



OF THE OFFICERS OF THE CHURCH¹

I. By whom was the Christian Church collected?

“Our blessed Lord at first collected his Church out of different nations, and formed it into one body, by the mission of men endued with miraculous gifts, which have long since ceased.” [from Chapter III, *The Form of Government and Discipline, of the Presbyterian Church, in the United States of America*, 1788.]

Cf. PCA BCO 7-1. *Under the New Testament, our Lord at first collected His people out of different nations, and united them to the household of faith by the ministry of extraordinary officers who received extraordinary gifts of the Spirit and who were agents by whom God completed His revelation to his church. Such officers and gifts related to new revelation have no successors since God completed His revelation at the conclusion of the Apostolic Age.*

What were these officers called?

Apostles, and sometimes the Twelve or the Disciples. Their names are given in Matt. 10:2-4. After the death of Judas, Matthias was numbered with the Eleven (Acts 1:16-26), and Paul was called to be the Apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:1, 11-24; 2:7, 8).

What was an Apostle?

An Apostle was an immediate messenger of Christ, a witness of his doctrine and of his resurrection (Acts 1:21, 22; 1 Cor. 9:1).

What was the special work of the Apostles?

To testify of Christ, in his name and by his authority to declare the doctrine, worship and polity of the Christian Church, and to superintend its establishment and extension (Acts 1:8; 26:16; Gal. 1:12; 1 Cor. 5:3-5; 2 Cor. 10:8; 11:28)

Were they confined to this work?

No. They were also Ministers, Elders and Fellow-servants (Eph. 3:7; 1 Pet. 5:1; Rom. 15:25).

What were their peculiar gifts?

(1) Inspiration (John 14:26; 16:13); (2) miraculous powers (Matt. 10:8); (3) impartation of the Holy Ghost to others by the imposition of hands (Acts 8:17, 18).[* *What is Presbyterianism?* p. 53]

¹ Selections from: Chapter III, *What is Presbyterian Law As Defined By the Church Courts?* J. Aspinwall Hodge (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1882), pp. 41-45.

Have these ceased?

Yes. Miracles were intended to excite attention, to certify the messenger as having special divine authority, and to illustrate his teaching. Inspiration was to secure infallibility to the doctrine as spoken and written. When the Church was established, and furnished with the complete word of God for its only rule of faith and practice, the Apostles' work was finished and their peculiar gifts were no longer needed. The Church and the world has long recognized the fact that inspiration, miracles and the impartation of the Holy Ghost have ceased. The Roman Catholic Church still claims these gifts, but only in modified forms; as the infallibility of certain utterances of the Pope, occasional minor miracles, and a grace of orders by the imposition of hands. Even these are not credited by many in that Church. The Catholic Apostolic Church (generally known as the Irvingite) claims to possess a restoration of the apostolic office and gifts, but the claim is not admitted by others.

Are there any successors of the Apostles?

No. None can be immediate witnesses of Christ's resurrection and doctrine, none have their peculiar gifts, and none can do their special work. In fact, none other were appointed by Christ or recognized by the early Church. False apostles and antichrists were foretold and rebuked (2 Cor. 11:13; 2 Thes. 2:3, 4). The Roman Catholic Church and the Episcopal churches claim that besides the above work the Apostles labored as diocesan Bishops, having supreme authority over certain districts and over other Ministers; that they alone had power of ordination; that this office and work continue in the church; and that their Bishops are the successors of the Apostles. But the Apostles were not confined to districts; they did not ordain successors. The term "Bishop" was applied under them and in the early Church to Pastors. Ordination was performed by the Presbytery, and the parity of the ministry was constantly insisted upon. [*See the Acts of the Apostles.]

Were there any other extraordinary officers in the Christian Church?

Prophets, who "differed from the Apostles in that their inspiration was occasional, and therefore their authority as teachers subordinate." (1 Cor. 14:1-40). [*Hodge on Ephesians, p. 149.] Sometimes they foretold future events.

Why have these ceased?

The Church has the complete word of God.

Did Christ intend these to be temporary?

He made no provision for their continued work or recognition in the Church. After the apostolic age they ceased, and so have their qualifications, inspiration and miracles.

II. How many ordinary and perpetual officers are there?

"The ordinary and perpetual officers in the Church are Bishops or Pastors; the representatives of the people, usually styled Ruling Elders; and Deacons."

Were these designed to be perpetual?

Yes. Preaching, spiritual oversight and the care of the poor are their several functions, and correspond to permanent needs in the Church. Provision was made for the continuance of these officers by election and ordination. Qualifications were given, and directions for the performance of duties.

FOR FURTHER READING:

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