

Four New Testament Words Misused

I closed the previous chapter by saying that the widespread corruption of the New Testament system of church care and government has come about, in part at least, because believers have taken four New Testament words and changed – warped – their meaning. The words in question are *pastor*, *minister*, *clergy* and *ordain*. I realise several other words have been contaminated beyond recognition – ‘bishop’ among them – but I am trying to get to the root of the problem as it exists among Reformed and evangelical churches – dissenters in the main; in other words, non-episcopalians. ‘Bishop’ does not seem to be a problem in such churches. But ‘pastor’, ‘minister’, ‘clergy’ and ‘ordain’ are.

1. Pastor

Down the centuries, as I have shown, starting with the Fathers, men have distorted the system of church care instituted by Christ. One way in which they have done this is by distinguishing one of the elders and giving him a special name or title. What is this name or title? Today – and for many years past – that name or title is ‘the pastor’. But the turning of one of the elders into ‘the pastor’ is quite wrong.

Nevertheless, and sad to say, this unbiblical practice has won the day. Even in most churches which have a plurality of elders, there is still a single pastor who has a higher rank, with greater authority. Most believers are utterly convinced that a pastor is ‘the minister in charge of a church or congregation, with particular reference to the spiritual care of his flock’.¹ They simply cannot imagine things in any other way; their pastor is their minister in charge of (his) their church. Contrary to what almost all believers think, however, and despite the almost universal acceptance and love of this practice, there is no scriptural warrant whatsoever for it,

¹ *The Shorter Oxford*. Not the Bible, please note. In other words, to get the definition, it is no use going to Scripture. *It is not there*. We have to refer to the standard English dictionary. Something, surely, must be wrong.

none whatsoever. Although most believers do not realise it, ‘the pastor of so-and-so church’ is a character unknown in the New Testament. He simply does not exist in the sacred pages, even though he appears in nearly every book on church order, and is an everyday phenomenon of the vast majority of churches. Why is ‘the pastor’ not even mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:28-31? That the New Testament never speaks of a pastor of a church, let alone *the* pastor of a church, may surprise some readers.

Surprise? I am afraid even daring to point it out will offend them. In raising this issue, I have not set out needlessly to offend, but I am sorry to say I think offence is inevitable – as is the consequent reaction to it. The reason is, of course, harking back to my original illustration, I am approaching, pointed stick in hand, one of the most sacred of all sacred cows in this entire business.

So, taking a deep breath, in light of the fact that no man in the New Testament is ever called ‘the pastor’ of a church, because no church had a man they called ‘the pastor’, and no church member ever talked about this non-existent man as ‘our pastor’ – why is the practice so common today? How can we explain it? Why do we see a proliferation of ‘pastors’ – emeritus pastors, associate pastors, assistant pastors, student pastors, youth pastors, music pastors, education pastors, senior-citizens’ pastors, singles’ pastors, pastors of pastors,² and so on? Is it not incredible? Where does it all come from? The New Testament or... what? Where does the movement, the transfer (often, ‘promotion’) of pastors from one church to another come from? The rigmarole smacks of the transfer market in professional football managers. Which passage of Scripture do the churches and the men involved turn to in order to get apostolic instruction on the matter?

This is worth pursuing. Where, in the New Testament, do we read of, say, the pastor at Troas, moving to replace the pastor of Puteoli, who had moved to replace the pastor at Antioch, who

² Some pastors called D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones their pastor, the pastor of the pastors; some pastors dreaded his retirement and death – they felt they would be without a pastor. Really? I do not mean to say that it was wrong for men to consult Lloyd-Jones. In fact, one of the things I most admire about him was his willingness to give advice on difficult questions. Even so, I think my point still stands.

moved to replace the pastor at Troas...?³ Is it not odd that there is no New Testament record of any such movement – when it plays such an important and commonplace role in today’s churches? I might say, all-important role. How is it that the New Testament is silent on the matter – giving today’s churches no guidance, no instruction, no pattern to follow? How did those (non-existent) pastors know that they ought to move? How did they know the place to which they ought to move? What was the procedure? And so on. I am not trying to be ‘holier than thou’. I realise we all have decisions to make, every day of our life, for which we have no direct precedent in Scripture. But we are not talking about ‘every-day’ decisions. We are talking about what seems to be an absolute fundamental in the life of most churches today. Surely we should not be left without biblical warrant for *that*? All I am asking is, where in the New Testament are we given the thought process of a pastor coming to realise that his work at A was over, and he should now move to be the pastor of B? On the other side of the coin, how did the churches know what to do about finding a new pastor, and how to do it? Was there a clearing house system? Did the old-school cloak play any part? Where are we let into the way church B knew that the man from A was ‘God’s man’ for them? All this is of such importance to today’s churches, and today’s pastors, I cannot help wondering why there’s not a glimmer of biblical instruction about it.

The attempted biblical defence of the pastor’s office is, in effect, based upon two New Testament verses only; namely, Ephesians 4:11 and 1 Timothy 5:17. Let me quote both verses in full:

It was he [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers (Eph. 4:11).

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching (1 Tim. 5:17).

Take the second. As I have shown, some use the verse to argue first of all for a distinction among the elders – between teachers and

³ For reasons I give in this book, I do not think Paul’s use of Timothy and Titus constitutes a pattern for ‘pastors’.

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rulers.⁴ After all, it says: ‘The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching’ (1 Tim. 5:17). They then turn to the other verse to argue for a further distinction among the teachers – between pastors and teachers. After all, it says: ‘It was he [Christ] who gave some to be... prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers’ (Eph. 4:11). Let us look at these arguments, fair and square.

Before we start, note the plurals – not a singular in sight – in both verses. In particular, ‘pastors and teachers’ and ‘elders’; not ‘pastor and teacher’, ‘elder’; all plurals – ‘pastors and teachers’, ‘elders’. It may or may not be important – we shall see – but it is a fact, is it not? Not a single pastor or elder in view. How very different today. In fact, virtually the opposite.⁵

Now for a closer look at the verses. Take the word ‘pastors’. The word ‘pastors’ appears but once in the New Testament – in Ephesians 4:11. Only once in the New Testament, I stress. And in the plural. Judging by its ubiquity today, and nearly always in the singular, one would think the word was written on almost every page of the New Testament. But no. It occurs only this once. *And then only in this phrase ‘pastors and teachers’*. Note the apostle’s words. Paul did not say Christ gave the church *some* pastors, and, in addition, gave the church *some* teachers, but that he gave the church some pastors-and-teachers; that is, men who are pastoral teachers, teachers who teach with a pastoral heart, pastor-teachers, the double designation describing two aspects of their work – as most commentators agree. This is why I use the hyphens.

As for 1 Timothy 5:17, note that the verse does not talk about ‘pastors’ at all; it mentions only elders. Nor does it divide elders into two distinct groups, rulers and teachers. All elders rule (1

⁴ As I have shown, Presbyterian churches based on the Westminster documents, for example. Take the Presbyterian churches in Scotland as a case in point.

⁵ I am not, of course, saying a word against pioneer work, and such like, where there may be only one man capable of leadership. As long as the aim is to move to plurality as soon as possible, then such men deserve nothing but respect, sympathy, support and understanding. Even so, the exceptional must not be made the norm. Hard cases make bad law.

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Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 3:4-5; 5:17; Heb. 13:17),⁶ and all elders must be able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:5-9). I think we may go a little further. All elders rule, and all elders have to be able to teach. That must mean, surely, that can only mean, that all elders both rule *and* teach, *all* of them. If not, it would seem odd to stipulate that all must be able to teach, yet not expect them all to do it. It would seem odder still to set up one of the elders as ‘the pastor’ and teacher to the virtual exclusion of all the others. It would seem to make a nonsense of the apostle’s stipulations.

Indeed, in Titus 1, Paul made it clear that one of the tasks of an elder – an elder, please note – is to be able to ‘refute’ false teachers (Tit. 1:9). He has to be able to expose and confute false teachers and their teaching, and this involves speaking.⁷ That does not mean that an elder must be nimble with his mobile phone and call ‘the pastor’ so that *he* can come round and do the job!

I am not saying that all elders are equally gifted to teach in a public way. But all elders must be able to explain and apply Scripture to those under their care, and to refute false teachers and their error. The fact is, *all* the elders rule by their teaching. According to Ephesians 4:11, if there is any distinction to be made it ought to be between pastors and teachers, not between pastors and elders. But there is no distinction. There is no distinction, and no hierarchy within the eldership, none whatever.

As for financial support, Paul did not say *pastors* should be supported. He said elders who are separated to the work of teaching, and do it well, must be rewarded with double honour.

All this is a far cry from setting up a pastor as the president of the church and over the elders. It is perfectly right – necessary, vital, wherever possible – to separate men to the teaching ministry within the local church. *But they are still elders*. They do not move up a class by being financially supported. Moreover, if it is still insisted that pastors, teachers and elders *are* three different officers, then elders do not play any part in the edification of the church (Eph. 4:11-12), and pastors ought not to be financially rewarded (1

⁶ I recognise the NIV does not always use the precise words in some of these references. But ‘manage’ and ‘direct’ are clearly referring to ‘rule’. And I have already conceded that ‘leaders’ (Heb. 13:17) might be apostles.

