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# Ministry Without Borders: Insights from the New Testament

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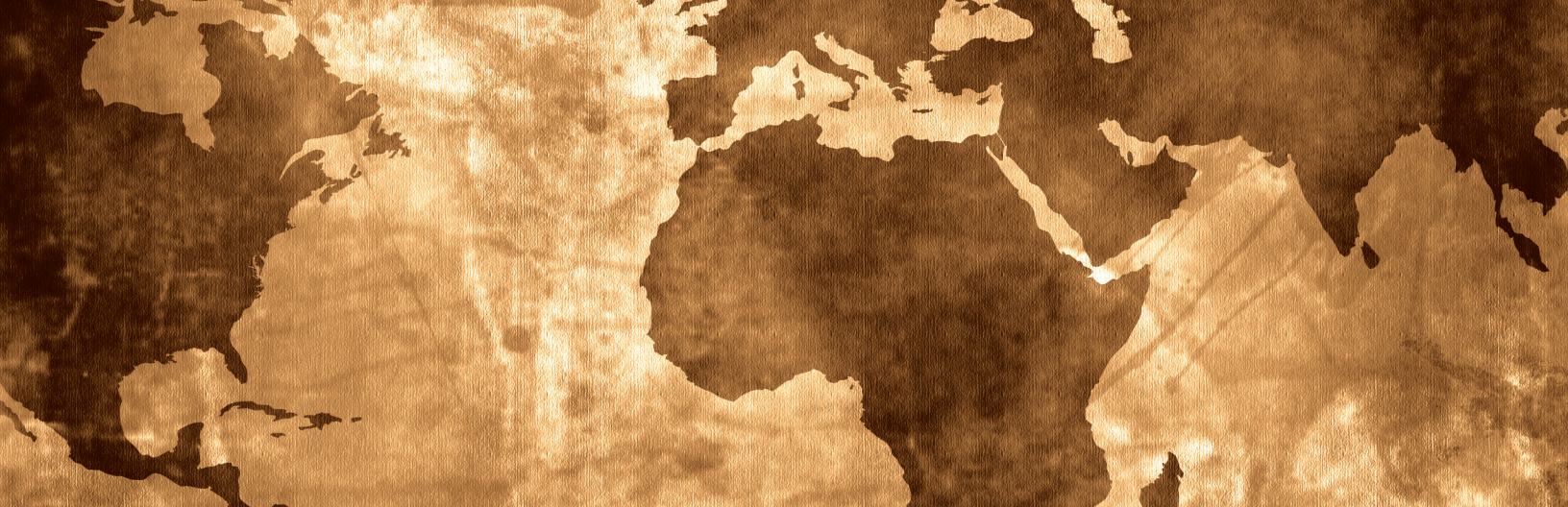
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# MINISTRY WITHOUT BORDERS: INSIGHTS FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT

*By Katelyn Campbell, Boubakar Sanou, and Hyveth Williams*

## Introduction

The subjects of clergy, laity and women's ordination to pastoral ministry are receiving a great deal of attention in many Christian circles. On one hand, there is a sharp but speculative distinction between clergy and laity. Often, the laity are expected to give allegiance to the clergy and also to depend on them for spiritual guidance and help.<sup>1</sup> Although the New Testament teaches the concepts of the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:5, 9–10) and the priestly ministry of the church as the function of the total church membership,<sup>2</sup> there is still a persistent tendency to create a dichotomy between clergy and laity.<sup>3</sup> The practice in the Christian church clearly shows two classes of believers: a special order, the clergy, who often monopolize ministry, and a second-class order for believers, the laity, who are ministered to.<sup>4</sup> As a result, many “pastors are worn out, discouraged, and in need of affirmation,”<sup>5</sup>

and members are not maturing in their Christian experience.

