

Systematic Theology 5.1.2

The Government and Power of the Church

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*Part Five: The Doctrine of the Church and of the Means of Grace — Section 5.1.2:
The Government and Power of the Church*

Editorial note

The text has been updated to UK English; gloss boxes have been added to explain technical terms; summaries have been included; and questions for further study have been added. We have also included a master outline with the part represented in this volume shown in bold.

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Berkhof's Systematic Theology: Master Outline

This six-part guide is designed for use at the beginning of each volume. The part represented in this volume is shown in bold.

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The Government and Power of the Church

III. The Government of the Church

Christ alone is the Head and King of the Church. Reformed government seeks to exercise His authority through ordained officers and representative assemblies, while preserving the proper responsibility of the local church.

A. DIFFERENT SYSTEMS OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT.

GLOSS Church government: the ordered way in which Christ rules His visible Church through the officers and assemblies He appoints.

1. THE VIEW OF QUAKERS AND DARBYITES. It is a matter of principle with the Quakers and Darbyites to reject all Church Government. According to them every external Church formation necessarily degenerates and leads to results that are contrary to the spirit of Christianity. It exalts the human element at the expense of the divine. It neglects the divinely given charisms and substitutes for them offices instituted by man, and consequently offers the Church the husk of human knowledge rather than the vital communications of the Holy Spirit. Therefore they regard it as not only unnecessary but decidedly sinful to organize the visible Church. Thus the offices fall by the way, and in public worship each simply follows the promptings of the Spirit. The tendency that becomes apparent in these sects, which gives clear evidence of the leaven of Mysticism, must be regarded as a reaction against the hierarchical organization and the formalism of the Established Church of England. In our country some of the Quakers have regularly ordained ministers and conduct their worship very much as other Churches do.

2. THE ERASTIAN SYSTEM, NAMED AFTER ERASTUS, 1524-1583. Erastians regard the Church as a society which owes its existence and form to regulations enacted by the State. The officers of the Church are merely instructors or preachers of the Word, without any right or power to rule, except that which they derive from the civil magistrates. It is the function of the State to govern the Church, to exercise discipline and to excommunicate. Church censures are civil punishments, though their application may be entrusted to the legal officers of the Church. This system has been variously applied in England, Scotland, and Germany (Lutheran Churches). It conflicts with the fundamental principle of the Headship of Jesus Christ, and does not recognize the fact that Church and

State are distinct and independent in their origin, in their primary objects, in the power they exercise, and in the administration of that power. 3. **THE EPISCOPALIAN SYSTEM.** The Episcopalians hold that Christ, as the Head of the Church, has entrusted the government of the Church directly and exclusively to an order of prelates or bishops, as the successors of the apostles; and that He has constituted these bishops a separate, independent, and self-perpetuating order. In this system the coetus fidelium or community of believers has absolutely no share in the government of the Church. In the early centuries this was the system of the Roman Catholic Church. In England it is combined with the Erastian system. But the Bible does not warrant the existence of such a separate class of superior officers, who have the inherent right of ordination and jurisdiction, and therefore do not represent the people nor, in any sense of the word, derive their office from them. Scripture clearly shows that the apostolic office was not of a permanent nature. The apostles did form a clearly distinct and independent class, but it was not their special task to rule and administer the affairs of the churches. It was their duty to carry the gospel to unevangelized districts, to found churches, and then to appoint others from among the people for the task of ruling these churches. Before the end of the first century the Apostolate had disappeared entirely. 4. **THE ROMAN CATHOLIC SYSTEM.** This is the Episcopal system carried to its logical conclusion. The Roman Catholic system pretends to comprise, not only successors of the apostles, but also a successor to Peter, who is said to have had the primacy among the apostles, and whose successor is now recognized as the special representative of Christ. The Church of Rome is of the nature of an absolute monarchy, under the control of an infallible Pope, who has the right to determine and regulate the doctrine, worship, and government, of the Church. Under him there are inferior classes and orders, to whom special grace is given, and whose duty it is to govern the Church in strict accountability to their superiors and to the supreme Pontiff. The people have absolutely no voice in the government of the Church. This system also conflicts with Scripture, which recognizes no such primacy of Peter as that on

which the system is built, and distinctly recognizes the voice of the people in ecclesiastical affairs. Moreover, the claim of the Roman Catholic Church, that there has been an unbroken line of succession from the time of Peter down to the present day, is contradicted by history. The papal system is, both exegetically and historically, untenable. 5. THE CONGREGATIONAL SYSTEM. This is also called the system of independency. According to it each church or congregation is a complete church, independent of every other. In such a church the governing power rests exclusively with the members of the church, who are entitled to regulate their own affairs. Officers are simply functionaries of the local church, appointed to teach and to administer the affairs of the church, and have no governing power beyond that which they possess as members of the church. If it is considered expedient that the various churches should exercise communion with one another, as is sometimes the case, this fellowship finds expression in ecclesiastical councils and in local or provincial conferences, for the consideration of their common interests. But the actions of such associated bodies are held to be strictly advisory or declarative, and are not binding on any particular church. This theory of popular government, making the office of the ministry altogether dependent on the action of the people, is certainly not in harmony with what we learn from the Word of God. Moreover, the theory that each church is independent of every other church, fails to express the unity of the Church of Christ, has a disintegrating effect, and opens the door for all kinds of arbitrariness in church government. There is no appeal from any of the decisions of the local church. 6. THE NATIONAL-CHURCH SYSTEM. This system, also called the Collegial system (which supplanted the Territorial system) was developed in Germany especially by C. M. Pfaff (1686-1780), and was later on introduced into the Netherlands. It proceeds on the assumption that the Church is a voluntary association, equal to the State. The separate churches or congregations are merely sub-divisions of the one national Church. The original power resides in a national organization, and this organization has jurisdiction over the local churches. This is just the reverse of the Presbyterian system, according to which the

original power has its seat in the consistory. The Territorial system recognized the inherent right of the State to reform public worship, to decide disputes respecting doctrine and conduct, and to convene synods, while the Collegial system ascribes to the State only the right of supervision as an inherent right, and regards all other rights, which the State might exercise in Church matters, as rights which the Church by a tacit understanding or by a formal pact conferred upon the State. This system disregards altogether the autonomy of the local churches, ignores the principles of self-government and of direct responsibility to Christ, engenders formalism, and binds a professedly spiritual Church by formal and geographical lines. Such a system as this, which is akin to the Erastian system, naturally fits in best with the present-day idea of the totalitarian State. Reformed Churches do not claim that their system of Church government is determined in every detail by the Word of God, but do assert that its fundamental principles are directly derived from Scripture. They do not claim a *jus divinum* for the details, but only for the general fundamental principles of the system, and are quite ready to admit that many of its particulars are determined by expediency and human wisdom. From this it follows that, while the general structure must be rigidly maintained, some of the details may be changed in the proper ecclesiastical manner for prudential reasons, such as the general profit of the churches. The following are its most fundamental principles. 1. CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH AND THE SOURCE OF ALL ITS AUTHORITY. The Church of Rome considers it of the greatest importance to maintain the headship of the Pope over the Church. The Reformers maintained and defended the position, in opposition to the claims of the Papacy, that Christ is the only Head of the Church. They did not entirely avoid the danger, however, of recognizing, the one more and the other less, the supremacy of the State over the Church. Consequently the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches had to fight another battle later on, the battle for the Headship of Jesus Christ in opposition to the unwarranted encroachments of the State. This battle was fought first of all in Scotland, and later on also in The Netherlands. The very fact that it was fought against such

