in the Spirit's ministry of bonding and leadership not demonstrating these qualities is not used.

SUPPORT:

- Mt. 18:20; I Cor. 12:24; Eph. 2:22; 3:10; I Tim 5:17;
- Heb. 12:14-25; Rev. 22;2
- WCF XXV-1
- BCO 12-5

ARTICLE X:

WE AFFIRM that the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA's congregations function as viable, spiritual organisms (assisted by organization) by the elders teaching and modeling the practice of trusting each other in the context of mutual love and confidence.

WE DENY that life and ministry of the congregation as a healthy spiritual organism is possible on any other basis.

RATIONALE: See RATIONALE for ARTICLE XII.

ARTICLE XI:

WE AFFIRM that congregations practice mutual love and confidence because of their commitment that all members, redeemed and adopted by the gracious work of Jesus Christ on the cross, are equally precious to the Lord.

WE DENY any lesser conviction will allow for the members to appreciate the birthright of Christianity that all of the Lord's own are equal in his sight.

RATIONALE: See **RATIONALE** for **ARTICLE XII**.

ARTICLE XII:

WE AFFIRM that fear of improprieties or the trauma of stressful circumstances do not warrant any substitution for practicing mutual love and confidence.

WE DENY that civil courts, heritage and/or finances are true bonding agents or acceptable substitutes even under stressful circumstances for any church.

RATIONALE - ARTICLES X, XI, & XII: Besides trusting each other, there are only two other premises upon which bodies of people can function without quickly falling into chaos. Neither are God honoring.

They can function for a time under fear (of those who lead them or as a common enemy). This is not the biblical premise for a spiritual organism, since the Bible teaches that "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The man who fears is not made perfect in love". (I John 4:18).

They can also function for a time for selfish gain. This is so patently non-biblical (note Paul's testimony: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" Phil. 1:19) that it is self evident that it cannot create a spiritual nor even a lasting organism.

In order to be vital and vibrant congregations they must trust one another.

SUPPORT:

- Rom. 8:14; Phil. 1:19; I John 4:18

ARTICLE XIII:

WE AFFIRM that biblical oversight and submission relationships within the family, local congregation and the denomination are God's directives for growing into Christ and for healthy Christian relationships.

WE DENY that God's directive for oversight and submission relationships are not possible in today's culture.

RATIONALE: The PCA is committed to the biblical injunction to practice spiritual oversight. It believes that this is the way in which the Fatherhood of God is made realistic as the very source of comfort, guidance, blessing and discipline to each of his children. Thus, submission becomes God's governing policy as the way to most easily discern His will and most readily enjoy His blessing, regardless of the modernity, pluralism and secularism of today's culture.

It teaches submission as the way of life for the families of

the church.

It also teaches submission for the ruling and teaching elders as well as for the members.

SUPPORT:

- Acts 20:28; I Tim 5:17; Heb. 13:17; I Peter 5:1-4
- BCO 8 BCO 11, 12 & 13

ARTICLE XIV:

WE AFFIRM that the Presbyteries and the General Assembly of the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA function by trusting one another - expressed as mutual love and confidence based on the redeeming and adopting grace of Jesus as the testimony of all its members, demonstrating that all are equally precious in his sight and equal under his Headship.

WE DENY that it is possible to have healthy, spiritual relationships as the foundation for the life and ministries of the Presbyteries and the General Assembly on any other basis.

WE FURTHER DENY that abuse can be effectively avoided by attempting to do the work of the Church, especially that of the GENERAL ASSEMBLY and its Committees and Agencies, with anything less than

'mutual love and confidence' for each other, nor will it permit spiritual maturity to control its meetings and ministries.

RATIONAL: The purposes of each Presbytery and the General Assembly (See ARTICLE XXXIII), like that of each congregation, call for practicing accountability and submission. This relationship ultimately becomes impossible based upon any other motivation but trust.

Further, the relationship between the courts of the Church is designed to provide a mutual relationship in order to "...realize the idea of the unity of the Church." (BCO 1-5).

SUPPORT:

- BCO 1-5
- BCO 13; BCO 14

EXPOSITION

Part of the genius of presbyterianism is accountability to our brethren in the Lord. There is an unfortunate tendency of fallen human nature to seek power and to avoid accountability. The General Assembly must continue to guard and revise our system of accountability so that our committees and agencies do not become de facto para-church agencies. At the same time, however, we need to allow our leaders to lead. The coordinators and presidents and the permanent committee members whom the General Assembly elects should be able to exercise the leadership roles for which they have been chosen without unwarranted suspicion and criticism.

SECTION 3
THE CONGREGATION GOVERNED

ARTICLE XV:

WE AFFIRM that the meetings of the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH in AMERICA'S Presbyteries and (especially) its General Assembly are to enhance their respective purposes (PRESBYTERY: to be the court of original jurisdiction for T.E.'s and the source of governance for its churches; GENERAL ASSEMBLY: to be the bond of union, peace and correspondence among all its churches and courts) by providing vital worship experiences while accomplishing its business in the context of bonding the relationships of the members.

WE DENY that the purity and vitality of life and ministry of the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH in AMERICA are dependent upon nor strengthened by its courts conducting business as the primary purpose for their existence.

RATIONALE: Although the ultimate purposes of these courts is clearly defined in the BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER, only by agreed upon vigilance on the part of all participants will the purposes be maintained.

Because of the amount of business and because of the way some elders transact the business, the ultimate purpose (for both meetings, but especially for the General Assembly) often appears to be to establish complete conformity to one or another interpretations of the Church's subordinate standards and/or instituting the organizational concepts of some members, regardless of the apparent will of the majority.

The meetings must be structured and conducted to conform with the ultimate purposes of the respective Courts.

When that is regularly accomplished, the meetings will be more open and family oriented. The concept of Court, although taken from the context in which the Westminster Assembly was conducted, will not be construed in the rigid legal context of the word, especially in today's litigious society.

SUPPORT:

- BCO 13-1; 14-1

ARTICLE XVI:

WE AFFIRM that the formal operation documents of the PCA (the BCO, THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDS, THE RAO AND THE BYLAWS OF INCORPORATION), which define the operational process for presenting theological and operational proposals and the standard against which elders acceptability is measured, provide assurance that permissible flexibility and diversity are part of the PCA heritage.

WE DENY that permissible flexibility and diversity present a threat to the purity and vitality of the life and ministry of the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA.

RATIONALE; 1. The experience of the recipient of God's grace teaches him that, until he goes to be with the Lord, he shall continue to be reformed and hence continue to have an ever-increasing perception of God's will for his life and an ever increasing degree of wisdom about the life and ministry of the church. Permissible flexibility and diversity are therefore part

of the life and ministry of the Church. The amazing degree of flexibility introduced into the Apostolic Church (Acts 11:18, Acts 15:24-35) sets the model for accepting permissible flexibility and diversity in the Church.

2. A schematic presentation, demonstrating the way absolutes cannot be amended and non-absolutes, with gradually increasing ease of amendment, can be amended, provides the support for assuring permissible divergence to be part of the life of the PCA.

| DESCRIPTION | TITLE | EASE OF AMENDING |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| <u>THE ABSOLUTE</u> | | |
| THE STANDARD | THE BIBLE | UNAMENABLE |
| <u>THE NON-ABSOLUTES</u> | | |
| <u>A. THE SUBORDINATE STANDARDS</u> | | |
| | THE WESTMINSTER - CONFESSION CATECHISMS | VERY DIFFICULT TO AMEND: BCO 26-3 |
| | THE BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER | VERY DIFFICULT TO AMEND: BCO 26-2 |
| <u>B. THE OPERATIONAL DOCUMENTS</u> | | |
| ECCLESIASTIC BUSINESS | RULES OF ASSEMBLY OPERATION (RAO) | QUITE EASY TO AMEND OR SUSPEND (RAO XVIII) |
| CIVIL BUSINESS | BY-LAWS | QUITE EASY TO AMEND BYLAWS IX |

ARTICLE XVII:

WE AFFIRM that all the power of Christ is vested in the whole body, constituting it a spiritual commonwealth.

WE DENY that any individual in the church or any court of the church may exercise his/its responsibility as if he/it was the sole recipient of the power of Christ.

RATIONALE: Christ is the Head of the Church. He gave the Great Commission to the Church, with its declarations that "All authority in heaven and earth has been given unto me", and, "surely I

will be with you always, to the very end of the age" (Mt. 28:18-20).

Further, he has designed self-government into his Church. In the first place, he calls on the members to elect their spiritual leaders (Acts 6; 14:23; Titus 1:5). Then he instructs his spiritual leaders to be his appointed pastor/teachers to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body can be built up. Then, the body, speaking in love, enables each other to grow into Christ, as each part does its work (Eph. 4:11-16).

The PCA has incorporated this concept into its BCO, especially in the sensitive area of who owns church property.

The concept must be incorporated into all the life and ministry of the PCA.

SUPPORT:

- BCO 3-1: "...power which Christ has committed...vests in the whole body...constituting a spiritual commonwealth"
- BCO 25:9: "all congregations shall be entitled to hold, own and enjoy local properties without any right of reversion...";
- BCO 25:11: "...the relationship is voluntary...is in no sense to be maintained by the exercise of any force or coercion whatsoever";
- BCO 25:11: "A particular church may withdraw from any court of this body at any time for reasons which seem to it sufficient";
- RAO 4-11: "with respect to agencies, financial coordination to the Assembly...is a 'filter upward' and has no downward authority";
- BCO 27-1, 5 (re: discipline).
- Acts 6; 14:23; Titus 1:5

ARTICLE XVIII:

WE AFFIRM that one of the heritages of the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA has always used for its church government is to maintain the axiom that "The power which Christ has committed to His Church vests in the whole body...constituting it a spiritual commonwealth." (BCO 3-1) and that this is the biblically correct heritage.

WE FURTHER AFFIRM that the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA uses this heritage as the means and motivation to prepare its leaders and to recognize and properly deal with any ungodly leadership (on any level) that would abuse the church.

WE DENY that all efforts, regardless of the sincerity of the participants, which fail to be governed by this axiom are in conformity with the heritage of the Church and will ultimately bring glory and honor to the Lord.

RATIONALE:

The polity upon which our government is founded is described in the preceding ARTICLES.

The 'grass-roots' philosophy (See ARTICLE XXV) in dealing with any issue of consequence is the expression of its heritage and it maintains the sense of a spiritual commonwealth.

The introduction of the "INTERNSHIP PROGRAM in 1981-82 demonstrates the concern to prepare the leadership to carry on this heritage.

SUPPORT:
- BCO3-1

SECTION 4. MAINTAINING THE CHURCH
AS A SPIRITUAL BODY, SEPARATE FROM THE STATE

ARTICLE XIX:

WE AFFIRM that all church power is only ministerial and declarative.

WE DENY that the power of the church is legislative.

RATIONALE: The PCA has not constructed a massive codification for every detail of church life and ministry. Its BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER is structured on the premise that accountability and decision-making should always take place in the original church concerned or in the lowest Court in which the issue arises (called the principle of 'original jurisdiction'). Only upon complaint or appeal does an issue come before a different court.

For instance, by moral oath, taken by men who have already sworn to their ordination vows in which this is found, the church binds itself to take the provisions of local church property ownership as a solemn covenant (BCO 25-10).

Recent church history makes this even more necessary. When the church goes to the civil courts except when it "...may be necessary for protection and equity equal and common to others..." (PRELIMINARY PRINCIPLES 1), it establishes the norm that the courts may even determine to whom property belongs, etc.

SUPPORT:

- BCO PRELIMINARY PRINCIPLES (1); (6);
- BCO 11-4; BCO 25-10
- BCO 15-10: "The provisions of this chapter are to be construed as a solemn covenant..."

ARTICLE XX:

WE AFFIRM that ecclesiastical discipline is purely moral and spiritual in nature.

WE DENY that ecclesiastical discipline is a matter for the civil courts.

RATIONALE: The PCA is committed to the working of the Holy Spirit to convince and convict of guilt; to lead into and enable repentance and to provide the commitment to proceed to restoration.

The PCA does not believe that the civil courts have the authority nor the spiritual understanding to be called upon to deal with difference within the church. Paul makes this abundantly clear in I Cor. 6:1-3.

SUPPORT:

- I Cor. 6:1-3
- BCO PRELIMINARY PRINCIPLES (8); BCO 11-1: "These assemblies are together distinct from civil magistrates and have no jurisdiction in political or civil affairs...but their authority is in all respects moral or spiritual."

ARTICLE XXI:

WE AFFIRM that the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA believes that in all ages, the state is obligated to maintain the moral law of God as its base for governing but, in the age between the first and second coming of Christ, the state may determine its civil/(sundry)judicial code of laws through which it will operate.

WE DENY that the Mosaic civil/(sundry)judicial law should be directly transferred to be the law of nations between the first and second coming of Christ.

RATIONALE: THE WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH makes a clear distinction between moral, ceremonial and `sundry judicial' laws.

It declares that the "...moral law doth forever bind..."

It declares that the ceremonial laws `prefigure' Christ and "...are now abrogated under the New Testament."

It declares that the `sundry judicial laws' "...which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any other, now, further than general equity thereof will require."

SUPPORT:

- WCF XIX

- I Peter 2:13,14; Mt. 5:17,38,39; I Cor. 9:8-10.

**OPERATING POLITY
BY WHICH THE LIFE AND MINISTRIES
OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
ARE STRUCTURED**

SECTION 1. THE CHURCH'S PURPOSE AND RESOLVE

ARTICLE XXII:

WE AFFIRM that the declaration of the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA that "the work of the GREAT COMMISSION is one work" (BCO 14-1(3)) is both a statement of purpose that the GREAT COMMISSION is the foundation for all the ministries of the Church, being implemented on the GENERAL ASSEMBLY level through equally essential committees, and is also a statement of resolve that the Church will oppose that which deters it from applying itself to its purpose.

