

THE PASTOR: OBSTACLE TO EVERY-MEMBER FUNCTIONING

Chapter 5

“It is a universal tendency in the Christian religion, as in many other religions, to give a theological interpretation to institutions which have developed gradually through a period of time for the sake of practical usefulness, and then read that interpretation back into the earliest periods of infancy of these institutions, attaching them to an age when in fact nobody imagined that they had such a meaning.”

-Richard Hanson, Twentieth-Century Patriotic Scholar

“I majored in bible in college. I went to the seminary and I majored in the only thing they teach there: the professional ministry. When I graduated, I realized that I could speak Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and the only thing on earth I was qualified for was to be pope. But someone else had the job.

-Anonymous Pastor

THE PASTOR. He is the fundamental figure of the Protestant faith. So prevailing is the pastor in the minds of most Christians that he is often better known, more highly praised, and more heavily relied upon than Jesus Christ Himself!

Remove the pastor and most Protestant churches would be thrown into a panic. Remove the pastor, and Protestantism as we know it would die. The pastor is the dominating focal point, mainstay, and centerpiece of the contemporary church. He is the embodiment of Protestant Christianity.

But here is the profound irony. There is not a single verse in the entire new Testament that supports the existence of the modern-day pastor! He simply did not exist in the early church.

Note that we are using the term pastor throughout this chapter to depict the contemporary pastoral office and role, not the specific individual who fills this role. By and large, those who serve in the office of pastor are wonderful people. They are honorable, decent, and very often gifted Christians who love God and have a zeal to serve His people. But it is the role they fill that both Scripture and church history are opposed to.

THE PASTOR IS IN THE BIBLE...RIGHT?

The word pastors does appear in the New Testament:

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers.

(Ephesians 4:11, NASB, Authors Emphasis)

The following observations are to be made about this text.

- This is the only verse in the entire New Testament where the word pastor is used. One solitary verse is a mighty scanty piece of evidence on which to hang the Protestant faith! In this regard, there seems to be more biblical authority for snake handling (see Mark 16:18 and Acts 28:3-6) than there is for present-day pastor. Roman Catholics have made the same error with the word priest. You can find the word priest used in the New Testament Three times. In every case, it refers to all Christians.

- The word is used in the plural. It is *pastors*. This is significant. For whoever these “pastors” are, they are plural in the church, not singular. Consequently, there is no biblical support for the practice of *sola pastora* (single pastor).
- The Greek word translated *pastors* is *poimenas*. It means shepherds. (*Pastor* is the Latin word for shepherd.) *Pastor*, then is a metaphor to describe a particular function in the church. It is not an office or title. A first-century shepherd had nothing to do with the specialized and professional sense it has come to have in contemporary Christianity. Therefore, Ephesians 4:11 does not envision a pastoral office, but merely one of many functions in the church. Shepherds are those who naturally provide nurture and care for God’s sheep. It is a profound error, therefore, to confuse shepherds with an office or title as is commonly conceived today.
- At best, Ephesians 4:11 is oblique. It offers absolutely no definition or description of who pastors are. It simply mentions them. Regrettably, we have filled this word with our own Western concept of what a pastor is. We have read our idea of the contemporary pastor back into the New Testament. Never would any first-century Christian have conceived of the contemporary pastoral office.

Richard Hanson observes, “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 titles of these offices can have meant little more than inspectors, older men and helpers. It was when unsuitable theological significance began to be attached to them that the distortion of the concept of Christian ministry began”

First-century shepherds were the local elders (presbyters) and overseers of the church. Their function was at odds with the contemporary pastoral role.

WHERE DID THE PASTOR COME FROM?

If contemporary pastors were absent from the early church, where did they come from? And how did they rise to such a prominent position in the Christian faith? The roots of this tale are tangled and complex, and they reach as far back as the fall of man.

With the Fall came an implicit desire in people to have a physical leader to bring them to God. For this reason, human societies throughout history have consistently created a special caste of revered religious leaders. The medicine man, the shaman, the rhapsodist, the miracle worker, the witch doctor, the soothsayer, the wise man, and the priest have all been with us since Adam's blunder. And this person is always marked by special training, special garb, a special vocabulary, and a special way of life.

We can see this instinct rear its ugly head in the history of ancient Israel. It made its first appearance during the time of Moses. Two servants of the Lord, Eldad and Medad, received God's Spirit and began to prophesy. In hasty response, a young zealot urged Moses to "restrain them" (Numbers 11:26-28, nasb). Moses reprimanded the young suppressor saying he wished all of God's people could prophesy. Moses had set himself against a clerical spirit that had tried to control God's people.

We see it again when Moses ascended Mount Horeb. The people wanted Moses to be a physical mediator between them and God because they feared a personal relationship with the Almighty (Exodus 20:19).

This fallen instinct made another appearance during the time of Samuel. God wanted His people to live under His direct headship. But Israel clamored for a human king instead (1 Samuel 8:19).

The seeds of the contemporary pastor can even be detected in the New Testament era. Diotrefes, who “love[d] to have the preeminence” in the church, illegitimately took control of its affairs (3 John 9-10). In addition, some scholars have suggested that the doctrine of the nicolaitans that Jesus condemns in Revelation 2:6 is a reference to the rise of an early clergy.

Alongside humanity’s fallen quest for a human spiritual mediator is the obsession with the hierarchical form of leadership. All ancient cultures were hierarchical in their social structures to one degree or another. Regrettably, the postapostolic Christians adopted and adapted these structures into their church life as we shall see.