external powers as the Papacy and the State or the King, both of whom claimed to be the head of the visible Church, clearly implies that they who were engaged in this battle were particularly interested in establishing and maintaining the position that Christ is the only lawful Head of the visible Church, and is therefore the only supreme Lawgiver and King of the Church. Naturally, they also recognized Christ as the organic Head of the invisible Church. They realized that the two could not be separated, but, since the Pope and the King could hardly claim to be the organic head of the invisible Church, this was not really the point in question. Respecting the Scottish teachers Walker says: “They meant that Christ is the real King and Head of the Church, as a visible organisation, ruling it by His statutes, and ordinances, and officers, and forces, as truly and literally as David or Solomon ruled the covenant people of old.”[Scottish Theology and Theologians, p. 130.] The Bible teaches us that Christ is Head over all things: He is the Lord of the universe, not merely as the second person of the Trinity, but in His mediatorial capacity, Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:20-22; Phil. 2:10,11; Rev. 17:14; 19:16. In a very special sense, however, He is the Head of the Church, which is His body. He stands in a vital and organic relation to it, fills it with His life, and controls it spiritually, John 15:1-8; Eph. 1:10,22,23; 2:20-22; 4:15; 5:30; Col. 1:18; 2:19; 3:11. Premillenarians claim that this is the only sense in which Christ is the Head of the Church, for they deny the very point for which our Reformed Fathers contended, namely, that Christ is the King of the Church, and therefore the only supreme authority to be recognized in it. Scripture plainly teaches, however, that Christ is the Head of the Church, not only in virtue of His vital relationship to it, but also as its Legislator and King. In the organic and vital sense He is the Head primarily, though not exclusively, of the invisible Church, which constitutes His spiritual body. But He is also the Head of the visible Church, not only in the organic sense, but also in the sense that He has authority and rule over it, Matt. 16:18,19; 23:8,10; John 13:13; I Cor. 12:5; Eph. 1:20-23; 4:4,5,11,12; 5:23,24. This Headship of Christ over the visible Church is the principal part of the dominion bestowed upon Him as the result of His

sufferings. His authority is manifested in the following points: (a) He instituted the Church of the New Testament, Matt. 16:18, so that it is not, as many regard it in our day, a mere voluntary society, which has its only warrant in the consent of its members. (b) He instituted the means of grace which the Church must administer, namely, the Word and the sacraments, Matt. 28:19,20; Mark 16:15,16; Luke 22:17-20; I Cor. 11:23-29. In these matters no one else has the right to legislate. (c) He gave to the Church its constitution and officers, and clothed them with divine authority, so that they can speak and act in His name, Matt. 10:1; 16:19; John 20:21-23; Eph. 4:11,12. (d) He is ever present in the Church when it meets for worship, and speaks and acts through its officers. It is Christ as King that warrants them in speaking and acting with authority, Matt. 10:40; II Cor. 13:3.

2. CHRIST EXERCISES HIS AUTHORITY BY MEANS OF HIS ROYAL WORD. The reign of Christ is not in all respects similar to that of earthly kings. He does not rule the Church by force, but subjectively by His Spirit, which is operative in the Church, and objectively by the Word of God as the standard of authority. All believers are unconditionally bound to obey the word of the King. As Christ is the only sovereign Ruler of the Church, His word is the only word that is law in the absolute sense. Consequently, all despotic power is contraband in the Church. There is no ruling power independent of Christ. The Pope of Rome stands condemned in that he, while professing to be Christ's vicar on earth, virtually supplants Christ and supersedes His word by human innovations. He not only places tradition on an equal footing with Scripture, but also claims to be the infallible interpreter of both when speaking *ex cathedra* in matters of faith and morals. Scripture and tradition may be the mediate or remote rules of faith, the immediate rule is the teaching of the Church, which has its guarantee in papal infallibility.[Cf. Wilmers, *Handbook of the Christian Religion*, p. 134.] The word of the Pope is the word of God. 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. 3. CHRIST AS KING HAS ENDOWED THE CHURCH WITH POWER. A rather delicate question arises at this point, namely, Who are the first and proper subjects of Church power? To whom has Christ committed this power in the first instance? Roman Catholics and Episcopalians answer: to the officers as a separate class, in contradistinction from the ordinary members of the Church. This view has also been held by some eminent Presbyterian divines, such as Rutherford and Baillie.

Diametrically opposed to this is the theory of the Independents, that this power is vested in the Church at large, and that the officers are merely the organs of the body as a whole. The great Puritan divine, Owen, adopts this view with some modifications. In recent years some Reformed theologians apparently favored this view, though without subscribing to the separatism of the Independents. There is another view, however, representing a mean between these two extremes, which would seem to deserve preference.

According to it ecclesiastical power is committed by Christ to the Church as a whole, that is to the ordinary members and the officers alike; but in addition to that the officers receive such an additional measure of power as is required for the performance of their respective duties in the Church of Christ. They share in the original power bestowed upon the Church, and receive their authority and power as officers directly from Christ. They are representatives, but not mere deputies or delegates of the people. Older theologians often say: "All Church power, in actu primo, or fundamentally, is in the Church itself; in actu secundo, or its exercise, in them that are specially called thereto." This is substantially the view held by Voetius, Gillespie (in his work on Ceremonies), Bannerman, Porteous, Bavinck, and Vos. 4. CHRIST PROVIDED FOR THE SPECIFIC EXERCISE OF THIS POWER BY REPRESENTATIVE ORGANS.

While Christ committed power to the Church as a whole, He also provided for it that this power should be exercised ordinarily and specifically by representative organs, set aside for the maintenance of doctrine, worship, and discipline. The officers of the Church are the representatives of the people

chosen by popular vote. This does not mean, however, that they receive their authority from the people, for the call of the people is but the confirmation of the inner call by the Lord Himself; and it is from Him that they receive their authority and to Him that they are responsible. When they are called representatives, this is merely an indication of the fact that they were chosen to their office by the people, and does not imply that they derive their authority from them. Hence they are no deputies or tools that merely serve to carry out the wishes of the people, but rulers whose duty it is to apprehend and apply intelligently the laws of Christ. At the same time they are in duty bound to recognize the power vested in the Church as a whole by seeking its assent or consent in important matters. 5. THE POWER OF THE CHURCH RESIDES PRIMARILY IN THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE LOCAL

CHURCH. It is one of the fundamental principles of Reformed or Presbyterian government, that the power or authority of the Church does not reside first of all in the most general assembly of any Church, and is only secondarily and by derivation from this assembly, vested in the governing body of the local Church; but that it has its original seat in the consistory or session of the local Church, and is by this transferred to the major assemblies, such as classes (presbyteries) and synods or general assemblies. Thus the Reformed system honors the autonomy of the local church, though it always regards this as subject to the limitations that may be put upon it as the result of its association with other churches in one denomination, and assures it the fullest right to govern its own internal affairs by means of its officers. At the same time it also maintains the right and duty of the local church to unite with other similar churches on a common confessional basis, and form a wider organization for doctrinal, judicial, and administrative purposes, with proper stipulations of mutual obligations and rights. Such a wider organization undoubtedly imposes certain limitations on the autonomy of the local churches, but also promotes the growth and welfare of the churches, guarantees the rights of the members of the Church, and serves to give fuller expression to the unity of the Church. Different kinds of officers may be

distinguished in the Church. A very general distinction is that between extraordinary and ordinary officers. 1. EXTRAORDINARY OFFICERS.

