

Chapter 7 Who Ya Gonna Call? “Myth Busters”

Moving the Set Man’s Seat

One of the prevalent doctrines in emerging apostolic and restorationist churches (but not limited to them) is the doctrine of the “set man:”

. . . there are no Scriptural grounds for a (sic) autocratic ministry or monarchial bishop, there is Scriptural ground for the “set man.”

Therefore it is recognized that each congregation must have a set man.

The set man must have vision and direction.

It does appear that any government was always in conjunction with a “first among equals” ministry.¹

The author of the above, and myriad others, believe that each local church or apostolic network must have not only a team of elders, but from within this team, a senior elder, the alleged “first among equals,” the “set man.” The set man is the chief executive and visionary of the church or network. At the local church level, it is assumed this is the pastor (senior pastor) and at a network level it is the apostle (senior apostle). The alleged logic behind this thinking is that you cannot lead a family, a church, or network unless there is a singular executive “head” responsible for the “house vision” and overall direction of the fellowship. That is likely true if a leader is defined as the chief visionary responsible for movement, rather than the chief servant responsible for equipping.

Let’s examine the set-man doctrine from a biblical basis.

1. The Scriptures never use the term. Isn’t it interesting the number of times, in this text, I have had to say this concerning the alleged divine order of God’s government as it is commonly taught? In and of itself, that it is no big deal: the Trinity is never “specifically” mentioned either. However, the cumulative effect, I think, is significant. At the very least, skepticism rather than dogmatism is appropriate.
2. The author above admits there is no scriptural basis for monarchial ministry. Monarch means “one ruler: one ultimate and final authority.” Changing nouns doesn’t fix the problem. Changing from bishop to set man merely shifts the matter from the left to right hand. There is not a lick of difference in substance. The appeal to the “plurality of elders” and “a team” is a sop thrown out to try to fog the obvious. A king or president has counselors and advisors on his team. However, he is still the king.ⁱⁱ Now, a king can be pleasant and inclusive or harsh and authoritarian. This is all style. In the end, he rules. It is the same in the set-man dogma and practice. In the final analysis, the set-man doctrine is monarchial: one man rules.
3. The author does not provide any New Testament exegesisⁱⁱⁱ to support his contention but supports his proposition with Old Covenant verses. We dealt with this line of thinking earlier.
4. The only New Testament verse the author offers to support his conviction (there is no exegesis, just an offering of this verse) is from the letters to the seven churches in Asia in the Book of Revelation. The letters were written to the “angelos” (Gr. *aggelos*), or the messenger, of each local church, whom, without a shred of exegetical support, the author declares to be the set man.

THAT'S IT

As Porky Pig would say, “Th, th, th, th, that’s all folks!” The entire system of government ardently adhered to and presented as God’s order is based on no more than this. Even if the arguments presented were accurate, the sparseness of New Testament evidence should make us view the proposition with strong reservation. Though I believe the doctrine is unsound, even if it were true, one would expect the tone of presentation might be muted in restorationist and apostolic circles because of the lack of clear evidence: “this could be,” “this may be,” “we think it is so.” That is not the case. This author has heard this doctrine espoused for decades as the final, authoritative word concerning God’s governmental order. If any should even question the matter, he or she will be accused of being under a spirit of independence, unsubmitive, anti-authority, and so on.^{iv}

ⁱ Conner, Kevin, *The Church in the New Testament*. Portland: City Christian Publishing. 1989. pp. 204–205. Used by Permission.

ⁱⁱ To a lesser extent, presidents, though in a representative republic he can be stopped. If folks want to use this metaphor for supporting set man government in the church, let’s follow it all the way.

ⁱⁱⁱ He quotes a scripture from Acts 7, quoting an Old Testament story.

^{iv} See Bevere, *Under Cover* for typical adjuring.