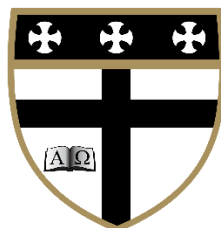


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A HISTORY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

**“The Rabbi Jesus of Nazareth:
A Prologue to the New Testament”¹**

by

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¹ Roderick O. Ford, *The Apostolate Papers* (unpublished research papers, 2015 to 2022).
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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Chapter 1. The Rabbis and Pharisees of Jesus’ Day	7
Chapter 2. Jesus’ Arguments with Scribes, Lawyers, and Pharisees.....	10
Chapter 3. Did Jesus Terminate the Rabbinical Office for Christians?.....	16
Chapter 4. Is the Term “Reverend” ever Appropriate for Christian Pastors?.....	21
Chapter 5. Who may be called a “Saint”?.....	26
Conclusion.....	29

“I am a Jew, and Jesus is my Rabbi!”

-- Messianic Judaism

² Roderick O. Ford, *The Apostolate Papers* (unpublished research papers, 2015 to 2022).
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Introduction



It has been widely held throughout Christendom that Jesus Christ wears three crowns of Israel—namely, that of *Prophet*, *King*, and *Priest*. Indeed, the constitution of ancient Israel, as recounted in the Torah (and summarized in the Book of Deuteronomy), broadly outlined those three constitutional offices.

But we often forget that Jesus of Nazareth held another important office, -- namely, that of *Rabbi*.

When Moses, Aaron, and Joshua lived, and throughout most of the Old Testament, the only offices ostensibly mentioned or emphasized were that of Prophet, Priest, and King. However, we know that sometime during the Second Temple period, the organization of the synagogues took root through the Jewish diaspora; and the new “teaching” or “ruling” office of the Jewish rabbi began to mushroom in Jerusalem and throughout much of ancient Palestine. So that by the time when Jesus of Nazareth was born during the first century, the office and function of the Jewish rabbi had become firmly established.

According to Rabbi Arthur Kurzweil’s *The Torah*, a rabbi is “[a] person authorized to make decisions on issues of Jewish law; literally ‘my teacher.’”³

Notably, as Rabbi Kurzweil points out, Jewish law was, and still is, comparable to constitutional law in the United States and Great Britain; the Torah, from which Jewish law is derived, is comprehensive and designed to cover every human endeavor—whether public or private, or whether secular or sacred.⁴

It is for this reason that the duties and functions of the Jewish rabbi were to discuss and debate the tenets of the true meaning of Torah with fellow rabbis.⁵ And this is what Jesus of Nazareth did in ancient Palestine.

Perhaps this is why in Puritan and Reformed theology, the Old Testament law and customs have such high esteem, and Orthodox Judaism is still highly regarded as an important repository for Christian hermeneutics. Hence, we Reformed theologians pay attention to Judaism because, as Augustine of Hippo stated in *The City of God*, regarding ancient Israel and the Jews:

This same nation, too, was afterwards dispersed through the nations, in order to testify to the scriptures in which eternal salvation in Christ had been declared. For not only the prophecies which are contained in words, nor only the precepts for the right conduct of life, which teach morals and piety, and are contained in the sacred writings—not only these, but also the rites, priesthood, tabernacle or temple, altars, sacrifices, ceremonies, and whatever else belongs to that service which is due to God, and which in Greek is properly called *hatpeia*—all these signified and fore-announced those things which we who believe in Jesus Christ unto eternal life believe to have been fulfilled,

³ Arthur Kurzweil, *The Torah* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Publishing, Inc., 2008), p. 302.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5 (“... the Torah has an equal concern for behavior in communal affairs, like the court system, employee/employer relations, and property rights.”)

⁵ See, also, Noah Feldman, *To Be A Jew Today: A New Guide to God, Israel, and the Jewish People* (New York, N.Y.: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2024), p. 355 (“As should be evident to readers of this book, a dispute between rabbis is not unusual in the Jewish tradition. It is constitutive of the struggle with or alongside God. Rabbinic dispute—disagreement among Jews about what God truly is or wants or says—is the basic building block out of which the whole Torah is made.”)

or behold in process of fulfillment, or confidently believe shall yet be fulfilled.⁶

In the New Testament, Jesus of Nazareth was referred to a “rabbi” approximately 16 times. And Jesus never disavowed the title “rabbi.”

Indeed, His *Sermon on the Mount*, in fact, was a legalistic and lawyerly dispensation on the Torah, stating,

“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil”;⁷ and

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hat you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.... Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect”;⁸ etc., etc.

In fact, I would argue that throughout the New Testament, Jesus acted and preached mostly in his role as a “rabbi.” His ministry was mostly directed at teaching his 12 disciples the true meaning of the Law and the Prophets; and he performed this dozens of times throughout the New Testament. We see him performing this role in the fields or synagogues of ancient Judea or in the Second Temple in Jerusalem.