WE DENY that the ineffectiveness and lack of progress flowing from ignoring either of these affirmations will enable the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA to maintain its needed degree of spiritual health nor permit it to be used by the Lord as a foundation for truth in a modern, pluralistic and secular world.

WE FURTHER DENY that the necessary motivation the GENERAL ASSEMBLY must provide to the local churches and their members to become active participants in "the work of the Great Commission is one work" (its Statement of Purpose) can be accomplished by focusing great amounts of the GENERAL ASSEMBLY'S time and energy on settling minor issues and/or parliamentary procedures that usually could be settled by empowering a commission to hear various points of view and make the necessary decisions.

RATIONALE: Each congregation and every church court must focus on the purpose for the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA to exist. Without prioritizing its time and energy on its biblical focus the Church will at best become ingrown and thereby unwilling to be the leader in God's Kingdom he may well call on it to be. At worst, it could become so frustrated that it will lose its first love and will disintegrate, possibly even splinter into small denominations.

SUPPORT:

- Mt. 28:16-20; Mt. 5:1-16; Eph. 2:22

EXPOSITION

When the church courts meet, we should engage ourselves in worship, the study of God's Word, prayer, mutual encouragement and love, and deliberation upon our vision and mission, as well as the fulfillment of our constitutional, administrative, judicial and programmatic duties.

Session, presbytery and General Assembly meetings should be viewed as family gathering in church councils.

The Church should be seeking God through preaching His Word and sustained prayer that He might grant us vision for the future mission and direction of the Church. As gathered leaders, elders should spend time deliberating on the Church's future with informed, biblical optimism (the gates of hell cannot prevail against us) with every intent of facing the changing demands of the Church and the world with the gospel of Christ.

ARTICLE XXIII:

WE AFFIRM that the application of its resolve is evident when the GENERAL ASSEMBLY is conducted in the context of spiritual commitment to the Lord and sensitivity for one another.

WE DENY that the GENERAL ASSEMBLY, when conducted in anything less than spiritual commitment to the lord and sensitivity to one another, and especially when the context becomes saturated with the tension of confrontation, is acting upon its resolve.

RATIONALE: See ARTICLE XXIII.

ARTICLE XXIV:

WE AFFIRM that the application of its resolve is evident when the GENERAL ASSEMBLY is encouraged by the evidence that the Lord has been glorified through the ministries of its Committees and Agencies.

WE DENY that the GENERAL ASSEMBLY, when conducted so that the ministries of its Committees and Agencies are not considered as of primary importance in the ASSEMBLY'S docket, is acting upon its resolve.

RATIONALE: See ARTICLE XXIII.

ARTICLE XXV:

WE AFFIRM that the GENERAL ASSEMBLY, when faced with majority and minority opinions about permissible differences, conducts itself so that both sets of opinions are heard by each delegate, weighed, prayed for, and voted on, and then considers the issue settled at that point.

WE DENY that presbyters are acting upon the commitment of the GENERAL ASSEMBLY'S resolve when, after differences of opinion have been properly heard, weighed, prayed about and voted on and therefore are settled, seek as the minority to attempt to overturn those decisions by reintroducing the issues as valid new business in future meetings, often with the perception projected that the minority was not previously dealt with in a Christian fashion.

RATIONALE for XXI, XXII & XXIII: The GENERAL ASSEMBLY constantly invokes the guidance of the Holy Spirit to guide it in its business. It operates within an agreed upon set of rules. It also operates under the conviction that its delegates are practicing mutual love and confidence. Therefore, actions that are aimed at reintroducing previously defeated motions, at least before ample time to evaluate the consequences of the original decision, are tantamount to disregarding the work of the Holy Spirit and the

consciences of those who voted in the affirmative on the previous occasion.

EXPOSITION

There is never unanimity on all issues that come before a given General Assembly. We use our BCO, RAO and Robert's Rules of Order to ensure that the will of the majority is enacted while the rights of the minority are protected. Admittedly, the process can be frustrating to both the majority and the minority. Our present procedures give the opportunities for the minority on an issue to make its position known, to seek to persuade the majority otherwise, and in the event of losing a vote, to enter a respectful protest on the record. It is necessary for the purity and peace of the Church that there be open, fair and reasonable debate of issues before the General Assembly and, after a deciding vote has been taken, that there be closure to the matter at hand.

SECTION 2. THE CHURCH AND THE CHURCH-AT-LARGE

ARTICLE XXVI:

WE AFFIRM that the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA, in recognizing itself as but one of the branches of the true Church, properly seeks to cooperate in the work of Christ's Kingdom with other Churches and para-church organizations up to but not beyond the point of violating the ordination vows of its elders (BCO 8-7); **WE DENY** that such guarded participation with those who do not hold all of the tenants of the doctrine and ecclesiology of the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA will eventually corrupt its doctrinal purity.

RATIONALE: The ordination vows demand of the elder to not only guard but to participate in using the truths about which he has taken vows. This includes the freedom of conscience to profess the Reformed Faith in all circumstances, but always with the submission generated by continuing under spiritual submission to the oversight of the courts of this Church.

However, The ordination vows do not demand administrative oversight of his ministry only by the Courts of the Church. Hence, he may serve with other organizations and be under the administration of that organization. This is expressed in the commitment of the Church to supply chaplains to serve in the armed forces, retirement homes, industry, etc.

This concept is further demonstrated by making the distinction between ways to accomplish denominational merging. Two procedures are available: by 'Joining and Receiving' (J & R) (BCO 14-6h) and merging by way of a (reorganizational) Plan of Union (14-6j). In the former, agreement has been reached to be united on the basis of what the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA now is and therefore no reconsideration of doctrine or ordination vows

is considered. Hence, a relatively simple process is proposed. In the latter, because consideration of all parts of the CONSTITUTION of the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA are involved, but especially because the doctrine and ordination vows of the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA are involved, a PLAN OF UNION amounts to calling on the General Assembly to substitute a new BCO for its existing one and a very difficult process is proposed.

SUPPORT:

- BCO 8-7
- BCO 14-6;

SECTION 3: THE CHURCH AND ITS ACCOUNTABILITY

ARTICLE XXVII:

WE AFFIRM that each Presbytery of the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA and each of the Committees and Agencies of its GENERAL ASSEMBLY must do its work so that it may be reviewed as an encouragement to the Church.

WE DENY that the practice of many of the COMMITTEES OF COMMISSIONERS to conduct reviews as if they were civil investigations does accomplish the design of the founding fathers for ministry review.

RATIONALE: The "...work of the GREAT COMMISSION is one work..." is the framework for all review. The tenor of the COMMITTEES OF COMMISSIONERS approach to reviewing and their goals for it must be in conformity to this framework.

SUPPORT:

ARTICLE XXVIII:

WE AFFIRM that the ways and means instituted by the founding fathers of the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA were designed only to serve as ways to validate that the organization being reviewed was fulfilling its basic purpose in conformity to the purpose of the Church itself and that it was carrying out whatever programs the GENERAL ASSEMBLY had assigned to it. They were not designed to provide any degree of control by the COMMITTEE OF COMMISSIONERS over the organization being reviewed.

WE DENY that reviews conducted as if they were civil investigations provide support to the organization, confidence to the Church and do not provide a degree of control over the organization by the COMMITTEE OF COMMISSIONERS.

RATIONALE: The reason why Synods and Councils exist (WCF XXXI) is for the better government and edification of the Church.

The Church's commitment to the doctrine of plurality of eldership and its inherent responsibility to carry out accountable oversight and submission for those under its care is carried into all the Courts of the Church by virtue of each of them being constituted by elders.

SUPPORT:

- WCF XXXI-1

ARTICLE XXIX:

WE AFFIRM that using mutual love and confidence as the context for all review will effectively reinforce the spiritual maturity of the ways and means instituted by the founding fathers of the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA to conduct any review for the dual purpose of providing support to that organization and instilling the joy of confidence in the Church about its ministry.

WE DENY that to attempt to do any of the work of the Church, especially that of the GENERAL ASSEMBLY and its Committees and Agencies, with anything less than 'mutual love and confidence' for each other and the men the Church elected to lead its activities will effectively provide support and encouragement, avoid abuse by ungodly leadership nor permit the context of spiritual maturity to control its meetings and ministries.

RATIONALE: The precept of providing support and confidence involved in exercising review by elders in the local church carries over into all the Courts of the Church by virtue of them being constituted by elders.

ARTICLE XXX:

WE AFFIRM that the heritage that the PCA used from the time of the Church's founding, is that decisions of consequence are the business of the entire church, not that of a few individuals or organizations within the Church (often referred to as the 'grass-roots' philosophy).

WE DENY that 'business-by the executive committee' syndrome properly fulfills the Church's commitment that the power of Christ is vested in the whole body and, if practiced, keeps the Church from living as a commonwealth.

RATIONALE:

1. The General Assembly (G.A.) defines itself as consisting of all the Teaching Elders in good standing with their Presbyteries and Ruling Elders, according to a prescribed ration, from every congregation. BCO 14-2.

2. The G.A. elects its own moderator and limits his task to guiding the G.A. through its business, including elections and responding to overtures and COMMITTEE/AGENCIES recommendations; to begin the next G.A. and conduct its business through the election of the succeeding Moderator, but not to be the official representative of the denomination between G.A. meetings. RAO 1-5; 2-1-2.

3. The G.A. elects its STATED CLERK, to minister under the oversight of the ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE. RAO) 3-1.

4. The G.A. elects the members of its COMMITTEES and AGENCIES. BCO 14-12; RAO 4-1 through 9.

5. The Coordinator/President for each COMMITTEE and AGENCY is elected by the G.A., for a one year term. RAO 4-9

6. Each COMMITTEE and AGENCY must have its budget approved by the G.A. each year. RAO 4-11.

7. Each COMMITTEE and AGENCY may propose 'ASKINGS' (the actual budget total minus all funds received as fees, interest, etc) but must have the 'askings' approved by the G.A., and there shall be no 'equalization' of undesignated funds received. RAO 4-12.

8. Each COMMITTEE and AGENCY must present every new proposal for G.A. approval before it can be instituted. RAO 11-1

SECTION 4. THE CHURCH'S USE OF DOCTRINE

ARTICLE XXXI:

WE AFFIRM that the use of doctrine is essential for a congregation to be a healthy organism.

WE DENY that a PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA congregation can be a healthy organism without conforming to the CONFESSIOIN OF FAITH and CATECHISMS as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures.

RATIONALE: Anything less mars or destroys the confessional standards of the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA and consequently makes mockery of the oaths of ordination of its officers.

ARTICLE XXXII:

WE AFFIRM that the government and heritage of the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA defines its use of doctrine . IT defines its use of doctrine by: 1) calling for only the officers are to be oath bound to "...sincerely receive and adopt the CONFESSIOIN OF FAITH and the CATECHISMS of the Church, as containing the system of doctrine..."; 2) preparing its officers to maintain the consistent teaching and use of the substance of its system of doctrine throughout its life and ministries; and 3) calling on the Church to participate in ministries and fellowship with the evangelical community at large, yet consciously keep the distinctives of its doctrine from dilution.

WE DENY that, for a church to be a healthy organism, the pastor and officers must place an extreme emphasis on one or two doctrines and their details, even to the extent of calling for almost verbatim recall as opposed to being in conformity with the system of doctrine, for the member or officer to be considered spiritually mature.

WE DENY that, for a church to be a healthy organism, almost every activity/program of the church must be designed to emphasize one or two doctrines, rather than being in conformity with the system of doctrine, in order to be evaluated as spiritually profitable.

WE FURTHER DENY that the zealous practicing of these denials is needed to keep the church from becoming doctrinally impoverished or heretical.

RATIONALE: "The visible church...consists of all those who make profession of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, together with their children (BCO 2-1). No reference is made in this definition for the non-officers to be committed to the system of doctrine. Therefore to emphasize one or two doctrines and their details to the point of distorting doctrine as a system and using conformity to details to make judgments (actual or even by inference) about the spiritual maturity of members, churches or their programs is contrary to the context and the specific injunction of Mt. 7:1.

Further, when the exercise of oversight in this fashion becomes zealous, it destroys the unity resulting from the Spirit's bonding ministry and ultimately distorts the very substance of the system of doctrine.

The duty of the eldership (by oath) to take spiritual accountability and concern for the individual members' spiritual maturity and the activities/programs of the church in the context of teaching and measuring by the whole system of doctrine is the safeguard that is needed(BCO 12-5).

The PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA started with a magnanimous letter to the Church at large laying the foundation for its existence. In conformity with this is the provision (BCO 8-7) which permits a Presbytery to approve a call of a Teaching Elder "...to work with an organization outside the jurisdiction of the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA...". In the practice of this there is the work of MISSION TO THE WORLD for many of its missionaries and the work of the Church's chaplains. This would not be possible if these men were expected to place undue emphasis on one or two doctrines.

SUPPORT:

- BCO 9
- BCO 12
- BCO 21-5 (2); 24-5 (2)
- Mt. 7:1
- Introductory letter of the denomination
- BCO 8-7
- the records of almost every Presbytery of the denomination.

SECTION 5. THE PARTICULAR CHURCH AND
THE DENOMINATION

ARTICLE XXXIII:

WE AFFIRM that each congregation's voluntary membership in the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA enlarges and strengthens the life and ministry of the congregation, the Presbytery and the General Assembly and it solidifies connectionalism.

