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# **MAN IN GOD'S WORLD**

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"The heavens, even the heavens are the Lord's; but he has given the earth to man" (Psalm 115:16). These words of the psalm writer put the focus on man at his place in God's world. They draw God, man, and the world together. To study man apart from his work in the world would be an empty enterprise; to view him without recognition of God who made the world and there gave man a place, would be ungodly. Take them together, see them in mutual relation, and you see *man* in God's *world*.

There is an old idea that expresses how God, man, and the world are related: the idea of man's office. This idea, unfortunately, has largely fallen into disrepute and disuse. One reason is that it was often used to defend a corrupt status quo in human society. Nevertheless it expresses what we want to say better than any other. This idea must be reclaimed. In order to reclaim it, however, we must first reform it. We need a new look at an old idea. Lest we scuttle the old idea because it is unpopular we should go to its rootage in the Scriptures. And lest we only rehash what was said long ago, only to discard it a second time, we shall relate its biblical meaning to life today. The eternal Word still speaks in ringing voice to today's man as he walks and works in God's world.

In explaining the biblical idea of office we shall first briefly cover the use of the terms and certain key passages in Scripture, and then draw together in broad scope the essential characteristics of the idea.

In Hebrew a steward (*asher al bayith*) is literally a man over the house. The word is sometimes translated *ruler* and sometimes *possessor*. The idea conveyed is clearly expressed in the speech of Pharaoh to Joseph. "Thou shalt be over my house and according to thy word shall all my people be ruled" (Genesis 41:40). Joseph was Pharaoh's administrator or overseer. Eliezer, the slave of Abraham, serves as another example of a steward. He was entrusted both with Abraham's family and with his property (Genesis 24:2). As the person in charge of family affairs he was sent on one occasion to find a wife for Abraham's son, Isaac. No small task for a steward, one will readily admit!

In the New Testament the word for steward means virtually the same. He may be one who has charge of a family and is called a tutor. Paul in his Galatian letter speaks of tutors (*epitropous*) and governors (*oikonomous*) (Galatians 4:2) who take charge of the minor son of the master until he comes of age. The steward may also have charge of his master's material goods. In the parable of the 'unjust steward' the servant (*oikonomos*, ie., one who rules the house) is summoned to give an account of his stewardship (*ton logon tees oikonomia*, Luke 16:2).

In the apostolic church the idea of a steward was applied to the office bearers of the congregation. It described in particular the ministry of the

word. The ministers of Christ were called stewards of the grace of God (I Corinthians 4:1). A bishop, Paul declared, must be blameless as the steward of God (Titus 1:7).

The idea of stewardship (literally housekeeping) is not limited to the ministry of the word and work of the apostles and bishops, but applies to a much broader group. It pertains to every man who has 'received the gift'. In an important passage Peter writes, "As every man has received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards (*oikonomoi*) of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God, if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth, that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be the praise and the dominion for ever and ever" (I Peter 4: 10, 11).

The Greek term itself indicates that office or stewardship has to do with managing or administration. In each context where the term is used above, the position of managing or administering, whether it be a family, a business or country, is delegated to man. The office bearer is therefore a representative of his superior. The letter of Peter shows that the exercise of office is not merely of a superior to those under him, but functions in the *ministry* of one member of the community to another.

In the broadest sense the idea of office refers to man's administration of the entire world which God has given him to manage. The creation account in Genesis clearly states that God placed man over the world to rule it in obedience to his Maker. That man as the vicegerent of God is the administrator of the world, was not the mere notion of the earliest and most primitive peoples; it was the heart-beat of faith of the Hebrew people of God who got the idea by divine revelation. The earth and its fulness, they said, is the Lord's for he made and established it (Psalm 24:1). But for all the world's greatness and the abundance of its 'fulness', God has not forgotten man. The inspired writer saw it all on a clear, star-lit night when he gazed at the heavens and exclaimed: "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas. O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!" (Psalm 8:3-9).

This passage is repeated in Hebrews 2. Only, there is no mere repetition of the words, for the letter to the Hebrews reinterprets man by relating him to his place at their time in history, i.e., at the point when Jesus, who had come into God's world, had gone to the cross and had been raised from the dead, had now ascended into heaven.

The meaning of the Hebrews passage becomes clearer when we compare it to the original word of God in Genesis and to the poetic exclamation of the inspired Hebrew poet. In Paradise God said: "Have dominion." This command was also a benediction. Law and blessing blended in God's first address to his creature. Here God put man in his place as a ruler under God and told him what to do to attain well-being and peace.

Psalm 8 expresses man's response to God's address. Here man, now in his position in the world, says: What is man! He is at one and the same time infinitely small (compared to the heavens) and incomparably great (because God gave him dominion). He rules over the world in which he is only a speck. The Hebrew poet recognized that the dignity and greatness of man are due solely to the fact that God gave him his place as ruler in the creation. Man's office is his glory! But it is a glory *under God* whose name is "excellent in all the earth" (vs. 1, 9).

The Hebrews passage states bluntly, "But now we see not yet all things put under him, but we see Jesus" (vs. 8, 9). A simple recognition of man's failure! He could not achieve his life's goal. Somehow he flubbed his work. The inspired writer does the only thing possible: he looks away from man to Jesus. Not to the angels, for God did not subject the coming world to them, but to the Captain of man's salvation who became perfect through suffering. The inescapable conclusion is that God has subjected the administration of the world to Christ through whom he created all orders of existence (1:2). Christ did not, like the first Adam, begin from a position of pristine harmony, but as a rejected one. He attained perfection through suffering and was crowned with glory and honour, not at the beginning of his way, but at the end. He is the office bearer *par excellence*.

