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**PERSPECTIVES ON CHURCH GOVERNMENT:  
FIVE VIEWS OF CHURCH POLITY**

EDITED BY CHAD OWEN BRAND AND R. STANTON NORMAN  
CONTRIBUTORS: DANIEL AKIN, JAMES LEO GARRETT,  
ROBERT REYMOND, JAMES R. WHITE, AND PAUL F.M. ZAHL  
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE: BROADMAN AND HOLMAN, 2000  
XIII-353 PP. PAPERBACK  
ISBN 080542590X

Bringing into conversation a variety of evangelical voices, Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman's *Perspectives on Church Government* explores five of the most common forms of church polity. The book is structured as a series of essays by contributors, who also respond briefly to one another's work at the end of each chapter. The editors, both Southern Baptists, make clear in the introduction their bias toward prioritizing Scripture over tradition or organizational pragmatism in shaping church governance. With one exception, their contributors share this bias, and much of the book is correspondingly taken up with the interpretation and application of New Testament texts related to church polity. The contributors include three Baptists (Daniel Akin, James Leo Garrett, Jr. and James R. White), one Presbyterian (Robert Reymond, of the Presbyterian Church in America) and one Anglican (Paul Zahl, now dean of Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry). The authors share a common sensibility and outlook, and the volume seems intended for a primarily evangelical audience.

In their introduction, Brand and Norman offer a short overview of the history of church polity, defining it as "the way in which a local church or group of churches organize and administrate themselves" (2). In the discussion that follows, controversy focuses on the extent to which the New Testament defines a normative polity for the church, as well as the degree of centrality polity holds within theology—to use Zahl's terms, whether forms of governance apply to the *esse*, or very identity of the church, or its *bene esse*, merely its well-being. While the authors share many assumptions (for instance, that the terms "elder" (*presbyteros*) and "overseer"

(*episkopos*) refer to the same New Testament functions), they also depart from each other in some striking ways.

Daniel Akin, a Southern Baptist, attempts to construct a scripturally-based argument for the single-elder-led church, claiming that the New Testament churches were “basically congregational in their government and polity” (26). Akin shows a degree of flexibility regarding the number of elders within each church while proposing a “senior pastor” role that reflects common practice today. In his review of Scripture, Akin assumes that whole congregations were involved in making decisions at critical points in early church history (for instance, the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, which features prominently in several chapters of this book). Akin also tends to conflate the various biblical terms into two offices of leadership—“pastors” and deacons.

Robert Reymond, following the footsteps of many Presbyterians, attempts to demonstrate that “the Presbyterian form of church government alone passes biblical muster” (93). Critiquing congregational autonomy as scripturally unfounded, Reymond draws heavily on his reading of Acts 15 to suggest that connectional structures (presumably analogous to the “courts” of modern Presbyterian polity) existed within the early church. Behind Reymond’s argument is the assumption that Christ’s lordship over his church requires that the Bible be clear on the issue of polity. He goes beyond the biblical basis to claim that Presbyterianism is also “the most trustworthy, just and peaceful way for the church to determine its principles, its practices and its priorities and to resolve its differences” (135). Reymond’s respondents gently suggest he is reading modern forms of representative government back into the Bible.

James Leo Garrett, Jr., another Southern Baptist, departs from Reymond by making a more flexible, less magisterial case for congregational polity. Garrett’s argument, retracing many of the same biblical texts invoked by Akin and Reymond, is that a pattern of ecclesiastical organization exists in outline rather than in detail in the Bible, with application left up to the judgment of Christians within each context. This approach seeks to steer clear of a fully pragmatic view of polity, on the one hand, and a divinely-

granted view like Reymond's, on the other. Garrett's chapter includes a historical survey of the role of congregational polity within Baptist identity, as well as acknowledgment that many mega churches today have moved away from it. One reason may be the inefficiency of such a polity, which Garrett recognizes.