WE DENY that each congregation's voluntary membership in the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA jeopardizes the ability of the Church to function as a truly Presbyterian body.

RATIONALE: The voluntary nature of the decision of a body of believers to become a member of the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA expresses that mutual love and confidence exists and that it feels assured the congregation will enjoy equality with every other congregation, regardless of size or finances.

Further, its decision to join indicates that it anticipates enjoying without restraint the unique benefits and responsibilities of PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA connectionalism.

Finally, the option guaranteed that it may leave if it must and continue to hold title to its own properties allows it freely to enter into all the experiences and responsibilities of connectionalism.

SUPPORT:

ARTICLE XXXIV:

WE AFFIRM that the guarantee of each congregation to hold and keep the title of its own local properties enlarges and strengthens the life and ministry of the congregation, Presbytery and General Assembly and solidifies connectionalism.

WE DENY that this guarantee jeopardizes the ability of the Church to function as a true Presbyterian body.

RATIONALE: The traumatic and financial costs involved in standing opposed to attempts to lead the Church away from its doctrinal, ecclesiastical and historical roots are so great that churches without this guarantee too often opt not to stand for truth because of the price to pay and thereby to accept and participate in the ultimate destruction of the testimony of the Church.

With this guarantee there is freedom to stand firm and be counted for what is best as expressions of love and confidence for each other.

SUPPORT:

- BCO 25-8,9 & 19

**SECTION 6: THE PARTICULAR CHURCH AND
THE ELDERSHIP**

ARTICLE XXXV:

WE AFFIRM that the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH in AMERICA churches are directed (ruled; led) by elders taking accountable oversight as undershepherds.

WE DENY that spiritual maturity of the church member, the congregation or the corporate denomination can be reasonably accomplished without accountable oversight.

RATIONALE: I Tim. 5:17 admonishes all the elders (ruling and teaching) to direct the church well. Under their leadership the members are to be growing into Christ, experiencing vital worship of the Living God, enjoying the experience of being part of a living organism (body) which supports them, feel godly restraint placed upon them when going astray, be learning more of the power of the resurrection in their lives and thereby being motivated to live with hope, and be rather acutely aware of being part of the continuing presence of Christ in this world of time and space.

SUPPORT:

- Acts 20:28; I Tim. 5:17; I Peter 1:1-4;

- BCO 12, 13, 14

ARTICLE XXXVI:

WE AFFIRM that both the ruling and teaching eldership of the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH in AMERICA is a calling of God to individually and jointly accept the mantle of accountability over God's flock.

WE DENY that ordination accountability is properly exercised if it is used as an excuse to wield power over anyone by lording

over him (them), to deny to those in submission to use the power of Christ vested in them as members of the whole body or to fail to make those in submission know the care of Christ through a caring ministry to them in the name of Christ.

RATIONALE: The office of elder calls for him to stand before the Living God to be used by him to make each member more like Christ and more his own individual priest. This means that the elder seeks to join with Paul and say, when he stands before God, "...I am innocent of the blood of all men" (Acts 28:26).

This mantle of accountability makes the Session a 'group of shepherds' rather than a business executive committee. As such, it keeps the elders as God's undershepherds (I Peter 5:2) who are leading the flock well (I Tim. 5:17).

SUPPORT:

- I Peter 5:1-4; Acts 20:26; Eph. 4:11; I Tim. 3: 1; Titus 1:5; I Tim. 3:2-7; I Tim 5:17; Titus 1: 6-9; Heb. 13:17
- BCO 7-2
- BCO 16

ARTICLE XXXVII:

WE AFFIRM that the oaths of ordination, undertaken by every teaching and ruling elder in the Church, are both the motivation for and measurement by which the Holy Spirit governs the hearts of the eldership in maintaining the peace, unity and purity of the Church as the accountable leaders/rulers of the church.

WE DENY the validity of leadership that does not conform to all the oaths of ordination.

RATIONALE: The Church has a prescribed path of preparation before any man may assume the ordination vows for eldership. This is especially controlled for the ordination of a Teaching Elder.

The Teaching Elder must have not only his own internal conviction that God is calling him to a particular ministry, but a particular body of believers must be independently convinced that God is calling him to be their undershepherd, and the Presbytery must agree that the man is qualified and available.

The scope of these vows covers the entire spectrum of the candidates personal beliefs and life and that of the church as well.

Therefore, each man taking the vows of ordination is expected to understand them so that he takes them intelligently and with moral commitment. Consequently, men who accept the mantle of accountability to be godly servant/leader elders and attempt to lead the church but who do not take into account these vows are sinning against their consciences and against God.

SUPPORT:

- Mt. 5:37; I Cor. 1:17-19; James 5:12;
- BCO 16; BCO 17;
- BCO 21-5; BCO 25-5

ARTICLE XXXVIII:

WE AFFIRM that elder accountability demands leading, which must be administered in the context of servant/leadership and will be beneficial to the church when it is so exercised.

WE DENY that church leadership other than servant/leadership, regardless in which court of the church it is exercised, is biblical leadership.

RATIONALE: The example of Jesus as the greatest leader who has ever lived and at the same time the greatest servant is the model for every elder. However, it is even more than a model: it is the command of the Lord (Phil.2: 4-8) through Paul.

"The servant/leader practices his leadership so that his leadership is evidently for the benefit of the person being led" (DJM)

SUPPORT:

- Mark 10:45; Phil. 2:4-8; II Cor. 6:4; Col. 1:24-25;
- BCO 21-5(4), (5); BCO 24-5 (4), (5)

SECTION 7: THE CHURCH AND CHURCH DISCIPLINE

EXPOSITION: CHURCH DISCIPLINE

"Church discipline is part of the ongoing work of God among his people. It is one of the ways that he shows his loving concern for his own. Because he first loved us with an everlasting love, he will graciously lead an offender to repentance, confession and full restoration.

"Through this exercise of love, God produces righteousness. This confirms that he is our Father, since he is treating us like sons. Some would say that church discipline is 'tough' love, but it is more than that -- it is divine love at work.

"The WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH states that when offenses have been committed, censures are necessary. In Chapter 30, section 3, it gives several reasons for using censures. They are:

- + to reclaim and gain the offending brethren,
- + to deter others from similar offenses,
- + to purge out the leaven that might infect the whole lump,
- + to vindicate the honor of Christ and the holy profession of the gospel, and
- + to prevent the wrath of God from falling upon the church.

Gal. 6:1,2: "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ".

"Believers are often aware of the sins of others and will speak up in love... those who are spiritual are able to restore those who have sinned..."

"Finally, we see in Gal. 6 that effective church discipline must be part of an ongoing ministry of caring. The offender must be fully aware that God is working to enable him to be restored by and within the family of God. Fellow Christians must carry his burden with him. In this way the 'law of Christ' will be fulfilled in the disciplinary process".

ARTICLE # XXXIX:

WE AFFIRM that church discipline principles are set forth in scripture and must be followed.

WE DENY that church discipline is properly administered outside the context of the instruction of the Word, particularly passages such as Mt.18: 15ff and Gal. 6:1, and precise use by the courts of the church of the various instructions of the RULES OF DISCIPLINE.

SUPPORT:

- BCO 27-5;
- Mt. 18: 15ff; Gal 6:1; Mt. 5:23-24; Deut. 8:2,3,5; Heb. 12:7; HEB. 13:17; I Cor. 5:13; I COR. 5:4,5

ARTICLE XL:

WE AFFIRM that the power which Christ has given the Church is for building up and not for destruction, and therefore, the goal of church discipline is the restoration of the offender.

WE DENY that the goal of church discipline, even if excommunication is employed, is to sever the offender from the body so that he never can be restored.

SUPPORT:

- Psalm 32:5; II Cor 2: 6,7; 7:11; 13:10
- WCF 15-2

ARTICLE XLI:

WE AFFIRM that the driving dynamic for using judicial discipline is to vindicate the Name of Christ, never that of the offended party; and further that it is administered to prevent the consequences of not vindicating the Name of our Lord.

WE DENY that bypassing the use of church discipline for fear it will drive people from the church is unworthy of our faith in a promise-keeping, providence acting God.

SUPPORT:

- BCO 31 - 3,4
- II Cor. 2:15; 11:30-31.

EXPOSITION:

"Church discipline begins when an offender has been exposed. This may happen in one of three ways. First of all, the offender may accuse himself... It is not self-accusation merely to talk (or even boast) about an episode(s) warranting discipline. Genuine self-accusation

must be an act of confession directed toward repentance. It must be made in the spirit of making things right with God".

"The second way in which an offender may be exposed is that the offended party brings an accusation against him. ...Mt. 18:15 is the starting place."

If the alleged offender consistently denies the alleged accusation, a trial may have to be processed.

"Finally, an offender may be exposed when his sin becomes common knowledge."

ARTICLE XLII:

WE AFFIRM that the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA conducts its judicial process in the manner of old English law. The elders must determine a strong presumption of guilt before processing a charge, and they must also serve as attorneys, judge and jury. **WE DENY** that attempting to protect the body and the accused by bypassing church discipline done under the eldership of the church will bring any degree of lasting peace and unity to the body.

SUPPORT:

- BCO 31-2,7

D.J.MacNair
CHURCHES VITALIZED
Jan., 1994

INTRODUCTION TO CONNECTIONALISM
IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA:

CONCEPTUALIZING THE CHURCH

I. A BIBLICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE CHURCH:

This is presented from the perception of the Christian. It is not a complete study, but it adequately emphasizes the Church as described in the NEW TESTAMENT and it particularly demonstrates the beauty and uniqueness of the CHURCH. The comments are designed to highlight these two characteristics.

Only as the church member, and especially their elders, perceive the Church this way, rejoice in it and regularly reaffirm their commitment to maintain this beauty and uniqueness will there be any connectionalism in our denomination.

A. The church is of utmost importance to God the Father. For the church God: "...placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be Head over everything for the Church..." (Eph. 1:22)

B. The church is the centerpiece of God's providential ruling of all His creatures and all their actions. For the church God: "...fills everything in every way." (Eph. 1:23)

C. The church is Christ's Body on earth--now. "In Him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit." (Eph. 2:21, 22)

D. The Church lives under/in its Head! "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ." (Eph. 4:15)

- He is the source of life
- He is the source of living--growing into Him
- He is of God's living revelation and instruction into God's written revelation
- He is the Ruler/King over our lives.

E. The Church is made of very special people.
I Peter 2:4
Romans 8:28.

F. The Church is a body of believers all equal in God's sight.

I Cor 12: 14-20: No one is inferior!;

I Cor. 12: 21 -46: No one is superior!.

G. The Spirit arranges each church as He wants it to be. Therefore, at this moment every true Church has the manpower to do today's task and to start tomorrow's!

I Cor. 12:18:

"But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be."

H. The universal purpose of the Church is to:

a). worship the Lord:

"Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
Ascribe to eh LORD the glory due his name;
worship the LORD in the spendor of his holiness."

b) fulfill the GREAT COMMISSION:

"Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matt. 28:19,20)

Therefore:

"Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth." (I Tim. 3:14, 15)

I. The church has been provided a means of oversight--by qualified elders, who are in and of themselves held accountable.

I Tim 5:17

"The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching."

Heb. 13:17

"Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account, Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you."

Acts 20:28

"Guard yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood."
(Acts 20:28)

II. THE CONFESSIONAL DESCRIPTION OF THE CHURCH:

- WCF XXV - cf XXI, I
- WLC #62, 63

III. THE PCA APPLICATION OF THE CONFESSIONAL DESCRIPTION:

A. BCO Preface

1. Christ is The King and Head of the Church--the implication:

- to rule
- to teach
- through His Word and Spirit by the ministry of men and, by ordination¹ therein; His:
- system of doctrine
- government
- discipline
- worship.

2. (Key) Preliminary Principles (PP) --the implication:

PP#(1) "...no religious constitution should be supported by the civil power, further than may be necessary for protection and security equal and common to all others."

PP#(2) "...the power to elect persons to the exercise of authority in any particular society resides in that society."

1. Note the Reformed Position:

"...all of which are either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary inference may be deduced therefrom... WCF I.VI; WLC #99.

PP#(7) All church power; "...is only ministerial and declarative...¹ must be purely moral and spiritual in nature"²

Comments about the use of The Preface:

The Preface is the context within which the life and ministry of the PCA is to be conducted.

Each decision (local church, presbytery, general assembly) should, therefore, be in conformity with the Preface.

Each interpretation of the BCO should, therefore, be made in the context of the Preface.

Each proposal to delete, revise or expand the BCO should, therefore, reflect the Preface.

IV. The Perspective of the Church from the Viewpoint of the Individual Christian:

This is personal, individual and difficult to categorize. However, some typical perspectives are:

- the church is my spiritual home, no matter where I may travel;
- the church supplies me the spiritual and physical support system I need with which to keep going;
- the church and its preaching is an inspiration to me;
- the church is a necessity and it fills that role to some degree; otherwise, I have little interest in it;
- the church supplies religious teaching to my children and I know that this is necessary.

-
1. Therefore, not legislative
 2. Therefore, not civil.

DISCUSSION MATERIAL

INTRODUCTION TO CONNECTIONALISM
IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA:

CONCEPTUALIZING THE CHURCH

I. A BIBLICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE CHURCH:

This is presented from the perception of the Christian. It is not a complete study, but it adequately emphasizes the Church as described in the NEW TESTAMENT and it particularly demonstrates the beauty and uniqueness of the CHURCH. The comments are designed to highlight these two characteristics.

Only as the church member, and especially their elders, perceive the Church this way, rejoice in it and regularly reaffirm their commitment to maintain this beauty and uniqueness will there be any connectionalism in our denomination.

