

The Authority of "Ministries" (Part I)

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Introduction

This article is written to show what the New Testament has to say about the authority of "ministries." In Part One I will examine the roots of the original model of the first century very closely. Part Two will present a few timely observations about current religious "leadership."

1. THE ROOTS OF THE ORIGINAL MODEL OF THE FIRST CENTURY

God Delegated His Power of Christ

When discussing any question of authority, it is important to state one's bedrock assumptions at the beginning: According to the entire Bible, God is viewed as the ultimate Authority. God is also over Christ (1 Cor. 11:3). God the Father sent Jesus with full authority. Jesus spoke the words of God (John 3:34). At first, Jesus was sent only to the lost sheep of the household of Israel to preach the kingdom of God, and "to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18). God sent His Son to save the whole world (John 3:17). Accomplishing God's will was Jesus' mission, and, ultimately, he was our sin-offering (1 John 4:10), so that we could live eternally through him. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (2 Cor. 5:19).

Christ's Authority and Power

During the ministry of Jesus, God anointed him with the Holy Spirit without measure and with power (*dunamis*). He taught people as one having authority (*exousia*). He had the right to forgive sins on earth. Jesus commanded unclean spirits to come out, and he was in control of the elements. Governor Pilate had no power over him (John 19:10,11). Christ had the power to lay down his life as a sacrifice voluntarily and to rise from death (John 10:18; cf. 1 Cor. 6:14). He destroyed the Devil's power (*kratos*) through his own death and resurrection (Heb. 2:14). So, at the end of his earthly ministry, Jesus said, "All authority (*exousia*) has been given to me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18). And, he will come again with power (*dunamis*, Matt. 24:30). Christ is the power (*dunamis*) of God (1 Cor. 1:24), i.e. the preaching about the cross of Christ (1 Cor. 1:18), which is where our faith should rest (1 Cor. 2:5). He now lives forever by the power of God (2 Cor. 13:4; Heb. 7:16). At the end of time, Jesus will have subjugated every other kind of rule (*arche*), authority (*exousia*), and power (*dunamis*) (1 Cor. 15:24). Every knee will bow to him (Phil. 2:10).

Various Roles of Christ

Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through him (John 14:6). Acts 4:12 says, "There is salvation in no one else, because there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved." And, there is only "one Mediator between God and men--the man Christ Jesus." (1 Tim. 2:5).

Jesus is the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4), the Great Shepherd (Heb. 13:20), the Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14), who laid down his life for the sheep. Sometimes the people were like sheep without a shepherd. He yearned to bring Israel and "other sheep not of this fold" into one flock with one Shepherd (John 10:16). He is the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls (1 Pet. 2:25). He is the Lamb shepherding us and guiding us to the springs of the water of life (Rev. 7:17). Jesus is the Head of the ekklesia (Eph. 1:22, 23; 4:15; 5:21-23; Col. 1:18, 2:19; Heb. 3:4, 6), both locally and worldwide. Believers are members of his body (Rom. 7:4; 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 10:17; 11:29; 12:12-30; Eph. 4:4, 12, 16, 5:30; Col. 1:24; 3:15). Similarly, Jesus is the Vine and individual Christians are the branches (John 15:1-10). Jesus is our adopted Brother, i.e. we are fellow-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17). He is the Bridegroom (Matt. 9:15, 25:1, 6; John 3:29; Rev. 21:2) and the ekklesia is his bride (2 Cor. 11:2, Rev. 19:7; 21:2; 22:17). Christians are united to him (Rom. 7:4; 1 Cor. 6:15; 1 John 2:24).

Jesus is Lord. He was Lord of the holy Sabbath (Matt. 12:8). He is the Head of every male, who are over the females (1 Cor. 11:3ff). Christ is "the Head of all principalities and powers" (Col. 2:10, 15). All angels, authorities, and

powers have been made subject to the ascended Christ (1 Pet. 3:22). Jesus is the King. Jesus is our only High Priest. Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is the Foundation, the Chief Cornerstone.

The Early Disciples of Christ

Jesus set the right example: He is the Messianic Servant in Matt. 12:18, quoting Isaiah 42:1-4, one of the Suffering Servant passages. He took upon himself the form of a slave and was made in the likeness of men (Phil. 2:7). He came to serve (*diakonein*) and not to be served (Mark 10:45). For example, he washed the feet of the disciples (John 13:1-15). Even though he had no sins, he so identified with us, that he allowed himself to be immersed because it was proper "to fulfill all righteousness (Matt. 3:15). Jesus Christ was a "minister" (*diakonos*) to the Jews on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises which were given to their forefathers (Rom. 15:8). As High Priest, he is the "Minister" (*leitourgos*) of the heavenly Sanctuary and of the true Tabernacle (Heb. 8:2). He left the true example for every Christian to follow "in his steps" (1 Pet. 2:24). He taught that greatness comes through serving (*diakonein*) in Matt. 20:26-18. Jesus said, "If any man serves (*diakonee*) me, let him follow me. And where I am, there my servant (*diakonos*) will also be. If any man serves me, my Father will honor him" (John 12:26). So, following Jesus is equivalent to serving Jesus.

No follower of Christ is greater than Christ or the Father. Matt. 10:24, 25 says: "The disciple (*matheetes*) is not above his master (*didaskalos*), nor the slave (*doulos*) above his lord (*kurios*). It is enough for the disciple that he be like his master, and that the servant be like his lord" (Compare also John 13:16; 15:20). But Jesus told his apostles:

"Hereafter I am not calling you 'slaves' (*douloi*), because a slave does not know what his master (*kurios*) is doing. Instead, I have called you 'friends' (*filoi*), because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You have not chosen me; I have chosen you. I ordained you, so that you can go and produce fruit, and so that your fruit will last, that whatever you ask for from the Father in my name, He will give it to you" (John 15:15, 16).

Jesus sent out his apostles into Israel and into the world with authority from God.

The Role of the Holy Spirit

The Father and Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to the people through the apostles and other key individuals (Luke 24:49; John 14:16, 17, 26; 15:26; 16:7; Acts 1:4, 5, 8; 2:18; 1 Thess. 4:8). John was a witness of the tradition passed down by the **Holy Spirit** (John 19:35; 21:24; 1 John 2:27).

Two Kingdoms

Although "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" (Psa. 24:1, **Satan** has invaded it (Matt. 13:38, 39). He is called "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2) and "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4). He offered "all the kingdoms of the world and their glory" (Matt. 4:8; Luke 4:5) to Jesus. His is a world of darkness (Luke 22:53) where many rule by force and more are dominated by dictatorial authority. However, **Jesus** said that his kingdom is **not** of this world. Otherwise, his servants would have been fighting for Him (John 18:36; cf. 2 Tim. 2:24). In the world, kingdoms rise up against kingdoms (Matt. 24:7). There is constant turmoil merely to maintain political power (Matt. 12:25; Mark 3:24; Luke 11:17, 18; 19:15).