THE BIRTH OF ONE-BISHOP RULE

Up until the second century, the church had not official leadership. That it had leaders is without dispute. But leadership was unofficial in the sense that there were not religious “offices” or sociological slots to fill. New Testament scholarship makes this abundantly clear.

In this regard, the first-century churches were an oddity indeed. They were religious groups without priest, temple, or sacrifice. The Christians themselves led the church under Christ’s direct headship. Leaders were organic, untitled, and were recognized by their service and spiritual maturity rather than by a title or an office.

Among the flock were the elders (shepherds or overseers). These men all had equal standing. There was no hierarchy among them. Also present were extra-local workers who planted churches. These were called “sent ones” or apostles. But they did not take up residency in the churches for which they cared. Nor did they control them. The vocabulary of New Testament leadership allows no pyramidal structures. It is rather a language of horizontal relationships that includes exemplary action.

Church leadership began to formalize at about the time of the death of the itinerant apostolic workers (church planters). In the late first and early second centuries, local presbyters began to emerge as the resident “successors” to the unique leadership role played by the apostolic workers. This gave rise to a single leading figure in early church. Without the influence of the extra-local workers who had been mentored by the New Testament apostles, the church began to drift toward the organizational patterns of her surrounding culture.

Ignatius of Antioch (35-107) was instrumental in this shift. He was the first figure in church history to take a step down the slippery slope toward a single leader in the church. We can trace the origin of the contemporary pastor and church hierarchy to him. Ignatius elevated one of the elders in each church above all the others. The elevated elder was now called the bishop. All the responsibilities that belonged to the college of elders were exercised by the bishop.

According to Ignatius, the bishop had ultimate power and should be obeyed absolutely. Consider the following excerpts from his letters: “Plainly therefore we ought to regard the bishop as the Lord Himself....All of you follow the bishop as Jesus Christ follows the Father....Wherever the bishop shall appear, there will the people be; even as where Jesus may be....It is not lawful apart from the bishop either to baptize or to hold a love feast; but whatever he shall approve, this is well-pleasing also to God....It is good to recognize God and the bishop. He that honors the bishop is honored of God.

...Do nothing without the bishop....Therefore as the Lord did nothing without the Father, being united with Him, either by Himself or by the Apostles, so neither do you anything without the bishop and the presbyters....You should look on your bishop as a type of the Father.

For Ignatius, the bishop stood in place of God while the presbyters, or elders, stood in the place of the twelve apostles. It fell to the bishop alone to celebrate the Lord's Supper, conduct baptisms, give counsel, discipline church members, approve marriages, and preach sermons.

The elders sat with the bishop at the Lord's Supper. But it was the bishop who presided over it. He took charge of leading public prayers and ministry. Only in the most extreme cases could a layman take the Lord's Supper without the bishop present. For the bishop, said Ignatius, must "preside" over the elements and distribute them.

In Ignatius's mind, the bishop was the remedy for dispelling false doctrine and establishing church unity. Ignatius believed that if the church would survive the onslaught of heresy, it had to develop a rigid power structure patterned after the centralized political structure of Rome. Single-bishop rule would rescue the church from heresy and internal strife.

Historically this is known as the "monoepiscopate" or "the monarchical episcopacy." It is the type of organization where the bishop is distinguished from the elders (the presbytery) and ranks above them.

At the time of Ignatius, the one-bishop rule had not caught on in other regions. But by the mid-second century, this model was firmly established in most churches. By the end of the third century, it prevailed everywhere.

The bishop eventually became the main administrator and distributor of the church's wealth. He was the man responsible for teaching the faith and knowing what Christianity was all about. The congregation, once active, was now rendered passive. God's people merely watched the bishop perform.

In effect, the bishop became the solo pastor of the church—the professional in common worship. He was seen as the spokesperson and head of the congregation and the one who controlled all church activities. In short, he was the forerunner of the contemporary pastor.

FROM PRESBYTER TO PRIEST

Clement of Rome, who died in about 100, was the first Christian writer to make a distinction in status between Christian leaders and non leaders. He was the first to use the word *laity* to distinguish them from the ministers. Clement argued that the Old Testament order of priests should find fulfillment in the Christian church.

Tertullian was the first writer to use the word *clergy* to refer to a separate class of Christians. Both Tertullian and Clement popularized the word *clergy* in their writings.

The New Testament, on the other hand, never uses the terms *clergy* and *laity* and does not support the concept that there are those who do ministry (clergy) and those to whom ministry is done (laity). Thus what we have in Tertullian and Clement is a clear break from the New Testament Christian mind-set where all believers shared the same status. By the mid-third century, the authority of the bishop had hardened into a fixed office.

Then Cyprian of Carthage appeared, furthering the impact. Cyprian was a former pagan orator and teacher of rhetoric. When he became a Christian, he began to write prolifically. But Cyprian never abandoned some of his pagan ideas.

Due to Cyprian's influence, the door was open to resurrect the Old Testament economy of priests, temples, altars, and sacrifices. Bishops became to call priests, a custom that became common by the third century. Every church had its own bishop. (At this time bishops were essentially heads over local churches. They were not diocesan superintendents as they are today in Roman Catholicism.) And bishops and presbyters together started to be called "the clergy."

The origin of the unbiblical doctrine of "covering" can be laid at the feet of Cyprian also. Cyprian taught that the bishop has no superior but God. He was accountable to God alone. Anyone who separated himself from the bishop separated himself from God. Cyprian also taught that a portion of the Lord's flock was assigned to each individual shepherd (bishop).

After the Council of Nicea (325), bishops became to delegate the responsibility of the Lord's Supper to the presbyters. Presbyters were little more than deputies of the bishop, exercising his authority in his churches.

