

# **IS THERE A DOCTOR IN THE HOUSE?**

## **THE TEACHING OFFICE IN THE REFORMED CHURCH**

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**First Version 10/4/97**

**Last Revised 5/16/02**

### **INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND AND PRESUPPOSITIONS**

The sixteenth century Reformation was, among other things, a revival of Christian education.<sup>1</sup> The Calvinist branch of the Reformation was particularly focused on recovering the teaching ministry of the church. Unfortunately, many of the gains Calvin and his fellow reformers made have been lost. The Reformed tradition has failed to maintain a parish-based teaching function, distinct from, but complementary to, her preaching office. Often, the church has handed teaching responsibilities over to the academic world or to the para-church or to schools, colleges, and universities. The end result is that frequently church members either have to look outside the ministry of their local churches for serious, in-depth Bible instruction, or, what is even worse, they do not receive such instruction at all.

This paper seeks to illustrate the Reformed church's historical understanding of the teaching office, from Calvin through the seventeenth century, and propose ways it can be recovered in our day. This paper will not engage in detailed exegetical argument because it would simply repeat much of what is covered in historical survey. Underlying this paper is the assumption that the church's teaching muscles have atrophied and need to be strengthened. While this survey is not as comprehensive as it could be, it should be adequate to show that the Reformed tradition has given up a vital part of her heritage and needs to reassess her present view of the teaching office. This is no mere "academic" matter, but a pressing one that the church must consider once again.

### **DOCTOR CALVIN**

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<sup>1</sup>To properly understand the Reformation, it must be viewed from several different perspectives. From the most important angles, the Reformation may be seen as: 1) an educational movement, reforming the church's teaching and preaching ministry; 2) a liturgical movement, reforming the Roman mass and restoring the features of ancient or apostolic "catholic" worship; 3) a sacramental movement, reforming the church's theology and practice of baptism and the Lord's Supper; 4) an ecclesiastical movement, reforming the church's discipline and government. This paper most directly involves perspectives one and four.

Calvin refers to the office of teacher as “church doctor” and considers this office to be second in rank to the pastoral office. Calvin fairly consistently teaches there are four distinct church offices (pastor, doctor, ruler, and deacon), each with its own role to play in the church’s ministry.<sup>2</sup> There are several critical texts in Calvin’s commentaries, in which his exposition identifies and defines this office of doctor. One example will suffice:

*Pastors and teachers* [in Eph. 4:11] are supposed by some to denote one office, because the apostle does not, as in the other parts of the verse, say, *and some, pastors; and some, teachers...*I partly agree with them, that Paul speaks indiscriminately of pastors and teachers, as belonging to one and the same class, and that the name *teacher* does to some extent, apply to all *pastors*. But this does not appear to me a sufficient reason why two offices, which I find to differ from each other, should be confounded. Teaching is, no doubt, the duty of all pastors; but to maintain sound doctrine requires a talent for interpreting Scripture, and a man may be a *teacher* who is not qualified to preach.<sup>3</sup>

*Pastors*, in my opinion, are those who have the charge of a particular flock; though I have no objection to their receiving the name of *teachers*, if it be understood that there is a distinct class of *teachers*, who preside both in the education of pastors and in the instruction of the whole church. It may sometimes happen, that the same person is both a pastor and a teacher, but the duties to be

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<sup>2</sup>Robert W. Henderson, in his fine study *The Teaching Office in the Reformed Tradition: A History of the Doctoral Ministry*, explains: “Following the Strasbourg sojourn (1538-1541), Calvin and his colleagues presented a scheme of ecclesiastical organization to the city council for ratification. Here, for the first time, the fourfold public ministry of the Reformed churches was set forth in its classical formulation. ‘There are four orders of officers which our Lord has instituted for the government of his Church. [First] pastors, then the doctors, next the elders, fourthly the deacons.’ By its acceptance and ratification this document became known as the *Ordinances Ecclesiastiques...*” (32). That Calvin distinguished the office of teacher from that of pastor is also obvious from the fact the he saw himself as holding both offices, but in succession, rather than simultaneously. He wrote to cardinal Sadolet, “In that Church [Geneva] I have held first the office of Doctor, and then of Pastor.” As a doctor, he gave theology lectures; as a pastor, he preached sermons. Interestingly, Beza, Calvin’s successor, followed the same pattern. For details, see Henderson 41, 53. From here on, all unmarked page numbers are references to Henderson’s landmark work.

<sup>3</sup>For Calvin, the primary difference between the teacher and the pastor (and also between teaching and preaching) is that the former primarily interprets Scripture, while the latter primarily applies Scripture. Obviously these cannot be separated too sharply, so it may be best to see the difference as a matter of style, emphasis, and depth. The teacher may give a more detailed exposition of the text, while the pastor may make more searching applications. Obviously, then, the teacher and pastor are to complement one another in the overall ministry of the church, and hence Calvin finds both indispensable.

performed are entirely different...[The offices of pastor and teacher] are intended to be perpetual...without pastors and teachers there can be no government in the church.”

In singling out a special office of church doctor, Calvin believed (rightfully, I think) he was following the practice of the early church. Henderson acknowledges that,

There seems to be no doubt that a peculiar teaching ministry existed in the primitive church alongside of, and at times even in competition with, the established ministry of bishops, elders, and deacons. Certainly as late as the first quarter of the third century there still existed within the Egyptian church an order of teachers (*doctores ecclesiae*) alongside of the cultic and administrative ministry.<sup>4</sup>

The teaching office in the early church frequently involved catechesis, but also occasional teaching and preaching in the liturgical assembly, as Eusebius reports.<sup>5</sup> Beginning in the third century or so, the doctoral office was either thrust out of the church or absorbed into the pastoral office. Over the next several centuries, those who would have previously fulfilled the teaching office in local churches often functioned in catechetical schools, monasteries, and universities. Sometimes these teachers were officially commissioned by the church, other times they were not.<sup>6</sup>

Calvin believed that “false doctors” (as he frequently called the teachers of the Roman church) were to blame for much of the church’s trouble in the late medieval period. Often, these men operated in university settings, training in theology men who would later serve as clergy. But without much ecclesiastical oversight, they often misled their pupils with vain speculations and unbiblical doctrines. “It was Calvin’s conviction, we think, that the doctorate of the medieval church represented a legitimate and fruitful ministry that had been corrupted, which caused him to include it as an integral office of the public ministry of the church in its Reformed estate.”