Paul Zahl's chapter on Anglican/Episcopal polity is an anomaly in this book. His argument is not based upon Scripture. Rather than focusing strictly on polity, Zahl offers a broader defense of Anglicanism that includes as much critique as support of his own tradition. Zahl assumes the scriptural evidence supports multiple forms of governance and sees polity as a "penultimate" concern of the church. He suggests at one point that polity comes to the forefront only when more pressing issues of mission do not, describing American Christianity today as a "success." Given the numerical decline of his own denomination (and many others), one wonders whether Zahl has considered the missionary implications of various forms of polity. In fact, this is one concern left generally untouched by this book as a whole—how do church organization and governance support or detract from mission? Zahl recognizes the challenges of Episcopal polity—including the danger of authoritarianism among bishops, as well as the difficulty of disciplining them. He gives short shrift to the diaconate, an order that has resurged within Anglican, Lutheran and Methodist circles in the past several decades. Predictably, all of Zahl's respondents critique the lack of biblical basis for Episcopal polity, an argument that Zahl (unlike some Anglican commentators) perhaps too readily concedes.

James R. White, a Reformed Baptist, follows Robert Reymond in offering a strenuous argument for the divinely-ordained character of his polity—in this case, the plural-elder-led church. White works from a premise that the rest of the book calls into question: the structure of the church is "plainly taught" in the Bible (257). He rejects the possibility that any structure beyond elders of the local church is divinely ordained, casting the Jerusalem Council as an "unrepeatable apostolic event." The apostles appointed elders in each local church, White observes, but he never

explains clearly how those elders are chosen once the historic apostles passed from the scene. White's overriding concern seems to be for elders safeguarding the church's truth, rather than "equipping the saints for ministry" (Ephesians 4:11-12, a text White disclaims in connection with polity).

*Perspectives on Church Government* is notable for its absences—of any Methodist or Lutheran voice—as well as its narrow field of conversation (i.e., the preponderance of Baptists). The only Anglican voice is identified with that tradition's low-church, evangelical wing; Roman Catholic polity is dismissed outright and Orthodoxy not even referenced. All authors seem to accept uncritically that leadership and governance in the church are restricted to males. While those who accept this volume's assumptions may find it a helpful tool for engaging the scriptural bases of church polity, readers with more ecumenical sensibilities may prefer to look elsewhere.

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**POLITY, PRACTICE AND THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH (UPDATED EDITION)**

BY: THOMAS EDWARD FRANK

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE: ABINGDON PRESS, 2002

357 PP. PAPERBACK

ISBN: 0687023564

As a primary text in most United Methodist polity courses, Thomas Frank's *Polity, Practice and the Mission of the United Methodist Church* (Updated Edition) blends the governance content of *The United Methodist Book of Discipline* with its contextual and historical background. In contrast to other texts on UM polity that generally follow the *Discipline* section by section (e.g., Bishop Jack Tuell's *The Organization of the United Methodist Church*), Frank also addresses broader themes like the first chapter's "Polity as Ecclesial Practice and Practical Discipline." The text is so seminal to denominational studies that the next edition, based on the 2004 General Conference, is scheduled for release in April 2006.

The first two chapters explore the historical and theological backdrop of United Methodism, particularly in America. The denomination began as a renewal movement within an established church. Gatherings of Methodists were linked in a connection of itinerant preachers and common discipline. The religious traditions from which John Wesley drew shaped the language and practices experienced today. The concept of itinerancy persists, though in an altered state. Personal and social holiness continue to be held in tension by ecclesial statements and guidelines. Ecclesiological issues link to the historical United States struggles like racism and economic inequalities. "The *Discipline* has been in continuous revision and publication for over two hundred years, and contains within it the cultural and ecclesial influences identified above and many others besides. It is itself an exercise in practical theology, demonstrating how the church has responded to changing contexts and situations" (111).

Particularly in the United States context, United Methodism is constituted on two key principles: conferencing and superintendency. Indeed, the founding

conference of the Methodist Church in America first voted to accept their new leaders set apart by Rev. Wesley before those leaders were willing to take up their charge. For many decades the democratic annual and quadrennial meetings were of the traveling preachers. Eventually laity were elected as representatives based on the number of preachers in each charge. These lay and clergy representatives to the annual conferences are the pool from which delegates are sent to the Jurisdictional, Central and General Conferences that typically meet every four years. Oversight of the church comes through the bishops whose “constant travel and omnipresence makes the connection tangible” (126). They appoint, ensure an apostolic faith, and seek to missionally direct the denomination. Chapter eight lines out the nature and responsibilities of the general superintendent (i.e., bishop) and the district superintendent.

United Methodism stands not on doctrinal statements per se but on a commitment to theological narrative and pragmatic ministry. It does enjoy historical documents such as the Articles of Religion and Confession of Faith, yet the primary mode is one of seeking theological consensus. The practical impact of being the church in the world unfolds in the Social Principles and detailed further in the *Book of Resolutions*, which is updated every four years.