Because the presbyters were the ones administering the Lord's Supper, they began to be called priests. More startling, the bishop came to be regarded as the high priest who could forgive sins! All of these trends obscured the new Testament reality that all believers are priests unto God.

By the fourth century, this graded hierarchy dominated the Christian faith. The clergy caste was now cemented. At the head of the church stood the bishop. Under him was the college of presbyters. Under them stood the deacons. And under all of them were the laymen. One-bishop rule became the accepted form of church government throughout the Roman Empire. (During this time, certain churches began to exercise authority over other churches-thus broadening the hierarchical structure.)

By the end of the fourth century, the bishops walked with the great. As noted in chapter 2. Constantine was the first to give them tremendous privileges. They became involved in politics, which separated them further from the presbyters. In his attempts to strengthen the bishop's office, Cyprian argued for an unbroken succession of bishops that traced back to Peter. This idea is known as apostolic succession.

Throughout his writings, Cyprian employed the official language of the Old Testament priesthood to justify this practice. Like Tertullian (160-223) and Hippolytus (170-236) before him. Cyprian used the term *sacerdotes* to describe the presbyters and bishops. But he went a step further.

The non-New Testament concept of sacerdotalism-the belief that there exists a divinely appointed person to mediate between God and the people-originated with Cyprian. He argued that because the Christian clergy were priests who offer the holy sacrifice (the Eucharist) they were sacrosanct (holy) themselves.

We can also credit Cyprian with the notion that when the priest offered the Eucharist, he was actually offering up the death of Christ on behalf of the congregation. To Cyprian's mind, the body and blood of Christ are once again sacrificed through the Eucharist. Consequently it is in Cyprian that we find the seeds of the medieval Catholic Mass. This idea widened the wedge between clergy and laity. It also created an unhealthy dependence of the laity upon the clergy.

THE ROLE OF THE PRIEST

Until the Middle Ages, the presbyters (now commonly called “priests”) played second fiddle to the bishop. But during the Middle Ages there was a shift. The presbyters began to represent the priesthood while the bishops were occupied with political duties. The parish (local) priests became more central to the life of the church than the bishop. The priest now stood in God’s place and controlled the sacraments.

As Latin became the common language in the mid-fourth century, the priest would invoke the words *hoc est corpus meum*. These Latin words mean “This is my body.”

With these words, the priest became the overseer of the mysterious happenings that were believed to have occurred during the Catholic Mass. Ambrose of Milan can be credited for the idea that the mere utterance of *hoc est corpus meum* supernaturally converted bread and wine into the Lord’s physical body and blood. (Some scholars say that the stage-magic phrase *hocus pocus* comes from *ho est corpus meum*.) According to Ambrose, the priest was endowed with special powers to call God down out of heaven into bread.

Because of this sacramental function, the word *presbyteros* came to mean “sacerdos” (priest). Consequently, when the Latin word *presbyter* was taken into English, it had the meaning of “priest” rather than “elder.” Thus in the Roman Catholic church, *priest* was the widely used term to refer to the local presbyter.

THE INFLUENCE OF GRECO-ROMAN CULTURE

The Greco-Roman culture that surrounded the early Christians reinforced the graded hierarchy that was slowly infiltrating the church. Greco-Roman culture was hierarchical by nature. This influence seeped into the church when new converts brought their cultural baggage into the believing community.

Human hierarchy and “official” ministry institutionalized the church of Jesus Christ. By the fourth century, these elements hardened the arteries of the once living, breathing Ekklesia of God-within which ministry was functional, Spirit-led, organic, and shared by all believers.

By the fifth century, the concept of the priesthood of all believers had completely disappeared from Christian practice. Access to God was now controlled by the clergy caste. Clerical celibacy began to be enforced. Infrequent Communion became a regular habit of the so-called laity. The church building was now veiled with incense and smoke. Clergy prayers were said in secret. And the small but profoundly significant screen that separated clergy from laity had been introduced.

The role of the bishop was also changing, elevating him from serving as the head of a local church to becoming the representative of everybody in a given area. Bishops ruled over the churches just as Roman governors ruled over their provinces. Eventually, the bishop of Rome was given the most authority of all, and his position finally evolved into the office of the pope.

CONSTANTINE AND ROMAN HIERARCHY

The hierarchical leadership structure first emerged in ancient Egypt, Babylon, and Persia. It was later carried over into the Greek and Roman culture where it was perfected.

Historian D.C. Trueman writes, “The Persians made two outstanding contributions to the ancient world: The organization of their empire and their religion. Both of these contributions have had considerable influence on our western world. The system of imperial administration was inherited by Alexander the Great, adopted by the Roman Empire, and eventually bequeathed to modern Europe.

The social world into which Christianity spread was governed by a single ruler-the emperor. Soon after Constantine took the throne in the early fourth century, the church became a full-fledged, top down, hierarchically organized society.

Edwin Hatch writes, “For the most part the Christian churches associated themselves together upon the lines of the Roman Empire.” This not only applied to the graded hierarchy it adopted into its leadership structure, but also to the way the church divided itself up into gradations of dioceses, provinces, and municipalities all controlled by a top-down leadership system. “The development of the organization of the Christian churches was gradual,” Hatch adds, “[and] the elements of which that organization were composed were already existing in human society.

Will Durant makes a similar point, noting that Christianity “grew by the absorption of pagan faith and ritual; it became a triumphant church by inheriting the organizing patterns and genius of Rome....As Judea had given Christianity ethics, and Greece had given it theology, so now Rome gave it organization; all these, with a dozen absorbed and rival faiths, entered into the Christian synthesis.”