⁷ See Thayer.

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Tim. 5:17-18). Is this something the advocates of ‘the pastor’ system can live with?

I am not playing with words. No verse in the New Testament says that *the pastor* should be paid. How could it? As I have explained, no verse even talks about the pastor, let alone paying him!

Some claim to see ‘the pastor’ in Acts 14:23: ‘Paul and Barnabas appointed elders... in each church’. But, please note, the verse speaks of ‘elders’, not ‘pastors’. Furthermore, note, once again, the plural. I keep on about it because Paul, on another issue it is true, makes much of the singular as opposed to the plural (Gal. 3:16). It is without warrant to suggest, as it is suggested (by Calvin, for instance – see ‘Extracts’), that Paul and Barnabas chose two men, following which the church indicated by show of hands which of the two they preferred, ending up with the patristic notion of presidency, and then further distinguishing between the election of elders and pastors. What scripture justifies these claims?⁸ Why should elders be appointed in one way, but pastors in another? Calvin’s misguided comments encourage the notion of a *single* pastor coupled with the spectre of hierarchy and clericalism, and all is based on a verse which does not even mention pastors!

Let me sum this up. The New Testament does not distinguish between a pastor and an elder. The fact is, as I have said, it never speaks of the pastor of any church. What was the name of the pastor of the church at Rome or Ephesus or wherever? Nobody knows, it has not been recorded. No apostle ever wrote to him. He couldn’t. He didn’t exist. I am not trying to be clever. A massive principle is at stake. Paul wrote to the saints, the believers at Rome, Ephesus, and so on. Furthermore, he never wrote to the bishop of any church. He couldn’t. He didn’t exist. Peter addressed the elders (1 Pet. 5:1-4), and Paul wrote to the saints, bishops (overseers, elders) and deacons at Philippi (Phil. 1:1), for example. He did not

⁸ If Acts 1:15-26 is thought to justify it, is it not strange that no reference is made to it in Luke’s record in Acts 14? Besides which, as I have already noted, there are some interesting but unanswerable questions to be thought about in regard to the proceedings in the earlier passage, which are, in many senses, unique. For a start, they are pre-Pentecost.

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write to the pastor of the Philippi church. He couldn't. He didn't exist. In passing, note Paul's order! The saints come first!

Here, of course, we bump into our old friend, 'arguing from silence'. And this friend, as we know only too well, brings a lot of baggage with him, awkward baggage, including something like Pandora's box – without, as far as I can see, the fabled compensation at the bottom. It *can* be right to argue from silence, yes. *But it can also be very wrong, not to say very dangerous.* I have fully dealt with this elsewhere,⁹ so I will not digress to develop the point here.

Except to say this about it: Arguing from silence. Am I doing this in the wrong way here? I do not think so. After all, I made the claim: 'The New Testament does not distinguish between a pastor and an elder. The fact is, as I have said, it never speaks of the pastor of any church'. Silence, yes. But in this case it is the silence which is the biblical point. Those are indisputable facts. It is for those who do think we should be talking about 'the pastor' of a church, to explain how *they* can argue *against* the silence. It is for those who so strongly advocate 'the pastor' system to explain why they cannot turn up any New Testament passage to explain the practice they staunchly agree with. And that takes me on to the next point.

Is this important? Well, things are very different today. Glaringly so! Almost invariably in my experience, Christians refer, not to the church in any given place, but to the pastor. 'Pastor Bloggs is a good man; our friends go to his church'. Do they, indeed! It is Christ's church, isn't it? Why do almost all churches see fit to put 'Pastor Blank' or whatever on their notice board outside the meeting house, or on the website? Why do they usually make it prominent? Why is the pastor's name put on the letter-head of the church notepaper? Why is it the pastor addresses the people as 'my people'? Why does he frequently use a special language and talk about himself as 'your pastor' – when he asks them to pray for him, or whatever? 'Please pray for your pastor as he goes to hospital this week'. Why does he frequently talk like this? Why do churches put up with it? Examples of this sort of goings on are

⁹ See my *Particular; Infant*.

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legion. Yet nobody, but nobody – nor any church – in the New Testament talked like this. Why should we?

I realise my words will infuriate many, but I am convinced they need to be said, and I deplore it. Here are two examples of how frightening this unacceptable emphasis on ‘the pastor’ can be. The first concerns a Reformed Baptist church where ‘the pastor’ was away, and the service was to be taken by a deacon – a man who looks upon ‘the pastor’ in the way I have deplored. This deacon was approached on the way into the meeting by a stranger who asked if there was a service there that evening. The deacon replied to the effect, No, since ‘the pastor’ was not present; upon which the stranger walked off. What a catastrophe that might turn out to be – on the basis that without ‘the pastor’ the church could not possibly hold a proper meeting. In what spiritual state was the stranger – was he seeking after salvation? Was he turned away, not only from the meeting but from... what? Who knows?

The second example concerns a letter printed in the *Evangelical Times*, October, 1994. The letter from ‘a sin-sick soul’ was a virtual confession of sin to ‘the pastor’ with the urgent request that ‘the pastor’ should pray for this ‘sin-sick soul’. The writer could not even address ‘the pastor’ by his name. The letter and what it represented boiled down to unadulterated priestcraft. Confession of sin to ‘the pastor’? Desire for ‘the pastor’ to pray? Could the man (or woman) not pray for himself? I am not suggesting that it is wrong to ask a fellow-believer to pray for one, but I do not think the above is as innocent as that! Christ was not mentioned once! And the man knew what was wrong in his life but instead of putting it right, he shuffled his responsibility onto God and ‘the pastor’. The letter, and its publication, was an offence to all those who reject Popery, or it ought to have been.

So this is what ‘the pastor’ business comes to. Pastor and priest are not so very different in spelling, and when men and women hold the kind of views illustrated by the letter just quoted, pastor and priest are virtually the same in more ways than mere spelling. Milton was right, was he not? Presbyterian can be priest writ large.

Paul, I am convinced, would have had no truck with such shenanigans. For a start, I do not recall he ever wrote to the pastor of any church. And let me remind you of how he opened the letter

to the Philippians: ‘To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers [bishops, traditionally and footnote] and deacons’ (Phil. 1:1); note the biblical order. (See also Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:2; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1-2; 2 Pet. 1:1; Jude 1; Rev. 1:4). I know the seven angels (Rev. 1:20) are traditionally taken to be the seven pastors of the churches, but it takes a bit of proving in light of the rest of the New Testament. Of course, *if* the Revelation had been written 200/300 years later than it was... *But it wasn't!* Whatever view we take of the seven angels – and I have no more insight than anybody else – we must not read the 3rd century back into the New Testament. Rather, we must expose the 3rd century to the New Testament. How different to today’s practice.

I am not kicking up a fuss about nothing. Reader, if you still think I am, I suggest you put ‘pastor poems’ or ‘pastor appreciation’ into a search engine. Did you know there is an annual ‘Pastor Appreciation Day’?

I am convinced that priestcraft is at the bottom of all this. Or at least that is what it leads to. Overwhelmingly, I am prepared to concede, this is unwittingly so, but there it is, all the same. Those who are appalled at my language, should read again the history of the Fathers. And if the Reformed and evangelicals claim they have no thought of priestcraft, perhaps they might care to ponder on Spurgeon’s words:

One idea which conflicts with [Scripture] is this, that a priest or a minister is absolutely necessary to assist men in salvation. That idea is current in other places besides the Romish Church; there are many, alas! too many, who make a dissenting minister as much their priest as the Catholic makes his priest his helper... The minister and the priest are mixed up with it...

We have, even in Protestant churches, too much priestcraft. Priestcraft assumes to be the divinely appointed channel of communicating with heaven, and this monstrous pretence is so abominable that we would sooner have the curse than the blessing of a man hardened to such an imposture.

There is a notion among some people that the priest is to save them, alias the minister, for men easily in these charitable days make even dissenting ministers into priests. I have heard people say: ‘Just as I employ a lawyer to attend to my temporal business, and I do not bother my head any more about it, so I employ my priest or my clergyman to

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attend to my spiritual business; and there is an end of it'. This is evil talk, and ruinous to the man who indulges in it... O sirs, do not be deluded by priestcraft and sacramentalism, whether it be of the school of Rome, or of Oxford.¹⁰

Or, I would add, of any dissenting academy, not excepting the Reformed Baptist variety. Substitute the word 'pastor' for 'priest' in those extracts, and you have my meaning in a nutshell. 'Pastorcraft' is nothing but 'priestcraft' writ equal. Let me show you what I mean:

One idea which conflicts with [Scripture] is this, that a pastor or a minister is absolutely necessary to assist men in salvation.¹¹ That idea is current in other places besides the Romish Church; there are many, alas! too many, who make a dissenting minister as much their pastor [priest] as the Catholic makes his priest his helper... the minister and the pastor are mixed up with it...