See, e.g., “Jesus in the Synagogue” (“As the local town hall and place of Jewish law, public synagogues also served other civic functions, especially that of a court of law and justice. The Gospels and Acts mention this on a number of occasions (Mark 13:9; Matthew 23:34; Luke 12:11-12; Acts 22:19).... Similar hints at the judicial function of synagogues appear in the Mishnah as well (Makkot 3:12; Shevu’ot 4:10).” [See, e.g., Luke 10: 25-37 (Jesus tested by "expert in the law" (NIV) or "lawyer" (KJV)); Luke 11: 45-52 (Jesus' debating "experts in the law" (NIV) or "lawyers" (KJV))]. Hence, Jesus of Nazareth "discussed and debated the

⁶ St. Augustine, *The City of God* (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), pp. 238-239.

⁷ Matthew 5: 17.

⁸ Matthew 5: 43-48.

interpretation and practice of Jewish law in synagogues (Mark 3:1-6; Luke 13:14-17; John 6:30-59)."

Of course, Jesus also fulfilled His titular functions as *King*, *High Priest*, and *Prophet* as well. To be sure, during his earthly ministry, Jesus did not actually fulfill the conventional or traditional role of the king, priest, or prophet. He did not sit on the throne of David; he did not assume Aaron's role as High Priest.

But Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate revealed him as the true King of Israel; and His crucifixion on the cross transformed him into a divine High Priest of Israel.

On the other hand, the objective of this essay is to point out that Jesus of Nazareth was also a Jewish rabbi. He is the last and only Jewish rabbi of the Christian Church. Christians have a Rabbi—a Chief Rabbi—and his name is Jesus! When the Jews ask the Christians, do you have a Rabbi? The answer is, we have no Rabbi save the last and eternal Rabbi, the man Christ Jesus.

Chapter One:

“The Rabbis and Pharisees of Jesus’ Day”

In the last paper we have discussed briefly the inception of the Jewish “minyan” as comprising of at least 10 lay Jewish men coming together for public worship—for it was believed that Yahweh was also with them.

In this paper we shall see that another custom arose up among the Jews, but we know not precisely how or when, only that this custom existed during the time of John the Baptist and Jesus—namely, that Jewish rabbis were authorized to teach the Jews the Torah. How these rabbis were formally or informally trained, or came into existence, is unknown; but it seems that talent and ability were self-evident proof of their qualifications.

Jesus of Nazareth carried out such a custom of fulfilling the role of a “rabbi” or “teacher” in ancient Judea:

First, Jesus was sometimes called “rabbi” in the Gospels (Matthew 26:25, 49; Mark 9:5, 11:21, 14:45; John 1:38, 49, 2:2, 4:31, 6:25, 9:2, 11:8). The word “rabbi,” as John informs us, is translated “teacher” (John 1:38). The title “teacher” is more common. Nevertheless, both Jesus and John the Baptist were called “rabbi.”

A second similarity is that rabbis have disciples — as both Jesus and John the Baptist had. Usually, disciples picked the rabbi under whom they wished to study. To the casual observer, Jesus and his disciples looked more or less like the rabbi-disciple circle, which was common in those days.

Another similarity with rabbis is how Jesus taught. For rabbis, “to repeat” meant the same as “to teach,” and so rabbis would use repetition to help their disciples learn and memorize their teachings. Jesus also used repetition. For example, Jesus appears to have given essentially the same sermon in two different places (the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 and the Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6). Scholars believe that the differences in place and composition might

be due to editing by the Evangelists, but it could be that Jesus simply gave two similar sermons on two separate occasions.

With rabbis, their teaching wasn't just a lecture; rabbis proposed legal questions to their disciples for their judgment, and the disciples would ask questions. The Gospels are filled with examples of Jesus using the same technique as, for example, the issue of paying the temple tax. When Simon Peter approached Jesus about paying the temple tax, Jesus responds by proposing a situation to Peter: 'What is your opinion, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take tolls or census tax? From their subjects or from foreigners?' Like a good rabbi, Jesus answers Simon's question with a question.⁹

While a Rabbi could in theory also be a member of the Pharisee sect that was prevalent during the time of Christ, a person who was a Pharisee was not necessarily a rabbi.

A "Pharisee" could be anyone—including rabbis, rulers, officers, lawyers, priests, Levites, etc.—who subscribed to a particular manner and method of reading and interpreting the Torah. The Apostle Paul, for example, was a Pharisee but who was not also a rabbi.

We should note that the Pharisees during the time of Christ were to forerunners of the "Rabbis" – i.e., the beginning of the "Rabbinic Period" after 70 A.D.— who took over the helm of Jewish spiritual, local, and national leadership following the collapse of the Second Temple.

Hence, although Jesus of Nazareth was certainly carrying out a Jewish custom and tradition, he was a "rabbi" of a separate type or sect than those of the Jewish Pharisees.

But this argument—which is the objective of this essay—places the Christian faithful underneath the banner of Judaism!¹⁰ This is certainly my point:

⁹ Gary Mithuta, "Was Jesus a Rabbi?" *Detroit Catholic* (<https://www.detroitcatholic.com/voices/was-jesus-a-rabbi>).

