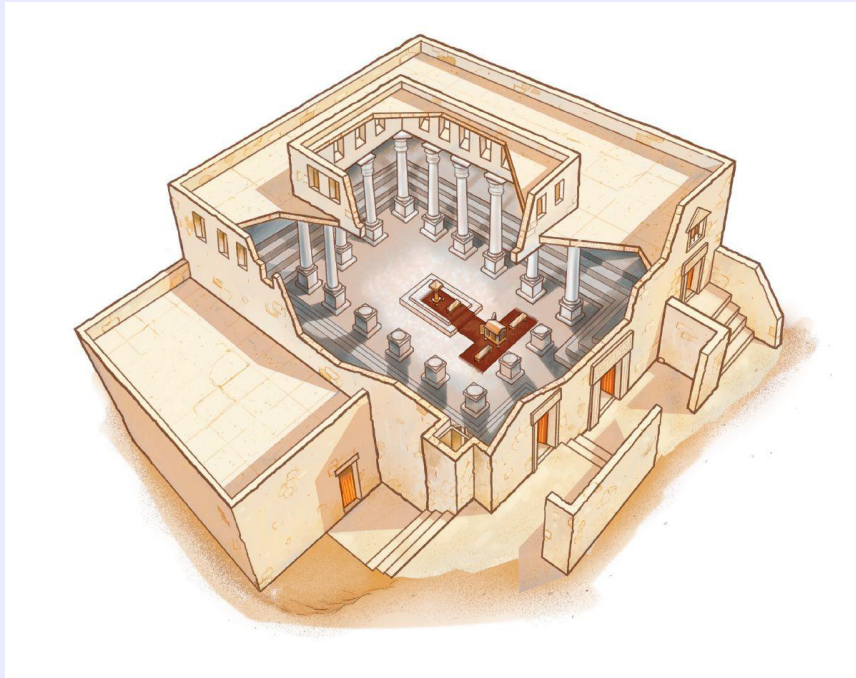


DRAFT

Are Ministers Priests or Elders?

Questions and Answers

By CM White
v. 4.2



A typical first century synagogue

Is the New Testament Ministry the continuation of the Old Testament Priesthood?

Or is it a close reflection of the Priesthood?

Or does it have a different origin and approach?

What has the Church of God taught on this subject, what does it teach now and most importantly, what does God's Word reveal?



Are Ministers Priests or Elders? Questions and Answers

Authored by Craig Martin White.

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The purpose and desire is to foster Biblical, historical and related studies that strengthen the Church of God's message & mission and provides further support to its traditional doctrinal positions.

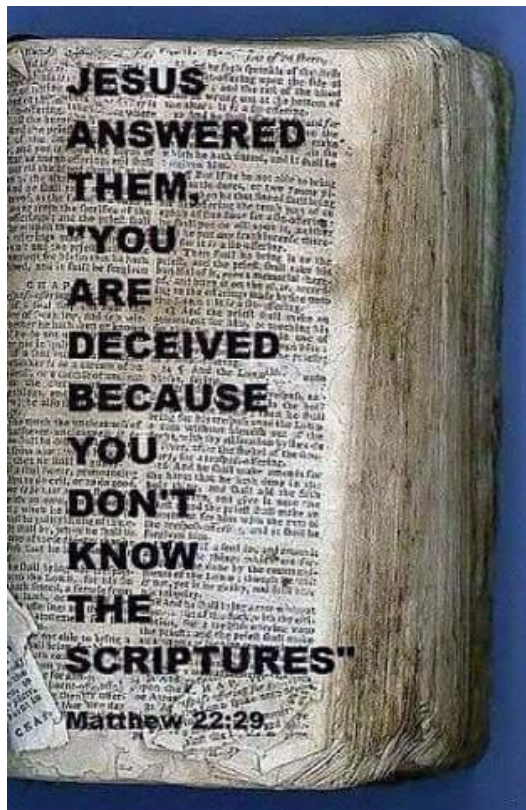
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- *Bible Study Note: Meaning of Ecclesiastes 5:1*
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- *Comparing Offices in the Synagogue and the Church (chart)*
- *Cross-referencing select Scriptures with Matthew 18 (chart)*
- *Should we 'move on' from the old Doctrines?*
- *So, what does a Deacon do?*
- *Suggestions for Bible Study Topics*
- *They have their Reward*
- *Was Peter the Leading Apostle?*
- *What is Sound Doctrine?*
- *Youth and their elders*

“For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”
(Acts 15:21)



Cp: Matt 12:3, 5; 19:4; 21:16, 42; 22:31; Mark 2:25; 12:10, 26; Luke 10:26

Introductory Remarks

What has inspired me to write this article? How did it come about?

The structure of Church governance has always interested me from my earliest time in the Church and it didn't take long to find articles with at least some information or passing comment in regard to this matter.

Since that time knowledge has substantially increased on the subject.

In light of this, I was at an overseas Feast of Tabernacles site several years ago. A minister mentioned during a sermon that today's ministry are heirs of the eldership system and not that of the priests. In talking with him after the sermon I raised the point that it was once taught or inferred by some – that the New Testament ministry were priests from around the early 1950s until around 1969/71. This belief was then dropped for reasons I shall address further along in this article – he was unaware that this was once taught or believed by some.¹

Others went further, drawing parallels between the political transfer of power from Moses to Joshua with that of the ministry (eg Num 27:18-23).

This teaching or belief (whether officially sanctioned or subtly taught by a few at Ambassador College or among themselves) doesn't seem to have been captured in any formal way or contained in a single document but taught by various ones and scattered throughout sermons. Nevertheless, it is axiomatic to some.

To illustrate the point, late 2017 I had dinner with an elder in the USA. When I was invited to dine with him and his wife, I had no idea that he was an elder. But as the evening progressed, I felt drawn to him and his wife who seemed shepherd-like.

He had the heart of a shepherd and genuine desire to discuss God's Word and increase in Scriptural knowledge. The following day, I attended Sabbath services and could see how he spent time with the under-privileged and poor. He had a real interest in them.

I wondered if he was an elder after all and asked his wife who confirmed this.

He was not haughty, but a servant of God's children and you could just tell by his behaviours and could even feel it. The vibes were that good.

At other times I have known or met some lovely ministers and their wives and wish we had more like that.

Some had the heart of a shepherd, others were hirelings (John 10:12-13), thieves (John 10:1), strangers (John 10:5) or wolves (Matt 7:15). But none are priests and that is what this article is centred around.

As Dr Rod Meredith (-2017) quoted from Jesse Lyman Hurlbut's famous book *The Story of the Christian*

¹ As one ex-WCG minister wrote: "At no point during my years in Bricket Wood [from 1967 forward] did anyone (from Mr. Armstrong on down to the unordained sermonette speakers) ever refer to ministers as "priests". I've never heard that concept before. We can draw all kinds of analogies to all kinds of things. But analogies are never reality ... they are only analogies."

Church:

“As Hurlbut elaborates ... later: " The adoration of the Virgin Mary was substituted for the worship of Venus and Diana; the Lord's Supper became a sacrifice in place of a memorial; **and the elder evolved from a preacher into a priest**. As a result of the church sitting in power, we do not see Christianity transforming the world to its own ideal, but the world dominating the church" (p. 79).” (“What Happened to the Truth?” *Tomorrow's World*, Nov-Dec 2003, p. 3) [emphasis mine]

Synagogue and Church

In my article *Synagogue and Church: Comparative Structures* demonstrated that research proves that the Early Church's structure was based on that of the Synagogue which included independent courts to judicated on serious matters.

It is important to note that the above article does not diminish church governance or ministerial leadership. I merely show the origin of the structure of the church and how, in many ways, the modern church more-or-less contains similarities in structure.

Several in-depth research works are available (and scores of shorter works) on the subject of synagogue – church structural similarities, but one which stands out with some unique thought and research is *From Synagogue to Church* by James Burtchaell. It was obvious to Burtchaell that we should

“... assume that the pattern of community organisation in those earliest churches may also have been an heirloom from the Jewish past ... they would instinctively create communities in the way familiar to them: following the patterns of the Hellenistic Jewish synagogue ...”²

The early Christians, being mainly Jewish and observers of the Law, attended synagogue each Sabbath. Christ Himself was a rabbi or teacher but did not hold any synagogue office such as pastor, elder or deacon (though He spiritually occupies those roles). Note Luke 4:16-30; Mark 1:21-28, 39; Matt 4:23; 7:28-29. Refer also to the appendix *Chart of Christian functions and Ministerial Offices*.

Who established the synagogues in the first place? It is thought that Levites did in cooperation with the elders.³ Also, of interest is that principles based on Biblical Law abound in their structure and practice.

Any reading on the subject will show that the term *synagogue* is derived from the Greek *synagein*, (“to bring together”) – in other words a place of assembly. The Yiddish equivalent word is *shul* (derived from the German *schule* or “school”).

² Burtchaell 1992, pp. xii-xiii. The contents for this book are: Preface; 1. The Reformation: challenge to an old consensus; 2. The nineteenth century: a new consensus is formulated; 3. The early twentieth century: the consensus is disputed; 4. The last fifty years: the consensus restated, rechallenged, reused; 5. A search for a new hypothesis; 6. Jewish community organization in the later Second Temple period; 7. The officers of the synagogue; 8. Community organization in the early Christian settlement; 9. A conclusion; Index auctorum; Index locorum. This work is a ‘must read’ for all serious researchers into early Church structure.

³ The gradual transfer of power from the priesthood to the elders is exemplified by this quote from the *Jewish Encyclopedia*: “In the Temple itself the Pharisees obtained a hold at an early date, when they introduced the regular daily prayers besides the sacrifice (Tamid v. 1) and the institution of the "Ma'amadot" (the representatives of the people during the sacrifices). Moreover, they declared that **the priests were but deputies of the people.**” (art. “Pharisees) [emphasis mine]

As such the synagogues were known as: *bet ha-kneset* ("house of assembly"), and *bet ha-midrash* ("house of study"), and *bet ha-tefilla* ("house of prayer").

In terms of our historical knowledge of when synagogues first appear, all that can be proven at this time is that they date from at least the 3rd century BC or earlier. An older history and those who have researched the subject of their origins are of the opinion that they arose sometime after the destruction of Solomon's Temple 586 BC. It is thought that homes were initially used to teach the Torah but as the attendees outgrew the homes, there arose a need for religious instruction in a public place of worship – hence the synagogue.

As the synagogues grew and flourished the elders grew in power and influence and the Priests' influence gradually diminished. The latter continued to control the Temple which existed side-by-side with the synagogues. After the destruction of the Temple in 70AD, many priests fled after that event and some even attempted to set up their system in distant locations. But for all intents and purposes, the Priesthood which had been gradually declining in power, was shattered and remains inoperable until the Messiah returns and institutes His restored and revised system on earth (Ezek 40:46; 44:15).

Instead of a governing priesthood, synagogues were served by a presiding pastor, a local council of elders, a council of deacons, teachers or rabbis (non-ordained), senior men and women. There was an overall basic structure common to all of them, though also some local variance.

The council of elders sought senior men from the congregation to join their ranks. Older men by virtue of their age did not automatically qualify for the local council of elders. They did qualify for respect, advice, knowledge and to be honoured as senior men (and women). The youth did not rule the elder.

I cite a few examples which demonstrate synagogue practice mirrored in the New Testament:

- Offices of pastor, elder, deacon; also, teachers and senior men and women (Eph 4:11-12; ICor 12:28)
- Did not ordain hastily (ie without due consideration and gauging the community's knowledge of the proposed ordainee) (ITim 5:22)
- A council or group of elders performed ordinations (ITim 4:14)
- Elders anointing the sick (James 5:14)
- Steps to take for resolution of major sins and issues (Matt 18:15-20)
- Older people were treated respectfully. Snappiness and cockiness was not tolerated in the synagogue: "Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers" (ITim 5:1). Encouragement is via opportunities to serve – not being blocked out of jealousy
- Older women to teach younger women (Titus 2:4-6)

Notice what one scholar wrote: "The first Churches were synagogues."⁴ How true, for early, primitive Christianity was considered a sect of Judaism.

In fact, the Church of God in those formative years was even known as "the sect of the Nazarenes" (Acts 24:5) – a term reminiscent of "sect of the Sadducees" (Acts 5:17) and "the sect of the Pharisees" (Acts 15:5) used for other sects or groupings within first century Judaism. In other words, the early Church of God was a distinct sect within the synagogue and its Hebraic teachings of that time-period. It was not revolutionary or opposed to the Torah or Law in the slightest. Instead, it sought to clean up the

⁴ Pizner 1990, p. 23. And "The synagogue became the cradle of the Church, without it ... the conversion of the gentiles (would) have required a succession of millennial miracles" (Edersheim 1993, p. 299). "The eldership structure of government, therefore, was very familiar to the Jewish Christians." (Strauch 1995, p. 123)

falsities and errors within the teachings at that point in time.

Its major difference to Judaism was cleansing out of the corruption, false teachings in their midst and accepting the Divinity of Christ, regarded as heresy to most Jews in that day.

"From their beginnings the communities of Christian believers had gathered into the shape already familiar from the Jewish synagogues ... the evidence is more respectfully treated if we conclude that the synagogue was the point of reference for the church ... There are also clear similarities in the structures of community offices. The presiding officer, the college of elders and the assistant appear to carry over from synagogue to church ...

"Jesus instigated no characteristic new organization or anarchy among those who shared faith in him ...

"as the offensive and destructive abuses of office [in Catholicism and Protestantism] are believed now to be neither necessary nor inevitable (perhaps because, if not accorded absolute clout, the officers are not so likely to be corrupted absolutely) the inveterate ability of those officers to serve the needs of a unified church is once more credible."⁵

"The Jewish eldership was transferred from the old dispensation to the new. "The creation of the office of elder is nowhere recorded in the New Testament ..."

