

ABSTRACT

CHURCH POLITY AND CHURCH ORDER
IN THE LIGHT OF
GOD'S RIGHT AND ORDER
FOR HIS CHURCH

thesis submitted to the Faculty of Theology of the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education for the degree Theologiae Doctor by Cornelis Johannes Smit

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The aim of this study was to determine the nature and the meaning of church polity and church order in the light of God's right and order in his church.

A study on the basis of *ecumenical principle* was first undertaken to determine the postulator and the minister of the right (law) and the order of the church. On the basis of the Scriptures it is clear that God is the only Postulator and Minister of the right (law) and the order for the church.

On the basis of this finding the following issues were studied exegetically on the basis of topicality and principle: what is the meaning of the concepts *God's church*, *God's right for his church* and *God's order for his church*? By way of the relevant concepts in Hebrew and in Greek, respectively from the Old and the New Testaments, the lexicological meanings of the concepts were first determined. Following that the contextual meaning aspects of the concepts were researched in both the Old and the New Testaments.

From this study a conclusion was reached with regard to God's right for his church: *God's right is that which, in accordance with his will, is good in his sight. His justice is the realization of his right in his dealings with and for man.* With regard to God's order for his church, the following finding was made: *On the one hand it is the order which He gave with a view to a specific way of life and by means of which redeemed mankind had to live in obedience to Him. On the other hand the church emerges as the redeemed community through the acceptance of the prescribed way of life*

and in this way is the embodiment of the new order, or the verus ordo.

In the light of the findings the nature and the meaning of *church polity* and *church order* are explicated in the section *Topical-Functional* along a personal view. According to this church polity is not God's right for his church. Church polity derived from Scripture, however, cannot be separated completely from God's right for his church, because it entails the *research, the explication and the making relevant of God's right and order for church government.*

Church polity is therefore very explicitly not a merely human activity. It is very definitely not positivism. Church polity is a 'ministering' science. It does not have the power to positivize laws, as is the case with state laws, but it 'ministers' the principles which God in his Word gave to church government, by researching these principles, explicating them and systematically rendering them.

Church order by the same token is not God's order for his church. The church order is, as fruit of the practice of church polity, in essence the systematized explication and rendition of God's order for his church. The church order is not positivized church polity. For that reason the church order also has no independent authority. In fact, church order only wants to be the principle-bearing pointer to God's Word. In the practice of church polity the stress is never on transgressions of church order, as in the case of a legal statute, but on transgressions of the Word of God.

The church order has to be handled with *wisdom* and *fairness* in order to answer to the highest demand, viz., the making secure of the *dissemination of the Word* in the church of the Lord. By making secure (protecting) the dissemination of the Word, *grace* and *faith* are also made secure. In this way church order is the protector of the three *solae* of the reformation.

The relationship between church polity and church order is of the greatest importance for church government. Should church polity be deduced from church order, church order is thereby rendered as a church law. Fundamentally the compiler of the church order, viz. the meeting of the church, is then the postulator and the minister of the 'law' and order of the church.

In this way church government is relinquished to human positivism.

The true relationship between church polity and church order lies in the fact that the church order is the fruit of church polity. The church order is a rendition of the scriptural principles of church government and is therefore founded on Scripture. The correct relationship between church polity and church order is essential for the government of the church in its effort to make secure, to protect Christ's sovereignty in his church.

Church polity and church order in the light of God's right and order for his church lead to a church government in which Christ's voice sounds over his flock and in which the church of Christ is edified to *his* greater glory.