The ministry of all Christians is played out in the local church. Up until the early 1900s, the “society” was the predominant language for the congregation, stemming from the societies and classes that permeated the Anglican Church in the 1700’s. In what Frank labels “A Connection of Local Churches,” congregations are held together in a common mission and polity. “In short, every local church is fully the church” (179). Membership is a covenantal relationship with vows to fulfill in a disciplined community of faith. In the spirit of conferencing, the local church is governed by the charge conference while encouraged to have minimal administrative units for the daily execution of mission. The network of conferences then links the local expression with the regional, national, and global presence of the United Methodist Church. Chapters nine through eleven discuss the

agency of these conferences and their stewardship of the ministry and properties of the denomination.

Out of the ministry of Christians are called particular leaders set apart for ordained and diaconal roles. The local church affirms the gifts for specialized ministry and sets those so gifted on the path for examination, credentialing and ongoing support. They may be lay speakers (or lay ministers, per the new category defined by the 2004 General Conference), diaconal ministers, deacons, local pastors or elders. While the historical emphasis has been on the preaching gifts, increasingly the denomination is acknowledging those called to other forms of ministry. Itinerancy is no longer the only option for specialized ministry.

Frank highlights in chapter twelve the rather recent development of the Judicial Council of the United Methodist Church. This place of appeal for both the legislative and episcopal bodies was established in 1934 in the Methodist Episcopal Church South and constituted in both the 1939 and 1968 unions. Since its inception, the Judicial Council has decided more than nine hundred issues of church law (310). Its role in the direction of the denomination is gaining increasing attention since its decisions are final. Changes to the constitution or *Discipline* are the only ways to appeal a Judicial Council opinion.

United Methodist polity serves to direct its people in mission to make the hope of God known in the world. *Polity, Practice and the Mission of the United Methodist Church* continues to be commissioned by the denomination's General Board of Higher Education and Ministry because it captures the heart and history of United Methodism. The author places the legacy of Wesley, Otterbein, and Albright within the broader Church. He links the past and present while calling the denomination forward to greater influence.

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**ELDERS AND LEADERS:  
GOD'S PLAN FOR LEADING THE CHURCH**

BY: GENE A. GETZ

CHICAGO: MOODY PRESS, 2003

240PP. PAPERBACK

ISBN 0-8024-1057-X

In this volume, Gene A. Getz brings a rich and diverse background in his attempt to develop a biblically based theology of church leadership and his experience as a seminary professor, noted writer, and highly successful pastor combine to give a uniquely balanced approach. Getz is careful and exacting in his effort to explore the relevant biblical passages and at the same time deliberate in his application to church administrative leadership.

Three bedrock assumptions by Getz are crucial in the development of the book. The first assumption is in regard to the preeminent place of the local church. He relates that though he enjoyed twenty years in the academic world, “it’s the local church setting that provides the grassroots context for doing theological studies that relate to the total person—mind, emotions, and will” (26). Getz does not ignore the cultural lens but rather views it as the ministry context which must be understood in order for the church to be relevant.

The second assumption is that the Bible must be the primary voice in any theological conversation. Getz follows the thinking of Stanley Grenz in advocating this as basic to the evangelical heritage. Therefore, though Getz acknowledges the importance of the historical and theological heritage of the church, he unapologetically explores what he considers to be the key biblical passages on the subject while giving less attention to the “systematic outlines and categories made by theologians” (27, 28). Getz urges accurate interpretation of the Bible through not only bringing to bear the standard tools for sound exegesis but also by examining “the totality of Scripture on a particular subject” (40). He further emphasizes that the chronological sequence in the development of leadership and governance in the New Testament Church must be carefully noted.

The third assumption is closely connected to the two previous ones. Getz believes that there are supra-cultural principles that can be used in the local church ministry and are applicable to any cultural context. According to author, supra-cultural principles for the church are extracted from the Bible. He makes a sharp distinction between methodology and supra-cultural principles. Getz argues that the Scriptures are basically silent in regard to specific forms of implementation. Otherwise, “we would be severely limited in practicing biblical Christianity in other cultures of the world and at different moments in history” (31). Getz is interested in finding the supra-cultural aspects of church leadership and governance issues. As well as being biblical, the test for the validity of whether a principle is supra-cultural is that it must be able to work in every local church, regardless of its context.