How then did Calvin conceive of the office of church doctor? Calvin connected this office with the prophetic office, particularly as it is exercised by Christ himself. While the gift of inspiration ceased with the closing of the canon, the duty of giving instruction in God’s Word continued on into the post-apostolic era:

The office of doctor and the office of prophet under the gospel were closely linked...Thus, for Calvin, the prophetic-doctoral ministry under the gospel was not to be confused with the apostolic-pastoral office. It rested squarely on the prophetic-doctoral office of Christ himself, and performed functions that are

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<sup>4</sup>15

<sup>5</sup>*Ecclesiastical History* VI:xxvii

<sup>6</sup>17f

essentially didactic and critical in contradistinction to the liturgical, shepherding, and governing competence of the apostolic-pastoral office.<sup>7</sup>

In Geneva, there was a close relationship between church and school. Often, personnel would overlap between the church and the Geneva Academy. Doctors were to “preside in the education of pastors, and in the instruction of the whole church,”<sup>8</sup> including examining candidates for ministry and “taking care sound doctrine be maintained and propagated, in order that the purity of religion may be kept in the Church.”<sup>9</sup> While all kinds of modern applications may spin out of Calvin’s practice (such as the propriety of church affiliated and governed schools, seminaries, and universities), it is most important for our purposes to note that he saw the office of teacher as a *church* ministry, rather than a strictly academic position. Even if most of the doctors in Geneva functioned primarily in the academy, and only secondarily in the church, they still participated in church courts, functioned under the authority of other ecclesiastical officers, and had teaching responsibilities in the congregation.

## **HUGUENOTS AND THE DOCTORAL OFFICE**

Calvin solidified the place of the doctor in Reformed church polity and Protestants in other countries followed his lead. Unfortunately, Calvin left some details of the doctoral office unspecified and this confusion carried over to France. While Calvin had carefully distinguished the pastoral and doctoral offices, it was not always clear just what separated them. Henderson explains how this confusion played itself out in France:

Thus, by the close of the National Synod of 1572, we may say that the French Reformed Church regarded the professor of divinity (doctor) as an officer of the church with specific responsibilities for instruction in the schools...[but] in some minds this office was identical with that of the pastor...<sup>10</sup>

In France, church doctors were used primarily to oversee church schools and universities.<sup>11</sup> Doctors taught chiefly in theology, philosophy, and languages. By the mid-1600s the French were severely limiting the role of the doctor in the life of the local church, and eventually the office disappeared.<sup>12</sup> The church failed to utilize teachers and lost them to an increasingly secular academic world.

## **THE DOCTORAL OFFICE IN THE DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH**

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<sup>7</sup>30-1

<sup>8</sup>Comm. Eph. 4:11

<sup>9</sup>Comm. 1 Cor. 12:28

<sup>10</sup>76

<sup>11</sup>77, 80f

<sup>12</sup>88f

Like the French, the Dutch followed Calvin's basic plan of ordering church offices. John a Lasco, the chief architect of early Dutch Reformed church government, did differ from Calvin in some minor ways, such as using the title "elder" in a broader fashion, to cover pastors, teachers, and rulers.<sup>13</sup> While the teaching office is not always explicitly mentioned, it is implied in much of a Lasco's descriptions of proper church order. A Lasco also gave to the church doctor all the same liturgical, sacramental, and governmental functions as the pastor, which had not always been the case in Calvin's scheme. But the basic arrangement remained recognizably Calvinistic.<sup>14</sup>

According to a Lasco, the doctor's primary function was to instruct the congregation in what were called "prophesying sessions,"<sup>15</sup> which included teaching and discussion. Frequently the teacher would give lectures to the congregation, formally expositing a book of Scripture.<sup>16</sup>

While the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) was an international Reformed synod, rather than an exclusively Dutch gathering, it will be convenient to take it up here since the Dutch delegates to the assembly used the gathering to rework their church polity. Dort reaffirmed the fourfold scheme without debate and clearly demonstrated that "the church was not yet ready to relinquish its position of authority and control over the professorial or doctoral office in the university...These men [the church doctors serving in universities] were all required to subscribe to the Confession and Catechism of the church."<sup>17</sup> Henderson claims that the Dutch did indeed give the office of doctor a distinct place in the life of the church and considered teaching to be an integral ministry of the church, but were reluctant to spell out the precise status or nature of the office.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Calvin occasionally used the term "elder" in this broader fashion: "We have stated that Scripture sets before us three kinds of ministers. Similarly, whatever ministers the ancient church had, it divided into three orders. For from the order of presbyters [or elders] part were chosen pastors and teachers; the remaining part were charged with the censure and correction of morals; and the care of the poor and the distribution of alms were committed to the deacons" (*Institutes* IV.iv.1). However, a Lasco regularly grouped pastors, teachers, and rulers together under the heading "elders," making one wonder if perhaps he should be seen as a forerunner of the two office view that would later become popular in Presbyterian circles.

<sup>14</sup>99ff. Interestingly, a 1568 Dutch Church Order listed five offices -- not only separating pastor from doctor, as Calvinists had typically done, but separating doctor from schoolmaster, which was a new development. The national synods of 1581 and 1586 reverted to the familiar fourfold order. Henderson 104, 109f.