By the fourth century, the church followed the example of the Roman empire. Emperor Constantine organized the church into dioceses along the pattern of the Roman regional districts. (The word *diocese* was a secular term that referred to the larger administrative units of the Roman Empire.) Later, Pope Gregory shaped the ministry of the entire church after Roman law.

Durant adds, “When Christianity conquered Rome the ecclesiastical structure of the pagan church, the title and vestments of the pontifex maximus...and the pageantry of immemorial ceremony, passed like maternal blood into the new religion, and captive Rome captured her conqueror.

All of this was at gross odds with God’s way for His church. Thus, when Jesus entered the drama of human history, He obliterated both the religious professional icon as well as the hierarchical form of leadership. As an extension of Christ’s nature and mission, the early church was the first “lay-led” movement in history. But with the death of the apostles and the men they trained, things began to change.

Since that time, the church of Jesus Christ has derived its pattern for church organization from the societies in which it has been placed-despite our Lord’s warning that he was initiating a new society with unique character (Matthew 23:8-11 and mark 10:42ff). In striking contrast to the Old Testament provisions made at Mt. Sinai, neither Jesus nor Paul imposed any fixed organizational patterns for the New Israel.

CONSTANTINE AND THE GLORIFICATION OF CLERGY

From AD 313 to 325, Christianity was no longer a struggling religion trying to survive the Roman government. It was basking in the sun of imperialism, loaded with money and status. To be a Christian under Constantine's reign was no longer a handicap. It was an advantage. It was fashionable to become a part of the emperor's religion. And to be among the clergy was to receive the greatest of advantages.

Clergymen received the same honors as the highest officials of the Roman Empire and even the emperor himself. In fact, Constantine gave the bishops of Rome more power than he gave Roman governors. He also ordered that the clergy receive fixed annual allowances (ministerial pay)!

In AD 313, he exempted the Christian clergy from paying taxes-something that pagan priests had traditionally enjoyed. He also made them exempt from mandatory public office and other civic duties. They were freed from being tried by secular courts and from serving in the army. (Bishops could be tried only by bishop's court, not by ordinary law courts.)

In all these things the clergy was given special class status. Constantine was the first to use the words clerical and clerics to depict a higher social class. He also felt that the Christian clergy deserved the same privileges as governmental officials. So bishops sat in judgment like secular judges.

The net result was alarming: The clergy had the prestige of church office bearers, the privileges of a favored class, and the power of a wealthy elite. They had become an isolated class with a separate civil status and way of life. (This included clergy celibacy.)

They even dressed and groomed differently from the common people. Bishops and priests shaved their heads. This practice, known as the tonsure, comes from the old Roman ceremony of adoption. All those who had shaved heads were known as clerks or clergy. They also began wearing the clothes of Roman officials (see chapter 6).

It should come as not surprise that so many people in Constantine's day experienced a sudden "call to the ministry." To their minds, being a church officer had become more of a career than a calling.

A FALSE DICHOTOMY

Under Constantine, Christianity was both recognized and honored by the state. This blurred the line between the church and the world. The Christian faith was no longer a minority religion. Instead, it was protected by emperors. As a consequence, church membership grew rapidly—as large numbers of people with questionable conversions began to join. Such people brought into the church a wide variety of pagan ideas. In the words of Will Durant: “While Christianity converted the world; the world converted Christianity, and displayed the natural paganism of mankind.

As we have seen in chapter 3, the practices of the mystery religions began to be employed in the church’s worship. And the pagan notion of the dichotomy between the sacred and profane found its way into the Christian mind-set. It can be rightfully said that the clergy/laity class distinction grew out of this very dichotomy. The Christian life was now being divided into two parts: secular and spiritual—profane and sacred.

By the third century, the clergy/laity gap widened to the point of no return. Clergymen were the trained leaders of the church—the guardians of orthodoxy—the rulers and teachers of the people. They possessed gifts and graces not available to lesser mortals.

The laity were the second-class, untrained Christians. The great theologian Karl Barth rightly said, “The term ‘laity’ is one of the worts in the vocabulary of religion and ought to be banished from the Christian conversation.”

The false dichotomy led to the profoundly mistaken idea that there are sacred professions (a call to “the ministry”) and ordinary professions (a call to a worldly vocation). Historian Philip Schaff rightly describes these factors as creating “the secularization of the church” where the “pure stream of Christianity” had become polluted. Take note that this mistaken dichotomy still lives in the minds of many believers today. But the concept is pagan, not Christian. It ruptures the New Testament reality that everyday life is sanctified by God.

Along with these mind-set changes came a new vocabulary. Christians began to adopt the vocabulary of the pagan cults. The title pontifex (pontiff, a pagan title) became a common term for Christian clergy in the fourth century. So did “Master of Ceremonies,” and “Grand Master of the Lodge.” All of this reinforced the mystique of the clergy as the custodians of the mysteries of God.

In short, by the end of the fourth century on into the fifth, the clergy had become a sacerdotal caste—a spiritually elite group of “holy men.” This leads us to the thorny subject of ordination.

THE FALLACY OF ORDINATION

In the fourth century, theology and ministry were the exclusive domain of the priests. Work and war were the domain of the laity. What was the rite of passage into the sacred realm of the priest? Ordination.

Before we examine the historical roots of ordination, let's look at how leadership was recognized in the early church. After beginning a church, the apostolic workers (church planters) of the first century would revisit that body after a period of time. In some of those churches, the workers would publicly acknowledge elders. In every case, the elders were already "in place" before they were publicly endorsed.

Elders naturally emerged in a church through the process of time. They were not appointed to an external office. Instead, they were recognized by virtue of their seniority and spiritual service to the church. According to the New Testament, recognition of certain gifted members is something that is instinctive and organix. Every believers has the discernment to recognize those within his or her church who are gifted to carry out various ministries.