Initially, Getz addresses the role of elders (*presbuteros*). He observes they are first mentioned twelve years after Pentecost when the church in Antioch sent their gift to the elders in Jerusalem. From there he expands the discussion to their role in leadership and other functions such as healing ministry. Getz argues that *episkopos* is essentially synonymous with *presbuteros*. He then shifts to explore the function of deacons which he believes should primarily be a supportive ministering role. Getz attempts to develop the analogy of church leadership around the household model. Unfortunately, at some points his efforts to make the analogy are somewhat strained and underdeveloped.

In his discussion of the qualifications for the elder and deacon positions, the author does not eschew the controversial nature of this subject. He presents a supra-cultural list of qualifications in which he expounds such principles as giving candidates time to mature and the exclusion of women from the elder role. In regard to the latter, Getz interprets the Scriptures as allowing women to serve as deacons. He also addresses other fiercely debated topics such as the question of divorce. On this issue, Getz has the redemptive view that those who have demonstrated fidelity in their present marriage as well as the other qualities

listed in the Pastoral Epistles are eligible to serve as elders even if they have previously experienced divorce.

Getz is firm in his position that the office of senior pastor is one that should only be assumed by an elder, and that under no circumstances should the person who holds this position ever cease to be an elder. Otherwise, he believes there is opportunity for abuse as the elders gain an unhealthy authoritative position over the senior pastor. Throughout the book, Getz is very much an advocate of the servant leadership motif but admits that in the end there must be one clear leader of the church. He believes that the co-pastor type of model has significant weaknesses in that it endangers leadership continuity and inhibits the expression of a leader's full gift potential.

Though the author maintains that the Scriptures do not give certainty to a specific form, he nonetheless presents a number of case study examples of how certain procedures may work better than others. As one might expect from the title, *Elders and Leaders*, Getz makes a strong case for an elder system that governs all manner of administrative matters. He opines against the congregational system as one that allows the potential for the strong influence of immature believers. In this respect, he treads closely to practicing the very thing that he warns against, assuming that a particular form or methodology is part of the biblical supra-cultural principle. Aside from this, Getz is uncommonly honest in his attempt to find those aspects of Scripture teaching that can be universally applied to issues of church leadership and governance.

Getz has written a book that is both defensible in its scholarship and immensely practical. The author's humility in admitting some mistakes during his ministry is refreshing and helpful. Though some might desire a more comprehensive volume on the subject, the engaging communication style of Getz will appeal to both clergy and laity.

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**PATTERNS OF POLITY:  
VARIETIES OF CHURCH GOVERNANCE**

BY: EDWARD LEROY LONG, JR.

CLEVELAND, OHIO: PILGRIM PRESS, 2001

XII+163 PP. PAPERBACK

ISBN 0829814442

Surprising as it may be that a distinguished Emeritus Professor of Christian Ethics would write a book comparing the governance structures of several denominations, Edward LeRoy Long, Jr. has indeed produced a useful analytical guide to the polities of churches. His purpose is succinctly stated in the Prologue, "A book like this is needed!" (xi). Verily! The ecumenical movement necessitates a guide to the governance structures of the several churches to make dialogue among them more fruitful (x-xi, 151-157). Since churches tend to use many of the same political terms but infuse them with meanings arising out of their particular contexts (one thinks of the use of the term "elder," or "presbyter," for example), a primer on the "languages" employed by the churches is important to have, for "The more we know about other languages, the more we understand our own, and the less inclined we are to insist that ours is the only valid way of speaking" (152-153).

This book is ambitious in its scope, and yet modest. Long has attempted to speak to each major type of polity in the United States: governance by bishops (Roman Catholicism, Methodism, Anglicanism, and Orthodoxy), governance by elders, appointees, and the spiritually mature (Presbyterianism and other Reformed traditions, Mormonism, and Anabaptist traditions such as Mennonites and the Society of Friends), and governance by congregations (Lutheranism, the Free Church traditions such as the United Church of Christ, the Baptist Churches and the Disciples of Christ, and the Autonomous Churches such as Churches of Christ and a plethora of newer independent congregations). He aims not to evaluate these governance types, but to give us a fair description of them (151). The ethicist in him will not be denied, however. His most provocative and useful writing, in my opinion, comes when he is analyzing the way

polity both shapes and mirrors denominational approaches to ethical issues such as how authority is understood, how conflict is dealt with, how money is used, and how power is exercised (e.g., 7-8, 20, 26, 33, 55-56, 77, 86, 98, 133-135).

