

The Church of Christ
(The SECT everywhere spoken against, Part Four)

by

Kenneth Fortier

“But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect” (Acts 28:22)

In continuing our investigation of this sect everywhere spoken against, we come to seek out its polity and officers. As we do this, remember, if we want an unbiased view, God’s view, we must keep the curtain pulled, shutting out all outside prejudices and their philosophical reasoning. We are looking for what the Apostles say are the officers of this sect—not men!

Before we go further into this investigation, let’s summarize what we found out in the last three articles. In the first article we dealt with a descriptive term used to identify the Church of the Lord. That term was the word *haireisis*, or, as it is transposed into our language, heresy. *Hairesis* means, in all of its inflections, a “sect”—a party cut off from its parent. I know it seems blasphemous to call Christ’s Church a heresy, but that is what the Jews accused the Apostle Paul of being the ringleader of. Many accusations were leveled against him and the “*ekklesia*” or “called-out people of God”—what we call the Church. But, as the article concluded, the Church of Christ was the only “*haireisis*” approved by God, and He confirmed it with many signs, wonders, and powerful deeds done through the hands of the Apostles (See Mark 16:15–20).

In the second article we inquired into what sort of “creed” this “sect” held to and the name or names they were known by. It was very interesting to find that their “Creed” was the very Scriptures we have in our hands today—the Bible. As for the name they were called, it was “Christian;” and when they were assembled together in one place, they were called the “*ekklesian*” or “church;” suffixed by the country, city, town, area, or house they met in.

After knowing the creed and the name by which this peculiar body was known, we then sought out the titles and qualifications of its leaders. Many of you should have found that the terms used today were never used in the same sense back then. The “elders” that desired the office of bishop or overseer were chosen from among the assembly of Christians, and there were a multiple of them in each church. The Apostle Paul left a list of qualifications an elder must have to be a bishop; and also for a deacon. It would be a good thing if you were to re-read the article just mentioned (see *The Church of Christ*, part three).

While the last article didn’t expressly address it, the deacons (servants/ministers) of this sect are also found to be an office, and also **chosen from among the congregation and by the congregation**. Likewise, they are found to have been many in each and every congregation. Most of the qualifications listed for a bishop also pertained to the deacons. (Read 1 Timothy 3:8–13)

Now we come to this fourth part. It is going to be very hard for some of you to understand because it goes against the grain of what many may have told you, and what it says has been pushed aside for so long that it may seem to be a new teaching. Seeing as how the word or title of “priest” was never applied to any of the officers of this sect spoken against, we have to ask the question, “What about the priests of this sect?” That this question is important is beyond question. The office of bishop was never spoken of or insinuated to be a priesthood cut off from the common members of the congregation. The elders who made up this office of the bishops were never spoken of nor called priests. The deacons of the Church were never called priests, nor were the evangelists or Apostles ever call priests. Who then, was a priest? Where did this idea come from?

When the Jewish people living in Rome heard that Paul the heretic was in town, they came to him to find out more about this sect he was propagating. As Paul was spoken of as being the ringleader, they knew he was the proper one to go to if they wanted the facts—from the horses mouth, so to speak. These Jews had a lot more to be commended for than many inquirers do today. They were not going to draw conclusions until they had heard the whole story. They were not going to be carried away with gossip, innuendoes, glosses, sectarian philosophies and reasoning of men. They were going to put aside all outside viewpoints as they listened to what this so-called ringleader, Paul, had to say in his defense. It is with this same spirit of searching for truth that we ask all of you reading this to pull the curtain, shutting out all outside views so that they don’t color and prejudice your thinking. We are after the truth and not opinions, suppositions, insinuation, assertions, or probabilities.

Our question for this article is, “What about the priests of this sect everywhere spoken against?” For us to understand what the writers of sacred writ testify to, we must, of necessity, understand the terms or words in the same sense in which the Holy Spirit used them as He moved men to write the Scriptures (See 2 Peter 1:19–21).