A. The church is of utmost importance to God the Father. For the church God: "...placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be Head over everything for the Church..." (Eph. 1:22)

B. The church is the centerpiece of God's providential ruling of all His creatures and all their actions. For the church God: "...fills everything in every way." (Eph. 1:23)

C. The church is Christ's Body on earth--now. "In Him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit." (Eph. 2:21, 22)

D. The Church lives under/in its Head! "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ." (Eph. 4:15)

- He is the source of life
- He is the source of living--growing into Him
- He is of God's living revelation and instruction into God's written revelation
- He is the Ruler/King over our lives.

E. The Church is made of very special people.
I Peter 2:4
Romans 8:28.

F. The Church is a body of believers all equal in God's sight.

I Cor 12: 14-20: No one is inferior!;

I Cor. 12: 21 -46: No one is superior!.

G. The Spirit arranges each church as He wants it to be. Therefore, at this moment every true Church has the manpower to do today's task and to start tomorrow's!

I Cor. 12:18:

"But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be."

H. The universal purpose of the Church is to:

a). worship the Lord:

"Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
Ascribe to eh LORD the glory due his name;
worship the LORD in the spendor of his holiness."

b) fulfill the GREAT COMMISSION:

"Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matt. 28:19,20)

Therefore:

"Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth." (I Tim. 3:14, 15)

I. The church has been provided a means of oversight--by qualified elders, who are in and of themselves held accountable.

I Tim 5:17

"The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching."

Heb. 13:17

"Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account, Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you."

Acts 20:28

"Guard yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood."
(Acts 20:28)

II. THE CONFESSIONAL DESCRIPTION OF THE CHURCH:

- WCF XXV - cf XXI, I
- WLC #62, 63

III. THE PCA APPLICATION OF THE CONFESSIONAL DESCRIPTION:

A. BCO Preface

1. Christ is The King and Head of the Church--the implication:

- to rule
- to teach
- through His Word and Spirit by the ministry of men and, by ordination¹ therein; His:
- system of doctrine
- government
- discipline
- worship.

2. (Key) Preliminary Principles (PP) --the implication:

PP#(1) "...no religious constitution should be supported by the civil power, further than may be necessary for protection and security equal and common to all others."

PP#(2) "...the power to elect persons to the exercise of authority in any particular society resides in that society."

1. Note the Reformed Position:

"...all of which are either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary inference may be deduced therefrom... WCF I.VI; WLC #99.

PP#(7) All church power; "...is only ministerial and declarative...¹ must be purely moral and spiritual in nature"²

Comments about the use of The Preface:

The Preface is the context within which the life and ministry of the PCA is to be conducted.

Each decision (local church, presbytery, general assembly) should, therefore, be in conformity with the Preface.

Each interpretation of the BCO should, therefore, be made in the context of the Preface.

Each proposal to delete, revise or expand the BCO should, therefore, reflect the Preface.

IV. The Perspective of the Church from the Viewpoint of the Individual Christian:

This is personal, individual and difficult to categorize. However, some typical perspectives are:

- the church is my spiritual home, no matter where I may travel;
- the church supplies me the spiritual and physical support system I need with which to keep going;
- the church and its preaching is an inspiration to me;
- the church is a necessity and it fills that role to some degree; otherwise, I have little interest in it;
- the church supplies religious teaching to my children and I know that this is necessary.

1. Therefore, not legislative

2. Therefore, not civil.

CONNECTIONALISM

I. Definition:

Connectionalism in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) is the voluntary commitment, before God, of its officers and members to one another to be this particular branch of the church of Jesus Christ.

II. Purpose:

The purpose of connectionalism in the PCA is to enjoy the benefits of such commitment, namely: the blessing of living under godly accountability; ready assistance for member and officer to grow in grace; numerical growth throughout the PCA as God pleases to add of His own to the body, and the opportunity to provide leadership to the church-at-large - all for the glory of God.

III. Description:

Connectionalism is a ministerial - not civil - relationship between the individuals, courts and individuals with their courts.

Therefore, it does not introduce any control of the organism through an organizational structure. As such, it is consistent with historic Presbyterianism, especially in the American tradition. Further, it avoids being a refined congregationalism or a corporate bishopric.

It is an expression of the church's commitment to and practice of Heb. 13:17 as a voluntary use of two-layered accountability - the oversight elders bring to the flock and the submission of the members to the oversight, for their greatest blessing before God.

IV. BCO Statements Which Develop PCA'S Connectionalism:

(The following sections of the BCO show that the framers of the PCA and its documents had a definite philosophy of relationship in mind, although the word 'connectionalism' does not appear in the BCO.)

1. Every ordained officer of the church (teaching elders, ruling elders, deacons) has taken the same moral ordination vows before the Living God and His Church, especially that he is committed to the inerrancy of the Word of God the Standard for the church (21-5[1]) and as the foundation for all of his personal faith and practice.

2. the power of the church is vested in the whole body (i.e. the people); 3-1;¹

3. each court exercises original jurisdiction over its own business; 11-4, paragraph 2; and, PREFACE, Preliminary Principles, (1), last sentence - "No religious constitution shall be supported by the civil power, further than may be necessary for the protection and security equal and common to all others";

4. the lower courts are subject to the review and control of the higher courts; 11-4, paragraph 2;²

5. the courts are not separate and independent tribunals--every judicial act of one is an act of the whole; 11-4;

6. each elder, presbytery and the General Assembly enter into a solemn covenant promising never to attempt to secure possession of a congregation's property against its will; 25-10; and, each congregation is recognized as competent to function on its own in matters of church ownership; 25-11;

7. the entire concept of connectionalism is based on mutual love and confidence; 25-11;

8. the General Assembly itself submits to the advice and consent of its presbyteries for any and all changes of its constitutional standards and presbytery boundaries; BCO 26, and 14-6.

V. Major Force Dynamics Flowing From Connectionalism

PCA Connectionalism calls upon the people/courts of the church to insist that:

- every ordained officer has made himself accountable by oath to the Living God and therefore automatically carries the responsibility to determine that:

a) every candidate for ordination is prepared to intelligently assume this same vow;

b) every ordained officer continues to live with the commitment to and its meaning on his personal life and doctrine;

1. Therefore, not in the officers or the church courts.

2. Note that the RAO now calls this REVIEW, not REVIEW AND CONTROL.

- all power comes from Christ;
- all power is awarded by Christ as a legacy to the people with no contingencies;
- as such, it has been awarded to the people, not the officers or the courts of the church;
- the people/courts acknowledge that they need each other in order best to know and carry-out the will of God in their own lives and in the life of the church;
- the consequent interaction between people/courts assumes that the Lord is at work in each person/court, constantly working so that they are growing into Christ;
- this assumption effectively excludes the need for or use of the civil courts to provide the power needed to accomplish goals;
- the acknowledgement of mutual need commits each person/court to stand as one with every judicial action of every court, when properly taken;
- the motivation for and safeguard of the acknowledged need for each other is the honor given to the Lord by conducting all interactions with the commitment of mutual love and confidence one for the other;
- the ultimate expression of the PCA's connectionalism is that a church's property belongs exclusively to that local church, and, denominational affiliation is based exclusively on the commitment of that local church to the denomination.

VI. Working at Connectionalism:

The way to make PCA connectionalism work is to have each teaching elder and ruling elder made aware of the implications of the concept before ordination and to have it properly taught in the life of the church and its courts with regularity.

The definition and purpose of connectionalism must be taught in order to have it assume its proper influence in the church.

Also, the elders must regularly evaluate their degree of personal commitment to be connected with the officers, members, and churches of the PCA. This demands defining the benefits accrued from the relationship and the contributions made to it. It also demands a reconsideration of the ordination vows and a recommitment to them on occasion.

In teaching connectionalism the causes for its potential breakdown in one or another area of the life and ministry of the PCA must be presented as a warning for the future.

The major areas of failure are:

- lack of instruction for elders as to its meaning;
- poor or misguided instruction, often a consequence of having been 'hurt' in a previous church situation;
- fear by elders of condemnation for not being fully accountable for everything;
- fear to trust the Lord to be working in the lives of others, changing them day by day into His own image.

The most positive way to teach connectionalism is to develop love and confidence with one another in various churches and courts by getting to know others in personal ways so that sharing together the experiences of leadership will be the natural experience.

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA'S COMMITMENT TO ITS HERITAGE

The heritage of the Presbyterian Church in America has two parts:

- a) its standards and its procedural documents;
- b) its ecclesiastical roots.

The church is committed to respond to the beauty and obligation of its heritage in such a way that the future of the church does not drift or turn from its biblical foundation while keeping responsibility for its life and ministry ultimately in the hands of the people who make up the church.

The standards and procedural documents of the PCA will be called its FORMAL HERITAGE throughout this discussion.

The PCA's FORMAL HERITAGE consists of:

1. its Standard - the Bible;
2. its Subordinate Standards - the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms, the Book of Church Order (including those portions of the Directory of Worship that have been adopted by the GA);
3. its Rules of Assembly Operation (RAO), its Certificate of Incorporation and its Corporate By-Laws.

The intrinsic value of the various parts of the FORMAL HERITAGE is to maintain the distinctions that make it proper to have this denomination. They are that it has:

- a) an absolute for its life and practice - the Bible;
- b) non-absolutes for all its other documents.

The ecclesiastical roots of the PCA will be called its ECCLESIASTICAL HERITAGE.

The ECCLESIASTICAL HERITAGE of the PCA is:

- its commitment to operating the church with a 'grass-roots' philosophy.

The intrinsic value of the ECCLESIASTICAL HERITAGE is to safeguard and enhance the people in controlling their own life and ministry as a church rather than to have it controlled by an hierarchy within the church.

The most important objective to be achieved in making these intrinsic values be the experience of the church is to maintain both parts of its heritage as major dynamics in the governing and operating the PCA.

KEEPING THE FORMAL HERITAGE AS A MAJOR DYNAMIC

The key to keeping FORMAL HERITAGE as a dynamic is to maintain its absolute with no possibility of change and to control change of its non-absolutes with appropriate caution as well as care.

The following schematic will demonstrate the PCA's way to keep the FORMAL HERITAGE from losing its sharpness and influence.

KEEPING THE PCA'S FORMAL HERITAGE AS A MAJOR DYNAMIC IN ITS LIFE

| DESCRIPTION | TITLE | EASE OF AMENDING |
|---------------------|-----------|------------------|
| <u>THE ABSOLUTE</u> | | |
| THE STANDARD | THE BIBLE | UNAMENABLE |

THE NON-ABSOLUTES

A. THE SUBORDINATE STANDARDS

| | |
|---|---|
| THE WESTMINSTER - CONFESSION CATECHISMS | VERY DIFFICULT TO AMEND: BCO 26-3 |
| THE BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER | VERY DIFFICULT TO AMEND: BCO 26-2 |

B. THE OPERATIONAL DOCUMENTS

| | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| ECCLESIASTIC BUSINESS | RULES OF ASSEMBLY OPERATION (RAO) | QUITE EASY TO AMEND OR SUSPEND (RAO XVIII) |
| CIVIL BUSINESS | BY-LAWS | QUITE EASY TO AMEND BYLAWS IX |

The basic way to make it difficult to amend the NON-ABSOLUTES is to force them to be processed through the entire court system of the PCA and, in the final step, to have impressive support for the change from the entire GENERAL ASSEMBLY. This provides the time and opportunity needed to determine the degree to which a change may change the character or direction of the denomination.

This conclusion is viewed by the church as more important than the importance attached to the apparent validity or urgency of the issue involved. It serves to avoid making decisions on the basis of expediency.

The schematic also demonstrates that, the easier it is to amend a document, the less crucial it is felt to be in maintaining its FORMAL HERITAGE.

This commitment is structured, of course, not to rule out changes that reflect size in growth, change to accomplish a biblical contextualization of the denomination with its culture, or change which makes the work of the church more efficient.

Except for the Bible, the amending processes are expected to be used.

The way to make accomplished change as permanent as possible is to propose the change to be in the BCO, not the RAO.

The proper way to introduce change is by way of an OVERTURE from a presbytery. It should be noted that changes can be introduced by the PERMANENT COMMITTEES/AGENCIES as well.

OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE FORMAL HERITAGE AS A DYNAMIC IN THE GOVERNING AND OPERATION OF THE PCA:

1. The commitment of every teaching elder to the inerrancy of the Bible apparently is universal throughout the PCA. It is apparent that most if not all of the ruling elders likewise are committed to inerrancy.

This affords confidence that all the FORMAL HERITAGE has a potentially solid foundation upon which to maintain a dynamic influence upon the PCA.

2. Likewise, the use of the subordinate standards seems to be increasing. In and of itself, this bodes well for the Church.

However, it may be that more emphasis is being given to details of the BCO than to the Confessional Standards.

No thorough study has been made to prove that this is the case, but in many presbytery and GA meetings there is some evidence of it being the case.

This does not enhance the Church for the future.

3. Within the framework of the subordinate standards there is clearly a division of thought as to the implication involved when one takes the ordination vows. This is called the 'subscription' to the standards.

One of the fears of one point of view in this issue is that the may be permitting a dilution of the church's firm commitment to its standards either by making the conditions of subscription too firm or not firm enough.

This will be discussed in detail in the section entitled "SUBSCRIPTION."

4. An spinoff of this is evident in the area of the Procedural Documents. In fact, it is in this arena that the difference thus far have become most pronounced.

Some major changes have been accomplished in recent years in these documents. They appear to be well received by most of the ruling elders of the church.

One example of this is discussed in the Appendix on the Stated Clerk.

It appears that this difference has not altered the dynamic of the PCA's commitment to its FORMAL HERITAGE, nor is there any evidence that it will.