On the other hand, the subject of women's ordination is a hot-button issue. Although this subject is germane to this discussion, we defer to Jiří Moskala's statement that “the ministry of these committed and seminary educated women is truly needed in our church and those women who are our graduates already have played and will continue to play a vital role in fulfilling the mission of the church in proclaiming the everlasting Gospel to the world.”<sup>6</sup>

## A Brief Word Study

In the time of the New Testament writers, there were four possible Greek terms for official ministry: *telos* (office), *time* (task, with emphasis on the dignity—Hebrews 5:4),<sup>7</sup> *arche* (magistrate—Jude 1:6) and *leitourgia* (public service or priestly cultic service—Hebrews 9:6). However, with the exception of *telos*, these words appear in

the New Testament referring to Jewish priests, to Moses, to pagan civil officers, to good or bad angels, and sometimes to Jesus, but not to Christian ministry (Luke 12:11; John 16:2; Hebrews 8:6).<sup>8</sup>

Several terms are used in the New Testament to express the concept of Christian ministry. Some of these terms are *doulos* (Colossians 2:7; Revelation 22:9), *leitourgos* (Luke 1:23; Philippians 2:30), and *diakonia* (1 Corinthians 16:15; Revelation 2:9). In the early church understanding, every believer was a slave (*doulos*) of the Lord Jesus. This was also one of Paul's favorite descriptions of himself. If, in the ancient world, slaves were despised because it meant living without freedom under the authority of another, the early church believers rejoiced in the dignity of being the Lord's slaves. The early church found it a fitting term to express the spiritual reality that a believer belongs wholly to God and consequently must obey Him in total submission.<sup>9</sup> They considered it a privilege to be the Lord's

<sup>1</sup> Paul R. Stevens, *The Abolition of the Laity: Vocation, Work and Ministry in a Biblical Perspective* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1999), 27.

<sup>2</sup> Roland D. Sunderland, “Lay Pastoral Care,” *Journal of Pastoral Care* 42, no. 2 (Summer 1988): 159.

<sup>3</sup> Eddy Gibbs, *I Believe in Church Growth* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981), 319.

<sup>4</sup> Greg Ogden, *The New Reformation: Returning the Ministry to the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 60–66.

<sup>5</sup> Jon Zens, “The ‘Clergy/Laity’ Distinction: A Help or a Hindrance to the Body of Christ?” *Searching Together* 23, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 1.

<sup>6</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, “University and Seminary Response to GC Vote on Women's Ordination,” <https://www.andrews.edu/sem/about/statements/womens-ordination-response.html>.

<sup>7</sup> *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (1992), s.v. “Ministry in the Early Church.”

<sup>8</sup> Stevens, *The Abolition of the Laity*, 140.

<sup>9</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, “Behind the Word ‘Deacon’: A New Testament Study,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, (April–June 1983): 151.

“slaves,” living to please Him (Galatians 1:10) and to serve one another. The term *leitourgos* was used most often to describe cultic priests as ministers in temple practices. In Hebrews, angels are given this title, as they minister to God Himself (Hebrews 1:7), bridging the gap between earthly temple practices and heavenly ministers. Paul also takes this term and uses it to describe himself as he ministers on Christ’s behalf as he spreads the Gospel message (Romans 15:16). Therefore, the deed of declaring the Gospel is likened to priestly ministry.<sup>10</sup>

A full New Testament philosophy of ministry is enriched by each of these terms, but the most comprehensive biblical word for ministry is *diakonia*. Some related words are *diakonos* (servant, minister, deacon—Romans 15:8; 1 Timothy 3:8) and *diakoneo* (to serve—Matthew 27:55; Mark 10:45).<sup>11</sup> These words are distinctive in that their focus is squarely on loving actions on behalf of a brother, sister or neighbor.<sup>12</sup> *Diakonia* refers to a service that arises from the right attitude of love. It never implies any association with a particular status or class.<sup>13</sup> Contrary to *doulos*, which carries a sense of compulsion, *diakonia* implies the thought of voluntary service (Romans 15:25; Revelation 2:19).<sup>14</sup>