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There is a notion among some people that the pastor is to save them, alias the minister, for men easily in these charitable days make even dissenting ministers into pastors [priests]. I have heard people say: 'Just as I employ a lawyer to attend to my temporal business, and I do not bother my head any more about it, so I employ my pastor or my clergyman to attend to my spiritual business; and there is an end of it'.¹² This is evil talk, and ruinous to the man who indulges in it... O

¹⁰ Spurgeon: *New* Vol.3 pp268-269; Vol.4 1858 p176; *Metropolitan* Vol.17 p243; Vol.32 pp31-32; see also pp450-451. 'Oxford' is a reference to the Tractarians.

¹¹ If anybody thinks that Spurgeon was (or I am) making this up, remember what Cyprian said about no salvation outside the Church. I have already quoted Calvin on this, and will be coming back for more. And since 'the pastor' and the Church are virtually one and the same... See also my quotation of the letter printed in the *Evangelical Times*. And so on...

¹² I have been told that my complaint – against unbelievers employing ministers to give them reassurance at a funeral for a fellow-unbeliever – is unjustified on the ground that all they are doing is something similar to calling in a plumber to fix a leak. As for the oft-repeated 'taking the opportunity', I am not fully convinced that funerals for unbelievers are a

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sirs, do not be deluded by pastorcrafft and sacramentalism, whether it be of the school of Rome, or of Oxford.

Sadly, many churches – most churches – repeat the error of the Fathers in this regard. Who today bats an eyelid when he is told that a church which is in between pastors is in one of its periodic ‘interregnums’? An interregnum, I ask you! ‘The period of time between the end of one reign or regime and the beginning of the next... a period of time during which there is no government, control, or authority’.¹³ Phew! Why does the pastor take the chair at meetings? Why is the pastor always telephoned when a member is ill, and so on? Why is it, that when two church members – husband and wife – were ill, the wife complained that ‘no-one from the church had visited us’? In fact, I have been assured, church members *had* visited – but not the pastor! In her eyes, evidently, ‘pastor’ equated to ‘church’. *Q.E.D.* Why is the pastor (or his wife) the clearing station for virtually all church news? Why is the pastor the mainstay, the king pin, the focal point of the church? If the pastor leaves, does the church really believe it cannot carry out all its necessary functions? Why, as soon as a pastor resigns, does the all-consuming business of the church centre on finding a new man, and without delay? Could somebody who is in the system give me a scripture which shows a New Testament church in such a flap? Reader, before you dismiss my question, think! How many would say that some important decisions must await the appointment of the new pastor? I am not making it up, I assure you. Some, who are sympathetic to what I am saying, can testify that in their experience the church actually functioned better when they were without ‘a pastor’, and the church was ‘forced’ into getting closer to the New Testament priesthood of all believers in which each part did its work. This view, however, in my experience, is the exception – the rare exception, at that.

Let me give one example in response to the anticipated howls of horror. Take a glance at those booklets which are published on the

golden opportunity for preaching the gospel, nor am I sure how often it is really preached at such times. Every man has to answer for himself, of course. By the way, I am not blaming the unbeliever for asking. My remarks are directed at an altogether different target!

¹³ *Encarta Dictionary*.

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history of any particular local church. What do you find? Not what it says on the cover! What you find in most cases is not a history of the *church*, but a history of the *pastors*.

It reminds me of Calvin's misguided emphasis (of which I have already spoken) upon the institution, the structure and the officers of the church, to the neglect of the members and their priesthood as believers. Pastoral responsibility is a responsibility which devolves upon all the members, not just the man at the top. My stomach, for instance, knows when I have sciatica – and it doesn't like it. It doesn't shrug it off by saying: 'That's the responsibility of my head; leave it to him; nothing to do with me'.

Then again, it wasn't only the Fathers who thought there is no salvation apart from the Church and its pastors – the institutional Church, that is. Oh no! Calvin thought it. Calvin? Calvin had a grossly inflated view of pastors and the institutional Church, yes. Listen to him, dealing with 'the forgiveness of sins':

In the communion of saints, our sins are constantly forgiven by the ministry of the Church, when presbyters or bishops, to whom the office has been committed, confirm pious consciences, in the hope of pardon and forgiveness by the promises of the gospel... This benefit is so peculiar to the Church, that we cannot enjoy it unless we continue in the communion of the Church...¹⁴ It is dispensed to us by the ministers and pastors of the Church, either in the preaching of the gospel or the administration of the ordinances [Calvin had sacraments – with all the grim overtones that entails], and herein is manifested the power of the keys, which the Lord has bestowed on the company of the faithful.¹⁵

Pure Cyprianism! After that, how can any follower of Calvin complain if those who take his teaching seriously have an inordinate – unbiblical – view of 'the pastor' over the institutional Church? By the way, how can we find out which 'Church' is *the* essential Church? Is it the Presbyterian Church? If so, which one?

I have not finished with 'pastor'. Since this word has become infamous as an ubiquitous *title* in the churches, I will have to look at it again when dealing with *that* abominable practice – the use of

¹⁴ See my earlier note.

¹⁵ Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.2 pp298-299. As for 'the keys' (Matt. 16:19), see Eastwood: *Believers* pp66-67,90, quoted in 'Attempted Recovery' in the 'Extracts'.

titles in the churches – contradicting the plain command of Christ. But for now, I leave it there, and move on to the next New Testament word which has been grievously misused.

But just before I do, let me glance at a very common practice – but a very seriously misguided practice – in the churches. It is altogether too easily done, and too commonly done, to take New Testament passages which refer to apostles and to apply them to ‘the pastor’, virtually without pause. This is highly dangerous. We must never forget the obvious. The apostles were unique. Not in everything, I admit, but we have to be very sure of our ground when taking passages which speak about an apostle in a personal way and applying them to men today. To act like a bull in a china shop – or, to mangle another cliché, to barge in where angels tiptoe on eggshells – is to be in danger of making a direct link between an apostle and an elder (or a pastor) – whether or not this link is put into words. This is not infrequently done! And it can lead to apostolic succession and all that that entails – with a vengeance.

2. Minister

‘Minister’ is a biblical word. We must use it. But we must use it in a biblical way. Far too often, however, it is used *unbiblically*.

How? For a start, Christians must stop talking about preachers as though they, the preachers – and only they – are ministers. It is the ‘only’ that is wrong. Those whom God has gifted as preachers *are* ministers – in a very real sense – and nothing I say here must be taken to mean that I want to denigrate the public and stated ministry of the gospel. But to confine ‘minister’ and ‘ministry’ to the man in the pulpit, and to what he does there, is a travesty of the New Testament. To go down that route is to insult the church of God, belittling as it does, the biblical principle of the royal priesthood of all believers, of every-member ministry. Sadly, many who should know better, including the Reformed, do talk in such an unbiblical way. On what authority did William Hendriksen, for example, claim that ‘in Paul’s days a distinction began to be made between those whom today we call “ministers” and those we still call “elders”’? None. None whatsoever. It is simply not true. It is utterly false. But there it stands, unrepealed, in a Reformed commentary,

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published by one of the great Reformed publishing houses, and used by thousands. Again, in the same volume, without any justification, Hendriksen defined a ‘minister’ as one ‘who spends all his time and effort in kingdom work’.¹⁶ This is wrong, utterly wrong. All believers, *all of them* – both male and female – are ministers, whether or not they are engaged full-time ‘in kingdom work’, whatever that may be.¹⁷

Let me prove it. There are three main New Testament words for ‘minister’ – *diakonos*, *leitourgos*, and *hupēretēs* – plus various others which the AV, in particular, translates by ‘minister’ or its equivalent.¹⁸ None of these words, however, carry the connotation of THE MINISTER; none speak of any elevation in rank or importance. Quite the opposite. The opposite, I repeat. As Christ said: ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant [minister, *diakonos*]’ (Matt. 20:25-26). (The AV has ‘minister’). Indeed, Christ went on to use the word ‘slave’ (*doulos*). The Corinthian church, with its highly developed cult of man, more than any other church in the New Testament, failed in this regard. *In this respect*, it is the one church in the New Testament which is most like many Reformed and evangelical churches of today, where minister-cultism is rife. And Paul plainly told the Corinthians that their teachers are ministers, not masters. What is more, he told them that they are *only* ministers (1 Cor. 3:5). And Paul tells today’s churches the same – if they will only listen.

Let me spell this out a little more. The Corinthians were carnal, ignorant and divided. The church was riddled with strife. Why? In part, because they made too much of men, particularly ‘ministers’ (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:1-4). And what was the cure? First, the Corinthians had to get a proper sense of what these ‘ministers’ were, get it all

¹⁶ Hendriksen: *Timothy and Titus* pp180-181.

¹⁷ See my *Priesthood*.

