

A Professional Clergy

The Vocation God Never Intended

It may come as a shock to read this title and hear it stated that our Creator never intended that there be a profession known as “minister,” “clergy,” priest,” or “pastor” in our modern culture. How can I make such a bold statement and retain any credibility as a Christian? Let us examine God’s word and discover what our Creator has to say about such a topic, for within the pages of His word are the directions and standards for living.

We Are All to Be Kings and Priest

From the beginning of the history of Israel we learn that all of the people were to be kings and priests. We first read of this truth in Exodus 19:5-6, when the nation had reached Mt. Sinai after the Exodus from Egypt.

“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all peoples, for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

This message is repeated in I Peter 2:9-10.

“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light: who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have ob-

tained mercy.”

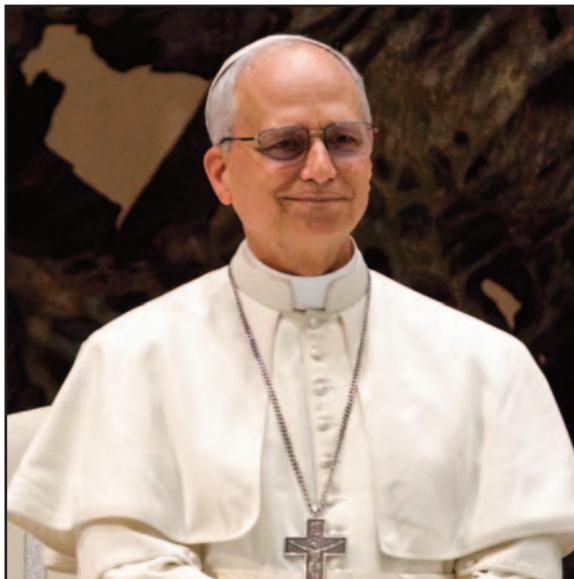
The apostle Paul also emphasized that all of the brethren are to aspire to be shepherds [*poimaino*, “to feed, pasture, tend a flock”] when he addressed the elders [*presbyteros*, “older brethren”] at Miletus, who had come from Ephesus (Acts 20:16-17). He stated in Acts 20:28,

“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the holy spirit has made you overseers [*episkopos*, ‘an inspector, overseer, watcher, guardian’], to shepherd [*poimaino*] the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

We see here that the older members of the ecclesia in Ephesus, and certainly in all of the fellowships of the saints everywhere, because of their accumulated wisdom and experience in life over the years, are admonished to be shepherds, or tend to younger members of the ecclesia so that they might also grow up to be shepherds themselves when they become elders. It was a sober responsibility that Paul was relating to these elders, one

that would absorb a great deal of their time and effort over the following years. It is an assignment that is highly reminiscent of the spirit of God resting on the 70 elders when the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness of Sinai, when two of the 70 prophesied in the camp instead of around the tabernacle.

“So Moses went out and told the people the



The epitome of hierarchical leadership within church groups is the Pope, who claims to represent Jesus Christ on earth.

words of the Lord, and he gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people and placed them around the tabernacle. Then the Lord came down in the cloud, and spoke to him, and took of the spirit that was upon him, and placed the same upon the seventy elders, and it happened, when the spirit rested upon them, that they prophesied [*naba*, ‘to speak as a prophet, to encourage or restore covenant faithfulness’], although they never did so again. But two men had remained in the camp: the name of one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad. And the spirit rested upon them. Now they were among those listed, but who had not gone out to the tabernacle; yet they prophesied in the camp. And a young man ran and told Moses, and said, ‘Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.’ So Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ assistant, one of his choice men, answered and said, ‘Moses my lord, forbid them!’ Then Moses said to him, ‘Are you zealous for my sake? ***Oh, that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put His spirit upon them!***’

(Numbers 11:24-29).

Our heavenly Father wants all of us to become shepherds and leaders in the ecclesia like Christ, to walk in His footsteps (I Peter 2:21; I John 2:6), to come to “... the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature [*helikia*, ‘full age, years of discretion’] of the fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). Even as Jesus Christ is a King and a Priest, so are the elect to become kings and priests, for it is their future to reign with Christ on the earth during the millennial reign (Revelation 5:10), as younger brothers of Him (Romans 8:29).