## Jesus and Ministry

Ministry in the New Testament finds its source and focus in Jesus Christ. Jesus set the tone and example for Christian ministry by calling His disciples to find greatness through servanthood by pointing to the fact that He Himself came not to receive service but to give it (Matthew 20:28).<sup>15</sup> Based on Jesus’ example, ministry in the apostolic age was always viewed as a position of service (*diakonia*) to the community of the people of God (1 Corinthians 16:15–16; 2 Corinthians 3:7–9; 4:1; 5:18;

2 Timothy 4:5; Ephesians 4:11–12). It was not the activity of a lesser to a greater, but the lifestyle of a follower of the Lord Jesus. It was modeled on the pattern and command of the Savior and represented the practical outworking of God’s love, especially toward fellow believers. Ministry is therefore not the activity of an elite class, but the mutual caring of a group of believers.<sup>16</sup> It is not confined to any one class of believers; rather it is the privilege and duty of all. There are assuredly diversities of gifts in that ministry, but ministry generally and of some kind is for all.<sup>17</sup>

## Ministry as Priesthood of All Believers

1 Peter 2:9, 10 and Revelation 1:5, 6 are two of the important texts that helped shape the New Testament perspective on the priesthood of all believers. Peter’s application of the priesthood terminology to the church points to the fact that it is the entire church membership that is now called, commissioned and enabled to perform the task of priests. This image intentionally connects the church with the Old Testament story by picturing the church both as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophetic expectations regarding the people of Israel, as well as the fulfillment of the Levitical priesthood. For John, the eligibility in this new priestly order is no longer determined by gender or ethnicity, but exclusively determined by faith in Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. Thus, the new priestly order established by Christ is, on the one hand, all-inclusive, i.e., totally devoid of any gender and ethnic specificities, and unstratified, on the other hand, i.e., nonhierarchical, as it is for the sole purpose of declaring the praises of God (1 Peter 2:9, 10; Revelation 1:5, 6). Paul emphasizes the new understanding of this priesthood without borders by pointing out that in Christ there is

neither Jew or Greek, male nor female (Galatians 3:28).

While we observe in the church today two classes of people separated by education, gender specific ordination, status, hierarchy and other criteria, we discover in the New Testament one ministering people with leaders, also members of the *laos* (people of God), serving them to equip the people for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:11–12).<sup>18</sup> One does not readily find an essential distinction between clergy and laity in the New Testament. Ministry was not seen as a status, but as a function—the function of service in bearing witness to the gospel to the community of the people of God.<sup>19</sup>

Alan Richardson sees the priesthood, about which the New Testament speaks, as a corporate priesthood of the whole Christian community. For him, the word *hiereus* (*sacerdos*, priest—Hebrews 10:11) is never used with respect to any priestly order or caste within the priestly community. All the members of the church, men and women, are priests fulfilling their individual and corporate responsibilities of witnessing and serving, whatever their secular profession or trade.<sup>20</sup> For this reason, “the members of the church should individually feel that the life and prosperity of the church are affected by their course of action.”<sup>21</sup>

In this community, though, there were functional differences because of differences in spiritual gifts (Ephesians 4:7–13). Power structures prevailing in the world were broken down. Ephesians 4:7–13 stresses that the variety of gifts which came from the Holy Spirit were for the building up of the one body of Christ, and no one function could claim precedence over any other. According to Paul’s understanding of the body of Christ in Ephesians 4, the gift of an office or leadership does not create any theological status among the believers. Leaders in the Christian community,

<sup>10</sup> Gerhard Kittel, ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Translated by Geoffrey William Bromiley. Vol. IV. 1967 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 1990.

<sup>11</sup> James Strong, *The Strongest Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), s.v. “diakonia.”

<sup>12</sup> *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (1985), s.v. “Ministry.”

<sup>13</sup> Christian A. Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift in the Church: How Natural Church Development Can Transform Theological Thinking* (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1999), 173.

<sup>14</sup> Hiebert, “Behind the Word ‘Deacon,’” 153.