<sup>15</sup>This should not be confused with any modern charismatic notion of prophesying as receiving and giving new revelation.

<sup>16</sup>99ff. Note that these were special teaching times and not Lord's Day worship services in which the pastor preached.

<sup>17</sup>112. The University of Leiden had challenged the church's right to employ professors in the university.

<sup>18</sup>113f

## THE SCOTTISH KIRK AND THE DOCTORAL OFFICE

“The Reformed Church in Scotland arrived at a formulation of the doctoral office prior to any comparable situation in the English Church.”<sup>19</sup> The Scots largely preserved the church order the Marian exiles had inherited from Calvinists on the continent. In *Forms of Prayers and Ministrations on the Sacraments, used in the English Congregation at Geneva -- 1566*, Calvin’s four church offices are described. The section on the doctoral office reads in part as follows:

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 doth permit. (But for lack of opportunity, in this our dispersion and exile, we cannot well have use thereof; and would to God it were not neglected where better occasion serveth.)<sup>20</sup>

These ministers are called Teachers or Doctors, whose office is to instruct and teach the faithful in sound doctrine, providing with all diligence that the purity of the gospel be not corrupt, either through ignorance, or evil opinions. Notwithstanding, considering the present state of things, we comprehend under this title such means as God hath 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 days, we may call it ‘Order of Schools,’ wherein the highest degree and most and next to the ministry of the Church, is the exposition of God’s Word, which is contained in the Old and New Testaments.

The refugees who composed the *Forms* placed a heavy emphasis on the teacher’s role in schools and colleges, echoing Calvin’s own practice. “Thus, even in exile the Reformed communities from the British Isles recognized the responsibility of the church in the institutional education of its people.”<sup>21</sup> The primary function of the church doctor was

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<sup>19</sup>127

<sup>20</sup>Henderson explains: “Interestingly enough, the English congregation felt under a certain kind of restraint in not being able to support the whole ministry of the church. Few in number, in alien surroundings, and with the expectation of returning once again to the homeland, the exiles did not feel that they were in a position to establish among themselves a doctorate separate from the [pastoral office]...Subsequent editions issued in Scotland from 1562 onward significantly omitted the apologetic sentence. No longer operating under exile conditions and with the *First Book of Discipline* before them as an active product of their own life, it was not deemed necessary to apologize that in an exiled condition the precursors of the kirk had not been able to do something they regarded as necessary.” 130

<sup>21</sup>130

that of biblical exposition, although the *Forms* does not hesitate to include broader educational responsibilities, namely “tongues and the human sciences.”

In the *Second Book of Discipline*,<sup>22</sup> the Scottish church explains that there are “four ordinary functions or offices in the Kirk of God; the office of pastor, minister or bishop, the doctor, the presbyter or elder, and the deacon.” The office of doctor is described in familiar Calvinistic terms: “[The doctor is to open] up the mind of the Spirit of God in the Scriptures, simply without such applications as the ministers [pastors] use, to the end that the faithful may be instructed in sound doctrine and that the purity of the gospel may not be corrupted through ignorance or evil opinions.” The doctor was clearly distinguished from the pastor in both gifts and function. The doctor was to oversee catechesis, instruct the congregation in biblical exposition, teach in schools, colleges, and universities, and join in the pastoral ministry of the church. The doctor was specifically given the designation “elder” and was charged to assist the pastor in the government of the church. However he was not to preach or administer the sacraments unless he received a special calling to do so.

Henderson points out that many of Scotland’s most notable theologians and churchman held the doctoral office, including William Ramsey, George Buchanan, James Melville, Patrick Melville, and Andrew Melville.<sup>23</sup>

## **THE TEACHING OFFICE WITHIN ENGLISH PURITANISM**

The pace of the Reformation in England accelerated rapidly when Edward VI came to the throne in 1546. Though his reign was very short, and many of his reforms were undone by his wicked successors, he opened the door for great progress within the English church. During his reign (which lasted until his untimely death in 1553), numerous Reformers from the continent escaped persecution by fleeing to England. Perhaps the most notable was Martin Bucer, whose work *De Regno Christi* is still a classic in providing an overarching plan for the restoration and maintenance of Christendom, that is, Christian civilization. Bucer’s work is important because he deals with questions concerning church organization, as well Christian education. Bucer urged young King Edward to fill university teaching positions with godly doctors (or teachers), that faithful pastors might be trained. For Bucer, the doctor’s role was tied tightly to Christian education. Doctors were to oversee the education of covenant youth as well train men for the pastorate. But he was also careful to insist that the doctor was an officer of the church, not simply an employee of the university or school.

After Edward’s death, Mary came to the throne and persecution of those upholding the Reformed religion began in earnest. Many Reformers who had enjoyed freedom and even special privilege under Edward were now forced to flee to the continent until Elizabeth’s reign began in 1558. While the Marian exiles fled to such places as Zurich, Basel,

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<sup>22</sup>The *Second Book* was written in 1578 and approved in 1592.