The "elders" of the New Testament church were the "pastors" (Eph. 4:11), "bishops or overseers" (Acts 20:28), "leaders" and "rulers" (Heb. 13:7; 1 Thess. 5:12) of the flock. Everywhere in the New Testament bishop and presbyter are titles given to one and the same officer of the Christian church. He who is called presbyter or elder on account of his age or gravity is also called bishop or overseer with reference to the duty that lay upon him (Titus 1:5-7; Acts 20:17-28; Phil. 1:1)."⁶ [emphasis mine]

In the book of James, we find reference to the Church as a synagogue (James 2:2). The Greek *sunagoge* is the word used elsewhere as meaning the Jewish synagogue or meeting place. It may also be translated *assembly* as we have seen. But there should be no doubt as to what image the use of such a word would conjure up in the minds of first century believers. In the first century it was known that assemblies of this sort were held every seventh-day sabbath and feast day.⁷

Note also the following quote from Eric Myers' and James Strange's work *Archaeology, the Rabbis and Early Christianity*:

"Our discussion of Jewish tombs, burial practices [they did not practice cremation], and views of afterlife has reinforced our methodological assumption that a study of the earliest Christian remains in Palestine means studying Jewish remains. Given this fact that Christianity did not develop its own symbolic vocabulary of signs and symbols until the fourth century, we must, so it seems, depend on Jewish remains in order to

⁵ Burtchaell 1992, pp. 335, 339, 352, 356

⁶ Easton 1897: art. "Elder"

⁷ Thayer 1889, p. 600. "...the name (synagogue) is transferred to an assembly of Christians formally gathered for religious purposes, Jas. 2:2."

Rackham wrote: "The Christians indeed, as we see from James 2:2, continued to call their places of meeting in Jerusalem synagogues: but the body which met there was the ecclesia (church) (Jas. 5:14)" (*The Acts of the Apostles: an exposition*, 1919, p. 79).

Bagster's *Analytical Greek Lexicon*: "a collecting, gathering; a Christian assembly or congregation, Ja. 2:2; the congregation of a synagogue, Ac. 9:2, et al.; hence, the place itself, a synagogue, Lu. 7:5, et al." (1870, p. 385)

understand the context of early Christianity.⁸ [emphasis mine]

Indeed, for the earliest Christians were Jewish and continued the Hebraic (ie Old Testament teachings) and were known to outsiders as Nazareans as almost all historians now accept.⁹ To themselves they were known as the holy ones or the assembly of God (Gr *ekklesia*) – a holy community of believers. Today, in our modern language, we would say ‘Church of God’ or ‘congregation of God’s people’ or ‘assembly of Yahweh’ etc, dependent upon the language one uses. In the first century, the term *ekklesia* was in common usage among the Jews as a synonym for synagogue. We can look at Acts 20:28 and find that Paul replaced *synagoge* with *ekklesia* and Christians began to use this title to differentiate themselves from the Jews later on.

“The Hebrew *qahal* is translated variously in the Greek Septuagint as *synagoge* and *ekklesia*. These Greek terms are subsequently translated in English Bible versions as *synagogue*, *church*, *assembly*, *congregation*, etc. **The perceived distinction between the terms *synagogue* and *church* is due only to centuries of polarization of Jews and Christians.**¹⁰ [emphasis mine]

When they left or were cast out of many of the synagogues (John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2), they had nowhere to meet at first, except in members’ homes, and later in halls.¹¹

And so, the connection to the synagogue was close, for it was here that the Christians first met. They were tolerated at first due to the Jewish tradition to permit a wide range of doctrinal opinion. For amongst themselves, they had the Sadducees, Zealots, Therapeuta, Essenes, Pharisees and others. The Pharisees themselves were divided into several schools of thought.

Later, it became apparent that the Christian claim that Christ was the Messiah and that he had been raised from the dead, did not forebode well for them. But to the Jews the Messiah would be an all-conquering human king, one that could not have been guilty of ‘crimes’ which Jesus Christ was accused of. How could Christians be tolerated in the synagogues, keeping the sabbath and holy days among fellows? To be put out of the synagogue or to quit was a terrible thing to happen to any Jew. One lost all public standing, welfare benefits, judiciary protection, access to marital arrangements, hospitality and so forth. It was an enormous blow to their physical, emotional, cultural and social well-being. The costs in political and social terms was simply enormous, providing some context to how the early Christians were treated.

After the Christians left the synagogues

“Clearly **they would have begun to duplicate the traditional synagogue program as best they could** ... evidence shows that the Christian development of titles follows the Jewish customs rather faithfully. The title community chiefs may serve as an illustration ...”¹² [emphasis mine]

What offices may be found in the early true Church? There is enough evidence that the rank of community chief was known as *archisynagogoi*, that is, the superintendent or shepherd, the elders as *presbyteros* and assistant as *diaconus*. These terms are used throughout the New Testament.

In other words, the Synagogue and Early Church contained a pastor, elders, deacons, teachers and such like. The priests were not the rulers of the synagogues but of the temple.

⁸ Meyers & Strange 1981, p. 169

⁹ See Ray Pritz 1988

¹⁰ “Synagogue”, *The New Encyc Britannica*, vol II, Micropedia, Chicago, 15th ed, 2007, p. 462

¹¹ See Burtchaell 1992, p. 287. Refer to ICor 16:9; Col 4:15; Philemon 1:2; Acts 20:20

¹² Burtchaell 1992, p. 283

Even centuries later, the sabbath-observing Paulicians also did not consider elders to be priests:

“The Paulician clergy were not a priesthood. The Paulicians did not draw that hard and fast line between the clergy and the laity which the orthodox churches drew ... the Paulicians had no priesthood exalted above the common laity ...”¹³

This does not mean that throughout the history of the Sabbatarians that they all subscribed to the same structure, but I mention the above out of interest of how many Sabbatarians viewed eldership.

The purpose of this short article is not to delve too much into this, but to assemble arguments that the Church of God structure of leadership (pastors and elders) is based on that of the Synagogue’s eldership structure and not on the priesthood.

A Comment on the evolution of Church governance structure

One can research the history of Sabbatarians and one would be looking through a glass darkly. For instance, little can be assessed about how they organised themselves over the centuries. From what can be gathered it seems that they were rather loosely arranged with elders in leadership and at times of revival, a leading figure arose.

The Church of God, as it re-assembled in the late 1800s, had a ruling board and elders. It then split in 1905/06 over those that wished to have local autonomy and those that preferred a bit more centralised leadership.

Similar battles emerged in the early 1930s. The two largest groups re-combined in 1949 with some few remaining separate from the combined body which is named the Church of God (Seventh Day) based in Denver, Colorado.

In this context we can see that Herbert W Armstrong changed his views on governance. His article on the subject published in the February 1939 *Good News* under the title “Did Christ Reorganize the Church” is well known.

Much has been made of this article with this or that claim concerning it. Most notably, various ones see in this article an excuse to revert to local congregationalism. Yet the thrust of the article did not dwell on that aspect but on excessive control. In fact, with the omission of a few lines here and there, the article may be current today.

It was written in reaction to the structures being set up in other Churches and he noted the errors he perceived within those structures – the backdrop to the article should be considered prior to one wishing to revert to localism or changing modern structure.

There can be no doubt that HWA made some basic changes to Church governance in the early 1950s – due to the Church adopting a corporate structure some years after that article was written, it managed to perform a great Work. Local congregationalist structures do not produce major fruits nor a united, combined, efficient means to reach a huge audience. Nor consistency in doctrine.

When God raises up a Work (eg Moses, Hezekiah, Ezra) under the helm of a strong leader who put the

¹³ Arpee 1906, p. 282

assembly and its teachings 'back on the track', a centralised administration naturally arises with this effort. The purifying of the doctrine and increase in knowledge is an outcome. Today we would term this a 'corporate structure.' The only time that localism is of some use is when the Church is scattered due to persecution or there is an extended time of limited communications and must survive locally.

Therefore, those that wish to return to a 1930s structure must consider that such a structure would not have led to a great Work. In addition, HWA was still learning in those days. For instance, in the 1930s he believed in 6 Sivan for Pentecost; did not know the identity of Germany; believed that one is born again now, not in the resurrection; did not understand the truth about the 'spirit in man'; or major aspects of God's Plan and such like. Should we revert to old 1930s teachings or reject newer understandings simply because he held to other positions in the 1930s? That just does not make sense.

As the United Church of God paper *Godly Governance* states:

"Government, in the hands of God, is a tremendous blessing, insuring peace, orderliness, goodness and security for its subjects. Likewise, government, when in the hands of humans guided by God, extends the same blessings to all social institutions—family, school, community, business, nation or church. **However, government, in the hands of self-serving humans, invariably ends in a curse, fomenting strife, abuse, fear, distrust, confusion and uncertainty**" ... (p. 2)

"The Bible nowhere outlines "God's government" on earth as one monolithic, immutable, unchangeable structure in place from the beginning, to the present and into the future. On the contrary, **His Word shows that over time He has employed a number of systems which have altered somewhat as the needs and realities of His people changed.** It is simply inaccurate to state, "God's government is . . ." and then outline a favored structure."¹⁴ (pp. 4-5)

Pages 5-6 of the paper outline serving vs lording.

When Church governance structures are established, there is much to consider, including the welfare of the children of God:

"Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, **in honor giving preference to one another.**" (Rom 12:10)

"Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes *are due*, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, **honor to whom honor.**
Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love *is* the fulfillment of the law." (Rom 13:7, 10)

But do we fulfil these Scriptures?

Questions and Answers

What sort of governance structure did the Church of God have in the 1930s and 40s?

Local autonomy per the above was believed initially. In late 1933 the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day) based in Stanberry, Missouri split with Herbert W Armstrong going with Andrew Nugent Dugger's new group based in Salem, West Virginia. Herbert Armstrong was a member

¹⁴ *Godly Governance* 2001, pp. 2, 3-5

of their Oregon Conference Church of God (Seventh Day) up until the split(their structure was to have conferences in the various States).

The reason for the split was chiefly over governance though some minor doctrinal differences and personality issues were involved. Herbert Armstrong was one of those that believed in local autonomy at that time.

What sort of governance structure did the Church of God teach early 1950s-early 1970s?

By the early 1950s Herbert Armstrong had accepted a more centralised form of governance. The influence of certain senior ministers, the effects of WW2 and knowledge of corporate structure was what led to the formulation of a structure that, in many ways, emulated the sort of business structures of the day.

This is how Mr Armstrong explained how this came about in an article published in the *Good News*, August 1969:

“I had tried to fellowship with the Church of God which, in my early days of conversion, was located at Stanberry, Missouri. But their ministers fought me, did all they could to discredit me, break up the broadcast, hinder and stop THE VERY WORK OF GOD! Soon they became divided, with one group making headquarters at Salem, West Virginia.”

“But in my days of trying to work with them, between 1927 and somewhere around 1941 to 1947, there was so much controversy over what constituted God's CHURCH GOVERNMENT that I, myself, became completely confused on that point. I could see that their systems were so wrong that I assumed that God's Church is a SPIRITUAL ORGANISM, and not a church ORGANIZATION. I did not want to assume any rule or authority that I ought not, and consequently when troublemakers and wrong attitudes came into our little Church in Eugene, Oregon, I wielded no authority whatsoever, and the result was a church split in two.

Perhaps the beginning of the Biblical KNOWLEDGE EXPLOSION we have enjoyed since the college was founded was the clearing up of the Biblical teaching on CHURCH GOVERNMENT. Personally I had gotten so CLOSE to all the errors among the "Sardis" people - with a "General Conference" type government at Stanberry, and a "12 apostles - seven deacons - and 70 elders" type at Salem, West Virginia, that I was like the man so close to one tree he couldn't see the forest.

Ambassador College started with only FOUR students. The three male students were Herman Hoeh (now Dr. Hoeh), Raymond Cole (now District Superintendent of the New York District), and my elder son Richard David. The second year there were added Raymond McNair (now Deputy Chancellor of Ambassador College in England, and Director over the Work in Britain), his brother Marion, and Kenneth Herrmann (now Registrar of Ambassador College, Pasadena campus). Perhaps my son Dick and Raymond Cole had been, like myself, too close to all the confusion in Oregon. But the others were free from that, and God was able to reveal clearly, through them, precisely what is His form of Church Government.

Once clearly seen, it was put in operation. I had to repent of neglecting to assume the responsibility God had charged me with in Oregon. God's government is always government from the TOP - GOD the Father - on down. Christ is the living HEAD of this Church. There is authority in the Church. Troublemakers, bent on dividing and

breaking up God's Church, are not tolerated. THERE IS NO DIVISION, but happy harmony and order, in LOVE!"¹⁵

The Church seems to set up systems and accompanying policies to operate effectively in the particular time period and culture it exists within. In other words, the Church reflects the world in some way, good or bad. Centralising functions was good and fruitful. Unfortunately, some took this to extremes which Herbert Armstrong addressed by 1970 or so.¹⁶

According to Raymond F McNair's Ministerial Conference notes (of which I have 2 volumes), Herbert W Armstrong confirmed that:

"The Levitical priesthood analogy should not be overdone. We are ministers under the Melchizedek priesthood." (18 January 1973)¹⁷

"Mr HWA said some of these people look upon ordination more as a coronation." (17 January 1972)

The idea that ministers were Levitical priests was dropped or repudiated by the late 1960s/early 1970s (it was believed by many and apparently taught behind HWA's back) and there were no verbal or written statements that ministers are Priests and Levites from headquarters since that time, yet some still continue with this view and subsequent church governance practices.¹⁸

Nor can one find anything in Worldwide Church of God literature stating this since the early 1970s at the latest. Some continue to think that they are the elohim priests (based on Psalm 82:6), that they "are as Christ before you" and sit on Moses Seat. They have assumed positions and authority way higher than that permitted in the Scriptures or even their own Church organisation. They have no business doing so and the harm done to so many, creating a "revolving door" or members is the fruit borne.

