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Christian Reformed
Church Order
Commentary

Henry DeMoor

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Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Dedication

When I completed my doctoral dissertation in 1986, I dedicated it to my wife, Ina, as it should be, and noted my gratitude to her and the remainder of our nuclear family, our four children, Renee, Tanya, Larissa, and Ryan.

Now that I have completed this commentary, I need to dedicate it to my other family, the people of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (hereafter: CRCNA). This church warmly received me when I arrived as an eleven-year-old Dutch immigrant kid in Strathroy, Ontario. It provided me with a challenging education based on a solid Christian worldview at the liberal arts college it owns and operates, Calvin College, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. It steered me and prodded me toward ministry while at its seminary, Calvin Theological Seminary, on the very same campus. It removed a lot of rough edges and taught me a great deal about preaching, pastoral ministry, church governance and a host of other things while I ministered in Duncan, British Columbia, and Edmonton, Alberta. And, as if that weren't enough, it placed its confidence in me and allowed me to serve as a seminary professor, administrator, and as an adviser to the church, its people, and its assemblies, for no less than twenty-four years. So this is the church that received me, nourished me, kicked me out of its snug nest to contribute what I could to its mission, and then just kept on encouraging and blessing. Warts and all, this is my family too, and to this family I dedicate this book.

I am grateful to the Administration and Board of Trustees of Calvin Theological Seminary for giving me a final sabbatical year to write this commentary. I thank my good friends and colleagues in ministry, Leonard Hofman and Kathleen Smith, for cheerfully offering critique as I wrote. And I am grateful, above all, to the Lord of the church who blesses and strengthens this family of mine on its pilgrimage through the ages.

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Preface

It has been four decades since the last commentary on the Church Order of the CRCNA saw the light of day. Zondervan Publishing House published the final edition of Idzerd Van Dellen and Martin Monsma's *Revised Church Order Commentary* in 1967; that edition's fourth and last printing appeared in 1970. In the meantime, of course, there have been a few versions of what is known as a *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government*: William Brink and Richard De Ridder's in 1979, 1980, and 1987; Richard De Ridder and Leonard Hofman's in 1994; David Engelhard and Leonard Hofman's in 2001; and Peter Borgdorff's in 2008. These manuals do have some brief commentary. Their primary purpose, however, is that of ordering materials: compiling various policy decisions of synod and listing them under appropriate Church Order articles, thus making them readily accessible for the church in one place. They aim to tell us what we are to do. Commentaries, however, have the opposite purpose. They also refer to various policy decisions, but their chief intent is to provide a context for the rules of the church. That context may be theological, historical, practical, or any combination thereof, whatever seems most helpful in illuminating why the CRCNA does what it does.

It is important to know the "why" behind the rules. If that's not clear to us, we are not truly privy to the wisdom of our tradition. How easy, then, to fall off one of two cliffs on the sides of the road. The cliff on the right is deadly legalism. We follow the rules for what they are, not why we have them. It's like parents answering their children's "Why?" with "because I said so." The cliff on the left is deadly anarchy. We don't like rules, period. It's the mission that counts and we'll do it our way. It's like parents saying

to children: “Do whatever you feel is right.” It’s the so-called “freedom” that reminds us of a goldfish jumping out of its bowl to gain more “space.” The church needs both manuals and commentaries. It needs to stay on the road between the cliffs and follow the rules, but also follow the precious principles they represent—principles that sometimes “fade in time” and need to live again. My hope is that this commentary will be that kind of vital contribution to our church’s pilgrimage.

The articles of the Church Order that appear in this commentary are in the latest version: the one that has been updated by Synod 2010. The material that synods have decided to place in the Supplements to the articles of the Church Order does not appear. Instead, I have only cited what I considered to be relevant to the discussion at hand. For the latest version of the Church Order articles and a complete listing of the supplemental material, the reader is referred to the current Church Order booklet available in PDF format at www.crcna.org under “synodical resources.”

For each article, I provide some exposition, a deductive sketch that crisply states our *modus operandi*. The sketch is followed by some questions and answers, an inductive section that also seeks to get at the “why” of our rules. These questions have come to me from different sources over many years of teaching the discipline of church polity at Calvin Theological Seminary: from students, of course, but also from churches, assemblies, and individuals. A few of these questions with my answers have been previously published in articles or presentations. None are “dreamed up” or fictional. They truly reflect the reality of church life in the last quarter-century.