KEEPING THE ECCLESIASTICAL HERITAGE AS A MAJOR DYNAMIC

The heritage that the PCA instituted when it began was that decisions of consequence (therefore of control) are the business of the entire church, not that of a few individuals or organizations within the church. This became known as the 'GRASS-ROOTS' PHILOSOPHY for operating the PCA, for making decisions, for exercising oversight by the people of the denomination.

EXERCISING THIS PHILOSOPHY

There are eight distinct areas in which this PHILOSOPHY is exercised by the GA.

1. The GA defines itself as consisting of all the TE's in good standing and RE's from every congregation according to a prescribed ratio.

Note that the PCA has no representative principle limiting the number of voting commissioners. Theoretically, the total in attendance should be well over 2000.

Built into this principle is the goal of having an equal number of TE's and RE's at each GA meeting.

2. The GA itself elects its Moderator and defines his task to be limited to guiding the GA through its business, including elections; responding to the overtures and COMMITTEE/AGENCY recommendations, but not be the representative of the church between GA meetings.

3. The GA elects its Stated Clerk and structures his ministry to be under the supervision of and subject to the Administrative Committee.

4. The GA elects the members of the COMMITTEES/AGENCIES. (The Administrative Committee has members-at-large elected by the GA plus having representatives from the other COMMITTEES/AGENCIES. However, the safeguard is that even then these have been elected originally to their respective COMMITTEES/AGENCIES by the GA.

5. The Coordinator/President/Director for each COMMITTEE/AGENCY is elected by the GA each year.

6. Each COMMITTEE/AGENCY must have its budget approved by the GA.

7. Each COMMITTEE/AGENCY must have its ASKINGS approved by the GA.

8. Each COMMITTEE/AGENCY must present every new proposal for approval by the GA before action can be taken on it.

FOCI FROM WHICH THE ECCLESIASTICAL HERITAGE
IS MADE INFLUENTIAL

There are seven major foci in the GA's PHILOSOPHY that are used as the means of exercising its influence.

1. The GA has established orderly procedures for the conducting and reporting of the work of its COMMITTEES/AGENCIES. They are detailed in the RULES OF ASSEMBLY OPERATION.

The key facets of this focal point are:

a) all the mission and educational work on the GA level is designed to be done through three permanent committees (MTW, MNA & CE&P) - not through commissions or Boards of Directors. A fourth permanent committee (Administrative Committee) has been established to service these three and the GA in general, but not to be a program committee per se.

b) the other program work is to be done by the AGENCIES, each set up by special action of the GA.

c) no COMMITTEE/AGENCY is permitted to generate funds for programs not yet approved by the GA. If they have been received, they may not be spent until the program is approved by the GA.

It is therefore necessary for the various sessions and presbyteries to keep themselves abreast of the work of its COMMITTEES/AGENCIES. Also, following the procedures of the BCO, they

must exercise their prerogative to communicate by way of overtures in order to propose changes.

2. The GA structures COMMITTEES OF COMMISSIONERS (COC) at each meeting of the GA to assist it in doing its work through its COMMITTEES/AGENCIES.

a) The COC's serve by:

- 1) reviewing the work of a COMMITTEE/AGENCY ;
- 2) evaluating the work;
- 3) reporting for the COMMITTEE/AGENCY by presenting the recommendations made by the COMMITTEE/AGENCY or reporting its amendment of the COMMITTEE/AGENCY recommendation after it has considered it in an 'executive-session' meeting.

b) No one on a COMMITTEE/AGENCY or employed by one may serve on a COC. This rule is designed to afford a high degree of independent and 'GRASS-ROOT' thinking about the work before the GA (RAO XIII).

c) The COMMITTEE/AGENCY Chairman may contest a recommendation of the COC by way of offering the COMMITTEE'S/AGENCY'S original recommendation as a substitute motion is designed to permit the GA to make a weighted decision on a given subject (RAO XIII-7).

d) All other committees (except those dealing with nominations and review/examination) must present themselves by way of a COC. This rule keeps the GA in a standardized approach to its business.

3. The GA has established orderly procedures for the process of nominating members to its COMMITTEES/AGENCIES.

4. The written reports of each COMMITTEE/AGENCY are mailed to each commissioner well before the beginning of the GA.

5. The AC is directed to study the proposed budgets and 'askings' of each COMMITTEE/AGENCY prior to GA and to report its recommendations to the GA.

6. No COMMITTEE/AGENCY has access to the GA except by a COC, and other reports, etc., are either directed to the GA through a COC or must have direct authorization to report directly.

7. Each commissioner, because of his study of reports before the GA begins, the recommendations of the COC's, and the floor discussion on them, is accountable to be in a position to vote his conscience on nominations, overtures and COMMITTEE/AGENCY recommendations.

OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE ECCLESIASTICAL HERITAGE AT WORK

No plan of men can keep the church's heritage intact and dynamic. Even so, the present practice of the PCA continues to do much to accomplish this.

There are two considerations about its short comings that have been discussed at length in past years but have not yet been resolved.

1. The COC procedure often places the COMMITTEE/AGENCY in a no-win position. It is a difficult task for each COC to start with no continuity of experience among its members to orient itself, then to grasp the implications of the report of the COMMITTEE/AGENCY before it and finally to make correct recommendations. Therefore, the COC normally invites the COMMITTEE/AGENCY to provide an orientation to its work and recommendations. Consequently, there is the potential, when it does make its response, to be perceived by the GA as not helping it as much as being manipulative either for or against the COMMITTEE/AGENCY.

The COC members often have little knowledge of how the system works and seldom have an indepth knowledge of the ministry of the COMMITTEE/AGENCY being served. When faced with some multi-million dollar/year budgets.

The COC procedure as now practiced occasionally makes it necessary to use a great deal of the GA's time. The COC must make recommendations on complex matters. Then the GA must work through a complicated parliamentary procedure if the COMMITTEE/AGENCY wants to have the GA consider a proposal other than that which the COC has recommended. This is the only way the COMMITTEE/AGENCY can achieve GA of its position.

Finally, in effect the present COC procedures make the COC a surrogate committee. By serving through the present process of the RAO, the GA is actually insulated from some of the direct relationship and interaction it ought to have with its COMMITTEES/AGENCIES.

It should be noted that this is not the way it was envisioned or practiced in the first years of the PCA, but revisions of the RAO has developed this procedure.

2. The desired mix of half TE's and half RE's is no longer being accomplished.

Only 1000 to 1200 register. This number is actually only about half what it ought to be. It appears that the PCA has a de facto system of representation, but one that is not accomplishing the desired goal.

In addition, far too many commissioners find it necessary to leave before the business is actually completed.

The GA is seeking to keep its ECCLESIASTICAL HERITAGE a major dynamic in the life and ministry of the denomination.

It must be diligent not to forfeit its 'GRASS-ROOTS' by permitting the COC problems and the unbalanced mix of RE's & TE's to discourage too many potential commissioners (especially RE's) from even attending.

It must also be diligent not to discourage the COMMITTEES/AGENCIES from unreserved compliance with the GA's directives.

SUBSCRIPTION

The Presbyterian Church in America is a voluntary body of believers whose officers and members are committed to be this particular branch of the Church.

Establishing and maintaining that commitment is accomplished by the Holy Spirit's work throughout the church, but especially in the hearts of the elders. The goal of the Spirit's work is to enable each particular body of believers comprising the churches of the PCA to "...be a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit" (Eph. 2:22).

The elders formally enter into this commitment when they take their ordination vows. To be submissive to the will of God by taking these vows they must wait on the Spirit to enable them to act with an intelligent grasp of the implications of the vows. Further, they must accept them with an unreserved persuasion that these vows are moral commitments that they accept as the way in which they will conduct their ministry.

The first three ordination questions are the controlling implications of all the oaths.

THE FIRST THREE QUESTIONS OF ORDINATION:

To take a vow is to subscribe to its implications.

The subscription involved in taking the first three oaths are worded so as to express a declining graduation of the rigidity controlling each successive oath. This is demonstrated by comparing the action portion of each of the oaths:

BOC. 21:5 -

1. re: SCRIPTURE: THE OATH IS "I BELIEVE"
2. re: SUBORDINATE STANDARDS: THE OATH IS "I SINCERELY RECEIVE AND ADOPT"
3. re: GOVERNMENTAL (INCLUDING DISCIPLINARY SECTIONS) AND WORSHIP: THE OATH IS: "I APPROVE"

THE SUBSCRIPTION ISSUE IN ORDINATION:

The issue of what is meant by subscribing to the PCA's system of doctrine and its standards by church officers is at present dividing the elders (and, on occasion the members) of the PCA to a tangible degree.

The key issue has two parts. The first is the need to determine in one's own heart what he means in using the oath to the second ordination vow. There is the necessity of each Session and Presbytery to be satisfied that a candidate's answer does not permit him to hold a view(s) which in fact destroys the unity of the system of doctrine we hold dear.

In the GA minutes of, 1982, in an APPENDIX entitled Confessional Subscription, four possible ways to interpret the phrase were presented. They have been used as the basis of discussion ever since.

They are:

- 1). the "substance of doctrine" view;
- 2). the "vital to the system" view;
- 3). the "very doctrines of the Word" view;
- 4). the "very word of doctrine" view.

View #1 is self-condemning. It amounts to not having any standard against which the life and ministry of the church can be measured.

View # 4 is also self-condemning. Some do hold to this extreme view. However, there is no place for it in the PCA because it elevates the subordinate standards into equality with the Bible, our only Standard, per se. This becomes a violation of the first ordination vow.

The discussion, therefore, is between views # 2 & 3, often termed 'loose' and 'strict' subscription, respectively. These are unfortunate terms to use.

In the true sense of being 'strict' with one's convictions in the office of elder and deacon, everyone ought to be strict.

Not only that, the term 'loose' subscription implies that the oath was not taken seriously in the first place and, if so, the individual is in sin by taking the oath with a less than sincere heart.

When these terms are used, therefore, they should be done with great care and only along with the constant restating of definitions of the various views, not as 'handles' for describing a person who holds such a view.

THE DIFFERENCES IN THE VIEWS 2 & 3:

The force of the difference between views 2 & 3 comes to light when the candidate for office is asked if he takes exception to anything in the Westminster Confession or Catechisms because of personal scruples.

Note that the 'exception clause' (BCO 21-4, last sentence of paragraph 4) deals with omitting parts of a candidate's examination, not with his scruples.

The practice of taking exceptions because of scruples has been with the Presbyterian heritage in our country through the church's history. In the historic Adopting Act of 1729 it was an issue. It actually was one part of the Old School and New School issue in 1837.

Oversimplified, yet valuable descriptions of these two views are:

View 2: the 'vital to the system' view:

Session or Presbytery must determine if a scruple expressed as an exception by a candidate for ordination affects any of the articles essential or necessary to the system;

View 3: the 'very doctrines of the Word' view:

The Westminster Confession and Catechisms are the expression of 'the very doctrines of the Word'. Therefore, scruples are limited to exceptions over the exact words or propositional forms used. As such, they cannot question the substance of any part of the documents.

Drs. Barker and Knight have written extensive papers on these views. The papers may be found in the Seminary Library. A few quotes are given in APPENDIX C.

THE NINTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PCA:

In the 9th GA, a Personal Resolution (#5) dealt with the issue of exceptions in the context of subscription. The following is an extended excerpt from the minutes.

The Questions Presented in the Personal Resolution:

"...what statements in the confessional standards are to be regarded as 'fundamental to the system of doctrine' which, if a man should fail to embrace them, would disqualify that man from holding office in the PCA?

"May a man be lawfully received/ordained/installed within the PCA who rejects either implicitly or explicitly any of the following doctrines...?"

Answer:

"It would be unwise, improper and unconstitutional for the GA to determine abstractly apart from the proper process afforded by our constitutional standards what would disqualify a man from holding office in the PCA...

"The approval of any man for office belongs, in the first place, to the court of jurisdiction...

"Any exception to the constitutional standards may have the potential of striking at the vitals of religion... A system of doctrine is made up of the constituent parts, so that a variation in one of these parts may logically effect a change in the system as a whole. Any court of jurisdiction should therefore give careful consideration to any exception a man might reveal or take with regard to the constitutional standards before determining that an exception is or is not in conformity to the standards and/or proceeding to receive/ordain/install him.

"When a man is ordained with the allowance of exceptions to his full acceptance of the PCA standards, he thereby obtains (1) approval of his suitability to function within the ordained office, and (2) liberty to believe and live in some way not fully in accord with some portion of those standards. This allowance of exceptions, however, does not warrant his teaching or preaching of that matter so as to disturb the peace and unity of the church. The court of jurisdiction must determine in each situation whether such unwarranted actions have occurred."

This statement was widely understood as that GA calling for commitment to View # 3 - "the very doctrines of the Word" view of subscription.

THOUGHTS ON SUBSCRIPTION BY DR. DAVID C. JONES, CTS:

Dr. David C. Jones, Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Mo., has prepared a paper entitled THOUGHTS ON SUBSCRIPTION, (March, 1987).

He argues that the Reformed view of creeds and confessions, "...and hence of subscription to them, presupposes the fundamental principle of sola scriptura.. He goes on to state the conclusion of this commitment as defined in the Westminster Larger Catechism #3: Q. WHAT IS THE WORD OF GOD? A: "The Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, the only rule of faith and obedience."

In addition, he points out the implication of this principle: "...surfaces in the WCF in chapters on the Holy Scriptures, on Christian Liberty of Conscience, and on Synods and Councils..".

In the last of these (Chapter 31), his point is that it belongs to synods and councils "...ministerially to determine controversies of faith and cases of conscience...which degrees and determinations, if consonant with the Word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission ..."(31:2).