¹⁸ As always, the AV has a lot to answer for in this area. I have already noted that the authorities certainly got their way with the bringing back and retention of ‘the old ecclesiastical words’. See my *Battle*. On this issue, at least, would that we had gone back to Tyndale, and allowed the AV to sit quietly in the museum.

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into proper perspective: ‘Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers...?’ (1 Cor. 3:5, NKJV). I have already noted the vital word *but* – ‘only’. This is a word which needs to be thundered throughout Reformed and evangelical churches today – every bit as much as it was at Corinth, two thousand years ago. So-called Ministers are *only* ministers; they are *but* ministers. How few talk like this today. Quite the reverse. Ministers are often referred to with bated breath. We must get back to the New Testament! If we do, of course, we shall discover the cure for the cult of man, the cult of ministers. Which is? The proper view of the Lord himself, God, Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:13 – 4:1, for example). Let me tease this vital point out of that passage. Note the apostle’s emphasis: ‘Is Christ divided?... Christ... Christ... Christ... God... God... God... God... Christ... God... God... God... Christ Jesus... Jesus Christ... Christ... the Lord... God... God... God’s... God’s... God’s... God... Jesus Christ... God... the Spirit of God... God, God... God... God... the LORD... Christ’s... Christ... God’s... Christ... God’.¹⁹ Look at the apostle’s climactic command and statement:

So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death, or the present or the future – all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God. So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God (1 Cor. 3:21 – 4:1).

Is that not clear enough?

Ministers! Because of the corruptions foisted upon the word by the Fathers and others, I am tempted to make the vain and foolish suggestion, the wrong-headed suggestion, that we drop the word ‘minister’ altogether.²⁰ But it *is* a biblical word – let us therefore learn to use it biblically. Let us remember what we ought to mean by it, and stick to it.

In the New Testament sense, a minister is a servant, and that is all. For example, in the following, compare the AV, NKJV, NIV

¹⁹ And still I have omitted some!

²⁰ Let me remind you, reader, of the caveat I mentioned right at the start. The NIV, rightly, often uses ‘servant’ – almost consistently – but falls back into ‘minister’ on occasion. The AV, NKJV and NASB often, if not always, use ‘minister’.

and NASB: magistrates are ministers (Rom. 13:4,6), as are Satan's minions (2 Cor. 11:15), angels (Heb. 1:7), Jewish synagogue officials (Luke 4:20), waiters (John 2:5,9), attendants or assistants (Acts 13:5) and deacons (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8,12). All are ministers. I say it again. All these are, in New Testament terms, ministers.

Take the last case. How many churches look upon a deacon as a minister? But this is exactly what he is. This is precisely what the word means. Speaking biblically 'minister' does *not* mean 'the man in charge of the church, the preacher, the pastor'. Of course preachers *are* God's servants or ministers (Luke 1:2; Acts 26:16; Rom. 15:16; 1 Cor. 3:5; 4:1; 2 Cor. 3:6; 6:4; Eph. 3:7; 6:21; Col. 1:7,23,25; 4:7; 1 Tim. 4:6).²¹ Yes, of course. I am, for example, perfectly content with the AV, NKJV and NIV rendering of 1 Timothy 4:6. But, as I have shown, *all* believers are ministers. Preachers and elders have their ministry, yes. But so do all believers. So does *each* believer! The priesthood of all believers is not a figment of the imagination – nor a mere evangelical slogan!

The truth is, as I have explained, the *corrupt* notion of 'a minister' is more akin to the Old Testament than the New. And that fact is fatal when talking about the church – a new-covenant organism, if ever there was!

I do not want to be misunderstood. But I fear I shall be. So let me do what I can to spell it out. Let me glance at the misapplication of the old covenant to the church.²²

The misapplication of the old covenant to the church

Let me say it straight away. The Old Testament is as much a part of Scripture as the New. I hope I have said it plainly enough. The Old and New Testaments comprise the one word of God. But, having said that, we must get to grips with the subject of the continuity/discontinuity between the covenants. The point here is this: It is to make a mistake of mammoth proportions to apply, to the church, the old covenant which Christ fulfilled and thus

²¹ Even so, some of these passages might apply to all believers in general, and might refer to something other than stated preaching.

²² For my arguments in this section, in addition to my forthcoming book on the law, see my *Battle, Infant, Baptist Sacramentalism; Priesthood*.

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abolished (Heb. 7:18; 8:7-13; 9:1-15). Reader, if you stand aghast at my words, may I ask you: Would you discipline your stubborn and rebellious son by the principles of Deuteronomy 21:18-21? Let me remind you of the old-covenant procedure:

If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. They shall say to the elders: 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is profligate and a drunkard'. Then all the men of his town shall stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid.

And that, of course, is but one example out of scores and scores which could be chosen. Bearing in mind what Scripture means by 'sabbath', will you discipline sabbath-breaking church members by the principles of Exodus 31:12-17 and Numbers 15:32-36? Would you like church disputes to be sorted out according to Numbers 16? And so on and on.

If any reader is still appalled and deeply offended by what I have said, and think my arguments too thin, I can only respectfully ask that you wait for my forthcoming book on the law, when I will fully work out all my arguments. But to try to get off the hook of what I am alleging by falling back to Aquinas' proposal that the law should be divided into three parts (moral, ceremonial and judicial), abolishing two of them and retaining the third, is nothing but a convenient, face-saving invention, an imposition foisted on Scripture. It will not wash! It is useless as well as wrong. I make bold to say this, even though Calvin retained the notion when quitting the medieval Roman Church, enlarged upon it, and set it in concrete, so that it has become virtual canon law for the majority of Reformed and evangelical believers ever since. It is still wrong. As I say, I will set out my detailed arguments in my book on the law.

Reader, do *you* realise that to apply the old covenant to the church, is grievously mistaken, and misguided in the extreme? I am sorry to have to record that, in regard to the ordering of a church, many – most – believers today are following the principles laid out by Cyprian, and applying old-covenant concepts to the church, not least, in the matter of 'ministry'. But, in moving from the Old

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Testament into the New, we cannot fail to be struck by the significant change in the idea of ‘ministry’. This is only to be expected, of course, since under the old covenant there *was* a priestly class to whom God delegated much of the practice of religion for the Hebrews (Heb. 5:1-4; 8:3), but this system has been utterly abolished in the New Testament, under the new covenant (Heb. 7:18-19; 8:7,13).

Why have I gone into all that? The reason is, it has a direct bearing on the misunderstanding over the word ‘minister’. In particular, the mammoth alteration involved in the change of covenants is highlighted and emphasised by the way the New Testament uses one of the words often translated as ‘minister’; namely, *leitourgos*. The *leitourgoi* are those through whom God executes his will. That is the essential quality of *leitourgia*. It is the way in which the Bible uses this word which is so interesting and instructive.

In the Septuagint, the word is used to denote ‘the priests and Levites who were busied with the sacred rites in the tabernacle or the temple’.²³ In other words, such men formed a special class of professionals who had specified religious duties among the Hebrew people, as distinct from the ordinary people. Quite!

Nevertheless, when the New Testament uses the word to speak of the ministry, it says that *all* believers are *leitourgoi*, and *all* perform *leitourgia*. On that last, it is not obvious to a non-Greek reader that, for instance, Paul uses the word in Acts 13:2; 2 Corinthians 9:12; Philippians 2:25,30. The NIV – rightly, I stress – avoiding the loaded ‘ministry’, preferred ‘worshipping’, ‘perform’, ‘take care of’ and ‘help’, thus giving a far better idea of the range of meaning we should attach to *leitourgos* and its derivatives. In the New Testament, the word most definitely does *not* speak of a special, distinct and professional class engaged in religious duties, separate from the mass of the people – except when referring to the abolished Jewish priesthood (Luke 1:23) or the unique priesthood of Christ (Heb. 8:2,6; 9:21). Not only so; magistrates, angels, as well as preachers, are all ‘ministers’, *leitourgoi* (Rom. 13:6; Heb. 1:7) – for which the NIV rightly uses ‘servants’.

²³ Thayer.

But now for an objection. What about Romans 15:16? Doesn't Paul call himself a *leitourgos*, one who was 'administering in sacred service', 'ministering in the manner of a priest, ministering in priestly service'? He certainly does. And the word he uses (*hierourgounta*) comes from *hierourgeō*, in turn from *hiereus*, a priest. So what is this 'priest', and what is this 'priestly activity'?

In answering that, it is important to note that this is the only place in the New Testament where *hierourgounta* is used. But what did the apostle mean by it? Let me quote the verse in both the NIV and the NKJV:

To be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit (NIV).
That I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit (NKJV).

Clearly, the apostle was speaking spiritually – the 'offering' was the Gentiles; that is, he regarded those Gentiles who were converted, under his ministry, as an 'offering' to God. But, as Charles Hodge said: 'Paul... no more calls himself a priest in the strict sense of the term, than he calls the Gentiles a sacrifice in the literal meaning of that word'.²⁴ The verse is best understood in the context of the priesthood of all believers (Rom. 12:1; Phil. 4:18; Heb. 13:15-16; 1 Pet. 2:4-12; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).

