

A
DICTIONARY
OF
RELIGION AND ETHICS

EDITED BY

SHAILER MATHEWS, D.D., LL.D.

*Professor of Historical and Comparative Theology, and Dean
of the Divinity School, University of Chicago*

AND

GERALD BIRNEY SMITH, D.D.

*Professor of Christian Theology,
University of Chicago*

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among the early Fathers, notably in Justin Martyr and Origen. It is possibly intended in John 9:2, and seems to have been held by the Essenes. In Greece it played a conspicuous part in the speculations of Pythagoras, Plato and their followers. See TRANSMIGRATION. W. E. CLARK

PREFECT.—A frequent designation in the R.C. church for ecclesiastical dignitaries with supervision of some church enterprise or some specific field of activities.

PRELATE.—In mediaeval times, a person in high authority whether secular or ecclesiastical. In modern times, a R.C. dignitary with episcopal or quasi-episcopal jurisdiction who is distinguished by a violet robe. There are four classes: great exempt (heads of monastic order themselves), exempt (from ordinary jurisdiction), active Roman, and honorary Roman.

PREMILLENNARIANISM.—The belief that the personal visible return of Christ will precede his reign for a thousand years on earth. See MILLENNARIANISM.

PREMONSTRATENCIAN CANONS.—A R.C. order of regular canons founded by St. Norbert (ca. 1080–1134) in the diocese of Laon, organized on the Cistercian plan and following the rule of Augustine. Also called Norbertines and white Canons.

PREPARATION, DAY OF.—In Judaism, the day preceding a holy day as the Sabbath or Passover; in some Christian churches the day preceding the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

PRESBYTER.—Literally, an "older" person, used as a substantive, in heathen and Jewish circles alike, of both a municipal and a religious functionary, and in the New Testament, of a member of the board of officials by which each settled Christian congregation was governed, an "elder." An officer in the Christian church, holding, in non-prelatical churches, the highest place, in prelatical churches the second highest, above a deacon and below a bishop. See ORDER, HOLY.

As reflected in the N.T. each primitive local church (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5) was governed by a board of officials called indifferently "presbyters" or "bishops" (Acts 20:17, 28; I Pet. 5:1, 2; I Tim. 3:1–7; 5:17–19; Tit. 1:5–7); the former designation was the name of dignity, the latter of function. All shared in the oversight of the church, and some of them labored also in word and doctrine (I Tim. 5:1). The differentiation thus already begun issued later (seen complete e.g., in Ignatius, early 2nd. century) in one of the presbyters drawing to himself the higher functions of the board, together with the distinctive title of bishop; leaving to the presbyters, now their distinctive name, a lowered rank and diminished function. By a still further development (late 2nd. century) the presbyter regained some of his lost dignity and function by becoming the head, ordinarily the single head, of the local church. Meanwhile, he had also become a "priest" (etymologically only a shortened form of "presbyter" but actually absorbing into itself the sense of *sacerdos*). In this final development, the presbyterate is defined as the highest of the seven orders, that is to say, the office and dignity of those clerics who possess the priesthood (*sacerdotium*) in the literal sense. In this definition, it is observable, the presbyterate still embraces both bishops and presbyters.

In non-prelatical churches, presbyter, when used instead of the more common "elder," continues to bear its New Testament sense of the highest permanent official in the local church.

BENJAMIN B. WARFIELD

PRESBYTERIANISM.—One of the three principal systems of ecclesiastical polity, occupying an intermediate position between episcopacy and congregationalism, or independency. With the one it shares the unifying principle that the entire church is a single entity and should function as a whole; with the other the democratic principle that what should function in the church as a whole is the entire membership of the churches. Its characteristic feature whence it derives its name, is that in it the government of the church is exercised exclusively by "presbyters" or "elders." These officers of the local churches, combined in conciliar courts, administer the affairs of the whole body of churches thus compacted into one.

I. PRESBYTERIAN POLITY.—1. *The New Testament basis.*—Presbyterians look upon their polity as imposed by the Apostles, the agents of Christ in establishing his Church in the world, on the churches which they founded, as part of their equipment as the pillar and ground of the truth. Its chief feature was the installation in each church of a college of "elders" or "bishops"—the equivalence of the titles is clear—to whom were committed its teaching and government; by the side of whom, however, a similar college of "deacons" was placed, whose duty it was "to serve tables." Following this pattern, the local Presbyterian church is organized with a plurality of "presbyters," or "elders" elected by the congregation to rule, and a plurality of "deacons," similarly elected by the congregation to serve.

2. *The pastor of the local church.*—In the Presbyterian polity, the pastor is one of the elders, who while he does not differ from the others in office, differs greatly from them in function. To him is committed the ministration of the Word and the Sacraments; he presides by right over all the meetings of the "Session," as the college of elders is called; and he is by right one of the two representatives of the session in the higher court, or Presbytery. He differs from his fellow elders also in not being a member of the local congregation which he serves, or responsible to it for his efficiency in his service or amenable to its discipline. He is not responsible even to the session of which he is a member and whose presiding officer he is, for either his personal or official department. His membership is in the higher body, the Presbytery; and to it he is directly responsible. He comes into the local congregation from without; by its free "call," that is to say by election of the congregation; but not without the explicit consent of the Presbytery to which he belongs; and by formal installation by it alone can he enter upon the pastorship of the church which calls him. Here we see an aristocratic element entering into the Presbyterian system and modifying its democracy.

3. *The higher courts.*—In the higher courts the local churches are united into one general body. In the Presbyterian system, delegates from the local churches within a prescribed area—these delegates consisting of the "teaching elder" of each church as a matter of right, and one "ruling elder" selected from their own number by each session—unite to form a "Presbytery" which has jurisdiction over all the churches within its area. Delegates similarly selected from a larger area, including several Presbyteries—the number of "teaching elders" and "ruling elders" being kept always as nearly as possible equal—a "Synod," having jurisdiction