A very critical word we must understand is the Greek word for “priest.” Then there is the word “laity” that has caused so much confusion that we must also see what the Scriptures say about the word “clergy.” Much of what we are about to reveal in this article is very capable of causing contentions to arise from partisans of those churches which have “priests” as office holders of their church. A partisan is one who will fight to the end for what he believes, even if he is proven to be wrong. A partisan has so much pride (which the Lord Jesus said is idolatry) that he is unable to admit what he believes is wrong. A partisan is one who will not admit that he is wrong, even though the proof showing the truth is unassailable. He will attempt to castigate anyone who speaks against what he considers sacred tradition, even to the extent of persecuting anyone who disagrees with him, and in that, with any and all means at his disposal. He will accuse us just as the partisan Jews accused Paul. As Paul said, “*We can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth*” (2 Corinthians 13:8). Now that we have said this, let’s see what the term “priest” really means as told to us by the Holy Spirit as he moved men to write the Scriptures.

Priest: From the Greek term “Hiereus” (ἱερεῖς)

This word is used in Scriptures to identify “one who offers sacrifice and has charge of the things pertaining to it.” It is found only 33 times in the New Covenant Testament of God.

18 of these times it has direct reference to the Jewish Levitical Priests. Of the remaining 15 times, 8 have direct reference to our Lord Jesus Christ, 3 have reference to Melchizedek, 1 to the pagan priests of the god Jupiter, and the remaining 3 refer to the entire membership of the Church—the community of saints who are described as “a kingdom, and priests to God” (revelations 1:6). As you can see, it is not used in very many places, especially to Christians or the Church.

Let us now comment and shed some light on this. In searching the New Testament we find that the word “priest” is NEVER ONCE applied to a special ministry or caste in the Church of Christ. NOT ONCE do we find an evangelist, bishop, or deacon referred to as a “priest” in any distinctive sense; no such individual was “priest” by right of office. The only use of the word “priest” when used to describe Christians, and that in only 3 places, always meant the common members and not the leaders.

Before I bring out more on this topic, I want you to understand that I do not write this to appear contemptuous, proud, or arrogant, but to find out what God says and not man. I am not a partisan of any group of Christianity except the group God has called-out to be saints. Yes, the word “saint,” the way the Holy Scriptures uses it, is aptly able to describe the term “priest”—but that is something to be expounded upon at another time. Be that as it may, I am forced to use terms just as the Holy Spirit used them, for if I don’t, there is no way that we can have the truth God wanted us to know. Let’s look at the next word that is used by partisans to describe a special group of men before we go on to bring them all together.

Clergy: From the Greek “kleeros”

This word has caused a lot of confusion among God’s people. When the average man hears it used he immediately thinks of a special caste or group of distinguished men. His thinking is prejudiced because of its long use, and only partially right. It is to “whom” he relates it to that he is wrong. The meaning of this word as used in Scriptures is not what the average man relates to. He runs to a modern day dictionary and sees that it is a general term or title given collectively to “priests and ministers.” The trouble is that the word in its original meaning and use during the New Testament times of the first three centuries of Christianity was never designated to apply to or create a special caste or group of men (or women).

What then, does it mean? We find in our investigation that the Greek word “kleeros” means “a lot, an inheritance.” In the New Testament Scriptures of God it is used a total of 13 times, but is never translated as “clergy, clergyman or cleric.” It is rendered 1 time as “heritage,” 2 times as “inheritance,” 3 times as “lot,” 5 times as “lots,” and 2 times as “part.” It is never used to mark off a segment or special caste in the Church. It is used to designate ALL who have been redeemed and immersed into Christ. It is God’s people who constitute the “heritage” (kleeros) of Him! God, through Christ, has not selected a special caste or group from among those called-out to be Christians to serve as His “lot” or “inheritance!”

Wherefore, then, do we get the term “clergy?” To get into how this word came about would encompass much writing, but to condense its history, we will bring out only certain facts. To anyone who would want to trace its origin, we warn you in advance that it is time consuming and frustrating. We know, for we have done it.