Previous to that, it seems that the thinking was that the New Testament eldership was the continuation of the Old Testament priesthood. This caused a divide between the general membership and the elders – many of the latter assumed power not granted to them in the Bible or by the Church leadership. They were backed up by certain regional directors and their deputies; or their tracks covered by colleagues. The outcome led to very bad outcomes for many and formed the means for an apostasy to arise.

Instead, elders come from among the general membership as recognised and chosen by a neutral local eldership council. At no time were they to be a priestly class levels above the membership.

Sure, there are some principles from the Levites and Priesthood applicable to eldership, but eldership

¹⁵ Herbert W Armstrong, "Personal From", *Good News*, August 1969, pp. 5-6

¹⁶ Abuses and disgraceful behaviours did occur. However, as someone wrote: "but not everyone is one of the walking wounded. It is a fact that some were sorely mistreated by either College professors or their local minister. It really depended on where you lived and who your Pastor was."

¹⁷ HWA did not develop his thoughts on the Melchizedek priesthood concept further as far as is known. Presumably he was preoccupied by other matters, and this was perhaps considered less important than other tasks at hand. More than likely, he completely abandoned this idea as nothing was taught by him or authorized by him on the subject ever since. This does not mean that others did not do so, behind his back. This went on quite a lot and kept from him by certain regional directors and the groupings aligned with them.

¹⁸ According to certain ministers, the death of Mrs Loma Armstrong was a catalyst for rethinking the policies and control over the members leading to the reforms by Mr Armstrong 1968 into the 1970s. In 1978 with the change of administration, he never went back to the 1960s on doctrine or policy. He did tighten up doctrinal statements but did not implement the controls of the 1960s. The exception was in make-up and a couple of other matters, but not in governance over the members. Others implemented these sorts of controls behind his back in outer areas or in the regions.

does not originate in the Priesthood. So why are some still teaching or inferring that ministers are Priests? Or that the ministry is more-or-less based on that of Moses and Joshua's political leadership? And then act accordingly?

At the end of this article you will find an appendix ***Chart Comparing what a Priest and Elder would put into practice*** to help understand the differences in approach.

In the early 1970s, Herman L Hoeh made a statement (I read it many years ago) that the Church thought of itself as a sort of little Israel. We went overboard on that, he said. We over did separateness from the world to an extreme degree; enforced various Laws such as land sabbaths and third tithe which – while they should be taught – were enforced and caused a lot of unnecessary and unfortunate issues to arise. There are some laws that we don't understand today and others that are just too difficult to keep in the way it was in the time of Israel. Many of these laws we should apply in principle and intent and not necessarily in the letter. We should also try and understand them.

Congruent to this, ministers were regarded as priests by many.

Surely, there must be a balance on all these sorts of policy areas. Let's not go from one extreme to the other.

What sort of governance structure did the Church of God have 1970s-c1986?

Many years ago, it was explained to me by ministers that after the death of Mrs Loma Armstrong in 1967, the Church leadership eventually began to re-evaluate governance, policy, the healing doctrine and such like.

Administrative changes began to be made to 'loosen up' from 1968-74: aspects of administration and governance (eg dress including wearing more colourful clothing to church services); medicines; excess ministerial control (ie ministers are elders and pastors are not priests); no longer discouraging investing in the stock exchange or discouraging members being doctors, lawyers or actors; opposition to vaccinations dropped; excess disciplining of children by some (and ministerial interference in child-rearing); discouraging having friends outside of the Church; tithing to be on net instead of gross in many or most regions; third tithe no longer required; okay to honour birthday milestones; ministers were no more to go into member's homes as if they were priests, inspecting them for tidiness or cleanliness; or give advice on areas outside of their expertise etc.

Here are some examples:

"We have noticed in reading recent reports that **some of you ministers are still being very hard and extra critical of the men under you - - in some cases just waiting to "pounce" on them** if they make any mistake. You accuse them of having a wrong attitude when perhaps they simply were weak or did not understand and **some of you are simply overbearing in your attitude** toward subordinates in the ministry or local deacons -- constantly "putting them in their place" by your overbearing approach.

Perhaps all of us have made one or more of these mistakes in our ministry - - but we can and must CHANGE. I hope each of you will examine yourself carefully and ask: "Could just a little bit of this refer to me?" And I want you all to know **that we at Headquarters have been changing this approach for some years now, and intend to make even more progress on this in the future with God's help**. Also, I would like, again, to remind you all that we are beginning to stress management concepts in handling the work more than ever before and hope that all of you will begin to buy

and study material along this line and use it. I have already sent out some material and suggestions to the District Superintendents, and we will be sending certain materials to all of you full-time ministers and elders within the next several weeks and should have an entire course in management ready for your use by the end of this summer - - if not sooner!

So for your good, and the good of those working under you, try to grasp these concepts - - back off and take a good long, objective look at YOURSELF - - and be willing to change and grow in this area."¹⁹ [emphasis mine]

"I now have before me a letter from a prospective member who attended one of our churches only a few times, and then quit attending. He is undoubtedly a little biased and carnal but obviously upset because our local minister was unable to give him proper counsel before inviting him to church. Then, when he did show up at church two or three times, the minister did not greet him, the brethren did not come up and welcome him and the *only* man who shook his hand or said hello was apparently one of the deacons at the back of the room who let people in.

Although coming from an as-yet unconverted person, the letter does sound very sincere and based on fact. So let's remind ourselves that it is absolutely mandatory that the minister in charge of the church, or at least those elders whom he has directly appointed to do so, must be the ones to invite new people to church after proper counsel and knowing that they are ready. Then, he and his assistants should watch for them, greet them personally if possible, and in any case make sure that they are greeted, welcomed and counseled and perhaps even "sounded out" about their first reactions to our particular kind of church service.

Their attitude and reactions to the first Sabbath service or two are often *very critical* in determining whether they should be baptized in the near future and what steps to take in dealing with them in general. So all of you hear this in mind, and try to remind your members from time to time to be more friendly to new members and even to strangers or guests who may be attending from time to time WITHOUT, of course, telling them all the deep truths of God's plan and "jumping the gun" on the minister.

But the overall enthusiastic friendliness, warmth and welcome expressed to new brethren and visitors in many of our churches should be felt in all. **And the hypercritical, hesitant, fearful, defensive "police state" attitude and feeling ought to be erased from all congregations of God's people!"**²⁰ [emphasis mine]

"One of the major problems I'm sure we'll discuss during the conference will be DEFECTIONS FROM THE MINISTRY. By now, you all know of SEVERAL problems relating to the ministry in various parts of the U. S., and the world. We have had not only an UNUSUAL (for GOD'S MINISTRY) amount of various sensual sins, but also just plain BOLTING THE RANKS of the ministry, LEAVING God's Church, and going right back into the world."

"... but the continual LOSS of upwards of FIVE TO SIX HUNDRED ex "members" per year with the notations "NEVER CONVERTED" after their names really concerns me!"²¹

And the *Ministerial Letter* of 24 April 1969 admonished the ministry for not questioning a teaching that may need correction.

¹⁹ Rod C Meredith, *Ministerial Bulletin*, 18 April 1972, p. 35

²⁰ Rod C Meredith, *Ministerial Bulletin*, 12 Nov 1970, p. 61

²¹ Garner Ted Armstrong, *Ministerial Bulletin*, 15 Dec 1970, pp. 70, 71

A policy was announced to not enforce land sabbaths. I believe similar statements were made on other agricultural/environmental laws, mixed fabrics and other laws around or prior to this time. Similarly, circumcision and not being cremated etc were also de-emphasised.²²

In addition, Ushers (inc Deacons) no longer to wear arm bands (which were worn at large churches and large Feast of Tabernacles sites in the 1960s to be able to identify them, control traffic etc) – apparently some took the symbol of wearing them too far. Some taught that God created evil human nature, and this must be crushed in kids. Or that we should despise ourselves (rather than the old nature). As mentioned above, there was a thinking that the Church was a sort of little Israel, separate from the world - which was dropped. It went too far, imposing ideas that made the Way too restrictive per the above. Thereafter the Church strove for balance on this and other teachings.

Due to various issues, from mid-1978 until his death, HWA decided to impose a more stronger church governance – mainly over doctrinal issues and he did not reverse most of the policy changes he had previously authorized.²³ Nor did he teach that ministers must go to excess like some did, terrorizing their congregations and teaching that they were priests, “as Christ before you” as some proclaimed; or that Christ spoke through them in sermons and judgments.

Why was the Priestly approach eschewed?

It is true that Barnabas and other priests converted to Christianity (Acts 4:36; 6:7). This does not mean that all the ministry and eldership are priests.

"You are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren.
And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven.
Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ" (Matthew 23:8-10).

Herbert Armstrong obviously became aware that this approach led to abuses, excesses and taking advantage of people. There is nothing new to this:

“Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes the king, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the food allowance of the governor. The former governors who were before me **laid heavy burdens on the people** and took from them for their daily ration forty shekels of silver. **Even their servants lorded it over the people.** But I did not do so, because of the fear of God. I also persevered in the work on this wall, and we acquired no land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work. Moreover, there were at my table 150 men, Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations that were around us. Now what was prepared **at my expense** for each day was one ox and six choice sheep and birds, and every ten days all kinds of wine in abundance. Yet for all this I did not demand the food allowance of the governor, because the service was too heavy on

²² “Land Sabbath and its Application in the Twentieth Century” policy statement 14 Nov 1973. Two major doctrinal changes were made by HWA: Pentecost observance from Monday to Sunday. After studying the subject in late 1973/early 1974 Raymond F McNair brought further information on this to HWA than that brought in 1961 by Ernest Martin. It was officially changed 14 February. HWA also changed divorce and re-marriage 6 May 1974.

HWA authorised a doctrinal taskforce to research doctrines and to advise (not a committee that can make the changes). Sources: Pentecost change comments (R F McNair) *Bulletin* 1974 (Vol. 2 No. 12) 23 Sep, pp. 504-505; D&R change Q&As - *Bulletin* 1974 (Vol. 2 No. 12) 23 Sep, pp. 496-498; Healing change - *Bulletin* 1974 (Vol. 2 No. 12) 23 Sep, pp. 494-495; Birthday change - *Bulletin* 1974 (Vol. 2 No. 5) 21 Jun, pp. 196-198; Makeup change - HWA - *Bulletin* 1974 (Vol. 2 No. 13) 23 Oct, pp. 522-526.

²³ The only one was the make-up ruling which he reversed in 1981.

this people.

Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people.” (Neh 5:14-19, ESV. Cp IPet 5:3; Matt 20:25-26; 24:45-51; Col 2:18-19; Eph 4:11-12)

“**Not that we lord it over your faith**, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith.” (II Cor 1:24)

The priestly approach led to the following (as stated by ministers in sermons or privately; or those who had repented of such an approach; or snippets in the *Good News* magazine in the early/mid-1960s):

- Accusing people falsely out of jealousy or upon hearing gossip and not willing to give a fair go
- Going around to see members and putting pressure on them to reveal what sins they had to cause sickness, bad luck, various issues in life. If they talked about any weaknesses or sins they were fighting, they were suspended from Church attendance. If they didn't, they were told they lacked faith in the ministry and thus in Christ. Then they were suspended. None of this was authorised by Herbert W Armstrong. And they wonder why there is no growth!
- Many were suspended for the slightest thing or nothing at all based on the accusation that they 'have a bad attitude' or were 'proud' etc
- Refusing to back down when in the wrong – falsely accusing the innocent person defending themselves from abuse and lies by stating “you cannot defend yourself, it is wrong”
- Screaming and shouting at people if when they did no wrong or for some very minor issue
- Go two-by-two to members' homes and always have a witness against them without a fair trial, often over absolutely nothing
- Ministers even admitted to shouting at or being rude to prospective members saying they are Laodicean etc
- Some would say that they are the 'gods' based on a false understanding of Ps 82 and Jude 8 (ie a special priestly class)
- Others taught that if you asked a Bible question (and they didn't have the answer) then you were questioning the Church and should repent or be suspended
- Others did say they formed a priesthood and that one cannot question behaviours etc as that is as if one was questioning Christ Himself!
- Christ and Church government backs them up regardless, so don't even try and make a suggestion, correction or report to anyone about wrong-doing
- In sermons, it is Christ speaking through them. So, just accept poorly developed or researched sermon, no matter how shallow it is. The problem is not with them, but you as you are spiritually 'dull of hearing'
- One stated in a sermon that he is used by God like the lying spirit was (ie II Chron 18:21). In effect, as they are agents of God, He suspends the Law in their situation (Matt 12:5)²⁴ he stated (Deut 10:17; Rom 2:11 were ignored) and they can tell 'fibs' to catch people out etc
- He also said he can be used by God to be like a serpent – lying in wait for bad people then suddenly striking at them
- They were accuser, policeman, judge, jury and jailor or executioner as no 'checks 'n balances' or a neutral judiciary were in place as “we are inspired”
- Thinking that God always inspired one and one could do no wrong
- A class system emerged
- It led to focus on the self rather than on God
- Some went so far as to make statements such as 'be very careful when you make suggestions for sermons'!

- And so forth – the joy of salvation was thus snatched away (Ps 51:12; Rom 15:13; II Cor 1:24)

Over time, many ministers confessed openly in sermons what they did was wrong and gave examples. One minister told me personally of how he hurt and destroyed people. Years later he woke to what he had done and repented before God in tears.

Others refused to relent and became belligerent and self-willed, continued to wreak havoc long after Armstrong's reforms and even into the Tkach era for many years.

This caused suffering and resulted in some disrespect and consequent weakness in the structure of the Church. A large turnover of members was the result. It meant that when the apostates/synagogue of Satan took over the leadership, their job was made easy for them. Many members were relieved to be set free from unnecessary burdens and such like because of the priest-like approach by some. That is, they thought priests should act that way for some reason. Perhaps, because the tribe of Levi was considered to be fierce and angry, certain ones thought they should emulate such behaviours.

