

Office of Doctor

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Although much-neglected in discussions of church polity today, the divines of the First and Second Reformations found in the Scriptures -- along with the traditional ecclesiastical offices of minister, elder and deacon -- the office of doctor. For consideration, I have assembled some snapshots from various creeds and ecclesiastical disciplines in which the existence and nature of this office is affirmed and discussed. I have not included John Calvin's statements from the *Institutes* concerning the doctoral office, but I refer the reader to *Institutes* 4.3.4.

Genevan *Ordonnances Ecclésiastiques* (1541):

First there are four orders of offices instituted by our Saviour for the government of his Church: namely, the pastors, then the doctors, next the elders [*nominated and appointed by the government,*] and fourthly the deacons. If we wish to see the Church well-ordered and maintained we ought to observe this form of

government.

...

There follows the second order which we have called the doctors

The special duty of the doctors is to instruct the faithful in sound doctrine so that the purity of the gospel is not corrupted by ignorance or wrong opinion.

As things stand at present, every agent assisting in the upholding of God's teaching is included so that the Church is not in difficulties from a lack of pastors and ministers. This is in common parlance the order of school teachers. The degree nearest the minister and closely joined to the government of the Church is the lecturer in theology.

The Form of Prayers and Ministration of the Sacraments, etc. used in the English Congregation at Geneva: and approved by the famous and godly learned man, John Calvin [Genevan Book of Church Order] (1556):

Of Teachers or Doctors

We are not ignorant that the scriptures make mention of a fourth kind of ministers left to the church of Christ, which also are very profitable, where time and place do permit. But for lack of opportunity, in this our dispersion and exile, we cannot well have the use thereof; and would to God it were not neglected where better occasion serves.

These ministers are called teachers or doctors,[a] whose office is to instruct and teach the faithful in sound doctrine, providing with all diligence that the purity of the gospel be not corrupted, either through ignorance, or evil opinions. Notwithstanding, considering the present state of things, we comprehend under this title such means as God has in his church, that it should not be left desolate, nor yet his doctrine decay for default of ministers thereof.

Therefore to term it by a word more usual in these our days, we may call it the order of schools, wherein the highest degree, and most annexed to the ministry and government of the church, is the exposition of God's word, which is contained in the Old and New Testaments.

But because men cannot so well profit in that knowledge, except they be first instructed in the tongues and human sciences (for now God works not commonly by miracles), it is necessary that seed be sown for the time to come, to the intent that the church be not left barren and wasted to our posterity; and that schools also be erected, and colleges maintained, with just and sufficient stipends, wherein youth may be trained in the knowledge and fear of God, that in their ripe age they may prove worthy members of our Lord Jesus Christ, whether it be to rule in civil policy, or to serve in the spiritual ministry, or else to live in godly reverence and subjection.

a. Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:28

Second Helvetic Confession (1566), Ch. 18:

MINISTERS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

Furthermore, the ministers of the new people are called by various names. For they are called apostles, prophets, evangelists, bishops, elders, pastors, and teachers (I Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11).

Dutch Articles of the Convention of Wesel (1568):

(Excerpted from Robert Henderson, *The Teaching Office in the Reformed Tradition: A History of the Doctoral Ministry*, p. 104):

In this document five offices were described as "public ministries" of the Reformed Church: (1) minister or pastor; (2) doctor; (3) elder; (4) schoolmaster, and (5) deacon.¹⁵

¹⁵ F.L. Rutgers, *Acta van der Nederlandsche Synoden der zestiende eeuw* (Utrecht, 1889), pp. 1-36.

Willem Nijenhuis, *Ecclesia Reformata: Studies on the Reformation*, p. 105:

In Wesel there were basic declarations concerning offices five in number: *ministri, doctores, prophetae, seniores, diaconi*, the catechism and its instruction, the sacraments, the solemnization of marriages, and discipline.