a. Apostles. Strictly speaking, this name is applicable only to the Twelve chosen by Jesus and to Paul; but it is also applied to certain apostolic men, who assisted Paul in his work, and who were endowed with apostolic gifts and graces, Acts 14:4,14; I Cor. 9:5,6; II Cor. 8:23; Gal. 1:19 (?). The apostles had the special task of laying the foundation for the Church of all ages. It is only through their word that believers of all following ages have communion with Jesus Christ. Hence they are the apostles of the Church in the present day as well as they were the apostles of the primitive Church. They had certain special qualifications. They (a) received their commission directly from God or from Jesus Christ, Mark 3:14; Luke 6:13; Gal. 1:1; (b) were witnesses of the life of Christ and especially of His resurrection, John 15:27; Acts 1:21,22; I Cor. 9:1; (c) were conscious of being inspired by the Spirit of God in all their teaching, both oral and written, Acts 15:28; I Cor. 2:13; I Thess. 4:8; I John 5:9-12; (d) had the power to perform miracles and used this on several occasions to ratify their message, II Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:4; and (e) were richly blessed in their work as a sign of the divine approval of their labors, I Cor. 9:1,2; II Cor. 3:2,3; Gal. 2:8. b. Prophets. The New Testament also speaks of prophets, Acts 11:28; 13:1,2; 15:32; I Cor. 12:10; 13:2; 14:3; Eph. 2:20; 3:5; 4:11; I Tim. 1:18; 4:14; Rev. 11:6. Evidently the gift of speaking for the edification of the Church was highly developed in these prophets, and they were occasionally instrumental in revealing mysteries and predicting future events. The first part of this gift is permanent in the Christian Church, and was distinctly recognized by the Reformed Churches (prophesyings), but the last part of it was of a charismatic and temporary character. They differed from ordinary ministers in that they spoke under special inspiration. c. Evangelists. In addition to apostles and prophets, evangelists are mentioned in the Bible, Acts 21:8; Eph. 4:11; II Tim. 4:5. Philip, Mark, Timothy, and Titus belonged to this class. Little is known about these evangelists. They accompanied and assisted the apostles, and were sometimes sent out by these on special missions. Their work was to preach

and baptize, but also to ordain elders, Tit. 1:5; I Tim. 5:22, and to exercise discipline, Tit. 3:10. Their authority seems to have been more general and somewhat superior to that of the regular ministers. 2. ORDINARY OFFICERS.

a. Elders. Among the common officers of the Church

the presbuteroi or episkopoi are first in order of importance. The former name simply means “elders,” that is, older ones, and the latter, “overseers.” The term presbuteroi is used in Scripture to denote old men, and to designate a class of officers somewhat similar to those who functioned in the synagogue.

As a designation of office the name was gradually eclipsed and even superseded by the name episkopoi. The two terms are often used interchangeably, Acts 20:17,28; I Tim. 3:1; 4:14; 5:17,19; Tit. 1:5,7; I Pet.

5:1,2. Presbuteroi are first mentioned in Acts 11:30, but the office was evidently well known already when Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem, and may have been in existence even before the institution of the diaconate. At least the term hoi neoteroi in Acts 5 seems to point to a distinction between these and the presbuteroi. Frequent mention is made of them in the book of Acts, 14:23; 15:6,22; 16:4; 20:17,28; 21:18. Probably the presbyterial or episcopal office was first instituted in the churches of the Jews, Jas. 5:14; Heb. 13:7,17, and then, shortly after, also in those of the Gentiles. Several other names are applied to these officers, namely, proistamenoι, Rom. 12:8; I Thes. 5:12; kuberneseis, I Cor. 12:28; hegoumenoi, Heb. 13:7,17,24; and poimenes, Eph. 4:11. These officers clearly had the oversight of the flock that was entrusted to their care. They had to provide for it, govern it, and protect it, as the very household of God.

b. Teachers. It is clear that the elders were not originally teachers. There was no need of separate teachers at first, since there were apostles, prophets, and evangelists. Gradually, however, the didaskalia was connected more closely with the episcopal office; but even then the teachers did not at once constitute a separate class of officers. Paul’s statement in Eph. 4:11, that the ascended Christ also gave “pastors and teachers,” mentioned as a single class, to the Church, clearly shows that these two did not constitute two different classes of officers, but one class having two related functions. I Tim. 5:17 speaks of elders

who labor in the Word and in teaching, and according to Heb. 13:7 the hegoumenoi were also teachers. Moreover, in II Tim. 2:2 Paul urges upon Timothy the necessity of appointing to office faithful men who shall also be able to teach others. In course of time two circumstances led to a distinction between the elders or overseers that were entrusted only with the government of the Church, and those that were also called upon to teach: (1) when the apostles died and heresies arose and increased, the task of those who were called upon to teach became more exacting and demanded special preparation, II Tim. 2:2; Tit. 1:9; and (2) in view of the fact that the laborer is worthy of his hire, those who were engaged in the ministry of the Word, a comprehensive task requiring all their time, were set free from other work, in order that they might devote themselves more exclusively to the work of teaching. In all probability the aggeloi who were addressed in the letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor, were the teachers or ministers of those churches, Rev. 2:1,8,12,18; 3:1,7,14. In Reformed circles the ministers now rule the churches together with the elders, but in addition to that administer the Word and the sacraments. Together they make the necessary regulations for the government of the Church. c. Deacons. Besides the presbuteroi the diakonoi are mentioned in the New Testament, Phil. 1:1; I Tim. 3:8,10,12. According to the prevailing opinion Acts 6:1-6 contains the record of the institution of the diaconate. Some modern scholars doubt this, however, and regard the office mentioned in Acts 6, either as a general office in which the functions of elders and deacons were combined, or as a merely temporal office serving a special purpose. They call attention to the fact that some of the seven chosen, as Philip and Stephen, evidently engaged in teaching; and that the money collected at Antioch for the poor in Judea was delivered into the hands of the elders. No mention is made of deacons whatsoever in Acts 11:30, though these, if they had existed as a separate class, would have been the natural recipients of that money. And yet in all probability Acts 6 does refer to the institution of the diaconate, for: (1) The name diakonoi, which was, previous to the event narrated in Acts 6, always used in the general sense of servant, subsequently began to be

employed, and in course of time served exclusively, to designate those who were engaged in works of mercy and charity. The only reason that can be assigned for this is found in Acts 6. (2) The seven men mentioned there were charged with the task of distributing properly the gifts that were brought for the agapae, a ministry that is elsewhere more particularly described by the word diakonia, Acts 11:29, Rom. 12:7; II Cor. 8:4; 9:1,12,13; Rev. 2:19. (3) The requirements for the office, as mentioned in Acts 6, are rather exacting, and in that respect agree with the demands mentioned in I Tim. 3:8-10,12. (4) Very little can be said in favor of the pet idea of some critics that the diaconate was not developed until later, about the time when the episcopal office made its appearance. 3. THE CALLING OF THE OFFICERS AND THEIR INDUCTION INTO OFFICE. A distinction should be made between the calling of the extraordinary officers, such as apostles, and that of the ordinary officers. The former were called in an extraordinary way with an immediate calling from God, and the latter, in the ordinary manner and through the agency of the Church. We are concerned more particularly with the calling of the ordinary officers. a. The calling of the ordinary officers. This is twofold: (1) Internal calling. It is sometimes thought that the internal calling to an office in the Church consists in some extraordinary indication of God to the effect that one is called, — a sort of special revelation. But this is not correct. It consists rather in certain ordinary providential indications given by God, and includes especially three things: (a) the consciousness of being impelled to some special task in the Kingdom of God, by love to God and His cause; (b) the conviction that one is at least in a measure intellectually and spiritually qualified for the office sought; and (c) the experience that God is clearly paving the way to the goal. (2) External calling. This is the call that comes to one through the instrumentality of the Church. It is not issued by the Pope (Roman Catholic), nor by a bishop or a college of bishops (Episcopalian), but by the local church. Both the officers and the ordinary members of the church have a part in it. That the officers have a guiding hand in it, but not to the exclusion of the people, is evident from such passages as Acts 1:15-26; 6:2-6; 14:23. The people