¹⁰ See, e.g., St. Augustine, *The City of God* (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), pp. 238-239, regarding Israel and the Jews, stating:

This same nation, too, was afterwards dispersed through the nations, in order to testify to the scriptures in which eternal salvation in Christ had been declared. For not only the prophecies

true Christianity—particularly the Reformed Christianity of the Puritan-- is indeed a form of Messianic Judaism, whose only Rabbi is Jesus Christ.¹¹

In other words, the written Torah (the Law of Moses), which Christ taught— but not the Mishnah, the Talmud, or the Midrash of present-day Rabbinic Judaism— is a vital component of the Christian religion. For this reason, Messianic Judaism and Reformed theology converge.

which are contained in words, nor only the precepts for the right conduct of life, which teach morals and piety, and are contained in the sacred writings—not only these, but also the rites, priesthood, tabernacle or temple, altars, sacrifices, ceremonies, and whatever else belongs to that service which is due to God, and which in Greek is properly called *hatpeia*—all these signified and fore-announced those things which we who believe in Jesus Christ unto eternal life believe to have been fulfilled, or behold in process of fulfillment, or confidently believe shall yet be fulfilled.

¹¹ Ibid.

Chapter Two:

“Jesus’ Arguments with Scribes, Lawyers, and Pharisees”

In his role as Rabbi, Jesus interpreted, explained, and debated questions of Jewish law (i.e., the Law of Moses, or Torah). This was one of his fundamental and most important tasks. To that end, Jesus was certainly political, and his duties were likewise constitutional-legal-lawyerly in nature.

In general, the attitude of Jesus towards Jewish law, the synagogue, and the authority of the rulers of Isreal was affirmative and positive. Jesus generally reaffirmed the Jewish religious and legal system— often teaching in synagogues and the Second Temple.

For instance, Jesus thus informed his disciples:

The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:

All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do....¹²

Now the phrase “Moses’ seat” has a deeper meaning that requires an encyclopedic explanation. Suffice it to say, “Moses’ seat” certainly means the Jewish constitutional, legal, and political system itself. Here Jesus affirmed that this governmental system, as set forth in the Old Testament, is to be embraced and reaffirmed.

Moreover, Jesus also affirmed those who held official position and authority within that system—i.e., the scribes and the Pharisees. And since these scribes and Pharisees were ostensibly quoting from the Law of Moses, Jesus did not in theory disagree with their commandments and instructions. To be sure, these men had lawful authority and they quoted from the Law and the Prophets; and as such Jesus admonished his followers to “observe and do...” “whatsoever they bid you.”¹³

For the present-day Christian, then, we are to assume that Jesus is again here saying, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not

¹² Matthew 23: 2-3.

¹³ Ibid.

come to destroy, but to fulfil.”¹⁴ Therefore, by his authority as Master, and as Christ (i.e., Messiah), he here tells Christians to “observe and do...” “whatsoever they bid you.”¹⁵

Christians are to take the “Law and Prophets” seriously and to maintain, observe, and do them— but they must do so, *not in the same way* as the Scribes and the Pharisees!

In other words, Jesus expressly disapproved of how that Jewish constitutional, legal, political, and religious system was being operated and administered during his day. And his actions in the Second Temple, namely, that of overturning the tables of the money changers, etc., is likely what led to his arrest, trial, and crucifixion.¹⁶

Hence, Jesus admonished his followers to improve upon that system by insisting upon, and carrying out, a truer, holier form of justice and righteousness. To that end, he focused on the unjust “works” of the Scribes and the Pharisees, saying:

[B]ut do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.

For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,

¹⁴ Matthew 5: 17.

¹⁵ Matthew 23: 2-3.

¹⁶ Matthew 21: 12-13 (“Jesus entered the temple and overturned the tables of the money changers and the chairs of those selling doves. He told them, “The Scriptures declare, ‘My Temple will be called a house of prayer,’ but you have turned it into a den of thieves!”).

See, also, Noah Feldman, *To Be A Jew Today: A New Guide to God, Israel, and the Jewish People* (New York, N.Y.: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2024), p. 355 (“As should be evident to readers of this book, a dispute between rabbis is not unusual in the Jewish tradition. It is constitutive of the struggle with or alongside God. Rabbinic dispute—disagreement among Jews about what God truly is or wants or says—is the basic building block out of which the whole Torah is made.”)

And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,

And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.¹⁷

Now, the heart of Jesus' unique ministry was not so much to change the Jewish procedure or structure; but rather His ministry focused upon deeper, truer, and holier ideals of justice, mercy, and equity—this is what he wanted to see implemented within the present Jewish constitutional, legal, political, and religious structures.¹⁸

To emphasize this point, Jesus castigated the scribes and Pharisees in another passage as follows (Matthew 23: 13-39):

13 But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.

14 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.

15 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.

16 Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!

¹⁷ Matthew 23: 3-7.

¹⁸ See, e.g., St. Augustine, *The City of God* (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), pp. 238-239, regarding Israel and the Jews, stating:

This same nation, too, was afterwards dispersed through the nations, in order to testify to the scriptures in which eternal salvation in Christ had been declared. For not only the prophecies which are contained in words, nor only the precepts for the right conduct of life, which teach morals and piety, and are contained in the sacred writings—not only these, but also the rites, priesthood, tabernacle or temple, altars, sacrifices, ceremonies, and whatever else belongs to that service which is due to God, and which in Greek is properly called *hatpeia*—all these signified and fore-announced those things which we who believe in Jesus Christ unto eternal life believe to have been fulfilled, or behold in process of fulfillment, or confidently believe shall yet be fulfilled.

