

Render to God What Belongs to God:

**A Study on How *the Second Book of Discipline* Shaped Kirk's Office from the
Perspective of Church-State Relationship**

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Some churches do not know how to handle the relationship between Church and government, leading to divisions within the Church and sycophancy toward the civil government. Thus, this paper will analyze *the Second Book of Discipline* to demonstrate that the Church should practice this doctrine, which is that the church offices are spiritual governments and the only head and king of the Church is Christ, so the church offices should practice the power of the key, not the power of the sword to maintain the purity of the Church and her faithfulness to Christ. The paper will first present the background of *the Second Book of Discipline*. It will then describe how the Book of Discipline shaped the four offices of the Church and compare the Church of Geneva, where the civil government was in the Church government. It ends with a summary and its significance for the Church today.

Background

First, the emergence of *the Second Book of Discipline* resulted from a long discussion and the Church's ongoing struggle for independent jurisdiction. "As the young James VI grew to a precocious political maturity, he became more than ever convinced that 'godly bishops', appointed by and answerable to the crown, were essential to control the unruliness inherent in the Presbyterian system."¹ However, in Scotland, where the church courts had come into being without authority from the crown, there already existed a tradition of ecclesiastical independence. In 1567, the Church's jurisdiction in preaching the Word, administering the

¹ Euan Cameron, "John Knox and Andrew Melville," in *The History of Scottish Theology: Celtic Origins to Reformed Orthodoxy, Vol. 1*, ed. David Fergusson and Mark Elliott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 136.

sacraments, and correcting manners had been recognized in parliament's approval. However, an agreement acceptable to the Church and government alike was not readily achieved. Further discussions during 1573 and 1574 convinced Morton of the necessity to formulate the policies of a reformed Kirk. In 1576, the general assembly set about the task of producing an independent report of its own on the Church's constitution, which finished in 1578 and is known as *the Second Book of Discipline*.² “The Book itself was largely the product of ecclesiastical dissatisfaction with the Leith agreement, for which it now offered a remedy; and it was essentially a succinct restatement of earlier ideals and priorities espoused by the reformers.”³

Second, regarding authorship, *the Second Book of Discipline* cannot be attributed solely to Andrew Melville. “The Book was not even the product of six individuals, as was the first Book of Discipline...for it emerges that over thirty ministers, under the assembly's general guidance, were active in formulating and revising the contents of the work.”⁴ It was a complex task that required collaboration. “The procedure which the assembly adopted to ensure that the draft Book of Discipline was fully understood and thoroughly debated was for every section, each prepared by a separate individual, to be read aloud before the whole assembly and be

² James Kirk, *The Second Book of Discipline: With Introduction and Commentary* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1980), 42-45.

³ James Kirk, *Patterns of Reform: Continuity and Change in the Reformation Kirk* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 361.

⁴ Kirk, *The Second Book of Discipline: With Introduction and Commentary*, 45-46.

approved or remitted at the assembly's discretion.”⁵ In short, *the Second Book of Disciplined* is the result of the combined efforts of the ministers.

Last, *the Second Book of Disciplined* was developed on the basis of *the First Book of Discipline*. James Kirk said:

From a survey of the evidence, it is demonstrable that the theory of the two kingdoms, the rejection of royal supremacy over the church, the insistence on the general assembly's continued existence irrespective of the sovereign's religion, the disinclination to adopt the model of the English church, even the acceptance of parity among ministers, implicit at national level in the institution of the moderator's office and explicit in Adamson's identification of the parish minister alone as the truly godly bishop, were all principles which had been affirmed by leaders of the Knoxian church and therefore cannot be said to have been introduced by either Andrew Melville or the second Book of Discipline.⁶

Indeed, the very considerable participation of the first generation of reformers in *the Second Book of Disciplined*. It can be said to represent rather the logical extension of earlier ideals.⁷

The Doctrine of Church Government

Different from the *Genevan Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, which begin directly with a declaration of the offices of the Church, *the Second Book of Discipline* begins with a beautiful picture of the Christian commonwealth with the Redeemer at its head--a commonwealth in two inseparable, yet distinct, parts. The ideal is a theocracy--*Imperium cum Imperio*; two independent

⁵ Ibid, 48.