On the other hand, the full-blown kingdom of God was a long time in coming. When Jesus began his ministry, it was imminent (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; 12:28; Mark 1:14, 15; Luke 4:43; 10:9, 11; 11:2, 20; 16:16; 17:20). This is what Jesus and his disciples taught and proclaimed the gospel of the **kingdom of God** (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:39; Luke 9:2, 11, 60). The kingdom of heaven was being taken from the Jews and being given to Gentiles (Matt. 8:11, 12; 21:43; Luke 13:30); some of the Jewish leaders had barred the way (Matt. 23:13). The disciples were taught to pray that God's kingdom would come (Matt. 6:10, 33; Luke 12:31). They were told that they could have ownership of this kingdom (Luke 6:20; 12:32). However, even John the Immerser was not a part of this glorious new kingdom (Matt. 11:11; Luke 7:28). Jesus predicted that it would come "with power" (Matt. 16:28; Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27). Jesus was preparing the people to enter into this kingdom. One Jewish scribe was "not far from the kingdom of God" (Mark 12:34). Joseph of Arimathea was waiting for it (Mark 15:43). People were in suspense (Luke 19:11; 21:31). It was worth the sacrifice (Lk. 18:29). And, it was the Father's good pleasure to give it to His true followers (Lk. 13:28, 29).

Even after the resurrection of Jesus, his apostles held a basic misconception about the nature of the kingdom: "Lord,

is it at this time that you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). Jesus had already said: "the kingdom of God is within you (disciples)." (Luke 17:21). The thief on the cross understood the spiritual aspect of the kingdom better than the apostles when he said: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom! (Luke 23:42).

Jesus' kingdom will never end (Luke 1:43). It was in the mind of God since the creation of the world (Matt. 24:34). Jesus prepared his apostles for the Pentecost event on several occasions. On Pentecost (Acts 2) the kingdom of God became an embryonic reality (Acts 8:12; 14:22; Rev. 1:9). It was Paul's message everywhere he went. God "has delivered us from the power of darkness and He has translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son" (Col. 1:13). God's kingdom is now something that we can enter or fail to enter (Acts 14:22; I Cor. 6:9, 10; 15:50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; 2 Pet. 1:11). Christians have now received a kingdom which cannot be shaken (Heb. 12:28). Those who are rich in faith can be the heirs of the kingdom which God has promised to those who love Him (James 2:5). At the end of time, Jesus will deliver up the kingdom of God to the Father, when having totally subjugated everything to Him (1 Cor. 15:24; cf. Rev. 11:15; 12:10), where Satan is being overcome by the blood of the Lamb and through the victory of his saints.

Nowhere is there a sharper **contrast** between the ways of the world and Jesus' way than in Matt. 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45; Luke 22:24-20; cf. also 2 Cor. 1:23, 24. There was a dispute about who would be the greatest in the forthcoming kingdom of Christ. They were jockeying for the "best" positions. They still possessed worldly conceptions of power in their minds. However, Jesus calmly answered: "**It will not be among you.**" He stressed the importance of service and sacrifice as the true path to greatness. Earlier, he had taught them that the greatest in the kingdom of heaven are those who behave submissively, like children (Matt. 18:1-4; 19:13-15; Mark 10:14-16; Luke 18:15-17). **If people claim to be following Jesus, yet they still adhere to the power structures of the world, then they are self-deceived!**

There are three key passages describing the **initial structure** of the early *ekklesia* in considerable detail:

(1) "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow-citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the Chief Cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling in God in the Spirit." (**Eph. 2:19-22**);

(2) "And God has appointed in the *ekklesia*, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, administrations, various kinds of languages. All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?" (**1 Cor. 12:28-30**);

(3) "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists (*evangelistas*), and some as pastors (*poimenas*), and teachers (*diakonias*), to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ, so that hereafter we are no longer children." (**Eph. 4:11-14**).

The Apostles, the First Leaders

The apostles were hand-picked ambassadors (*presbeuein*) as representatives sent by Christ to recruit others on his behalf to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:20). Jesus promised that the Father would send the Holy Spirit (*Parakleetos*) to teach them everything and to remind them of everything that he had said (John 14:26). The Spirit of truth would guide them into all revealed truth (John 16:13). He would testify to them about Jesus (John 15:26). Jesus told them: "Peace be to you. As my Father has sent me, even so, I am sending you." And when he had said that, he symbolically breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." (John 20:22) The apostles became ministers (*diakonoi*) of the new covenant (2 Cor. 3:6), which is the ministration (*diakonia*) of the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:8), and the ministration of righteousness (2 Cor. 3:9). When Judas forfeited his place among the original twelve apostles, one was chosen to replace him (Acts 1:26). However, when each apostle died later, there is no indication in history that any attempt was made to replace them. The only hint of succession seems to be the conferring of the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit through the hands of apostles (Acts 6:6; 8:14-19; 2 Tim. 1:6). The prophet Joel predicted that the Spirit of God would be poured forth upon all mankind, upon all of His servants (Joel 2:28, 29). This happened on the day of Pentecost in 30 A.D. (Acts 2). The apostles were the first to receive the immersion of the Holy Spirit, but others received the gifts of the Spirit soon afterward through their hands.

Paul was a special case (1 Cor. 15:8). Besides being the apostle (*apostolos*) to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15, 16), Paul had other roles: He was a slave (*doulos*) of Christ (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:100; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:1), and a servant (*eduoloosa*) to everyone (1 Cor. 9:19; 2 Cor. 4:5; Col. 1:25). He was appointed a preacher (*keerux*) of the gospel (*evangelion*) and a teacher (*didaskalos*) of the Gentiles (1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11). Paul was a minister (*hupeeretee*) and a witness (*martur*) especially chosen by Jesus for the purpose (Acts 26:16). The gospel was committed to his trust, and he was very thankful that Christ had put him into the ministry (*eis diakonian*) (1 Tim. 1:10-13). The Holy Spirit had separated him out for "the work" (*diakonia*) (Acts 13:2). He regarded himself and Apollos as only servants (*diakonoi*) of the gospel through whom people came to faith in Christ (1 Cor. 3:5; cf. 2 Cor. 6:4; Eph. 3:6, 7; Col. 1:23). However, he magnified his ministry (*diakonia*) (Rom. 11:13). He wanted to be sure that nothing would discredit the ministry (*diakonia*) (2 Cor. 6:3). On one particular occasion regarding the gift for the saints in the Jerusalem area, he was "the minister. (*leitourgos*) of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering (*heirourgountas*) the gospel of God, so that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:15, 16). He was going there to minister (*diakonon*) to the saints, both physically and spiritually (Rom. 15:25; cf. 2 Cor. 9:1). Paul's sense of mission is best expressed in Acts 20:24: "...so that I can finish my course with joy and the ministry (*diakonian*) which I have received from the Lord Jesus to testify to the gospel (*diakonian*) which I have received from the Lord Jesus to testify to the gospel (to *euangelion*) of the grace of God." And he was successful in doing that (2 Tim. 4:6-8; Acts 21:13). Paul had always served (worshipped, *latreuein*) God (Acts 27:23; Rom. 1:9) with a pure conscience (2 Tim. 1:3)

Paul could have boasted about the authority (*exousia*) given to the apostles. But the Lord gave it to them for the purpose of edifying, not for destructive purposes. However, Paul would not be intimidated (2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10). Paul was fully conscious of the fact that what he was writing were the authoritative commands of the Lord (1 Cor. 14:37; cf. 2 Thess. 3:14). Some of his letters were later misinterpreted (2 Cor. 10:9 ff; 2 Pet. 3:16). Paul did not handle the word of God deceitfully, either (2 Cor. 4:2). Likewise, before Peter died, he constantly felt the need to remind Christians of the teaching of Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:12-15). He candidly reveals where he got his information (2 Pet. 1:16-21).