A preacher, therefore, is a minister, one of the *leitourgoi*, yes, but preaching is but one, and only one, of the many diverse aspects of being a 'minister'. Romans 15:16 is but one item in that list which speaks of the believer's spiritual sacrifice and worship to God (Rom. 12:1; Phil. 4:18; Heb. 13:15-16). To try to build a fabulous structure of a priestly, sacerdotal episcopacy upon this one verse would seem, at best, somewhat excessive and highly speculative.²⁵

The significance of the fact that all God's people are 'ministers' must not be missed, ignored, glossed over or suppressed. In the context of which I am speaking, all God's people – all of them – are

²⁴ Hodge: *Romans* p438.

²⁵ See my *Priesthood*.

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ministers, ministers through whom he fulfils his will. This must not be reserved to a designated special class of men. This change between the two Testaments is one of the great glories of the new covenant. It is tragic when it is lost or forgotten, as it is so often today.

Moving on, let me now summarise the New Testament use of the two other words for ‘minister’, *diakonos* and *hupēretēs*.

The first, *diakonos*, speaks particularly of one who carries out the commands of another, especially the commands of a master. It is used of one who is a servant, an attendant, a minister; or a servant of a king; or one who promotes the welfare and prosperity of the church; or, in truth, anyone through whom God carries out his will. Magistrates, teachers of the gospel, deacons and servants – all are *diakonoi* (see above).

The other word, *hupēretēs*, is widely understood to mean a subordinate rower in a galley – one who strained at his oar on the lower decks – a servant, a menial, an assistant or a helper, an attendant, ‘anyone who serves with his hands’, with a special emphasis on subordination, an official, guard or officer under authority (Matt. 5:25; 26:58; Mark 14:54,65; Luke 1:2; 4:20; John 7:32,45; 18:3,12,18,22,36; 19:6; Acts 5:22,26; 13:5; 26:16; 1 Cor. 4:1).

It is clear. All three words for ‘minister’ speak, above all else, of service and subordination, of being under orders. Consequently, when we speak of a minister, we should keep to this biblical notion of service and subordination. We ought not to impose upon the word any notion of dignity and rank – a minister is a servant, not a lord. Ministers are *under* orders, not *in* (so-called) holy orders! Ministers are servants of the Lord *and the church, the people of God*. Ministers are to be like Christ. He came to serve and not to be served (Mark 10:35-45; Luke 17:10; 22:25-27; 1 Cor. 15:9; 2 Cor. 1:24; 3:5; 4:1,5; 12:11; Eph. 3:8; 1 Tim 1:12-16). Ministers are not dignitaries, VIPs. They are servants, workers – even slaves, helpers and stewards – nothing to do with personal worth or rank. I must emphasise this, since it is so little understood.

It is, in fact, far worse. The way the word is commonly used today is the exact opposite of the New Testament. To foist upon the biblical word ‘minister’ any idea of importance, specialness,

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differentness, to give the word ‘minister’ or the man himself any hint of rank or elevation, is to go diametrically against the principles of the new covenant. Those who do it – many (most?) believers, I am sorry to say – could not be more wrong. It turns the new covenant on its head. Christ, through his people, in fulfilment of the prophet (Hag. 2:6-9,21-23; Heb. 12:18-29), ‘caused trouble all over the world’ (Acts 17:6), ‘turned the world upside down’ (NKJV). We, it seems, now are bent on turning it downside up.

What is more, we must never forget the universality of the New Testament concept of the believer’s priesthood and ministry; *every* believer is a priest, a minister, *every* believer without exception. But how often this is forgotten; or worse, ignored, with dreadful loss both to the church and to the individual believer. Most believers really do think that ministers form a special class and are engaged in a special way in special duties. And they do this despite protesting the opposite. This is so important, I will return to it.

In short, we must rid ourselves of the idea of THE MINISTRY, as dreamed up by the Fathers. If we don’t, we will find it impossible to speak of THE MINISTER without thinking in terms of his special call, education, ordination, title, dress, rank, dignity and power. We will find ourselves caught up in all the ministerial apparatus and jargon – clergyism – which surrounds us and threatens to smother us. Sadly, many Christians like having a professional ministry, even though professionalism is a curse in the church. They like the trappings of THE MINISTRY. Why do we have a particular education system for MINISTERS? Why do we have conferences for MINISTERS?²⁶ Why do we have fraternal for MINISTERS?²⁷ Why is there a peculiar dress for MINISTERS,

²⁶ If anyone should plead the lack of time for those employed in ‘normal’ work, I would note the ‘normal’, and call the pleading ‘special’. I do not think for a minute that time is the fundamental reason underlying ministerial conferences.

²⁷ The assembly recorded in Acts 20:17-38 does not support the notion; it was a meeting of the elders of the Ephesian church, called by the apostle. It most definitely was not a gathering of ‘ministers’ from various churches. Compare the mis-designation of Acts 15 as the Council of Jerusalem. As I have noted, it was nothing of the kind. It was a meeting of the local church – with apostolic overtones – called to deal with a problem which

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both official and unofficial? Why have we invented titles for MINISTERS? Why do we have ranks for MINISTERS – emeritus ministers, senior ministers, associate ministers and assistant ministers? Is there an ounce of Scripture for any of it? If not, why do we do it? Why do some sing hymns like this:

*Great Lord of all thy churches, hear
Thy ministers' and people's prayer...*

*Thus we our suppliant voices raise,
And weeping, sow the seed of praise,
In humble hope that thou wilt hear
Thy ministers' and people's prayer.²⁸*

Who gives men the right to differentiate between the prayers of the minister and the people? Does God? Do you see what I mean, reader, when I say that believers, without realising it, can think their minister is a special man, a member of the clergy, even when they deny they do any such thing? Do they think that his prayers are special to God? All God's people are his ministers.

Let me say that again: *All God's people are his ministers*. When Paul told Timothy to 'keep reminding them of these things. Warn them before God against quarrelling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen' (2 Tim. 2:14), to whom was he referring? Who shouldn't quarrel in this way? Is it only 'ministers' who should not quarrel? Or all believers in general? Is it not obvious? Incidentally, it shows that the believers in their day were talking and listening to each other.²⁹ The trouble was, they might drop into striving or quarrelling about words. Paul did not want that. But his solution was not to call for silence. He wanted them to go on speaking to each other about spiritual matters, but not to quarrel. It is just the same as the way in which he approached the

originated in the church at Jerusalem, and was causing trouble throughout the churches. See my *Battle*.

²⁸ *Gospel Hymns* 813; *The Presbyterian Hymnal* 585; ehymnbook.org

²⁹ The same might be said about the Corinthians. True, they were talking in the wrong way about men, boasting about gifts, and questioning truth, and so on (1 Cor. 1:11-12; 3:4; 4:19-20; (probably) 12:14-21; 14:1-40; 15:12). But they were talking, and not merely about the weather or recipes!

Corinthians and their excesses. He was talking about *believers*, and to *believers*; all of them. That is the point.

But for many, I fear it is not; that is, judging by the remarks on the passages by commentators such as John Gill and William Hendriksen, for instance. But it is not only ‘ministers’ in preaching who can ‘strive about words to no profit’ (2 Tim. 2:14, NKJV)! Is it only a ‘minister’, who is ‘the Lord’s servant’, who ‘must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful’, and so on (2 Tim. 2:24)? Of course, preachers and teachers can strive and quarrel – but so can every believer. Hendriksen, once again, however, when commenting on this verse, talked about the ‘minister’ in the professional sense.

The fact is, it is difficult to see how most ‘ministers’, in their public teaching and preaching today, could ever be said to quarrel with the congregation. A quarrel, surely, involves two parties. In the vast majority of meetings today, the congregation is mute, and the preacher is six feet above and twenty feet away from contradiction. Nor, in my experience, is it usual for the ‘minister’ and ‘his’ church to discuss doctrine – let alone quarrel about it! What is more, in this age of inclusivism and user-friendly churches, à la Bill Hybels and Willow Creek, Rick Warren and Saddleback, it would be more likely to have a man from Mars in the pulpit than a *quarrelling* minister!

Hmm!