The word “kleeros” was first used around 1500 years before Christ by God to apply to those who were to be his “lot” or “inheritance.” The “kleeros”—clergy—of God were originally to be the firstborn in every family of the tribes of Israel. But, as Scriptures tell us, God changed His mind and then chose only the descendents of Aaron to be “priests,” and the rest of the Levites to be servants or ministers to the priesthood of Aaron (See Numbers 3:1–13). That is how the title, “Levitical priests,” came about. Thusly, all Levites were God’s “clergy,” but not all Levites were “priests.” To be a priest, one had to be a direct descendent of Aaron.

The “presbuteros” (transposed from the Greek into our Bible as “presbters”), were the “elders” of each of the other 12 tribes of Israel. NONE of these “elders” were able to be priests, nor “high priests.” There were many of these “presbyters—which means elders”—in each of the 12 tribes of Israel. They were to be the “bishops,” that’s right, the “overseers” of their individual tribes or families. What is important to see is that not a one of these “elders” (presbuteros) who occupied that office of “overseer” (episkopos/bishop) were ever called “priests” (hiereus) or “clergy” (kleeros) of God.

It is futile to think a person could find this word used to apply to priests and ministers as a separate group within the realm of Christianity in the first three centuries, and even for a time thereafter, for its use was ONLY applied to Christians as a whole. Later on, as ecclesiastical groups started forming, they started to use this word to apply to only the elite, that is, only to those who were the leaders. But they had trouble doing this. If they used the term of “kleeros” to apply only to the leaders, the Scriptures would end up saying that ONLY THE LEADERS WERE CHRISTIANS! But that was something they could not do, so they invented the term “clergy,” and in so doing, were forced to invent the word “laity” also. Understand this: The word “kleeros,” God’s lot or heritage, is still applied by those who call themselves “clergy,” to the whole of Christianity. “Clergy” comes from the Greek word “kleeros.” Notwithstanding the appropriation of the term “clergy” to apply to a special select group, the “laity” are still referred to as the “kleeros” of God! Notice how the word “kleeros,” which really means “clergy” has been redefined into two separate words with very different meanings, although related. This being so, let’s look at this word “laity.”

Laity: From the Greek “laos”

This word “laos,” from which we get the transposed or the transliterated word “laity,” is found 141 times in God’s New Covenant Scriptures. STOP! You will never find the word “laity” in your Bible! It is ALWAYS translated “people.” “Laos” is NEVER translated by the term “laity.” It is ALWAYS translated “people.” In every instance when it is applied to the community Christ founded, it refers to the whole body of believers. “Laity” is a word invented by the ecclesiastical class to apply to the members of their organization or church. The way it is being used today by the “clergy” has no foundation in Scriptures, nor in the history of the early church up to the time the word “clergy” was invented. This Greek word “laos” was never used by the writers of Scriptures to refer to a group as distinguished from a priestly or a ministerial caste or class of people. In fact, the Apostle Peter used the term “laos” to designate all God’s “clergy.” Hear Him: ***“But you are a chosen race, a ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, a holy nation, God’s OWN PEOPLE (laos), that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into***

His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). Again: “*Draw near to Him (Christ), a living stone, indeed rejected by men but chosen and honored by God. Be you yourselves as living stones, built thereon into a spiritual house, a HOLY PRIESTHOOD, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*” (1 Peter 2:4–5).

This passage by Peter is real clear and also very significant, for it identifies the PRIESTHOOD—the CLERGY of God, as God’s LAITY, God’s called-out ekklesian, the Church of Christ. Yes, God’s CLERGY are His LAITY, and as Peter said, all God’s laity are members of the priesthood—a ROYAL PRIESTHOOD.

What shall we say to this then? Shall we continue to ignore what God has said and go on our merry way? Shall we continue to apply the words God used in a sense that He never applied them? Absolutely NOT. At least, I won’t. Every priest of God is one of His laity, and every member of God’s laity is a priest in the royal priesthood of God. Every child of God is His lot or heritage through the shed blood of Christ, all of God’s children are His clergy. Since Peter designated the “laity” as “clergy,” there can never be a distinction between them in God’s kingdom.