were recognized even in the choice of an apostle, according to Acts 1:15-26. It would seem that in the apostolic age the officers guided the choice of the people by calling attention to the necessary qualifications that were required for the office, but allowed the people to take part in the choosing, Acts 1:15-26; 6:1-6; I Tim. 3:2-13. Of course, in the case of Matthias God Himself made the final choice. b. The officers' induction into office. There are especially two rites connected with this: (1) Ordination. This presupposes the calling and examination of the candidate for office. It is an act of the classis or the presbytery (I Tim. 4:14). Says Dr. Hodge: "Ordination is the solemn expression of the judgment of the Church, by those appointed to deliver such judgment, that the candidate is truly called of God to take part in this ministry, thereby authenticating to the people the divine call." [Church Polity, p. 349.] This authentication is, under all ordinary circumstances, the necessary condition for the exercise of the ministerial office. It may briefly be called a public acknowledgement and confirmation of the candidate's calling to this office. (2) Laying on of hands. Ordination is accompanied with the laying on of hands. Clearly, the two went hand in hand in apostolic times, Acts 6:6; 13:3; I Tim. 4:14; 5:22. In those early days the laying on of hands evidently implied two things: it signified that a person was set aside for a certain office, and that some special spiritual gift was conferred upon him. The Church of Rome is of the opinion that these two elements are still included in the laying on of hands, that it actually confers some spiritual grace upon the recipient, and therefore ascribes to it sacramental significance. Protestants maintain, however, that it is merely a symbolical indication of the fact that one is set aside for the ministerial office in the Church. While they regard it as a Scriptural rite and as one that is entirely appropriate, they do not regard it as absolutely essential. The Presbyterian Church makes it optional.

1. THE GOVERNING BODIES (CHURCH COURTS) IN THE REFORMED SYSTEM.

Reformed Church government is characterized by a system of ecclesiastical assemblies in an ascending or a descending scale, according to the point of view from which they are considered. These are the consistory (session), the

classis (presbytery), the synod(s), and (in some cases) the general assembly. The consistory consists of the minister (or, ministers) and the elders of the local church. The classis is composed of one minister and one elder of each local church within a certain district. This is somewhat different in the Presbyterian Church, however, where the presbytery includes all the ministers within its boundaries, and one elder from each of its congregations. The synod, again, consists of an equal number of ministers and elders from each classis or presbytery. And, finally, the general assembly is (in the case of the Presbyterians) composed of an equal delegation of ministers and elders from each of the presbyteries, and not, as might be expected, from each of the particular synods.

2. THE REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT OF THE LOCAL CHURCH AND ITS RELATIVE AUTONOMY.

a. The representative government of the local church. Reformed churches differ, on the one hand, from all those churches in which the government is in the hands of a single prelate or presiding elder, and on the other hand, from those in which it rests with the people in general. They do not believe in any one man rule, be he an elder, a pastor, or a bishop; neither do they believe in popular government. They choose ruling elders as their representatives, and these, together with the minister(s), form a council or consistory for the government of the local church. Very likely the apostles were guided by the venerated custom of having elders in the synagogue rather than by any direct commandment, when they ordained elders in the various churches founded by them. The Jerusalem church had elders, Acts 11:30. Paul and Barnabas ordained them in the churches which they organized on the first missionary journey, Acts 14:23. Elders were evidently functioning at Ephesus, Acts 20:17, and at Philippi, Phil. 1:1. The Pastoral Epistles repeatedly make mention of them, I Tim. 3:1,2; Tit. 1:5,7. It deserves attention that they are always spoken of in the plural, I Cor. 12:28; I Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:7,17,24; I Pet. 5:1. The elders are chosen by the people as men who are specially qualified to rule the Church. Scripture evidently intends that the people shall have a voice in the matter of their selection, though this was not the case in the Jewish synagogue, Acts 1:21-26;

6:1-6; 14:23. In the last passage, however, the word *cheirotoneo* may have lost its original meaning of appointing by stretching out the hand, and may simply mean to appoint. At the same time it is perfectly evident that the Lord Himself places these rulers over the people and clothes them with the necessary authority, Matt. 16:19; John 20:22,23; Acts 1:24,26; 20:28; I Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11,12; Heb. 13:17. The election by the people is merely an external confirmation of the inner calling by the Lord Himself. Moreover, the elders, though representatives of the people, do not derive their authority from the people, but from the Lord of the Church. They exercise rule over the house of God in the name of the King, and are responsible only to Him.

b. The relative autonomy of the local church. Reformed Church government recognizes the autonomy of the local church. This means: (1) That every local church is a complete church of Christ, fully equipped with everything that is required for its government. It has absolutely no need of it that any government should be imposed upon it from without. And not only that, but such an imposition would be absolutely contrary to its nature. (2) That, though there can be a proper affiliation or consolidation of contiguous churches, there may be no union which destroys the autonomy of the local church. Hence it is better not to speak of classes and synods as higher, but to describe them as major or more general assemblies. They do not represent a higher, but the very same, power that inheres in the consistory, though exercising this on a broader scale. McGill speaks of them as higher and remoter tribunals. [Church Government, p. 457.] (3) That the authority and prerogatives of the major assemblies are not unlimited, but have their limitation in the rights of the sessions or consistories. They are not permitted to lord it over a local church or its members, irrespective of the constitutional rights of the consistory; nor to meddle with the internal affairs of a local church under any and all circumstances. When churches affiliate, their mutual rights and duties are circumscribed in a Church Order or Form of Government. This stipulates the rights and duties of the major assemblies, but also guarantees the rights of the local church. The idea that a classis (presbytery) or synod can simply impose whatever it pleases on a

particular church is essentially Roman Catholic. (4) That the autonomy of the local church has its limitations in the relation in which it stands to the churches with which it is affiliated, and in the general interests of the affiliated churches. The Church Order is a sort of Constitution, solemnly subscribed to by every local church, as represented by its consistory. This on the one hand guards the rights and interests of the local church, but on the other hand also, the collective rights and interests of the affiliated churches. And no single church has the right to disregard matters of mutual agreement and of common interest. The local group may be even called upon occasionally to deny itself for the far greater good of the Church in general. 3. THE MAJOR