<sup>23</sup>141ff

Strasbourg, and Geneva, “the congregation at Frankfort provides the best evidence of the internal relation between church, ministry, and school”<sup>24</sup> that had become a hallmark of Reformed church polity. In addition, the structure of the congregation at Frankfort would prove to be influential in determining the shape of things to come in later English church reforms. When the Reformed exiles returned home to England, it was the Frankfort model they followed most closely. The Frankfort refugee church clearly held to Calvin’s fourfold office, with some minor differences. There was preaching each Lord’s Day, but also on Wednesdays and Thursdays. The church’s youth were routinely catechized. Provisions were made for regular theological lectures and discussions. The Frankfort church also gave church doctors pastoral functions, “specifically...oversight of the people and administration of the sacraments.”<sup>25</sup>

Under the Elizabethan regime, Presbyterians sought to restructure the church of England along more thoroughly Calvinistic lines. Thomas Cartwright, a leader in the battle to presbyterianize the church of England, was concerned with the role of the doctoral office in the church. Cartwright preferred the title of “teacher” to that of “doctor” because he did not want the church’s office to be confused with a strictly academic position. Moreover, he feared that “ostentation and outward glory” might be sought in high-sounding titles.<sup>26</sup> According to Cartwright,

The pastoral office was to consist of the oversight and charge of the whole parish: in instruction, in admonition, in exhortation, in the correction of doctrine and behavior of everyone in his congregation, and in the administration of the sacraments within the parish. A teacher, on the other hand, although called in the same manner as the pastor, was specifically to concern himself with ‘lectures and expositions of the Scriptures, to the end that there may be set forth...a soundness of doctrine.’ Every congregation must have a pastor, and...as to the necessity of *each* congregation employing a doctor...‘the use of such an one is most needful.’

For Cartwright, the doctor assisted in teaching the youth of the congregation, trained those preparing for ordained ministry, and participated fully in church courts and shepherding.

With Cartwright, we notice a subtle shift in the *location* of the doctoral ministry. Earlier Reformed churchmen saw the doctor as a flexible office. The doctor held a church office, but could be employed in schools and universities, as well as the local congregation. Cartwright still allows the doctor’s teaching ministry to function in more academic environments, but primarily sees it as a special kind of pastoral office. William Travers went even further than Cartwright in making the teaching office a ministry of the local church, rather than a school or university post. Oddly, however, Travers lessened the pastoral emphasis on the doctor’s role, giving him an academic teaching position *within*

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<sup>24</sup>162

<sup>25</sup>170

<sup>26</sup>172f



the life of the local church. Henderson explains the position of Travers, as presented in Travers' work *Ecclesiastical Discipline*:

Travers specifically identified the doctoral office with the scholarly ministry as over against the ministry of shepherding and sacraments, for he said, "Let the Doctor have a chair. Let him have scholars appointed him whom he may teach and instruct in the fear of God and knowledge of heavenly mysteries; I mean a chair wherein he may sit to teach and to catechize, not wherein taking his ease he may be idle and fall asleep." Instructing and catechizing were the only functions required by the doctoral office. Although Travers would not prohibit their employment in schools and universities, he was as much, perhaps more, concerned that they function at the parochial level.<sup>27</sup>

In 1584, ten years after Travers wrote, William Fulke published *A Briefe and Plaine Declaration*. Henderson says that here "for the first time in an English Puritan Church Order the fourfold Calvinian ministry was adopted without equivocation and with little sense of ambiguity."<sup>28</sup> Earlier Puritans had sought to follow Calvin's plan, but frequently departed from him in minor matters. Fulke sought to be as faithful to Calvin as possible (though he may have misunderstood Calvin in a few areas). For Fulke, the church's ministry consisted of pastors, doctors, governors (elders), and deacons. Fulke located the doctoral office in the local congregation, but also desired for doctors to teach in universities in order to better instruct men in training for pastoral ministry. According to Henderson,

The need for properly qualified men to fill the pulpits of the land was very great, and out of this need the author was brought to viewing the office from an academic perspective, but we cannot get away from the feeling that such was not his primary concern. Rather, he veered away from the idea quickly to restate in general, but unmistakable, tones that the office was really for the edification of the church in its congregational manifestation.<sup>29</sup>

The Puritans continued to develop the doctoral office along these lines. Clearly the Puritans believed that when the church was at her best she had a teaching office filled by capable, godly men, who complemented the work of the pastoral office. The Puritans focused the doctor's teaching ministry on the local church, while allowing him to function in a more academic environment at times if needed. As Puritan convictions

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<sup>27</sup>177. A few years later, Travers stated his position again, with even more clarity in *Defense of the Ecclesiastical Discipline*. Henderson explains: "In common with other English puritans of this period, Travers did not regard the location of the teacher's office to be the university or the academic arena. Rather, he interpreted the doctoral office to be an auxiliary of the pastorate and in a number of places spoke of the 'Ministers of the Word, both Pastors and Teachers.'" (181)

<sup>28</sup>178

<sup>29</sup>179

matured, a general consensus gelled, so that Richard Bancroft could say in 1593 that “[if a church does not have a] doctor in every parish, then it is not properly a Reformed church.”<sup>30</sup>

How did the Puritans put their convictions concerning the teaching office into practice? As early as the 1550s, Puritan churches began supporting lectureships in theology. Doctors would gather parish members together during the week for teaching sessions. In reality, the Puritans were not doing anything new in establishing these teaching activities outside Lord’s Day worship; rather, they were putting a Reformed spin on a practice they inherited from the Medieval church.<sup>31</sup> The doctoral office and its lectureships became extremely useful when the Established church began to forbid Reformed pastors from preaching. Lectureships served as alternative outlets for ousted Puritan churchmen. But Puritans came to see the necessity of the teaching office not just as a matter of political expediency; rather, the teaching office was seen to be critical to the life of the local church because the need for instruction in the Scriptures was so pressing. Thus, whenever possible, Puritan churches employed both a pastor and a teacher.<sup>32</sup>

## **THE PASTOR AND THE TEACHER IN THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY**

We have seen that the sixteenth century Puritans sought to implement Calvin’s four offices at the parochial level. When the Westminster divines were finally able to turn their attention to preparing a book of church order, they continued this pattern. In October of 1643, at the behest of the Lords of Commons, the divines were instructed to focus on matters of church discipline and polity. A committee was formed to study the duties incumbent upon “pastors, doctors, and elders.”