In the New Testament the term *stewardship* is used to describe God's action as well as man's. In a sweeping statement that takes in "all in heaven and on earth," Paul speaks of the will and pleasure of God which he determined beforehand in Christ for the stewardship (putting into effect) of the fullness of time (Ephesians 1:10). That is, in the stewardship of God all things are to be brought into a unity in Christ. It should be observed that God's stewardship or administration of the world has not been delegated to him, for with him it is original. He, however, delegates it to Christ.

We are not concerned merely with a term or two, but rather with the idea that the words express. The idea of office, we may conclude from the few references given, refers to the way God uses man to administer the world. Man's office in the world is his stewardship of life, that is, the way he orders his life and all things given him to control. Although much more should be said about the passages we have referred to, what we have stated is sufficient to provide the setting for a further explication. This we may best do in point form.

1. *The office of man is his position-in-relationship. His position, as it relates to God, constitutes him a servant who is called to obedience. As it relates to fellow man it makes man a guardian, who must bring his charge to maturity. As it relates to the world it constitutes man a steward who must faithfully exercise dominion in the name of God.*

There are here three irreducible and central life relations: man's relation to God, to his fellows and to the world. All three figure in man's office. In all three man's position differs.

The most comprehensive designation we can give to man, as we consider him in relation to God, is that of servant. God intended that man's life in its entirety would be service of God. To that service God appointed him, for that service he gave him the gifts he needs and of that service God calls man to give account.

Man in office is always considered 'before the face of God'. This figure the Old Testament prophets often used to describe their place and task. The figure harks from the oriental court in which the king sat on his throne before which his servants stood, waiting to be sent on an errand at his bidding. To live before the face of God means to be ready to obey his command, in other words to live *coram Deo*. Here all men are equal, for all get their place from God and are responsible to him.

In his relation to fellow men, man the office bearer is a guardian and a member. He is put in charge of others. Here, in the place persons have in the community of mankind, there is no equality. There is rather a divinely established relation of higher and lower among men. Later we shall have opportunity to give examples how this obtains in the various life zones. Here we would only observe that the diversity of stations and tasks is a constituent part of human societal life and applies to every zone of human action. God has arranged men in a relation of higher and lower. Some rule, others are ruled. Some are guardians, others are wards. Some are responsible and accountable for others. They in turn are accountable to and dependent upon those placed over them.

In his relation to the world man is a steward to whom God entrusts the entire creation. He must use it, exercise lordship over it, and give to God a record of what he does with what he has received. Man's responsibility increases with the number and importance of his gifts.

Up to now we spoke only in general of man's office. It was necessary first to see man in a frame that is all comprehensive in its extent. Admittedly it lacks details. Some of them we shall now supply.

*2. Man's office is founded in the original creation ordinance by which God orders all created reality. God made the first man to be mankind's covenant head to have dominion. Sin did not annul but only corrupted the office bearer and vitiated his function by disrupting all three basic life relations.*

Because man's office is founded in the creation of mankind, it is universal. Here, then, we have the basis for equality among men: all are his creatures and are called by him to assume their place in his world which he created not a waste or a void but a structure of law and order.

All men are likewise taken into covenant with God. That is, to all of them he gives his command and his promise. With all of them he makes an arrangement of sovereign disposal over their lives by which he makes them all fully responsible to him. The differences among men are not that some of them are God's servants called to obedience and some are not, for all are called.

The covenant God made with man, like the office he gave him, binds man to fellow man and to the world, as well as to God himself. In Adam all men were represented. In his 'federal' act in the creation, (whether he would there fulfill his task in obedience or seek to usurp God's place and try to be like him [Genesis 3]) he changed the place and task of all mankind. By this act man estranged himself from God, who forthwith pursued man after he went in hiding and asked him: Why had he left his place? Why had he forsaken his office as servant ruler under God? The Divine Pursuer immediately found man and placed man under his displeasure.

That displeasure affected man's relation not only to God but also to man's fellows. Between the first parents of mankind already estrangement came. In their family the brotherhood of man was broken. The elder brother, who in the divine arrangement should have kept and cared for the younger, became his destroyer.

The dissatisfaction of the Lord extended even to the world over which he placed man. Because man disobeyed the Word of God, God cursed the earth. It was, as the Scripture puts it, 'for man's sake' (Genesis 3:17; 8:21).

The way God dealt with man after sin came illustrates how in man all things in the creation were intended to hold together. In man's office of servant-ruler God established the original unity of the creation. Mankind has only one head. God made of one blood all men to inhabit the earth (Acts 17:26). And God dealt with the creation *through man*. Thus in disrupting his relation to God, man also disrupted the two remaining relations as well.

The fall, which brought about a change in God's attitude to man, in man's attitude to his fellows and in his approach to the world, also brought about a change in the direction of man's life. Man had in effect made himself a servant of the serpent, for he had taken *his* word, rather than God's and had followed his directive of trying to be like God.

