

1829 Circular Warwick Association

[Note: In this session, **the Lexington (NY) Association opened correspondence.** The 1828 Minute of the Warwick is missing from our collection.

Ministers seated in this session were: Elders Leonard Fletcher, Henry Ball, Gilbert Beebe, Amos Harding, Philip Broome, Zelotes Grenell,

Associations in correspondence: Lexington (NY), Philadelphia, New-York, Abington, Hartford, Hudson River, Rensselaerville, New-Jersey, Union, New-London.

Item 15: The Committee to whom was referred the request of the Lexington Association, recommend the Association to open a correspondence with them. The report was accepted. Note: We have in our possession the Minutes of the Lexington Association from 1830 to 1893. When we copy the 1830 Warwick, we will begin copying the Circulars alone with the Warwick of the Lexington also, so the reader and/or researcher may compare them annually.

Elder Grinnell did not produce the Circular for this session, so the Association inserted the "*Resolution*" answering a query from the Lattingtown Church of 1828, relative to New Testament office of "Elders."

CIRCULAR LETTER

The Messengers of the Warwick Baptist Association, to the Churches they represent, send Christian salutation.

Dear Brethren.- Having been disappointed in regard to a Circular Letter, and having received such able reports from the Committee to whom was referred certain queries, we adopt them as our Circular, and submit them for your serious consideration.

Reply to queries from the Lattingtown Church, in 1828.

On the query from the above named Church, relative to the **office of Elder**, your Committee beg leave to report:

1st. The term *Elder* is used in the New-Testament in *two* senses only. In the first, it is used with reference to *age*: and hence persons far advanced in years are denominated *Elders*. See 1 Tim. v.1,2; "Rebuke not an *elder*, but entreat him as a father, and the younger men as brethren; the *elder* women as mothers, and the younger as sisters." Here it must be obvious that the comparison made by the Apostle respects *age*, exclusively, and not *office*.

Secondly, the term is also used in the New-Testament Scriptures, with reference to *office*; and when used thus, we are quite certain (whatever other sense may be pleaded for by some) that the ministers of Jesus Christ are denominated *elders*; and that, on account exclusively of the *office* they sustain, and not as a title; in evidence of which the following passages are adduced. 2d Epistle of John, 1st verse: "*The elder unto the elect lady and her children;*" and 3d Epistle, verse 1st, "*The elder unto the well-beloved*

Gaius.” In each of these passages, the Apostle John speaks of himself as an *elder* in *office*; even though he was one of the *Apostles*. So also the Apostle Peter calls himself an *elder* with respect to *office*, and denominates his brethren in the ministry the same. See 1st Peter, v. 1st to 4th. “*The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, &c. Feed the flock of God which is among you.*”

Paul, too, addresses his ministering brethren of the Church at Ephesus, as *elders*; see Acts xx.17 and 28 compared. Hence we are able to show that preachers of the Gospel and pastors of churches are on account of *office* denominated *elders*; but who can prove that the term *elder* is used in the New-Testament as expressive of an other office? We know it is urged by many, that the Scriptures require certain officers in the churches, which are neither preachers or deacons, but “ruling elders;” but we think the persons who advocate this view of the subject mistaken, and for the following reasons:

1st. Because they have no Scripture to support the opinion. The passage from Romans xii.2, so frequently referred to; “He that ruleth with diligence,” proves nothing respecting *ruling elders*, but applies with the utmost propriety to pastors of churches. The passage also from 1 Tim. v’17, may be applied without any impropriety to the church officers first named, the *minister elders*, and especially as they are in other Scriptures said to *rule* – “*Especially they that labor in word and doctrine.*” Here the distinction does not lie in the *different order* of officers in the church, but in the *different degrees of diligence* exercised by her preachers and pastors.

2nd. The *character* of the *ruling elders* under consideration, is no where described in the New-Testament, as is the character of a *Bishop* and a *deacon*, and hence we infer that the office was not known to the Apostolic Churches.

3rd. The Scriptures have not assigned any *office-work* whatever to this “ruling elder,” as they have to the Bishops and Deacons of the churches: hence, we reject as an innovation every kind of official eldership, excepting that which is included in the *office* of a Bishop.

Finally,- We are asked in the query before us – If preachers of the Gospel, and they only, are the *elders* of the Churches, in what sense or senses are they to rule? Ans. Not as “Lord’s over God’s heritage! 1 Peter v. 3. Not by usurping authority over the rights and consciences of mankind; but they may be said *to rule*,

1st. By their *life* and *conversation*, in which they are admonished to be *examples* to the flock, 1 Peter, v.3: thus exerting a salutary influence over the people of their Charge.

2nd. Inasmuch as they are *set apart* by the church to *administer the word and ordinances* of the Gospel, and thus to take the lead in the worship of the churches.

3rd. Also, they *rule*, by teaching, enforcing and *administering* the *laws* and *discipline* of the church of God, as revealed in His word.

In answer to the query relative to the *ordination* of Deacons, your committee would also report:

Inasmuch as the query included in the 6th item of the last year's Minute, does not involve the character or office-work of a Deacon, but regards the subject of *ordination* only, we shall therefore state very briefly our views on this subject. That such an office still exists in the Churches of Jesus Christ, no doubt remains on our minds, because their *qualifications* are as clearly designated by the Apostle Paul in his Epistle to Timothy, as that of the elder or Bishop, and that a time of service is necessary before his full investiture into his office. "*Let him first be proved;*" but of other offices where no office-work or qualifications are given, these have ceased as offices in the Gospel churches; but how, and by what procedure, shall he first be proved is the great object in the question.

Nor are your Committee divided in relation to the imposition of hands on those settled in the church at Jerusalem; their ordination is plain before us; but whether they were Deacons; and so from this example we can act correctly in setting them apart to the office-work of a Deacon.

Your committee are of opinion, that to deny, on the one hand, is more irrational than to assert the fact, that they were – because the choice of them was to relieve the ministry of the word, by committing to them other service; which being distinct from the office-work of an Elder, Pastor or Bishop, the designation of them by a plain and Scriptural name, *Deacons*, cannot do injury to the cause of God and Truth, or be in any way derogatory to their honor as men of God, and acting for Him. Besides as there are but two special officers in the Gospel church, and these seven in Acts were set apart by the imposition of hands to a work distinct from that of preaching the word, no harm can follow from the Church in every age setting her officers apart to pious service, in the same manner and form.

Your committee do conceive that **the office of a Deacon is more essential to the *organization and visibility* of the church of Christ than that of a Bishop, because she can, and often does, exist, without the elder or Bishop; [emphasis SCP]** whereas the former, or Deacon, is inseparable from her visibility.

This question having been so far considered, as to give publicity to a Circular Letter to the Churches of this Association, in the year 1798, we would refer you to the same.

Finally, as each Church is **an independent body, she may ordain by lifting up her voice or hand, or in any method so that the officer or Deacon is publicly known and acknowledged as such.**

Zelotes Grinell, *Moderator*.

Leonard Fletcher, *Clerk*.