ASSEMBLIES. a. Scripture warrant for major assemblies. Scripture does not contain an explicit command to the effect that the local churches of a district must form an organic union. Neither does it furnish us with an example of such a union. In fact, it represents the local churches as individual entities without any external bond of union. At the same time the essential nature of the Church, as described in Scripture, would seem to call for such a union. The Church is described as a spiritual organism, in which all the constituent parts are vitally related to one another. It is the spiritual body of Jesus Christ, of which He is the exalted Head. And it is but natural that this inner unity should express itself in some visible manner, and should even, as much as possible in this imperfect and sinful world, seek expression in some corresponding external organization. The Bible speaks of the Church not only as a spiritual body, but also as a tangible body, as a temple of the Holy Spirit, as a priesthood, and as a holy nation. Every one of these terms points to a visible unity. Congregationalists or Independents and Undenominationalists lose sight of this important fact. The existing divisions in the visible Church at the present time should not cause us to lose sight of the fact that there are certain passages of Scripture which seem to indicate rather clearly that, not only the invisible Church, but also the visible Church is a unity. The word *ekklesia* is used in the singular as an indication of the visible church in a wider sense than that of the purely local church, Acts 9:31 (according to the now accepted

reading), I Cor. 12:28, and probably also I Cor. 10:32. In the descriptions of the Church in I Cor. 12:12-50 and Eph. 4:4-16 the apostle also has its visible unity in mind. Moreover, there are reasons for thinking that the Church at Jerusalem and at Antioch consisted of several separate groups, which together formed a sort of unity. And, finally, Acts 15 acquaints us with the example of the council of Jerusalem. This council was composed of apostles and elders, and therefore did not constitute a proper example and pattern of a classis or synod in the modern sense of the word. At the same time it was an example of a major assembly, and of one that spoke with authority and not merely in an advisory capacity.

b. The representative character of the major assemblies. In the abstract it may be said that the major assemblies might have been composed of all the representatives of all the local churches under their jurisdiction; but, on account of the number of the churches represented, such a body would in most cases prove unwieldy and inefficient. In order to keep the number of representatives down to reasonable proportions, the principle of representation is carried through also in connection with the major assemblies. Not the local churches, but the classes or presbyteries, send their representatives to Synods. This affords the gradual contraction that is necessary for a well-compacted system. The immediate representatives of the people who form the consistories or sessions, are themselves represented in classes or presbyteries; and these in turn are represented in synods or general assemblies. The more general the assembly, the more remote it is from the people; yet none of them is too remote for the expression of the unity of the Church, for the maintenance of good order, and for the general effectiveness of its work.

c. The matters that fall under their jurisdiction. The ecclesiastical character of these assemblies should always be borne in mind. It is because they are Church assemblies, that purely scientific, social, industrial, or political matters do not, as such, fall under their jurisdiction. Only ecclesiastical matters belong to their province, such as matters of doctrine or morals, of church government and discipline, and whatever pertains to the preservation of unity and good order in the Church of Jesus Christ. More particularly, they deal with

(1) matters which, as to their nature, belong to the province of a minor assembly, but for some reason or other cannot be settled there; and (b) matters which, as to their nature, belong to the province of a major assembly, since they pertain to the churches in general, such as matters touching the Confession, the Church Order, or the liturgy of the Church. d. The power and authority of these assemblies. The major assemblies do not represent a higher kind of power than is vested in the consistory or session. The Reformed churches know of no higher kind of ecclesiastical power than that which resides in the consistory. At the same time their authority is greater in degree and wider in extent than that of the consistory. Church power is represented in greater measure in the major assemblies than in the consistory, just as apostolic power was represented in greater measure in twelve than in a single apostle. Ten churches certainly have more authority than a single church; there is an accumulation of power. Moreover, the authority of the major assemblies does not apply to a single church only, but extends to all the affiliated churches. Consequently, the decisions of a major assembly carry great weight and can never be set aside at will. The assertion sometimes made that they are only of an advisory character and therefore need not be carried out, is a manifestation of the leaven of Independency. These decisions are authoritative, except in cases where they are explicitly declared to be merely advisory. They are binding on the churches as the sound interpretation and application of the law, — the law of Christ, the King of the Church. They cease to be binding only when they are shown to be contrary to the Word of God.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY: What is the difference between the New Testament meaning of the word *episkopos* and its later connotation? Why are regular offices necessary in the Church? Does Scripture favor the idea that the people should have some part in the government of the Church? What is the chief characteristic of Prelatism? What is the Roman Catholic distinction between a hierarchy of order and a hierarchy of jurisdiction? How did the Territorial and the Collegial systems originate, and how do they differ? What system did the Arminians adopt, and how did this affect their position? What

is the present form of Church government in the Lutheran Church? How does the idea that Christ is the Head of the Church only in an organic sense affect the offices and the authority of the Church? What important practical bearing does the Headship of Christ (including His kingship) have on the life, the position, and the government of the Church? Can any Church be considered autonomous in the absolute sense of the word? How do Reformed major assemblies differ from Congregational conferences and general councils?

IV. The Power of the Church

Christ endows His Church with spiritual, ministerial power. That power is exercised under His Word for the preservation of truth, the ordering and discipline of the Church, and merciful care for those in need.

Jesus Christ not only founded the Church, but also endowed it with the necessary power or authority. He is the Head of the Church, not only in an organic, but also in an administrative sense, that is, He is not only the Head of the body, but also the King of the spiritual commonwealth. It is in His capacity as King of the Church that He has clothed her with power or authority. He Himself spoke of the Church as founded so firmly upon a rock that the gates of hell cannot prevail against her, Matt. 16:18; and on the same occasion — the very first on which He made mention of the Church — He also promised to endow her with power, when He said unto Peter: “I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven,” Matt. 16:19. It is quite evident that the terms ‘Church’ and ‘Kingdom of Heaven’ are used interchangeably here. Keys are an emblem of power (cf. Isa. 22:15-22), and in the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven Peter receives power to bind and to loose, which in this connection would seem to mean, to determine what is forbidden and what is permitted in the sphere of the Church.[Cf. Vos, *The Kingdom of God and the Church*, p. 147; Grosheide, *Comm. on Matthew*, in loco.] And the judgment he passes — in this case not

on persons, but on actions — will be sanctioned in heaven. Peter receives this power as the representative of the apostles, and these are the nucleus and foundation of the Church in their capacity as teachers of the Church. The Church of all ages is bound by their word, John 17:20; I John 1:3. That Christ endowed not only Peter but all the apostles with power and with the right to judge, and that not merely actions but also persons, is quite evident from John 20:23: “Whosoever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; whosesoever sins ye retain, they are retained.” Christ gave this power first of all and in the fullest degree to the apostles, but He also extends it, though in a lesser degree, to the Church in general. The Church has the right to excommunicate an unrepentant sinner. But it can do this only because Jesus Christ Himself dwells in the Church and through the agency of the apostles has supplied the Church with a proper standard of judgment. That Christ has given power to the Church as a whole, is quite evident from several passages of the New Testament, Acts 15:23-29; 16:4; I Cor. 5:7,13; 6:2-4; 12:28; Eph. 4:11-16. The officers in the Church receive their authority from Christ and not from men, even though the congregation is instrumental in putting them into office. This means on the one hand that they do not obtain it at the hands of any civil authority, which has no power in ecclesiastical matters, and therefore cannot bestow any; but on the other hand also, that they do not derive it from the people in general, though they are representatives of the people. Porteous correctly remarks: “That the presbyter is termed the people’s representative shows that he is their chosen ruler. The way in which the office is acquired, but not the source of its power, is designated by the title of representative.”[The Government of the Kingdom of God, p. 322.]

A. THE NATURE OF CHURCH POWER.

GLOSS **Spiritual power:** power exercised by Christ’s Spirit and Word, never by civil force or coercion.