The discussions of these matters of church order were long and tedious. There were debates over how strictly Scripture regulated such things and how much the example of continental Reformed churches should be consulted. As Henderson says, “Most pressing from a strictly pragmatic point of view was the endeavor to determine whether the office of teacher was indeed distinct from that of pastor.”<sup>33</sup> Jean de la March, pastor of a French refugee congregation in London, explained to the assembly the typical continental view of the pastoral and teaching offices, as well the office of reader: “[The] pastor according to practice in the reformed churches expounds the word and applies it, the doctor expounds and not applies it, and the reader yet neither expounds nor applies.”<sup>34</sup> Thomas Goodwin argued persuasively for the existence a distinct teaching office, “but he insisted, the distinction was not one of order, but rather of office and the gifts given by God necessary for the exercise of office.”<sup>35</sup> According to Goodwin, the primary difference between

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<sup>30</sup>182-3

<sup>31</sup>184

<sup>32</sup>As we will see, it was in New England that this could be done most consistently.

<sup>33</sup>198

<sup>34</sup>Quoted in Henderson, 197.

<sup>35</sup>198

pastor and teacher was simply in the way they administered their office. The differentiation in function was based on a difference in giftedness.

The debate soon turned to the place of the teacher in the local church. Interestingly, there was not a great deal of discussion over the place of the doctor in a more academic setting, i.e., the university. Perhaps this was because such a function was taken for granted, but it seems evident that many of the divines believed the optimum place of service for the doctor was a local congregation. The Independents present at the assembly were particularly insistent on this point, arguing for “the necessity of a doctor and teacher in every particular congregation...[The] ministry of the local church not only may but must support the office of teacher.”<sup>36</sup> The Scots present also made it known that they believed “there are four permanent offices in the Church, pastor, teachers, ruling elders, and deacons” but were more open to the doctor functioning in an academic capacity, possibly because Scottish schools and universities were more closely aligned with the cause of the Reformation than their English counterparts.<sup>37</sup> Some divines disputed whether or not the office of teacher could really be distinguished from that of pastor, but in the end, the arguments of the Independents were found to be compelling.

The doctoral office as it crystallized in the minds of the Westminster divines was not all that different from continental Reformed practice. The office allowed flexibility -- it could be located in church or school, but was best performed in the context of a local congregation.<sup>38</sup> There was a basic parochial parity between the pastor and doctor. The doctor was to use his gifts primarily in the exposition of Scripture and apologetics, whereas the pastor was primarily a keeper of souls and an exhorter. The doctor’s role was not so much to apply Scripture as it was to bring out Scripture’s meaning. While there is unavoidably some overlap between their roles, their functions are distinct enough, so that where there is no doctor in a local congregation, the pastor is called on to perform the doctoral duties as well. Thus, the doctoral office is seen as essential to the life of the church, even if there is no doctor to fill it.

The section on the doctoral office in the Westminster *Form of Government* is worth quoting at length:

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<sup>36</sup>201, 203. The Independents included some very capable theologians, such as Goodwin, Nye, Burroughs, Bridge, and Caryl.

<sup>37</sup>The problem with understanding the position of the Scottish commissioners is due to the fact that they frequently distinguished doctors from catechists. Doctors were teachers in universities, catechists were teachers in local congregations. It is clear that they desired every parish to have a catechist, so this seems to bring them closer to the position of the Independents. Additionally, the Scottish commissioner Guthrie said it was because of the poverty of the churches in Scotland that “there be few or no doctors.” (218)

<sup>38</sup>Henderson does not altogether approve of this parochial emphasis. While I would tend to agree with it, Henderson is right to point out that a major failing of the assembly was its refusal to work out the biblical relationship between church and school. See 212-213.

The Scripture doth hold out the name and title of a teacher, as well as of the pastor. *Who also is a minister of the Word as well as the pastor, and hath power of the administration of the sacraments.*

The Lord having given different gifts and divers exercises according to these gifts in the ministry of the Word, though these different gifts may meet in, and accordingly be exercised by one and the same minister. Yet where there be several ministers in the same congregation, they may be designed to several employments according to different gifts, in which each of them do most excel. And he that doth most excel in exposition of Scripture, in teaching sound doctrine, and in convincing gainsayers, than he doth in application, and is accordingly employed there, may be called a teacher or doctor, (the places alleged by the notation of the Word doth prove the proposition,)<sup>39</sup> nevertheless, where there is but one minister in a particular congregation, he is to perform so far as he is able the whole work of the ministry.

A teacher or doctor is of most excellent use in schools and universities; as of old in the schools of the prophets, and at Jerusalem, where Gamaliel and others taught as doctors.<sup>40</sup>

Here we have formulated over one hundred years of Reformed reflection on the teaching office. It is perhaps the most mature and wisest statement the Reformation tradition produced concerning the doctoral ministry of the church. Those who have a high regard for the Confession of Faith and Catechisms produced by the assembly should equally respect their work in this important matter of church polity.

### **A TEACHER IN EVERY PARISH: THE VIEW OF THE NEW ENGLAND PURITANS**

In New England, the office of church doctor as a ministry of the local church blossomed - not only in theory, but also in practice. Puritan Independents insisted that whenever possible, a local church should support both a full-time pastor and teacher. In numerous New England churches, we have record of men holding the office of teacher, as distinct from that of pastor or minister. The Puritans downplayed the academic role of the teacher and emphasized his function as lecturer to the congregation, apologist, and biblical expositor.

How important was the teaching office to New England Puritans?

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<sup>39</sup>Prooftexts: 1 Cor. 12:28, Eph. 4:11

<sup>40</sup>Note that the primary context in which the divines located the teacher was the local church. That this was their preference cannot be disputed. Possible academic use of the office is treated as a mere appendix. Interestingly, no biblical support is given for using the office outside the parish; rather there is appeal to the historical example of Gamaliel.