French National Synod of Nismes (1572):

(Excerpted from John Quick, *Synodican in Gallia Reformata*, Vol. 1, p. 106 [see also Robert Henderson, *The Teaching Office in the Reformed Tradition: A History of the Doctoral Ministry*, p. 75]):

Chap. III.

XV. The Article concerning Professors of Divinity shall be thus enlarged, Doctors and Professors of Divinity shall be chosen by a Synod or Classis, after good proof, and sufficient trial had of their Life and Doctrine. And they shall be acquainted, that they be wholly dedicated for their Lives unto the Service of God and his Church, and to be employed according to the appointment of the Classis or Synod, to whose Authority they shall yield Obedience. Moreover, they shall subscribe the Confession of our Faith, and Church-Discipline. And whenever any difficulty in Doctrinal Points does occur they shall be called forth, if they be upon the place, to assist at its decision.

Scottish Second Book of Discipline (1578):

Chapter 2

Of the Parts of the Polity of the Church, and Persons or Office Bearers to Whom the Administration Thereof is Committed...

6. Some of these ecclesiastical functions are ordinary, and some extraordinary or temporary. There are three extraordinary functions: the office of the apostle, of the evangelist, and of the prophet, which are not perpetual, and now have ceased in the kirk of God, except when he pleased extraordinarily for a time to stir some of them up again. There are four ordinary functions or offices in the kirk of God: the office of the pastor, minister or bishop; the doctor; the presbyter or elder; and the deacon.

7. These offices are ordinary, and ought to continue perpetually in the kirk, as necessary for the government and policy of the same, and no more offices ought to be received or suffered in the true kirk of God established according to his word.

Chapter 5 Of Doctors and Their Office, and of the Schools

1. One of the two ordinary and perpetual functions that travail in the word is the office of the doctor, who also may be called prophet, bishop, elder, catechiser: that is, teacher of the catechism and rudiments of religion.

2. His office is to open up the mind of the Spirit of God in the scriptures simply, without such applications as the minister uses, to the end that the faithful may be instructed, and sound doctrine taught, and that the purity of the gospel be not corrupted through ignorance or evil opinions.

3. He is different from the pastor, not only in name, but in diversity of gifts. For the doctor is given the word of knowledge, to open up, by simple teaching, the mysteries of faith; to the pastor, the gift of wisdom, to apply the same, by exhortation to the manners of the flock, as occasion craves.

4. Under the name and office of a doctor, we comprehend also the order in schools, colleges, and universities, which has been from time to time carefully maintained, as well among the Jews and Christians, as among the profane nations.

5. The doctor being an elder, as is said, [he] should assist the pastor in the government of the kirk, and concur with the elders, his brethren, in all

assemblies; by reason the interpretation of the word (which is [the] only judge in ecclesiastical matters) is committed to his charge.

6. But to preach to the people, to minister the sacraments, and to celebrate marriages, pertains not to the doctor, unless he is otherwise orderly called. Howbeit the pastor may teach in the schools, as he who has also the gift of knowledge oftentimes meet therefore, as the examples of Polycarp and others testify.

Dutch Church Order of the National Synod of Middelburg (1581):

(Excerpted from Robert Henderson, *The Teaching Office in the Reformed Tradition: A History of the Doctoral Ministry*, p. 109):

The National Synod of Middelburg (1581)³¹ amended the Church Order to return to the classical fourfold Calvinist definition of the public ministry. Under the heading "Of the Ministry" the ministers were declared to be four: "the Ministers of the Word, the Doctors, the Elders, and the Deacons."³²

³¹ Text in *ibid.* {Rutgers}, pp. 339-480.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 376: "De Diensten zijn vierderleij; Der Dienaren des Woordts, der Doctoren, Ouderlinghen ende Diaconen."

French National Synod of Gap (1603):

(Excerpted from John Quick, *Synodican in Gallia Reformata*, Vol. 1, p. 229 [see also Robert Henderson, *The Teaching Office in the Reformed Tradition: A History of the Doctoral Ministry*, p. 78]):

Chap. III.