1. A SPIRITUAL POWER. When the power of the Church is called a spiritual power, this does not mean that it is altogether internal and invisible, since Christ rules both body and soul, His Word and sacraments address the whole man, and the ministry of the diaconate even has special references to physical needs. It is a spiritual power, because it is given by the Spirit of God, Acts 20:28, can only be exercised in the name of Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit, John 20:22,23; I Cor. 5:4, pertains exclusively to believers, I Cor. 5:12, and can only be exercised in a moral and spiritual way, II Cor. 10:4. [Bavinck, Dogm. IV, p. 452.] The State represents the government of God over the outward and temporal estate of man, while the Church represents His government of man's inward and spiritual estate. The former aims at assuring its subjects of the possession and enjoyment of their external and civil rights, and is often constrained to exercise coercive power over against human violence. The latter is founded in opposition to an evil spirit and for the purpose of delivering men from spiritual bondage by imparting to them the knowledge of the truth, by cultivating in them spiritual graces, and by leading them to a life of obedience to the divine precepts. Since the power of the Church is exclusively spiritual, it does not resort to force. Christ intimated on more than one occasion that the administration of His Kingdom on earth involved a spiritual and not a civil power, Luke 12:13 ff.; Matt. 20:25-28; John 18:36,37. The Church of Rome loses sight of this great fact, when it insists on the possession of temporal power and is bent on bringing the entire life of the people under its sway.

2. A MINISTERIAL POWER. It is abundantly evident from Scripture that the power of the Church is no independent and sovereign power, Matt. 20:25,26; 23:8,10; II Cor. 10:4,5; I Pet. 5:3, but a diakonia leitourgia, a ministerial power, Acts 4:29,30; 20:24; Rom. 1:1, derived from Christ and subordinate to His sovereign authority over the Church, Matt. 28:18. It must be exercised in harmony with the Word of God and under the direction of the Holy Spirit, through both of which Christ governs His Church, and in the name of Christ Himself as the King of the Church, Rom. 10:14,15; Eph. 5:23; I Cor. 5:4. Yet it is a very real and comprehensive power, consisting in the

administration of the Word and the sacraments, Matt. 28:19, the determination of what is and what is not permitted in the Kingdom of God, Matt. 16:19, the forgiving and retaining of sin, John 20:23, and the exercise of discipline in the Church, Matt. 16:18; 18:17; I Cor. 5:4; Tit. 3:10; Heb. 12:15-17.

B. THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF CHURCH POWER.

GLOSS **Potestas:** the Latin term for authority or power; here it describes the Church's teaching, governing, and merciful ministries.

In connection with the three offices of Christ there is also a threefold power in the Church, namely, the potestas dogmatica or docendi, the potestas gubernans or ordinans of which the potestas iudicans or disciplinae is a subdivision, and the potestas or ministerium misericordiae.

1. THE POTESTAS DOGMATICA OR DOCENDI.

The Church has a divine task in connection with the truth. It is her duty to be a witness to the truth to those who are without, and both a witness and a teacher to those that are within. The Church must exercise this power: a. In the preservation of the Word of God. By giving His Word to the Church, God constituted the Church the keeper of the precious deposit of the truth. While hostile forces are pitted against it and the power of error is everywhere apparent, the Church must see to it that the truth does not perish from the earth, that the inspired volume in which it is embodied be kept pure and unmutilated, in order that its purpose may not be defeated, and that it be handed on faithfully from generation to generation. It has the great and responsible task of maintaining and defending the truth against all the forces of unbelief and error, I Tim. 1:3,4; II Tim. 1:13; Tit. 1:9-11. The Church has not always been mindful of this sacred duty. During the last century too many of the leaders of the Church have even welcomed the assaults of a hostile

criticism upon the Bible, and have rejoiced in the fact that it was brought down to the level of a purely human production, a mixture of truth and error. They have shown little of the determination which caused Luther to cry out: “Das Wort sollen Sie stehen lassen.” b. In the administration of the Word and of the sacraments. It is not only the duty of the Church to preserve the Word of God, but also to preach it in the world and in the assembly of the people of God, for the conversion of sinners and for the edification of the saints. The Church has an evangelistic or missionary task in the world. The King, clothed with all authority in heaven and on earth, gave her the great commission: “Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe whatsoever I commanded you.” Through the ministry of the Church the Son is ceaselessly gathering out of the whole human race a Church chosen to everlasting life. The empirical Church of any particular time must be actively engaged in the enlargement and expansion of the Church through missionary endeavors, must be instrumental in bringing in the elect out of all the nations of the world, adding living stones to the spiritual temple that is in process of construction, and must in that manner promote the completion of the number who will ultimately constitute the ideal Church of the future, the perfect bride of Christ, the new Jerusalem of Revelation 21. If the Church of Jesus Christ should be derelict in the performance of this great task, she would prove unfaithful to her Lord. That work must be continued and must be completed before the glorious return of the Saviour, Matt. 24:14. And the great means at the disposal of the Church for the accomplishment of this work is, not education, civilization, human culture, or social reforms, though all these may have subsidiary significance, but the gospel of the Kingdom, which is none other, in spite of what Premillenarians may say, than the gospel of free grace, of redemption through the blood of the Lamb. But the Church may not rest satisfied with bringing sinners to Christ through the instrumentality of the gospel; she must also engage in preaching the word in the assemblies of those who have already come to Christ. And in the performance of this task it is not

her main task to call sinners unto Christ, though the invitation to come to Christ may not be wanting even in organized churches, but to edify the saints, to strengthen their faith, to lead them on in the way of sanctification, and thus to solidify the spiritual temple of the Lord. Paul has this in mind when he says that Christ gave the teaching officers to the Church “for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ: till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” Eph. 4:12-13. The Church may not rest satisfied with teaching the first principles of faith, but must press on to higher ground, in order that those who are babes in Christ may become full-grown men and women in Christ, Heb. 5:11-6:3. Only a Church that is really strong, that has a firm grasp of the truth, can in turn become a powerful missionary agency and make mighty conquests for the Lord. Thus the task of the Church is a comprehensive task. She must point out the way of salvation, must warn the wicked of their coming doom, must cheer the saints with the promises of salvation, must strengthen the weak, encourage the faint-hearted and comfort the sorrowing. And in order that all this work may be done in every land and among all nations, she must see to it that the Word of God is translated into all languages. The ministry of the sacraments must, of course, go hand in hand with the ministry of the Word. It is merely the symbolical presentation of the gospel, addressed to the eye rather than to the ear. The duty of the Church to preach the Word is plainly taught in many passages of Scripture, such as Isa. 3:10,11; II Cor. 5:20; I Tim. 4:13; II Tim. 2:15; 4:2; Tit. 2:1-10. In view of the clear instructions of her King she may never allow any totalitarian government to dictate to her what she must preach; neither may she accommodate herself, as far as the contents of her message is concerned, to the demands of a naturalistic science, or to the requirements of a culture that reflects the spirit of the world. Modernists have done just that during the past decades by the suicidal efforts to adapt themselves in their preaching to the demands of a rationalistic higher criticism, of biology and psychology, of sociology and

economics, until at last they completely lost the message of the King. Many of them are now coming to the discovery that the message recommended in *Rethinking Missions* and in Vernon White's *A New Theology for Missions* is quite different from the original message and contains little that is peculiar to the pulpit; and that, as things now stand in their circles, the Church has no message of its own. Frantic attempts are made by Modernists to discover for themselves some message which they might bring to the churches, while they should seek to recover the original message and humbly take their place at the feet of Jesus. c. In the framing of symbols and confessions. Every Church must strive for self-consciousness in the confession of the truth. In order to accomplish this, it will not only have to reflect deeply on the truth, but also to formulate its expression of what it believes. By doing this it will engender in its members a clear conception of their faith, and convey to outsiders a definite understanding of its doctrines. The necessity of doing this was greatly enhanced by the historical perversions of the truth. The rise of heresies invariably called for the construction of symbols and confessions, for clearly formulated statements of the faith of the Church. Even the apostles sometimes found it necessary to restate with greater precision certain truths because of errors that had crept in. John restates the central truth of Christ's manifestation in the world in view of an incipient Gnosticism (cf. his Gospel and his First Epistle); Paul restates the doctrine of the resurrection, which was denied by some (I Cor. 15; I Tim. 1:20; II Tim. 2:17,18), and also that of the second coming of Christ, which was misunderstood (II Thess. 2); and the council of Jerusalem found it necessary to re-assert the doctrine of Christian liberty (Acts 15). Naturally, the Bible contains no example of a creed. Creeds are not given by revelation, but are the fruit of the Church's reflection on revealed truth. In our day many are averse to symbols and confessions, and sing the glories of a creedless Church. But the objections raised against them are not at all insuperable. Creeds are not, as some insinuate, regarded as equal in authority to the Bible, and much less as superior to it. They do not, either by express statements or by implication add to the truth of Scripture. They do not