[The] Puritans, when they crossed the waters and were free to establish their internal ecclesiastical discipline as they saw fit, immediately turned to the teaching office as one hallmark of parish life. In each case, the teacher was but one of the church officers which those of the New England Way regarded as the fit and proper office bearers of the church 'well reformed.'<sup>41</sup>

Henderson gives numerous particular examples of New England churches that supported both a teacher and a pastor.<sup>42</sup> Often, men would move from one office to the other, usually with a reordination (which proves they really did believe the pastoral and doctoral offices to be distinct). Many of new England's finest churchmen served as teachers, such as John Cotton, Thomas Shepherd, John Eliot, and Richard Mather.

Puritan New England was clearly the most mature branch of the Reformed church in terms of understanding and implementing the office of teacher. It was in New England that the view expressed in the Westminster *Form* took root and grew. Henderson gives an excellent summary of the doctor's role:

The actual practice of the New England congregations in regard to the teaching office was almost precisely that which we are able to view in the latter disciplines of the presbyterian Puritan period. The activity of the teacher was confined strictly to a parochial ministry, and was not solely occupied in a ministry of instruction, but was equally involved in the government and discipline of the local congregation along with the pastor and ruling elder. As were the pastor, the ruling elder, and the deacons, the teacher was ordained by the laying on of hands, either by office-bearers or by selected members from the congregation itself.

The *Cambridge Platform*, drawn up in 1648 and largely shaped by Thomas Hooker, represents the best of Puritan New England's thinking on the subject:

[The doctor] is given to the Church, and that with the intent and aim, *for the gathering and perfecting of the body*, and that is the *Church* or *congregation* and *ergo* they are to choose him, to employ and improve him for their special and spiritual edification...we understand the Officer we now inquire after, and that wherein he shares in common with the Pastor is, that they have both of them Authority and right delegated from Christ to consecrate and administer the Sacraments.

It was in New England Puritanism, more than anywhere else, that the Reformed office of teacher came into its own. But it was not to last.

## **THE ECLIPSE OF THE TEACHING OFFICE**

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<sup>41</sup>188-9

<sup>42</sup>189ff

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, only a shadow of the teaching office remains in most Reformed churches. It is hard to say exactly why the teaching office slipped into oblivion. Is it because most pastors have taken teaching responsibilities upon themselves, in addition to their normal pastoral duties? This is doubtful. While the lines between the pastoral and teaching offices were often blurred in the Reformed tradition, it does not seem that most pastors have simply taken over the teaching role themselves.<sup>43</sup> In many of the cases where they have, their pastoral roles have suffered.<sup>44</sup>

Why then has the teaching office become virtually extinct? Perhaps it is because of an increasing egalitarian approach to church offices in the Presbyterian tradition. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, four church offices were clearly identified. By the beginning of the eighteenth century the teaching office had essentially disappeared from local churches, leaving three offices. By the early to mid-nineteenth century, some within Presbyterian circles were calling for the reduction of Presbyterian polity to two offices: elder and deacon. Not only was the distinction between teacher and pastor lost, but now the distinction between pastor and ruling elder was threatened. In Thomas Witherow's *Apostolic Church: Which Is It?*, a very compelling case is made for a two office system, departing radically from the earlier books of church order composed by Calvin, Knox, and Melville, the original architects of Presbyterianism. But while Witherow makes good sense of most of the NT data, he ignores the OT pattern. His arguments have a certain plausibility because of the ambiguity with which the term elder is used (both in the Bible and in traditional Reformed ecclesiology), but in the end, it seems the distinctions between the offices are more than merely functional.<sup>45</sup> The office of ruler must not swallow up the office of pastor, and the office of pastor must not swallow up that of teacher.<sup>46</sup> Traditional Reformed polity is not two office, or even three office, but four office.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>This seems to be Henderson's answer to the rapid fading away of the office of teacher after the Westminster Assembly. He believes the rationale for a teacher in the church has been lost because the teacher's position has been simply absorbed by the pastor.

<sup>44</sup>For example, their sermons may become lecture-like, lacking proper pastoral application.

<sup>45</sup>See Numbers 11:16ff, 2 Chronicles 19:8, Matthew 21:23, Mark 15:1, 1 Timothy 5:17, etc. on the distinct nature of the ruling elder. Earlier Reformed three and four office proponents did not see the ruling elder in view at all in passages such as Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3. Rather, the basis for the ruling elder was sought primarily in the OT. Ephesians 4:11-12 is difficult to exegete, but it seems Paul is indicating that pastors and teachers have been given to the church to equip the saints, to do the work of the ministry, and to edify the body. In this context, pastors and teachers are clearly distinct from the laity ("the saints"), but it would also seem they are distinct from ruling elders (who are not mentioned in this list of officers, but are included in the list of gifted people in 1 Corinthians 12:27ff and Romans 12:6ff).

<sup>46</sup>Calvin, Knox, and Melville, the giants of Reformed Presbyterianism, all seem unanimous in holding to a four office view. According to this older Reformed conception, all bishops are elders, but not all elders are bishops. Witherow was one of

While most Reformed churches have not completely followed Witherow, it seems sharply defined roles for the various orders of church office have been lost. If the teaching office is to be restored, these roles must once again be carefully expounded and lived out in the church. We cannot take an egalitarian approach to ministry, assuming any officer can perform any function. Christ has gifted men in the church in specific ways, and these gifts are to be used in the execution of specific offices. We dishonor the subtle difference between the gifts Christ has distributed to us if we do not distinguish the teacher from the pastor, and each of these from the ruler.