17 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?

18 And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty.

19 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?

20 Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon.

21 And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein.

22 And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.

23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

24 Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.

25 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.

26 Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

27 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

29 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous,

30 And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.

31 Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.

32 Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.

33 Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?

34 Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city:

35 That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.

36 Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.

37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

38 Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

39 For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.¹⁹

And in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus makes a similar indictment against the Jewish lawyers of his day.²⁰

Christian clergy, and indeed all the Christian faithful, are no different than the Jews, but except in this one respect: the Christian's fundamental law is subordinate all Jewish law— even if this means doing away with certain rudimentary liturgical or legal procedures— to achieve the mandates of justice and equity.

This is where John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* came in to play during the period of the Protestant Reformation. Calvin brought this subject matter into greater focus and helped the Protestant Reformers to better understand which Jewish laws were still operable and necessary (i.e., the moral laws; the

¹⁹ Matthew 23: 13-39.

²⁰ Luke 11: 45-52.

Decalogue) and which Jewish laws were obsolete and unnecessary (i.e., liturgical laws of the Second Temple; Levitical atonement laws, etc.)

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not here emphasize the important fact that the Protestant Reformers, like the Jews, considered the civil polity itself to be divine and all civil rulers to be ministers of the Most High God. Even amongst the Baptists, such as Roger Williams, who advocated in favor of separation of Church and State, this fundamental political theoretical concept—extracted no doubt from Old Testament Scripture, was never modified or changed in basic Puritan or Protestant doctrine.²¹

²¹ See, also, St. Augustine, *The City of God*, supra, p. 158 (providence of God), p. 178 (Christian emperors or rulers).

Chapter Three:

“Did Jesus Terminate the ‘Rabbinical Office’ for Christians?”

We return here to the Jewish conception of the minyan, which was previously analyze in the last paper.

As we have observed, a minyan is a quorum of ten Jewish adult males that is required to carry out certain religious obligations and collective worship, or to formally establish a synagogue.²²

Indeed, “[i]t is understood from this that a minyan must likewise comprise ten Jewish adult males.”²³

“The most common activity requiring a minyan is public prayer.”²⁴

“[T]he **presence of a rabbi (a teacher, not a priest) is not essential**—it is said that ‘nine rabbis do not constitute a minyan, but ten cobblers can.’”²⁵

Notably, “[i]t is the firm belief of the sages that whenever ten Israelites are assembled, either for worship or for the duty of the Law, **the Divine Presence dwells among them.**”²⁶

²² Rabbi Abraham Milgrim, “Minyan: The Congregational Quorum Only in a group of 10 or more adult Jews is there sufficient sanctity to recite certain public prayers,”

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/minyan-the-congregational-quorum/>, stating:

A minyan is made of ten adult Jews, traditionally males (over the age of 13). In **Orthodox synagogues**, this continues to be the standard. In more progressive Jewish communities, ranging from halachic egalitarianism, to **conservative to reform synagogues**, adult women and men are both counted in the quorum. Some communities also require twenty adults, ten men and ten women, so that women are as essential as men to the formation of the prayer community, but the traditional requirement of ten men is still fulfilled.

²³ “Minyan,” *Wikipedia* (online) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minyan>.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

This “Divine Presence” at the minyan must not be deprecated or taken lightly; because I think that this “Divine Presence” is the real and true “Rabbi” that is in the churches or gatherings of a few Christians. This we find in the Gospel of John to be that Holy Spirit (i.e., Paraclete; the Comforter; the Spirit of truth), whom Christ said “**dwelleth with you, and shall be in you**” and “**shall teach you all things.**”²⁷

From this we find that a common “Israelite” is a sort of priestly and holy person—no matter his or her actual occupational station in life.

A Jewish rabbi is not more important than the common Jew.

A Jewish priest or Levite is not more important than the common Jew.

Under Jewish law, ten common Jews may constitute a minyan (or a synagogue), without leave or inclusion of a rabbi, priest, or Levite; and, when a minyan is formed, **the presence of God is among them**; and, indeed, it is the divine right of the common Jew— so called laymen-- under the Law of God, as previously discussed, to do so.

Notably, Jesus did not contradict this ecclesiology of the minyan where he specifically instructed his Christian disciples to call no earthly man “Rabbi” or “Father” or “Master,” stating:

But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.

And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.

Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ.

But he that is greatest among you shall be **your servant.**

And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and **he that shall humble** himself shall be exalted.²⁸

²⁷ John 14: 17, 26.

²⁸ Matthew 23: 8-12.

Here it would appear that the Jewish tradition of calling clergymen “rabbi”; the orthodox Christian tradition of calling clergymen “father”; and the other titles that might suggest the title “master” (i.e., hierarchical designations such as “bishop” “archbishop” “pope” etc.) were expressly forbidden in Christ’s teachings.