All Scripture references are rendered in Today’s New International Version (TNIV).

It is my hope that this book will be helpful for churches, assemblies, students, and ministry practitioners. May all our ways be fitting to who we are in Christ, by grace, as a people of Christian and Reformed persuasion in twenty-first century North America.

Introduction

Article 1

- a. **The Christian Reformed Church, confessing its complete subjection to the Word of God and the Reformed creeds as a true interpretation of this Word, acknowledging Christ as the only head of his church, and desiring to honor the apostolic injunction that in the churches “everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way” (1 Cor. 14:40), regulates its ecclesiastical organization and activities in the following articles.**
- b. **The main subjects treated in this Church Order are: The Offices of the Church, The Assemblies of the Church, The Task and Activities of the Church, and The Admonition and Discipline of the Church.**

In this introductory article of the Church Order, the CRCNA insists on three things: complete subjection to the Word of God and the Reformed creeds, the confession of Christ as the only head of the church, and the desire to have order, some kind of regulation in its affairs. This latter desire—and how it blends with the first two convictions—is not obvious to all Christians.

The Church: Spirit-Led, Yet Ordered

The church is the Spirit-led community of those chosen in Christ to be God's people in his world. But it is also a human institution fully embedded in all aspects of created reality. The tension between these two truths permeates church polity without ever finding complete resolution. On the one hand, the church must constantly be reminded that it is the Lord's. On the other, it must recognize that it must structure itself and order its affairs in appropriate ways. This is precisely what the apostle Paul held before the Corinthian church in New Testament days. When some found ways to divide that congregation as if it were merely a human organization with its accompanying divisions and power struggles, Paul insisted that the church was not of Apollos, nor of himself, but of Christ as the only Lord and Master. When others claimed that they were spiritual enough to be "above the law" for worship, Paul insisted that God is a God of order and proceeded to present his prescriptions for their gatherings.

Paul's utterance in 1 Corinthians 14:40—a favorite among church order specialists—that "everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way" is more than just a "proof text" for rules. In fact, it holds the above-mentioned tension within it. It speaks of orderliness but also of fittingness, of conduct that is becoming, appropriate to the church's true nature, namely, that in all its ways it point to Christ, its Lord. The same is true of Article 30 of the Belgic Confession. On the one hand, it suggests orderliness by stating that officebearers must be chosen according to the rules. On the other, it insists that the "true church ought to be governed according to the spiritual order that our Lord has taught us in his Word."

In the same way, John Calvin argues in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* that "some form of organization is necessary in all human society to foster the common peace and maintain concord," and, accordingly, churches must have certain laws. Without them, he claims, "their very sinews disintegrate and they are wholly deformed and scattered" (4.10.27). But the point of such laws is "that the people who are governed become accustomed to obedience to God and to right discipline" (4.10.28) and that "ceremonies . . . ought to lead us straight to Christ" (4.10.29). The church, says Calvin, requires a kind of "order and decorum" that is not specifically taught in the Scriptures (because it is "not necessary to salvation"), but one that must be there nonetheless for "the upbuilding of the church." Such "order and decorum" can be "variously accommodated to the customs of each nation and age." There is no call for rigidity here. One may "change

and abrogate traditional practices” and “establish new ones,” and often “love will best judge what may hurt or edify.” On the other hand, all such practices and rules must be “tested against” more “general rules” that can clearly be “drawn from Scripture” and are, therefore, “wholly divine.” In this matter of its polity, the church may not be capricious about its rules, nor merely take its cue from society at large, but must be certain that its “human constitutions . . . are founded upon God’s authority” (4.10.30). In Calvin’s teaching, therefore, there is clearly a similar tension. He favors “useful observances” when they contribute to the “upbuilding of the church.” He charges us not to require certain things “too fastidiously of others,” not to elevate law to the level of “superstition,” and not, as churches, to “despise another because of diversity of outward discipline.” There is a measure of freedom in choosing laws, but, again, they must be “edifying” and in tune with principles clearly taught in God’s Word (4.10.32). The challenge, apparently, in every age, is to know the “general rules” and be creative about specifics.

