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DIACONAL TRAINING

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One of the important aspects of any military organization is a program of recruiting and training. Officers Candidate School, ROTC, and the military academies are examples of this training. The military services also require continuing education programs, such as the war college system, or the various correspondence programs. Universities receive military contracts to provide advanced academic training (degrees) for those who wish to advance their careers. At all levels, those who wish to gain greater responsibility within the organization must improve their skills.

Corporations follow similar programs. They offer sabbaticals for middle and higher management representatives to attend business school, or refresher courses. They offer in-house seminars, motivation programs, and the like. Corporations outlast their founders. They are legal "persons." This means that the senior managers must train replacements if they want to gain the confidence of shareholders. If they refuse, shareholders will sell their shares, thereby lowering the market price of the shares, and alerting other entrepreneurs of a company that is ripe for a take-over. To avoid this, corporate managers establish training programs.

Churches recognize this to some limited degree. They finance theological seminaries, the ecclesiastical equivalent of the military academies or the business schools. But these schools concentrate on training pastors, or what Presbyterians call "teaching elders." They train professionals, the way that business schools turn out men who are expected to become high-level managers, and the military academies turn out future field-grade officers. Unlike the military, which has continuing education programs for all members, and corporations, which offer advanced education for those with initiative, churches do not offer systematic programs for training deacons and "ruling elders."

Church Officers

The word "officer" conveys a sense of authority. When an officer of the law signals for you to pull your car over to the side of the road, the tightening of your stomach is greater than the mere threat of the monetary cost of the looming fine for a traffic violation. When an officer shouts "Corporal Jones!" you can rest assured that Corporal Jones pays attention, at least in a functioning army. But "church officer" is a phrase which conveys little more sense of authority than the words "student body president" or "chairman of the flower committee."

A church officer must serve the flock. He is more than a military commander or a policeman. He is a friend of those under him. Thus, the sense of foreboding is normally absent. But if we fear God, then we must fear church officers who act in the name of God. Why is it that we do not have the same sense of awe? One reason is that men do not really fear God. Another is that church officers really do not view their offices as being offices ordained by God to impose His rule over His

church. Finally, the offices are too easy to attain and hold, unlike the office of Lieutenant, Captain, or General.

Elders in the New Testament were first to serve as deacons, in order to prove their abilities (1 Tim. 3:10). Deacons were required to have the same qualities as elders: one wife, home in good order, etc. They were expected to be elevated eventually to the full leadership position of elder. The family serves as the training ground for diaconal service; the diaconate serves as the training ground of the eldership.

How many churches rigorously screen candidates for the diaconate in terms of their faithfulness and visible success as heads of households? How many screen their elders from the ranks of the diaconate? The eldership is seen as a kind of popularity contest, like election to the student council. The churches have taken the office lightly; so have the members and officers.

Because the pastor has had the academic training, he is regarded as the "true" elder. He has had to go through a screening process. **People recognize screening as an indication of the importance of a position.** The screening process sets the graduates off from the "mass of men." Even if this screening process is third-rate (as seminary educations tend to be), and even if it really does not produce the skills necessary to develop pastoral leadership, the members instinctively recognize the authority of the pastor. He is God's true representative because he has a degree from some school. This mythology of certified holiness ("set-apartness") was first established in the Roman Church, and the Lutherans, Anglicans, Puritan Congregationalists, and Presbyterians kept it alive by their emphasis on university-trained ministers. Holiness is not by degrees — step by step progressive sanctification — in this perspective, but rather holiness by degree, meaning academic degree.

Officers Candidate School

Deacons pass the collection plate and count the money after the service. Anyone with a 4th grade education could do as well. They decide how much to spend on the annual church picnic. Their wives could budget the event more efficiently. What tasks are assigned to deacons today that could not be equally well performed by anyone in the congregation above the age of 12?

Because all members of the church are considered equal, each possessing one vote in any church election, all seem eligible for the diaconate. There is no screening process to divide communicant members from voting members. Nontithing members vote on the programs that will be funded by tithers. Those who have not made a profession of faith in the church's confessional statement vote to determine which officers will serve the congregation. A wave of converts from a revival could conceivably outvote the long-term members who had been under the discipline of the confession for years. In short, there is no program of screening which is