It seems the loss of the teaching office in the local church is related to the diminishing of the church's educational ministry as a whole. I do not have in view simply church schools or universities, which were lost as the educational process in the West was secularized.<sup>48</sup> Rather, it seems the church has entered into a self-imposed famine of biblical teaching. This is why the eclipse of the teaching office should alarm us. It seems the church has lost her zeal for full-orbed biblical teaching. With the rise of a mostly para-church, academic seminary for training pastors, many of those gifted as teachers left the church for academic posts.<sup>49</sup> This severing of rigorous biblical study and teaching from the local church has proven to be unhealthy for both teachers and their students. As church teachers have been transformed into professors of theology, congregations have lost out as well, and often fail to receive the teaching they need. Often, churches are not able to provide the quality and quantity of biblical instruction that is required in a vibrant, growing congregation. While I am sure this could be proven with stories and statistics of various sorts, all we have to do is look at our churches to see this is indeed the case.

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the first to challenge this conception of the church's ministry, and he did so from within the ranks of Scottish Presbyterianism. Witherow's two-office view was quite radical at the time, but came to have significant influence in America, first in Southern Presbyterianism and later in Northern Presbyterianism. It seems this debate cannot be finally resolved until a definitive biblical-theological study of church government is done. Quite frankly, the issue is far more complex than is generally realized and we cannot go into it in depth here. In addition to Witherow's book, for a complete survey, one should consult Brown, editor, *Order in the Offices*, Calvin's *Institutes* (Book 4), Hall's *Paradigms in Polity*, Irons' *Theories of Eldership*, and the appropriate books of church order.

<sup>47</sup> Or, to put it another way, it's a three-and-a-half office polity. The line between teacher and pastor may be thin and dotted, not bold and thick, but it is a line nonetheless.

<sup>48</sup> Conversely, one could argue education in the West was secularized *because* the church gave it up (primarily to the state).

<sup>49</sup> This is not to say that there would be no place for church-affiliated seminaries in an ideal situation. But the divorce of rigorous academic study of the Scriptures from a context of fellowship, liturgical worship, oversight, accountability, and practical service within a local congregation can never be healthy.

In addition, the loss of church doctor has also frequently meant the loss of church schools and universities. The relationship of church and school is a complex one and cannot be entered into fully here. Suffice it to say, disconnecting the church and education in the West has led directly to the rise of statist, secular education. The church has surrendered vital territory she once claimed for Christ. The end result is that the church has suffered because her members have been more thoroughly trained in idolatry than in the true faith. Recovering the office of church doctor will take us a long way to re-establishing church-based educational institutions.

## SUMMING UP AND MOVING ON

At this point it might be helpful to provide a short summary of the church's teaching office as it has been formulated by the best of the Reformed tradition. A working definition might read something like this:

*The office of church teacher is given to the church by the ascended Christ and is a permanent form of eldership in his church. The teacher is to complement and supplement the work of the pastor (or preacher or minister) by expounding and defending the whole counsel of God, primarily to the local congregation, and secondarily to the world. The teacher's office and role overlap significantly with the pastor's, but, whereas the pastor is most concerned with exhorting the people through preaching and thorough application of God's Word, and overseeing their lives as their shepherd, the teacher is mainly concerned with explaining and defending God's Word and ensuring that the people understand it.<sup>50</sup> Teachers have a crucial role to play in the development of future church leadership. This may involve them in teaching a broad range of the church's membership, including youth, new converts, and officer candidates. Teachers may also be used in various other educational functions, such as Christian schools and universities, but the chief location of their teaching ministry should generally be the local parish.*

What have we seen in this in this study and what are we to do with it? Working out all the implications of the teaching office for the local church and for Christian education is too much to cover in this analysis. Rather, allow me to summarize five problems the church faces and briefly mention how a renewed commitment on the part of local churches to the teaching office may be a huge step towards their solution.

1. The church faces the problem of training men for the ministry. The church can never rise above the level of her ordained ministers and so preparing men theologically and spiritually for church office is critical. There are numerous problems with seminary education as it presently functions. Frequently, the modern seminary is a para-church

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<sup>50</sup> Contrary to some earlier Reformed proponents of the four office scheme, I see no reason why teachers should not be permitted to administer the sacraments along with the pastor and take a shepherding/disciplinary role alongside the other elders. These functions are secondary to his teaching function, but may be helpful adjuncts.



institution. Thus, it lacks accountability to the institutional church. True, this is somewhat alleviated if the professors are ordained churchmen. But it is still not ideal. A revived church teaching office might permit churches to develop apprenticeship programs for young men training for the ministry, giving them a better feel for what pastoral ministry is all about and allowing them to test and develop their gifts in the proper setting. Only if we raise up great *churchmen*, as well as great theologians and biblical scholars, will we see true reformation.<sup>51</sup>

2. We face the problem of biblical illiteracy. Even within the church, the Bible is not that well known or understood. Our people simply do not know how to read the Bible in a Christocentric, canonical, literary fashion. This is not to say that heavy Bible teaching will cure the church's present day ills. The church is not a theology club, unified by some common ideology. The church is the living body of Christ and the communion of the saints, united by one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. It is also true that the church's problems are much more than just intellectual or narrowly theological. Restoring the office of church teacher is not some Socratic attempt at salvation through education. But nonetheless, it remains true that one component of any reformation-type movement within the church will be an emphasis on teaching the whole counsel of God. Holistic reformation cannot take place apart from redoubling our efforts at teaching and preaching the whole counsel of God. A doctor or teacher within the local congregation can aid the pastor in evangelism and apologetics, and in teaching the church's youth and new converts, as well as doing more detailed teaching than is normally permissible from the pulpit. While modern expectations on what a sermon should be may limit what the pastor can do from the pulpit, the teacher may have more freedom to teach the whole counsel of God. It makes better sense liturgically and homiletically to do our more in-depth instruction outside of the Lord's Day covenant renewal worship service. This is where the teacher fits in -- supplementing (but certainly not supplanting) the church's preaching.