Strikingly, only three passages in the New Testament tell us that elders were publicly recognized. Elders were acknowledged in the churches in Galatia (Acts 14:23). Paul had Timothy acknowledge elders in Ephesus (1 Timothy 3:ff.). He also told Titus to recognize them in the churches in Crete (Titus 1:5ff.).

The word ordain (KJV) in these passages does not mean to place into office. It rather carries the idea of endorsing, affirming, and showing forth what has already been happening. It also conveys the thought of blessing. Public recognition of elders and other ministries was typically accompanied by the laying on of hands by apostolic workers. (In the case of workers being sent out, this was done by the church or the elders.)

In the first century, the laying on of hands merely meant the endorsement or affirmation of a function, not the installment into an office or the giving of special status. Regrettably, it came to mean the latter in the late second and early third centuries.

During the third century, ordination took on an entirely different meaning. It was a formalized Christian rite. By the fourth century, the ceremony of ordination was embellished by a symbolic garments and solemn ritual. Ordination produced an ecclesiastical caste that usurped the believing priesthood.

From where did Christians get their pattern of ordination? They patterned their ordination ceremony after the Roman custom of appointing men to civil office. The entire process, down to the very words, came straight from the Roman civic world.

By the fourth century, the terms used for appointment to Roman office and for Christian ordination became synonymous. When Constantine made Christianity the religion of choice, church leadership structures were buttressed by political sanction. The forms of the Old Testament priesthood were combined with Greek hierarchy. Sadly the church was secure in this new form—just as it is today.

Soon ordination was viewed as a rite that resulted in an irrevocable position. Augustine taught that ordination confers a “definite irremovable imprint” on the priest that empowers him to fulfill his priestly functions.

Christian ordination, then, came to be understood as that which constitutes the essential difference between clergy and laity. By it, the clergy were empowered to administer the sacraments. It was believed that the priest, who performs the divine service, should be the most perfect and holy of all Christians.

Gregory of Nazianzus (329-389) and Chrysostom had such a high view of those occupying the priesthood that danger loomed for the clergy if they failed to live up to the holiness of their service. “The priest, [Chrysostom] observed, is ever judged by his parish as though he were an angel and not of the same frail stuff as the rest of men.”

How was the priest to live in such a state of pure holiness? How was he to be worthy to serve in “the choir of angels”? The answer was ordination. By ordination, the stream of divine graces flowed into the priest, making him a fit vessel for God’s use. This idea, also known as “sacerdotal endowment,” first appears in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa (330-394).

Gregory argued that ordination makes the priest “invisibly but actually a different, better man,” raising him high above the laity. “The same power of the word, “ writes Gregory, “makes the priest venerable and honorable, separated....While but yesterday he was one of the mass, one of the people, he is suddenly rendered a guide, a president, a teacher of righteousness, an instructor in hidden mysteries.”

Listen to the words of one fourth-century document: “The bishop, he is the minister of the Word, the keeper of knowledge, the mediator between God and you in several parts of your Divine worship....He is your ruler and governor....He is next after God your earthly god, who has a right to be honored by you.” Priests came to be identified as the “vicars of God on the earth.”

To further show the priests’ distinction from other people, both their lifestyle and dress were different from that of laymen. Regrettably, this concept of ordination has never left the Christian faith. It is alive and will in contemporary Christianity. In fact, if you are wondering why and how the present-day pastor got to be so exalted as the “holy man of God,” these are the roots.

Eduard Schweizer, in his classic work *Church Order in the New Testament*, argues that Paul knew nothing about an ordination that confers ministerial or clerical powers to a Christian. First-century shepherds (elders, overseers) did not receive anything that resembles modern-day ordination. They were not set above the rest of the flock. They were those who served among them (see Acts 20:28, nasb, and 1 Peter 5:2-3, nasb).

First century elders were merely endorsed publicly by traveling apostolic workers as being those who are for the church. Such acknowledgement was simply the recognition of a function. It did not confer special powers. Nor was it a permanent possession.

The contemporary practice of ordination creates a special caste of Christian. Whether it be the priest in Catholicism or the pastor in Protestantism, the result is the same: The most important ministry is restricted to a few “special” believers.

Such an idea is as damaging as it is non-scriptural. The New Testament nowhere limits preaching, baptizing, or distributing the Lord's Supper to the "ordained." Eminent scholar James D. G. Dunn put it best when he said that the clergy—laity tradition has done more to undermine New Testament authority than most heresies.

Since church office could only be held through the rite of ordination, the power to ordain became the crucial issue in holding religious authority. The biblical context was lost. And proof-texting methods were used to justify the clergy/laity hierarchy. Perhaps the best---known example is the early Catholics' use of Matthew 16 to justify the creation of a papal system and the doctrine of apostolic succession. The result: Ordinary believers, generally uneducated and ignorant, were at the mercy of a professional clergy.

THE REFORMATION

The reformers of the sixteenth century brought the Catholic priesthood sharply into question. They attacked the idea that the priest had special powers to convert wine into blood. They rejected apostolic succession. They encouraged the clergy to marry. They revised the liturgy to give the congregation more participation. They also abolished the office of the bishop and reduced the priest back to a presbyter.

Unfortunately, however, the Reformers carried the Roman Catholic clergy/laity distinction straight into the Protestant movement. They also kept the Catholic idea of ordination. Although they abolished the office of the bishop, they resurrected the one-bishop rule, clothing it in a new garb.

