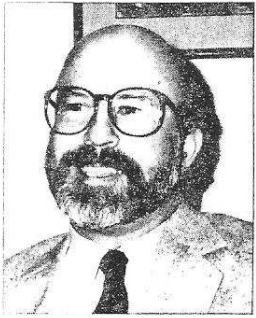


"STEP INTO MY OFFICE"

by James W. Skillen



Asking someone to step into your office might mean as little as inviting that person to "come in out of the cold," or to join you "where you can have some privacy." But it can also mean much more.

You might be asking someone to "step into your shoes" in order to see a situation from your point of view. If you hold a "high" office of judge or governor or attorney general, you might be inviting someone to recognize the special responsibilities that your office holds—responsibilities that can only be fully appreciated from an inside view.

Although the word "office" means many things today, it continues to draw attention to the particular responsibilities, functions and obligations that people possess in different situations. A "public office" is usually defined explicitly by laws and statutes; a church office derives from an ancient vintage. The existence of such offices provides Christians with at least three important tools for seeking and conveying truth in the present world: 1) they point us to the Creator; 2) they teach discipline, humility and submission; 3) they can show us how to live thankfully as God's stewards.

The Reality of Office

In the broadest sense, "offices" are the varieties of duties and responsibilities to which God calls us with our diverse talents. Because this world is not in arbitrary chaos, its historical shape does not arise from us *ex nihilo*. We can only shape what the

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Creator gives us to shape. Families, schools, governments and business enterprises take on particular shapes because everything that we do is a creaturely response to the multiple arenas of human accountability God created for us.

If, for example, we could help more citizens think about the office to which the American president is called rather than simply about the personalities and ideologies of the candidates, we all might make better selections at election time. We could understand the responsibilities of the presidential office and compare candidates' abilities to fulfill them.

The reality of office also teaches discipline, humility and submission. People who mistakenly think of their power and prestige as something of their own making tend to be proud, excessive and overstep boundaries. Those who realize that they hold an "office" of accountability will be willing to accept the disciplines of the office; their evaluation by peers and superiors; and the legal and moral limits of that office. Rather than misusing the office as a means toward other ends, they will seek to be good stewards of the particular duties with which they are charged.

The "rule of law" is one part of our tradition that points to the concept of "office" if properly used. Human beings should exhibit modesty, patience and submission to the rules that define particular offices. If established laws are unjust or a new situation arises, then the wise officeholder will seek a healthy reform of the rules so that humble service can

continue. He or she will not be satisfied with disobeying the rules or destroying the office.

God is Sovereign

Finally, the idea of "office" can point us toward thankful lives as God's redeemed stewards. On occasion most of us have had the feeling that the world's irresponsibility and lawlessness are overwhelming. Bankruptcies, famines, federal deficits, stock market crashes, court cases backing up, family and school breakdowns and immoralities of all sorts make us wonder whether any aspect of our social order will remain by the end of the century. "Does anything make sense any more?" we ask.

Our understanding of "office" tells us that God is upholding His creation, keeping the rainbow in its place, showering us with grace for redeemed lives. Every office you hold in your business, law firm, church, home or community makes you the recipient of a gift from God. He has given you a task to perform as a service for Him and for your neighbors. You and I don't hold the world together; God does. As long as it is still today, and as long as we hold any offices, let us thank God for upholding us as we witness to His truth and justice, to His love and power.

When Paul and other apostles wrote to the Christian churches, they addressed the followers of Christ in all their offices: church members and leaders; employers and employees; husbands, wives and children; citizens and more. As the redeemed of the Lord, we can give thanks by learning how to be faithful stewards of the offices to which God has called us. Those who remain faithful will hear the Lord say, "Step into my office, good and faithful servant. You have been trustworthy with a few things. I will make you ruler over many things as a joint heir with your elder brother Jesus, the head officer in My Kingdom." □