The wolf-like behaviour is nothing new and has always been among God's people. For instance, the Messenger Party (ie Church of God in the mid-nineteenth century) suffered similarly:

"H. S. Case was a pioneer preacher who accepted the faith in Michigan in 1851. He labored effectively in Michigan, New York, Ohio, and Wisconsin. But becoming incensed over rebuke for a harsh and unchristian attitude toward certain lay members, he left the ranks, and with C. P. Russell started in 1854 a paper they called the Messenger of Truth; hence they were known as "The Messenger Party."²⁵

What was the function of the Priests and Levites?

In the Old Testament we find that the priesthood was based on a genetic lineage from Levi. Moses was the first political/religious ruler over Israel and Aaron the first High Priest, both descendants of Levi. When the High Priest died, a successor was selected from among the priests.

The priest's main function was as intermediary between the common man and God, by offering sacrifices to cover sins and short-falls (Ex 28:12; Lev 4:20, 26, 31; Heb 5:1; 8:4).

In addition, they were in charge of the sacred lots (Ex 28:30).

Concerning the Levites, Levi had three sons and one daughter (Jochebed) from Elisheva, a Judahite:

- Kehath
- Merari
- Gershon

Each of these families had specific roles in the Tabernacle and Temple while Aaron's descendants became the priests. The Levites were their junior, assisting them. Their various duties are mentioned in a number of Scriptures such as serving at the Ark (Deut 10:8-9; I Chron 16:4-27), teaching (Lev 10:11; Deut 17:11; 24:8; 33:10; II Chron 17:7-9; 35:3; Neh 7:10; 8:7; Jer 18:18; Hag 2:11-12; Mal 2:7); were Tabernacle and Temple musicians, singers, doorkeepers, repairers (Num 1:50-53; 3:6-9; 4:1-33; I Chron 23); many judges were Levites (Deut 17:8-9; 21:5; I Chron 23:4; II Chron 19:8) and also were responsible for various regulations and policies based on the Law (I Chron 23:29; Lev 19:35-36).

²⁵ *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists* by A. W. Spalding, p. 229

Centuries later,

“Chief priests, together with elders and scribes, comprised the Jerusalem Sanhedrin (Mark 14: 55) before whom Jesus appeared before being sent for trial by Pilate. The ‘chief priests’ were members of priestly families from whom the ‘high priest’ (Caiaphas, Matt. 26: 3) was chosen. In the NT Church the whole body of Christians were regarded as a ‘royal priesthood’ (1 Pet. 2: 9) not in the sense of a ruling or tyrannical priesthood but as a body charged, like a king, to mediate blessings to the world and to offer spiritual sacrifices.”²⁶

Did the Priests present sermons?

Some use the reasoning that because priests gave sermons therefore, it followed, the ministry were priests. This is a flawed reasoning.

They think that the Priests presented sermons based on Eccl 5:1. From what we know, however, it was the Levites who gave instruction and teaching to the people – probably in their homes or open fields (IIChron 17:7-9; 35:3. Cp Rom 10:17).

Eccl 5:1 reads:

“Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to **listen [or hear]** is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil.” (ESV) [emphasis mine]

But the word *listen* (or *hear*) is not a true rendering. The *Keil and Delitzsch Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* says:

“In the word הוֹרֹת, priests are not perhaps thought of, although the comparison of Ecclesiastes 5:5 (הַמְלִאךָ) with Malachi 2:7 makes it certainly natural; priestly instruction limited itself to information regarding the performance of the law already given in Scripture, Leviticus 10:11; Deuteronomy 33:9., and to deciding on questions arising in the region of legal praxis, Deuteronomy 24:8; Haggai 2:11. **The priesthood did not belong to the teaching class in the sense of preaching. Preaching was never a part of the temple cultus [ie religious practice] but, for the first time, after the exile became a part of the synagogue worship.** The preachers under the O.T. were the prophets, - preachers by a supernatural divine call ...

The great word of Samuel, 1 Samuel 15:22., that self-denying obedience to God is better than all sacrifices, echoes through the whole of the Psalms. And the prophets go to the utmost in depreciating the sacrificial cultus.” [emphasis mine]

Wesley's Explanatory Notes Commentary:

“5:1 Thy foot - Thy thoughts and affections, by which men go to God and walk with him. To hear - To hearken to and obey God's word. Of fools - Such as wicked men use to offer, who vainly think to please God with their **sacrifices without obedience.** For - They are not sensible of the great sinfulness of such thoughts.” [emphasis mine]

²⁶ *Oxford Dictionary of the Bible* online <http://www.oxfordbiblicalstudies.com/article/opr/t94/e1526#>

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary:

“CHAPTER 5

Ec 5:1-20.

1. From vanity connected with kings, he passes to vanities (Ec 5:7) which may be fallen into in serving the King of kings, even by those who, convinced of the vanity of the creature, wish to worship the Creator.

Keep thy foot-In going to worship, go with considerate, circumspect, reverent feeling. The allusion is to the taking off the shoes, or sandals, in entering a temple (Ex 3:5; Jos 5:15, which passages perhaps gave rise to the custom). Weiss needlessly reads, "Keep thy feast days" (Ex 23:14, 17; the three great feasts).

hear-rather, "**To be ready (to draw nigh with the desire) to hear (obey)** is a better sacrifice than the offering of fools" [Holden]. (Vulgate; Syriac). (Ps 51:16, 17; Pr 21:3; Jer 6:20; 7:21-23; 14:12; Am 5:21-24). The warning is against mere ceremonial self-righteousness, as in Ec 7:12. **Obedience is the spirit of the law's requirements** (De 10:12). Solomon sorrowfully looks back on his own neglect of this (compare 1Ki 8:63 with Ec 11:4, 6). Positive precepts of God must be kept, but will not stand instead of obedience to His moral precepts. The last provided no sacrifice for wilful sin (Nu 15:30, 31; Heb 10:26-29)." [emphasis mine]

Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on the Bible:

"5:1-3 Address thyself to the worship of God, and take time to compose thyself for it. Keep thy thoughts from roving and wandering: keep thy affections from running out toward wrong objects. We should avoid vain repetitions; copious prayers are not here condemned, but those that are unmeaning. How often our wandering thoughts render attendance on Divine ordinances little better than the sacrifice of fools! Many words and hasty ones, used in prayer, show folly in the heart, **low thoughts of God, and careless thoughts of our own souls.**" [emphasis mine]

The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges:

"... [and be more ready to hear] The words have been differently interpreted: (1) "**And to draw near to hear is better than to offer the sacrifice ...;**" and (2) "**To hear (= obey) is nearer (i.e. is the truer way for thy foot to take) than to offer the sacrifice ...**" The general spirit of the maxim or precept is identical with that of 1Sa_15:22; Psa_40:6-8; Psa_50:8-14; Psa_51:16-17. **The "sacrifice of fools" as in Pro_21:27 is that offered by the ungodly, and therefore an abomination.**" [emphasis mine]

So, a more accurate rendering is:

"Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to **obey** is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil."

What do Elders do if they are not priests?

Elders are conferred a number of duties and responsibilities in service to the brethren. This includes carefully selecting from the assembly older men to join their ranks.

Older men and women had status and respect in the assembly, but age did not guarantee automatic admission into the office of the elder. That only came about after careful and fair deliberation.

Elders nurtured the congregation and taught all the doctrines and Law thoroughly. They were men of integrity, knowledge and understanding and took care of people. Especially the under-privileged.

Their duties were not just to open a hall on the Sabbath, give recycled sermons and some counselling and such like. They were supervised and were warned not to lord it over the flock. (cf Matt 24:45-51)

In other words, they had a critical role in creating and maintain a happy community. It was not supposed to be an easy job.

In today's terms we would say that they would set up and maintain social events working groups, outreach working groups and good works working groups to involve all the congregation in service to others. They would/should have sign-up lists for service opportunities, not just appointments as if one were a priest. Many of these behaviours are contrary to Church policy and may be in breach of contract.

The members' talents and gifts were utilised without prejudice and jealousy. Refer to the appendix **Chart of Christian Functions and Ministerial Offices** for further information.

What are the qualifications for elders if they are not priests?

The following thoughtful list was found on the internet:

• Children are	• Titus 1:6
• Children are	• I Tim. 3:4-5
• Has Faithful Wife	• I Tim. 3:10
• Has Pure Conscience	• I Tim. 3:9
• Holds Sound Doctrine	• Titus 1:9
• Honest, No Hypocrite	• I Tim. 3:8
• Hospitable	• Titus 1:8
• Humble, Not Arrogant	• Titus 1:7
• Husband of One Wife	• I Tim. 3:2, 12
• Keeps Faithful Word	• Titus 1:9
• Lover of Good	• Titus 1:8
• Man of Character	• I Tim. 3:8
• Man of Integrity	• I Tim. 3:2
• Not a New Convert	• I Tim. 3:6
• Not Covetous	• I Tim. 3:3
• Not Given to Wine	• I Tim. 3:12
• Not Greedy	• Titus 1:7
• Not Quarrelsome	• I Tim. 3:3
• Not Quick-Tempered	• Titus 1:7
• Not Violent	• I Tim. 3:3
• Of a Sound Mind	• Titus 1:8
• Of Good Behavior	• I Tim. 3:2
• Of Good Reputation	• I Tim. 3:7
• Patient	• I Tim. 3:3
• Refutes Gainsayers	• Titus 1:9
• Righteous in	• Titus 1:8
• Rules His House Well	• I Tim. 3:12
• Self-Controlled	• Titus 1:8
• Skillful in Teaching	• I Tim. 3:2
• Sober, Vigilant	• Titus 1:8

• Steadfast in Faith	• I Tim. 3:9
• Student of the Word	• II Tim. 2:15

There is also a helpful Ambassador College handout *Bible Requirements for Ministers*.²⁷

Other thoughts

- Shepherds would never hold back food or water from the flock
- They would not let wolves take down any of the sheep
- Nor would they permit power cliques to develop
- Nor shear the sheep just prior to Winter to line his pockets, one way or the other
- He does not mete out unreasonable and silly rules making life uncomfortable for God's children
- He does not run into the middle, cowardly, to hide. Which scatters the flock
- He speaks softly to them
- Does not have leashes on them
- When a storm comes he does not abandon them.

In other words, there is no perniciousness in his attitude and approach.

Where do Apostles fit in? Did they function as priests?

This was one group which the synagogues did not have at the helm but which served at the bottom of the order.

“... whether through a personal call or some prophetic summons, went forth as appointed by God. Hence a much higher sponsorship that their home churches might accept and accredit but not initiate.”²⁸

They were acknowledged by their fruits as having been sent by Christ Himself, with a prophetic and leadership role. All the churches answered to the Apostles who spoke with *kyriotes* = *ruling power*. Note the statement “It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by ourselves” (Acts 15:28) as evidence for this.

In this way they were different from the *apostoli*. They were sent as messengers between the synagogues. In the literature we find that they were sent as travelling fund collectors and messengers. In effect, their role was elevated or converted from a messenger-boy to the highest office of service in the Church. Dr Hoeh alluded to this in a sermon he gave sometime in the early 1980s and which has stuck in my mind ever since. I am unaware if he had ever expanded on this important concept.

Why else would Paul state:

“And God hath set some in the church, **first** apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles?” (1Cor 12:28-29)

Paul mentioned “first Apostles” here to emphasise a change in the Church’s adoption of the synagogue model.

²⁷ This is available at www.friendsofsabbath.org

²⁸ Burtchaell 1992, p. 307

“And he gave some, **apostles**; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;
For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” (Eph 4:11-12)

Again, he lists Apostles first.

After all, why is there such a great deal of emphasis on the role of Apostles in the New Testament? Why did Paul have to mention his credentials if the rank of Apostle was already the highest? Perhaps some, familiar with the synagogue structure, needed convincing.

It seems that over the years the Church of God knew little about the organisation of the synagogue, yet the basic structure of the Worldwide Church of God was based upon it in many ways. There was probably a certain amount of Divine inspiration for this to happen. For God works in mysterious ways.

Doesn't Numbers 27:18-23 mean that ministers are responsible to God only?

Nothing can be found that such is current Church of God teaching or was officially taught or sanctioned from at least the early 1970s. This Scripture, of course, has to do with the political transfer of power and not ordination of ministers. Nevertheless, I insert this matter into the document because it is used in a similar way to the ‘ministers are priests’ belief.

“So the LORD said to Moses, "Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him.
Make him stand before Eleazar the priest and all the congregation, and you shall commission him in their sight.
You shall invest him with some of your authority, that all the congregation of the people of Israel may obey.
And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the LORD. At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he and all the people of Israel with him, the whole congregation."
And Moses did as the LORD commanded him. He took Joshua and made him stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole congregation,
and he laid his hands on him and commissioned him as the LORD directed through Moses.”

Some take this to mean that that is all that is required for ordination of New Testament ministers. It is thought that just because they pray about it and the actual ordination is performed in front of the congregation, that legitimises it. That all who are ordained are thus on the track.

Consider that when ordinations of elders in the Synagogue and during the New Testament times were similarly performed, how many stayed on track? How many were genuine? How many had the heart of a shepherd?

Decision on who would be successor to Moses would have been well-known prior to public confirmation. Similarly, those selected for eldership were well-known and the congregation would have been asked about them, their conduct, behaviours and private doctrines prior to ordination.

There was no such thing as ‘once ordained, always ordained.’ If you did not measure up or perform your duties you were let go. The congregation did not have to endure suffering needlessly due to inept or bad leadership.

Now let us ask ourselves, if every ordination was legitimate, then why did Paul warn about false ministers in our midst?

Why did Jude? Jude's letter concentrates on false ministers that infiltrate the Church. Compare for instance Jude 12 with Ezek 34:1-4 (cp IIPet 2:10).²⁹

What about Armstrong berating both the ministry and membership in the early 1980s roaring 'half of you just don't get it'?³⁰

How about well over 50% not staying with the truth after the passing of HWA? Are we so soon to forget?

So, Num 27:18-23 should be studied respectfully and in deep reflection of God's Word. Frivolously finding this or that Scripture to support a position is not good enough.