We should comment somewhat more extensively upon the effects of the fall because we shall not attain a true idea of man in God's world unless we see his likeness as well as his dissimilarity to God. This has special pertinence in an age when there seems to be no limit to the extent in which man can eventually rule the physical elements in the entire cosmos. He not only can do so very much but also knows so much, it seems almost anachronistic to speak of man's response to God, for secular man is sure he can do without the idea of God. Nevertheless, we shall not be able to understand even how man is able to rise to the heights he has reached nor how the idea of doing without God can enter his mind unless we see the original constitution of man and the subsequent estrangement of man from God in sin. We shall pursue this by considering man the image of God.

Essential in the image is its representation of the reality for which it stands. Thus the golden calf image which Aaron made while Moses talked with God in Mt. Horeb represented God. The Israelites were not so naive as to say that the image was Yahweh. To call man the image of God underscores that he is the office bearer of God, for both the image and the office bearer represent God.

Although the likeness of office and image is on the surface, and therefore obvious, this has by and large been overlooked in the consideration of man the image of God. A chief reason is that it is usually thought that the image refers primarily to the spirit of man, for God, so the reasoning goes, is spirit and if man is to be like him, he must be like God in spirit. And since man is both body and spirit, the body cannot be considered properly as participating in the image of God, and man is



accordingly called the '*image bearer*'. Man *is* man, and in addition bears God's image which, the term seems to imply, could possibly be laid down without man's losing his essential character. This view fails to see the heart of the idea: man's being consists in his imaging his Maker.

The customary view, whether this is Roman Catholic or Protestant, whether it be neoorthodox or evangelical, tends to down-grade the role of man's body in the idea of the image. The more's the pity, for it is precisely in the body where the imaging occurs. There the invisible God takes on visible form. At the same time, the image indicates in the strongest possible way that man, while he is like God, is also wholly dependent upon him, for a reflection is nothing in itself. As an aside it may be noted that unless and until man's body is seen in the light of Scripture we cannot see what place man has in the world.

For primitive man there was only one way in which he could see what he looked like: to look at his reflection in a pool of still water when the light permitted him to see the features of his face. We may presume that this is the only way in which the first parents could see themselves. This and one other: They could also see their likenesses in their children. Fact is Adam called his third son Seth, for he was the very image of himself. His features so much resembled his father's!

God, in explaining to man what his relation to his Creator would be, used the figure of an image in order to express both man's nearness and his distance from God. The distance is that man is only the image, which like the reflection, has no substance and lasts only so long as God keeps man in sight. If God but withdraws from man, man ceases to exist. It expresses nearness too because man is a son of God, he not only looks like God, but may also act for God and represent him in the creation. The whole creation should come to man in order then to go to God. And God in turn goes through man to get to the creation.

When we point out that the idea of the image leaves no room for the thought that man is a substance (which needs nothing outside of itself in order to exist) we do not want to construe man's likeness solely in terms of his acts. Nor would we limit man's likeness to God to his ability to think nor yet restrict it to remnants of an original perfection, a number of core qualities (knowledge, righteousness and holiness). Again, we would not say that only what man is constitutes the image. Man's acts and nature both constitute the image. His structure and his act are inseparably joined. The whole man is the image of God.

The image idea suggests how God looks at man. He turns to see what kind of creature he made, and sees in him a son who is a reflection of himself. Man, however, is not a photograph for God to look at. The

likeness is not static. No, when man *walks in the ways of God* (and this he does in his body) then God sees one who is like himself.

This means that as with the idea of office, so with this companion idea of the image: both involve the direction of man's life. Only when man responds to God in obedience does he image God. When he disobeys he is like that other 'father' the devil (John 8:44).

God wants us to look at man the same way He does. Therefore, we too should do those deeds in the body which show that we are like him.

In the light of these observations the question whether sinful man still is the image of God should be viewed. He does *to the extent* that he is still the representative of God and obeys his Word. But the determining direction in life of man without God is in opposition to the man who walks uprightly (Psalm 1).

Much more might be said about the image of God in those whom the Bible calls unbelievers. We should not digress at this point. It is necessary now to consider the place of Christ in the plan of God for man.

*3. Christ, the Suffering Servant of God, became the great Office-bearer, the Mediator between God and man. He was sent by the Father, received authority from him, and was qualified by the Spirit. He finished his work, administers the affairs of the church and will one day take account of man's work. When this administration is completed, he will return the Kingdom to the Father.*

God flatly forbade man to make an image of Himself. Apparently the fact that man himself was the image would have to suffice. That God made man his image shows clearly that he did not think it wrong for man to have something to see that would show him what God is like. It was only wrong for man to devise that image. Making images of God is work for God alone. He only may make the Invisible One visible. This he did through man and through Christ.

When man corrupted himself by sin and thereby turned away from his Maker, God did not leave it at that. As God had worked in the creation before the fall through one man, so now again he would work through one man, Jesus Christ.

Christ is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). He, moreover, has all the essential qualities of an office bearer.

We must see Christ's place in God's creation. As with man, so with him: he should be seen in the three central life relations. Only then can he be shown to be the one in whom the Father brings into unity all things in the universe, in heaven and on earth (Ephesians 1:10). He is the head of a new humanity, the Church. He is the King of creation. But he is also the Servant of God.

Again we notice that the office of Christ, like that of Adam, has an essential directional element: therefore, he was the Suffering Servant. He attained perfection through his suffering. He took over at the point where man flubbed. He was born into a humanity estranged and entered a world accursed. He came to a realm where another force, a kingdom of darkness ruled. In order to restore the creation and to rescue fallen man, he must wrest the kingdom from the Serpent, and make right the relationship of God to man, of man to fellow man and of man to the cosmos into which lawlessness has come. Therefore, he set his face as a flint to Jerusalem. Therefore, he despised shame and endured the cross. His eye was fixed on the Father and his coming glory (Philippians 2:9-11).