<sup>15</sup> *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (1980), s.v. “Ministry.”

<sup>16</sup> J. Gary Inrig, “Called to Serve: Toward a Philosophy of Ministry,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, October–December 1983, 337.

<sup>17</sup> W. H. Griffith Thomas, “Is the New Testament Minister a Priest?” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, (January–March 1979): 66.

<sup>18</sup> Stevens, *The Abolition of the Laity*, 30.

<sup>19</sup> William J. Martyn, “Mutual Recognition of Ministry: Creating Another Rip Van Winkle?” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 23 (Summer 1986): 493–494.

<sup>20</sup> Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1958), 301–302.

<sup>21</sup> Ellen G. White, *Christian Service* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1947), 10.



just as all other members, remained members of the one body. They did not go beyond the status of members, despite their functional differences.<sup>22</sup> All were equal.

The apostolic Christian community knew that, in terms of service, there was no passive membership in the body of Christ.<sup>23</sup> They understood that ministry refers to the work both of those commissioned to leadership and of the whole body of believers.<sup>24</sup> All baptized members, male and female, were called to share in this service in accord with their state of life, special gifts and role within the structure of the Christian community (1 Peter 2:9; 4:10). This was true for the early church, and it can still be true today if “those who put their names on the church book should do so with a full and intelligent understanding of what this action involves. It means that you have solemnly pledged yourself to serve God.”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, today’s church also needs to act upon the fact that, regardless of one’s job or career, he or she is “called to *full-time* Christian service. A ‘non-serving Christian’ is a contradiction in terms.”<sup>26</sup> Because “ministry means service, and to this ministry we are all called,”<sup>27</sup> every church member is therefore engaged in active service for God.<sup>28</sup>

In his letter to the sponsors of the Atlanta “Clergy Conference” in February 1996, Jon Zens pointed out that “these kinds of events, though undoubtedly well-intended, nevertheless serve to perpetuate what I believe to be an unhealthy division of God’s people into two classes: the ‘clergy’ and the ‘laity’—a distinction that is totally without biblical justification.”<sup>29</sup> According to him, the clergy/laity distinction is more of a hindrance than a help to ministry in the body of Christ.

The New Testament clearly teaches leadership among the people of God, but not in a way that leads to the clergy/laity conclusion. Although the root words for the English words clergy and laity are found in the New Testament, the contemporary usage of these words is far removed from their New Testament usage. To oversimplify this would be “to say not that they had no clergy but that they had no laity.”<sup>30</sup> *Diakonia* in the New Testament does not refer to a particular class of people set apart from the rest of the church, but to the entire church membership. Unfortunately, the church continues to make a false distinction between clergy and laity. Those who continue to hold fast to that false distinction seem to ignore the fact that “we are all laity: laymen and women, because we are all part of the people of God.”<sup>31</sup>

### Spiritual Gifts, Leadership, and Ministry in the New Testament

God bestows upon all members of His church spiritual gifts which each member is to employ in loving ministry for the common good of the church and humanity. The fact that each believer receives at least one gift from the Spirit (1 Peter 4:10) is an indication that each member of the body of Christ has a ministry. The gifts provide abilities and ministries needed by the church to fulfill its functions. Spiritual gifts are for a common ministry (Romans 12; Ephesians 4; 1 Corinthians 12). Paul believed and taught that the gifts of the Spirit were to be exercised by Christians of both genders and from all walks of life.<sup>32</sup>

Scripture does not support the view that the clergy should minister while the laity merely warm the pews and wait to be fed. Both clergy and laity make up the church.<sup>33</sup> Although both *kleros* and *laos* appear in the New Testament, they denote the same people, not different people (2 Corinthians 6:12; 1 Peter 5:3).<sup>34</sup> Clergy and laity are both responsible for the well-being of the church and its prosperity. They are both called to work together, complementing each other, everyone according to his or her special gift(s). According to Paul F. Bradshaw, the fundamental division in the New Testament was not between ministers and laity but between the church and the world, and it was the privilege and responsibility of every baptized Christian to be a minister of Christ according to their spiritual gifts. Liturgical participation in the ministry of word and prayer would have been open to all whose gifts were recognized by the community of believers.<sup>35</sup> Preaching and teaching in the apostolic church were not confined to a particular class, but every convert was to proclaim the gospel to unbelievers, and every Christian who had the gift could pray, teach and exhort in the congregation.<sup>36</sup> The difference in gifts resulted in a variety of ministries.