mililitate against the freedom of the conscience, nor do they retard the progress of scientific theological study. Neither can they be regarded as the cause of the divisions in the Church, though they may be expressive of these. The divisions were there first and gave rise to the various creeds. As a matter of fact, they serve to a great extent to promote a measure of unity in the visible Church. Moreover, if a Church does not want to be silent, it is bound to develop a creed, be it written or unwritten. All this does not mean, however, that creeds cannot be abused. d. In the cultivation of the study of theology. The Church may not rest on its oars and be satisfied with the knowledge of the divine truth to which it has attained and which it has formulated in its confessions. It must seek to dig ever deeper into the mine of Scripture, in order to bring to light its hidden treasures. Through scientific study it must seek an ever deeper knowledge, an ever better understanding, of the words of life. It owes this to the truth itself as a revelation of God, but also to the training of its future ministers. The Church is in duty bound to provide for, or at least to supervise, the training of the successive generations of its teachers and pastors. This would seem to be implied in the words of Paul to Timothy: “And the things which thou hast heard from me among many witnesses commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” II Tim. 2:2.

2. THE POTESTAS GUBERNANS.

This is divided into the potestas ordinans and the potestas iudicans. a. The potestas ordinans. “God is not a God of confusion, but of peace,” I Cor. 14:33. Hence He desires that in His Church “all things be done decently and in order,” vs. 40. This is evident from the fact that He has made provision for the proper regulation of the affairs of the Church. The regulative authority which He has given to the Church includes the power: (1) To enforce the laws of Christ. This means that the Church has the right to carry into effect the laws which Christ has promulgated for the Church. There is an important difference on this point between the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Churches. The former virtually claims authority to enact laws that are binding on the conscience,

and the transgression of which carries with it the same penalty that is annexed to any breach of the divine law. The latter, however, disclaim any such authority, but maintain the right to enforce the law of Christ, the King of the Church. And even so they claim no other than a ministerial or declarative power, regard the law as binding only because it is backed by the authority of Christ, and apply no other censures than those which He has sanctioned. Moreover, they feel that compulsion would conflict with the nature of their power and could never result in real spiritual benefit. All the members of the Church possess this power in a measure, Rom. 15:14; Cor. 3:16; I Thess. 5:11, but it is vested in a special measure in the officers, John 21:15-17; Acts 20:28; I Pet. 5:2. The ministerial character of this power is brought out in II Cor. 1:24; I Pet. 5:2,3. (2) To draw up canons or church orders. Numberless occasions arise on which the Church is prompted to make enactments or regulations, often called canons or church orders. Such enactments are not to be regarded as new laws, but merely as regulations for the proper application of the law. They are necessary to give the outward polity of the Church a definite form, to stipulate on what terms persons are permitted to bear office in the Church, to regulate public worship, to determine the proper form of discipline, and so on. General principles for the worship of God are laid down in Scripture, John 4:23; I Cor. 11:17-33; 14:40; 16:2; Col. 3:16(?); I Tim. 3:1-13; but in the regulation of the details of divine worship the churches are allowed great latitude. They may adapt themselves to circumstances, always bearing in mind, however, that they should worship God publicly in the manner best adapted to the purpose of edification. In no case may the regulations of the Church go contrary to the laws of Christ. b. The potestas iudicans. The potestas iudicans is the power that is exercised to guard the holiness of the Church, by admitting those who are approved after examination, and by excluding those who depart from the truth or lead dishonorable lives. It is exercised especially in matters of discipline. (1) Scriptural teachings respecting discipline. Among Israel unintentional sins could be atoned for by a sacrifice, but sins committed “with a high hand” (intentional) were punished with extermination. The cherem (the ban or that

which is devoted) was not only an ecclesiastical, but also a civil punishment. The uncircumcized, the lepers, and the impure, were not permitted to enter the sanctuary, Lev. 5 f.; Ezek. 44:9. It was only after Israel lost its national independence, and its character as a religious assembly became more prominent, that the ban, consisting in exclusion from the assembly, became a measure of ecclesiastical discipline, Ezra 10:8; Luke 6:22; John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2. Jesus instituted discipline in His Church, when He gave the apostles and, in connection with their word, also the Church in general, the power to bind and to loose, to declare what is forbidden and what is permitted, and to forgive and to retain sins declaratively, Matt. 16:19; 18:18; John 20:23. And it is only because Christ has given this power to the Church, that she can exercise it. Several passages of the New Testament refer to the exercise of this power, I Cor. 5:2,7,13; II Cor. 2:5-7; II Thess. 3:14,15; I Tim. 1:20; Tit. 3:10. Such passages as I Cor. 5:5 and I Tim. 1:20 do not refer to regular discipline, but to a special measure permitted only to the apostles and consisting in giving the sinner over to Satan for temporary physical punishment, in order to save the soul. (2) The twofold purpose of discipline. The purpose of discipline in the Church is twofold. In the first place it seeks to carry into effect the law of Christ concerning the admission and exclusion of members; and in the second place it aims at promoting the spiritual edification of the members of the Church by securing their obedience to the laws of Christ. Both of these aims are subservient to a higher end, namely, the maintenance of the holiness of the Church of Jesus Christ. With reference to diseased members of the Church, discipline is first of all medical in that it seeks to effect a cure, but it may become surgical, when the well-being of the Church requires the excision of the diseased member. It is impossible to tell when a process of discipline begins, whether a cure will be effected, or whether the diseased member will finally have to be removed. Probably the Church will succeed in bringing the sinner to repentance—and this is, of course, the more desirable end—; but it is also possible that it will have to resort to the extreme measure of excommunicating him. In all cases of discipline the Church will have to figure

with both possibilities. Even in the most extreme measure it should still have the saving of the sinner in mind, I Cor. 5:5. At the same time it should always remember that the primary consideration is the maintenance of the holiness of the Church. (3) The exercise of discipline by the officers. Though the ordinary members of the Church are frequently called upon to take part in the application of discipline, it is generally applied by the officers of the Church and can be applied only by them when discipline becomes censure. There are two different ways in which it may become the duty of a consistory to deal with a matter of discipline. (a) Private sins can become a cause of discipline in the more technical sense of the word in the manner indicated in Matt. 18:15-17. If one sins against a brother, the latter must admonish the sinner; if this does not have the desired effect, he must admonish him again in the presence of one or two witnesses; and if even this fails, then he must notify the Church, and it becomes the duty of the officers to deal with the matter. It should be remembered, however, that this method is prescribed for private sins only. The offence given by public sins cannot be removed privately, but only by a public transaction. (b) Public sins make the sinner subject to disciplinary action by the consistory at once, without the formality of any preceding private admonitions, even if there is no formal accusation. By public sins are meant, not merely sins that are committed in public, but sins that give public and rather general offence. The consistory should not even wait until someone calls attention to such sins, but should take the initiative. It was no honor for the Corinthians that Paul had to call their attention to the scandal in their midst before they took action. I Cor. 5:1 ff.; nor was it an honor for the churches of Pergamus and Thyatira that they did not rebuke and exclude the heretical teachers from their midst, Rev. 2:14,15,20. In the case of public sins the consistory has no right to wait until someone brings formal charges; neither has it the right to demand of anyone who finally feels constrained to call attention to such sins that he admonish the sinner privately first. The matter of public sins can not be settled in private. The disciplinary action of the consistory passes through three stages: (a) The *excommunicatio minor*,