The Church: Human but Christ-Ruled

In some ways church law inevitably reflects the particular political flavor of the environment, whether that be monarchical, aristocratic, or democratic. On the other hand, in its focus and intent, church law must always be *christocratic*. It must reflect the fact that—whatever else it may be in any age—the church is always and ever a community of the King, a Christ-ruled fellowship.

From the beginning, there have been those in the Christian church who have insisted that order, regulation, and church law of any kind is out of place among God’s people. Rudolf Sohm and Emil Brunner are good examples, claiming that church law is inevitably a “substitute” Christians invent when they have failed to experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit among them. So beginning with Constantine in the fourth century, if not earlier, they claim, the church has come to be fashioned after the ways of Roman government rather than the Scriptures. For these people, adopting regulations—whatever their character—is in and of itself the downfall of the spiritual church, the work of those who are weak in faith and wish to be led by rules rather than by God himself. This is, in effect, to resolve the tension by declaring it to be nonexistent. The church must be led by the Spirit alone. But that is not what Paul told the Corinthians.

At the same time, there have been some in the Christian church who insisted that order and church law must be drawn from that which governs human society in general. The notion, for example, that our assemblies are governed by Roberts' Rules of Order—though false—is frequently heard among us. When Article 37 insists that “the authority for making and carrying out final decisions remains with the council as the governing body of the church” people often complain, opting for democratic rather than christocratic principles. The very notion that Christ-representatives (members of council) have the final say rubs them the wrong way because culture has taught them otherwise. But again, this is in effect to resolve the tension by declaring it to be nonexistent. The church must be led by rules of ordered society. But that also is not what Paul taught the New Testament church. Order, yes, but then an order that is based on general rules clearly drawn from Scripture.

The Church: One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic

One way to begin identifying the “general rules” that must hold in every age is to ensure that our church polity is in harmony with what the Nicene Creed confesses to be the four permanent attributes of the church of Christ: its unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. Reformed church orders, for example, have always spoken of officebearers as more than mere functionaries in congregational life: they are Christ-representatives who lead God's people in their mission as pilgrims sent to bring good news (apostolicity). These orders have always sought to build in a measure of accountability whereby local churches were placed within a larger framework of broader assemblies (catholicity). They have insisted on entire sections devoted to church discipline, upholding wherever possible the purity of the church's life and doctrine (holiness). And they have sought to give expression to the oneness in Christ that must be experienced in every age, whether that be within the local church, specific denomination, or on the larger front of ecumenical relationships (unity).

Beyond these, there are undoubtedly other “general rules” that are clearly drawn from Scripture and now lie at the foundation of the Christian Reformed Church Order. We hope, in what follows, to uncover them at the root of our regulations.

Church Order: Minimal, Flexible, and Biblical

One thing is clear: there must be a minimum of rules. This too is the heritage of the sixteenth-century Reformers. Martin Luther, for example,

ceremoniously burned the entire *Codex Iurus Canonici*, the “church order” of his time, along with the papal bull that excommunicated him. From that day on, he insisted that there be few regulations in the church. They have too much potential for binding the conscience. The tragedy of Luther’s life, of course, is that disorderliness in the German churches required re-introducing some of the very laws he had so liturgically rejected, and that he never developed a positive polity that would avoid that danger, yet recognize the need for order. This would be the unique contribution of John Calvin. As with Luther, Calvin envisioned a minimum of regulations, flexible ones at that, but these were also to be manifestly biblical. True, the Scriptures do not present a specific church polity good for every age. Nonetheless, they do present a number of guidelines for what is edifying and upbuilding in the church of Christ. As the Belgic Confession, Article 32, puts it,

although it is useful and good for those who govern the churches to establish and set up a certain order among themselves for maintaining the body of the church, they ought always to guard against deviating from what Christ, our only Master, has ordained for us. Therefore we reject all human innovations and all laws imposed on us, in our worship of God, which bind and force our consciences in any way. So we accept only what is proper to maintain harmony and unity and to keep all in obedience to God.

The Christian Reformed Church Order is a “child” of the Reformation era, specifically, of the Church Order of Dort (1618-1619). Over the years it has changed dramatically, especially in 1965, when it was completely revised. And every year since, it seems, more changes are made. In itself this need not surprise nor concern us. The church is on a pilgrimage. It moves through different times, places, and circumstances. Yet as it does, it must continue to test all of its polity against the general rules drawn from the Word that abides unchanged. It is important, therefore, that church leaders distinguish between that which is transient and that which is permanent, adapting to the times without abandoning the wise experience of the centuries.