There were certainly leaders in the early churches (1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Corinthians 16:15, 18; Philippians 1:1), but the way the Bible addresses “those who are over you” or “who care for you,” was a way to qualify their functions, not as titles. Being an overseer or servant is related to one gift among many, not qualitatively different from other gifts.<sup>37</sup> Roles as determined by a spiritual gift do not lead to any fixed hierarchy which

<sup>22</sup> Manuel Miguens, *Church Ministries in New Testament Times* (Arlington, VA: Christian Culture Press, 1976), 110.

<sup>23</sup> Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift in the Church*, 173.

<sup>24</sup> *The Concise Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (1993), s.v. “Ministry.”

<sup>25</sup> E. G. White, *The Upward Look* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1982), 143.

<sup>26</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What On Earth Am I Here For?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 264.

<sup>27</sup> Ellen G. White, *Reflecting Christ* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1985), 256.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>29</sup> Zens, “The ‘Clergy/Laity’ Distinction,” 1.

<sup>30</sup> Franklin H. Littell, “The Radical Reformation,” in *The Layman in Christian History*, ed. Stephen Charles Neill and Hans-Ruedi Weber (London: SCM Press, 1963), 263.

<sup>31</sup> Paul E. Pierson, *The Dynamics of Christian Mission: History Through a Missiological Perspective* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey, 2009), 47.

<sup>32</sup> George E. Rice, “Spiritual Gifts,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 610.

<sup>33</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe... A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Washington, DC: Ministerial Association, 1988), 211.

<sup>34</sup> Rex D. Edwards, *Every Believer a Minister* (Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1995), 67.

<sup>35</sup> Paul F. Bradshaw, “Patterns of Ministry,” *Studia Liturgica* 15, no. 1 (1982-1983): 51.

<sup>36</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1907-1910), 3:124.

<sup>37</sup> *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (1992), s.v. “Ministry in the Early Church.”

would distinguish members with a special quality from other members without it. Leadership in the Jerusalem church was originally in the hands of the 12 apostles. But certainly Jesus does not seem to have appointed any of His disciples to any permanent post. In Acts 2:37; 5:3, 29; 8:14, Peter is seen assuming leadership, but in Galatians 2:1–10 and Acts 15:13–21, James appears as the undisputable leader of the church. Nevertheless, in the early Christian community, there was no hierarchical distinction between leaders and the rest of the people. Service was the sole principle of leadership, as well as the single criterion of greatness.<sup>38</sup>

The charge of Christ in Matthew 28:18–20 and in Acts 1:8, and the subsequent gifts of the Holy Spirit, were not confined to the 12 apostles (Acts 1:15), the ordained ministry of that time and context (Matthew 10:1–4), but were given to all the members of the infant church (1 Peter 4:10). Thus, upon the church of Christ, clergy and laity alike, the duty to witness is equally laid and the power to witness is equally bestowed.<sup>39</sup> Every believer, man and woman, by the ordination of baptism was understood as being called to serve because “every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary. He who drinks of the living water becomes a fountain of life. The receiver becomes a giver.”<sup>40</sup>

### The Emergence of the Clergy and Laity Distinction

The situation of every believer’s active involvement in ministry in the New Testament was not destined to last. By the end of the first century, the beginnings of one of the most significant developments in the history of ministry in the church, the movement from spiritual giftedness to office, could already be detected. Ministries that members of the Christian community once

performed without official appointment started to be clericalized, and liturgical actions were turned into permanent offices. As a direct result, the possibility of lay people exercising individual ministries sharply declined, even to the point of extinction.<sup>41</sup> While the first-century church was marked by a people without the hierarchical distinction between clergy and laity, in the second