His argument is that "...though synods and councils are ordinances of God, they have no independent authority in addition to the Word of God. Their determinations are to be treated with due respect, but only if they are consonant with the holy scriptures....".

He points out: "There is a "higher court" to which the synods and councils are subject: 'The supreme judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils...are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture' ". (1:10).

This understanding emphasizes the ministerial role of the synods and councils in determining controversies of faith.

Based on this, he proceeds to discuss the way the PCA has expanded the first two ordination questions to bring out the intended meaning more explicitly. Further, he makes reference to the RPCES government as an important historical support.

He gives an excellent list of reference papers, and then quotes extensively from James Henley Thornwell who, as the advocate of 'strict subscriptionism, says: "The great system which they teach never can be altered by those who love the truth; but there are incidental statements not affecting the plan of salvation and the doctrines of grace, about which our children may not be as well satisfied as ourselves." (THE COLLECTED WRITINGS OF JAMES HENLEY THORNWELL, 1873, in a report entitled: REASONS FOR SEPARATE ORGANIZATION.).

FOURTEENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY:

Five years later there was a situation that led to an historic movement of the church toward the "Vital to the System" view.

At the 14th GA, one of the major implications of the "very doctrine of the Word" view became evident through the voting on issue after issue on the floor of the Assembly.

The GA became mired in arguments and almost unable to make decisions on any issue because of being 'dead-locked' on vote after vote.

Shortly after the GA, Dr. R. C. Sproule expressed his concern about the matter. He wrote in the PRESBYTERIAN JOURNAL of 8/20/86:

"There is division in the house. The 14th GA demonstrated the most intense spirit of division in our young church's history. Many of us left Philadelphia distressed and confused about the sharply contested issues.

"One cause was a clear difference with respect to strict subscription to our confessional theology. I do not believe the divided votes of our assembly reflect a divided theology.

"...I speak as one who does not agree with the strict approach. I want our church to be Biblical and solidly Reformed. (Maybe I qualify as an 'SR'). My fear, however, is that zeal for strictness tends to cause overreaction. If we become too strict, we risk provoking a negative reaction against subscription at all. A spirit of distrust may emerge that will eventually lead to the very evil latitudinarianism we need to avoid..."

ASSEMBLIES SINCE THE 14TH GA:

In following General Assemblies several crucial issues were came before the Assembly and the voting indicated that the commissioners were becoming convinced of the 'vital to the system' view.

The first one had to do with Missouri's right to put a 'fence' around certain exceptions about some scruples of a candidate in the matter of prophecy. It was Judicial case # 5, in the 17th GA.

The GA voted in favor of the Presbytery's majority opinion.

In the 18th GA, overtures whose intent was to overturn the position of the preceding GA were defeated.

The next crucial issue had to do with the office of the Stated Clerk.

In the 19th GA, the Stated Clerk was named the Chief Administrative Officer of the Administrative Committee.

Note that the change of the Committee name from Committee on Administration (COM) to Administrative Committee (AC) was used to demonstrate part of the issue. Previously, the COM included the Stated Clerk with [basically] equal status with a Coordinator for the COM. The change was to make the Stated Clerk the Chief Administrative Officer [but; not CEO] under the AC with a Business Manager working under him, thus doing away with a Coordinator. This removed the possibility of two-heads for the COM and it removed the COM from the potential of becoming a Program Committee rather than remaining a Service Committee.

This reflected the direction consistent with of the GA away from the 'very doctrines of the Word' view. It provided a way for a Stated Clerk, who might have a 'vital to the system' view, to have the responsibilities and opportunities of service office affords (and all the related responsibilities of being the Secretary and Treasurer of the PCA) under the oversight of the AC without being yoked to a Coordinator who might have the other view, or vice versa.

THE ISSUE FROM THE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF EARLY AMERICAN PRESBYTERIANISM:

Dr. Barker has articulated a major point in regard to the 'vital to the system' view.

"A proper understanding of the ADOPTING ACT must include the PRELIMINARY ACT as part of the immediate historical context.

"The reference to 'essential and necessary articles' occurs five times in the 'PRELIMINARY ACT' in which a method is proposed for dealing with any scruple a minister or candidate may have:

...he shall at the time of making his said declaration declare his sentiments to the Presbytery or Synod, who shall, notwithstanding, admit him to the exercise of the ministry...if the Synod or Presbytery shall judge his scruple or mistake to be only about articles not essential and necessary in doctrine, worship or government..." (RESPONSE TO THE 10TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY'S PAPER ON 'CONFSSIONAL SUBSCRIPTION'. - Covenant Theological Seminary, 1/21/83.)

The 'PRELIMINARY ACT' thus expressed confidence that the 'vital to the system' view would maintain purity in the church.

RELATING ORDINATION QUESTIONS #1 AND #2:

Every elder agrees that an unequivicable commitment to the Scriptures as the inerrant Word of God is mandatory if the PCA is to maintain itself as a pure church.

The commitment to what a pure church is cannot be separated from the belief of the elders about the Word of God itself.

The second ordination vow - SINCERELY RECEIVE AND ADOPT - by virtue of being on the second level of commitment, carries with it some degree of permissible divergence.

For instance, in RAO 3-5 (Qualifications for the STATED CLERK), the GA declares:

"He must be conversant with the breadth of Reformed thinking in the PCA and be able to communicate with members of the PCA and with representatives of other Reformed denominations."

This appears to indicate that the PCA recognizes the potential of divergence while (because of the first ordination question) not allowing it to destroy the integrity of the church's system of doctrine.

The first ordination vow may not be invalidated by permitting an unwarranted divergence of the church's system of doctrine or the church's commitment to the inerrancy of the Word will be damaged.

THE ISSUE OF CHURCH PURITY IN REGARD TO THE SECOND ORDINATION VOW:

Several questions must be examined about church purity as part of this study.

Is it possible that the 'very doctrines of the Word' view is the only way that the PCA can maintain church/doctrinal purity in the future?

Is giving up this view tantamount to giving the PCA over to the liberal theologian or at least to latitudinarianism within the next few generations?

Both of these questions call for a search into the very heartbeat of the PCA. The issue is to understand what makes the PCA elder vote as he does in his church, Session, Presbytery and GA.

Purity in our church, in doctrine and life, will only be maintained as elders lead the church by paying the price to be submissive to God's will while trusting that He is simultaneously working in the hearts of each candidate for office and in the hearts of all those involved in every issue in which a decision is made.

It cannot be accomplished by using the Subordinate Standards and the Procedural Documents as if they were of such intrinsic value that they actually could serve as substitutes for trust that the Spirit will work in the hearts of all who are involved. They can only be used as a measuring tool drafted by men. They must be guarded and used but only as a tool for helping to search the heart of each candidate/issue. They may not be permitted to be a mechanical way to solve each issue.

The practice of waiting on the Spirit to enlighten the hearts and minds of candidates/examiners and of the participants seeking resolution for issues which are before the church, calls for waiting on Him to really understand any announced scruple or difference of opinion. It also calls for Spirit-given insight as to the probable implications of each position taken. It calls for a church that literally lives by trust. It works at it, and it lives by it.

The result of such an approach to the life and ministry of the church is that confidence that the Spirit is working will be enjoyed and will grow into the 'hallmark' of the PCA. It will also remove the misguided concept that a legislative approach to issues will, in and of itself, keep the church pure.

Lack of this confidence begins to rob the church of gentleness, tenderness and love, with a further consequence of loss of confidence in one another. The legislative approach may keep the church technically pure in its doctrinal statements for a period of time, but at the expense of leading to spiritual sterility.

How then is decision-making, based on trust and designed to keep purity in the church, to be accomplished?

Each elder must diligently process the work of the church and the consequent decisions that must be made (especially as to the fitness of candidates for church office) in a given context. That context is:

1. (Acts 20:28) he must never cease to guard himself - his life and his ministry - to determine that it is bearing positive fruit for the Lord and that it is not a shame on the name of the Lord;

2. (Acts 20:28) he must be a shepherd in fact as well as name;

3. he must have a working standard of what a biblically healthy church is as his point of reference for decision-making;

4. he must make each decision by first searching the Scriptures for insight into the issue, waiting in prayer for the Holy Spirit to enable him to weigh the merits of the issue, seeking advice and counsel from mature brothers whose experience is valued and then, by faith to decide what he perceives the will of the Lord appears to be. When he takes the time and effort to do this, he not only can proceed with confidence, but he also knows that he has not yielded to any undo influence, even that which comes with situations that appear to be extremely urgent;

5. he must wait on God as he works through his decision and its consequences to dominate his heart by:

a) trust that God will really work in the lives of all involved in the decision, not only his own;

b) trust that God really is at work through His infinite and perfect providence in the midst of the issues involved and the decision-making itself;

c) trust that the others involved in the consequence of the decision once it is made will share in (or at least grow in) a confidence that God is working.

CHURCH UNITY AND PEACE AS WELL AS CHURCH PURITY:

True church unity must embrace permissible flexibility and permissible diversity or it forces the body's 'organic unity' into the mold of 'organizational identical oneness.' At best, repression of diversity is an attempt to develop the church (which is an organism supported by an organization) and seek to maintain its life by strengthening one point of view in the organization over another rather than by feeding on the Word and depending on the work and presence of the Holy Spirit.

The 'vital to the system' view holds the feet of the elders 'to-the-fire' of commitment, even in the pressure-cooker problems they often face, while allowing them to benefit by the permissible divergence among themselves.

This in turn makes it more realistic to strive for peace in the church.

DANGERS, STRENGTHS AND A PROPOSED RESOLUTION FOR TENSIONS FLOWING
FROM DIFFERENT VIEWS ON SUBSCRIPTION
AND
THOUGHTS ABOUT APPLYING THE RESOLUTION

The difference of opinion about the second question of the ordination vows has caused tensions in Presbyterianism since the beginning of its use.

My paper on SUBSCRIPTION identifies the two basic views taken about the issue. They have been called:

- the 'vital to the system' view;
- the 'very doctrines of the Word' view.

Dr. Morton Smith has suggested that they be called the 'system' view and the 'full' view'. These terms will be used throughout.

Basic to any discussion on subscription is the position of the ordinand on the inerrancy of the Bible. One of two possible premises must be recognized as that which the ordinand holds before developing dealing with the subscription issue. Either the ordinand is not fully committed to the inerrancy of the Bible (in the autographs) or he is.

The first of the two possible premises is that the ordinand does not intelligently and/or conscientiously commit himself to the inerrancy of Scripture. If this premise is permitted, regardless of his position on subscription, there is an extremely high potential that the church will become heretical under his leadership. If there is even the slightest question about his commitment to inerrancy nothing further is needed to declare him unfit to be ordained.

The second (and only worthy) possible premise is that the ordinand is committed to the inerrancy of Scripture. This is the premise that is used to undergird all of the following discussion.

It is my observation in traveling throughout the PCA that there is little question about the inerrancy of the Bible - it is quite universally agreed to by both ruling and teaching elders, although not all fully understand the implications of their position.

**DANGERS OF MINISTERING WITH AN
IMPROPER OR INADEQUATE CONVICTION ABOUT THE SUBSCRIPTION ISSUE**

I. An improper view: The ordinand does not understand the implication of the subscription issue involved in question # 2.

When this is the case, the church these men eventually lead seldom will maintain no less develop a Reformed theological position.

If the church already has a Reformed position the church will (albeit gradually) become satisfied with becoming a general evangelical church with a Reformed name. It could happen in a decade, possibly two. Its members will not have the discernment to recognize Reformed expressions of doctrine and sometimes not even recognize heretical doctrine. Also, its members often will be easily persuaded of the validity of the substitute.

II. An inadequate view: The ordinand holds either to one or the other view of subscription, but with little conviction.

The consequences that flow from each position when administered by a pastor with little conviction about subscription are:

| System | Full |
|---|---|
| a). the doctrines of the church soon cease to be thought of as a connected 'whole' - a system in which each doctrine relates to all the others and stand together. | a). the doctrines of the church soon cease to be thought of as a connected-'whole' - a system in which each doctrine relates to all others and stands together. |
| b) the church emphasizes salvation by grace and the providential love and care of God for His own, but otherwise becomes more and more of a typical, general evangelical church probably focused on growth in size and good family relationships. | b) the church emphasizes the doctrines of sovereignty, covenant theology and salvation by grace, but tends to lose the desire to be focused on anything. |
| c). in both cases the lack of conviction too often establishes the basis for: | |
| 1). future examinations of candidates in a rather perfunctory, inadequate manner; | |
| 2). a church that ultimately is not a Reformed church but a general or, at best, a unique 'evangelical' church. | |

III. An improper view: The ordinand holds to one of the views of subscription, but with too rigid ('zealot-oriented') an application of his conviction:

When this is the case, the church (the individual members and/or the corporate body) these men eventually lead but seldom develop no less apply a balanced world-life view for decision-making. The following scenarios illustrate this conclusion:

| System | Full |
|--|--|
| a). preaching and teaching is conducted so that the Bible is always primary and the doctrines of the Reformed Faith, though not transgressed, are never clearly presented and therefore never fully appreciated or understood by the people; | a). preaching and teaching is conducted so that the Bible is primary but its doctrine is perceived to be the hallmark of acceptable faith and practice; |
| | b).the church begins to concentrate on defending the faith as its primary ministry, and often evaluates preaching and teaching on the use or absence of terminology is deemed to be theologically correct. |

c) in both cases, the rigidity too often establishes the basis for:

1). future examinations of candidates in a rather hostile way, even at times degenerating into an inquisition-type atmosphere;

2) a tendency to live with a suspicious attitude toward Christians (inside the body as well as those outside the body) who do not practice the same degree of exactness in articulating and/or applying doctrine;

3). a downward church-health cycle that ultimately destroys the peace and unity of the body. The steps of the cycle appear to be:

- whatever the view, those who hold it begin to defend and propagate it with more and more vigor;

- objections to the presentation of the view become grounds for distrust of the other party;

- within the body, distrust of others undermines friendships, making them strained and often broken; spiritual support-networking is endangered;

- outside the body, distrust of others (individuals or corporate bodies) undermines the desire and ability to have any ongoing relationships;
- the distrust leads to zealous protectionism;
- zealous protectionism leads to at least informally implying that those who disagree with having heretical views;
- these implications lead to the disassociation of individuals from the activities of the body and eventually to individuals (or even proportionately large-size groups) leaving the church;
- leaving the church leads to a spiritual wilderness for some, to 'church-hopping' for others, and even to starting new congregations (often with the driving dynamic to add to the Great Commission the condition not to tolerate the kind of position those who remain hold) by groups who leave.