Today, the Church of God does not teach that Num 27:18-23 only applies to elders. Nor the notion that because it is God Who does the actual ordination through a human instrument, it is between them and God and they cannot be corrected or reported for wrong-doing or dereliction of duty or refusal to teach the Church's doctrines and such like.

But Num 27 and other such Scriptures applies to *all* of us typologically (elders and non-elders alike). In that sense it shows that it is God Himself Who puts us into the Church – He is the one that calls us into His Church and His spiritual priesthood. This is the real typology behind this Scripture. Refer to the appendix *Extracts from In All About Water Baptism by Herbert W Armstrong* to read what he wrote about Who actually calls and baptises us.

As such, the attitude that "it is just between me and God and no man can correct me to change, only God can do that" is incorrect though touted many times. Be careful what you wish for!

"for whoever may give you to drink a cup of water in my name, because ye are Christ's, verily I say to you, he may not lose his reward;
and whoever may cause to stumble one of the little ones believing in me, better is it for him if a millstone is hanged about his neck, and he hath been cast into the sea."
(Mark 9:41-42)

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Heb 10:31)

So, be very careful what you wish for!

Further, if a member or a group of members wish to petition the Church leadership about issues, they get wrongfully branded as rebels and likened to Korah. However, Numbers 16 discusses Korah's rebellion - it is about the Levite Korah (read pastor) who was opposed to the leadership (read Church leadership) of Israel (read Church). Today that would be equivalent to some who are opposed to the Church's doctrines, values and policies and want to do things their way contrary to their training, Church policies, manuals and instructions So, because they refuse to preach many doctrines, follow the values, Constitution, Bylaws, Rules of Association, policies and want to run things their way – in effect taking the place of the leadership, they can be likened to Korah (compare Num 16:10).

²⁹ Jude has a maritime theme – see especially verses 12-13.

³⁰ Refer also to his articles "Why some ministers have failed" and "Now God speaks to you Ministers" for proof.

Then a few Israelites (read Church members) were upset with God dealing with Korah and rebelled also and were dealt with. So, there were those loyal to the leadership (petitioners) and those that peeled off and wanted to support the trouble-maker (Korah).

One wonders how petitioners can be compared to Korah & co or become like them? The opposite is the case – they are/were standing up for the Church, its leadership, the Church's values and against members being abused.

In a most unjust fashion they will meddle behind your back to prevent the correct Biblical outcome (justice).

“Whoever meddles in a quarrel not his own is like one who takes a passing dog by the ears.” (Prov 26:17)

Which means

“He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him,... One that going along the streets, and passing by the door, where two or more persons are quarrelling, and he thrusts himself in and intermeddles in the affair he has no concern in; and interests himself in the cause of the quarrel he has nothing to do with, **on account of acquaintance, relation, or office**; and especially when, **instead of being a mediator and peacemaker, he takes on one side**, and acts the angry part, as Aben Ezra interprets the word rendered "meddleth"; blows things up into a greater flame, and enrages the one against the other.” (*Gills Exposition of the Entire Bible*)

Do Ministers have unlimited power (based on Heb 13:7)?

Some apply Heb 13:7 to order around members and make unjust rulings because they believe that they have unlimited authority etc that is somehow instilled into them upon ordination, though the Church does not teach that:

“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of *their* conversation.” (KJV)

However, a better translation is

“Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.” (ESV)

As much as I love and appreciated the King James Version of the Bible, I also am aware of the politics behind it which you can read in a range of books and articles.³¹

When King James called for the new translation, he was adamant that it must fit the doctrine and agenda of the Anglican Church and his own which skewed Scripture for this purpose and Heb 13:7 is one example of this stance.

“Though the Puritan translators wanted to translate key Greek words in ways favoring their ecclesiology — e.g., translating *episcopos* as “overseer” instead of “bishop”, *presbuteros* as “elder” instead of “priest”, and *ecclesia* as “congregation”

³¹ For instance Michael Rather's article "About the Political Dimensions of the Formation of the King James Bible," *Purdue*, Vol. 11, No. 2, pp. 1-10 and *Story Behind King James Bible*, <https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1601-1700/story-behind-king-james-bible-11630052.html>

instead of “Church” — King James insisted that they use the traditional terms to translate them, i.e., he kept them from changing anything.”³²

The ministry has limited power and cannot assume power not given to them in the Bible or federal or state legislatures. Or make up rules or regulations to suit themselves.

Do ministers sit on Moses Seat?

This is answered in the article [Bible Study Notes: Do Ministers Sit on Moses Seat?](#)

Are ministers above the Law of God?

Some ministers have taught that, based on Matt 12:3-8, they (as priests) are above God’s Law (and even man’s).

“He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him:
how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?
Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless?
I tell you, something greater than the temple is here.
And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless.
For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."

However, the pertinent verse (Matt 12:5) should be translated

“Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple ‘**profane**’ the Sabbath and are guiltless?” (ie inverted commas to indicate sarcasm).³³

Note also

“Profane the Sabbath - He referred them to the conduct of the priests also. On the Sabbath days they were engaged, as well as on other days, in killing beasts for sacrifice, Numbers 28:9-10. Two lambs were killed on the Sabbath, in addition to the daily sacrifice. The priests must be engaged in killing them, and making fires to burn them in sacrifice, whereas to kindle a fire was expressly forbidden the Jews on the Sabbath, Exodus 35:3. **They did that which, for other persons to do, would have been "profaning" the Sabbath.** Yet they were blameless. They did what was necessary and commanded. This was done in the very temple, too, the place of holiness, where the law should be most strictly observed.”³⁴

³² “Why did King James alter the Bible, and why is his version used?” <https://www.quora.com/Why-did-King-James-alter-the-Bible-and-why-is-his-version-used>

³³ see also <https://relevantmagazine.com/god/4-times-jesus-used-sarcasm-to-make-a-point/>

³⁴ *Barnes Notes on the Old and New Testaments*. Some researchers have this as a ‘tongue in cheek’ comment or that the word should be in inverted commas, viz “profane”. Because to the Pharisees what Christ and His disciples were doing was law-breaking, yet far less than what was required of the priests on the Sabbath. Priestly duties were not profaning the Sabbath any more than the death sentence for certain serious sins was breaking the 6th commandment. In other words, they were not profaning the Sabbath any more than the armies of Israel were guilty of murder when God ordered them to slay pagan tribes, otherwise they would have been guilty of sin and literally profaning. It must be the use of sarcasm again by Christ.

In other words, they were not profaning the Sabbath any more than the armies of Israel were guilty of murder when God ordered them to slay pagan tribes. Otherwise they would have been guilty of sin and literally profaning. It must be the use of sarcasm again by Christ.

"The Jews were so superstitious, concerning the observance of the Sabbath, that in their wars with *Antiochus Epiphanes*, and the *Romans*, they thought it a crime even to attempt to defend themselves on the Sabbath: when their enemies observed this, they deterred their operations to that day. It was through this, that *Pompey* was enabled to take Jerusalem."³⁵

What they regarded as profaning and what God does, are two different things.

So, for anyone to try and find Scriptures to support their haughtiness and bullying puts their spiritual lives in danger and also affects others. Spiritual abuse is a terrible thing.

Also, as they are supposed to be 'priests,' they are even above man's law – by covering up for each other when there are certain illegal activities (such as defamation or corruption), they can avoid the full force of the law (but see Rom 13:1-7).

Does God bind in heaven what ministers bind on earth?

Some think that they are so inspired that they are above the law of the land or even Church policies that they can ignore them because they are 'inspired.' If you think their decisions are contradictory, it is your imagination. If you are given advice it is as if Christ Himself is speaking through the minister. If the advice is not adhered to, you are a rebel. If the advice is followed and you are not blessed, it is your fault and you hold a secret sin. And if you are not healed after anointing, it is your fault and sin.

Because they are so inspired, they do not need training in counselling and such like. Because God somehow forces through some kind of energy dump through them to make correct judicial decisions and thus independent panels or judiciaries are not needed – despite the Biblical model and requirement. Matthew 18:15-18 is suspended or reinterpreted so that they or their friends always win.

So they bind decisions on earth which God backs up.

However, the Bible clearly shows otherwise. Note the online article by the United Church of God *What are the "keys of the kingdom" referred to in Matthew 16:19?* (<https://www.ucg.org/bible-study-tools/bible-questions-and-answers/what-are-the-keys-of-the-kingdom-referred-to-in-matthew-1619>) .

"God is not obligated to bind an ungodly decision. In other words, Christ would lead the Church leadership to decisions that He had already bound in heaven, not vice versa."

Also, in *Balloting in the Church. Doctrinal Study Paper*, the United Church of God states:

"Christ is speaking to the apostles (plural). Jesus was not giving Peter or anyone else unilateral authority to bind and loose decisions. This plurality reflects the need for the apostles to arrive at collaborative decisions." (p. 5)

³⁵ Adam Clarke's *Commentary on the Whole Bible*

Nowhere does God back up an elder regardless of abuses, sins or corruption. Covering up, redacting and breaking the law of the land is ungodly. Instead, the elder is confirming decisions God has already made in His Law.

Should members not be relieved when an oppressor leaves the ministry?

There have been times when ministers have been so oppressive and even cultic in behaviour that members have sighed with relief and even showed joy when a certain minister moved to another area or left the ministry.

Is that wrong to do?

The Scripture distinctly states: "When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule, the people groan." (Prov 29:2, ESV). See also Prov 11:10; 28:12, 15; 20:26.

The Church is meant to be a community, with loving relationships between the members and elders - and of course, of paramount, with the Father and Christ. As Herbert W Armstrong wrote in 1960, we have *direct* access to God (ie not via priests):

"Jesus Christ paid THE SUPREME PENALTY for us -- WHY? To purchase for us **ACCESS DIRECT TO GOD the Supreme FATHER over all! To DENY that access is to DENY the very blood of Jesus Christ! ...**

Jesus Christ, who is very GOD, is also our ELDER BROTHER! He made it possible for us to have access to the Father so that we might be begotten by the FATHER. We are not begotten by our elder BROTHER. A brother does not beget and sire brothers! We are begotten by our FATHER into HIS FAMILY.

My sons and daughters have always had a FAMILY RELATIONSHIP with, and full access to, ME. All of us who are God's begotten children have ACCESS to GOD THE FATHER. And, **we also have access to our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ, and to our still human but begotten brothers and sisters! It is a WONDERFUL family relationship!** Yes, PRAISE GOD for it! We have access direct to the FATHER -- and also to Jesus Christ! Many times DAILY we may go into intimate COMMUNION with BOTH God and Christ -- our FATHER and our BROTHER! Our GOD and our SAVIOUR! HOW WONDERFUL to really come to KNOW the great supreme GOD! How grateful to Jesus we should be for making this blessed privilege possible! **The MOST JOYOUS thing in life is to have this COMMUNION -- this close and intimate FELLOWSHIP with BOTH the FATHER and Christ the SON!**" ("Should we pray to God, or only to Christ?" *Good News*, May 1960, pp. 5-8,12) [emphasis mine]

Ministers are elders, not priests. Nor are they to put on air of pretence as if they are invincible in some way and that "God always backs me up" or that "Government always backs me up" and thus they cannot be reported, critiqued, corrected and such like. As a result many spiritual crimes which are committed are not addressed and thus continue on and on and on, wrecking congregations and lives of many. They continue on for decades through one group and into another, taught as if these are normal practices and covered up by colleagues.

They do not know – or want to know – the terrifying fate that awaits them unless they repent:

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Heb 10:31, ESV)

Should Elders excommunicate someone or declare members as “not in good standing” behind their back?

We must all look at ourselves and take responsibility for our actions. More so ministers who are hired and paid by their particular church.

For example, without their knowledge or involvement, members have been excommunicated on flimsy grounds or declared doctrinal heretics. But:

1. some ministers themselves do not believe in or hold to different doctrines to their church themselves. They have themselves said so privately; even publicly; and refuse to preach on them because they don't believe them. Yet, unethically and even illegally, draw salary from an organisation they don't agree with.
2. due process is often not followed. A heavy-handed approach leads to one becoming puffed up with power.

Patience and working with the (supposedly) sinning member should be paramount, getting them back on track. Because good communications leads to good cooperation and then long-term relationships. Slander and defamation of members behind their backs on councils and committees will result in actions to resolve the matter, even if it takes years. Christ stood up to the Pharisees and Herbert Armstrong similarly stood up to his detractors.

This thing that one should not report or have an abusive minister dealt with because “Christ will sort it out” is just not Biblical or common sense. All such an approach does is cover up these crimes and let the perpetrator and his allies get away with it, continuing the oppression for years and decades. Those who protect the guilty participate in the crime. Legally, before God, this is complicity.

Best to not protect one's friend or relative than be guilty of hurting God's flock or any human being.

“The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for **murderers [which includes spiritual murders and slander]**, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and **all liars**, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.” (Rev 21:7-8)

Much of these behaviours are due to jealousy, envy, the spirit of competition and such like which are carnal, leading to the members being 'put down' and preventing them from participating in the local congregation. All sorts of unbecoming excuses are used, but never an admission to the real reason: the spirit of competition and a sense of rivalry.

How do they get away with such conduct? Why is this so?

It goes back to the idea that God always 'backs up government' and 'ministers have to always be backed up regardless of what they do'! Some have stated that openly. As such, they can never be questioned or their conduct challenged as that would result in actions against the members.

The statement that they do not have to follow Matthew 18:15-18 as God inspires them to make correct judgments and decisions is appalling.

Well, that means that they can have the outcome they want and you “just have to accept that” and “you have to trust God's representatives.” All this because they teach each other that “God backs up

government” rather than “God backs up His Word and Laws which form the foundation of His governance.”

Yet the Bible teaches due process. Breach of this is a failure to comply with God’s legal obligations and thus is sin. Biblically – and even in the world, if legal process is not followed, the resultant action is considered void.

Further, failure to comply with God’s court order is thus in contempt of court.

