

Church Polity

Systematic Theology III

Importance

Does polity matter?

No & Yes

- In what ways does it *not* matter?
- In what ways does it *really* matter?
 - How things get done at your church
 - Accessibility to and view of leadership
 - The power or peril of a church's independence/dependence
 - Career/calling path (schools, network, etc.)

Basis for Organization

Why organize at all?

- Order is spiritual.
- Order is connected to human calling
- Order is connected to care.
- Order is connected to edification.
- Order is connected to unity.
- Order is connected to justice and mercy.
- Order is connected to giftings.
- Order is connected to synergy.
- Conclusion: The church organizes itself to fulfill its calling (to love, worship, missions, teaching, etc.).

Church Polity Principles

Polity should be
characterized by...

- Spirituality.
- Plurality.
- Parity.
- Diversity.
- Stewardship.
- Leadership.
- Servanthood.
- (Submission).
- Others?

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Category Caveats

- Categories are soft.
- Many varieties within each category.
- Great disparity between “on paper” and “in reality.”

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Episcopalean

- Definition: “Episcopalianism (or “prelacy”) is the rule of the church by monarchical bishops. That is, one man may govern those under him (whether members or other elders), and he need not be chosen by the people to be their leader, but can be appointed by a higher agency. Authority thus rests in the one human priest at the top (a pope or archbishop), is then communicated to his subordinates, and extends from there over all of the congregations.” -Bahnsen
- Examples.
- Evaluation?

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Presbyterian

- Definition: “Presbyterianism is the rule of the church by multiple, elected elders—not the dictates of one man, nor those of the whole congregation. These elders must be chosen by the people from among themselves (men to whom they are willing to vow submission), but also examined and confirmed by the present governing board of elders in the congregation or regional body of elders (the presbytery).” -Bahnsen
- Examples.
- Evaluation?

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Congregational

- Definition: “Congregationalism (or better: “independency”) is the rule of the church by every member and the independence of every congregation from all others. Authority now rests with the many at the bottom. Technically speaking, for any given decision which the church may make, every member within the congregation has the same authority as every other; ruling boards are simply an administrative convenience (whose decisions can be overthrown by the congregation as a whole). Moreover, no individual congregation is subject to external jurisdiction; associations of churches are voluntary and have no independent power over the internal affairs of their member churches.” -Bahnsen
- Examples.
- Evaluation?

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Immanuel Church

General Governance:

- “The Church is to be recognized as a Jesus-ruled, elder-led, deacon-supported, and congregationally-accountable church in accordance with the principles laid down in the New Testament.” (6.1)

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Immanuel Church

- Governing bodies:
 - Council of Elders
 - Church in Conference (a.k.a., “Family Meeting”)
 - Diaconate.

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Immanuel Church

Church in Conference:

- Responsibilities: “The congregation is responsible for ensuring the Church remains faithful to its mission as given by Jesus Christ and to its doctrines as laid out in Scripture.” (6.3.3)
- Voting: “The Church, duly assembled at a Church in Conference, shall be responsible to vote on: 1.) the election and removal of officers, 2.) the reception of new Church members, 3.) the termination of membership, 4.) the editing or amendment of the Statement of Faith, Church Commitments, or Bylaws, 5.) the exercise of Church discipline, 6.) the annual budget of the Church, 7.) any transactions regarding real property, 8.) the expenditure of any funds which are not covered by an approved budget, and 9.) other actions deemed major and extraordinary by the Council of Elders...” (6.3.5)

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Immanuel Church

- Evaluation?
 - What are we?
 - Why/how does membership matter at Immanuel?
 - Why/how do family meetings matter at Immanuel?

Polities

Convoluting Factors

- NT is wisely sparse on polity.
- Extra structure is needed.
- Interchurch help is needed.
- Being human determines some of what we do.

Church Polity

Systematic Theology III