By trade, Paul was a tent-maker (Acts 18:3). He was a stellar example of self-sufficiency in spreading the message of Jesus. The exemplar for a modern-day "minister" could be Paul, the businessman. Not only did he support himself, but also an entire entourage of co-workers! He never wanted to be accused of preaching the gospel for money, though he certainly defended the right of others to receive some loving support while they were preaching it (1 Cor. 9:14). He did receive assistance from the Philippian congregation (Phil. 4:15), but only after leaving that area. Perhaps, he was establishing the principle of maintaining a proper balance with the locals. He encouraged people to get a job and work with their hands, so that they would have something to give to other whenever needs arose (Eph. 4:28). He felt so strongly about the necessity of working that he said bluntly: "If anyone will not work, neither let him eat!" (2 Thess. 3:10). He and his companions labored, working with their hands (1 Cor. 4:12). He said, "For, brethren, you recall our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed (*ekeeruxamen*) to you the gospel (to *euangelion*) of God." (1 Thess. 2:9). Paul adds:

"And we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; not because we do not have the right (*exousio*) to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, that you would follow our example." (2 Thess. 3:8, 9; cf. 1 Thess. 4:11; 1 Cor. 9:15; 2 Cor. 11:7, 8).

Later, he told the Ephesian elders:

"I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own necessities, and to those who were with me. I have shown you all things, how that, so laboring, you ought to support the weak and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (Acts 20:33-35). One time Paul's resources were tested to the limit. While in prison in Rome, he was prevented from making money through his occupation. See Phil. 2:30, where the Philippian congregation came through for him again and again while he was incarcerated (also cf. Phil 4:14-16).

Other Workers

Paul wrote this to young Timothy: "And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach (*didaxai*) others also." (2 Tim. 2:2). Although there

were a number of prophets inspired directly by God, the normal means of transmission was through teaching (*didaskhein*). The **continuity** of links in this one chain becomes unmistakably clear: Jesus saw God. The apostles saw Jesus. And faithful Christians keep the witness alive within themselves as an anointing (1 John 2:20, 27) and by teaching the simple story to others. Because of the presence of false teachers, it was necessary to test the purity of the apostolic tradition (1 John 3:24 4:6, 13). According to 1 John 5:6-8, the chief criterion was the historicity of the Spirit's witness at Jesus' immersion (the water) at the beginning of his ministry, and the death of Jesus (the blood) at the end of his life's work.

Younger men like **Timothy**, an evangelist (*euangelistees*), were crucial bridges in the early stages to insuring an unbroken succession of authentic apostolic teaching (1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:14). Timothy had authority (cf. Titus 2:15), but he was not an apostle of Christ. Nevertheless, Timothy was fully endorsed by Paul as a **"brother"** and **"co-laborer of God in the gospel of Christ"** (1 Thess. 3:2; cf. Rom. 16:21; 2 Cor. 1:19). He was **like a son** to Paul (1 Cor. 4:17, Phil. 2:22; 1 Tim. 1:2). He seemed to be everywhere, helping Paul and the cause. Timothy **"worked the work of the Lord"** (1 Cor. 16:10). His work is called **"service"** in Phil. 2:17. Paul told him: "For the time will come when they will not endure healthy doctrine, but they will heap teachers to themselves after their own lusts, having itching ears. And they will turn away their ears from the truth, and will be turned to legends. But watch yourself in all things. Endure afflictions. **Do the work of an evangelist** (*ergon poieeson euangelistou*). Make full proof of your ministry (*diakonia*). (2 Tim. 4:3-5). Timothy was encouraged by Paul to be **"a good minister"** of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and good doctrine." (1 Tim. 4:6). "Good" here probably means "dependable" (cf. Heb. 3:5; Rev. 15:3). Timothy was to perform diligently like an unashamed **craftsman** who skillfully presents the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

In addition to Timothy, there was a whole host of very special individuals flanking the apostles. They were extremely important in directly helping God's people to gain momentum. Some of them were: **Barnabas** (9:27; 11:22); **Philip** (Acts 6:5, 6; 8:5-13; 21:8); **Titus** (2 Cor. 2:13; 7:6, 13, 14); **John Mark** (Acts 12:12, 25); **Silvanus (Silas)** (Acts 15:22, 27, 32, 40); **Priscilla (Prisca)/Aquila** (Acts 18:2, 18, 26); **Apollos** (Acts 18:24; 19:1; Titus 3:13); **Luke** (Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philm. 24), **Tychicus** (Acts 20:4; Eph. 6:21); **Epaproditus** (Phil. 2:25; 4:18); **Trophimus** (Acts 20:4; 21:29; 2 Tim. 4:20); **Stephanas** (1 Cor. 1:16; 16:15, 17); **Onesiphorus** (2 Tim. 1:16; 4:19); **Epaphras** (Col. 1:7; 4:12; Philm. 23); **Gaius** (Acts 19:29; 20:4; Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor 1:14); Archippus (Col. 4:17; Philm. 2); **Fortunatus** (1 Cor. 16:17); **Achaicus** (1 Cor. 16:17); **Sosthenes** (Acts 18:17, 1 Cor. 1:1); **Demas** (Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:10; Philm. 1:24); **Aristarchus** (Acts 19:29; 20:4; 27:2); **Sopater** (Acts 20:4); **Secundus** (Acts 20:4); **Clement** (Phil. 4:3); **Creascens** (2 Tim. 4:10); **Erastus** (Acts 19:22; Rom. 16:23; 2 Tim. 4:20); **Artemas** (Titus 3.12), **Zenas** (Titus 3.13), and **the brother** (2 Cor. 8:18-22; 12:18). They were variously called: **"co-worker," "partner," "fellow prisoner," "laborer," "servant" (diakonos), "fellow-soldier," "brother," "messenger" (apostolos), "minister" (hupeerete), "steward" (oikonomos), and "fellow-slave" (sundoulos).**

Other Leaders

In my judgment, the next five categories in the list of 1 Cor. 12:28-30 probably comprise those who also shared in some of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:4-11; Rom. 12:6-8; Eph. 4:7, 8). This was God's way of empowering His *ekklesia* until it was firmly established in the world. (I interpret 1 Cor. 13:8-11 to mean that these miraculous gifts would gradually cease as the *ekklesia* reached spiritual maturity (*to teleion*). This view is confirmed by Eph. 4:13, 14 *leis andra teleion... hina meeketi oomen neepioi*).

In keeping with their Jewish heritage, the apostles went about helping to set up a group of "elders" (*presbuteroi*) in each local congregation (Acts 14:23; 1 Tim. 5:22; Titus 1:5; James 5:14). These men were equivalent to "overseers" (*episkopoi*), compare Acts 20:17 with Acts 20:28, and Titus 1:5 with Titus 1:7. There was a plurality of them (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 4:14). And some were supported well while they worked hard at preaching and teaching (1 Tim. 5:17, 18). Paul urged the Thessalonian Christians to know those who labored (*tous kopoontas*) among them and who led (*proistamenous*) them in the Lord, who admonished them (1 Thess. 5:12). In the Hebrew letter, it says: "Remember those who lead you (*heegoumenoon*, 13:7)... Obey your leaders (*heegoumenois*) and submit to them, because they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief" (13:17). The Apostle Peter exhorted them to "shepherd (*poimante*; cf. *poimenai* in Eph. 4:11) the flock of God among you, not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God, and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness, nor

yet as lording it over (*katakuriuontes*; cf. Matt. 20:25) those allotted to your charge, but provoking to be examples to the flock." (1 Pet. 5:2-3). Their characteristics are given in 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-11. It is significant that neither Timothy nor Titus were ever called "*presbuteros*" or "*episkopos*," but it is clear that good men like these helped those new Christians become grounded in the faith.