The rallying cry of the Reformation was the restoration of the priesthood of all believers. However, this restoration was only partial. Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli affirmed the believing priesthood with respect to one's individual relationship to God. They rightly taught that every Christian has direct access to God without the need of a human mediator. This was a wonderful restoration. But it was one-sided.

What the Reformers failed to do was to recover the corporate dimension of the believing priesthood. They restored the doctrine of the believing priesthood soteriological—i.e., as it related to salvation. But they failed to restore it ecclesiologically—i.e., as it related to the church.

In other words, the Reformers only recovered the priesthood of the believer singular). They reminded us that every Christian has individual and immediate access to God. As wonderful as that is, they did not recover the priesthood of all believers (collective plural). This is the blessed truth that every Christian is part of a clan that shares God's Word one with another. (It was the Anabaptists who recovered this practice. Regrettably, this recovery was one of the reasons why Protestant and Catholic swords were red with Anabaptist blood.)

While the Reformers opposed the pope and his religious hierarchy, they still held to the narrow view of ministry that they inherited. They believed that "ministry" was an institution that was closeted among the few who were "called" and "ordained." Thus, the Reformers still affirmed the clergy-laity split. Only in their rhetoric did they state that all believers were priests and ministers. In their practice they denied it. So, after the smoke cleared from the Reformation, we ended up with the same thing that the Catholics gave us—a selective priesthood!

Luther held to the idea that those who preach needed to be specially trained. Like the Catholics, the Reformers believed that only the “ordained minister” could preach, baptize, and administer the Lord’s Supper. As a result, ordination gave the minister a special aura of divine favor that could not be questioned.

Tragically, Luther and the other Reformers violently denounced the Anabaptists for practicing every-member functioning in the church. The Anabaptists believed it was every Christian’s right to stand up and speak in a meeting. It was not solely the domain of the clergy. Luther was so opposed to this practice that he said it came from “the pit of hell” and those who were guilty of it should be put to death.

In short, the Reformers retained the idea that ordination was the key to having power in the church. It was the ordained minister’s duty to convey God revelation to His people. And he was paid for this role.

Like the Catholic priest, the Reformed minister was viewed by the church as the “man of God”—the paid mediator between God and His people. He was not a mediator to forgive sins, but a mediator to communicate the divine will. So in Protestantism an old problem took on a new form. The jargon changed, but the error remained.

In the seventeenth century, Puritan writers John Owen (1616-1683) and Thomas Goodwin (1600-16880), like Luther and Calvin, viewed the pastorate as a permanent fixture in God’s house. Owen and Goodwin led the puritans to focus all authority into the pastoral role. To their minds, the pastor is given “the power of the keys.” He alone is ordained to preach, administer the sacraments, read Scripture publicly, and be trained in the original biblical languages, as well as logic and philosophy.

FROM PRIEST TO PASTOR

John Calvin did not like using the word priest to refer to ministers. He preferred the term pastor. In Calvin's mind, pastor was the highest word one could use for ministry. He like it because the Bible referred to Jesus Christ, "the great Shepherd of the sheep" (Hebrews 13:20). Ironically, Calvin believed that he was restoring the New Testament bishop (episkopos) in the person of the pastor!

Luther also did not like using the word priest to define the new Protestant ministers. He wrote, "We neither can nor ought to give the name priest to those who are in charge of the Word and sacrament among the people. The reason they have been called priests is either because of the custom of the heathen people or as a vestige of the Jewish nation. The result is greatly injurious to the church. So, he too adopted the terms preacher, minister, and pastor to refer to this office.

Zwingli and Martin Bucer also favored the word pastor. They wrote popular treatises on it. As a result, the term began to permeate the churches of the Reformation. However, given their obsession with preaching, the Reformers favorite term for the minister was preacher. And this was what the common people generally called him.

It was not until the eighteenth century that the term pastor came into common use, eclipsing preacher and minister. This influence came from the Lutheran Pietists. Since then the term has become widespread in mainstream Christianity.

Even so, the Reformers considered the pastor to be the functioning head of the church. According to Calvin, “The pastoral office is necessary to preserve the church on earth in a greater way than the sun, food, and drink are necessary to nourish and sustain the present life.

The Reformers believed that the pastor possessed divine power and authority. He did not speak in his own name, but in the name of God. Calvin further reinforced the primacy of the pastor by treating acts of contempt or ridicule toward the minister as serious public offenses.

This should come as no surprise when you realize what Calvin took as his model for ministry. He did not take the church of the apostolic age. Instead, he took as his pattern the one-bishop rule of the second century. This was true for the other reformers as well.

The irony here is that John Calvin bemoaned the Roman Catholic Church because it built its practices on “human inventions” rather than on the Bible. But Calvin did the same thing. In this regard, Protestants are just as guilty as are Catholics. Both denominations base their practices on human tradition.

Calvin taught that the preaching of the Word of God and the proper administration of the sacraments are the marks of a true church. To his mind, preaching, baptism, and the Eucharist were to be carried out by the pastor, not the congregation. For all the Reformers, the primary function of a minister was preaching. The preeminent place of preaching is best reflected in Luther’s German Mass, which included three services on Sunday. At 5 or 6 a.m., a sermon was given on the Epistle of the day. At the main service at 8 or 9 a.m., the minister preached on the Gospel of the day. The sermon at the Vesper service in the afternoon was based on the Old Testament.

Like Calvin, Luther also made the pastor a separate and exalted office. While he argued that the keys of the Kingdom belonged to all believers, Luther confined their use to those who held offices in the church. “We are all priests,” said Luther, “insofar as we are Christians, but those whom we call priests are ministers selected from our midst to act in our name, and their priesthood is our ministry.”