The Apostle’s Functions

Paul, Peter, and the other apostles had a direct command that Jesus gave them before His final ascension into heaven. It is stated in Matthew 28:19-20.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the

nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the holy spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

We, the ecclesia of today, have this same commission, to make disciples of all nations, baptize those whom God has called, and teach these disciples the ways of God. This is the function of a shepherd of the flock, just as Jesus was (and is) the Chief Shepherd (I Peter 5:4), in whose footsteps we follow.

When Paul would travel to various locations in Asia Minor, he would preach the message of the good news of the kingdom of God, and those whom the Eternal appointed for salvation as firstfruits would heed the message, repent of their sins, and be baptized. Then he and others in these congregations would select older people as overseers and organizers. This was done by voting of the people, a “stretching out of the hand.” See Acts 14:21-23.

“And when they had preached the gospel to that city (Derbe) and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.’ So when they had appointed [*cheirotoneo*, ‘to stretch out the hand, to constitute by voting’] elders [*presbyteros*, ‘senior, more advanced in years’] in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commanded them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”

Take special note here that it was the older members of the elect who were placed in leadership positions, and from these older members were selected, by voting or a raising of the hand, certain ones to be overseers. This procedure makes sense because who better than the people themselves, who likely had been neighbors and friends for years, would know who was best qualified and of high repute. Paul relied upon the knowledge of the groups to select qualified people for the very important responsibilities of an overseer or superintendent.

We know that Paul, Peter, and most likely all of

the apostles would return at times to visit these congregations and see how they were faring, and to help them with various issues that inevitably cropped up (Acts 14:21; 18:21; etc.). Sometimes they could not manage to make a personal visit, as Paul in his dealings with the ecclesia in Corinth: He "... intended to come to you before, that you might have a second benefit ..." (II Corinthians 1:15), but since he could not carry out a personal visit he sent messages by letter in many cases. Thus we have the letters of Paul that constitute a goodly portion of the New Testament writings. Paul's teachings and admonitions through these letters constitute a great pillar of knowledge regarding our modern everyday walk in life, in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, for whom Paul was an ambassador (Ephesians 6:20) Thus, it is plain to see that Paul was not a hired pastor from a headquarters church organization in Jerusalem, sent to serve as a permanent teacher in the various congregations throughout Asia Minor and the Mediterranean. Of course he taught God's truth wherever he went, but he was not a paid clergy member to any particular congregation. He served them all, and the overseers appointed by popular vote from the various fellowships were not paid by the brethren, but had their own jobs to support themselves. The New Testament example of leadership in the ecclesia is not to have a paid minister from a headquarters — as we see amongst Catholics, Protestants, and Evangelicals today — but to have local members serve the brethren in independent fellowships within their spiritual gifts of administration. It is the free, spirit-led serving of the brethrens' spiritual gifts one to another that defines government within the ecclesia as it ought to be. Corporate, top-down structure finds no support within God's system; that is the working of Satan the Devil!

How Did We Get to This Place?

The history of governments throughout the world has been one of domination of people over other people. It is the system that Jesus Christ strictly admonished us to avoid at all costs.

"The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called benefactors. But not so

among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. For who is greater, he who sits at the table or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves" (Luke 22:25-27; see also Matthew 20:25-28).

It is the Adversary's desire to hide the truth from us and practice self-centeredness and hedonism to



Protestant clergy have much resemblance to Roman Catholic priests, where even women can often officiate nowadays.

lure the elect from the calling they have been given. Thus, greatness is equated with being rich and powerful, whereby control can be exerted over others. Nowhere is this character of Satan more clearly revealed than in totalitarian governments, where leaders have the power of life and death over their citizens: obey or be dead! Multiple millions over the millennia have lost their lives due to the utterly self-centered rulership of dictators.

This same character of lordship permeates religious organization. In fact, wars involving religious differences have killed multiple millions over the millennia, a prime example being the Moslems in the Middle East and Europe who killed countless "infidels" in many wars.