When we view the life and work of Christ in terms of office, we note that both his work and life remain un-understandable until we see them in terms of a specific task and position which God gave him and he in turn freely accepted. Therefore, the numerous references to him as the one who was sent. Therefore, the many passages that tell what he was sent to do. Therefore, just because he was given this unique and colossal task, he received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In the light of this official work we sense the necessity that in all things he must learn obedience in the things he suffered. For there can be no second failure. This is man's second and last chance! The word of Christ, near the end of his ministry on earth: "I have finished the work you gave me" (John 17:4) is therefore his way of giving account of his work to the Father (who as the Sender is greater than the one sent). When from the cross he declared "It is finished" (John 19:30) he meant that his work of suffering was done. He had satisfied all God's demands for the redemption of man. No longer would he be the *Suffering* Servant. From now on he would be the Servant in glory; yes, he would continue a Servant.

Christ's office did not end with the Ascension for he continues as the one commissioned of the Father. After ascending, he sent the Spirit, gathers his church, rules in the congregation and exercises authority in the world.

In Christ God had created all orders of existence (Hebrews 1:2). In him, not in the first Adam, all things now hold together (Colossians 1:17).

He received all authority (Matthew 28:18). Before him every knee shall bow (Philippians 2:10).

Christ put man back at his place in God's world when He was in the days of his flesh! His official work now as the Servant of Glory is to bring many sons to perfection. This he does because God has predestinated in Christ those whom he conforms to the image of his son (Romans 8:29).

This gives to the life of Christians today a new and open and gripping perspective. Once man was the perfect image of God. When he fell, that image, like an aged and weather-beaten mirror, was badly corrupted. But in Christ, we reflect again as in a mirror the glory of the Lord and are transformed from glory to glory (II Corinthians 3:18).

Christ the 'only begotten' son of God also restores man to sonship. He again brings man near to God. In so doing, however, Christ the Son takes God's place. He is the One with whom we have to do. Even as God held man in life, so Christ tells his disciples: "Without me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Total dependence upon Christ is the order of the day for Christians.

The man Christ, then, is the key figure in God's world. Because he came we can sing, "This is my Father's World." The thought of the song would have been enriched if it had stated that God entrusted his world into the hand of Christ, that he gave his world to the Son.

The world will remain Christ's until all things are brought under his feet. Then, when that work too is done, he will lay down his office, return the kingdom to the Father, and God will be all and in all (I Corinthians 15:28).

As the christian man today slugs out his existence in a hostile world, he recalls the promise that one day he will be like Christ, for "we shall see him as he is" (I John 3:2). In body too we shall be like Christ (Philippians 3:21).

With this as background we can now proceed to explain specific aspects of man's office in God's world. We had to deal first with Christ because he is the Great Office-bearer. All things are Christ's and he is God's. He the Great Vicegerent delegates authority to men and assigns them tasks. He who ascended gives gifts to men (Ephesians 4:8). He is King of kings (I Timothy 6:15). How he administers the world through the agency of men will now occupy our attention as we investigate what it means that man is under the law of Christ (I Corinthians 9:21).

4. *Man's right of office consists of his God-given authority to function as God's representative and is specified in his assignment to carry out the command of the King. This right, therefore, is delegated and limited.*

In whatever zone of life you may look, you see that man has authority. The structure of human society, whatever form that society may take, whether it be communistic or democratic, whether it be tribal or technological, whether it be 'religious' or secular, requires a system of authority among men. In no society are all men equal: some have authority and others are under it. Where does this authority come from?

The answers that are given evidence great difference in detail. Yet there is only one basic divergence: man's authority is either self derived or it comes from God. Either man is autonomous, setting his own law, perhaps in aristocratic fashion, perhaps in terms of a dictatorship and perhaps in a democratic way; or God rules. The idea of human autonomy is held, for instance, by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This document declares: "The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government." To this the Christian idea is opposed. Although the christian idea does not exclude the agency of people, in the authority of the government sphere (or elsewhere) it claims that there is no authority in last analysis, except as it comes from God. After the Ascension of Christ it comes from God through him.

When we ask, when did man first get this authority, we must return to the beginning when God told man to rule the world. When he gave man his life's assignment he gave together with the task authority to carry it out.

"There is no authority but of God" (Romans 13:1). These words of the Apostle express it succinctly. Man has authority but he is not the source of authority. Its origin is God in Christ who gives it to those who rule in his world.

It goes without saying—and yet nothing needs saying more than this—that those who exercise authority in the world, whether it be in this or that area of life (state, church or family, et cetera) should do so in the awareness that they have a commission that derives from God. When Pilate accosted Jesus with the claim that he had an authority over Jesus vested in his person, Jesus countered by saying: "You would have no authority over me except it were given you from above" (John 19:11).

This bears saying today because a prevailing view is that authority among men is strictly a horizontal affair. It derives from the people, and officers, therefore, are accountable only to them. The fatal fallacy in this

view is that it leaves the God-relation out of account. Worse: it would cast off the 'shackles' of God.