The Greek word *diakonos* has a special sense in 1 Tim. 3:8-13. It is quite possible that the seven men of Acts 6:1-6 were "deacons," but we cannot be certain. They helped with more routine matters in order to give their leaders more time to deal with higher priorities. The feminine form of the same word (*diakonon*) appears in Rom. 16:1. She may have only been a messenger from Cenchreae, carrying Paul's letter to the Roman Christians.

The People of God

Who are the people of God? They are not only the leaders mentioned above, but ALL those who follow Christ. There are several different modalities used in the New Testament to describe God's people:

(1) familial

One of the terms which is used most commonly is "brothers" (*adelphoi*). It reveals close family ties "in Christ." Jesus is the one and only (*monogenees*) Son of God, but believers become sons or daughters of God through adoption (Rom. 8:15). Therefore, in the family of God (Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 3:15a), no sibling can be higher than the others. This is tantamount to **a real sense of equality**. Paul said, "There is neither Jew nor non-Jew (ethnic distinctions), slave nor freedman (economic status), male nor female (sexual differences), because you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). Yet the same apostle also taught the wisdom of recognizing necessary cultural standards (1 Cor. 7:18-24; 11:1-16; 14:34, 35; Eph. 6:1-9; Col. 3:17--4:1-6; 1 Tim. 2:11, 12; 5:1-22).

(2) connective

Because believers are immersed into Christ (Rom. 6:3, 4; Gal. 3:26, 27; Col. 2:11, 12), they become members of his body (Eph. 5:30), which is the *ekklesia* (Col. 1:24). "For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (Rom. 12:4, 5; cf. 1 Cor. 12:12). The communion bread symbolizes unity (1 Cor. 11:29). The Holy Spirit knows how to bring about a balance of diversified functions in this spiritual body (1 Cor. 12:12-30; Eph. 4:4, 12, 16; Col. 3:15). According to John 15:1-10, individuals (branches) draw their life from Christ, the Source (Vine). This is called sharing (*koinoonia*).

(3) organizational

The term *ekklesia* occurs 114 times in the New Testament. Most of the time it refers to a "congregation" of God's people in a local sense. Occasionally, it is used in a global sense (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22, 23, etc.). However, in Acts 19:32, 39, 40 it retains its classical sense of a legal assembly, i.e., a group of people regularly summoned together ("called out") for the purpose of voting. Firmly rooted in the Exodus event (Acts 7:38), *ekklesia* conjures up the idea of God calling His people out of the world (Egypt) to live holy lives (2 Cor. 6:17, 18)--**in** the evil world but not **of** it (1 Cor. 5:10). Christ is the bridegroom (Matt. 9:15; 25:1, 6) and the *ekklesia* is his bride (2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 19:7; 21:2; 22:17).

Etymologically, the English word "church" does **not** derive from *ekklesia* but from *kuriakon*, which means "(house) which belongs to the Lord," viz., a "church" building. *Ekklesia* is better translated by the term "congregation" in the autonomous sense or by "community" in the universal sense. Besides, there were **no** church buildings until three centuries after Christ! They often met in the homes of Christians (1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:5; Phil 4:21, 22; Philm. 2). Perhaps, the Corinthian Christians met in a larger place for worship (1 Cor. 14:23). It is interesting to note that here it was called "the *ekklesia*" **before** it gathered. 1 Tim. 3:15 is probably the best clue to the sense of family which is inherent in the word *ekklesia*. Eph. 5:21-33 depicts the *ekklesia* as being like a good marriage--something which we have to work at to perfect.

(4) hierarchical

Although Jesus Christ is undeniably Lord and King, he is portrayed as benign and not as a demagogue. The stakes are high. One chooses to serve as a slave (*doulos*) of one of two masters sin or Jesus (John 8:34; Rom. 6:6, 16-20, 22; 7:6, 25; 16:18; 1 Thess. 1:9). One repays with death and the other with life (Rom. 6:23). The final victory will belong to Christ: "The kingdoms of the world (will) have become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ. And He will reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). Knowing the eventual outcome, we must lovingly serve (*douleuete*) one another (Gal. 5:13).

(5) sacramental

With Jesus being our only High Priest, we are "a chosen class, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a special people" (1 Pet. 2:9). He made us to be a kingdom, priests to his God and Father (Rev. 1:6). In the New Testament, the word "saints" (*hago*,) is used frequently to refer to many ordinary living Christians, **not** a few canonized dead people!

Using the motif of Jesus as the rock foundation of it all (Matt. 16:18; Acts 4:11; 1 Cor. 3:11), we learn that God's true Sanctuary (*naos*) is now His holy people and His Spirit lives in them (1 Cor. 3:16, 17; 6:18, 19; 2 Cor. 6:16). Jesus explained the changed nature of worship in John 4:19-24. There is no special holy place on earth. We must fully realize that God never lived in a house made by human hands, like that of Solomon (Acts 7:47-50). The tabernacle or the temple only represented His presence. **We** are that house (Heb. 3:1-6), and we are like living stones who have been built up as a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, which are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:5). And Christ acts as a singular High Priest, "a minister (*leitourgos*) in the Sanctuary and in the true Tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man" (Heb. 8:1, 2). Today uncompromising Christians everywhere present their bodies as acceptable, living, holy sacrifices everyday. This is the true worship (Rom. 12:1, 2 cf. the practical things of James 1:27). They continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God in the form of the fruit of their lips giving thanks to His name (Heb. 13:15). Paul thought of himself as being poured out like a drink-offering upon the sacrifice and service of the faith of the Philippian congregation (Phil. 2:17). Also, he pictured himself as a priest offering up the Gentiles to God as an acceptable sacrifice to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:15, 16). Someday we will serve (worship) in front of the throne of God in heaven (Rev. 7:15; 19:5; 22:3).

(6) dependent

Finally, the imagery of a shepherd leading his sheep is poignant indeed when considered with reference to the people of God. Sheep are timid, errant, defenseless creatures who are no match for the wolf (Satan). They need constant protection and care from the Good Shepherd (Jesus, John 10:1-18), who has given his very life to save them. The New Testament is replete with rich examples of the value of just one sheep (Matt. 12:11, 12; 18:12) in comparison with the whole flock (Luke 15:1-6), of the intimacy between the shepherd and his pet sheep (John 10:2-4), of unprotected flocks (Matt. 9:36; 26:31; Mark 6:34), and of our sinful tendencies (1 Pet. 2:25). Peter was told to tend (feed) the sheep (John 21:16, 17) and the Ephesian elders/overseers were urged to be ever vigilant (Acts 20:28-30).

The first-century community of God was a brotherhood (1 Pet. 2:17). There were no power structures among Christians like those which prevailed in the world at that time. All were equal in Christ (Gal. 3:28). The early *ekklesia* understood themselves to be without rank or status, because each member (sheep) was essentially equidistant to the Shepherd and Guardian of their souls (1 Pet. 2:25)--Jesus Christ, the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4). **There is no evidence of any "clergy" system in contradistinction to the "laity."** That is an Old Testament concept. Both Greek words (*kleeros and laos*) were used to refer to the same people of God (Col. 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:3; Rom. 9:25, 26; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:9, 10). **The modern alleged distinction between clergy and laity is an artificial one and should be totally abandoned.** Let there be not even a hint of it among us! This is not to say that there are not true leaders, but one should not conclude that any particular function in the body of Christ is more important than all other functions. Christ and the whole *ekklesia* are "priestly" together. Nowhere in the New Testament does a class of men in the *ekklesia* take on special elevated priestly characteristics.