So why do so many believers think only of preaching when they use the word ‘ministry’? Some New Testament references, of course, can only mean ‘the ministry of the word’ in the sense of (probably) public preaching and teaching (Luke 1:2; Acts 1:17,25; 6:4; 26:16; 2 Cor. 5:18; 6:3-4; 1 Tim. 1:12). *Some*, I emphasise. But, in the majority of cases, ‘ministry’ can and does refer to service far wider than preaching; sometimes it may not even include preaching; and sometimes it definitely excludes preaching; and sometimes it is impossible to decide.³⁰ Was John Mark a

³⁰ See, for instance, the AV, NKJV, NIV, NASB for Acts 1:17,25; 6:1-3; 11:19; 12:25; 13:2,5; 20:24; Rom. 11:13; 15:25-28,31; 1 Cor. 12:5; 16:15; 2 Cor. 3:3; 4:1; 8:4; 9:1,12-13; Eph. 3:7; 4:12; 6:21; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:7,23; 4:17; 1 Tim. 3:8-13; 4:6; 2 Tim. 1:18; 4:11; Philem. 13; Heb. 6:10; 1 Pet.

preacher? Did Paul and Barnabas take him along with them so that he could preach to them? I ask this (stupid) question because he was, after all, their minister (Acts 13:5, AV). I say ‘stupid’, by the way, simply because so many believers do think if someone is called ‘a minister’ then it inevitably means he must be a preacher. The truth is, Mark was their ‘assistant’ (NKJV), ‘helper’ (NASB), their ‘gofer’. The same goes for Timothy and Erastus – they were not Paul’s private preachers or chaplains even though they ‘ministered to him’ (Acts 19:22, NKJV). The truth is, they were his ‘helpers’ (NIV), his travelling companions (Acts 19:29). What is more, Paul had ‘ministered’ to himself and them (Acts 20:34, NASB, AV). Did he preach to himself and them? Of course not!³¹ With his ‘hands’ he ‘supplied [his] own needs and the needs of [his] companions’ (NIV), ‘provided for [his] necessities, and for those who were with’ him (NKJV). He did manual work to put bread on the table for himself and his travelling companions – thus fulfilling, in this instance, his ‘ministry’ as a ‘minister’. Think about Tychicus. He was a ‘minister’ (Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7, AV, NKJV), yes, but was he a ‘preaching minister’, in the sense almost universally understood today? Can we be sure? Epaphroditus ‘ministered’ to Paul’s need (Phil. 2:25, AV, NKJV; see Phil. 4:18). Did he prepare his meals, do his laundry, do his shopping, run his errands and such like – or did he preach to him? Did Paul take ‘preaching ministers’ along with him in his travels? (See Acts 20:4; Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7; 2 Tim. 4:12; Tit. 3:12). I am not saying he did not, but is it absolutely certain that is what they were, all of them? And what about that oft-neglected list of saints in Romans 16:1-16? They were servants of the church (Phoebe was a *diakonos* of the assembly), helpers, workers, labourers... In other words, they were all ministers – every man-Jack, and every woman-Jill, of them. Ministers, all of them. Note the number of women who got an honourable mention in Romans 16:1-16.

Angels *ministered* to Christ (Matt. 4:11; Mark 1:13, AV). Did they preach to him? They ‘attended’ him. Women *ministered* to

1:12; 4:10-11; and so on. Sometimes ‘ministry’ is used; sometimes not – also making the point.

³¹ I am not saying they did not talk about spiritual things – but did he act as a professional minister or preacher *to himself* and them? Of course not!

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Christ (Matt. 8:15; Mark 1:31; 15:41; Luke 4:39; 8:3, NKJV). Did they preach to him? The prophets and teachers at Antioch ‘ministered to the Lord’ (Acts 13:1-2, NKJV). Did they preach to him? They ‘worshipped’ him. And so on.

All God’s people are holy and consecrated ministers of the new covenant. Indeed, they are, all of them, royal priests (1 Pet. 2:4-12; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). As I have argued, the words ‘not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant’ (2 Cor. 3:5-6), apply to more than apostles, to more than stated preachers. They apply to all the saints. The biblical pictures of the church as a body and a building speak of the one-ness of the ministry of *all* God’s people; that is, the vital ministerial contribution made by *every* member, the competence, by God’s Spirit, of all believers as priests and ministers. Please see again the extracts I have already quoted (from Rom. 12:3-8; 15:14; 1 Cor. 1:4-7; 12:1-31, especially 4-7,18; 2 Cor. 3:5-6; Eph. 2:19-22; 4:7-16,29; 5:18-21; Col. 3:15-17; 1 Thess. 5:11,14-15; 1 Pet. 2:2-5; 4:7-11; Jude 20-23). Are they not proof enough?

It is not only ‘ministers’ who have ‘to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints’ (Jude 3). Each and every believer has to know enough, and be committed enough, to be able ‘to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in [their] way that are contrary to the teaching [they] have learned’, and to ‘keep away from them’ (Rom. 16:17). And this is but a sample of such scriptures. The New Testament writers did not write such things to ‘ministers’, as commonly delineated today. They said what they said to the *believers* as ministers, as priests; and they said it to all of them. Moreover, they said what they said to all believers of every age. Above all, they said it to us! They said it to me. Reader, if you are a believer, they said it to you. It is, I say, abundantly clear: All the saints are ministers; all engage in ministry.

Not all see it in this way, however. Not all? Very few, I am afraid. Especially is this so among ‘ministers’ themselves! Paul, apparently, in Ephesians 4:12, is not talking about ‘the ordinary, average members’, but ‘those, and those only, who hold ministerial offices’, and, furthermore, the New Testament generally uses

‘ministry’ in this way. So we are told by D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones.³² I am quoting him verbatim. With respect, as I stated earlier, the facts just do not support this assertion. And this is putting it kindly. He was very wide of the mark. Paul states the position precisely: Christ gives stated ‘pastors-and-teachers’ to carry out their work. And that work is ‘the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry’ (Eph. 4:11-12, NKJV). It is ‘the saints’ – all the saints – who are to be equipped ‘for the work of the ministry’. Moreover, Lloyd-Jones was guilty, as many others, of imposing a formal structure on the word ‘ministry’. He was making the mistake of reading back into the New Testament the principles dreamed up, and foisted on the churches, by the Fathers. As Richard Hanson said: ‘All have been long accustomed to reading their own structures of ministry [back] into the earliest period of Christianity’. We all do it. It is wrong. We should, at the very least, be aware of it. Otherwise we end up, like Lloyd-Jones here, losing the new-covenant concept of ‘ministry’, and confirming, in a self-fulfilling way, our preconceptions, and turning ‘ministry’ into a formal office. The new covenant is far more spontaneous. Allowing for the extraordinary, and without in any way sanctioning the Corinthian excesses, glance again at 1 Corinthians 14. Hanson again: ‘The Christians of the earliest age were able, in a manner which we find difficult to understand, and more difficult to recapture, to reconcile and combine freedom and authority, spontaneity and consent’.³³ It would help if we used ‘service’ instead of ‘ministry’ for the vast majority of the New Testament.³⁴ Certainly we must eliminate this hushed-breath mentality when speaking about THE MINISTRY!³⁵

As for reading back, we dare not forget that:

For us the words bishops, presbyters and deacons are stored with the associations of nearly two thousand years. For the people who first used them, the [words] can have meant little more than inspectors, older men and helpers. It was when unsuitable theological significance

³² Lloyd-Jones: *Ephesians 4* p200. See ‘Extracts’.

³³ Hanson pp18-19.

³⁴ See my earlier note on different Bible versions.

³⁵ But, and the point must not be missed, if ‘ministry’ is insisted upon, then all the saints are ‘ministers’. As they are – in the new-covenant sense.

began to be attached to them that the distortion of the concept of the Christian ministry began.³⁶

And at the risk of over-egging the pudding, I must stress again that which is nearly always overlooked: The ministry which every saint engages in may include one form or another of practical service, yes, but the main element of the ministry which every believer should engage in is that of *teaching* (Eph. 4:12-13,16; 5:19; Col. 3:16). I want to underline this. Every believer is a *teaching* minister, and edifying minister (1 Thess. 5:11). So let us get rid of this notion of THE MINISTRY and get back to the new covenant where every church member is a minister of God.

Note how in Acts 2:42, apostolic teaching, doctrine, instruction led the early church to fellowship. Now ‘fellowship’ means sharing. Let me make it clear. ‘Fellowship’ does not mean sharing a cup of coffee in order to swap recipe suggestions, pass round some holiday snaps, or gossip about others (‘rock-cakes and back-stabbing at the manse’), and such like. I am not saying the mundane details of our life are unimportant, or do not have a bearing on much bigger things, but when ‘fellowship’ is confined to such, it ceases to be fellowship in the new-covenant sense. Allowing for the extraordinary, see Acts 2:42-47; 4:23-37 for the sort of things the early church called ‘fellowship’.

Let me sum up: ‘Minister’ plays a very important role in the New Testament, and *getting it wrong leads to much trouble, and produces grievous loss*. Yet *this* is precisely what has happened. The sad tale began with the Fathers, and has continued until now. Many of today’s churches have adopted the Fathers’ invention of THE MINISTRY, which is very different to the concept of the New Testament; unwittingly it is done by most, by others in vehement denial that they do it. Nevertheless, this misuse is well-nigh universal and deeply entrenched.

So what? After all, if nearly every Christian talks in this way, and it has been the practice of the churches for centuries, how can it be wrong? and why does it matter?