OPTIONS FOR OVERCOMING SUBSCRIPTION-ISSUE TENSION

There is more room for differences (not inadequate or improper ones) on the application of the subscription issue to exist as a healthy mix in the Presbytery and the General Assembly than on Session of a particular church.

In the particular church, unless those in the minority position are committed to serve without forcing every action of Pastor, Session and congregation into extended theological debate, the mix seldom works.

Option I and II below deals with the Session of a particular church. Option III deals with the Presbytery and General Assembly.

I. Every ordinand and the installed Teaching Elder(s) and Ruling Elders hold the same view and hold it graciously.

When all the officers of a Reformed church hold the same view and hold it firmly and graciously, the church that they direct will be a Reformed church and will experience purity, unity and peace on theological issues, on most of their applications and in the daily life of the church. Very often this circumstance exists because the Sr. Pastor and/or a leading elder(s), especially if instrumental in having established the church, have determined to make it the operating practice of the church.

However, care must be taken not to begin excluding people from the body or from service in it if they do not hold the same view. Their orientation into the church should have made clear the position of the church so that they join with at least an introduction to the conviction that church holds and practices.

II. The consciences of the minority members of the Session who hold a different view on subscription are satisfied that the church is basically healthy and they are willing to be in submission to their brethren on this point.

Much of that which is discussed above under Option I fits this situation. However, it is indeed hard, possibly theoretical, for those elders holding the minority view not to 'evangelize' their position whenever the opportunity arises. Consequently, this Option may indeed be too idealistic or difficult to be workable.

In order to be workable, this Option calls on the elders to have a clear and common accepted VISION for the church, and one that is an expression each elder accepts with a clear conscience. Then, each elder must be committed to apply the thrust of the VISION STATEMENT (or the unwritten statement if that is the case) to the life and ministry of the church.

Further, when a disagreement appears too great, each elder must be conscience-bound to pray and talk it through thoroughly. If this does not appear to have brought all concerned to mutual ground on which to proceed, have further discussion, using additional elders, preferably from outside the church. If this does not appear to satisfy the consciences of those involved, consider instituting the Mt. 18. discipline passage. BUT - a church officer turns to this passage on only the basis that the other brother's insistence on his view has disturbed the peace, purity and/or unity of Christ's body and therefore is a sin against the Lord.

The thrust of this 'how to' material is to seek before God an attitude of faith and love, energized by hope (Col. 1: 5).

This attitude must be the conviction that each elder seeks to adopt as his testimony of living with his brethren. When this attitude is operative to a tangible degree throughout the eldership, it will be a major tool in the structuring the leadership of the people. It also will be one of the most influential dynamics to bring unity, purity and peace into the church and enable the church to be used by God to develop a momentum in its desire to fulfill its VISION STATEMENT.

This attitude demands special care be taken not to develop groups of followers to personally gather in support of one or another elder between election of elders to the Session. The desire of any elder cannot be honoring to God if it is to generate enough voting power in the congregation to influence the voting in order to 'stack' the Session. Nominations to the office of elder and then the congregation's voting must be only on the basis of a candidate's living evidence of biblical qualification and his willingness and availability to serve the church as a shepherd of the body of Christ.

III. Every ordinand and the members of Presbytery and delegates to General Assembly deeply believe that the Holy Spirit is at work in His church and therefore embrace a degree of permissible 'breath' of faith to accept difference on the subscription issue with firmness and gracious forbearance.

The SEMPER REFORMANDA concept in our heritage of faith "...requires that the Reformed Faith be represented by a greater breath than any one camp can represent¹".

True unity in Presbytery and the General Assembly calls for trust that the Holy Spirit is working in the hearts of the members and therefore also in the corporate body and providing the dynamic that will make the dogma of SEMPER REFORMANDA a reality.

Without the dynamic developed by such trust, the majority, the most tenacious, the loudest, the most articulate, or the members with the most politically astute use of the rules becomes the voice of the court. This then forces the court to define the concept of being a unified, organic body as:

a church whose unity lies in becoming a church committed to have an identical oneness with a given model in every aspect of its organic (and often even organizational) structure.

It then makes the denomination a group of 'cloned' churches.

In order for trust to work, several basic assumptions must be in place. (Remember that the undergirding premise adopted at the beginning of this discussion is that the officers are, by oath, unequivocally committed to the inerrancy of Scripture. They are:

- the ordinands (and the RE & TE) are qualified biblically;
- each ordinand (and RE & TE) commits himself, when processing the work of the church and its consequent decision-making, to the following context for his ministry:
 1. he must never cease to guard himself - his life and his ministry - to determine that it is bearing positive fruit for the Lord and that it is not a shame on the name of the Lord (Acts 20:28);
 2. he must have a standard of what a biblically healthy church is as his point of reference for decision-making and work from and toward it continuously;
 3. he must make decisions by first searching the Scriptures for insight into the issue, waiting in prayer for the Holy Spirit to enable him to weigh the merits of the issue, seeking advice and counsel from mature brothers whose experience

1. PROPOSED STATEMENT OF IDENTITY FOR THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA, 1994, page 8.

is valued, listening with an open mind to the apologetic of his brothers and then, by faith, decide what he perceives the will of the Lord appears to be. When he takes the time and effort to do this, he not only can proceed with confidence, but he also knows that he has not yielded to any undo influence, even that which comes with situations that appear to be of extreme urgency;

4. he must wait on God to dominate his heart as he works through decisions in order to enjoy the trust that:

a) God is really working in the decision-making in the lives of all involved, not only in his own life;

b) God is really working through His infinite and perfect providence in the midst of the issues involved and the decision-making itself;

c) the others involved in the consequence of the decision once it is made will share in (or at least grow in) a confidence that God was working;

d) uses submission (so long as the issue is not heresy or immorality) to his ordination vow to be in subjection to his brothers;

e) demonstrates his submission by continuing to accept and treat the brothers who disagree with him as equals in the work of the Lord and personal friends in Christ.

Intrinsic to this entire proposal is the assumption that the elder has learned to trust the Lord in his own daily life. This means he has the respect and love of the people. He is perceived as able not only to make decisions but to lead those involved to accept them and then help the people carry them out.

Only then will the Presbytery members and General Assembly delegates do all their decision-making in the context of trust. The implications of the subscription issue which governs each elder is thus maintained firmly yet graciously. Each elder knows and believes that only the Holy Spirit can give the church unity (I Cor. 12:28) and peace (Phil. 4:7).

Possibly the greatest statement in our Subordinate Standards with which to support this proposal is the WESTMINSTER LARGER CATECHISM #131. The Bible clearly declares that everyone is equal in his standing before God (not so as to responsibility, of course). Consequently, Q #131 is directly applicable to living with divergency in the subscription issue. The question is: What are the duties of equals?

A. The duties of equals are, to regard the dignity and worth of each other, in giving honor to go one before another, and to rejoice over each others' gifts and advancements as our own.

Based upon the force of this WLC answer, the ordinand and the elders alike are committed to seek grounds to trust each other so that, if an ordinand has scruples about the subordinate standards (or if he appears to be less than outstanding in some facet of his examination) Presbytery members will firmly and graciously consider what, if any, are the implications in deciding to to accept the ordinand.

HOW (PRESBYTERY/GENERAL ASSEMBLY-OPTION II) CAN SEEK THE GROUNDS FOR TRUST

I. For every ordinand, the Ruling and Teaching elders of Presbytery must be satisfied with the ordinand's examination.

A. The examination of his personal life:

The examination of his personal faith and practice must be sufficiently thorough to warrant the presbyters comfort that he is deemed to have a "...life...according to godliness" BCO 16-3; see also 18-2,5; 19-3; 21-5(7), 9(3)).

This means that the ordinand should be well enough known by the presbyters that his background, his use of his theology to forge a working world-life view and his personal goals (at least within the foreseeable future) for himself and his family become major factors in the decision-process.

B. The examination of his gifts:

The examination of his gifts (of the Spirit) and his use of them must be sufficiently thorough to warrant the presbyters comfort that he not only has used them on the field and God has blessed the effort but that he will not bring dishonor to the Church (BCO 19-7; see also 19-12).

C. The examination of his ability to rule:

The examination of his ability to rule must be sufficiently thorough to warrant the presbyters comfort that he demonstrates the ability to rule as a Teaching Elder (BCO 19-7,12).

D. The examination of his comprehension of the knowledge required to minister as a Teaching Elder::

The examination of his comprehension of the knowledge required to minister as a Teaching Elder must be sufficiently thorough to warrant the presbyters comfort that he demonstrates a tangible degree of mastery of the material (BCO 19-2;21-4).

II. For every ordinand who declares that he has a scruple(s) about the Subordinate Standards of the Church, the Ruling and Teaching Elders of presbytery must be satisfied that the ordinand's scruple(s) does not violate the system.

The examination of an ordinand about his scruple(s) must include:

- a close examination of his convictions to determine whether or not the scruple is semantic and therefore of little threat to the system, or whether it appears to threaten the vitality of the system:
- if the scruple appears to be a threat to the vitality of the system, the presbyters must conduct a careful examination to determine the actual force of the scruple. This will include a decision as to the scruple in the context of the ordinand's evident degree of knowledge of and conviction about the doctrinal system and of his attitude of submission concerning the scruple;
- if the examination proves to the presbyters that there is a danger to the validity of the system involved, they must weigh this conclusion against their knowledge of the person, life and potential ministry of the ordinand as germane facets for determining any final conclusion, but: regardless of external appearance or pressure, presbyters may not approve any individual's examination which, when practiced, could dishonor Christ and His Church.

This attitude produces, because of the ordinand's and elders' trust in the presence and work of the Holy Spirit throughout the examination and voting process, to unity and peace.

This approach to the issue also builds up a working relationship of the ordinand and the Presbyters that will develop into loyalty and usefulness in the years to come. It provides the Presbyters with the confidence that their ministry is both guarded and powerful - it provides a desire to be involved together in the work of extending God's Kingdom.

II. The Ruling and Teaching Elders of presbytery, along with the ordinand, must have a spiritually mature perception of a healthy church, of their place and role in her leadership, and be committed to work together within that perception.

In working together as elders, each elder must take the time and make the effort to:

- guard his own life and ministry so that it is a consistent testimony to the Lord (Acts 20:28);
- be committed to the arranging by God (I Cor. 12:18) of the body (including the elders) of a permissible divergence among them on this issue, with the exception of any divergence on the issue of full commitment to the inerrancy of the Bible;

- interact in church and social activities without restraint so that no sense of belonging to one side or the other is evident, especially in light of the practice of only associating with like-minded people most of the time;
- pray for the Presbyters and each ordinand daily;
- pray for the health of the church each day and urge the members to join in a church-wide, content-oriented prayer endeavor.

CHURCHES VITALIZED
Donald J. MacNair;

A P P E N D I X A

POWER IN AND OF THE CHURCH

I. The Vestment of Power in the Church:

The power is Christ Himself.

The power which He has committed to His church: "...vests in the whole body, the rulers and the ruled..." BCO 3-1.

"The powers, therefore, exercised by the ruling elders, are powers which belong to the lay members of the church." (CONFES- SION OF FAITH, (A. A. Hodge) (ibid).

See: PREFACE, PRELIMINARY PRINCIPLES: (6), last clause

Therefore everyone--a representative or a member--when faced with decision making, must:

- hear the others involved;
- must know that he has been heard by the others;
- then must vote his conscience.

This means that a representative or a member does not determine the apparent will of a segment of the body and vote that way (modified congregationalism), nor does he ignore the will of those involved and vote his own predetermined persuasion (a modified hierarchy).

II. BCO 3-4:

The power of the church is ministerial and declarative, and its discipline exclusively spiritual.

PREFACE, PRELIMINARY PRINCIPLES (1) - last sentence.

III. BCO 3-6:

The exercise of church power, when practiced in conformity to the Standard and the Subordinate Standards has divine sanction. This demands that elected officers must use their authority so as to avoid generating personal power.

The church is really a Kingdom, in which the King has chosen to exercise His rule through a 'republic' form of government. See: COMMENTARY ON THE PCA BCO, Morton Smith, Greenville Seminary Press, page 3-1.

A very simplified study of the key words is:

- power is might. It is an expression of the only source of power, God Himself. Therefore, it is not to be used other than as God's nature uses it.

-authority is recognized credentials.

A very simple word-study of the two major New Testament words used will help determine the difference between authority and power.

-DUNAMIS: basically refers to might.

-Rom. 1:4 - "...and who through the Spirit of Holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead."

-Rom. 1:16 - "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes; first the Jews, then the Gentiles."

-EXOUSIA: basically refers to the right to exercise power.