This was sacerdotalism, pure and simple. Luther broke from the Catholic camp in that he rejected a sacrificing priesthood. But in its place, he believed that the sharing of God’s Word belonged to a special order.

The following are characteristic statements made by Luther in his exaltation of the pastor: “God speaks through the preacher....A Christian preacher is a minister of God who is set apart, yea, he is an angel of God, a very bishop sent by God, a savior of many people, a king and prince in the Kingdom of Christ....there is nothing more precious or nobler in the earth and in this life than a true, faithful parson or preacher.

Said Luther, “We should not permit our pastor to speak Christ’s words by himself as though he were speaking them for his own person; rather, he is the mouth of all of us and we all speak them with him in our hearts....It is a wonderful thing that the mouth of every pastor is the mouth of Christ, therefore you ought to listen to the pastor not as a man, but as God.” you can hear the echoes of Ignatius ringing through these words.

Such ideas reveal a flawed view of the church. Luther felt the church was primarily a preaching station. The Christian congregation,” said Luther, “never should assemble unless God’s Word is preached and prayer is made, no matter for how brief a time this may be.” Luther believed that the church is simply a gathering of people who listen to preaching. For this reason, he called the church building a Mundhaus, which means a mouth-house. He also made this alarming statement: “the ears are the only organs of a Christian.” These are the roots of Protestantism.

THE CURE OF SOULS

Calvin, Luther, and Bucer believed that the two key functions of the pastor were the proclamation of the Word (preaching) and the celebration of the Eucharist (Communion). But Calvin and Bucer added a third element. They emphasized that the pastor had a duty to provide care and healing to the congregation. This is known as the “cure of souls.” Bucer wrote the preeminent book on this subject, entitled *True Cure of the Souls*, in 1538.

The origin of “cure of souls” goes back to the fourth and fifth centuries. We find it in the teaching of Gregory of Nazianzus. Gregory called the bishop a “pastor”—a physician of souls who diagnoses his patient’s maladies and prescribes either medicine or the knife.

Luther’s early followers also practiced the care of souls. But in Calvin’s Geneva, it was raised to an art form. Each pastor and one elder were required to visit the homes of their congregants. Regular visits to the sick and those in prison were also observed. For Calvin and Bucer, the pastor was not merely a preacher and a dispenser of the sacraments. He was the “cure of souls” or the “curate.” His task was to bring healing, cure, and compassion to God’s hurting people.

This idea lives on in the Protestant world today. It is readily seen in the contemporary concepts of pastoral care, pastoral counseling, and Christian psychology. In the present-day church, the burden of such care typically falls on the shoulders of one man—the pastor. (In the first century, it fell on the shoulders of the entire church and upon a group of seasoned men called “elders.”)

THE PASTOR-DRIVEN CHURCH

In short, the Protestant Reformation struck a blow to Roman Catholic sacerdotalism. It was not a fatal blow, however, but merely a semantic change. The Reformers retained the one-bishop rule. The pastor now played the role of the bishop. The bishop-driven church evolved into the pastor-driven church. The pastor came to be regarded as the local head of a church—the leading elder. As one writer put it, “In Protestantism, the preachers tend to be the spokesmen and representatives of the church and the church is often the preacher’s church. This is a great danger and threat to the Christian religion, not unrelated to clericalism.

In their rhetoric the Reformers decried the clergy-laity split. But in their practice they fully retained it. As Kevin Giles says, “Differences between Catholic and Protestant clergy were blurred in practice and theology. In both kinds of churches, the clergy were a class apart; in both, their special status was based on Divine initiatives (mediated in different ways); and in both, certain duties were reserved to them.

The long-standing, postbiblical tradition of the one-bishop rule (now embodied in the pastor) prevails in the Protestant church today. Tremendous psychological factors make laypeople feel that ministry is the responsibility of the pastor. It's his job. He's the expert in their thinking.

The New Testament word for minister is diakonos. It means "servant." But this word has been distorted because men have professionalized the ministry. We have taken the word minister and equated it with the pastor, with no scriptural justification whatsoever. In like manner, we have mistakenly equated preaching and ministry with the pulpit sermon, again without biblical justification.

HOW THE PASTORAL ROLE DAMAGES BODY LIFE

Now that we have unearthed the little-known roots of the contemporary pastor, let's shift our attention to the practical effects that a pastor has on the people of God.

The unscriptural clergy/laity distinction has done untold harm to the body of Christ. It has divided the believing community into first and second-class Christians. The clergy/laity dichotomy perpetuates an awful falsehood—namely, that some Christians are more privileged than others to serve the Lord.

The one-man ministry is entirely foreign to the New Testament, yet we embrace it while it suffocates our functioning. We are living stones, not dead ones. However, the pastoral office has transformed us into stones that do not breathe.

Permit us to get personal. We believe the pastoral office has stolen your right to function as a full member of Christ's body. It has distorted the reality of the body, making the pastor a giant mouth and transforming you into a tiny ear. It has rendered you a mute spectator who is proficient at taking sermon notes and passing an offering plate.

But that is not all. The modern-day pastoral office has overthrown the main thrust of the letter to the Hebrews-the ending of the old priesthood. It has made ineffectual the teaching of 1 Corinthians 12-14, that every member has both the right and the privilege to minister in a church meeting. It has voided the message of 1 Peter 2 that every brother and sister is a functioning priest.

Being a functioning priest does not mean that you may only perform highly restrictive forms of ministry like singing songs in your pew, raising your hands during worship, setting up the PowerPoint presentation, or teaching a Sunday school class. That is not the New Testament idea of ministry! These are mere aids for the pastor's ministry. As one scholar put it, "Much Protestant worship, up to the present day, has also been infected by an overwhelming tendency to regard worship as the work fo the pastor (and perhaps the choir) with the majority of the laity having very little to do but sing a few hymns and listen in a prayerful and attentive way.