Polity crucially shapes leadership, as well. From that angle, Long offers useful insights and a few surprises. Roman Catholicism favors leaders who are adept at integration into a hierarchy, but are not so effective at creating leaders who can solve persistent problems (20). Methodism shapes leaders on a managerial model (28ff). Anglicanism and Orthodoxy develop persuasive leadership styles (49, 57). Presbyterianism uses a representative eldership model that, under pressure from its ethos favors cerebral matters such as learning, understanding and order rather than emotions (77). Mormonism produces leaders hooked into the “totalitarian” system of the LDS, and who espouse classic American public and private values and virtues, such as duty and personal restraint (86). The Anabaptist traditions forge leaders with high moral and societal discipline (97-98). Lutheranism shapes leaders, who can live with differing understandings of polity, and still co-operate, and Long believes this model has promise for ecumenism (115-116). Similarly, the UCC and Baptist traditions have developed a sort of associational congregationalism that seeks balance and co-operation between values that, on the face of it, oppose each other. These leaders stand in the space created by the tension between personal and congregational freedom, and covenanted mutuality (128-130). The Disciples of Christ have labored to produce parity between lay and clergy leaders among them so as not to produce a clergy class (142-143).

Long works hard to keep his descriptions of leaders in each communion from seeming to be caricatures, and nuances each of these main characteristics sufficiently well that the reader gets a more balanced and well-formed idea of what contextual leadership is like than this brief review is able to do. This nuanced presentation leads to some interesting surprises in his findings. One might assume that Baptists, for example, are freer to lead in prophetic ways than Episcopalians. Not so. Baptist pastors are susceptible to become “a domesticated caretaker, available on request to

provide for church members' spiritual benefit" and are therefore not apt to be prophetic leaders at all, notable Baptist social leaders to the contrary (135).

The strength of Long's book is also a weakness. The sweep of this small volume is what makes it so useful. To have so many American traditions juxtaposed in such a readable form recommends this study to laity as well as clergy and seminary professors. The necessary brevity of each denominational account means that there are some unavoidable distortions, and I would be surprised if clergy and lay leaders from each tradition did not respond to his descriptions by objecting, "Yes, but..." The Disciples segment (137-145), for example, is drawn from accounts of the denominational ethos already out of date well before the date of this book's publication. Disciples leaders have not seen themselves belonging to a denomination with no over-structure since the late 1960s, at least. The new associational structure Long writes about (Regional structure, actually), has moved far beyond the early stage noted here. Still, in the main, what he writes is true to the polity as hoped to be, if not lived out. Long mitigates the problem of a single author with selected contacts in the denominations by listing short but meaty bibliographies at the end of each segment.

A more substantial criticism is the lack of the ways ethnic American groups have influenced the development of polity. The current tension in the American Baptist Churches USA between the older white establishment and the rising tide of African Americans and Hispanic Americans is a case in point. A chapter devoted to the politics of the Black Churches in this country would be effort well spent.

For those of us seeking a more in depth study of leadership in the context of these several governance structures, that book remains to be written. But Edward Long has started us in a most commendable direction, and his book is the most useful in this regard to date.

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**CHURCH, IDENTITY AND CHANGE:  
THEOLOGY AND DENOMINATIONAL STRUCTURES IN  
UNSETTLED TIMES**

BY: DAVID A. ROOZEN AND JAMES NIEMAN, EDITORS

GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN: EERDMANS, 2005

VII-661 PP. PAPERBACK

ISBN 0-8028-2819-1

Are the rumors of denominational demise accurate? Are denominations vital to the religious environment of today's world—grounding churches and individuals to religious memory, experiences, and traditions and concentrating scarce resources for kingdom ministry? How are denominational leaders attempting to restructure and reenergize their organizations?

Roozen and Nieman's work provides a fresh perspective concerning these and other questions. They posit that current denominational tensions are better understood as periods of re-identification and organizational transformation rather than death rattle. They build upon two stated premises: (1) national structures of denominations are organizationally embodied traditions whose religious character includes an intrinsic commitment to being a community of memory, and (2) these same structures are presently facing a period of transition in the United States (18). These premises are the basis for in-depth and well-designed stories of eight diverse protestant denominations. Each denominational story is told through the lenses of theology, history, sociology, and practice to reach the editors' goal: "to generate critical but appreciative reflection that provides grounded, comparative, and multidisciplinary insights for both scholars and practitioners who care about how denominations seek to embody God's work" (8). The study is limited to the North American religious experience.