## Service was the sole principle of leadership, as well as the single criterion of greatness.

and third centuries a definite clergy/laity distinction arose, largely from the following influences:<sup>42</sup>

First, the imitation of the secular structures of the Greek-Roman world.<sup>43</sup> Status distinction present in the cultural context of Greco-Roman society between the magistrate (*kleros*) and the people who were ruled (*laos*) was infused into the Christian community. As the gulf between *kleros* and *laos* grew in the society, the *kleros* in the church became associated with the sacred and the *laos* with the secular.

Secondly, the transference of the Old Testament priesthood model to the leadership of the church. The theological justification for going back to the Levitical order was the conviction that the church was the new Israel, therefore it was also natural to look to the Old Testament for the form, the function being already embraced.<sup>44</sup> The idea and institution of a special priesthood, distinct from the body of the people,

passed imperceptibly from Jewish analogies into the Christian church. Thus, “the Levitical priesthood, with its three ranks of high-priest, priest, and Levite, naturally furnished an analogy for the threefold ministry of bishop, priest, and deacon, and came to be regarded as typical of it.”<sup>45</sup>

Thirdly, the popular piety that elevated the Lord’s Supper to a mystery that required priestly administration. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, is said to have insisted that it was not lawful to baptize or to celebrate the Lord’s Supper without the bishop or his representative.<sup>46</sup> The bishops, priests and deacons thus became very essential to the existence of the church.

Fourthly, an elaborate clerical hierarchy emerged in order to fight heresy, provide order, and maintain orthodoxy in the church.<sup>47</sup>

The term *kleros* (lot, portion, inheritance), which originally referred to the whole body of the people of God, started to be applied to those primarily or exclusively entrusted with church functions. Thus *laos* and *kleros*, two words originally referring to the same reality, came to designate two distinct realities. As early as the beginning of the second century, a distinct cleavage had begun to appear between clergy and laity, in spite of the fact that in the first century every believer was held to be a priest unto God.<sup>48</sup> The term “lay” in Clement of Rome’s letter to the church in Corinth around 95 AD, in reference to the people of the church, indicated that the division between the ordained clergy and the rest of the congregation was already being made.<sup>49</sup> The rite of laying on of hands, originally used as a sign of setting apart persons for particular functions within the Christian community, became viewed in the second century as a sign of status as the church became identified with the bishop. Ordination was thus establishing a clear division between clergy

<sup>38</sup> Ronald Y. K. Fung, “Function or Office? A Survey of the New Testament Evidence,” in *Evangelical Review of Theology*, ed. B. J. Nicholls (Exeter, UK: The Paternoster Press, 1984), 17.

<sup>39</sup> Edwards, *Every Believer a Minister*, 21.

<sup>40</sup> E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1940), 195.

<sup>41</sup> Bradshaw, “Patterns of Ministry,” 52.

<sup>42</sup> Stevens, *The Abolition of the Laity*, 39.

<sup>43</sup> Ogden, *The New Reformation*, 66.

<sup>44</sup> W. A. Henrichsen and W. N. Garrison, *Layman, Look Up! God Has a Place for You* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 79.

<sup>45</sup> P. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1910), 123.

<sup>46</sup> D. A. Borchert, “The Fascinating Role of the Laity in Supervision,” *Review and Expositor* 93 (1996), 555.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 556.

<sup>48</sup> J. Vaillancourt, *Papal Power: A Study of Vatican Control Over Lay Catholic Elites* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 22.