Jesus of Nazareth certainly does appear to have in mind a congregational system where there is no “hierarchical” clergy, such as, for instance, the ecclesiological system that has been established by the Quakers or the Jehovah’s Witnesses. (I know, this is radical preaching! But I surmise that this is one of the reasons the Temple elites wanted to execute Christ!)

I will not try to elaborate further but leave that to the judgment and further research of the readers....

Nevertheless, I must conclude this chapter by stating that, just as Jesus was the last and eternal High Priest, we must understand that He, too, was the last and eternal Rabbi, for the Christian Church.

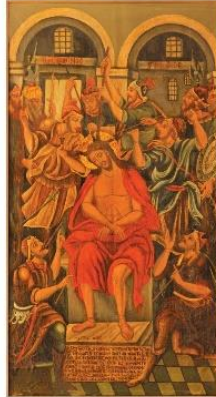
Therefore, it is important that we remember that Jesus was the King of the Jews and, indeed, King over all of Israel.

But we must also remember that He was also a Jewish Rabbi who taught Jewish law in the synagogues and in the Second Temple.

For the Reformed theologian such as Luther, Calvin, and those insisting upon “Scripture alone,” this makes sense, because, if Jesus was the last Rabbi, then the only “Talmud” (i.e., oral law) for Christ’s followers would be his New Testament (primarily the Four Gospels, which contain the sayings of Christ).

See, e.g., my own publication, *The Parables of Christ* (outlining 48 parables of Jesus of Nazareth).²⁹

THE PARABLES OF **CHRIST**



RODERICK O. FORD

This “oral law” of the Rabbi Jesus of Nazareth called parables defines a sort of universal Judaism as a fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets.³⁰

In other words, Christ’s definitive interpretation of the Torah (especially the four Gospels and the Book of Revelation) is the final, authoritative “oral law” for the Christian faithful.³¹

The Torah (“written law”) and the prophets (“judgments”) in the Old Testament, and Christ’s interpretations of the Torah and the prophets (i.e., “oral

²⁹ Roderick Ford, *The Parables of Christ* (Tampa, FL: Xlibris Pub., 2015).

³⁰ The Christian faithful, I surmise, may comment upon and extrapolate from that “oral law” of the Rabbi Jesus—that is what the Letters of the Apostle Paul and the other disciples have done. That is what present-day Christians may do. But that only “oral law” in Christianity is the actual sayings of Christ himself, which are recorded in the New Testament.

³¹ See, e.g., Revelation 22: 18-19, stating:

8 For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:

19 And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

law”) in the New Testament constitute the sum of the “Divine Law” for the Christian faithful.

The Jews, the Roman Catholics, and the Church of England seem to have a better handle upon the “Divine Law” of both Judaism and Christianity, than do the Protestant or Reformed faithful, and this is because Protestant Christianity has evolved into “private” religion that has no nexus to secular jurisprudence and the courts— a “church-and-state” dichotomy which Judaism, Roman Catholicism, and orthodox Anglicanism never conceptualized or authorized.³²

In any event, the egalitarian nature of the Christ’s minyan or congregation or church (i.e., the prophetic Restored Israel) is reaffirmed in Isaiah 54:13; Jeremiah 31: 33-34; and Hebrews 8: 10-11. Hence, the Reformed, Baptist, Presbyterian and general Protestant ecclesiology have firm theological basis in Scripture.

³² And although the Mishnah, the Talmud, and the Midrash of the Jews form no part of the Christian canon, I surmise that Christians may learn a lot from them, since they are direct observations and interpretations on Torah, which often correlate with and affirm the same teachings of Jesus Christ (and of Christ’s followers such as the Apostle Paul). For Protestants, the same may be said of the canon laws and rulings which come from the Roman Catholic magisterium—i.e., the Catholic teachings may be helpful, though not binding, upon the Protestants.

Chapter Four:

“Is the Term Reverend ever Appropriate for Christian Pastors?”

In my opinion, the ecclesiological structure of the congregation is more important than the actual title of the elders within the congregation— but this can be a tricky subject, and it calls for reason and common sense within the context of any given set of circumstances.

In summation, the title “reverend” is fine for a Christian pastor, so long as it does not, in actual practice, take on the meaning of “rabbi,” “father,” or “master,” within the context in which Christ proscribed usage of those titles during his earthly ministry.

What I mean by this is, every Christian has the duty and the right to read and interpret the Scripture for themselves—*Holy Spirit* guiding that interpretation. Indeed, this is the foundation of the Protestant and Reformed doctrine.

For, indeed, John 14: 26 explains this clearly: “[b]ut the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, *he shall teach you all things*, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.”³³ Indeed, the prophetic character of Christ’s new church was described in both Isaiah and Jeremiah, and again re-emphasized in the Epistle to the Hebrews—namely, that:

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; **I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts:** and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

³³ During the period of Enlightenment, as well as in Protestant and Reformed theology, the logos or reason came to be synonymous with the Holy Spirit—i.e., the right to interpret the Scriptures through clear reason. Every lay Christian has that right—through the Holy Spirit’s aid—to read and interpret the Sacred Scriptures for themselves. And it was for this reason that John Knox and the early Scottish reformers sought to make education widely available to the common Christian.

And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.