The impetus towards authoritarianism is particularly strong within incorporated groups, for corporations must operate by law through a hierarchical

leadership system, not a brotherhood system as Jesus outlined in Luke 22. Satan will encourage any sort of system that will draw people away from the truth, in particular try to require a human priest or minister to be interjected between the person and God. These priests and ministers, trained at seminaries and other colleges that fail to teach the leaders of their denominations the truths of God, then control the understandings passed on to various congregations. Deep and sincere study of God's word is seldom encouraged, and a person who diligently searches for the truth is likely sent away or marked.

Note what Derek Gilbert states in *The Great Inception* (Defender Publishing, 2017, pages 28 to 29), concerning the origin of kingship-type leadership within religious organizations.

"This period [the centuries after the Flood] also saw the construction of the first temples in Mesopotamia. Each city apparently had a temple for its own local god. And each temple had a granary for collecting the offerings of the commoners. Of course, this means somebody oversaw who gave how much, and — more importantly — who *received* how much. Archaeologists and sociologists believe this led to an elite class of hereditary leaders, who may have been the ones doling out the grain from temple granaries.

"Substitute income tax and social security control over the grain harvest and rationing, and it's clear that things haven't changed all that much in the last eight thousand years. But I digress.

It's fair to ask how this situation came about. We can only speculate since we don't have any written records to study. Logically, though, it's a pretty good guess that entities who rebelled against Yahweh at this early stage had set themselves up as gods. It's conceivable, based on what we know about angels from the Bible, that one or more of them appeared to the pre-Sumerians and encouraged certain candidates who were receptive to the idea that 1) gods needed temples, and 2) the temples required priest-kings to oversee offerings and ensure that

the gods were pleased. The result was a civilization in which freedom was restricted to the upper class while the peasants worked the land to support them."

This insight into the early post-Flood development of religious systems stemming from control over the grain and food stores to develop a stratified and urbanized society in which the overseers of the grain became the powerful men in their society, shows that well before the Flood the specter of control permeated society. Nimrod reflects that tyrannical nature of leadership by his building the Tower of Babel and his encouragement of urbanization, and his effort to rule all people from all nations under his umbrella. This effort at world government, as we know, failed grandly once God confused the tongues of the various nations, but the system of domination by government over all aspects of society continues to this very day.

The top-down form of repressive government began after the Flood through Satan's instigation, and that system has been carried forward to the present time through every strata of society, including religious organizations. Concerning the Roman Catholic Church, we read at *Saylor.org (Early Globalizations: East Meets West [1200s-1600s], The Medieval Catholic Church)*

"Christianity transformed from a persecuted, unorganized group of believers into a hierarchical, dominating Church over the course of seven centuries, developing alongside the changing political environment of post-Roman Europe. The development of the institution of the Catholic Church and the spread of Christ throughout Europe during these seven centuries directly impacted every aspect of late-antiquity and early-medieval life, especially politics and the relationship between kings and religion. During this time period the Church rejected its domination by the Roman and Byzantine emperors, in turn exerting its own type of spiritual dominance over the rulers of post-Roman Europe. Christianity, through the Church, became organized and 'conquered' all of Europe by the time of the Norman Conquest of England in 1066.

“Christianity had developed as a religious idea in Roman Palestine, and had slowly spread throughout the eastern part of the Empire toward the west. During the first three centuries of its existence, Christianity remained disorganized and concentrated within the cities. Each group of believers centered around a few charismatic local leaders and developed their own liturgy. However, the conversion of Emperor Constantine in 312 CE changed the structure of Christianity and turned it into a well-organized, quasi-political institution. The Church provided Constantine with a tool to use to hold together the crumbling Empire. The Church came under the Emperor’s control with the Emperor as the *divus caesar*, or divine emperor. Constantine used the Christian bishops as imperial officials to administer law and justice throughout the Empire. These “imperial bishops” answered directly to the Emperor, thus instituting imperial dominance over the

Church. The Council of Nicaea in 325 CE further brought the Church under imperial control with the establishment of a uniform liturgy to use throughout the Empire and approved by the Emperor. Imperial dominance was completed with Theodosius II proclaiming Christianity to be the official religion of the Roman Empire a century later. Thus began the period of *praeparatio evangelii*, the Christian conquering of the world. “Christianity had transformed greatly throughout the first millennium of its existence along with the changing political culture of Europe. The collapse of the Roman

Empire in the fourth and fifth centuries gave rise to an increasingly powerful and influential Church that would remain so for five hundred years. However, the onset of the feudal mutation and the collapse of imperial and royal power in Europe in the tenth century led to the division and subjugation of the Church.”