Yet some persist that they are above the law, even if it is not in contradiction of God’s law. They can say these things to the Police or Magistrates or even perjure themselves and see what happens. Will God back them up?

Are Ministers inspired?

Some have gone around claiming that ministers are inspired and elevate themselves to the *same level* as patriarchs, prophets, apostles, high priests or a King David figure. But elders are not at that level. They are elders.

Nothing can be found in Scripture that elders are sort of priests.

As one minister stated publicly (referring to a trainee elder in the audience) that they are attempting to ‘be something that they are not’. They attempt to present themselves with an aura of invincibility instead of being with and among the members; yet the Apostle Paul states the role of elders:

“Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith.” (II Cor 1:24, ESV)

Some prefer to appear as superior beings and talk down to members as if they are nothing or know nothing. Pretending to know about subjects they are not qualified in. Herbert Armstrong attempted to deal with this by the early 1970s as has been discussed in this paper.

There do appear to be degrees of inspiration in the Bible, but no way are elders or members anywhere close to the inspiration level of apostles or prophets. Nor did Herbert Armstrong teach that.

Murmurings or discussions?

Notice:

“Do all things **without grumbling [KJV = murmurings] or disputing**; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world...” (Phil 2:14-15, ESV)

It is easy to turn to Scriptures such as this. But they do not refer to groaning under oppression, but *wrongful* murmurings. How can one not groan under oppression?

By those who have suffered unethically, take comfort:

“Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you;

yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, **so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.** For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil." (IPet 3:13-17)

Discussing what is going on in the church is not murmuring at all. In fact, murmuring is being disgruntled against good decisions or governance and rebellion, *not* bad behaviours and decisions. It is malicious slander, mutterings, not a discussed fact!

Do 'wining and dining' represent a type of bribery?

Ever wonder why some get so many "opportunities to serve"? It is sometimes to do with being sycophants and crawling to those in positions; or massaging their egos.

While others spend a lot of time 'wining and dining' ministers to be able to gain favours. This breaks the spirit of the law concerning bribery:

"You shall appoint judges and officers in all your towns that the LORD your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they **shall judge the people with righteous judgment.**

You shall not pervert justice. You shall not show partiality, and you shall not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous.

Justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that the LORD your God is giving you." (Deut 16:18-20)

"... and said to the judges, "Consider what you do, **for you judge not for man but for the LORD.** He is with you in giving judgment.

Now then, let the fear of the LORD be upon you. Be careful what you do, for there is no injustice with the LORD our God, or **partiality or taking bribes.**" (IIChron 19:6-7) [cp. Col. 3:23]

"You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, **but in righteousness shall you judge** your neighbor." (Lev 19:15)

"So David reigned over all Israel, and **he administered justice and equity** to all his people." (IChron 18:14-15)

"**Evil men do not understand justice,** but those who seek the LORD understand it completely." (Prov 28:5)

"Like a cage full of birds, their houses are full of deceit; therefore they have become great and rich;

they have grown fat and sleek. They know no bounds in deeds of evil; **they judge not with justice** the cause of the fatherless, to make it prosper, and they do not defend the rights of the needy.

Shall I not punish them for these things? declares the LORD, and shall I not avenge myself on a nation such as this?" (Jer 5:27-29)

Does the minister spend as much time with the poor and suffering as he does with the rich?

Are ministers "above the law of the land"?

The laws of man can form a restraint upon human nature - they teach us human conduct, tame and

civilise peoples. These human laws are also a safeguard for all – in particular the poor and underprivileged or those without much influence and power. No one is beyond or above the law of the land (Rom 13:1-7).

Yet certain ministers have said that they are above the law of the land even where it is not in conflict with the law of God. Why have they not researched the Bible on this; or talked with Church leaders;

Mr Herbert W Armstrong addressed this in a sermon *Just What is the Church?* In 1970 he addressed this:

“Now I have shown that the true Church of God is NOT a human organization or corporation, but a spiritual organism, composed of all who have and are being led by the Holy Spirit of God abiding in them. Yet the Church is ORGANIZED...”

“But is the corporation the Church?”

IT IS NOT! The Church existed as a spiritual organism, organized as CHRIST organized it (NOT organized on any human plan), and it carried on the SAME Work of God.

What about incorporating according to the civil laws of man? The answer is: **God instructs His Church to be subject to the powers of man’s government over him.**

When — in our time — the Work of God was small there was no need of being incorporated. This Work was NOT incorporated until it became necessary in order to deal with the world in carrying out the Commission to go to the world with Christ’s Gospel. The Work has grown worldwide and very large, and human governmental laws would not allow it to function without incorporating.” [emphasis mine]

Ten years later he wrote in an article titled “Romans 13 and the State of California Attack,” *Good News*, March 1980:

“Now notice what a “scholarly” commentary says in expounding Romans 13.

Speaking of government rulers: “If he rules according to the Constitution nothing can justify (the individual) rebelling against his authority... When the ruler acts thus (contrary to law or the Constitution) he dissolves the compact between him and his people; his authority is no longer binding, but illegal; and it is illegal because he is acting contrary to the laws of the Constitution, according to which, on being raised to the supreme power he promised to govern. This conduct justifies opposition to his government” — and the commentary means in GOD’S sight! (*Adam Clarke’s Commentary*)”

Paul Johnson, the famous British historian wrote:

“The rule of law, as distinct from the rule of a person, or class or people, and as opposed to the rule of force, is an abstract, sophisticated concept. It is mighty difficult to achieve. But until it is achieved, and established in the public mind with such vehemence that masses of individuals are prepared to die to uphold it, no other form of progress can be regarded as secure. The Greeks had tried to establish the rule of law but failed. The Romans had succeeded under their republic, but Caesar and his successors had destroyed it. The essence of the rule of law is its impersonality, omnipotence and ubiquity. **It is the same law for everyone, everywhere—kings, emperors, high priests, the state itself, are subject to it. If exceptions are made, the rule of law begins to collapse**—that was the grand lesson of antiquity” (“No Law Without Order, No Freedom Without Law,” *Sunday Telegraph*, 26 December, 1999) [emphasis mine].

Should we be in fear?

Some ministers have distilled fear in their congregations by tactics such as the following:

- Constantly using Scriptures about “hearing and fearing” God (which means to respect Him and His ways, not humans) as if they are referring to ministers.
- That they are as priests and every imagined resistance to them or not following advice is as if one is rebelling against God Himself.
- Not following due process in regard to serious issues.
- Preference for friends and sycophants.
- Spies in the congregation reporting on members – one never knows what they are saying about one. And the minister believes them.
- Little ‘taps on the shoulder’ to see a minister and trying to put people on edge – enjoying the chase like a predator. Bulling and physical touching in that manner are legal offences, let alone being unGodly.
- Brow-beating, shouting and threatening. Verbal abuse or verbal violence is also a legal issue.
- Wrongful excommunications.

Notice:

“Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, **able to teach**, not a drunkard, **not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.**” (1Tim 3:2-3)

They cause fear in the congregation and then accuse people in fear of having the wrong attitude and if in fear are holding on to a secret sin. Instead, the causer of fear should be admitting that they have the wrong approach. Never admitting to error or abuse is the order of the day for some.

The Scripture they use to justify their actions is IJohn 4:18, but they take it out of context:

“So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.
By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world.
There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.
We love because he first loved us.” (IJohn 4:16-18)

They use fear tactics and then blame the members, misapplying IJohn 4:18. Strange, but true. Taking a Scripture out of context and using that to cause fear is both dishonest and poor theology.

The context is that of judgment! Simply read the previous verse. We should all fear God, but not man!

“The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?
When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall.
Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.” (Ps 27:1-3)

“Out of my distress I called on the LORD; the LORD answered me and set me free.
The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?
The LORD is on my side as my helper; I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.
It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man.

It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes." (Ps 118:5-9)

"So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" (Heb 13:6)

"For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control." (II Tim 1:6-7)

These sorts are a law unto themselves and don't care what the Bible teaches or what their own Church teaches or its policies are.

Are Christians priests?

The ministry is there to be helpers – to assist in our journey toward salvation (Eph 4:11-13). Nowhere are they called priests in terms of their governance office in the New Testament spiritual Israel; nor are they supposed to be an go between a Christian and God in any way.

McDill in his *The Authority of Elders in the New Testament* writes that some claim the elders to be:

"parallel to the function of the priesthood under the Old Covenant. Sometimes this parallel is made intentionally ... **Such paradigms fail to take account of critical differences of leadership under the New Covenant.** The conclusions proposed here reinforce an understanding of the priesthood of all believers."³⁶ [emphasis mine]

Thus, we all have direct access to God the Father through Jesus Christ and not a human priest – this negates the need for priests, but entails the need for elders.

However, elders and all Christians constitute a Royal Priesthood (IPet 2:9) with Christ as the High Priest of this order (Heb 5:5-10; ITim 2:5-6). Christians function now as priests in a limited sense but will in a complete sense in the Kingdom – but priests in this sense do not occupy ministerial offices today.

To enter this order or priesthood, one has to accept the invitation of the Supreme Leader of the universe – God the Father Himself (John 14:6; 6:44; Lev 8).

As with the Levites, so Christians have a number of functions (Rom 12:4-5). In addition, there are many Scriptures demonstrating this that writers on typology such as Habershon explain. Here are two examples of many:

"Through him [Christ] then let us continually **offer up a sacrifice** of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name." (Hebrews 13:15)

"Present your bodies as **a living sacrifice**, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." (Romans 12:1)³⁷

For a serious study on the Priest-Christian typology, I recommend Adar Habershon's work *The Study of the Types*, Part II, "Priests and Levites." The book delves into splendid detail providing bountiful proofs of this typology.³⁸

³⁶ McDill 2009, p. 186

³⁷ Refer also to Ps 4:5; 51:17; 107:22; Heb 13:16

³⁸ It is available for free on the internet

Christians are today the Kingdom in embryo or first stages – so we are priests in training also, in embryo form metaphorically.

Why hasn't there been clarity on this subject?

The Churches of God seem to have a tradition of mentioning or addressing some subjects, but only fleetingly. Detailed attention to many subjects, pronouncements or policies seem to be outside of our tradition. Policies and announcements are scattered across articles, sermons and are often not catalogued in a systematic way.

Yet today, it is so easy to assemble information, doctrines and policies coherently. Internet technology makes this ultra-easy.

This neglect has led to misunderstandings, forgetting of decisions/changes or in some circumstances, just ignoring them as well as some forming incorrect conclusions.

Assembling, categorising and systemising our approach has not been among our strengths.

In fact, we have not produced definitive articles and booklets on a range of issues and topics. Announcements are made and forgotten. Trying to remember decisions becomes quite a 'stretch' for most people and so they just don't seem to care about certain matters.

Why do some heap up teachers and have itching ears instead of adhering to the doctrine of the Church and elders?

The Church is based on Christ and His teachings. However, it is sad to say that many find certain sermonettes and sermons as inadequate.

Instead of believing one is a priest and that one's sermons are inspired of God – that He speaks directly through him – one should clothe oneself with humility (IPet 5:5).

So, when they are inadequate, not interesting, not going deeper into God's Word, not preaching all the doctrines of the Church and simply just lazy recycling of sermons every 2 or so years – God's children get bored and, unfortunately, some start looking to others outside the Church for interesting sermons and literature. Or weird ideas and theories (II Tim 4:3-4).

As 'priests in training' should Christians be studying God's Word earnestly?

A further attribute of the synagogue and the Jewish family was study. Dr John Garr throws some light on the educational function of the synagogue:

“When Christians think of worship, images of the Sunday morning worship service come to view, with singing, praying, giving, preaching, and sharing the sacrament. Study is perhaps something that is done in preparation for worship, but could Christians ever conceive of study, itself, as an act of worship, even the highest form of worship? When we analyze this concept, however, we begin to understand that **intensive study of the Word of God is the most reliable way in which God can speak to us and cause us to understand his will and his ways.** Even the most intense and profound subjective experiences must be judged by the written Word of God (II Peter 1:16-19). Study of the Word of God, then, with a view toward doing the Word, is an

act of submission to the divine will, the essence of true worship. When we pray, we speak with God; when we study, God speaks to us.

For many centuries study has been at the very heart of the Jewish experience, so much so that much of Judaism has considered study as the highest form of worship. Humbly submitting oneself to the wisdom of God revealed in the *Tenach* (Hebrew Scriptures) was viewed as worship, which literally meant to "prostrate oneself" before the Eternal. The Hebrew word for worship, *dg's* (segad), means to "bow down or do obeisance to," and it has the connotation of total submission to a superior (as the king). The Greek translation of this word, *proskunevw* (*proskuni*), is even more graphic, meaning to "kiss as a dog licking its master's hand." ...

"The continuing recognition of the synagogue as a house of study is seen in the fact that many Jews today prefer the Yiddish term *shul* over the term synagogue to identify their place of meeting. *Shul* literally means school and probably is related to the Latin *schola*, from which we get the words scholar and scholastic."³⁹ [emphasis mine]

For the Biblical principle is this:

"How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity?" (Prov 1:22)

"The simple inherit folly: but the prudent are crowned with knowledge." (Prov 14:18)

Notice what the New Testament reveals about this approach:

"And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming *thither* went into the synagogue of the Jews.

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and **searched the scriptures daily**, whether those things were so.

Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few." (Acts 17:10-12)

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, **rightly dividing the word of truth.**" (II Tim 2:14)

"But grow in grace, and *in* the **knowledge** of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him *be* glory both now and for ever. Amen." (II Pet 3:18)

And so, studying the Word was a crucial aspect of synagogue and Jewish home life – as it was in the early Church. Is this aspect of worship disappearing from the Church today?

Or are we studying – as priests in embryo – to know the Word of God and His will, given we will be priests in the Kingdom?

Where did Mr Armstrong teach that the Church is the Kingdom of God in embryonic form and all Christians are 'priests'?