For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.³⁴

In other words, in an ecclesiastical setting where clergymen actually exercise abusive and lordly authority over other members of the church, the word “reverend” may take on an acrimonious and bad meaning. During the days of Luther and Calvin, the numerous ecclesiastical abuses within the Roman Catholic Church, which they frequently cited, could well-nigh justify the discontinuance of the usage of the word “reverend” for Christian pastors.

Hence, I like the response or explanation given in the following blog, which states:

Psalm 111:9 (KJV) states, referring to God, "Reverend is his name." Some interpret this as saying the title "reverend" is to be used of God alone and vehemently oppose any human church leader being referred to as "reverend." The original Hebrew word, though, is not referring to a title. It is declaring that God's name is to be "revered, highly respected." The NIV, NAS, NKJV, and ESV all render the Hebrew word "holy and awesome" instead of the KJV's rendering of "reverend."

Whatever the case, if you are uncomfortable using the title "reverend" for a church leader, by all means, use some other title. In most churches/denominations, the title of "reverend" is given to a person who has undergone formal ministry training and has been examined by those in church leadership. This is commonly known as "ordination." A "reverend" is a person who has been formally "ordained" into the ministry. First Timothy 5:17 states, "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching." A godly man who exemplifies 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and sets a godly example in word

³⁴ Hebrews 8: 10-13 (quoting Isaiah 54: 13 and Jeremiah 31:34).

and deed is worthy of being "respected." Whether or not the title of "reverend" should be used is a matter of personal conviction and preference.³⁵

Another online source, I also find interesting; it thus states:

"'Reverend' means 'worthy of reverence'. It is a word found once only in the Word of God and *it pertains to deity alone*....

This is a title carried over from Romanism by the state church, accepted by the Presbyterians and later by many Non-conformists. Today the title is used without embarrassment by those who are known as Reformed and evangelical. Knowing what the term 'Reformed' really means, perhaps we should not be too surprised, but for a true evangelical, one who claims to stand for all the teaching and practice of Holy Scripture, to take for himself such a title is to be deplored....

Let us state, that while we have no love for the title, and prefer to be addressed in some other way, we find the objections to the use of this title groundless. Indeed they betray an ignorance of Scripture and a lack of careful study."³⁶

And, finally, a Roman Catholic publication has given the following response, which I believe if reasonable, to wit:

The term reverend does not mean that a person is equal in dignity with God or possesses divine attributes or even that he is to be revered for anything intrinsic to himself. A person bearing the title Reverend may be a thorough scoundrel. The title simply indicates that a person holds a position for which reverence is to be shown (as he has chosen to devote his full-time to ministry in serving God), whether or not he is a worthy occupant of that position.³⁷

³⁵ <https://www.gotquestions.org/reverend.html>

³⁶ Ronald Hanks, "Should Ministers be called 'Reverend'?"
<https://www.prca.org/resources/publications/cr-news/item/2011-should-ministers-be-called-reverend#:~:text='Reverend'%20means%20'worthy%20of,it%20pertains%20to%20deity%20alone.>

³⁷ <https://www.catholic.com/qa/is-it-unbiblical-to-refer-to-ministers-as-reverend>

Like the Roman Catholics and the Presbyterians, I have no problem with the title “reverend.”

On the other hand, I can honestly see how ecclesiastical titles such as “reverend”, “very reverend,” and “most reverend” might lead some Christian clergymen to think that they are “rabbis,” “fathers” or “masters” over their fellow Christians.

Again, the spirit in which such things are done is most important; and I do not wish to confuse the reader with issues involving “form” rather than “substance”—the ecclesiastical “title” is not the sin, but rather the arrogant abuses which the ecclesiastical “title” might inspire or instill within the souls of the various clergymen is the real sin. I think this is what Jesus was really and truly prohibiting in Matthew 23: 8-12.

Also in the ancient world, the Medieval world, and the early modern period, the dichotomy between the learned classes and the average commoner was so vast that monks, priests, and bishops were naturally elevated to higher positions of authority and governance for the sheer sake of the survival of civilization. But the Protestant Reformation eventually brought these things to light and placed them into a proper perspective.

Accordingly, I disagree with the Roman Catholic or Orthodox Christians who permit their priests to be *officially titled through custom or canon law as* “fathers” or “popes” or “patriarchs” when, in fact, Christ himself prohibited such titles.³⁸ These titles were no doubt relics of the Medieval past marked by socioeconomic and political feudalism.

I understand that where, in certain circumstances, an elder of the church is affectionately or unofficially thought of, and described as, “mother” or “father.” A lay person or senior clergyman who is an elder—whether a woman or man—may be unofficially called “mother” or “father” out of respect, and the title of “mother” is especially appropriate for elderly women in the churches, such as, e.g., “Mother Teresa”; but this is not the same thing as, for example, establishing an official title of “father” for all ordained male priests or clergymen, no matter how old they are.

³⁸ Matthew 23: 8-12. A Roman Catholic response can be found here: <https://www.catholic.com/tract/call-no-man-father>. However, I respectfully disagree with that Roman Catholic response’ defense of the use of the title “father” for Catholic or Orthodox clergymen.