⁶ Ibid, 51-52.

⁷ Ibid, 51.

co-ordinated governments, both of God, having one 'authority, ground, and final cause' for the purpose of advancing God's glory.⁸

First, the Church has the power to use a proper government. *The Second Book of Discipline* traces the source of the Church's power first. "This power ecclesiastical is an authority granted by God the Father, through the Mediator Jesus Christ, unto his kirk gathered, and having the ground in the word of God; to be put in execution by them unto whom the spiritual government of the kirk by lawful calling is committed."⁹ The power of the Church comes from God, and out of it flows Church policy. Therefore, the power of the Church must not be violated.

Second, the Church is a spiritual government. *The Second Book of Discipline* states that the power and policies of the Church are essentially different from the civil government's power and policies, even though their power both derive from God and aim to glorify God and have good godly subjects. This ecclesiastical power flows immediately from God and the Mediator, Jesus Christ. It is spiritual, not having a temporal head on earth, but only Christ, the only spiritual King and Governor of his kirk.¹⁰ The Church has only one spiritual head and king, Jesus Christ. Thus, anyone else claiming to be the Church's head is the Antichrist.

Lastly, the Church governs conscience and religion. *The Second Book of Discipline* distinguishes between Church and civil government concerning domain and function.

⁸ James King Hewison, *The Covenanters, Vol. 1: A History of the Church in Scotland From the Reformation to the Revolution* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2019), 85.

⁹ *The First and Second Books of Discipline* (Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1993), 121-122.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 123.

The civil government holds the power of the sword that the magistrate commands external things for external peace and quietness among the subjects. The civil magistrate craves and gets obedience by the sword and other external means; the Church holds the power of the key that the spiritual ruler judges both inward affections and external actions, in respect of conscience, by the word of God.¹¹ Therefore, the Church should rule in conscience by the spiritual sword, not by the sword of civil government.

Specifically, on the one hand, the magistrate ought to assist, maintain, and fortify Kirk's jurisdiction, command the ministers to observe the rule commanded in the word and punish the transgressors by civil means. They must refrain from preaching, ministering the sacraments, executing the censures of the Kirk, nor yet prescribing any rule on how it should be done. The magistrates ought to submit themselves to the discipline of the Kirk if they transgress in matters of conscience and religion; on the other hand, the ministers should assist their princes in all things agreeable to the word, provided they neglect not their charge by involving themselves in civil affairs. They exercise not civil jurisdiction but teach the magistrate how it should be exercised according to the word. The ministers are subject to the judgment and punishment of the magistrate in external things if they offend.¹² In short, the Church and the civil government should not touch each other's areas of dominion but govern properly within their areas of dominion. "The Second Book of Discipline made a clear distinction between Church and state.

¹¹ Ibid, 124-125.

¹² Ibid, 125.

Each had its own God-given sphere of authority: they were distinct but should cooperate.”¹³

These principles give the foundation for the offices of the Kirk.

The Offices of Kirk

First, the offices of the Kirk are certain. The Church as a spiritual government needs rulers appointed and obeyed according to the word of God and the inspiration of his Spirit, always under one Head and Chief Governor, Jesus Christ.¹⁴ *The Second Book of Discipline* connects church policy and church offices consistently. “Again, the whole policy of the Kirk consists in three things: viz., in doctrine, discipline, and distribution...And according to the parts of this division arises a threefold sort of office-bearers in the Kirk: to wit, of ministers or preachers, elders or governors, and deacons or distributors.”¹⁵ The Discipline defines the four ordinary offices of the Church: the office of the pastor, minister or bishop; the doctor; the presbyter or elder; and the deacon. About the extraordinary functions: the office of the apostle, of the evangelist, and of the prophet, which is not perpetual, and now had ceased in the Kirk of God, except when he pleased extraordinarily for a time to stir some of them up again.¹⁶ In short, the offices of the Church have been determined, and any other ambitiously invented titles should be rejected.

¹³ Nick Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power: The Age of Religious Conflict, Vol. 4* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016), 363.

¹⁴ *The First and Second Books of Discipline*, 126.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid, 127.

