

# THE LOWER LIGHTS

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**"Brightly beams our Father's mercy  
from the lighthouse evermore;  
But to us He gives the keeping  
of the lights along the shore."**

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## **NO CLERGY: A RADICAL IDEA**

The *Detroit Free Press* recently did a feature story on a church in the metro area which is going to great lengths to be non-traditional. According to the newspaper, their most radical idea is that they have no "clergy".

It is hard to imagine "Christianity" without the "clergy" (from Greek for "chosen"). In both Catholic and Protestant Churches there are those who make up a specially chosen class of Christians. They have special titles (e.g. "Father", "Bishop", and "Reverend"), many of them wear special clothes (robes and collars), and they are ordained to serve in the role of a priest, , officiating for the church in preaching, baptizing, serving the Lord's Supper, marrying, praying for the sick, performing funerals, etc. The "laity" (from Greek for "people") cannot perform these services and they must depend on the clergy in order to worship and have their spiritual needs met. Yes, compared to common practice, the idea of "no clergy" is radical, but is it radical when compared to the New Testament?

In the Old Testament, God set up a special priesthood. Aaron and his sons were ordained as priests to draw near to God and offer sacrifices for the people and the rest of the tribe of Levi were appointed to assist them (Num 18:1-7). But, God set up the Old Testament system to show men that they needed something better. The priests were weak. Before they offered sacrifices for the people, they had to offer sacrifices for their own sins first (Heb 7:27-28). The priests were mortal. They died and had to be replaced by someone else (Heb 7:23). But Jesus, who is sinless and lives forever to provide continual service, fulfils man's need for a priest (Heb 7:24-28). All Christians are encouraged to boldly draw near to God through Him (Heb 4:14-16;

10:19-22). Why then should we look to sinful, mortal men as mediators between us and God?

In His gospel, Jesus teaches that all Christians are priests, capable of offering spiritual sacrifices (1 Pet 2:5,9). He therefore never required a special ordination at the hands of men for one to preach, baptize, serve the Lord's Supper, pray for the sick, etc. He taught the "radical" idea that the subjects of His kingdom would all be of the same class, "servants" (Mt 20:25-28). He condemned wearing special clothing to draw the attention of men and the use of special titles such as "Rabbi" and "Father" which exalt men (Mt 23:5-11).

But, as early as Tertullian (A.D. 155-223), "Christians" had begun to compare the elders with the priests and the Levites with the deacons and to say that others should teach, baptize, and serve the Lord's Supper only when "circumstances required it" (elders and deacons couldn't do it). By the time of Cyprian (A.D. 195-268), they had begun to use the Greek word "kleros" to describe those who were financially supported to devote themselves to spiritual work (as the priests and Levites of the O.T.) as "clergy" (Neander's History of the Christian Church, Vol 1, p. 195-96). How quickly men brought into Christianity the Old Testament setup of men drawing near to God through a special class of men!

Now, after hundreds of years, the clergy system is so developed, accepted, and ingrained into "Christianity" that to depart from it seems radical. But to do so is to return to Christianity the way that Jesus set it up. May more men make this "radical" move to enjoy the blessing of serving God directly through Jesus and not through a separate and exalted class of men!! We shine the light of truth through the fog of error that men may see the truth!

## **A CHURCH MAKING UP IT'S OWN RULES?: NOW THAT IS RADICAL!!**

The headline of the *Detroit Free Press* story about a church in the metro area (see pg 1) read, "Church excels without rules". How is it possible for people to worship and work together as a spiritual body without rules? It isn't.

A closer look at the newspaper article reveals that the church does have rules. The *Free Press* writer reports that "It makes up its own rules, designs its own religious experiences..." How then are they "without rules"? This church is "without rules" in that they came together initially without subjecting themselves to a particular set of previously established rules, as is the case with most new churches. New Catholic Churches are formed under the rules of the Catholic Catechism, new Methodist Churches are founded upon the rules of the Methodist Discipline, new Baptist Churches are set up using the rules of the Baptist Manual, etc... The way this church has come together is, as reported, "beyond radical", for, as the article puts it, "few people anywhere have seen a church like this".

But, given time and human nature, this church will have set rules and their worship experiences will become traditional. Perhaps other churches across the country and around the world will be established using their rules and worship forms. Maybe even a denominational organization will be formed and a Guidebook will be written. New believers will come into the Church by subjecting themselves to the existing rules. Then the once "beyond radical" group will have become as "traditional" as the Catholics, Methodists, Baptists,

etc. Will it happen with this church? Who knows? But the 100's of denominations in existence show that it has happened many times before.

What does the New Testament say about rules for churches? The people of God belong to the "kingdom of God's beloved Son" (Col 1:13). Where do the rules in a "kingdom" come from? From the king, of course. It is not surprising then to find that in the N.T. local churches were told to follow the rules of King Jesus rather than to make up their own rules or to follow rules men previously established.

Paul told the church at Corinth that he was sending Timothy to remind them of his ways in Christ (the King) which he taught everywhere in every church (1 Cor 4:17). The apostle scolded the Galatian churches for quickly deserting Christ for another gospel, really not another but a perversion of the one true gospel (Gal 1:6-9). He exhorted the Thessalonian church to "hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us" (2 Thess 2:15).

A church which makes up its own rules or follows those already made up by men is "beyond radical" when compared to the New Testament. Are you a part of a church which is following the rules of men? Should you be? Why not do something "radical"? Leave that church and join yourself to a local church which has for its rules only the New Testament, the rules of Jesus, the King. We shine the light of truth through the fog of error that men may see the truth!