In my view, this later practice of establishing officially titled “fathers” for ordained clergymen is what Christ expressly prohibited— in Protestant and Reformed theology, the tendency of the nomenclature “father” is to abrogate the equality of Christian brotherhood amongst all adult males, as Christ originally instituted his Church.

Again, this is my own interpretation of Matthew 23: 8-12, and I invite the reader to further research this matter for themselves.

Chapter Five:

“Who may be called ‘Saint’?”

A far more glorious recognition than the titles “rabbi,” “father,” “master,” “reverend,” “most reverend,” “doctor,” “bishop,” “elder,” and the like—is that of SAINT.

In the Roman Catholic tradition, the title of “saint” is reserved for the holiest of holy men and women whose lives exemplify great Christian service. The same is true in the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches.

Some great saints who are also doctors of the Roman Catholic Church include Saint Ambrose, Saint Augustine of Hippo, and Saint Thomas Aquinas. These and very many others canonized saints are universally revered through Christendom and even in many other religions.

However, in keeping with the Protestant and Reformed tradition, which upholds the doctrine of the “priesthood of all believers”³⁹ and the doctrine that Christ has made us “kings and priests,”⁴⁰ this paper concludes that all born-again Christians are certainly SAINTS,⁴¹ and that, push come to shove, any person

³⁹ 1 Peter 2:9.

⁴⁰ Revelation 1: 6.

⁴¹ See, e.g., “Saints,” Wikipedia (online encyclopedia), stating:

Within some Protestant traditions, saint is also used to refer to any born-again Christian....

In the Lutheran Church, all Christians, whether in Heaven or on Earth, are regarded as saints....

Methodists believe that all Christians are *saints*....

In many Protestant churches, the word *saint* is used more generally to refer to anyone who is a Christian. This is similar in usage to Paul's numerous references in the New Testament of the Bible. In this sense, anyone who is within the Body of Christ (i.e., a professing Christian) is a saint because of their relationship with Christ Jesus.

See, also, “What are Christian saints according to the Bible,” <https://www.gotquestions.org/saints-Christian.html>

holding church office may rightfully be called “saint”; and, indeed, any Christian may rightfully self-label themselves as “saint,” when choosing to be addressed within a religious setting or within a religious context.

Hence, every common man who is a redeemed, born-again Christian is a “saint.” No ordained Christian clergyman is more important “saint” than a Christian layman who is also as “saint.” Every true, born-again Christian believer is a “saint”— a *spiritual Jew* with a circumcised heart, and a member of that *spiritual Israel!*⁴²

The word “saint” comes from the Greek word *hagios*, which means “consecrated to God, holy, sacred, pious.” It is almost always used in the plural, “saints.” “...Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem” (Acts 9:13). “Now as Peter was traveling through all those regions, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda” (Acts 9:32). “And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons ...” (Acts 26:10). There is only one instance of the singular use, and that is “Greet every saint in Christ Jesus...” (Philippians 4:21). In Scripture there are 67 uses of the plural “saints” compared to only one use of the singular word “saint.” Even in that one instance, a plurality of saints is in view: “...every saint...” (Philippians 4:21).

The idea of the word “saints” is a group of people set apart for the Lord and His kingdom. There are three references referring to godly character of saints: “that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints ...” (Romans 16:2). “For the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12). “But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints” (Ephesians 5:3).

Therefore, scripturally speaking, the “saints” are the body of Christ, Christians, the church. All Christians are considered saints. All Christians are saints—and at the same time are called to be saints. First Corinthians 1:2 states it clearly: “To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy...” The words “sanctified” and “holy” come from the same Greek root as the word that is commonly translated “saints.” Christians are saints by virtue of their connection with Jesus Christ. Christians are called to be saints, to increasingly allow their daily life to more closely match their position in Christ. This is the biblical description and calling of the saints.

How does the Roman Catholic understanding of “saints” compare with the biblical teaching? Not very well. In Roman Catholic theology, the saints are in heaven. In the Bible, the saints are on earth. In Roman Catholic teaching, a person does not become a saint unless he/she is “beatified” or “canonized” by the Pope or prominent bishop. In the Bible, everyone who has received Jesus Christ by faith is a saint. In Roman Catholic practice, the saints are revered, prayed to, and in some instances, worshiped. In the Bible, saints are called to revere, worship, and pray to God alone.

⁴² St. Augustine, *The City of God*, supra, p. 592 (“the Christians, who are Israelites not after the flesh but after the Spirit”); p. 598 (“the true Israelites... by faith, is the City of God”); p. 658 (“the true Israelites, the citizens of the country that is above”); p. 562 (“For Israel means *seeing God*, which will at last be the reward of the saints.”)

Therefore, to be a Christian is to be holy; and to be holy is to be a saint!⁴³

In the New Covenant, the “saints” are “spiritual Jews” and “spiritual Israelites.”⁴⁴ Indeed, all of the saints—from the least to the greatest—shall know the Lord God, having His laws written in their hearts—Christ being their only Rabbi or Master, the Holy Ghost teaching them all things!⁴⁵

And throughout all of Christianity, there is no higher title for the Christian faithful than that of “saint.” But this does not mean that the “saints” may not form churches and elect officers, deacons, elders, overseers, and the like; but it does mean that the churches of Jesus Christ are not authoritarian but must be fiercely democratic, congregational, connectional, and presbyterian in nature.