Let’s look a little further into this. Peter declares that all Christians are God’s people (laos), “That you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness.” Yes, let’s fact it. God’s laity are not those who sit and listen to a “clergy” declare the wonderful deed of God; it is the laity who do the declaring. Again: It is the priesthood of God who declare or proclaim the Good News of Christ to the world; and that priesthood is composed of all God’s laity. That is what Peter declares, and I believe him. You want proof? Behold!!!

A very interesting scenario takes place in the 8th chapter of the Book of Acts: “*Now there broke out on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and ALL EXCEPT THE APOSTLES were scattered abroad throughout the land of Judea and Samaria ... Now those who were scattered abroad went about PREACHING the word*” (Acts 8:1, 4). Well, what do you know, God’s laity were the ones who first preached the word of God outside of Jerusalem! The Apostles stayed in town! That sure is different from a special select group being the only ones ordained to preach the Good News, isn’t it!

But, was this report an exception? Absolutely not. That same persecution that sent all the laity over the area of Judea and Samaria, also sent the laity to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, where they continued to preach the word concerning the risen Savior. “*Now those who had been dispersed by the persecution that had broken out over Stephen, went all the way to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to Jews only. But some of the, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks (yes, the Gentiles) also, telling them the Good News about the Lord Jesus. The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord*” (Acts 11:19–21). Praise God, his laity were fulfilling their duty as priests in the royal priesthood. Do you do this same thing?

This ought to show you that we are ALL to proclaim the Good News of Christ, and are not to depend upon a select group to do the job for us while we sit on our behinds. For those of you who do not know the Good News, and there are multitudes that

don't, I appeal to you to find out. Jesus said that "*If a man love Him, he would obey His commands*" (John 14:15). Now, who can show me one single verse of Scripture that tells us to hire a preacher to do our job? An Evangelist is another story though...and that is Biblical.

You want praise from God? Then proclaim the Good News of the Christ. "As it is written: How beautiful on the mountain are those who bring Good News" (Romans 10:15, see also Isaiah 52:7). The Prophet Daniel cries out: "And those who have an instructors will, will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever" (Daniel 12:3). Do you really want this? If you do, and don't know the Good News of Christ to proclaim it, I urge you again to start catching up with your Bible studies, spending time in repentant prayer to God in the name of Jesus for the wisdom only He can supply you with. When you can answer the question, "What must I do to be saved?", then you are advancing the kingdom of God on earth—the Church of Christ.

Now to get back to the term priest, as I mentioned earlier. A priest is "one who offers sacrifice and has charge of the things pertaining to it." Now if every Christian is a priest in the priesthood of God as the Apostle Peter said, just what kind of sacrifices are we to offer? As we started this series by seeking out what the Apostle Paul had to say about this sect called the WAY, let's let him answer this question.

I urge you therefore, brothers, by the compassion of God, to present yourselves as a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship" (Romans 12:1).

Then there is what Jesus said:

"Believe me, ... a time is coming, and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks, God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:21, 24).

We must worship the father in spirit and in truth. Our worship is the giving of a living sacrifice to God. A giving up of ourselves as a living sacrifice means that we turn our whole self over to the service of God, "Which is our spiritual worship." It is to be by the transforming of our minds to obey God as taught by Jesus the Messiah, and not be conformed to the pattern of worldly traditions and reasoning of men. "*IF any claim to be in Christ, they must walk s Jesus did*" (1 John 2:6). Read Colossians, chapter 2 to 3:17, Ephesians 4:17 to 5:20, and Philippians 2:1–18, especially verse 5, where the Apostle Paul says that our attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. As a priest not only "offers sacrifice," but also "has charge of the things that pertain to it," so it is that every Christian is in charge of his own body to offer it to God—"Which is his spiritual worship."

What I now say is very hard for most to understand, and is especially sorrowful for me to say. Nothing is clearer in the Scripture than the fact that in the beginning, and nothing is clearer in the history of the first three centuries of the Christian community, that there was no priesthood other than that of Jesus Christ as the High Priest, and every one of His followers as priests to Him; who were to “offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God.”