In summary, even though the early movement of the first followers of Christ was generally characterized by a certain classlessness, the divine wisdom of God saw to it that gifted leaders were in place when needed most. Leadership

(oversight) will always be necessary, because necessary functions will always have to be performed.

Conclusion

In Jesus' day, the Sadducees and Pharisees constituted **the Jewish hierarchy**. Although Jesus was often called "Rabbi," he was never recognized by the Jewish leaders as belonging to that official category. He was not ordained by them and neither were his followers (see Acts 4:13).

Near the end of Jesus' ministry, the Jewish "clergy" badgered him with this question: "**By what authority** are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" (Matt. 21:23). This was only natural, because their entire religious system was being severely **challenged** by the implications of the message of Jesus. Not only did the content of his teaching disturb the religious establishment, but his instructional style was markedly different from the usual rabbinic form (Matt. 7:29). The **question of authority** for servants of God is just as relevant today for ethical matters as it was then. The position of Jesus was **not popular** with those in power. I suspect that my views, which, hopefully, are identical, will not be widely accepted either.

The Authority of "Ministries" (Part II)

Stanley L. Morris (September, 1988)

Introduction

This article is written to show what the New Testament has to say about the authority of "ministers." In **Part One** I examined the roots of the original model of the first century and carefully defined all the pertinent terms. In **Part Two** I am now presenting a few timely observations about current (so-called) religious "leadership."

American Religiosity

There are approximately 336,000 congregations in the United States of all denominations,¹ but, according to a 1978 Gallup poll, 88% of non-churchgoers and 70% of churchgoers say that one does not need to "go to church" to be religious.² What do people mean by this? What does it show about their perceived needs?

Catholic Priests

America's religious flock is 60% of the population in the United States. They are led by about 520,000 Catholic "priests" and /or Protestant "ministers" and /or an unknown number of other types of leaders in nondenominational churches and other faiths. Among U.S. Catholics, the number of active "parish priests" has declined from 37,000 in 1966 to about 30,000 today. 13,000 priests have **left the priesthood** to marry. The number of priests may drop to 15,000 by the year 2000³. In San Antonio, Texas, although the number of Hispanic Catholics are increasing very rapidly, the number of Hispanic Catholic priests is dwindling to an all-time low point - one priest for every 65,000 Spanish Roman Catholics. If their felt needs are not met, they may begin to worship elsewhere with Protestants!⁴

Catholic priests typically face 70-hour to 80-hour work weeks, along with fatigue, loneliness, and self-doubt. Some succumb to the pressure by breaking their church vows and becoming involved in certain sins, such as alcoholism, fornication, homosexuality, etc.⁵

Schillebeeckx, a famous Roman Catholic theologian, asks: "Why is there such a shortage of priests? What has gone wrong with the way Catholics look at their church and those who hold office in it?"⁶

Protestant "Ministers"

The situation among Protestant "ministers" is no better. A minister's **family life** is always open to inspection by "the faithful." This leaves little room for privacy between husband and wife, parents and children. A breakdown almost always reveals itself in a marriage or family crisis. Divorce even among ministers appears to be increasing. And many "pastors" are abandoning the pulpit forever. Why?

In **Colorado**, in Crystal River Valley, there is a Protestant center which was founded to help repair the damage. More than 700 distressed clergy and their spouses have traveled to the home of Dr. Louis McBurney and his wife Melissa. For the past 14 years they have been helping with "pastors" coming from 40 states and with missionaries from 30 countries. They work exclusively with religious leaders whose marriages, families, and careers are in shambles. The troubled visitors come for **two weeks** of wrenching, one-on-one counseling and group therapy with 6 to 10 peers. They talk about workaholism, sexual affairs, deep-seated guilt, hang-up's, alcohol abuse, or whatever is splintering their lives. The major problems which tear "ministers" apart are usually the same at all levels, from small churches to large churches. Typically, Protestant ministers believe that they are too busy to spend much time with family or friends. And, they can trust no one with their innermost secrets and trials. Some feel **helpless** against powerful church members who hold the reins, while stacking more and more responsibilities on their tired shoulders. Church members may also try to control a "pastor" through unreasonably high expectations. One such idea is that ministers must have perfect marriages. One "pastor's" wife said, "When you **live in a glass house**, it is hard to get help. Then you come out here to Colorado and find out it is O.K. to spill your guts."

A denominational preacher often steps into the pulpit feeling that he is **God's man** who has come to speak God's word, all the while knowing that he has dark secrets of his own. As a result, he often has a feeling of considerable self-doubt followed by a sharp decline in his own self-esteem.

Many preachers have dreamed that they stepped into the pulpit and found that they were **naked**. One "minister" actually stood before his congregation and revealed that he had lied, hidden his failings as a "pastor" and administrator, and that he had also been unfaithful to his wife. He stated that he had already confessed his sins to his wife and the "bishop," and that both of them had forgiven him. Now he was seeking the church's forgiveness as well. Later that week, the church board fired him.

Professional "ministers" are used to telling people all about right and wrong. Knowing **what** to do is not their problem. They feel a special sense of **guilt** because they know what God wants them to do, but they cannot do it. This is a place in Colorado where "clergy" take off their collars and get away from their churches.

The McBurneys say that, in the last 14 years, they have learned that "ministers" and their families **learn to hide things well**. "Pastors" are usually quite articulate and highly-skilled at *appearing* to share deep emotions. Some are well-trained counselors themselves. Minister's wives often bury their own intense feelings of pain or hatred, believing that they must play the outward role of submissive "help-meets" for "God's men." A "pastor's" wife does not have a "pastor" of her own. When he gets home, he is burned out. She asks, "What am I supposed to do? Look in the Yellow Pages under Pastoral Care?"

It is even harder to dig into the deep insecurities, self-hatred and doubt of a denominational "minister." Most of these people believe that they were **called** to be "ministers" by God, but they were called by someone else. Perhaps it was an insistent grandmother, an overbearing father, or a domineering denominational evangelist whom they had met when they were young. And, they have struggled with this all through life.

One Pentecostal preacher in the Midwest said, "The **pressures** just keep building, and the people just keep asking you to give and give and give! The isolation grows inside you. You feel like you are buried in nothing but other people's problems." "Pastors" often jump when the telephone rings. A call can carry extremes - a suicide threat or a complaint about a stopped-up church toilet. And, either problem may be viewed as "the minister's" responsibility.

Mrs. McBurney said, "One can really see the **fear** in their eyes when it is time to go home. It is back to reality, back to business as usual, back to the old temptations and problems that sent them here in the first place!" ⁷

The Clergy

The **rigid partition** between "clergy" and "laity" has created all kinds of problems. It creates the impression that the essence of the "church" is the **hierarchy**. All others are part-timers, and therefore, inferior subjects in the kingdom of God. Is the "clergy" perceived as guardians of the pearly gates and, therefore, the sole interpreters of God's Word for the rest of us? Does the "laity" perceive **the Bible** to be a book of rules only understood by the clergy who "orders" them to obey them and sends them on "guilt trips" if they do not comply? Does the laity believe that if they do not conform to the church rituals and traditions that they won't get into the Kingdom? Who perpetuates these rules and traditions and why? Has the "church" become so **institutionalized** with its own professional hierarchy that it is **dedicated only to maintaining itself**?⁸ The answer is a resounding **YES!**

In Third John, Diotrephes is an example of a self-elevated leader who intimidated anyone who would oppose him locally. He would personally excommunicate anyone who dared to challenge his personal authority. He was a **dictator**. The authority was not granted to him by the local group of Christians or by Christ. He usurped it!