<sup>49</sup> Borchert, “The Fascinating Role of the Laity in Supervision,” 555.

and laity and even between clergy and clergy. Through ordination, it was thought that clergy became dispensers and guardians of salvation. They differed essentially and not just functionally from the laity. This gave them an awesome authority over the believers.<sup>50</sup> After the time of Constantine, the clericalization of the ministry had begun. The clergy were seen as a more exalted class in the church. Bishops began to wear a distinctive dress of office and in some places they shared titles and honors that were previously reserved for emperors and their high officials.<sup>51</sup>

By the fifth and sixth centuries, the cleavage between clergy and laity had

themselves, a lower grade of Christians than the ordained ministers.<sup>53</sup> Despite their strong emphasis on the priesthood of all believers, the Reformers maintained a clear and rigid distinction between the role of the ordained ministers and that of the rest of the believers in congregational involvement in worship. The ordained ministers were there to minister and the congregation was ministered unto.<sup>54</sup> However, great importance was laid on the right and duty of the head of each household to conduct regular family prayers at home. With few exceptions, the Reformation did not really fundamentally alter the way in which the relationship between

church—the laity who pay to receive the ministry and the clergy who are paid to give ministry, whereas in the New Testament we find only one people with leaders among it.

## Our Perspective

Despite all the teaching of the New Testament on ministry as the function of the total church membership, there is still a persistent tendency to make a dichotomy between clergy and laity.<sup>56</sup> The biblical content and intent of the concepts *laos* and *kleros* is essentially different from the meaning laity and clergy have historically acquired. The whole church is both the *laos* (the people of God) and the *kleros* (God's heritage).<sup>57</sup>

The mission which Christ has committed to His church constitutes a great enterprise with which the whole membership of the church can be identified. Its effective implementation calls for the total and equal mobilization of all God-given resources. It is unfortunate that many people define ministry by what they see pastors do—preaching, administering the sacraments, and caring for the spiritual needs of church members—and, as a result, limit ministry mostly to a place (the church) and titles (Pastor, Reverend, Bishop, etc.). But a survey of New Testament passages using the *diakoneo* word group reveals what ministry involves. It involves the following activities: caring for those in prisons (Matthew 25:44), serving tables (meeting physical needs, e.g., Acts 6:2), teaching the word of God (Acts 6:4), and all other services offered by Christians to others to build them up in faith (1 Corinthians 12:5; Ephesians 4:12).<sup>58</sup> In short, full ministry calls for a complete exercise of all spiritual gifts (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12–14; Ephesians 4), thus for all church membership. “Christian ministry is any general service rendered to others in Christ and because of Christ *in the name of the Church and for the sake of helping the Church fulfill its mission.*”<sup>59</sup>

become entrenched. In the Middle Ages, with the establishment of a sacerdotal system of mediated grace, the laity became a submissive, docile part of the church with the priest holding authority over souls.<sup>52</sup> A sharp differentiation between clergy and laity had thus developed, degrading the ministries of the lay people and emphasizing the special function of the clergy. During this period, the laity became dependent upon clergy for access to God's favor.

Although at the Reformation some Protestants recovered much of the New Testament teaching (e.g., Lutherans, Calvinists, Anabaptists), nevertheless, the laity were still normally expected to help clergy in church work rather than to develop their own ministries in their occupations. The laity were still often considered, and even considered

clergy and laity was perceived. It was only in the Radical Reformation that the New Testament doctrine of the priesthood of all believers was once more carried to its logical conclusion. The radical reformers highlighted the equality of all believers. They emphasized that, by the ordination of baptism, every Christian man and woman was called to serve and witness.<sup>55</sup>

While one does not find an essential distinction between clergy and laity in the New Testament writings, one does view a dichotomy between clergy and laity in the patristic period. As the church moved from the apostolic age to the patristic period and began to be both influenced and an influence in the known world, it also began to shift from its roots. This shift led to the existence of two classes of people in the

<sup>50</sup> E. G. Hinson, 'Ordination in Christian History' *Review and Expositor* 78 (1981), 485.

<sup>51</sup> Martyn, "Mutual Recognition of Ministry," 495.