7. The third Article of the second Chapter shall be couched in these words. Provincial Synods, in which are our Universities, shall choose their own Doctors, Pastors, and Professors of Divinity, whose ability, shall be proved by publick Lectures, on some special Text out of the Original Hebrew and

Greek Bible, given to them for that purpose, and by disputations in one or two days following, as may be most adviseable. And being approved, in case they were never in the Ministry, the right hand of fellowship shall be given them, they having first of all promised to discharge their Office with faithfulness and diligence, and to handle the sacred Scriptures with all sincerity according to the analogy of Faith, and the confession of our Churches, which shall be subscribed by them.

Dutch Church Order of the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619):

Article 15

The office of the Doctors or Professors of Theology is to expound the Holy Scriptures and to uphold sound doctrine against heresies and errors.

Westminster Form of Presbyterian Church Government (1644):

Teacher or Doctor.

The Scripture doth hold out the name and title of Teacher, as well as of the Pastor, 1 Cor.12:28. Ephes.4:11.

Who is also a Minister of the Word as well as the Pastor, and hath power of administration of the Sacraments.

The Lord having given different gifts, and divers exercises according to these gifts in the Ministry of the Word, Rom. 12:6,7,8; 1 Cor. 12:1,4,5,6,7. Though these different gifts may meet in and accordingly be exercised by one and the same Minister, 1 Cor. 14:3; 2 Tim. 4:2; Tit.1:9. yet where be severall Ministers in the same Congregation, they may be designed to severall employments, according to the different gifts in which each of them doth most excell, Rom. 12:6,7,8; 1 Pet .4:10,11. and hee that doth more excell in exposition of Scripture, in teaching sound Doctrine, and in convincing gain-sayers, than he doth in application and is accordingly employed therein, may be called a Teacher, or Doctor (the places alledged

by the Notation of the Word doth prove the Proposition). Neverthelesse, where is but one Minister in a particular Congregation, he is to performe so far as he is able the whole work of the Ministry as appeareth in the 2 Tim. 4:2; Tit. 1:9. before alleadged, 1 Tim.6:2.

A Teacher or Doctor is of most excellent use in Schooles, and Universities, as of old in the Schooles of the Prophets, and at Jerusalem, where Gamaliel and others taught as Doctors.

Westminster Directory of Church Government (1645):

In the Scripture we also find, the name & title of Teacher; who is a Minister of the word, & hath power of administration of the Sacraments, & discipline, as well as the Pastor.

The Lord having given different guifts, & divers exercises according to those guifts, in the ministers of the word; though these different guifts may meet in, & accordingly bee exercised by one & the same Minister: Yet where there be severall minist[ers] in the same Congregation, they may be designed to severall employments, according to the different guifts wherein each of them doth excell: And he doth more excell in exposition of Scripture, in teaching sound doctrine, and in convincing gain saye[rs] than he doth in application, & is accordingly employed therein may be called a Teacher or Doctor: Neverthelesse where there is but one Minister in a particular congregation he is to performe, so farre as hee is able, the whole work of the Ministry.

A Teacher or Doctor, is of most excellent use in Schools & Universities, as of old in the Schooles of the Prophets, & at Jerusalem, where Gamaliel & others taught as Doctors.

London Provincial Assembly, *Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici* (*The Divine Right of Church Government*) [on Rom. 12.6-8] (1646, 1995), p. 124:

These offices are reduced first to two general Heads, viz: *Prophecy* (understand not the extraordinary gift of fore-telling future things, &c., but the ordinary, in the right understanding and interpreting of Scripture) and *Ministry*; and the

general duties thereof are annexed (vss. 6-7). Then these Generals are subdivided into the special offices contained under them, the special duty of every officer being severally pressed upon them. Under *Prophecy* are contained, 1. He that Teaches, i.e., the Doctor or Teacher; 2. He that exhorts, i.e., the Pastor (vs 7-8). Under *Ministry* are comprised, 1. He that gives, i.e., the Deacon; 2. He that rules, i.e., The Ruling Elder. 3. He that shows mercy, i.e., such as were to entertain strangers, relieve the sick, &c. (v. 8).