This Christian doctrine is indeed the foundation of Western democracy.

⁴³ To be a “saint” does not necessarily imply only those holy persons within the domain of Hebrew-Jewish-Christian religious traditions. For, as Augustine of Hippo says in *The City of God*, supra, p. 238, “[t]his mystery of eternal life, even from the beginning of the human race, was, by certain signs and sacraments suitable to the times, announced through angels to those to whom it was meet”; and, at p. 658, “it is not incongruous to believe that even in other nations there may have been men to whom this mystery was revealed, and who were also impelled to proclaim it, whether they were partakers of the same grace or had no experience of it.... [They cannot deny that there have been certain men even of other nations who belonged, not by earthly but heavenly fellowship, to the true Israelites, the citizens of the country that is above. Because, if they deny this, they can be most easily confuted by the case of the holy and wonderful man Job, who was neither a native nor a proselyte, that is, a stranger joining the people of Israel, but, being bred of the Idumean race....”

⁴⁴ St. Augustine, *The City of God*, supra, p. 592 (“the Christians, who are Israelites not after the flesh but after the Spirit”); p. 598 (“the true Israelites... by faith, is the City of God”); p. 658 (“the true Israelites, the citizens of the country that is above”); p. 562 (“For Israel means *seeing God*, which will at last be the reward of the saints.”)

⁴⁵ Isaiah 54:13; Jeremiah 31: 33-34; and Hebrews 8: 10-11.

CONCLUSION

This paper concludes that Jesus of Nazareth was a “Rabbi” within the meaning and customs of ancient Judea’s egalitarian institutions of the synagogue system—including independent prayer or study groups (e.g., minyans) led by teachers of Jewish law (i.e., rabbis).⁴⁶

Since the Early Church depicted in the New Testament grew out of this egalitarian Jewish system, the Protestant and Reformed churches postulated that Christian churches should likewise have a fundamental democratic and egalitarian structure.⁴⁷

Since this New Testament Early Church was egalitarian and fiercely democratic, literally treating the common man as a “priest” and a “king,” (Rev. 1: 6) and a member of a common “priesthood of all believers” (I Peter 2:9), the Congregationalist and Presbyterian movement began under this premise.

The Protestant Reformers thus formulated their ecclesiology in opposition to the hierarchical structures of the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England through a careful analysis of the Early Church during the days of the Apostle Paul.

Martin Luther’s *Letter to the German Nobility* (1520)⁴⁸ set forth and further explained the Puritan and Protestant doctrine of ecclesiology, based upon the New Testament.

⁴⁶ See, e.g., St. Augustine, *The City of God* (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), pp. 238-239, regarding Israel and the Jews, stating:

This same nation, too, was afterwards dispersed through the nations, in order to testify to the scriptures in which eternal salvation in Christ had been declared. For not only the prophecies which are contained in words, nor only the precepts for the right conduct of life, which teach morals and piety, and are contained in the sacred writings—not only these, but also the rites, priesthood, tabernacle or temple, altars, sacrifices, ceremonies, and whatever else belongs to that service which is due to God, and which in Greek is properly called *hatpeia*—all these signified and fore-announced those things which we who believe in Jesus Christ unto eternal life believe to have been fulfilled, or behold in process of fulfillment, or confidently believe shall yet be fulfilled.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ See, e.g., Martin Luther, *Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate* (1520), stating:

But if we examine the Old Testament closer, we find that this same Protestant doctrine of ecclesiology is contained firmly within the Torah and, hence, within the Jewish law of the minyan.

Significantly, Christ made all Christians “kings” and “priests”; and this doctrine is indeed the foundation of the Protestant Reformation and Western democracy.

Perhaps for this reason, Jesus of Nazareth adopted a very egalitarian ecclesiological structure, directed the “greatest” among his followers to also be “servants,” and specifically instructed that none of them be called “Rabbi,” “Father,” or “Master.”

For, as Augustine of Hippo says, “the Church could not now be called His kingdom or the kingdom of heaven unless His saints were even now reigning with Him.... for to **His saints** He says, ‘**Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.**’”⁴⁹

Therefore, the only “Master” and (or) “Rabbi” for the Christian faithful is Christ, — He is their High Priest, King, and “Rabbi.” Yes, the Christians also have a “Rabbi,” who is the Man Christ Jesus!⁵⁰

THE END

Through baptism all of us are consecrated to the priesthood, as St. Peter says in I Peter 2:9, ‘Ye are a royal priesthood, a priestly kingdom,’ and the book of Revelation says, Rev. 5:10 ‘Thou hast made us by Thy blood to be priests and kings.’ ... [J]ust as though ten brothers, all king's sons and equal heirs, were to choose one of themselves to rule the inheritance for them all, -- they would all be kings and equal in power, though one of them would be charged with the duty of ruling.

⁴⁹ St. Augustine, *The City of God* (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), Book XX (citing Matthew 28:20).

⁵⁰ Matthew 23: 8-12.

