



Should we be casting the lots

Question:

In a group discussion the subject of elections of office bearers came up. The option of casting lots came up and was strongly defended by some. Is this something the church today should be using?

Answer:

The matter of "casting the lot" is mentioned once in a while in letters to the editor, articles, or otherwise in *Clarion*. In connection with the election of office bearers, women voting, and the text of Article 3 C.O., it was suggested as an alternative for our present practice and perhaps as a way out of the division surrounding the discussion on women voting (*Clarion*, Vol. 60, No. 21). Another letter to the editor suggested that we should not be voting for elders and deacons at all, since the church is Christ's and he should be selecting the shepherds of his flock (*Clarion*, Vol. 60, No. 25). Since these letters to the editor pertained to an article written by the Rev. Karlo Janssen, he interacted with these suggestions and sentiments in that same Year End issue of *Clarion* 2011, p. 620. I can wholeheartedly agree with him when he explains the fact that after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2) no mention is made anymore of the casting of the lot even though the election of elders and deacons does happen in the congregations of Christ.

The presence of the Holy Spirit makes "casting lots" unnecessary. It is true that the church is Christ's and that he in his government of the church gives office bearers to his church (Eph 4:11). Just as in the OT, the calling to the office comes from God (also the calling to the general office of all believers; namely by our sharing with Christ in the anointing with the Holy Spirit, LD 12). As we confess in Belgic Confession Article 31, however,

*"We believe that ministers of God's Word, elders, and deacons ought to be chosen to their offices **by lawful election of the church**, with prayer and in good order, as stipulated by the Word of God."*

God extends this call to office in the way of, by means of, the council and congregation. God himself makes the office bearers and congregation instrumental in the process toward the call to office! That's a great honour for the congregation, a confirmation also of the maturity of the NT believers, which the Holy Spirit gives to the church of Christ. The Holy Spirit, thus, activates the believers, using their spiritual gifts, discretion, and discernment in the nomination and election process (cf. Dr. C. Trimp, *Zorgen voor de Gemeente*, p. 23). Those who are chosen, then, acknowledge this God-given calling with the first question for the installation,

*"Do you feel in your hearts that God himself, **through his congregation**, has called you to these offices."*

In his article, Dr. Trimp also highlights the fact that in the reformation of the sixteenth century the church received it back, this gift of Christ by the Holy Spirit to his congregation. In the background of Article 31 we must see the return to the Word of God regarding the calling to office from the practice of succession and self-continuation among the clergy in the RCC. It was one of those practices of hierarchy against which Luther and Calvin placed the power of the Word, the gift of the Spirit, and the ability of discernment in the NT congregation.

When Article 31 speaks of "*lawful election*" and "*in good order*," it also reacts against the practices among the Anabaptists in those days. The calling to office among them consisted of a so-called "inner calling," suggesting or pretending to have heard a voice in their heart, claiming thereby a special calling from God. The reformers rejected such subjective "calling" and restored the place of the congregation and the good order in the process toward the calling to office (which then gives the one who is called this conviction *in his heart* that he is called by God).

Although we may thankfully receive, confess, and practise this calling process toward the installation in office of ministers, elders, and deacons, involving and activating the congregation in the orderly manner in which this has become organized in our churches (with some variation in the procedures locally), this does not mean that the "casting of lots" has been eliminated completely. We do not recommend it nor forbid it, but if necessary it may still be used. Perhaps this is one of those examples in which Belgic Confession Article 25 applies, namely that "*the truth and substance remain for us in Jesus Christ.*" The OT principle and truth was God's calling and anointing in office (directly, or by way of a prophet). In the event, therefore, that the voting by ballot results in a tie vote repeatedly, voting procedures of many a congregation include the possibility still of "the casting of lots" (with prayer!) to break out of such an impasse (while other congregations use the practice of considering *the older in years* to be elected).

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