The attitude is not new. Centuries ago, the Psalm writer exclaimed, nations sought to cast away the yoke of God. They would no longer have his law. But the man of God detected the displeasure in God's response: "He that sits in the heaven will hold them in derision." What is more, he has delegated authority over the nations to his Anointed. With him the nations must make reconciliation or they will be destroyed (Psalm 2).

To the Anointed One, Jesus, God has given all authority. His power alone is unlimited. All other authority is restricted because it is delegated to a person who rules only for a while and then only for one specific zone of life. How each kind of authority is limited by other kinds will be explained in more detail under 7 below. Therefore, the nations must kiss the Son, lest they perish (Psalm 2:12).

*5. The exercise of office includes man's administration of the world and his service (ministration) of God according to man's qualification (gifts). For both his administration and his service he is responsible to God.*

The office bearer, we stated earlier, is always a man between. He is both under and over; he both serves and rules. He is both responsible *to* and accountable *for*.

The first aspect of this exercise is administration. It is the act of ruling in the name and in the stead of God.

The christian view of things will not permit any suggestion that God has withdrawn himself in any sense from world affairs, nor that he permits man to go his way as if he did not exist. To the contrary, although he rules through men, he does the ruling. Therefore, his representative is in the first place an administrator. He carries into effect the plan, i.e., the 'stewardship' of God.

What we mean is not what is often meant by a theocracy in which God rules directly or at least through kings and prophets whom he appoints by direct observable fiat. Theocracy is a thing of the past. Its alternative, however, is not the social contract, nor the democratic idea of government of the people, nor yet the rule of established royal families. The true alternative of a theocracy is the christian idea of office. This is both similar and dissimilar to the theocratic arrangement. The similarity is that there is a divine operation in the one as well (and as much) as in the other. God does not lessen his concern for mankind, nor does he loosen the reins of control. The likeness is that both would give due recognition

to God in the conducting of human affairs. The dissimilarity is that God who does in every age what he will in the armies of heaven and among the children of men, now in the day when he no longer picks out by a revelatory word who will be king works through his servants who in most nations are elected by people.

Distinction should therefore be made—if we apply this now to the area of the state—between a christian state and the christian idea of the state. The former would presumably be one in which there would be an establishment of the christian religion with its implications for statecraft. The latter would mean, as a bare minimum, that statecraft honor God's law for the state at every turn. This would mean, in so far as civil rights are concerned, that there would be no discrimination on the basis of religion and therefore no religious establishment.

The second aspect of the exercise of office is service. It is a service that always looks in two directions: to God and to those who are placed under man's administration.

The office bearer's service of God consists in his carrying out God's will in obedience to his law. Here service is simply obedience.

But there is also the service to the underlings. Service of those placed under authority does not consist in doing their will, for that turns topsy turvy the administration of their lives. It consists rather in such an administration that will be to their advantage, that will be motivated by concern and love, that, if they are minors, will bring them to maturity. It is service that will recognize their say in matters, that will carry out their mandate to the extent that it accords with the purpose of God. This service of those placed under will be done with the knowledge that they are not there for the sake of the officer; the officer is rather there for their sakes.

In the exercise of office a firm balance must be maintained between its administration and its service, for when an imbalance occurs here the whole exercise runs amuck. Thus, if the officer forgets that he himself is placed under authority and thinks he can direct himself, and thereby forgets the dimension of his work that has to do with God, to restrict it to the horizontal relationships of one human being to another, there then remains no sure guarantee against totalitarianism, except the fickle whims of the people. Again, if the officer forgets that he is given authority to *serve* the persons under him, there is no certainty that he will not force them to give him deference and to serve him. The next step becomes oppression. The annals of the history of nations are full of incidents to show that this is not an empty fear. But Jesus said, he that would be the greatest must be the servant of all.

Unfortunately, in the past, both in affairs of church and state, often only part of the exercise of office has been kept in mind. Those who had authority were not slack in pointing out that they occupied a particular station in life by reason of God's appointment. Rulers called in regularly the idea of the divine rights of kings and churches appealed to the fact that they had the duty to preserve their God-given station (of privilege!). To those who were the victims of the arrangement—and the victimization can neither be minimized, nor may it be exploited by those who would vest all authority in people—the appeal of persons in authority to their God-given office only looked like a means of self protection, of a defense of the status quo, and therefore as proof that a corrupt regime would have to go in order to bring in the new deal of a liberated humanity.

This is not the place to assess the merits and disadvantages of the modern ideas of liberty and equality. It is however the occasion to state that there is an unmistakable need to keep a true balance between both sides of one's official work. This exercise of office both administers the will of God and serves him and his creatures.

This delicate balance the Apostle Paul sensed when he summarized his own preaching ministry by saying, "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Christ's sake" (II Corinthians 4:5). He preached Christ exclusively. He seems at first glance to remove himself completely. He does not preach, does not praise, does not serve himself. In his message Christ has the preeminence. And then, which to a mind that does not see the significance of office, appears to be a contradiction to what he has just said, he says "and ourselves." This is also part of the proclamation! Yes, ourselves, *your* servants for the sake of Christ.

Only when this is crystal clear, namely that the work that is for Christ's sake is in the service of God's people, will we be able to reclaim the christian idea of office from disrepute into which it has fallen. This will mean a renewal of attitude and a reformation of thought. It will come only through a *self denial* that finds free expression in every zone of life.

Another reason for the discredit that has befallen the idea is that the position of the officer is often divorced from the qualifications of his person. This seems to be especially prevalent when office is hereditary. He who got it first likely obtained it because he was qualified but his successors were of smaller stature and perhaps not immune to graft and corruption.