In spite of this we are confronted with the fact that few indeed realize that they were intended to be priests, and their idea of priesthood has been so conditioned by the subservient role to which they are placed, that they find it very hard to even consider themselves as priests in any sense of the word. That is a very sad situation, to say the least.

The danger of this lies in the fact that the kingdom of heaven is designed to be a kingdom of priests (Revelation 1:5–6). It derives its nature from a citizenry composed of priests. If we propagate a completely different order in which the citizens disclaim any relationship as priests, it is very questionable as to whether or not it can be regarded as the kingdom of heaven. To what extent can we alter the mental make-up of God’s kingdom and still regard ourselves as composing it? There is nothing more important in our days than to recapture the concept of God’s people—His royal priesthood of all believers. It is a deplorable situation when the citizens of any society lose their citizen rights to a select few of the elite. It is doubly deplorable when that society happens to be God’s Kingdom!

What has happened to us? Every child of God is a priest. Every man, yes, and woman, who is a Christian, has entered into the royal priesthood of God. A person is ordained into this priesthood the day he or she becomes immersed into Christ Jesus. It is that simple. There is no way that I would or could defend modern religious practices that have been born in the fertile minds of fallible men. My humblest efforts will be toward the restoration of the priesthood of all believers, not towards any refinement, or even a reformation of any existing practice of man. Not one student of Church History can fail to be impressed with the simplicity of its worship and practices for holy living during the first centuries of Christianity.

The early Christians were moved by a fervent zeal; yea, motivated by a common purpose, possessed of a true and deep love for each of their fellow believers, met together on the first day of the week, and in the faith there was but one heart and one life. In this early gathering there was no distinction between a clergy and laity. God’s clergy (portion or lot) consisted of all God’s laity (people). Every member of the laity was a member of God’s clergy. Yes, every Christian was a minister of God, proclaiming the Good News to all who were not yet in Christ Jesus. They entered this “ministry” by their coming into Christ. This pure and holy spirit can never be recaptured until those who love the Lord restore in its fullest sense, the priesthood of all believers, free from the taint of a special caste.

I believe the religious world has gone “religious” in its true tongue-in-cheek meaning of “superstitious”—just the way in which the Apostle Paul used it (Acts 17:22–23). It has went far away from the pattern laid out by the apostles, building away from the foundation laid, and setting up its stones upon shifting sands where there is no foundation laid.

The original gathering of Christians sat around a table; the modern church sits before an altar. In the early community of saints all spoke one by one; today all the

speaking is done by one. The Holy Spirit was then fired up; now it is quenched. Originally Christians professed to love one another and talked about Jesus; now they make a claim to love Jesus and talk about each other. In the beginning Christians exerted an effort to exhort each other into good works of the faith; today all must be exhorted to exert an effort.

Christ's followers did not ask the world to come and hear the Gospel, they took it to the world. They gathered on the first day of the week to eat the Lord's supper at the Lord's table in memory of His death, burial and resurrection, then scattered to proclaim the word. Whenever a Christian met a sinner, there was a revival meeting. They proclaimed the salvation offered to their masters if they were slaves, and to slaves if they were the masters. They were unashamed to present it to their friends and neighbors. The whole earth was their auditorium, the place where they happened to be standing became their pulpit.

All of us must come to realize we live in a modern world. But, is it really that different? Religion was the name of superstitious rites and laws made to bind the conscience of adherents then, and each religion was institutionalized. So really, my friends, it is not so different today. Today, many who sincerely want to follow Christ are hindered by religion and the institution of it. They have been so long led by others that they have lost the concept of freedom—the very freedom Christ died for, and they don't know it. It is going to be very difficult to recover the abandoned (but yet given lip-service to) ideal of the universal priesthood of God. The greatest deterrent to this is the bitter opposition by those who claim to follow Christ. They have really been converted to a system, not to Christ. There is no real vital relationship to Jesus as the living head of the Church. This must be changed. DO YOU SEE IT? DO YOU UNDERSTAND THAT?

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