According to Carroll's definition, the **authority** of leadership means "legitimate power" bestowed by the flock.⁹ A group grants authority because they assume that the exercise of power will be for the collective good.¹⁰ However, this **unbalanced** clergy/laity scenario has turned out to be very detrimental. It has destroyed the balance originally intended by God. Members have abdicated their own responsibilities, turning themselves entirely over to "pastors" or "priests" who have led them down the primrose path to **apostasy**.

In the closed "church," the "laity" are not viewed as "ministers." They are only pale, **inferior** copies of the bona fide "clergy." "Lay ministry" thus loses its distinctive direction and fades into a very weak support system. They become spectators instead of participants.¹¹

The model professional "minister" is expected to have "head and heart together," to be the one who "lives the gospel," or to be "a man of God and a man of the world."¹² But, why should these admirable qualities be considered to be exclusive to this **one person**? Why are they not applicable to all of us? Do the members have higher expectations because they pay the salary of a "clergyman?" Does **money** have anything to do with it?

The "Laity"

Because the "clergy" has become a paid profession, some local members think it is necessary to periodically "pull rank," to be sure that they have "their" minister (whom they pay to be "good" for them) right under their thumbs. They often remind them who pays their salary. There is a latent power structure in the "laity" which can be ruthless at times. They often reason as Caiaphas did in John 11:50. He stated that it is better to sacrifice one individual for the sake of the group.

The institutional "authority" of "ministers" often **hamstrings** them when speaking out on their own. They are not allowed such freedom, because they are viewed as the embodiment of the group 24 hours a day, and they are expendable if they do not play the part appropriately. **They are bought and paid for!** Unfortunately, they are reduced *de facto* to adroit **politicians** who must duck most controversial issues. In other words, "they know which side their bread is buttered on." So, they "pull their punches" in the pulpit and "throw the fight," making it look like the real thing, but no longer caring about anything except collecting their salary regularly and rationalizing it all away. (*Comment: The prime definition of a hireling!*)

The following is the standard arrangement: A congregation *or an organization* hires a "clergyman" whom they feel **comfortable** with and they "keep" him as long as he stays within these "safe" limits. And, the clergyman is **very careful** to abide within these boundaries in order to receive his paycheck each week. Simple isn't it? How convenient for everyone! It is designed to maintain religious order efficiently and to give the appearance of continuity and stability, but the fruits of this man-made system is rotten to the core!

According to Hahn, a **true prophet** (e.g. Amos 7:14, 15) must have enough distance (economic independence) from the institution in order to speak out effectively?¹³

The Institutionalized Church

The modern church has become a powerful religio-political structure, and yet, it is **weak** at its core and **crumbling** around the edges because it traps both "clergy" and "laity" into internal, institutional, win-lose power relations, thus sustaining superior/inferior class distinctions. We should be **tapping** the people instead of **trapping** them. The institutional "church" is now "upside-down." At least, flatten it out a bit! Somewhere along the way, the "**people of God**" became "the church," the institution? ¹⁴

Every living organism tries to **survive**. Similarly, every institution strives to maintain itself to insure its own primacy and stability. This is how it protects itself from outside threats. But the **modern secular world** has domesticated the "church" into something like an "Indian reservation" for people with "religious needs," and the "church" has largely accepted this taming? ¹⁵ But what about Acts 17:67 How did the early Christians overturn the awesomely-large Roman Empire? The early Christians were doing something right. Unfortunately, we seem to have lost our way. (That first love.) If we are to surpass, we need to get back to the basics!

Generally speaking, people do not want to **change**; they say "the old is better" (Luke 5:39). People need to be weaned away from the seduction of the "church" as "institution" and turned toward the **direct** service of the world. That is how they changed things ¹⁶ The true purpose of the *ekklesia* is not to 'service' the saints but to put the saints into service!

A **closed "church"** is a world in itself. It is a closed system, rigid and static and completely out of touch with the real world. Power and knowledge move **from the top downward**. Dozier complains that within it there is a "built-in clericalism" which hides a "caste system." Who has the monopoly on truth and to speak exclusively for God? ¹⁷ The "clergy" have become the subjects of "ministry" (dispensers) and the "laity" are the objects of "ministry" (recipients)? ¹⁸ But true leaders are only different from, not higher than followers. Followers and their leaders should have an interdependent relationship, like all parts of the human body. **We can all be powerful**. The current "clergy" has far too much responsibility, and the "laity" has abandoned theirs? ¹⁹

The assembly of Christ has already degenerated to pure sentimentality. It has become a "**cut-flower religion**;" ²⁰ pretty, but dead, like a desiccated flower pressed between the pages of a seldom-used family Bible. There may be plenty of warm, religious feelings, but deep ethics are missing. And people feel the urge to attend only on special occasions (hatching, matching, and dispatching) or to be "Sabbath Day Christians" only, moving in and out of the world with no thought to transforming the world. When some members are questioned about why they are not more **committed**, they respond with something like this: "That is not my job. I have done my duty. I've paid my dues. Why don't you contact our minister." Secularization is a process whereby certain areas of human life are increasingly removed from the sacred. ²¹ Aren't we sucking the life (holiness) right out of the church, so that nothing but the shell is left?

Bigger Barns

In one of Jesus' parables (Luke 12:16-20), a rich man's "solution" to a bumper crop problem was to build bigger barns. But he forgot about God. I think the "churches" are doing the same thing today. They have become increasingly **materialistic**. In an attempt to appear to be ultra-stable, they have gotten "the edifice complex?" ²² They lust for a strong, outward presence on the corner of Main and Church Streets. In other words, they really think bigger is better. And, the religion business is big business. Besides, they rationalize that real estate is a good investment for the "church." But something far deeper is going on here. In the minds of many people, **the church building** itself has become **the** symbol of "Christianity." So, in the religious world, huge church buildings connote "success."

I am not saying that buildings are wrong per se. I am only wondering what some people have begun to make of them. Huge church budgets with hefty allocations for even larger facilities are actually only symptoms of a deeper, underlying sickness. How did such things become so important? It is really a question of **priorities**. Is the church building really the essence of the church? Technically, we do not "go to church;" we **are** the church (even before we assemble). If church buildings were so essential, why did Christians thrive for the first three centuries **without** church

buildings? How do millions of mainland Chinese believers in Christ today survive the ravages of persecution from a Communist government year after year? They do it by meeting underground **without** church buildings!

By calling the church auditorium a "sanctuary," some have completely reverted to a Jewish form of worship. The Holy Place, the Most Holy Place, the Altar, the Levitical priests, the high priest, incense, the eternal flame (*neer tamiyd*), etc. - all have their counterparts in **the "services"** of many denominations today. Have we misplaced the emphasis? Shouldn't it be upon spiritual matters instead of brick and mortar?

The Price Is Right

In the Book of Judges there is an interesting vignette of that period. There was a man named **Micah** who very much wanted **religious security**. He found a Levite and offered him the job of being his exclusive priest. So, he provided a salary, food, and clothes to the Levite. Micah exclaimed, "Live with me and be a father and a priest to me!" So, the Levite was content to dwell with Micah for a while, and he became like one of his own sons. (Judges 17:10, 11). But there were the elements of idolatry there--a graven image, an ephod, teraphim, and another molten image. In time, six hundred Danites went into Micah's house and confiscated them (Judges 18:17, 18). They questioned the Levitical priest about what he was doing there. They offered him a **new job** with a larger "congregation" (Judges 18:19, 20). So, the priest agreed to go away with them. But Micah protested, "You have taken away my gods which I made, and my priest, and you are going away" (Judges 18:24). He was crushed: His "faith" collapsed because it was based upon human contrivance. It was like sand (cf. Matt. 7:26, 27).