Where authority is divorced from the ability that is needed to effectively administer a post, the administration limps and those who are under it become the victims of maladministration. In reaction, they seek



for a way in which the two may be brought together and so they search for an expert.

Only, by a strange turn, the authority of the expert is then thought to lie in his expertise, and once again the God-relation is eliminated. The reaction is quite understandable; it is another thing to justify it.

That which has often become separated in the course of human events, God intended to be joined in permanent bond: the exercise of office and the ability to perform the work well. For this reason the officer in Israel was anointed to show that the Spirit of God would give him all that he needed. And the officer on his part, when accepting the office, would, like Solomon, ask God for the gift of wisdom and insight to judge the people of God (I Kings 3:9).

Jesus' 'parable of the talents' likewise indicates that gifts and responsibility belong together. The lord, so the parable goes, gave to his servants according to the ability of each (Matt. 25:15). The amount required of each servant moreover is commensurate to what he received.

For good administration, ability and responsibility must unite in the same person. In a democratic society, therefore, much attention must be given to the qualifications of the candidate for office by the people who elect him. And elected officials must bear this in mind in appointments of lesser officials to civic office. When elections become popularity contests and appointments the payment of favors in return for assistance in getting elected, the administration is headed for a time of maladministration.

This points up that the most disqualifying trait in an officer is disobedience. Saul, king of Israel, had many qualities for leadership. But when he disobeyed, he was discharged.

The christian man will heed the words of the Apostle: "The gifts we possess differ as they are allotted to us by God's grace, and must be exercised accordingly: the gift of administration, in administration. A teacher should employ his gift in teaching, and one who has the gift of stirring speech should use it to stir his hearers" (Romans 12:8). He will note that in the qualifications for office he is not dealing with self-derived abilities but with 'gifts'. Even here the officer must live in the awareness that he exists before the face of God. Therefore, "whatever gift each of you may have received, use it in service to one another" (I Peter 4:10).

Due acknowledgement by every man that his talents are gifts will be a strong antidote against pride, the feeling of superiority, that has been the downfall of many men in office. He should ponder the question of Paul:

"What do you have that you did not receive?" (I Corinthians 4:7). It's God-consciousness that keeps a man humble.

6. *Every man has an office. Being a Christian and an office bearer are one and the same.*

The Protestant Reformation proclaimed the universal office of believers. The Reformers claimed that every man has equal right of access to God, should function as his own priest and perform his work as a sacred trust, a calling from God. The Reformation called christian man from reflection solely upon the soul and the hereafter to christian living in the world.

Here there is place for every man. No one is left out in the administration of mankind under the regime of Christ. Individually and as a group, Christians are incorporated in the 'body' of which Christ is the head. "We are members of one another" (Romans 12:5). In the stewardship of Christ no one is overlooked.

The very word *Christian* means that they who bear the name share in the anointing which Christ received. That is, they get both the appointment and qualifications. Through Christ God distributes the gifts of the Spirit to all the members without exception. "There are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit" (I Corinthians 12:4).

The people of God in the world therefore may not be divided into those who have an office and those who do not. Nor may a distinction be made between some who have a calling and others who don't.

It is difficult to be understood rightly here. The very terminology we generally use has been given a meaning in Western thought that allows for no such distinctions as the Scriptural idea of office requires. Even in church affairs it is difficult to make this understood. A common distinction is made in church between the clergy (who have a calling and training) and the laity who do not. In affairs outside the church a distinction is made between the elite and the hoi poloi, and between the experts and the masses.

The false distinction between those with office and those without is a source of much wrong thinking that has led to a division of human life into secular and sacred spheres. In the sacred vocations, so the thinking goes, a person follows the call of the Lord. In the secular place he must do without this special blessing.

The view of the Apostle is that even a slave has a 'calling' to be a slave (I Corinthians 7:21). The same applies with equal force to the

freeman. In other words, one's station in society, e.g., whether he be a slave or a freeman, is due to God's disposition of his life. What is more, and this is the point the Apostle makes, in his particular station at any particular juncture in history every man must carry out his Maker's will, and whether he is free or enslaved he must serve God.

Unfortunately many have used the idea of office to perpetuate suppressive social institutions such as slavery. It may therefore be apropos to remark that at no time did the Apostle condone the institution of slavery. He gave instructions to people who found themselves in a society where the institutions existed, telling them that they should acknowledge the hand of God in their lives and what their attitude under those circumstances toward others should be. In their own calling they should remain. Therefore, at the same time Paul said, "You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of man" (I Corinthians 7:23). These words, far from being a defense of the status quo, become a powerful dynamic to change the situation. This dynamic is indicated in the very word calling which shows how God relates himself to man as well as prescribes man's duty. The power of the dynamic is that the man who sees in the affairs of his life the directing will of God, so that without His will no creature can so much as move (*Heidelberg Catechism* Q. 28) enjoys the necessary sense of stability in which he can perform his life's work meaningfully. He sees that the change in institutions must come, not in revolt against them, but by reforming them according to the gospel of justice and love.

Fortunately the calling of man, therefore (which in its widest sense means to respond to Christ's words, "follow me") includes more than one's individual place within the existing structure of societal arrangements. It means also to reform the societal structures according to the law of God. This means, of course, the attempt to remove the institution of slavery and any degrading relationship that belies our freedom in Christ.

