

open ministry

extract of Proposition X § xxvi xxvii

§ xxvi. In response to the objection that I seem to make no distinction between the minister and the people, I answer: If we are talking about liberty to speak or prophesy by the Spirit, I say that everyone may do that when they are moved to do so, as has been shown before. But we do believe and affirm that some people are more particularly called to the work of the ministry, and therefore they are fitted and equipped\* by the Lord for that purpose. Their function is to continually instruct, exhort, admonish, oversee, and watch over their brothers and sisters. Since they have more responsibility in that respect than every ordinary believer, the flock owes to them in that relationship the obedience and submission which is mentioned in these testimonies in the Scripture: Hebrews 13:17; I Thessalonians 5:12-13; I Timothy 5:17; I Peter 5:5.

In addition to these people who are particularly called to the ministry and to constant work in the Word and in doctrine, there are also the elders, who may not be moved to frequent testimony by declaration in words, but who are mature in the experience of the blessed work of truth in their hearts. They watch over and privately admonish the young, care for the widows, the poor, and the fatherless, and make sure that nothing is left out so that peace, love, unity, harmony, and good sense\* may be preserved in the Church of Christ. This corresponds to the deacons mentioned in Acts 6.

What we oppose is the distinction between laity and clergy, which is not found in Scripture. This distinction requires that no one be admitted to the work of the ministry

except those who are educated at schools for the purpose and have studied logic and philosophy, etc. They must do their apprenticeship to learn the art and trade of preaching, just as a man learns any other trade. By this means all other honest workmen who have not learned this heathenish trade are excluded from this privilege. He that is raised to be a scholar must not have any honest trade by which to earn his livelihood if he wants to become a minister. Instead he must find a way to get himself appointed to a position, by which he then has his fixed wage for his livelihood. He must also be distinguished from other people by the color of his clothes, and must only wear black, and he must be a Master of Arts. I will say more about this later.

§ xxvii. This way of separating men for the ministry is very different from the church in the days of the apostles, and it has caused great evils. Parents who see the honor and profit that comes with being clergy sometimes assign their children to it from their infancy and raise them for that purpose. Others enter the same trade in adulthood for the same reasons. When they have these natural and acquired skills which are considered necessary qualifications, they are admitted to the ministry. In this way they become accustomed to idleness and pleasure, and think it would be a disgrace for them to work with their hands. They only have to get a little from their books to make a sermon about an hour long once or twice a week. There is complete neglect of the Gift, Grace and Spirit of God which calls a person to the ministry and gives the gift and the qualifications.

Many greedy, corrupt, worldly, and fleshly men intrude themselves, men who have only the outward appearance but are strangers to and utterly ignorant of the inward work of grace in their hearts. Through them death, barrenness, dryness\* and darkness have come in, and as a consequence

superstition, error and idolatry have corrupted the church. Those who examine the matter closely will find that this was how the apostasy happened; I could give many examples of this truth but I omit them for brevity's sake. In this way the office, and the reverence and respect due to it, were attached to the mere title, so that once a man was ordained a bishop or a priest he was heard and believed, although he had nothing of the Spirit, Power and Life that the true apostles and ministers were in. In a short time the succession came to be based on the name and title, and the office was based on that and not on the nature, power, and life. In effect this made them cease being ministers of Christ, but only a shadow and vain image of the ministry.

Source: Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, Proposition X § xxvi, xxvii (Glenside PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 2002) pp. 273-275; and Roberti Barclaii, *Teologiae verè Christianae apologia*, facsimile (Amsterdam: Jacob Claus, 1676) pp. 207-208.