We expect doctors and lawyers to serve us, not to train us to serve others. And why? Because they are the experts. They are trained professionals. Unfortunately, we look upon the pastor in the same way. All of this does violence to the fact that every believer is a priest. Not only before God, but to one another.

But there is something more. The contemporary pastorate rivals the functioning headship of Christ in His church. It illegitimately holds the unique place of centrality and headship among God's people, a place that is reserved for only one Person—the Lord Jesus. Jesus Christ is the only head over a church and the final word to it. By his office, the pastor displaces and supplants Christ's headship by setting himself up as the church's human head.

For this reason, we believe the present-day pastoral role hinders the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. Why? Because that purpose is centered on making Christ's headship visibly manifested in the church through the free, open, mutually participatory, every-member functioning of the body. As long as the pastoral office is present in a particular church, that church will have a slim chance of witnessing such a glorious thing.

HOW THE PASTOR DAMAGES HIMSELF

The contemporary pastor not only does damage to God's people, he does damage to himself. The pastoral office has a way of chewing up many who come within its parameters. Depression, burnout, stress, and emotional breakdown occur at abnormally high rates among pastors. At the time of this writing, there are reportedly more than 500,000 paid pastors serving churches in the United States. Among this massive number of religious professionals, consider the following statistics that testify to the lethal danger of the pastoral office:

- 94 percent feel pressured to have an ideal family.
- 90 percent work more than forty-six hours a week.
- 81 percent say they have insufficient time with their spouses.
- 80 percent believe that pastoral ministry affects their family negatively.
- 70 percent do not have someone they consider a close friend.
- 70 percent have lower self-esteem than when they entered the ministry.
- 50 percent feel unable to meet the demands of the job.
- 80 percent are discouraged or deal with depression.
- More than 40 percent report that they are suffering from burnout, frantic schedules, and unrealistic expectations.
- 33 percent consider pastoral ministry an outright hazard to the family.
- 40 percent of pastoral resignations are due to burnout.

Most pastors are expected to juggle sixteen major tasks at once. And many crumble under the pressure. For this reason 1,400 ministers in all denominations across the United States are fired or forced to resign each month. Over the past twenty years, the average length of a pastorate has declined from seven years to just over four years.

Unfortunately, few pastors have connected the dots to discover that it is their office that causes this underlying turbulence. Simply put: Jesus Christ never intended any person to sport all the hats a present-day pastor is expected to wear. He never intended any one person to bear such a load.

The demands of the pastorate are crushing; they will drain any mortal dry. Imagine for a moment that you were working for a company that paid you on the basis of how good you made your people feel. What if your pay depended on how entertaining you were, how friendly you were, how popular your wife and children were, how well-dressed you were, and how perfect your behavior was?

Can you imagine the unmitigated stress this would cause you? Can you see how such pressure would force you into playing a pretentious role-all to keep your authority, your prestige, and your job security? (For this reason, many pastors are resistant to receiving any kind of help.)

The pastoral profession dictates standards of conduct like any other profession, whether it be teacher, doctor, or lawyer. The profession dictates how pastors are to dress, speak, and act. This is one of the major reasons why many pastors live very artificial lives.

In this regard, the pastoral role fosters dishonesty. Congregants expect their pastor to always be cheerful, completely spiritual, and available at a moment's call. They also expect that he will have a perfectly disciplined family. Furthermore, he should never appear resentful or bitter. Many pastors take to this role like actors in a Greek drama.

Based on the scores of personal testimonies we have heard from erstwhile pastors, many—if not most—pastors cannot stay in their office without being corrupted on some level. The power-politics endemic to the office is a huge problem that isolates many of them and poisons their relationship with others.

In a insightful article to pastors entitled “Preventing Clergy Burnout,” the author suggests something startling. His advice to pastors gives us a clear peek into the power-politics that goes with the pastorate. He implores pastors to “fellowship with clergy of other denominations. These persons cannot harm you ecclesiastically, because they are not of your official circle. There is no political string they can pull to undo you.

Professional loneliness is another virus that runs high among pastors. The lone-ranger plague drives some ministers into other careers. It drives others into crueler fates.

All of these pathologies find their root in the history of the pastorate. It is “lonely at the top” because God never intended for anyone to be at the top—except His Son! In effect, the present-day pastor tries to shoulder the fifty-eight New Testament “one another” exhortations all by himself. It is no wonder that any of them get crushed under the weight.

CONCLUSION

The contemporary pastor is the most unquestioned fixture in twenty first century Christianity. Yet not a strand of Scripture supports the existence of this office.

Rather, the present-day pastor was born out of the single-bishop rule first spawned by Ignatius and Cyprian. The bishop evolved into the local presbyter. In the Middle Ages, the presbyter grew into the Catholic priest. During the Reformation, he was transformed into the “preacher,” “the minister,” and finally “the pastor” —the person upon whom all of Protestantism hangs. To boil it down to one sentence: The Protestant pastor is nothing more than a slightly reformed Catholic priest. (Again, we are speaking of the office and not the individual.)

Catholic priests had seven duties at the time of the Reformation: preaching; the sacraments; prayers for the flock; a disciplined, godly life; church rites; supporting the poor; and visiting the sick. The Protestant pastor takes upon himself all of these responsibilities—plus he sometimes blesses civic events.

The famed poet John Milton put it best when he said, “New presbyter is but old priest writ large! In other words, the contemporary pastor is but an old priest written in larger letters!