Therefore, *the Second Book of Discipline* argues that godly magistrates should do their part to remove the abuses in Kirk. As to bishops, their name is not to savour of rank, least of all of idleness, but of a special function in an equal ministry, so that it is as much a question of nomenclature and not of eminence.¹⁷ Thus, they either agree to that order or are deposed from all functions in the Kirk. For no man ought to have the office of visitation, but he that is lawfully chosen thereunto by the presbytery. The papistical titles of benefices should be revoked. Other titles, flowing from the Pope and canon law, have no place in the reformed Kirk.¹⁸ In other words, the Discipline required a purification in the office of the church.

Second, the election and ordination of church offices only belong to the Kirk. In Calvin's Geneva, the election of a pastor required the approval of the Council.¹⁹ The Church of Geneva did not elect its elders; the Council elected them, and they were essentially magistrates, and so were the deacons. Regarding the ordination, the pastor must take an oath before Seignury that they should be loyal to the government under the precondition that they had expressed their loyalty to God.²⁰ In short, in Geneva, the Council was indispensable in the offices of election and ordination, and the congregation was placed last. Contrary to that, the eldership and the congregation were indispensable in Kirk's elections and ordination. *The Second Book of Discipline* argues that calling is common to all that should bear office within the Kirk, in which

¹⁷ James Barr, *The Scottish Covenanters* (Glasgow: John Smith & Son, 1946), 13.

¹⁸ *The First and Second Books of Discipline*, 148-149.

¹⁹ John Calvin, *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, ed. J.K.S. Reid (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1954), 59.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 72.

the ordinary call depends on the eldership and the congregation. The ordinary and outward calling has two parts: election and ordination. The election is the choice of a person or persons most able to the office that takes, by the judgment of the eldership and consent of the congregation to whom the person or persons be appointed. It is to be eschewed that any person be intruded in any of the offices of the kirk contrary to the will of the congregation to whom they are appointed or without the voice of the eldership. Ordination is the separation and sanctifying of the person appointed by God and his Kirk after he is well-tried and found qualified. The ceremonies of ordination are fasting, earnest prayer, and imposition of hands of the eldership.²¹ In short, all those admitted to church office can only be called by God and in according with the order of the church, not by civil magistrates putting their hands on them.

Third, the service of the church offices should be church-wide. *The Second Book of Discipline* specified the functions of the four offices with an ecclesiastical boundary.

Regarding the office of pastors, they should be concerned with teaching the Word of God, administering the sacraments, praying, and blessing the congregation. After lawful proceeding by the eldership, the pastor may pronounce the sentence of binding or loosing upon any person or solemnize the wedding. In addition, no pastor may leave his flock without the license of the provincial or national assembly.²² It differs from the Church of Geneva, which delegated the ultimate discipline and overseeing the work of the pastors to the civil government and the

²¹ *The First and Second Books of Discipline, 129-130.*

²² *Ibid, 132-133*

Council. It also differs from *the First Book of Discipline*. Initially, according to *the First Book of Discipline*, ministers were placed under the control and supervision of the kirk session, which consisted of elders and deacons, together with the superintendent and his court, was the responsible body. *The Second Book of Discipline* placed the discipline of ministers under “particular elderships,” which is provincial or national assembly.²³ In short, shepherding and supervision should be accomplished within the Church.

Regarding the office of Doctors, *the Second Book of Discipline* defines that as the teacher of the catechism and rudiments of religion. The Doctor being an elder, should assist the pastor in the government of the kirk and concur with the elders in all assemblies; by reason, the interpretation of the word is committed to his charge.²⁴ Furthermore, on the one hand, the Discipline does not limit the office of the Doctor to the religious field. “Under the name and office of a doctor, we comprehend also the order in schools, colleges, and universities, which has been from time to time carefully maintained, as well among the Jews and Christians, as among the profane nations.”²⁵ On the other hand, the Discipline does not hold the idea that the office of the Doctor is to train children for the civil government, as in Geneva where a college should be instituted for instructing children to prepare them for the ministry as well as for civil

²³ Jurgens Wyk, *The Historical Development of the Offices According to the Presbyterian Tradition Of Scotland* (Zomba: Kachere Series, 2004), 51.

²⁴ *The First and Second Books of Discipline*, 133-134.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 134.

government.²⁶ In other words, in Geneva, the school is not only a church school but also a state school; in Scotland, it is not necessary.