That is why grasping the fundamentals of Reformed church polity is so crucial for those who wish to lead wisely in the body of Christ. Sound leadership inspired by God’s Word allows Christ truly to be “the only head of his church” and, as the Belgic Confession so poignantly adds, “the only universal bishop” of our souls (Article 31).

Has our denomination always been called the Christian Reformed Church?

No. Here's the history of the name, in its most often used English version, complete with old Dutch nomenclature where applicable, since that was the predominant language during the first few decades of its beginnings in 1857:

1857-1859: None

1859-1861: Holland Reformed Church
(*Hollandsche Gereformeerde Kerk*)

1861-1863: Free Dutch Reformed Church

1863-1880: True Dutch Reformed Church
(*Ware Hollandsche Gereformeerde Kerk*)

1880-1894: Holland Christian Reformed Church
(*Hollandsche Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*)

1894 (officially 1904)-present: Christian Reformed Church
(*Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*)

When it came time to be legally incorporated, we added the phrase “in North America.” This occurred in 1974. All of this courtesy of Richard H. Harms, CRCNA archivist, in his excellent publication *Historical Directory of the Christian Reformed Church* (2004).

What has not changed is the singular word “Church.” There have been many attempts to change the official name to the “Christian Reformed Churches in North America,” but none has been successful. Those who sought the change wanted to give expression to the “relative autonomy” of individual congregations. Others responded by insisting that we recognize the “organic unity” as a gift of Christ and see ourselves as mutually accountable congregations in a single denomination.

To be quite frank, I am tired of elders who never want anyone to rock the boat. It is almost as if they just want to keep the ship afloat (to stick with the metaphor) and never dream the dreams of visionaries, the ones who want to raise the sails and catch the wind of the Spirit.

Am I wrong to believe that in the CRCNA order trumps vision and renewal and that this will ultimately lead to our demise?

Thanks for a terrific and thoughtful question.

You are certainly not wrong in your desire that our churches live by the Spirit's breath. The church is on a mission in the world, and people of the Reformation gladly acknowledge that a Reformed church (as institution) is to be defined as one that is constantly reforming—being transformed by God's leading.

My problem with your question, to be just as frank, is that it sets things up in such a way that maintaining order necessarily detracts from that exciting mission. But this is true only if that order lacks biblical roots and quenches the Spirit. In my view, a *properly functioning* church order does not dam up the rivers of ministry and outreach. It just sets up the banks of the flowing river so that the water does not move chaotically and without any direction at all. I will not accept an either-or, maintenance *or* mission. I truly believe that we need both, and that the one complements the other. Good, biblically based order keeps us from repeating history's mistakes, prevents us from being overwhelmed by controversies that paralyze us, and actually enhances the mission we're on.

My Th.D. mentor was fond of quoting John Calvin, who once said that we ought not to change from hour to hour. I'm always happy when the sun shines, my mentor would continue, and it's just fine with me when it comes up a little later and goes down a little earlier because of autumn breaking out. On the other hand, it must not go down at noon—that would be altogether too undependable. That's true of liturgy and—as far as I'm concerned—of all order in the church.

Oh, and let me end this by rendering this paraphrase of Mark Twain's famous observation after reading his own obituary; namely, that reports of the CRCNAs imminent demise are "greatly exaggerated."

I. The Offices of the Church

This first section of the Church Order deals with the *who* of the institutional church: they are its leaders, given by Christ “to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:12-13).

I. The Offices of the Church

Article 2

The church recognizes the offices of minister of the Word, elder, deacon, and ministry associate. These offices differ from each other only in mandate and task, not in dignity and honor.

Offices: Instruments of Christ

The offices are instruments of Christ's ministry and organs of his rule. They constitute his lordship and saving presence among his people as well as his continuing witness to his world. They are "tools of the great workman" (John Calvin) and "beams of light whose source lies elsewhere" (Abraham Kuyper). As ministers, ministry associates, elders, and deacons proclaim the Word, extend the claims of the gospel, nurture faith, bring healing, apply discipline, and show mercy, Christ's promise is fulfilled in their work: "I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20).