Walter Steuart, *Collections and Observations Concerning the Worship, Discipline, and Government of the Church of Scotland* (1709, 1770), Book I, Title VI, pp. 32-33:

Of Doctors, and Professors of Theology.

§ 1. According to the fifth chapter of the Policy of the Kirk, in the General Assembly 1581, the office of the doctor or catechiser, is one of the two ordinary and perpetual functions that travel in the Word. He is to open up the mind of the Spirit of God simply, without such applications as the ministers use. They are such properly who teach in schools, colleges, or universities: But to preach unto the people, to administer the sacraments, and to celebrate marriage, do not pertain to him, except he be called and ordained thereto. If the pastor be qualified for it, he may perform all the parts of the doctor's office, that being included in the pastoral. By the 2d article, chap. 11 of the Discipline of the French church, a doctor in the church cannot preach nor administer the sacraments, unless he be both doctor and minister. And when the General Assembly, February 10. 1645, ratifies the propositions sent to them from the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, concerning church-government, and ordination of ministers, they expressly provide, that the present ratification shall be noways prejudicial to the further discussion and examination of one of the articles or propositions, which holds forth, that the doctor or teacher hath power of the administration of sacraments, as well as the pastor.

[The sentiments of this church about the doctor's office. He is no pastor as such.]

§ 2. Though the office of a deacon is included in the office of a ruling elder, yet it is fit that some be appointed deacons, distinct from that of the elder; so, albeit the office of a doctor be included in that of the pastor, yet it were

very fit that some not in the sacred order of the ministry were ordained and set apart to teach and catechise the people, especially in large and incommodious parishes, (See § 3. of the preceeding title,) as well as in schools and colleges.

[Catechists, or doctors, should teach in colleges and in large parishes.]

§ 3. By the act of Assembly February 13. 1645, for encouragement to scholars for professions in schools, it is recommended to synods, to try who within their bounds most probably may be for a profession in the schools, and report their names to the General Assembly, that they may be stirred up, and encouraged by them to frame their studies for such places. This cumulative power doth noways prejudice or hinder the faculty of an university (which hath power and right to elect) from doing the same. It were to be wished, that this custom of synods, reporting to General Assemblies the names of such as are fit to be professors, were again revived, and more exactly practised; for it would prevent the transporting of ministers to be only teachers or masters in universities, which is an appointing of him to exercise the office of a doctor, and dispensing with him from preaching the word, and administering the sacraments: Which dispensation, or the loosing of which tie, if it be a favour, it can never be imposed upon any pastor without his own consent: but, if it be a punishment, it can be inflicted upon none without their fault. It is liker a commutation of offices than a transportation: or if he still continue to be a pastor, his pastoral talent is thereby but much hid in a napkin. By the 3d article, 2d chap. of the French church-discipline, doctors and professors of divinity shall be elected and tried by the synods of the province where the academies are.

[Synods are to report to the Assembly the names of scholars fit to be professors.]

No pastor can be compelled to give himself to teaching and leave his pastoral charge.]

§ 4. By the 5th chap. of the Policy of the kirk of Scotland, the doctor, being an elder, is to assist the pastor in the government of the kirk. And by the act of Assembly August 4. 1643, professors of theology cannot be elected commissioners to General Assemblies, except they be ministers; so that, as doctors, they are not ruling elders, and the Assembly consists of none but

pastors and elders: therefore, as doctors, they cannot be members of church judicatures for government and ruling; see § 1. huj. tit.

[The doctor as such no ruling elder, nor as meer doctor, can be member of Assemblies.]

§ 5. By the act of Assembly June 18. 1646, professors of divinity are desired to present their dictates to the next General Assembly; but they declined at that time to make any act about it for the future, till further consideration.

[Professors dictates may be reviewed by General Assemblies.]