

# EXHIBIT A

# Awake!

# BENIN



*Suppresses*

# FREEDOM OF WORSHIP



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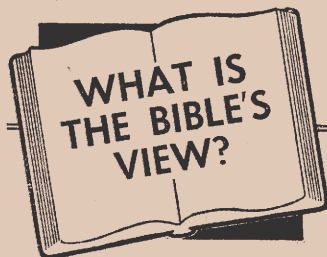
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## Are Clergy-Laity Distinctions Scriptural?

CLERGY-LAITY distinctions have existed in the religious system of Christendom for many centuries. Few persons give thought as to the Scripturalness of having a professional clergy class presiding over the rest of the believers. Yet it may be asked, Is the dividing up of believers into clergy and laity in harmony with the inspired Scriptures?

In the first-century Christian congregation clergy-laity distinctions were unknown. These were a later development. Says the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: "The 2nd century of the Christian church witnessed the emergence of a distinction between clergy and laity (Gr. *laos*, 'people'). This distinction received form and recognition by the privileges and immunities granted to the clergy by Constantine I [4th century]."

Well, has the bringing in of a professional clergy class been in the best interests of the church members? The Jesuit monthly *Etudes* states that it "main-

tains 'the faithful' in a state of ignorance and irresponsibility." This is not an exaggeration. As part of a laity class, people generally take little initiative on their own to find out what the Bible says and to grow in spiritual comprehension. They simply leave this up to their clergyman, much the same as they entrust their health problems to their doctor.

This, however, was not the arrangement in the days of the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ. All men within the congregation were encouraged to make spiritual progress and to work at becoming qualified teachers of God's Word. According to the rendering of the Catholic *Jerusalem Bible*, the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: "To want to be a presiding elder is to want to do a noble work." The Catholic *New American Bible* reads: "Whoever wants to be a bishop aspires to a noble task." —1 Tim. 3:1.

The office of "presiding elder" or "bishop" was not beyond the reach of Christian men. However, this office was not what is commonly thought of today. It was an office of oversight held, not by just one man, but by a body of men. Those appointed to that office were called "overseers" or "elders." Acknowledging that a body of men presided over a congregation, a footnote on Titus 1:5 in the *Jerusalem Bible* tells us: "In the earliest days each Christian community was governed by a body of elders ('presbyters', whence the English word 'priests')."

One's qualifying as an "elder" or "overseer" was not a matter of ascending a hierarchical ladder, starting with the lowest rung. Catholic theologian Legrand writes: "The ordained ministry is not a *cursus honorum* [race for honors] to be run like climbing the rungs of a hierarchical ladder. In fact, the word *hierarchy* is not to be found in the Bible. Its earliest use goes back to the beginning of the 6th century, when Pseudo-Dionysius used it, although quite differently from the meaning given to it in the Middle Ages, limiting it to ordained ministers, whereas for Dionysius it [hierarchy] included the laity and even catechumens [learners]."

The fact that being an overseer or elder is not restricted to a limited number, nor dependent upon some seminary

training, encourages Christian men to strive to measure up to the qualifications outlined in the Holy Scriptures. This encourages all to grow in knowledge and to want to be of service to fellow believers. Unlike the clergy-laity arrangement that contributes to people's being Bible illiterates and failing to shoulder Christian responsibility, the Scriptural arrangement encourages their taking positive action in growing in Christian knowledge and in serving fellow believers. This has been the experience of Jehovah's Witnesses, who are striving hard to pattern their congregations according to Biblical guidelines.

Furthermore, those serving as elders in the first-century congregation were under command to avoid taking a superior position with reference to its members. No man was to be viewed as an official leader or head of the congregation. Elevating titles were ruled out for all. Jesus Christ stated: "You, do not you be called Rabbi, for one is your teacher, whereas all you are brothers. Moreover, do not call anyone your father on earth, for one is your Father, the heavenly One. Neither be called 'leaders,' for your Leader is one, the Christ. But the greatest one among you must be your minister [servant]." —Matt. 23:8-11.

The Christian congregation was to be like a family under the headship of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, elders were to treat members of the congregation in harmony with that fact and humbly serve them. The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: "Do not severely criticize an older man. To the contrary, entreat him as a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters with all chasteness."—1 Tim. 5:1, 2.

The whole spirit of the Bible's counsel to Christian elders is against the development of a clergy-laity distinction. The emphasis is always placed on unselfish ser-

vice and avoiding anything that would imply an exalted position over fellow believers. The apostle Peter, for example, admonished fellow elders: "Shepherd the flock of God in your care, not under compulsion, but willingly; neither for love of dishonest gain, but eagerly; neither as lording it over those who are God's inheritance, but becoming examples to the flock."—1 Pet. 5:2, 3.

The objective of Christian elders who were not inspired apostles was to avoid exercising a dominion or lordship over the "flock of God." Their obligation was to help the members of this "flock" to hold onto what faith they already had and to help them to keep it pure and thereby work for the Christian joy of all. Just as the apostle Paul, when writing corrective letters of help to the Corinthian congregation, said: "It was out of consideration for you that I did not after all come to Corinth. Do not think we are dictating the terms of your faith; your hold on the faith is secure enough. We are working with you for your own happiness."—2 Cor. 1:23, 24, *The New English Bible*; see also *The Jerusalem Bible*.

Truly the facts establish that clergy-laity distinctions of today are not based on the Holy Scriptures. They have actually hampered Christian growth by discouraging spiritual initiative. Such distinctions that exist in the religious organizations of Christendom are in fulfillment of prophecies that pointed to a turning away from true belief and practice. For example, the apostle Paul told the body of elders or overseers of the Ephesus congregation: "From among you yourselves men will rise and speak twisted things to draw away the disciples after themselves." (Acts 20:30) Is this not something that should be given serious consideration by those belonging to organizations that approve clergy-laity distinctions?