The authority of officebearers resides in the One they proclaim and exemplify. Though they provide leadership, they do not rule the church "since they are all servants of Jesus Christ, the only universal bishop, and the only head of the church" (Belgic Confession, Article 31). Nor are they

mere “functionaries” set aside by the congregation for particular tasks. They are ordained or installed and held “in special esteem” (Belgic Confession, Article 31) precisely because they are the normal channels through which Christ is represented among us and his Word reaches our lives. We need to catch the biblical balance.

The spineless sons of Zebedee once persuaded their mother to pop the impertinent question they dared not ask themselves: “Lord, in your Father’s kingdom, may we be at the top of the heap?” Their fellow disciples, Matthew reports with a wink of his eye, became indignant: after all, they wanted to be there themselves. Only somewhat amused by their lust for power, Jesus used the occasion to set them all straight:

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:25-28).

Can Jesus be clearer? Even so, we liberally sprinkle our vocabulary with such terms as *ruling elders*, *spiritual supervision*, and *headship* without blinking an eyelash. At times, our thinking about church office has taken on a decidedly authoritarian character. Predictably, the opposite then also occurs. Guided by Jesus’ words on “servant character,” we go through times of anti-authoritarianism where everyone is said to be “equal and at the same level” and officebearers are nothing more than congregational servants appointed to certain tasks.

We have Jesus present, the Lord of the church. Officebearers are not “bishops,” as if he is absent from the scene, nor are they “mere agents of the congregation,” as if they have no word of authority from the Lord. They are channels of Christ’s Word, of the Spirit’s leading, of the Father’s care. The authority is not absent. It is also not so much “in their person” but rather in the Word, their “ministering work.” As Louis Berkhof wrote some seventy years ago:

But while it is true that Christ exercises His authority in the Church through the officers, this is not to be understood in the sense that He *transfers* His authority to His servants.

He Himself rules the Church through all the ages, but in doing this, He uses the officers of the Church as His organs. They have no absolute or independent, but only a derived and ministerial power (*Systematic Theology*, p. 583).

Offices: How Many?

The Scriptures do not provide us with a precise list and number of offices for all time. Some have claimed that references to early church structures in the book of Acts and the Pauline epistles are prescriptive and limit us, for example, to preaching elders, teaching elders, and deacons. Others claim that there is a multiplicity of offices in the New Testament, indicating that the Spirit will provide as needed in every age—and the possibilities are therefore boundless. Still others find that the threefold office of Christ—prophet, priest, and king—must be replicated in the offices of the church: ministers, deacons, and elders. Those three: no more, no less. Most agree that one can discern in Scripture and church history a threefold *pattern* of proclamation, oversight, and service that allows for the number of offices appropriate to the needs of the church, in its judgment, at any particular time of its pilgrimage. There are three dimensions of officebearing, not necessarily three and only three offices.

The earliest provision in the CRCNA, in fact, lists four offices: those of the ministers of the Word, the “doctors,” the elders, and the deacons.

As originally conceived by John Calvin, the office of “doctor” was an ecclesiastical office to be held by those called to teach the church and guard it from heresy. This office never quite materialized in the Reformed tradition beyond Calvin’s day. By the time the CRCNA began, it was already being defined more precisely as the service of theologians called to train students for the ministry of the Word. Subsequently, the conviction grew that the training of ministers must not be left to the academy or university, but that the church must have its own seminary for that purpose. As a result, the 1965 Church Order dropped the reference to “doctors,” insisting that theological professors are nothing other than ministers of the Word with a specialized calling.

For much of its history, the CRCNA struggled to find an “official place” for what was commonly referred to as “lay workers in mission and evangelism,” difficult to do if one is committed to “threefold office” as a biblical given. Indeed, the 1965 Church Order asserted resolutely that “the offices *instituted by Christ* in His Church are those of the minister of the

Word, the elder, and the deacon” (italics mine). As pressures mounted to provide official status, the church considered two options: ordaining the lay worker as an elder “with an extraordinary task of evangelism” or as a “minister of the Word-evangelist.” Synod 1978 blended these options as it moved to establish a fourth office of evangelist, who shall be “acknowledged as an elder” of the calling church. Synod 1979 then drew the logical conclusion and weakened the 1965 statement by rephrasing it to read: “The church *recognizes* the offices of minister of the Word, elder, deacon, and evangelist” (italics mine). Synods 2003 and 2004 proposed and adopted changing the nomenclature from “evangelist” to “ministry associate,” an umbrella term covering the office of evangelist and any others that might yet be adopted.