In a field where far too many authors paint with broad brushes, giving their readers polemic generalities and singularly focused anecdotal perspectives, to have these editors provide such an integrated and helpful look at the actual struggles and strategies of some of today's denominations is refreshing. Even critics or skeptics of

denominations like the author of this review will find Roozen and Nieman's book informative and insightful.

This study offers numerous distinct features and strengths. Analyzing how the national level of a specific denomination relates to the overall structure of the denomination, to its congregations, and to individuals is one such feature. While other authors speak of this tension and offer general solutions, this study gives actual examples of what denominations are doing and how these strategies are helping.

Another helpful contribution of this study is how Christian nature connects with organizational nature or, stated differently, how to think theologically about form and function of a denomination. Not enough informative research exists in this aspect of Christian organizational science. While not providing a thorough model that can be reproduced for others, this study does provide foundational pillars for future studies.

The intentional dialogue between historian, theologian, sociologist, and denominational executive about each denomination gives an integrated wholeness to the analysis and storytelling, and offers readers a multi-orbited look at denominational life. Additionally, including eight broadly diverse denominations gives readers a broader understanding of the struggles these organizations face and the variety of strategies they are implementing to lead their denominations through these challenging times. Readers better understand that the committed work of denominational leaders is about trying to revitalize shared, beloved community, not lifeless forms from the past. Personal commitment and sacrifice are skillfully painted on the pages of these stories.

The study does have some weaknesses. For one, the editors may confuse fervent with effective activity in their argument that life still exists in these denominations. Certainly some denominations included in this study remain vital in their growth and kingdom impact. For others, no matter how committed the denominational leaders are, if their work is ineffective, a period of transitional reorganization may result in their demise.

This study also lacks a thorough analysis of whether too many resources are being spent on trying to rekindle the denominational identity, resulting in a continued loss of focus from their mission. Building a shared memory and identity may be more accurately seen as a strategy, not mission, and confusing this may prove fatal to their efforts to revitalize. Some in the missional church movement may argue that any re-identification must start first with renewed, missional commitment.

Some readers might posit that the study lends toward the naturalistic fallacy of describing, “what is” versus “what ought to be.” This could be inferred from the idea that the presence of activity determines the validity of denominational work; however, it is the presence of the correct type of activity that will launch meaningful growth. If the study had systematically compared the efforts of the eight denominations in a search for effective patterns, this possible objection might have been eliminated.

Ultimately, what is really gained by proving that some denominations are hard at work trying to develop new identities for their denominations? It may eliminate some rumors and counter those who recklessly suggest all denominations are dying or irrelevant; however, it does not seem to really answer the question of how God’s people should best embody Christ in this era. Certainly denominations are one vital approach—but not the only one and maybe not necessarily the best.

Certainly Roozen and Nieman are correct when positing that denominations are better understood as transitioning instead of dying, and that most are surviving. However, mere survival does not prove that most denominations are vital to the future health of the North American religious experience. Might more meaningful methods to embody God’s presence in today’s world result if leaders and resources of struggling denominations were more focused on exploring innovative ways to embody God in today’s world? Future studies could examine what are the appropriate variables for determining whether denominations should continue their efforts, reinvent themselves, or give way to other approaches. Another study might work to establish the appropriate

criteria to prove denominational effectiveness in this new environment. Further research into which denominations are successfully accomplishing the tasks of revitalizing the identity and mission of their denomination and whether these principles are transferable might also enhance this field of study.

Scholars, students, pastors, denominational leaders, and individual members will enjoy and benefit from reading this important and well-designed study.

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**ORDINATION: CELEBRATING THE GIFTS OF MINISTRY**

BY: STEPHEN V. SPRINKLE

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI: CHALICE PRESS, 2004

1-278 PP. PAPERBACK

ISBN 0-8272-2719-1

Ordination is a great theological experiment where the minister's vocation, the church's mission and the Holy Spirit live together in creative tension, according to Stephen Sprinkle in his recent book *Ordination: Celebrating the Gift of Ministry*. Sprinkle's thesis claims that the event of ordination provides a means by which the church can share in the gospel as people of faith engaging in theological reflection and participate in planning.