Here we see a **pitiful example** of a man who tried to control God through hiring (for his own purpose) a genuine Levitical priest who was "serving" a considerable distance away from the true House of God. And we also observe what happened to him when his religious "crutch" was taken away. This situation is not unlike the religious condition in the world today. **The central issue is money**. You can always find someone to preach whatever you want to hear, if the price is right. 1 Timothy 6:10 cites the problem well. The love of money (especially in religious circles) is a very powerful force. One's relationship to God should not be based upon money. This unfortunate (but accepted) situation affects "clergymen" and their families adversely and it stunts the spiritual growth of the other church members. We need to return to a wholistic approach where every member of the body of Christ is functioning well.

Tradition

There is a tendency to equate venerable traditions with unchangeable, divine ordinances. We need to carefully differentiate between what **God** has actually said and **man-made** religious rules (cf. Matt. 15:2, 3). Why do people get so upset about "liturgical" reform instead of the weightier matters such as "justice, mercy, and faithfulness" (Matt. 23:23)? Why reinforce the outward, measurable credits instead of the heart? We crave order and rules and security. In short, we want an **institution**, and we're going to have it--no matter what! Folks love to belong to an exclusive club. Are we trying to reduce God down to human size (cf. 1 Sam. 15:29; Isa. 55:8, 9)? We should walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). But the institutional "church" is always striving to make reality certain, to pin it down in a liturgy, in an organizational structure, in educational systems, etc. Therefore, does the institution only need to be "shaken up" from time to time, like knocking off the barnacles of the hull periodically to increase the ship's efficiency as it slips through the waves? Or, is the institution so corrupt, so amalgamated with error, that to remove the years of encrusted layers of barnacles would also rip open gaping holes of the hull causing the whole thing to sink? You, the reader, will have to decide that one! The pew is too comfortable, and the role of a true preacher of the gospel should be to act as a gadfly.²³

Can the **love of structure** grow to such an extent that the river has nothing but banks with no water flowing? If so, the structure has become the goal, **the idol**. Structure should be held only loosely in order to serve a purpose. If it no longer serves that purpose, get rid of it! It is not the ultimate reality. If it is pointing to God, then it is doing its job. But if it begins to act as if it is God, then it is idolatry.²⁴

Getting Involved

Do we have **ownership** in the congregation? Are we players on the playing field or are we fans in the stands? Unless

everyone risks **participation**, equality is never achieved. Rank-and-file "church" members are often too passive and unable to shape their own destiny. They are not thought to be responsible (cf. John 7:49). However, the Biblical teaching of the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9) should still be our goal. If the people are unusually **dependent on professional "ministers," then the general condition of the congregation will be predictably weak. "Clergymen" do not have all the answers, but "lay people" encourage that illusion.**²⁵ Dozier says, "The church lost its vision of being a disturber of the status quo and became a supporter of the status quo."²⁶ Also, "Religion cannot be the glue if it is one of the pieces?"²⁷ We need to know how all of life fits together. Our world view should not be so **compartmentalized**.

Out of Balance

The *ekklesia* is the people of God, and individual Christians are members of that body. There is no such thing as a solitary Christian-at-large. In the New Testament, all Christians were saints (holy people), but eventually it took on a different meaning. Some were thought to be better than others. Then a professional "clergy" developed. This condition did not happen overnight. The **crystallization process** was slow but steady. "Clergymen" received "the call," but the rest of the members got jobs. However, the truth is, the whole assembly is the called-out (*ekklesia*)²⁸

Money = Power

Invariably, most of the problem revolves around money, the world's medium (Matt. 6:24). Money is not evil in itself, but when the undue influence of money starts to dictate the decisions of or upon the Lord's people, we have strayed far from the path of righteousness! (Jer. 5:30-31)

I am not saying that some of the Lord's servants should not be partially supported for their time and efforts. Jesus was helped (Luke 8:1-3). Work is work, and everyone should be appreciated in the form of aid for what they are trying to do for the Lord (1 Cor. 3:8; Rom. 11:6). We should all realize that everything costs something! There are such things as expenses. Godly people will find a way to cover necessary costs. Jesus taught this principle. "A workman is worthy of his food (*trofee*, Matt. 10:10; Luke 10:7 (*wages=misthos*); cf. Matt. 21:1-8ff, 28; Rom. 16:6; Gal. 6:6). Paul stated, "So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to live from the gospel." (1 Cor. 9:14). However, I see no evidence in the Bible that apostles or prophets, in a strict sense, preached God's message **for** money or as a profession. They knew that their responsibility was to simply preach it, and if people wanted to help provide for their physical needs while they were doing it, then fine, well, and good. But, God was their "Employer;" only He could put the words in their mouths.

I am saying that a true "minister" of God ought to be extremely careful about his motives. Whenever a man can lose his "job" because he openly expresses a gospel truth that he feels compelled to speak, then it is time to change "occupations." **One must never be entirely dependent on his audience for his financial support.** If he is, they may not want to hear the truth someday (e.g. Gal. 4:16; 1:10). And then what is he going to do? There are only three options: (1) compromise (soften) the truth so that it is palatable to the congregation; (2) resign; (3) speak out and risk getting fired. (Note: A true man of God cannot be "fired" because, in the first place, he was never "hired" by a man to do God's work!) According to John 10:12, a clear-cut distinction is made between a true "shepherd" and a "hireling" (most so-called "clergymen"). The former has ownership, the latter does not. Does this passage relate to the entire religious scene today? I think it does.

The key to real success is **tent-making**, i.e. independence from potentially-corrupting influence, but still being dependent upon God. We are always co-workers with God (2 Cor. 6:1). Paul was very proud of his work (1 Cor. 9:1). He said,

"Have I committed an offense by humiliating myself so that you could be exalted, because I have preached God's gospel to you FOR FREE? I 'robbed' other congregations, receiving wages (*opsoonion*) from them to service you. And when I was present with you and I had needs, I was chargeable to no one. The brothers who came from Macedonia supplied whatever I lacked. In everything I have kept myself from being a burden to you, and I will continue to do so. As the truth of Christ is in me, no one will take this boast away from me in the regions of Achaia. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows otherwise. No, what I do, I am doing so

that I may cut off an incident from those who desire an embarrassing incident." (2 Cor. 11:7-12) "We do not domineer over your faith; we are helpers of your joy - you stand by faith." (2 Cor. 1:24; cf. I Thess. 2:6).

We are spiritual laborers in the Lord's harvest (Matt. 9:38; Luke 10:2). Jesus said, "My food is to do the will of the One who sent me and to finish his work" (John 4:38; cf. John 9:3, 4; Rom. 16:12). This is a beautiful analogy for our lives. This is what every Christian and every leader should imitate.

Jesus also said, "My Father is working until now, and I myself am working" (John 5:17). God is always at work! (cf. John 9:3, 4; 10:25, 37, 38; 14:10, 11, 12; 15:24; 17:4 all referring to the mission of Jesus). What is the answer to this question: "What should we do, so that we can work the works of God?" (John 6:28). The answer is to believe in Jesus whom God sent (John 6:29). This is the work of God (Acts 13:2, 41; 14:26; 15:38; 20:35).