Parity of the Offices

The second sentence of Article 2 finds its roots in two earlier provisions that read as follows:

Equality shall be maintained among the ministers of the Word with respect to the duties of their office and in all other matters as far as possible, according to the judgment of the consistory and, if necessary, of the classis. Likewise equality shall be maintained among the elders and deacons.

There shall be no lordship in God’s church, whether of one church over another church, of one minister over other ministers, or of one elder or deacon over other elders or deacons.

In both cases there was room for the interpretation that the principle of “equality” applies only *within* the office of minister of the Word and also only *within* the offices of elder and deacon, not to all officebearers. While notions of *essential* hierarchy are clearly inconsistent with the Reformed tradition, it may be that these earlier provisions reflect the idea of a *functional* hierarchy whereby the ministry of the Word is considered to be more significant to the life of the church than the services of elders and deacons. In any case, Synod 1965 ended all ambiguity in earlier formulations by adopting the current statement that clearly acknowledges a parity of all offices.

Why ordain officebearers at all? Isn't all of this just a leftover of Roman Catholic hierarchy in the life of a Reformed church? Isn't an unordained church school teacher as significant in the faith maturation of our children as their ordained ministers and elders? And don't all members participate in what our 1973 report on ecclesiastical office called "universal office-sharing"?

Your concern is valid. As children of the Reformation, we do not believe that a small professional elite acts as "priests" that stand between God and God's people—so that access to God's grace and his access to our praise is possible only through them. At the same time, we have learned from the error of the sixteenth century Anabaptists who denied any office in the church. The Pauline epistles leave little doubt that the apostle wanted officebearers appointed in every place, and that such people must meet certain qualifications. They must not "rule over God's people" in the way Christ alone may do that, but they most surely represent the only Mediator as he leads his people through life. They speak and act with his authority. The clarity of that Pauline message, however, is easily lost on us who spend most of our days in democratic environments.

The Scriptures speak of the need for the church to "have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority" (Heb. 13:17), to name just one passage. As John Calvin put it, it is precisely because Christ "does not dwell among us in visible presence" that he "uses the ministry of men to declare openly his will to us by mouth, as a sort of delegated work." True, he does this "not by transferring to them his right and honor," but most assuredly so that "through their mouths he may do his own work—just as a workman uses a tool to do his work" (*Institutes*, 4.3.1). Take away the tools, and you have effectively removed the normal channels of the work and ministry of Christ himself.

There is a sense in which all Christian believers are called to be "ministers of the gospel." But not all are called to be "ministers of the Word." We all have responsibility in witnessing Christ's grace to the world. But not all have the added mandate to equip God's people to carry out that responsibility. As for church school teachers—perhaps we ought to ordain them as well. After all, they are ministering to

our people, equipping them, young and old. Their service is also to equip and train others in the Christian faith and life. And that fits our definition of office: equippers of God's people. To recognize this, however, is not the same as suggesting that all should be ordained or that none should be ordained. The Scriptures implicitly recognize set-apart leaders, for example when Hebrews urges us to "have confidence in your leaders, and submit to their authority" (Heb. 13:17).

You mention our 1973 report on Ecclesiastical Office and Ordination. It is also necessary to read our 2001 report on Ordination and "Official Acts of Ministry," because it offers a much-needed corrective to the "functionalistic" tone of the earlier one:

Ordination is not a way of recognizing a person's academic credentials, elevating the prestige of religious professionals, or granting of tenure in the church. It is a recognition and enactment of a pastoral relationship between Christ and the church, mediated in a certain leader. As such it should not be entered into lightly (*Agenda for Synod, 2001*, p. 297; *Acts of Synod, 2001*, p. 504).

We do well when we acknowledge both "echoes of Scripture" in the Belgic Confession's references to officebearers:

they all have the same power and authority, no matter where they may be, since they are all servants of Jesus Christ, the only universal bishop, and the only head of the church.

. . . everyone ought, as much as possible, to hold the ministers of the Word and elders of the church in special esteem, because of the work they do, and be at peace with them, without grumbling, quarreling, or fighting (Article 31).