<sup>52</sup> Borchert, "The Fascinating Role of the Laity in Supervision," 556.

<sup>53</sup> A. Richardson and J. Bowden (eds.), *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1983), 318-319.

<sup>54</sup> Bradshaw, "Patterns of Ministry," 56.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>56</sup> E. Gibbs, *I Believe in Church Growth* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981), 319.

<sup>57</sup> S.C. Neill and Hans-Ruedi Weber (eds.), *The Layman in Christian History* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 15.

<sup>58</sup> L. O. Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, 443.

<sup>59</sup> W. J. Rademacher, *Lay Ministry: A Theological, Spiritual, and Pastoral Handbook* (Crossroad, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991), 90.



If the Church is to attain its full potential as the body of Christ, we must divest it of such unscriptural hierarchical structures and return to its intended “one-another” relationships and ministries.<sup>60</sup> It strikes at the heart of the priesthood of all believers advocated in 1 Peter 2:5, 9–10, thus hindering church growth because the majority (the laity) pays the very few (the clergy) to do the work of the whole and still expect the Great Commission to be accomplished. The church must, if at all possible, get rid of this hierarchical system in order for the Word of God to have free course.

Ministry needs to be redefined by who is served rather than by the location and titles for the simple fact that it is “service to God and on behalf of God in the church and in the world.”<sup>61</sup> “To be committed to the service of Jesus Christ for all mankind is to be a minister of the Christian gospel.”<sup>62</sup> Ministers are all those who put themselves at the disposal of God for the benefit of His cause. It should not be limited by the place where service is rendered, the function, the need met, by titles borne, or the gender of the one who ministers. Because the decisive thing about being a disciple of Jesus is service; ministry should not be seen as an exceptional optional activity for the people of God, but rather part of its essence.

Although trying to literally apply the New Testament model of ministry could be considered a utopia in the 21st century, there is great need for applying its principles even today for the spiritual wellbeing of the church and its members. Michael Green summarizes some

of such principles as follows:<sup>63</sup> in the New Testament, (1) all Christians were called to ministry, not some; (2) ministry was a function, not a status; (3) ministry was something corporate and shared; (4) character, not intellect, was the most important condition; (5) leaders were selected from men of experience, and; (6) these leaders’ ministry was one of enabling others for ministry.

The clergy/laity distinction strikes at the heart of the priesthood of all believers. In no situation do the apostles use these terms to describe appointment to an ecclesiastical office, as was the case much later. When we enter the church today, there are two people—the laity, who receive the ministry, and the clergy who give it. But when we enter the world of the New Testament, we find only one people, the true *laos* of God, with leaders among the people.<sup>64</sup>

The New Testament knows no spiritual aristocracy or nobility, nor does it recognize a special priesthood in distinction from the people, as mediating between God and the laity. It rather knows only one High Priest, Jesus Christ, and clearly teaches the universal priesthood, as well as the universal kingship of all believers (1 Peter 2:5, 9).

## Conclusion

On the basis of the evidences surveyed above, although there is functional distinction among the *laos* of God, if we consider the body imagery given to the church and the variety of spiritual gifts (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12–14 and Ephesians 4), there should be no

status, gender, class or hierarchical distinction, because all believers and ministries are equal before God (Acts 10:34; Galatians 3:26–28). While the clergy/laity hierarchical distinction is embedded and assumed in religious circles, it cannot be found in the New Testament. Rather than being the activity of a spiritual aristocracy or the work of a professional class, ministry in all its aspects should be the lifestyle, responsibility and privilege of every believer.



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<sup>60</sup> J. Zens, “The ‘Clergy/Laity’ Distinction,” 4.

<sup>61</sup> Stevens, *The Abolition of the Laity*, 133.

<sup>62</sup> G. M. Newlands, *The Church of God* (Trowbridge, UK: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1984), 4.

<sup>63</sup> M. Green, *Freed to Serve* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1983), 10–14.

<sup>64</sup> Stevens, *The Abolition of the Laity*, 26.