-II Cor. 10:8 - "For even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave me for building you up rather than pulling you down, I will not be ashamed of it."

From this very simplified study, the distinction between the words is nonetheless apparent.

Some quotations may also help.

Engstrom, in THE MAKING OF THE CHRISTIAN LEADER, page 112 says: "A common but well known definition is this: 'Authority is whatever you possess at the moment that causes someone else to do what you want him to do at the moment' ..LMO

Robert N. White, in MANAGING TODAY'S LEADERS, page 11 states: "Power is the prerogative to determine what happens and the coercive force to make others yield to our wishes, even against their own will. Authority is the recognition of the leader as a legitimate leader with the right to expect compliance to his wishes.

"When a leader is able to persuade others to do his will without coercion, when he presents himself in such a way that people want to obey him...he has authority."

The key to using authority with power is to recognize that, though we have indeed been endowed with the very power of God through the resurrection power of God given to us, it is power which always is consistent with and in harmony with the very nature of God. It is not independent of its source. Its nature is the very being and perfection of God. Every use we make of it must be in conformity to that very nature.

The pastor-leader must learn to use divine authority with power as the practice of his leadership, but NEVER with the overt or unconscious ambition to use power in order to be the spiritual head of the church.

Assuming the role of leader is his preaching, no matter how good he is as a teacher or a discipler, if he does not bring his congregation regularly into the awareness that its corporate worship is indeed a meeting with the Living God, and do so in a unique way through his preaching in the midst of the worship experience, he will not be in the position effectively to use his teaching or discipling skills.

He must understand the use of both power and authority and be unconditionally committed to only the proper use of each.

APPENDIX B

THE PLACE OF THE STATED CLERK IN THE STRUCTURE

OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

RAO 3-1

I. His authority:

A. The STATED CLERK is the Chief Administrative Officer of the ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE (AC).

Note the difference in this title and its implications and those used by business, commerce, etc:

- he is not a CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER (CEO)

- he is not the CEO of the denomination, which would imply sweeping powers to be inherent in his position.

B. He is under the supervision of and subject to the direction of the ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE to which he is responsible to carry out the appropriate duties of that COMMITTEE.

This is another facet of the 'grass-roots' HERITAGE of the PCA.

II. The recent history establishing this arrangement:

A. Until 1988, the PCA had a COMMITTEE ON ADMINISTRATION (COA). It had its own Coordinator.

1. The Coordinator directed the affairs of the COA, under that COMMITTEE, and had liaison with the STATED CLERK.

2. The STATED CLERK directed the affairs of his office and kept liaison with the Coordinator.

3. The STATED CLERK had his own staff and controlled his portion of the budget.

The purpose of this arrangement was to keep the STATED CLERK (and the Coordinator) from 'gathering power' to himself because of his office.

B. The change to the present structure and the changes in the list of responsibilities of the STATED CLERK were made in order to accomplish three major goals:

1. to overcome the inefficiency of what on occasion functioned as an organization with two heads;

2. to assure - guarantee, if possible - that the COA would not become a program committee, but would continue to function solely as a service committee;

3. to assure that the AC would be in a better position to exercise its responsibility to keep the office of STATED CLERK apart from any debates on such matters as the philosophy behind structural changes in the PCA.

C. The 'CHAIN-OF-COMMAND' now built into the office of the STATED CLERK/ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE:

RAO 3-1

1. the STATED CLERK employs the Business Manager, with the approval of the AC (cf. RAO 3-3c);

2. the Business Administrator employs all the other employees of the AC. (cf RAO 3-3c).

III. Comments on his job description:

3-2a in his office as an elder he may give advice

3-2b his duties are clerical - no special role in denomination

3-2f,g he serves as a 'clearing-house' for the denomination

3-2k if asked, he may give advice to BOARDS/AGENCIES

3-2m under supervision of AC, prepares the docket (the logic and necessary strategy involved in structuring the docket does have some influence in shaping the direction of GA meetings)

3-2o he is secretary and treasurer of the PCA

3-2r he is custodian of the roll of the GA (by necessity of doing this task, when a name is contested, the STATED CLERK has an influential part in deciding whether or not to sustain the contention)

3-2t NO statement not related to specific actions of the GA.

3-4 the openness of nominations reflects concern to avoid hierarchical rule by one man/committee

IV. Comments about STATED CLERK qualifications:

3-5b conversant with Presbyterianism in general and PCA in particular

3-5e must be conversant with the breadth of reformed thinking in PCA

ACCOUNTABILITY AND SUBMISSION

TERMINOLOGY

Leadership accountability is being set apart as a leader under the Living God uniquely equipped by the Spirit and called to accept the mantle of accountability to lead others to better know and enjoy His will while also living in personal submission

Member submission: the Christian's willing submission under the God-provided leadership accountable to help the member better know God's will and accomplish responsible commitment to and joy in fulfilling it - a function of the grace of God providing the Holy Spirit to work His ministry of sanctification.

Corporate submission: the same as member submission except it is a corporate body being led by the God-provided leadership accountable to God for the body's commitment to and joy in fulfilling God's will for it. It too is a function of grace.

The concepts inherent in membership submission and leadership accountability are the same as those between husband and wife (Eph. 5:22-23) and parents and children (Eph. 6:1-4).

ELDER/LEADERSHIP ACCOUNTABILITY

Elder accountability over the individual Christian and the corporate body assumes that the elder is a child of God, prepared and called by God for encouraging, guiding or restraining members of the church to live and enjoy God's will as the norm for everyday living.

His goal for leading with accountability is first to enable the member in submission to his oversight to base his life on the tenants of a biblical world-life view to life. It is to enable the member to better read and understand the Word of God for guidance and to persuade him to use what he has learned, even while growing in the use of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). It therefore is a personal cry from the elder to the Christian to appreciate, obey and apply the Word of God in his/her own life. The ministry is always done in a mature and gracious manner. It amounts to a shepherding ministry, even when firmness and discipline is needed.

Secondarily, his goal is to function for the corporate body in almost the same manner. However, in this area the accountable elder often is also called on to determine church direction (such as the style of worship to be used), all in the capacity of being an accountable leader.

Being called to be an elder is itself a call personally to live in submission. The ordination vows the elder takes commit him to be in daily submission to the judgment of God. They also call on him to be in submission to his brethren.

The ultimate goal of this ministry is to enable the member and the corporate body to more fully enjoy the benefits of directly taking responsibility for learning and submitting to God's will - for God's glory and their edification (Heb. 13:17).

Paul gives the essence of the ministry of accountability in II Cor. 1:23-24:

"I call God as my witness that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth. Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm."

The mandate for the elder to use the Keys of the Kingdom (Mt. 16:19) - to open up or close off the Kingdom - must be heeded. The Kingdom is open to those whom God reconciled to himself and have repented. It is closed to those who refuse to acknowledge the person and work of Christ in their lives. This concept is intrinsic to both taking Christ as personal Savior and being admitted into the church and to the daily conduct of everyone of the flock (Heb. 13:17).

The motivations driving the elder to practice biblical accountability for each church member and the corporate body are to bring honor to the name of Christ (Acts 20:28); to be a channel of blessing to the member (I Peter 5:1-4), and, because of his love for the Lord, an awareness of godly fear for failing to do His will and thereby experience the displeasure of God (Numbers 30; Ez. 18:13; 33:10; II Thess. 2:10b-12).

Numbers 30 discusses headship in the family. The head of the family (the accountable one) is not to break his word but is to do everything he said (:2). In verses 3 & 10, the ones carrying accountability are called on to weigh given situations, make judgments on the implications of them and make a decision whether to intervene or not.

In Ez. 3:16-21 the prophet was told what God's will for godly-living was. Based on that knowledge, the prophet was accountable (:18,20) to speak out with warnings, or carry the blood of those people on his own head. He is also told (:19,21) that if he does and there is no change, he has saved himself.

In other words, the actual facets of practicing accountability are to know (at least) the governing principles of God's will about a situation; to watch, warn, enable, encourage, instruct and, when necessary, condemn, all based on that knowledge, as well as to provide an unmistakable example of submission before the Living God (as will be demonstrated later).

The prerequisites that govern the value of an elder's ministry of accountability are to be qualified for the office (I Tim. 3:1:1-7) and his comprehension of and moral commitment to his vows of ordination upon accepting the office.

The dynamic that enable the elder to gain more and more mature and wise experiential insights into the way God works in His church - His own blood-bought children - and in creation and the world culture of this age is his diligence in using the Word of God to deal with each situation while waiting on the Spirit to illumine his mind and heart for the insight needed.

These insights in turn force the elder to focus on the need to be alert to needs of the members and of the corporate body. They also accomplish two other things. They add depth and sensitivity to his comprehension of actual situations the member face; they provide answers/proposals in real-life context.

The cogency of such insights is directly controlled by the elder himself. It is his willingness to wait on the Holy Spirit to illumine his mind to grasp the Bible's message his accountability should express. This grasp is garnered either by recognizing one or more direct Scriptures that fit the need or is deduced by the good and necessary consequence of relating Scripture to Scripture, Scripture to doctrine and Scripture to life itself.

In addition effective accountability calls on the elder to wait on the Holy Spirit to confirm just the right presentation of the decisions made so that Christ, and only Christ, is honored by the ministry of encouragement, guiding or preventing.

Normally the most effective way the elder administers accountability is as a shepherd, using the context of his own submission before God and its lessons and consequences to encourage, guide or restrain, as the case might be.

In II Cor. 2:4 Paul demonstrates both the responsibility and motivation of a mature elder exercising accountability through shepherding:

"For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you."

The greatest example of the exercise of accountability was given by Christ Himself in the introduction to His high priestly prayer:

"I have brought you glory on earth by completing the works you gave me to do" (John 17:4)

Second only to that of the Lord is the testimony of the Apostle Paul as he addressed the Ephesian elders:

"Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men" (Act 20:26).

A partial list of areas of accountability¹ is:

- To care for the flock so that they are not scattered Jerm.23:1-3
- To warn those who are doing evil of God's judgment II Chron. 19:10
Ez. 3:16-21
- To provide understanding of God's Word Ez. 7:26
- To persuade men of the truth and of good judgment Ez. 34:10
- To have a constant concern for the church. II Cor. 11:28

MEMBERSHIP SUBMISSION

Member submission: the Christian's willing submission under the God-provided leadership accountable to help the member better know God's will and accomplish responsible commitment to and joy in fulfilling it - a function of the grace of God providing the Holy Spirit to work His ministry of sanctification.

It has always been God's economy in dealing with men to hold a few men accountable for many. The concept of headship is evident from creation in the Bible and in all of history. Even today God's providence has designed the affairs of men so that one man in high office, taking what he deems is his accountability, can start a nuclear war the effects of which will devastate generations of men, women and children.

Submission in the church is built upon the premise that in God's sight every member of the body (pastor, elder, deacon and all others) are equal in station with everyone else (I Cor. 12:14-27). The equality of station is without differences, including even gender (Gal. 3:18).

The practice of accountability does not imply that the elder is any better than the member. The benefit of submission under biblically qualified elders is that the member and the corporate body are in the place to freely accept accountable oversight as the way for them to most readily enjoy exciting, expectant obedience, lived in love (Prov. 10:17). It is the best way to find and enjoy the Living God's will on a daily basis. It is God's direct assist for each believer to account for the biblically revealed

1.This list is taken from THE CHALLENGE OF THE ELDERSHIP, D.J.MacNair; Great Commissions Publications; 1984.

requirements of God since: "... each of us will give an account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12; II Cor. 5:10; Heb. 13:17).

Member-submission therefore is not subjection nor is it second-class citizenship. Rather, it is a function for spiritual growth. It is a tool the Holy Spirit uses in His administration of God's grace as the basis for His ministry of sanctification in our lives.

It is to be in the place in which God normally chooses to equip the Christian and the body to enjoy and serve Him. It couples the member as a servant with the elder (himself a servant 'eager to serve' - I Peter 5:2) in common submission to Christ. Such testimony bears witness to the church and to the world that Jesus is indeed the Head of His church (Eph. 1:22).

Submission therefore flows from four convictions at work in the heart of the member(s):

- submission is the way the Lord works in His creation (I Peter 2:13);

- its blessings therefore depend on willful, humble submission to the biblically designated elders who themselves are seeking to live in the submission that comes from both love of the Lord and the reverential fear of failing those in submission - (their 'blood' is on the elders' heads when the elders fail to practice their accountability - Ez.3. 16- 21; 33;7; Acts 20:26);

- submission is a blessing to be sought in order to fully enjoy the outpouring of the grace of God (Heb. 10:14);

- submission becomes a desired way of life in the context of a strong relationship between member/congregation and elder(s) on a daily and ongoing basis so that accountability is received as a source of blessing and not perceived to be a form of coercion (Heb. 13:17; I Thess. 5:13)

Conclusion:

Submission for elders and members alike amounts to being in the posture of seeking to enjoy the grace of God by practicing obedience in order to more easily enjoy God's will and good pleasure.

The following Bible texts are foundational to the concept of accountability/submission:

In His high priestly prayer Jesus said:

"I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them" (John 17: 14).

Some of Paul's comments about being imitators, when put together, go to the blessing of the concept of accountability/submission:

"Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:1).

"You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit" (I Thess. 1:6).

Finally, Paul clearly demonstrates the context and ultimate goal for exercising accountability/submission in his letters:

"Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong. Not that the people will see that we have stood the test but that you will do what's right even though we may seem to have failed" (II Cor. 13:7).

"For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into His kingdom and glory." (I Thess. 2:11-12).

D. J. MacNair, CHURCHES VITALIZED
480 Brightspur Lane
Ballwin, Mo. 63011
(314) 394-2832