Serving Christ

The key to understanding Christ is **being a servant**. This is the opposite of what the world expects (Matt. 20:25). In fact, any attempt to set up the body of Christ upon a **worldly power structure** fails in His sight! Jesus said "It will not be so among you" (Matt. 20:26). But look how the Roman Empire and other political structures have subtly molded the denominational churches! They are all **still** affected in their basic orientation by these early precedents.

The kingdom of God is the broadest concept; it encompasses everything. It has existed prior to Christ (in a preparatory sense) and will exist throughout eternity. It is the rule of God in the hearts of His people, not a political thing. (John 18:36; Acts 1:7). There is a chain of command which emanates from God Himself. He sent Jesus. And Jesus' authority supersedes all other authorities (Matt. 28:18), human or Satanic. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to empower His apostles. They were installed as the first leaders commissioned to establish His *ekklesia* everywhere on earth.

Another important truth is the **classlessness** of God's flock. Even though there are older, wiser sheep (a team of shepherds) to help watch over us all (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17; I Pet. 5:2), Jesus is the only Chief Shepherd (I Pet. 5:4). He is the head of the *ekklesia* (Eph. 1:22, 23; Col. 1:18). In other words, although some human leadership is certainly needed, we are all truly equal "in Christ" (Gal. 3:28).

The nature of **true worship is spiritual** (John 4:23, 24). All Christians are priests of God (I Pet. 2:5, 9), with Jesus being the High Priest (Heb. 3:1; 4:14; 5:5, 6; 7:26). We offer up spiritual sacrifices of praise to God (Heb. 13:15). We ourselves are the living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1, 2), and collectively we are a temple sanctuary (*naos*) of God with His Spirit dwelling inside us (1 Cor. 3:16, 17; 6:19, 20; 2 Cor. 6:16). So, where did a "clergy"/"laity" distinction come from?

All Sheep Are About The Same

There is only one Leader and one Shepherd - Jesus Christ. A set of human "shepherds" may be helping Jesus, but they are all sheep too. They are merely a little more knowledgeable than younger sheep. In other words, there is no essential distinction between the *leading* sheep and the *led* sheep. We are all supposed to be sheep following the Good Shepherd (John 10:14). Although I generally subscribe to symmetrical relationships among and between saints of God in which the Power (Christ) is available to all the members, a few older, experienced sheep (leaders) are needed to show the younger sheep "the ropes." However, we all have the right (even as sheep) to ask if the leaders ahead of us are following the orders of the Chief Shepherd and his chosen leaders (apostles, prophets, etc.) **We do not want to be following followers. We desire only to follow Jesus!** And the main question is always authority. Who says so? Who's really in control?

Authority

The Roman centurion had a proper understanding of how authority works (Matt. 8:9; Luke 7:8). Jesus taught another parable illustrating the same principle (Mark 13:34; Luke 19:17). **Jesus is Lord**. Therefore, we derive all authority directly from him or his designates (cf. Mark 9:38, 39; Luke 9:49).

In a human sense, **control** is an indication of being somebody. Having power over others means that we are not required to face suffering, failure, or give an honest appraisal of our own unworthiness?²⁹ But too much power over others leads to distrust, competition, and even oppression. **Responsibility** weighs heavily at the top of the pyramid, while the responsibility of those at the bottom becomes extremely limited. The institution exerts control within its own boundaries. So, it is no wonder that it focuses its attention only on what it can control. And it becomes even more inbred as time passes.³⁰

However, everyone needs to possess some **power**. Power is the ability to change situations and circumstances. And, no one wants to feel completely powerless. The issue is not the fact of power per se, but rather the nature and source of that power.³¹ (*The old "Pray and pay, but you have no say!" situation.*)

"The" Minister

So, I conclude that "minister" is a loaded term today! What does it mean and to whom? In a very real sense, **every Christian is a "minister"** serving his fellow Christians and his fellowman. Where did the specialization of the term originate? Does this mean that a "clergyman" is a "**professional Christian?**" Does he live this way because he is **paid** to do so? Is it just a "job" for money? Money should not make that much difference, but in practice, it does! Who holds the power in the local "church?" Answer: usually the **monied individuals**. Sometimes it becomes just a religious "country club" where a small minority dominates. Awesome **power struggles** occur, just like the bickering among the apostles (Mark 9:33-37). Splits abound, because a spiritual breakdown has occurred, away from the divine authority which resides in the Head of the *ekklesia*, and his apostles, and their letters, and their example. No wonder people (especially pseudo-leaders) in religious circles are so miserable.

Is "the ministry" a "calling?" God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34), i.e. He shows no favoritism. Why does He not call **everyone**? He does! He calls all of us out of the world of sin. There are no special privileges. Even when we have done all 'our duty', we are still unprofitable servants (Luke 17:10).

My "Authority" as a "Minister"

My "authority" as **only one "minister" among many "ministers"** derives neither from my own person nor from a formal ordained "office." It comes from the charge of Jesus Christ to be a servant. I have difficulty with the term "**ordination.**" Anyone who can preach should preach. All men (young or old) should be encouraged to do so. Christ empowers me to accomplish a few functions with the talents that he has granted to me. I am trying hard not to bury any of those abilities (Matt. 25:14-30).

The principal error occurred when **one individual** began to be thought of as being more holy than the others. That was a tremendous mistake. Every Christian has been sanctified. The whole *ekklesia* has been called out and is the Temple of God. If one isolates the sacred from the secular within the flock, a confusing rift is created internally which will eventually cause the group to emulate a **worldly structure**.

Conclusion

The amazing thing is that **God's way** is so simple, so unstructured, so individualistic in function, that we have difficulty grasping that fact. May God help us to overcome the self-infused confusion which beclouds our minds because we have all been mired in years of institutional thinking. (1 Cor. 1:10 thru 3:23)

Footnotes:

¹ Celia A. Hahn, *Lay Voices in an Open Church* (Washington, D.C.: The Alban Institute, Inc., 1985), p. 1.

² *Ibid.*, p. 26.

³ Terry Mattingly, "World Troubles Ministers: Clergy, Spouses Come to Rockies to Mend their Strained Marriages," *Rocky Mountain News*, July 6, 1987, p. 30.

⁴ CBS Evening News, September 11, 1987.

⁵ Mattingly, *loc. cit.*, p. 30.

⁶ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Ministry: Leadership in the Community of Jesus Christ*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981, p. 1.

⁷ Mattingly, *loc. cit.*, p. 31.

⁸ Verna J. Dozier, *The Authority of the Laity* (Washington, D.C.: The Alban Institute, Inc., 1982), p. 23.

⁹ Jackson W. Carroll, "Some Issues in Clergy Authority," *Review of Religious Research*, Vol. 23 (December, 1981), No. 2, p. 100.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

¹¹ Hahn, *loc. cit.*, p. 45.

¹² Carroll, *loc. cit.*, p. 104.

¹³ Hahn, *loc. cit.*, p. 38.

¹⁴ Dozier, *loc. cit.*, pp. 2, 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁸ Hahn, *loc. cit.*, p. 41.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

²¹ Carroll, *loc. cit.*, p. 102.

²² Hahn, *loc. cit.*, p. 34.

²³ Dozier, *loc. cit.*, pp. 24, 26, 27.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9, 10, 12

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²⁷ Dozier, *loc. cit.*, p. 7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

²⁹ Urban T. Holmes III, *Spirituality for Ministry* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), p. 46.

³⁰ Hahn, *loc. cit.*, p. 45.

³¹ Holmes, *loc. cit.*, p. 43.