We may expect only impoverishment in continuing to divide people into those who have office and those who don't. In this also all are equal: all have an office, that is, a place and task. We should add that the placing of all men on an equality in this sense should be distinguished clearly from the idea of the mass man as well as the idea that every man, regardless of his race or religion, is equal by virtue of the divine-like power of human reason. This idea of equality that is so common today is a total secularizing of the idea of universal office.

In the community of christian believers, the servants of God are at one and the same time equal and unequal. In their representative head all share in the original life's assignment which God gave to man. In him they all fell. Moreover, all are restored in Christ to participate in the

administration of God. That they do it now as Christians means that they first have to be renewed and restored to sonship by Jesus Christ. In him alone do they get their office back.

In the administration of Christ, in which all Christians participate, there is a great variety of tasks, responsibilities and gifts. Here there is no equality at all.

In several New Testament passages, notably in I Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4 and Romans 12, the diversity of gifts and tasks is related in a most direct way to the unity of the people of God. The diversity including the variety in office does not in any sense detract from the unity but only enriches it. The unity that is here described is, as a matter of fact, not possible without the administration of office by each one in the position he is placed. This administration is for the building of the people of God to the glory of God. The diversity stresses the mutual dependence of the members on the others.

*7. There is a multiformity of office that coincides with the various life relationships (e.g., home, church, state, school). Man's office is basic to the development of the various life relations. The office of one life zone limits that of the others.*

In our advanced society there are several clearly distinguishable zones of life. Each zone bears its own peculiar character that prevents it from being absorbed into another zone. The state, for example, never becomes a church. It remains a state even though it may evidence a variety of forms. Whether it be a communistic or monarchical, a democracy or military government, it remains a state. Even though there would arise a christian state—an eventuality that is very unlikely in a secular age—it would thereby not become a church or an industry. That which makes the state a state is the unique state function: the maintenance of public justice and order. Only as the upholder of justice and order in human society does the state legitimately concern itself with the life of the citizens and all the other structures in society. Here, in this function, it wields an integrating force: it establishes regulations between the societal spheres.

In each societal zone there are distinct offices peculiar to that zone. Thus in the state the civil magistrate functions: in the school the teacher; in the church the pastor; in the home the father; and in industry the employer. In the area of labour there are stewards and foremen and in recreational organizations there are directors and leaders. But in each the office is peculiar to and limited to the sphere involved.

We do not at this point want to analyze this state of affairs in any detail. We are only interested now in asking the question: How did this state of affairs come about and what has the idea of office to do with it?

It must not be thought that these various areas of life were first formed in the course of history and that later the various area offices came into being. It is just the other way around: first the office came and then the life zone was formed. That this is the order, and not the reverse, will become clear when we understand that the basic idea of office is that God appoints man to perform a certain task communally. As man sought to perform this task, he developed the social machinery which now characterizes our highly organized multi-zoned life. This occurred through a historical process that covered thousands of years. Thus, from the task to maintain justice and order in public life the state has evolved. For the task of propagation and enriching human life by love, God instituted the family. In order to engage in worship and proclaim the message of salvation the church was formed. In order to transmit the culture of one generation to the next the school was instituted. In order to produce goods for human use industry and labour as distinct life zones came into being.

This does not imply that the various life zones are the creation of man. They do not of course come into existence without the agency of man, not even the family. But they are ordinances of God, not human inventions. Therefore, in order to understand how our highly complicated society came to be what it now is, it is necessary to trace it back to its origin. This means that we must consider it in its historical side.

History, however, is not self-interpreting nor does it explain how the zones originated. We have to see *behind* history. That is, we have to see how man got his societal tasks. This drives us back to the Word of God and the directive he gave for man's life.

In the christian view, man's life in its entirety is a response to the Word and will of God. Thus, as for the state, its origin lies in the Word of God that man must establish order and justice between man and man. By the very nature of human life man is forced to form the state. Unless man forms a state there is anarchy, a condition that renders communal life impossible. Likewise, God gave to parents the obligation to instruct their children in his law. This command is the basic constituent historical norm of the school. As men sought to do this assignment they formed the societal relation which we call the school.

Each societal structure has come about therefore through the two basic constituent parts of (1) God's Word and (2) man's communal response.

Even as there is a specific task which man is called to perform according to each life zone, so there is a specific law, a specific responsibility and a specific authority for each zone. If we take these all together we find a state of affairs which we can describe only as a 'sovereignty' in each zone of life. It is sovereignty which is first of all subordinate to the regime of Christ. In none of the zones is there room for a self-directing programme. In each one, man is under the law of Christ. It is, secondly, a sovereignty that is limited to its own sphere of operation. The state therefore should not presume to make regulations concerning how men should worship, except insofar as worship has an aspect of public justice. It would legitimately interfere, for example, if one group worshipped in such a way as to make it impossible for another to do so, but only insofar as the worship of one hinders the worship of the other. Worship as such is not the concern of the state. The church likewise does not have the task of transmitting the culture of the human race and therefore should not be engaged in general education. That is the task God gave to parents; and the school, therefore, should be formed by parents who jointly seek to train their children. In a modern diversified and highly developed society no parent can adequately train his children by himself. He may be thankful if he can help his child much at all in secondary education!

Because each life zone is limited by the law of God as well as by the exercise of authority in the other spheres, so long as men honour these coordinate structures of order which God has placed in the creation, there will be no totalitarian state, no dominating church and no industry or labour which will bend all of life to its will. The christian idea of office cuts off all totalitarianism, whatever its kind, at the roots.