Regarding the office of elder, *the Second Book of Discipline* defines that their office is, as well severally and conjunctly, to watch diligently upon the flock committed to their charge, publicly and privately, that no corruption of religion or religion or manners enters therein. Moreover, their principal office is to hold assemblies with the pastors and doctors (who are also of their number) to establish good order and execution of discipline.²⁷ This is different from Geneva, where the elders are civil magistrates, which means that the civil government oversees the religious life of the congregation by the sword. Negatively, *the Second Book of Discipline* argued that the exercise of two kinds of jurisdictions cannot stand in one person ordinarily.²⁸ Positively, *the Second Book of Discipline* specifies the office of a Christian magistrate in the Kirk that is to see that the public estate and ministry thereof be maintained and sustained as it appertains, according to God's word; to assist and maintain the discipline of the Kirk, and punish them civilly that will not obey the censure of the same; always without confounding the one jurisdiction with the other.²⁹ In short, the disciplinary and spiritual execution of the Kirk must not occupy the civil sword.

²⁶ Calvin, *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, 63.

²⁷ *The First and Second Books of Discipline*, 136.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 124.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 147.

Regarding the office of deacon, *the Second Book of Discipline* states that the office of deacon is to receive and distribute the whole ecclesiastical goods unto them to whom they are appointed. The deacon ought to be called and elected as the rest of the spiritual officers, and they ought to do according to the judgment and appointment of the presbyteries or elderships (of which the deacons are not), that the patrimony of the kirk and poor be not converted to private men's uses, nor wrongfully distributed.³⁰ However, in Geneva, the civil magistrates were ordained as deacons to do state charity. Furthermore, *the Second Book of Discipline* requires the civil government to make the laws and constitutions agreeable to God's word for the advancement of the kirk and policy thereof.³¹ Negatively, the law dealt with the property of the chapters and convents of abbeys, cathedral kirks, and the like places, which were belonged to the Pope:

They also that before were of the ecclesiastical estate of the Pope's kirk, or that are admitted of new to papistical titles, and now are tolerated by the laws of the realm to possess the two [third] parts of their ecclesiastical rents, ought not to have any further liberty, but to intromit with the portion assigned and granted to them for their lifetimes; and not under the abused titles which they had, to dispose to others the kirk rents, set tacks [leases] and fees thereof at their pleasure, to the great hurt of the kirk, and the poor laborers that dwell upon the kirk land, contrary to all good conscience and order.³²

Positively, "the ecclesiastical goods to be uplifted...suffer the kirk rents in time coming to be wholly intromitted with by the ministry of the deacons, and distributed faithfully to whom they

³⁰ Ibid, 144.

³¹ Ibid, 148.

³² Ibid, 154.

appertain.”³³ In short, the civil magistrate should make laws to promote the church and the deacon should serve only in the church.

Summary

The Second Book of Discipline made a clear distinction between Church and state. The Church has the power from God to use a proper spiritual government, which governs conscience and religion by the spiritual sword, not by the sword of civil government. These principles shape the offices of Kirk. The offices of the Church are certain so that any other ambitiously invented titles should be rejected. The election and ordination of church offices only belong to the Kirk, not involve civil magistrates. The service of the church offices should be church-wide: The pastors' work and supervision should be accomplished within the Church. Doctor is to teach the catechism and rudiments of religion. Elder is to establish good order and execution of discipline, which must not occupy the civil sword. Deacon is to receive and distribute the whole ecclesiastical goods unto them to whom they are appointed.

Application

For churches in persecution, they should recognize that its power has a divine origin and is inviolable. Churches should defend their rights with wisdom and patience, not without a bottom line. Especially in the election and appointment of church offices, the church must reject government intervention, even if it costs the church.

³³ Ibid, 159-160.

For churches that have religious freedom, they should be careful about cooperation with the government. They should clearly distinguish the power of the church and the government and reject pragmatism that uses government power to control conscience. In other words, the ministry of the church offices should focus on the church depending on the words of God, the spiritual sword.

Unorganized churches should establish office, discipline, and organization. The church is a spiritual government that needs them. If the church members do what they want, Christ would not be honored as King. Instead, the church's obedience to a policy based on the Word of God is obedience to Christ the King.

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