3. Many of those today who desire to give or receive in-depth biblical teaching turn to para-church ministries. While these ministries can and have been used greatly by the Lord, they are problematic. A para-church can simply never provide the holistic ministry of the local church. Only in the church are the marks of Christ's body -- teaching, sacraments, and discipline -- joined together as they ought to be. So long as the church cannot offer viable alternatives to para-church teaching ministries, the para-church will continue to thrive and the church will miss out on excellent opportunities to minister. A church teacher helps counter the para-church and enables the church to better fulfill her educational task.

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<sup>51</sup> This is not to say the seminary system itself is irreformable and should be scrapped in favor of a full blown apprenticeship model. In many cases, seminaries have served the church quite well. But there is no disputing that some seminaries have become overly academicized into "graduate schools of theology" that put more emphasis on degrees and credentials than training in full-orbed godliness. Perhaps church teachers could help bridge the gap that often seems to exist between seminary and local church.

4. The church also faces the problem of confronting secular, idolatrous education. Certainly, church affiliated schools and universities are not the only ways of dealing with this issue. But historically the church has not shied away from sheltering Christian education under her wings and in light of our current political and economic situation, this may be a better idea than ever. In addition it could stimulate much needed work in various areas of biblical worldview thinking. Church teachers can develop Christian approaches to various academic disciplines normally left untouched by pastors. Teachers can use their skills and knowledge in producing a curriculum for the sciences, the arts, and other areas, that is thoroughly grounded in the Scriptures. Moreover, if the church recovers her educational role, she can provide the kind of support and accountability educational institutions need. This is true not just in primary and secondary education, but all the way through the university level. The church created the university and it is time she recaptured the university, before it disintegrates completely. But it is hard to see how this can happen apart from redeveloping the church's teaching office.

5. With the increasing specialization of theological studies, pastors need more aid than ever. No one man can be an expert in theology, biblical studies, apologetics, ethics, ecclesiology, counseling, liturgics, hermeneutics, sacramental theology, church history, church music, biblical world view issues, socio-theology, etc. Teachers can be of obvious help here as well, by specializing in areas where pastors cannot. In this way, the church's teaching and preaching ministries may complement one another and lead the church into a more wholistic understanding of God's Word.

This list of problem areas barely even begins to scratch the surface. The church today is deeply in need of reformation and revival. There is no easy way of dealing with all of our problems. But certainly it is safe to say that nothing less than a full restoration of the office of teacher to the local church is called for -- not because this is a "quick-fix" but because no long term change is possible apart from it.

### **RESTORING THE TEACHING OFFICE TO THE CHURCH: A SPECIAL KIND OF CONGREGATIONAL MINISTRY**

How can the biblical office of teacher be restored in our day? The last thing the church needs today is a new crop of armchair reformers with great ideas but no practical way to implement them. Thinking through the way in which the church teacher is to be utilized is critical. But to do it properly, churches must reassess their priorities and renew their commitment to teaching the Word of God in its fullness. This will result in new inward and outward facing ministries for the church.

Inwardly, we must place a greater emphasis on teaching the whole counsel of God. How many Christians today -- even church officers -- know the whole psalter? Or can list and explain the various kinds of sacrifices in Leviticus? Or can explain the function of the genealogies in Chronicles? Or can summarize the message of Zephaniah? Or point out Mark's use of irony in his gospel and its theological significance? Or defend the doctrine of perseverance of the saints? We could go on and on. It may seem such knowledge is

useless, but if we really love God, mustn't we be committed to mastery of his Word? Could it be that our lack of effectiveness in the world today is largely due to the fact that we are so pre-occupied with *being effective* that we have forgotten one of our most important resources -- thorough familiarity with Scripture, backwards and forwards, inside and out? We are sanctified by the truth and that truth is found only in God's Word.

What kind of teachers does the church need to equip the saints for service in the world? The church is in desperate need of both specialists and generalists. We need teachers who narrowly focus on some specific area of theology, biblical exposition, liturgy, church history, etc, but we also need generalists who can help us regain a grasp of the "big picture." We need teachers who communicate thoroughly biblical content and fill church members with a holy zeal to see that biblical truth applied in all areas of life. We need teachers who will point us to the old paths, but also break forth new light from God's Word. We need teachers who can help bring reformation to the church's theology, worship, and life-practice, because reformation in the world begins with the household of God. We need to raise up teachers who can in turn train a new generation of faithful men who will stand on the shoulders of giants and see clearly the way to lead the church into a better day. We need teachers who can train our covenant youth in systematic and biblical theology and catechize new converts in the basics of the faith. We need teachers who can give a credible defense of the faith in an age of increasing skepticism, that the saints might have confidence in the creeds of Christendom. We need teachers who will protect and maintain the church's heritage of doctrine and worship and inculcate in the saints a love for the Spirit's work in the church through the centuries. We need teachers who will serve the church through producing lectures, books, articles, position papers, and so forth, but also teachers who can serve as critics of the church, prodding her to reform, even if it is uncomfortable and unwelcome.

Of course, for a teaching office to be of great usefulness to the church in our day, church members will need to be encouraged to reorient their lives more around the body of Christ and less around the structures of modernity. We need to recover an eccleio-centric praxis to fully avail ourselves of this ministry.

The teaching office also has an important role to play in the outward facing ministry of the church. Certainly there is a great need for effective evangelism in our day and many teachers may find themselves to be gifted evangelists. In addition, the Reformed tradition has always stressed that the teacher is to be used as an apologist. Work in both philosophical and cultural apologetics is needed if the church is to remain "relevant."

In conclusion, the teaching office should not be seen as a luxury the church can easily dispense with, at no great loss. The office of teacher should be seen as a buried and forgotten treasure that needs to be unearthed once again. The great sixteenth century Reformation recovered a teaching office that had been largely lost or corrupted in the Medieval period. If we truly desire to carry forward the work of reformation in our day, let us follow in the footsteps of our forefathers and revive the teaching ministry of the church before it is too late.