It is wrong because it is unscriptural. And it matters because of its grievous consequences – not least the Fathers’ invention of ‘the

³⁶ Viola and Barna pp107-108.

clergy’ as opposed to ‘the laity’, which notion has held almost all the churches in its grip for eighteen hundred years. Not a few Christians, however, are so short-sighted – not to say, blind – in this matter, that they deny they hold to a clergy, even though they do! Is it not true that many of them look up to ‘their pastor’ as someone special, an ‘ordained’ man, one who has ‘received a special call’ from God to become a minister, marking him out from the ruck of fellow-believers? Of course it is! Though, as I say, they would deny it, many – most – think of their minister, their pastor, as a member of what amounts to ‘the clerical order, the body of men set apart by ordination for religious service in the church’. In addition, it is not unknown for believers to talk quite openly about a *lay* minister or a *lay* pastor, as opposed to a professional. In other words, they do believe in a clergy, although they deny it. Furthermore, they seem unaware of the origin of the term; namely, ‘the Catholic Church’.³⁷

And this leads me to say that it is high time we moved on from the abuses of ‘minister’ to look at this next word – *clergy*.

3. *Clergy*

I freely acknowledge that the word ‘clergy’ – or its counterpart, ‘laity’ – is not used by all evangelicals. Reformed Baptists – at least, as far as I am aware – do not use it. Yet. This is not the case in all Reformed circles, however. But the word – surprising as it may seem to many – *is* a biblical word, and we *should* use it – in the right, the biblical, way. Sadly, the way it is commonly used is anything but right. What is more, the corrupt notion of ‘clergy’ has spread far wider than its overt use, and its insidious use is as damaging as its overt – if not more so.

So, taking the word as it is commonly used, let me start by saying, with Calvin, that the word ‘clergy’ is ‘improper’ – even though he contradicted himself and continued to use it! Surely, we can do better than that! A man like Oliver Cromwell saw the point, and rightly called ‘clergy and laity’ an ‘antichristian and dividing a term’. Viola and Barna paraphrased James Dunn: ‘The clergy/laity tradition has done more to undermine New Testament authority

³⁷ *The Shorter Oxford*.

than most heresies'.³⁸ And, as Spurgeon declared: 'The distinction between clergy and laity has no excuse in Scripture'.³⁹ In fact, 'laity' never appears in the New Testament.

Nevertheless, Spurgeon was not quite right. Scripture *does* know of a clergy/laity split. *But not in the New Testament.* In the Old Testament, yes, but not in the New. Why, the phrase 'the lay people' is actually used in 2 Chronicles 35:5,13 (NKJV, NASB, NIV verse 5), as distinct from the priests. Quite right, too. There was a clergy/laity split in the old covenant. *But not in the new.*

Let us get our feet planted squarely on the right foundation. According to the New Testament, even though there is structure in the churches, and everything must 'be done in a fitting and orderly way' (1 Cor. 14:40), and some men are gifted and recognised teachers to rule and instruct the church – even to the extent that some are supported financially to let them devote their lives to such work – there is no clergy/laity split; none whatsoever. It is utterly wicked,⁴⁰ blatantly unbiblical, to speak as though there is; it ought to be anathema to every believer. The New Testament is clear. As I have explained, all God's people are holy and consecrated ministers or priests of the new covenant; all engage in priestly ministry. In the passages I quoted earlier, note the emphasis, to 'each one' (1 Cor. 12:4-7,11,18; Eph. 4:7, NKJV). To each believer, Christ gives a gift (or gifts) so that each might serve the church. In short, there is no clergy/laity split among believers, none whatsoever. So where does the idea come from?

The word 'clergy' is derived from *klēros*, 'allotted portion'. Judas had 'shared', 'obtained a part' (*klēros*) (NKJV) in the apostolic ministry, lost it, and Matthias was chosen to take the vacant position, Judas' share (*klēros*) (Acts 1:17,25).⁴¹ Even so, neither Judas nor Matthias was a cleric; they had a share, a part, they had been allotted a part, they had been chosen to be a part of the apostolic band and engage in apostolic ministry. But the first

³⁸ Viola and Barna p127.

³⁹ Hill: *God's* p122; Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.2 p453; Spurgeon: *Metropolitan* Vol.29 p625.

⁴⁰ I do not apologise for the word.

⁴¹ In verse 25, *klēros* is a variant reading for *topos*. In verse 26, *klērous* and *klēros* appear as 'lots' and 'lot'.

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believers did not apply the word to apostles only. Peter told Simon the sorcerer: ‘You have no part or share (*klēros*) (portion, NKJV) in this ministry’ (Acts 8:21). Peter was not telling Simon he had been defrocked, that he was no longer a cleric. He was telling him he had no part in Christ; he was an unbeliever. Clearly, every believer has his allotted part in Christ, and in the priestly ministry under Christ.

klēros also means ‘inheritance’: Believers ‘receive... an inheritance (*klēros*) among those who are sanctified’ (Acts 26:18, NKJV). They ‘share in the inheritance (*klēros*) of the saints in the kingdom of light’ (Col. 1:12).

Beyond that, *klēros* is the church, the people of God, God’s flock, who have been entrusted to the care of the elders (1 Pet. 5:3). The people of God are God’s *klēros*, God’s ‘clergy’, God’s part, God’s portion, his elect, his inheritance, ‘his own special people’ (1 Pet. 2:9, NKJV).

The Fathers, however, turned all this completely on its head – not the first time they had done such a thing. As I have shown, they did it with ‘minister’ and ‘bishop’. So how did they turn ‘clergy’ on its head? By speaking of the clergy as ‘those to whom the care (the allotted charge) of churches has been assigned’! In the new covenant, the clergy are the people who belong to God. In Father-speak, the clergy are the men who ‘own’ the people. First the Fathers spoke about ‘clerical appointment or office’, then the ‘clergy’ itself. It was Tertullian, followed by Cyprian, who first used the term in this sense.

If it were not so serious, we should surely be amused by the irony of the apostle’s words not ‘to lord it over God’s clergy’ (see 1 Pet. 5:3). Of all the upside down interpretations of Scripture (of which there is no risk of shortage!), the nonsense the Fathers dreamed up on ‘the clergy’, and which they foisted on Peter’s words, must surely take the biscuit. Whatever else the ‘clergy’ have done these past 1800 years, they have, in the main, ‘lorded’ it over God’s people!

Let me underscore the point I am making, since it is so important. In the old covenant, there was a clergy, a distinct class of men who served as priests, yes. Certainly. *But not in the new*. In the new covenant, the clergy are *all* God’s people. It was the Fathers who, without warrant – indeed, in flat contradiction of the

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principles of the new covenant – went back to the old covenant, and applied its principles to the church, and thus invented a class of men who are over the church, a class of men who are of a different order to the rest of the members. And not only that. In doing such an abominable thing, they had the effrontery to take a New Testament word, *klēros*, and twist it to define this invented class of clerics. Humpty Dumpty had a field day!

Wait a moment, says an objector. Didn't some of the Fathers speak of the priesthood of all believers? Yes, as I have recognised, they did, especially in the very early days. Some also acknowledged that all Christians are ministers. But even so, the Fathers soon came to hold to the clergy/laity split, contradictory though it is. Actually, and to be fair to them, they were not contradictory. They simply let the priesthood of all believers wither and die. It was Cyprian who set the course for the elevation of the special priesthood, the clergy, and the corresponding elimination of the universal priesthood of all believers. And he got his way!

What is more, it must be remembered that the concept of the threefold ministerial order *evolved*; so much so, the Fathers could make biblical statements with one breath, yet sweep them away in a torrent of nonsense in the next. In any case, the Church – especially the bigwigs – liked the idea of a clergy, and so they went on their way regardless, saddling the following generations with the special priesthood of the few, the privileged.

This should not surprise us. Sadden us, yes, but not surprise us. It happens all the time. As I have already pointed out, 'the priesthood of all believers' appears in almost all church Statements of Faith. But how little it is acted upon and worked out in practice. In everyday terms, it has become virtually meaningless, not much more than an evangelical slogan.⁴²

As for 'clergy', the common practice is all wrong, dreadfully wrong. Ministers are not the clergy; God's clergy is the church itself. The elders are not the clergy; the church itself is. God's people are God's clergy. The Bible says so. After all, elders are commanded not to lord it over the clergy, *ho klēros*, the church (1 Pet. 5:3). How this simple statement needs to sink in. But,

⁴² See my *Priesthood*. As for self-contradiction and double-speak, see my *Infant* for examples of it from Reformed sacramentalists.

according to Church theory, this can only mean that the clergy must not lord it over the clergy. Nonsense! The elders must not become a clergy and thus lord it over the rest of the believers; *that* is what Peter meant. And, in the early church, when sinners were converted, they ‘joined’ – *proseklērōthēsan* – God’s people, God’s clergy (Acts 17:4).⁴³ That is to say, as soon as a sinner is converted he becomes a clergy-man – or she becomes a clergy-woman. Each and every believer is a part of God’s clergy (*klēros*).

But these same converts are laymen as well as clergymen. They are both at the same time. As for ‘laity’, the word comes from *laos*, ‘people’. All God’s people – all of them, elders included – are his people, his laity (Acts 15:14; 18:10; Rom. 9:25-26; Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:9-10). All God’s people, *laos*, are gifted (1 Cor. 12:7,11,18; 14:24-29; Eph. 4:7,16; Col. 4:17; 1 Pet. 4:10).