Sprinkle begins by defining *ordination* by referencing the Faith and Order document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)*. His work integrates this definition with Free Church and Reformed traditions' histories and current contexts for ordination. Sprinkle invites these traditions to integrate the relationship between ordained ministry and the ministries of the whole people of God as they renew their own theological work regarding the rite of ordination (14).

As churches consider the nature of ordination, they encounter six particular tensions that they must engage theologically, states Sprinkle. Tension one, "Between the Many and the Few," describes the polarity of baptism as induction into ministry for all Christian believers and ordination as the imposition of hands and Holy Spirit to an appointment of particular ministries of representative service from the church to the world. Grappling with the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers as it encounters the call to ordained ministry remains a key focus for Free and Reformed denominations.

Tension two, "Functional and Sacramental Models of Ministry," emphasizes the need to return to a sacramental understanding of ordination while maintaining the functional focus. Ordination is a sacramental sign in three senses: it is God's initiative, it is the church's liturgical act in which prayers of the church are being granted, and it is a sign of the covenant where gifts of God are received by the ordinand

and the community in the bond of love (98). This sacramental understanding allows the function of ministry to continue to move beyond itself and point to God.

The third tension, "Office and Gift," considers ordination an event where ministerial character forms through empowerment of gifts and personal authority mixed with cultural understanding and congregational leadership. The way of being minister and the pattern of office connect in this tension and enrich each other in the action and reflection of ministry.

Sprinkle introduces the fourth tension as a polarity of "Ambassador and Servant." Ordination seeks to invoke a vocation of empowered service of Jesus Christ and an ambassadorship of transformative reconciliation to the world. Each of these roles works with the other to enrich ministry, while calling for an ongoing negotiation between two poles.

The fifth tension, "Ordination as an Installation Rite and Ordination as a Process," differs from the first four as it examines particular Free and Reformed ordination liturgies to determine their theological positions in the aforementioned polarities. As installation, ordination is the point at which the ordinand assumes leadership and takes up the obligations of a charge upon culmination of candidacy. As process, ordination is a sign where ministerial leadership, local congregations, judicatories combine with polity and doctrine form a communion.

These five tensions complement each other in an induction to a particular ministry, according to Sprinkle. Ordination is both event and process with its communal, liturgical, sacramental, and juridical elements intertwined.

Having established the tensions, which provide theological parameters for ordination and specialized ministry, Sprinkle turns to the development of an ordinand's character within surrounding community. He devotes a full chapter to the notion of vocation where God takes initiative through love and invites the recipient to respond in kind by living the life of gratitude, even in the midst of suffering or oppression. Shaping this vocation eucharistically, a way to come to the table of ministry with gratitude, changes life

from the ordinary to the extraordinary (128). Those who suffer, those who sacrifice and those who are marginalized when seeking ordination itself all have place at the table, the means of grace by which to pursue their callings.

The second half of the book progresses from theological reflection on the nature of ordination with its tensions and vocational challenges to practical guides for ordination planning. Sprinkle addresses the ordinand's personal and spiritual preparation as well as the congregation's spiritual development as the initial focus. He then outlines "to do" lists and budgetary considerations complete with sample budgets. Sprinkle's last chapter provides sermons for particular ordination rites, followed by an appendix of ordination liturgies from Free and Reformed traditions as examples.

Theological educators will find Sprinkle's book useful when discussing the theological significance of ordination. His grasp of tensions offers unique insight to the conversation about the meaning of a "set apart" vocation that engages all persons in ministry. Currently, little attention in seminaries revolves around the very issue that the majority of theological students grapple with as they pursue theological education. Sprinkle's book provides a definitive, practical theological guide for those concerned with ordination. Pedagogically, participants in a classroom may debate Sprinkle's presentation on polarities regarding the nature of ordination and its purpose. They may also compare and contrast their own denominational and personal understanding of the nature of ordination as it relates to the tensions Sprinkle discusses.

Sprinkle's insight also provides an avenue for individual discernment about vocation and call, while challenging judicatories to re-engage their theological conversation about ordination and authorization for particular ministries. His use of story and example throughout the book illustrates the varieties of definition while effectively drawing together threads held in common. Finally, Sprinkle raises his prophetic voice: he calls the church to renew its work by finding the extraordinary in the ordinariness of ordained ministry.

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