As we well know, despite the ups and downs of centralized, authoritative administrations such as employed within the Roman Catholic Church, the end result was always the maintenance of a system that demands obedience to human rulers, an idea that spilled over into Protestant groups after the Reformation. While obedience to Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Episcopalian leaders may not be as strongly adhered to today as in the previous centuries, the system is still in place.

This sort of organizational structure, as practiced by the Roman Catholic Church, is hardly acceptable for God’s people, and the reasons for that have already been pointed out.



Perhaps things have not changed a lot since the days of the old Holy Roman Empire, when religious leaders and kings enjoyed a cozy relationship. Here the Pope and other Catholics meet with the United States president and other top political leaders (www.wikipediacommons.org).

1. The dictates of the church corporation will be enforced, even if they disagree with Scripture.

2. The spiritual gifts of the brethren will not be encouraged to develop, since the free flow of the spirit of God will be impeded. Corporate decree will hold the uppermost authority. Note the instructions in I Peter 5:1-3, 5: “The elders (older people) who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed. Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; not as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock Yes, all of

you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility”

The Levitical System Has Passed

Some people might say that the Levitical Priesthood of the Old Testament sets the standard and pattern for how the ecclesia of today ought to operate, with priests being administrators over the congregation and carrying out their divinely appointed duties. However, let us understand that THE PRIESTHOOD IS US, as we read in I Peter 2:5-9.

"You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

Also, remember that the ecclesia is now living within the Melchisedec Priesthood, not the Levitical Priesthood, which has passed away (Hebrews 8:13). The Levitical Priesthood was essential to bring Israel through the gentile nations for many generations, to prevent the Israelites from being swallowed up by the Canaanites and other foreign peoples and races whose pagan gods would mislead and squelch the existence of God's chosen people. That would have made God a liar, since He promised Abraham, and thereafter Isaac and Jacob, these things:

Promise 1: "Lift up now thine eyes, and look



The home fellowship is the manner in which the brethren were to congregate in New Testament times. The same can be true today.

from the place where you are — northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which you see, to you will I give it, and to your seed forever" (Genesis. 13:14-15).

Promise 2: "And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall your seed also be numbered" (Genesis 13:16).

Promise 3: "I will establish my covenant between me and you and thy seed after you in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto you, and to your seed after you" (Genesis 17:7).

Promise 4: "In your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 22:18).

Our Creator keeps His promises, and this Levitical system of governance did indeed preserve Israel throughout many centuries, even for some of the remnants of the nation when they were taken captive. The keeping of these promises enabled Jesus Christ to be born and carry out His ministry and sacrifice for mankind.

However, as Paul stated and we just read in Hebrews 8:13, the Levitical Priesthood for the New Covenant elect has passed away, to be replaced by the Melchisedec Priesthood, the same one which Abraham was a part of. Thus, the elect of today are walking within the same covenant as was Abraham, and as was Jesus Christ (Hebrews 7:11) ... for even though He is our High Priest similar to how Aaron was thousands of years ago, we walk in His footsteps as future kings and priests, of which Moses, Aaron, the Aaronic priesthood, and the Levites were types. What was shown to us on earth in the Tabernacle in the wilderness and through the Aaronic Priesthood is merely the type of what is in the spirit realm, and in us (Hebrews 8:4-5). We possess the spirit of God, unlike most of the ancient Israelites, so do not follow the Law on tablets of stone, but rather we walk in the Law as expressed on the tablets of our hearts (Hebrews 8:10; Jeremiah 31:33). We keep the Law because it is now our innate character, in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.

Let us praise God who has in

a real sense made us all “professional clergy!” It is the profession of each one of us to walk in Christ’s footsteps, to preach the truth of God, to heal the sick, to cast out demons, to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God, and to utilize our spiritual gifts to assist one another in enduring this society to be raised at the last trumpet. No higher calling can possibly be given to anyone!