Nor is this the end of it. All God’s people are stewards, ministers, servants of God (1 Pet. 4:10). All believers are sacred to God. All of them are his royal priests (Rom. 12:1; 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).

Thus all God’s people are at once both his clergy and his laity, his ministers, stewards, kings and priests, *all* of them without exception. Not only is there no clergy/laity split in the New Testament, the clergy and the laity are one and the same people. They are God’s elect (his clergy), his chosen portion, marked out and separate (his laity) from the world.

Can we not get back to the New Testament, the new covenant, in this? What a daft question! Can we? We must!

4. Ordain

There are several Greek words in the New Testament translated ‘ordain’, none of which has the dreadful connotations introduced by the Fathers, and which have been in vogue ever since. Viola and Barna drew attention to the way in which the AV perpetuated the fault: ‘Translators of the AV have used “ordain” for 21 different

⁴³ When it says they ‘joined Paul and Silas’, they did not join two clergymen in the non-biblical sense. No! They joined Paul and Silas, all of them as members of God’s people, all of them being clergy! By being converted, they were ‘clergyfied’.

Hebrew and Greek words. 17th century ecclesiastical misunderstanding influenced this poor word choice'.⁴⁴ Grievously, by using 'ordain', the AV – because of the commanding position it has maintained for centuries, and because many have regarded it as the 'original' word of God ('it was good enough for Paul!') – has given unwarranted support for, and some sort of credence to, the wrong-headed but commonly held notion of 'ordination', to 'confer holy orders on; appoint to the Christian ministry'.⁴⁵

This is a great error. I cannot say it too strongly. It is an error of enormous dimensions.

When Paul told Titus to ordain (AV) elders (Tit. 1:5), he used *kathistēmi*, 'to set down, to set one in charge of something, to appoint one to administer an office, to constitute, to declare'. This is a long way from *ordain* as generally understood. Seven men were *given* the responsibility or *appointed* to take care of the arrangements for the widows (Acts 6:3); Pharaoh *made* Joseph governor over Egypt (Acts 7:10); the Hebrews would not let Moses be *made* a ruler over them (Acts 7:27,35); by Adam's sin, many were *made* (that is, constituted) sinners (Rom. 5:19); man was *made* a little lower than the angels (Heb. 2:7); a steward is *put* in charge or *made* ruler over a household (Luke 12:42,44). Is any of this *ministerial ordination*? And yet 'ordain' is the original word.

Similarly, according to the AV, Christ ordained twelve, but the truth is, he *appointed* twelve (Mark 3:14); *poieō* means 'to make, to appoint', once again an act far removed from today's notion of ordination. All the saints are *made* kings and priests to God (Rev. 5:10). If anything, this tells us that only God can *make* a man such. Certainly, no ceremony carried out by men can do it.

How devoted is fallen man to the distortion of God's word, even to the extent of twisting it on its head. Humpty Dumpty never wants for followers and champions. How many times we have seen this in our glance at these New Testament words, and the way the Church has warped them out of all recognition. Here it is again!

Let me go on. According to the AV, Christ chose and *ordained* his apostles (John 15:16), and Paul was *ordained* a preacher (1 Tim. 2:7). But *tithēmi* means 'to make, to set in place, to appoint' (see 2

⁴⁴ Viola and Barna p124.

⁴⁵ *The Concise*. See earlier note on the AV and 'old ecclesiastical words'.

Tim. 1:11). It has nothing to do with *ordination* in the sense adopted by the Fathers and usually accepted by the vast majority of Christians. Christ's enemies will be *made* his footstool (Acts 2:35; Heb. 1:13; 10:13). Abraham was *made* a father of many nations (Rom. 4:17).⁴⁶

Further, Paul and Barnabas 'ordained' (AV) 'elders in every church' (Acts 14:23), but *cheirotoneō* means 'to vote by stretching out the hand, to appoint by voting, to elect, appoint, create'; nothing to do with *ordination* in the clerical sense. Moreover, in this verse even the idea of hand movement is lost; the verb means simply 'to vote, elect, appoint'. The NKJV, NIV and NASB all got it right – 'appoint'. A brother was *chosen*, 'appointed' (NASB), by the churches to travel with Paul (2 Cor. 8:19, AV, NKJV, NIV); that is, chosen probably by vote, by common suffrage of the people. An associated word, *procheirotoneō*, means 'to choose or designate beforehand', as the witnesses of Christ's resurrection had been *chosen* before by God (Acts 10:41). And, when all is said and done, it is elders – not pastors or ministers only – who were ordained.

All this is of the utmost importance. I am not straining out a gnat. As I have shown, many believers think of ordination as something which is 'done' to make or turn a man into a professional minister or pastor. What is more, many think it is something which can be 'done' to the man in question only by those who themselves have had it 'done' to them – in that they themselves have been ordained as professional ministers. This is wrong. It is appalling. It comes from the Fathers who, lifting the principles of the priesthood from the old covenant, and cobbling them together with the invented rigmarole of apostolic succession, forced the new covenant into their fantasy world, and thus foisted the diabolical nonsense, the dangerous nonsense, onto the churches of Christ.

And it is without a vestige of New Testament support. It ought to be abominated by all believers. Yes, the old-covenant priests were *appointed* (Heb. 7:28; 8:3), and they were also consecrated – with the full panoply of sacrifice, ritual and external glory. Such was life under the old covenant. Yes, indeed. *But not under the*

⁴⁶ See the AV, NIV, NKJV and NASB in all the verses from 2 Tim. 1:11 on.

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new. While elders are appointed, there is no notion of ordination into a distinct priestly class in the new covenant. True, Jesus was *made* both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36), *appointed* heir of all things (Heb. 1:2), but is this the way we are to think about men who are *made* ministers? We dare not take consecrating principles which apply to Christ alone, or the priestly principles of the old covenant, and apply them to a special class of men in the new covenant. We have no warrant for such a prostitution of Scripture. Cyprian greatly erred when he started the ball rolling almost 1900 years ago. I hope I have made that clear enough by now!

New Testament ordination is nothing more – and nothing less – than a recognition of men gifted by Christ for work in his church. No power is conveyed, none whatsoever. No change of class or status occurs, none whatsoever. It certainly does not move a man from the laity and put him into the clergy! Since, as I have proved, there is no such division in the churches of Christ in the New Testament, there can be no such move.

We must not interpret Scripture by Christendom; rather, we should judge Christendom by Scripture. Nowhere does this dictum apply more decisively than in this matter of ordination and laying on of hands. The fundamental scriptural point of ordination is appointment. Christendom's notions on this subject – as on so many subjects – are completely foreign to the new covenant.

In short, we should drop the patristic notion of ordination, drop it altogether. It should not be so much as named among us. We ought to stop holding special services for ordination, services taken by special men who we think have the power to ordain another. It is utterly wrong to think that, after a man has been ordained, and thus has become a minister or a pastor, he himself is now able to ordain others to the professional ministry. Yet, as I read it, the overwhelming majority of believers simply cannot get it out of their heads that their pastor is an ordained man, that this makes him special, and qualifies him to officiate at other ordinations.

This is no harmless practice. As I have said, the shocking farrago from beginning to end is patristic and unbiblical. As I have also said, I am not hunting gnats. Gnats? Are we not supposed to be governed and directed by Scripture alone? If this is to be anything more than a mere slogan, mere cant, for us – if we mean it, in other

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words – then let us drop all foolish notions of ordination, have no more to do with it, and start thinking about ordination as it is in the New Testament – simply(!) as recognition of a man as appointed and equipped by Christ.

I say ‘simply’. But what are we talking about? Christ saving, Christ raising up, Christ equipping sinners so that, by his Spirit, he might graciously use them to edify his saints. ‘Simply’ indeed! How much devilish lumber we have ‘gained’ by patristic ordination, and what dignity and privilege we have lost by undervaluing Christ and the way he gives gifts to the church.

So let us divest ourselves of the slightest thought that any power is conveyed to a man by any use of patristic ordination. Let us never for one moment imagine that somehow or another the ordination of a layman has turned him into a clergyman, has turned him from being a lay preacher into a pastor. When talking of ordination, too many believers think that ordination has conveyed power to the man, and has turned him into someone or something different to the rest of us.

Spurgeon:

There are many, alas! too many, who make a dissenting minister as much their priest as the Catholic makes his priest his helper... Oh take care [beware] of priestcraft, take care [beware] of mancraft, of ministercraft, of clergy craft. All God’s people are clergy, we are all God’s *klēros*, all his clergy, if we have been anointed with the Holy Spirit, and are saved. There never ought to have been a distinction between clergy and laity. We are all clergy who love the Lord Jesus Christ... No priestly hand, no hand of presbyters – which means priest written large – no ordination is necessary!⁴⁷

I cannot put it any better. So I won’t try.

⁴⁷ Spurgeon: *New* Vol.3 pp268-269.