In many articles and broadcasts Mr Armstrong likened the Church of true believers to be in embryonic form. In other words, a "kingdom of priests" currently being formed (Rev 5:10. See 20:6; IPet 2:9; Rom 15:16). Duties of the saints are not restricted to priests but also to kingship.

One of many examples of this is the 18 restored truths (no. 8) that we are not yet the kingdom of God,

³⁹ Garr, c2000

but “we are the embryo that will become the kingdom of God.”

Note the old Worldwide Church of God teaching on this subject:

Herbert W. Armstrong, letter to brethren, February 22, 1974:

"YOU, brethren, 'are a chosen generation'—yes, SPECIFICALLY chosen for a very SPECIAL commission—'a ROYAL priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people...' (I Peter 2:9)."

Herman L. Hoeh, "Why Build the New Tabernacle Near Gladewater?" *Good News*, December 1957:

"Today WE may have access by prayer to the holy place in heaven itself—'Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holies by the blood of Jesus' (Heb. 10:19). And, 'Let US therefore with boldness approach the throne of grace' (Heb. 4:16). We are a 'royal priesthood' (I Peter 2:5, 9) today."

Herman L. Hoeh, "Which Old Testament Laws Are in Force Today?," *Good News*, January 1954:

"Peter says that we are 'a royal priesthood'—'a holy priesthood' (I Peter 2:5, 9). Since we are a priesthood, of which Jesus Christ is High Priest, then WE NEED TO OFFER SACRIFICES, TOO. What sacrifices can we offer? 'I appeal to you,' said Paul, 'to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service' (Romans 12:1, Panin trans.)."

58-Lesson *Ambassador College Bible Correspondence Course*, Lesson 27, 1967, pp. 9-10:

"Since the Old Covenant Israelites failed to rest on the Sabbath, they failed to remember the true Creator God, and that they were to become a holy people—a kingdom of priests who were to reveal to the world the Creator God, His blessings and His plan.

"They failed because they did not have the HOLY SPIRIT to empower them ... 'for the Holy Spirit was not yet given'" (John 7:38-39)."

"But we, if we become spirit-begotten New Covenant Israelites, do have the holy spirit to help us recognize this call and obey God. We have the spiritual perception to UNDERSTAND God's calling and the spiritual power to CARRY IT OUT.

"Old Covenant Israel never became 'a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.' But WE can now become a relatively holy and competent 'nation' by the power of the Holy Spirit!"

L. Leroy Neff, "Should a Christian Fight?" *Good News*, October 1960:

"Today God is dealing with mankind through His Church. Notice I Peter 2:9, 'But ye (Christians) are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.'"

Each of the quotes above demonstrates that the Church taught that all members are already priests – but obviously in embryonic form. The idea that ministers are priests is not right – they are elders. ALL Christians are priests and kings in formation.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Note: "Old Testament Ordination (Male-Only) and Commissioning and New Testament Commissioning," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, Vol. 33 Nos.1-2 (2022), pp.15-26 by Roy E. Gane:

"Absence of priestly ordination in the New Testament corresponds with the absence of human priests as cultic mediators in the New Testament Christian church. In the New Testament, the only priestly mediator is the divine-human Christ, who ministers in God's temple in heaven (1 Tim 2:5; Heb 2:17; 4:14-15; 5:5-6, 10; 6:20; chs. 7-10). All Christians comprise "a royal priesthood" (1 Pet 2:9; cf. Rev 1:6; 5:10; 20:6) in the sense that all Israelites were to be "a kingdom of priests" (Exod 19:6). There are leaders in the Christian church, but they do not have greater access to God than other Christians do, so an ontological distinction between priests or ministers and laypersons does not apply to New Testament Christianity." (p. 25)

Concluding Remarks

It is self-evident from the Scriptures and history that the governance structure of the Early Church was based upon that of the Synagogue and not the Levitical Priesthood.

This does not exclude the probability that elders' roles include some Levitical properties and responsibilities. I may produce an article or chart on that sometime in the future.

As one elder wrote in response to the question whether ministers are likened to priests in the Church:

"No! Except we might think of parallels such as both being involved in teaching. And Num. 27:18-23 is simply about passing along Moses' office of leadership to Joshua."

A senior minister in the Church wrote 26 June 2018:

"I'm not aware of anything like that. That doesn't mean some may not have said something like that in a sermon here or there, **but it's not our official position**

I do know that one of the presentations being given in the current round of ministerial regional conferences is being a good "Elder at the gate," drawing parallels with city or town elders in biblical times. That's very different from functioning as any kind of priests." [emphasis mine]

A local elder wrote similarly on 11 August 2018:

"This Sabbath we had the blessing of having Mr. [a senior minister] and his wife visit us at our ... hall location. I used the opportunity to run your question by him. I will try to paraphrase the few notes I quickly wrote down as we spoke.

We do not perform the functions of the OT priesthood. There are some similarities, but no direct comparison can be made between the NT ministry and the OT priesthood. The NT records that the first ministers ordained into the Church were called "elders", not "priests".

Those ordained "elders" in UCG (analogous to the elders at the gates described in the OT) are spiritual overseers of the NT (i.e., New Covenant) church.

Christ is our High Priest. In the future, all of us who enter the Kingdom of God at the first resurrection will become a kingdom of priests under Christ, but until then none of us (including the elders in UCG) are priests.

Above is my attempt to paraphrase the discussion I had with Mr. [a senior minister] earlier today on the Sabbath." [emphasis mine]

In his PhD thesis, *A Worship Service or an Assembly: An Investigation of the Terminology Used to Describe Church Meetings in the New Testament*, Thomas Wadsworth asserts that challenging the modern assumption that New Testament church gatherings were primarily "worship services." Through exhaustive analysis of Greek terminology such as words commonly translated as "worship" (e.g., *proskuneō*, *latreia*, *thrēskeia*, and *leitourgeō*), Wadsworth demonstrates that these terms are rooted in temple rituals, prostration, or **priestly service** and are *never* applied to Christian assemblies. Instead, the New Testament consistently describes church meetings using neutral terms for gathering or assembly (e.g., *synagō*, *synerchomai*, and *epysynagōgē*), with *ekklesia* itself emphasising a called-out gathering which included mutual edification and encouragement among believers. His finding suggests that contemporary Catholic and Protestant practices labelling church meetings as "worship

services" may reflect later historical developments rather than first-century Biblical patterns. Where he goes wrong, however, is not understanding that the early Church emulated the structure of the synagogue which included pastors and elders, but they *did not* function as priests.

In the meantime, the reader may wish to study how the Priests typologically represent Christians as a whole (both elders and ordinary members). A good source is Habershon's *The Study of the Types* referred to above and listed in the bibliography.

May we all be respectful of one another, considering each other's needs, accepting Biblical eldership and that the ordinary members also have a role to play in accordance with their gifts and talents. Unfortunately, there is so much jealousy and the spirit of competition and deliberately placing 'square pegs in round holes' in order to prevent God's gifts and talents being utilised in the Church.

And remember: nothing human – no body and no structure is perfect. We must keep on trying, growing and involving ourselves with **quality improvement** on an ongoing basis. A pejorative approach to improvement is unacceptable.

Appendix: Chart Comparing what a Hireling or Wolf versus an Elder would put into practice

The chart below summarises and compares those with a priestly view (in reality a hireling or even a wolf) in relation to those with an eldership view. A priestly view is symptomatic of someone lacking humility and refuses to put into practice their training and contractual arrangements.

Note: this does not mean that this is what priests did, but how those who think they are priests often act. The bottom line is this: some practice the way of Get and some the way of Give. Some have outgoing concern for the members and others couldn't care and are jealous of them.

Issue	Hireling or Wolf view/behaviour	Pastor/Elder view/behaviour
Abuse	If they don't like someone, among their tactics is to accuse the person of pride or blind to themselves and thus deserving of suspension. If they cannot make you bend to their will, then the final tactic after hours of mental harassment is to finally scream 'we are as Christ before you' and 'we will break you down and then re-build you into a new man under the control of the ministry.' And 'you must surrender your will to us, as we are sitting on His throne.' Bringing cultic behaviours into God's Church is committing spiritual suicide. They will even try to get you to admit to things you haven't done	Would never conceive of falsely accusing someone or being jealous. IF the person has done something serious, then works with them patiently and nicely
Accusations	Guilty until proven innocent. In effect executing a 'false arrest' with false witnesses and making up a false record of the person. The person is unaware of the accusations. They may come out years later.	Innocent until proven guilty
Administration	Plays games by placing 'square pegs in round holes' and nit-picking	Having gotten to know the members, use the talents properly without preventing their use due to jealousy
Auro of authority	Tries to portray himself as something special. To apply pressure which develops a power kick. Which is a drug to human nature.	Shows himself as a human, with weaknesses and who can understand and help others
Belligerence	Does the opposite to what is suggested 'just because I can.' Immature. Just a suggestion is regarded as a challenge to their authority.	Is reasonable, considered, approachable and mature and will take on board ideas and suggestions
Bible questions	Asking questions can often be regarded as 'questioning the authority of the church.' This reaction is because he does not have the answer and feels inadequate	Tries to answer questions. Does not give flippant answers or 'it is not important for salvation' etc. Has the humility to obtain the answers and get back to the questioner
Cliques	Couldn't care less and in many cases, encourages them and forms ruling circles around himself	Discourages them and forges a church community. This takes time and efforts and knows that is what a loving pastor

Issue	Hireling or Wolf view/behaviour	Pastor/Elder view/behaviour
		does. After all he is paid to do this
Cultic behaviours	Work on people to break them down over 2 hours. Shout and scream at them to intimidate. Demand to know your sins. If you don't tell your sins, you do not trust Christ and will be suspended. If you are not healed or have problems, you are not being blessed and lack faith. Which is sin. Therefore you have sins which must be purged out. If you fear the minister, then you lack love because love casts out all fear.	Kind, gentle, humble. Getting the facts first
Deceitful and deceptive	Tells fibs about members and lies to the rulers claiming to believe in the doctrines while going around refusing to preach them or making statements to undermine them. Thus he is drawing a salary for something he does not believe in. This is fleecing the flock	Honest and open, preaching all the Fundamentals and the scores of other doctrines. Would resign or be honest if he did not believe in the doctrines
Defence from accusations	You cannot defend yourself but must accept false accusations. "You must not stand your ground" they forcibly declare. This a bullying tactic and similar to false arrests one reads about. Innocent people cave in under the stress and duress, admitting to things they haven't done	Will ignore false accusations or have 'a word' with the accusers
Doctrines and policies	Laughs in the face of the ruling council, refusing to implement policies and preach doctrines as he does not believe in them (eg US & Britain in Prophecy, God is a Family, born again in the resurrection, church eras, place of safety etc etc)	Preaches in depth on all the teachings including the Fundamentals. Takes his calling seriously and fulfils his obligations and contractual arrangements. Does not mind being supervised and guided as he is not self-willed and immature thinking that he is only accountable to God
Double portion of the spirit	Believe that they have a twice the holy spirit compared to the members. Presumably this is based on IIKings 2:9	Does not believe in that and respects everyone accordingly, not elevating the self to a higher plane
Friendliness and hospitality	Uses excuses not to fellowship properly with all. Snappy and rude to those he is jealous or whom he has heard a false rumour. Helps to undermine them. Sits there staring at one, trying to make the person squirm and uncomfortable	Gets to know the congregation and is friendly toward all. Happy and outgoing. Gets to know those that are 'least' in the Church and those on the outer. He does all he can to integrate them based on their talents and gifts
Give vs Get	Selfish and refuses to use the spiritual gifts and talents in the Church	Uses them happily and is pleased to see members using what God has given them. Is not jealous of others
Gossip and slander	Believes lies about members and acts accordingly. Exaggerates accusations greatly	Gets the facts. Does not aggravate the situation. Sees everything; intervenes in little; or if a major issue arises such as false doctrines and cliques, intervenes. Tries to keep the peace
Healing	If not healed, you do have not faith (Rom 14:23)	Knows that the lack of healing can be due to any number of reasons. We shall only know why at the resurrection

Issue	Hireling or Wolf view/behaviour	Pastor/Elder view/behaviour
Heresies	Ignores them, particularly if they are spread by their friends. If he does deal with them, it is often without due process	Takes action. Does not permit them to give sermons and sermonettes. The safety of God's flock comes first
Humility	Lacking. Pretends to have invincibility and tries to portray a strong man without weaknesses. Never admits to error – blames everyone else. A tactic that supposedly shows how tough he is.	Willing to be among and with the people. Admits to error and repents.
Inner circles	Favouritism	Fair and equitable
Inspired	Inspired of God as if they were Apostles, prophets or priests. All advice, counsel, decisions, rulings etc were inspired and must not be challenged and will not be reversed – for God Himself backs him as does Church government. They are always right and backed up by God	Humble as a servant. Not belligerent, self-willed or self-confident etc. Does not have you sit in front of him brow-beating you and investigating behind your back without you knowing whom the accuser is. You do not have to accept his judgment or opinion and can be appealed to a higher level Whether one has God's spirit or not, one can make wrong decisions, be biased. Thus a neutral court system is essential.
Jealousy and envy	Cannot handle members who are Bible students and undermines them. Instead, inserts men who are mediocre or not very good at Bible studies and sermons to make himself look good. Or out of sheer belligerence 'because I can.' The flock, as a result, is not fed and God's children drift away out of boredom	Loves them and utilises the resources in the Church. Ensures that the flock is fed with quality food
Jobs/duties	Appoints his favourites. Or places 'square pegs in round holes' to cause friction and dysfunctionality	Gets to know everyone in the congregation and asks them to get involved based on their talents
Judgment	Always right and 'God backs me up' regardless	Fair and balanced
Judicial decision	Accuser, policeman, judge, jury, executioner. Gets friends to back him	Division of powers which has a neutral judiciary decide
Lost sheep	Lazy and couldn't care	Cares about them and seeks them out
Matt 18:15-17	Ignores it and does whatever he wants	Fair and balanced with an independent judiciary
Membership	Claims every new born, visitor and young person (who attends involuntarily) as a member and submits attendance figures accordingly	Is realistic and truthful submitting factual data that attempts to break down the attendance into categories to get an accurate picture
Mental health	Depression etc seen as a spiritual problem and even demonic	Knows that one might genetically inherit such issues or get them during life experiences. Most times they are not demonic
Neo-Protestant	Sermons and studies are rather Tkachian – the only real difference is that they meet on Sabbath and the protestants meet on Sundays	Completely in the Church of God doctrinal tradition
Purging of sin	Claims he will purge and burn sin and 'rebellion' out of people by brow-beating, fierce techniques, suspensions, bullying, fear etc	Gently leads God's people and would fear greatly to offend the Father's children, realising the fate that awaits him if he does