The christian gospel, the christian faith, the christian idea of the coordination of life in all its complexities to make it all a harmony of indispensable parts, promise freedom from all total authorities in life. He who is under the law of Christ can acknowledge no other complete power.

*8. There is a specialization of office in each of the life zones. In the unfolding of history this specialization grows apace.*

It should be observed that no view of the place that man should occupy in life can ignore the historical situation in which he is. It is there, where he now stands, in a particular time in history that man must live in his life and perform his life's work. There he performs his office.

It should also be observed that man will not understand his place in today's world unless he understands how mankind got where he is. He won't know this, moreover, without a recognition of office. He knows that once people lived in tribal groups and that now after thousands of years

they spend their days in a highly specialized technological society. The tribe and modern society are connected by a line of historical development that may be called a process of differentiation.

This differentiation could be seen already in the formation of the life zones. The nuclear tasks that led to the formation of these zones existed already when societal life bundled together the administration of all life in the tribal head. He had in essence all the responsibilities for his tribe that modern society has for its members. There came a time, however, when he could no longer do all the tasks that he had and so another person was appointed to do some of them. Thus Moses (in his day the twelve tribes became a nation) appointed judges to assume part of his work, for he was overwhelmed by it all.

In this instance we find a differentiation that in time would lead to the delineation of the juridical life zone of the state from the zone of worship, the church. This is the differentiation that issues in the formation of the life spheres of which we spoke under 7.

There is another kind of differentiation also: one that occurs within the various spheres, not to form new zones but to diversify the work within the several zones. As an example of this kind of differentiation we may point to the appointment by the Apostles in Jerusalem, with the cooperation of the people of the church, of seven men who would minister to the people. The seven men would continue to work within the zone of the church. Later, but already in the days of the apostolic church, further distinctions were made between elders and deacons. There were even deaconesses, prophets, evangelists and teachers in the church. And each one seems to have been assigned his own kind of work. This differentiation amounted to a specialization of office within the church.

In every sphere this specialization process has advanced greatly. No man can administer more than a part of a single sphere. And no man can master the information of more than a small part of the world of knowledge. In every branch of science and in the exercise of each and every life zone we are forced to limit our scope to a very small part.

Again it should be stressed that the process of differentiation in society is not a self-directing process. There is no man or any group of men that has planned and is directing this. Every man in the specialized society is himself a specialist of one kind or other, or likely one who is unlettered and has no lead role. The hand that governs the process is not man's. God is carrying out his design of bringing the creation he made to its consummation, realizing his will in the doings of men. Working through the plans of men whether they acknowledge him or not.

Now that we have progressed this far in the discussion of office, it may be assumed that the benefit of the idea appears nowhere more strongly than in a specialized society such as ours. The idea of office itself, however, is not a new specialty, along with all the others. On the contrary it is a global view that takes in all the differentiations and specializations. It gives us a total frame, a ground plan for seeing man in the world.

Because God has set the course of history, to sum up all things in heaven and in earth in Christ (Ephesians 1:10), it makes no sense to talk about a return to the good days of the past. The law of historical unfolding has for its purpose the bringing of all things under the feet of Christ.

We may therefore rejoice at each new discovery, each new achievement, each new step in the developing of our human society into a way of living in which the possibilities of life become greater and richer. To this unfolding process the Christian may give himself freely. He need not fear the discoveries that are being made, for he knows that all things are still in his Father's hand and that without his will no creature can so much as move. He not only may give himself to this, he must; for it is part and parcel of his total life assignment to rule the world in the name of Christ. He knows that the Kingdom is coming. Christ will yet put all enemies under his feet.

Many men who have had a strong sense of office have been influential in shaping christianly the course of history. They have, that is, if they saw that in the faithful administration of the position they occupied they could be used of Christ, as his co-workers, to shape the course of human events, to direct man's culture, to pass on worthy ideals.

The christian idea of office has every bit as much relevance and power today. Perhaps even more than in the past, just because it has the answer to some of mankind's most vexing ills. It not only prevents all forms of totalitarianism from rearing their heads, but it offers the antidote against the listlessness of a view of life that sees no higher than the world, the present age, the 'now' generation.

The christian view has the true alternative to the impersonalism of the mass society of today. In the view we have presented, every man occupies a significant place in the Grand Plan. If he falls, the whole body hurts. The significance of each individual person is so intense that no person can say of any other, even if the other person may appear to have the most menial and base of tasks: "We can do without you." There is room for all and there is need of all.



The christian idea of office, because it is founded upon Christ, offers to man the only ground of hope there is in a world without Christ and therefore without hope (Ephesians 2:12). The hope is based upon the successful completion of Christ's work when he was in the days of his flesh. Because he finished that work, the Christian today may enjoy sabbath rest. It is based also upon the successful administration of Christ today of the affairs of the church and the world. He is, Paul says, head over all things to the church (Ephesians 1:22). Nothing is outside his regime.

Hope, of course, always looks to the future. Christ, the Suffering Servant of the past and the present Servant in Glory, is the sure ground for the coming reality which the promise of the gospel gives to man who lives and works in God's world. The Servant is the coming Judge. He will also soon finish the work he now performs. He will at the end give a final account to the Father (I Corinthians 15:28). Because He provided the basis for the functioning of our office in the world, the meek shall inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5).