restraining the sinner from partaking of the Lord's Supper. This is not public, and is followed by repeated admonitions by the consistory, in order to bring the sinner to repentance. (b) If the preceding measure does not avail, it is followed by three public announcements and admonitions. In the first of these the sin is mentioned, but the sinner is not named. In the second the name is made known in accordance with the advice of classis, which must first be obtained. And in the third the imminent final excommunication is announced, in order that this may have the consent of the congregation. During all this time the consistory, of course, continues its admonitions. (c) Finally, this is followed by the excommunicatio major, by which one is cut off from the fellowship of the Church, Matt. 18:17; I Cor. 5:13; Tit. 3:10,11. It is always possible to reinstate the sinner, if he shows due repentance and confesses his sins, II Cor. 2:5-10. (4) The necessity of proper discipline. The necessity of proper discipline is stressed in Scripture, Matt. 18:15-18; Rom. 16:17; I Cor. 5:2,9-13; II Cor. 2:5-10; II Thess. 3:6,14,15; Tit. 3:10,11. The church of Ephesus is praised because it did not bear with evil men, Rev. 2:2, and those of Pergamus and Thyatira are reprov'd for harboring heretical teachers and heathen abominations, Rev. 2:14,20,24. On the whole the Reformed churches have excelled in the exercise of Church discipline. They strongly stressed the fact that the Church of Christ must have an independent government and discipline. The Lutheran Churches did not emphasize this. They were Erastian in Church government, and were content to leave the exercise of Church discipline in the strict sense of the word in the hands of the government. The Church retained the right to exercise discipline only by means of the ministry of the Word, that is, by admonitions and exhortations addressed to the church as a whole. This was entrusted to the pastor and did not include the right to exclude anyone from the communion of the Church. At present there is in the Churches round about us a noticeable tendency to be lax in discipline, to place a one-sided emphasis on the reformation of the sinner through the ministry of the Word and—in some instances—through personal contacts with the sinner, and to steer clear of any such measures as excluding one from the communion

of the Church. There is a very evident tendency to stress the fact that the Church is a great missionary agency, and to forget that it is first of all the assembly of the saints, in which those who publicly live in sin cannot be tolerated. It is said that sinners must be gathered into the church, and not excluded from it. But it should be remembered that they must be gathered in as saints and have no legitimate place in the Church as long as they do not confess their sin and strive for holiness of life.

3. THE POTESTAS OR MINISTERIUM MISERICORDIAE.

a. The charismatic gift of healing. When Christ sent His apostles and the seventy disciples out, He not only instructed them to preach, but also gave them power to cast out devils and to cure all manner of diseases, Matt. 10:1,8; Mark 3:15; Luke 9:1,2; 10:9; 10:9,17. Among the early Christians there were some who had the gift of healing and who could perform miracles, I Cor. 12:9, 10,28,30; Mark 16:17,18. This extraordinary condition, however, soon made way for the usual one, in which the Church carries on its work by the ordinary means. There is no Scriptural ground for the idea that the charism of healing was intended to be continued in the Church of all ages. Evidently, the miracles and miraculous signs recorded in Scripture were intended as a mark or credential of divine revelation, themselves formed a part of this revelation, and served to attest and confirm the message of the early preachers of the gospel. As such they naturally ceased when the period of special revelation came to an end. It is true that the Church of Rome and several sects claim the power of miraculous healing, but the claim is not borne out by the evidence. There are many marvelous stories in circulation of miraculous cures, but before they are given credence it must be proved: (1) that they do not pertain to cases of imaginary sickness, but to cases of real diseases or physical defects; (2) that they do not refer to imaginary or pretended, but to real, cures; and (3) that the cures are actually wrought in a supernatural way, and are not the result of the use of natural means, either material or mental.[Cf. especially, Warfield, Counterfeit Miracles.] b. The ordinary ministry of benevolence in the Church.

The Lord clearly intended that the Church should make provision for her poor. He hinted at this duty when He said to His disciples: “For ye have the poor always with you,” Matt. 26:11; Mark 14:7. By means of a communion of goods the early Church saw to it that no one wanted the necessities of life, Acts 4:34. It is not impossible that the neoterioi of Acts 5:6,10 were the precursors of the later deacons. And when the widows of the Greeks were being neglected in the daily ministration, the apostles saw to it that seven well qualified men were put in charge of this necessary business, Acts 6:1-6. They were to “serve the tables,” which seems to mean in this connection, to superintend the service at the tables of the poor, or to provide for an equitable division of the provisions that were placed on the tables. Deacons and deaconesses are mentioned repeatedly in the Bible, Rom. 16:1; Phil. 1:1; I Tim. 3:8-12. Moreover, the New Testament contains many passages urging the necessity of giving or collecting for the poor, Acts 20:35; I Cor. 16:1,2; II Cor. 9:1,6,7,12-14; Gal. 2:10; 6:10; Eph. 4:28; I Tim. 5:10, 16; Jas. 1:27; 2:15,16; I John 3:17. There can be no doubt about the duty of the Church in this respect. And the deacons are the officers who are charged with the responsible and delicate task of performing the work of Christian benevolence with reference to all the needy of the Church. They must devise ways and means for collecting the necessary funds, have charge of the money collected, and provide for its prudential distribution. However, their task is not limited to this offering of material help. They must also instruct and comfort the needy. In all their work they should consider it their duty to apply spiritual principles in the performance of their duty. It is to be feared that this function of the Church is sadly neglected in many of the churches to-day. There is a tendency to proceed on the assumption that it can safely be left to the State to provide even for the poor of the Church. But in acting on that assumption, the Church is neglecting a sacred duty, is impoverishing her own spiritual life, is robbing herself of the joy experienced in ministering to the needs of those who suffer want, and is depriving those who are suffering hardships, who are borne down by the cares of life, and who are often utterly discouraged, of the comfort, the joy, and the sunshine of the

spiritual ministrations of Christian love, which are as a rule entirely foreign to the work of charity administered by the State.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY: How do the Reformed and the Lutheran conceptions of Christ as the Head of the Church differ? Does the Old Testament contain any indication that Christ is King of the Church? What systems of Church government deny, or detract from, the Head—or Kingship of Christ? How does the Headship of Christ affect the relation of the Church to the State, religious liberty, and liberty of conscience? Is the doctrine that the power of the Church is exclusively spiritual consistent with Romanism and Erastianism? How is the power of the Church overrated by High Church men, and underrated by Low Church men, of various descriptions? How do the Independents view the power of the officers? How is Church power limited? What is the end contemplated in the exercise of Church power? What is meant by the Church in Matt. 18:17? Does the key of discipline shut out only from outward privileges in the Church, or also from a spiritual interest in Christ? By whom and how is discipline exercised in the Roman Catholic, the Anglican, the Methodist, and the Congregational, Church? Can a Church safely discard discipline?