Issue	Hireling or Wolf view/behaviour	Pastor/Elder view/behaviour
Rebellion	The slightest thing sets them off to accuse members of “rebellion.” They then bring up ISam 15:23 and use that to suspend members for little or nothing	Wouldn’t have a bar of such disgraceful behaviour
Reporting abuse or lack of fulfilling office	On the other hand, if they are found out by higher ups, they will suspend the member who reported them and accuse them of pride, rebellion and such like	Wouldn’t get into that situation in the first place
Revolving door	His dysfunctional church results in a large turnover of members/ attendees. Blames them and claims they are not “called”	Takes full responsibility if there is such a turnover and makes changes to ensure it doesn’t continue.
Rumours	Passes on rumours to other ministers who ‘must’ believe him. Especially his successor – continuing the persecution	Would not dream of vindictiveness and such carnal behaviour
Self-elevation & selfishness	Focuses on the self. Out of a sense of knowing one is inadequate, constantly states that “I am a minister of Jesus Christ.” That doesn’t fool anyone – performance and fruits prove that. Never says to the members he loves and values them and they are His holy and righteous children	Focus put on God. Does not feel the need to elevate the self and shows genuine love and outgoing concern for God’s children
Sermons	Recycle them every 2-3 years. Nothing in-depth. Refuses to preach on many basic doctrines. Often the messages are like Sunday School stories. Believes that he is so inspired that Christ speaks through him, especially during sermons	Wants members to grow in grace and knowledge and preaches accordingly. Feeds the flock in depth messages on a range of topics.
Sets up people	Arranges through others to have someone cornered while orchestrating things behind the scenes. Then moves in for the kill	Wouldn’t dream of it
Sickness	Wants to know why you are sick. What caused it? Sin? “Tell us your sin” which is followed by suspension if you do. And if you don’t you are regarded as having no trust in church government	Realises that there are multiple causes for sins and has empathy for the flock. Does nothing to add to the stress, but instead relieves the flock of stress
Shepherds members	Mistreats them and considers himself a virtual sheriff. ‘I will purge sin from you’ they scream	Lovingly cares for God’s flock
Speakers’ Club	Sees this as rivalry and makes up excuses not to have one	Happily leads and encourages such clubs
Spies	Some are willingly used as spies as some ministers have exposed. Resulting in witch hunts	Refuses to have spies and pushes them away
Spiritual gifts and talents	Will not have a bar of it due to the elevation of the self. Is jealous and deliberately puts ‘square pegs in round holes’	All for it. Encourages members to use their talents and gifts to build up others. Places the right people in the right positions
Trust	Must have complete trust and confidence in him as he represents Christ on earth	Is humble and accepts his role as shepherd, not a military officer
Two-by-two	Go two-by-two to members’ homes and always have a witness against them	Respects the Law of God, the law of the land and Church governance principles.

Issue	Hireling or Wolf view/behaviour	Pastor/Elder view/behaviour
	without a fair trial, often over absolutely nothing. Use this as a pressure technique	Would never falsely accuse or be jealous of the flock
Under-privileged, poor and the neglected	Ignores them	Comforts and helps them
Unfairness	Different standards for different people enforced (dependent upon likes and dislikes)	Fair to all whether he likes them or not

NB: the supposed 'priestly' behaviours are not just unbiblical and ungodly, they are utterly contrary to Church teaching let alone the Bible's.

As one Church of God elder wrote:

"I recall listening to Charles Hunting (in advanced public speaking lecture a AC (USA) in the 1960s - using the term about a young elder/zealot "little Hitlers." This young minister had given a fiery message and Charles overheard to older men discussing the message, words to the effect, "Yeah, I heard the boy."

Sadly, we had the three-day wonders as they have been called.

1. Graduated one day
2. Married the next
3. ordained the third.

I witnessed many such occasions.

Perhaps not strictly in three days, but in quick succession. I personally believe this did not help the church or the individuals. This has perhaps been realized by history. Too quick to ordain the young in order to provide ministers for a growing church; a move that possibly had its backlash, men too young and too inexperienced to be shepherds.

There was an excellent sermon called "Sherrifsville" by Carl Gustofson, Cincinnati 1976. He talked about this town where everyone was sheriffing each other and locking them in Jail. Then while everyone is in jail who rides into town but Big Black Bart. He then applied it to what was taking place in the church.

I gave a sermon in recent years which was rebutted by one man who thought God had given him a special calling. He said he had never heard of such things. I mentioned how the gifts of the brethren as they grow can help take the weight off the shoulders of the ministers by helping teaching and bringing the new converts to spiritual maturity. He had obviously not understood the roll of the elders to bring the saints to the maturity of Christ. And some of those saints may eventually be in greater jobs than the minister himself.

Unfortunately, as it was recognised, men were ordained as a reward for works and not according to gifts, maturity etc. This turned out to be a disservice to those who were wrongfully ordained as has been said "above their level of competence." As for instance, men serving wonderfully as deacons {then later} ordained as elders and they were lost in that role."

One member wrote similarly from his observances and experiences:

“Since the doctrinal cyclone culminating in 1995 decimated the WCG, I've asked a number of ministers their thoughts about it, now in retrospect, from the vantage point of almost three DECADES later. I always ask them in private, and eventually zero in on one specific question, and that is, on the human level, who was mostly responsible for it. And surprisingly, their response is almost always the same: the ministry was.

Once, and this would have been back around 1996 or so, right after the UCG had just initially formed as a result of the open and blatant heresies that were being foisted on people by the leadership of the WCG. It was at a potluck meal after services one Sabbath day, and I happened to be standing in line right next to the new pastor who had just replaced the previous one. His name was Larry Neff, the son of Leroy Neff, a longtime minister that came to AC during it's very early days, in the early '50s sometime.

Anyway, I asked Larry Neff my question, and he didn't even hesitate in mentioning how he thought it was mostly the ministry's fault, an answer that I really wasn't expecting to hear, especially from someone who had been a longtime fulltime pastor for many decades by that time. My experience has been that by-in-large the members are almost always eagerly willing to reach out to folks in different COG groups. But often ministers aren't so willing, as perhaps they see all this as somehow a threat to their leadership or livelihood, and not to be encouraged. Honestly, to this day I still cringe when I hear a minister refer to a particular group of God's people as "MY congregation." (Rand Martens, e-mail 16 July 2023)

Appendix: Chart of Christian functions and Ministerial Offices

Some feel, based on the influences of evangelicalism, that all members are ministers or elders in the sense that they hold ministerial office automatically if they are a Christian.

It is true that we are all given gifts by our Father. We can all have functions in service to the Church of God. However, that does not mean that one holds an office.

For example, one could minister to (ie serve) another; or be a minister of government (eg the Minister for Health); or be a religious minister – so just because the word *minister* is used, does **not** mean one occupies the office of minister or elder (eg laying on of hands, baptizing, administering the church etc). The context must always be understood as a word can have a different connotation within a given context whether in common use or in the Bible.

Below I attempt to assemble Scriptures on the subject – those listed under “Christian services” are probably those used by the evangelicals to promote the idea that all Christians occupy these offices. Instead, they demonstrate that we have functions and Christian duties – but these are not official pastoral or eldership offices at all.

Without holding an office, a Christian can still undertake various functions, but without the leadership, breadth and depth that these offices contain. For instance, a Christian can shepherd another, be an elder figure, serve others, help with evangelising etc. In addition, all Christians have been given spiritual gifts by the Father.

Any happy, contented church that is growing and where members want to stay – uses their spiritual gifts and talents which are appreciated. Only jealousy and the spirit of competition prevents the fair use of resources in the church.

Notice that Christ occupies each office, though when He was on the earth He was not ordained into

any office in the synagogue. Instead, He was a rabbi or recognized teacher due to His knowledge, fame and teaching capacity.

Function/service	Christian services	Ministerial Office	Christ
Apostle	Rom 16:7?	Eph 4:11; ICor 12:28	Heb 3:1
Prophet	ICor 12:8,10	Eph 4:11; ICor 12:28	Deut 18:15; John 8:28; 12:49; Matt 13:57; 21:10-11; 14:5; 21_10-11; Luke 13:33
Evangelist	IPet 3:15; John13: 35	Eph 4:11; IITim 4:5	Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:16-21
Pastor	Rom 12:8; Eph 2:4-5; Gal 6:1; Prov 11:30; Dan 12:3	Eph 4:11; Phil 1:1	John 10:11; IPet 2:25
Elder	Rom 15:2; IPet 5:5; Heb 10:24-25	Titus 1:5	Ps 22:22; Heb 2:11; Mark 3:32-35
Deacon	Rom 16:1; 12:7; James 1:27	Phil 1:1	Luke 22:24-27; Matt 12:17-21; 20:28
Teacher	Rom 12:7; ICor 12:8	Eph 4:11; ICor 12:28	John 1:38; 3:1-2; Matt 11:4-5; Luke 4:18
Senior man or woman	Titus 2:1-5	This is a non-ministerial function	Christ is obviously our senior

Appendix: Extracts from *All About Water Baptism* by Herbert W Armstrong

The reason for quoting the below is two-fold: (1) to counter the idea that anyone can counsel and baptize whomever they wish without authorization; (2) to show that HWA was not as extreme as some made out. He is clearly showing here that members should be used in the Work.

“Must Baptism Be Administered Only by Ordained Ministers?”

Finally, who is authorized to administer baptism?

Must the repentant believer be baptized only by an ordained minister? How much depends upon the goodness, or belief, or spirituality of the man who performs the ordinance?

First, let us look to the example of Jesus; next, to the instructions of Christ; and then, to the teaching and practice in the early New Testament Church.

Was Jesus Himself an "ordained minister"— that is, ordained and approved by one of the popular denominations around Him? No, He was despised and rejected of them — opposed, persecuted, belittled as a non-conformist. And He baptized more disciples than John. Even John was not recognized, ordained, or sponsored in any way by any popular group or church. He was in their sight a rank outsider.

Actually, as pointed out earlier, Jesus Himself immersed no one with His own physical hands — His disciples did it for Him, by His authority. And right there is the point which answers the whole question. The one qualified to do the immersing must always perform it in the name of Jesus Christ — which means by His authority, acting for Christ as His disciple.

The principle is that it is Christ who is baptizing you. The man who puts you under the water is merely performing this physical act for Christ, in His stead. You are not to look to the human man,

further than to conscientiously try to go to one you honestly feel is a man of God, called of Christ, and used of Him in the work of His true Church. And if later he turns the wrong way, your salvation does not depend on that man or any other mortal man, but solely upon Christ! There is no cause to be baptized again by another man.

Always there is the chance that you may be deceived in the man you believe qualified to act for Christ in the act of baptism. If it depended upon this man, you would have to have divine powers of reading minds and hearts to be sure. You might have to be immersed fifty times before you could be absolutely sure of the man who did it — and even then, you could be mistaken. Just be as careful as you can, as God gives you to see, in the man who acts for Christ in baptizing you — and then do not look at the man — look at Christ — consider that it is Christ who is baptizing you, by and through a human instrument. And even if the instrument turns out to be imperfect, remember all humans are imperfect, and it was done for, and in the name of the only One who ever was perfect. And since it was in reality done by Christ, it should never be done over by another.

Who Should Baptize?

Now back to the example of Christ. In His own earthly ministry, He had this immersing performed for Him by His disciples. At that time they were not even converted — had not yet received the Holy Spirit — for the Holy Spirit was not yet given (John 7:39) because Jesus had not yet ascended to heaven to send the Holy Spirit (John 16:7), which first came to enter within and convert these disciples on the day of Pentecost.

Peter was their leader, and even after this baptizing, Peter denied Jesus three times. If you had been baptized by Peter in Christ's name, would you, on learning of his denial of Jesus, be baptized over again?

These men, who baptized for Jesus when He was with them in person, were not ordained ministers — were not recognized by any popular church — were merely students of Jesus at the time, being taught, not yet prepared to be sent out as His apostles and His ministers. And the indications are they were young men, perhaps not yet old enough to be made preachers or evangelists. They were not perfect, not even converted (Luke 22:32).

Consider now Christ's teaching. Those who go forth teaching, or preaching, His Gospel (most popular denominations preach a different gospel) are the ones He commanded and commissioned to do the baptizing (Matt. 28:19-20).

Consider the example of the inspired early Church. Philip was not an apostle, or a regular minister, but merely a deacon commissioned by the Church only to perform physical acts, such as waiting on tables (Acts 6:2-5). Yet he went down to Samaria and preached Christ and His Kingdom, and the people who believed were baptized (Acts 8:5-6, 12). The text does not even state that Philip did the baptizing — he may have had some of his new converts do it.

If you study the New Testament on the point, you will see it does not appear to attach great importance as to which man puts the believer under the water, since it is considered by the one baptized that Christ does it. The Holy Spirit sent Philip later to baptize the eunuch (Acts 8:26-39).

However, **notice that the one performing the baptism ceremony was a representative (though not necessarily an ordained minister)** of the true Church of God in every New Testament case. This was the Church Jesus founded (Matthew 16:18)."⁴¹ [emphasis mine]

⁴¹ Armstrong 1972, pp. 22-25

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Are Ministers Priests or Elders? Questions and Answers

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