5-1-1992

The Priesthood of all the Baptized: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation

Thomas Winger
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, twinger@brocku.ca

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.csl.edu/stm

Part of the Biblical Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholar.csl.edu/stm/72

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Concordia Seminary Scholarship at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master of Sacred Theology Thesis by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.
THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL THE BAPTIZED: AN EXEGETICAL AND THEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Department of Exegetical Theology, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Sacred Theology.

by

Thomas M. Winger

May 1992

Approved by James W. Voelz

Ronald Feuerhahn
To Sara

με τη χάρη
συγκληρονόμη χάριτος ζωῆς
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION ........................................... v

Chapter
I. THE PRIESTHOOD ACCORDING TO EXODUS 19 ........ 1

   Introduction ........................................ 1
   The Form of Ex. 19:3-8 .......................... 6
   The Structure and Relationship of the Covenantal Terms 15
   
   The Old Testament Use of לַעֲבֹדָה .............................. 17
   in Recent Debate .................................. 21
   in the Ancient Versions ......................... 42
   The Nature of the "Priestly" Metaphor - A study of לִווֹתָה 53
   Priestly "Holiness" .................................. 61
   The "Sacrifice" of the Priestly Kingdom .......... 65
   Summary ........................................... 67

EXCURSUS 1: THE "PRIESTS" OF ISAIAH .................. 69

   Isaiah 61:6 ......................................... 69
   Isaiah 66:21 ....................................... 75

II. THE PRIESTHOOD ACCORDING TO 1 PETER 2 .......... 79

   Introduction ........................................ 79
   Defining the Unit: 1 Peter 2:1-10 .................. 81
   Verse 1 ............................................ 83
   Verses 2-3 .......................................... 84
   Verse 4 ............................................ 86
   Verse 5 ............................................ 90
   Verses 6-8 .......................................... 95
   Verses 9-10 ......................................... 96
   Holy Baptism and 1 Peter .......................... 107
   Sacrifice and Priesthood Elsewhere in the New Testament 115
   Summary ........................................... 119
INTRODUCTION

For all the emphasis placed on the "priesthood of all believers" as an article of faith, very little critical research has been done into its exegetical, dogmatic, and historical foundations. In his monumental study, John Elliott notes that a detailed exegetical treatment of 1 Peter 2 had never before been done in the history of Christianity. Yet he declines any attempt to relate his conclusions to a "dogma" of priesthood. The most extensive historical study, undertaken in two volumes by Cyril Eastwood, attempts to trace the influence of this doctrine in the history of the church, but it fails to speak uniquely of the common priesthood and is based on a superficial exegesis of the biblical texts. These two authors illustrate the problem: there has been a general failure to relate a careful exegetical reading of the

1Though we will ultimately demonstrate why "the priesthood of the baptized" is a phrase more faithful to Scripture, in this study we will often use the terminology provided by the author(s) under discussion at each point. The "priesthood of all believers," as the most popular Protestant expression, serves as a convenient shorthand for the points of view we shall presently discuss.

2John Hall Elliott, The Elect and the Holy: An Exegetical Examination of 1 Peter 2:4-10 and the Phrase basileion hierateuma (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 4: "... though systematic or historical investigations of the idea of a priesthood of believers are numerous enough to fill a library shelf, all the exegetical examinations of the Scriptural basis of this doctrine, when taken together, would not fill the first hundred pages of a single book!"

3Cyril Eastwood, The Priesthood of All Believers (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1962); The Royal Priesthood of the Faithful (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963).
scriptural sources to the doctrinal theology of the church. The present study intends, therefore, to treat both sides of the issue, from an analysis of the most recent interpretations of the individual pericopes, to producing a coherent biblical theology of the "common priesthood." As much as possible, these conclusions will also be related to the specific theological problems which it affects.

At each appropriate point in this study, common interpretations of the "priesthood of believers" will be cited for comparison with the text itself. However, it will be instructive to begin with a broad overview of the role this article has taken in various theological traditions. We will survey briefly representatives of Reformed Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox systems, and then conclude with a few issues raised in Lutheran circles.

Typical of overtly Protestant thinking is the work of Cyril Eastwood, mentioned previously. One may note two ways in which he uses the common priesthood. First, it is used as a call for a greater role for the laity in the church:

> Important as it is that all Christians should participate in the liturgical actions of the Church, and that they should regard their daily vocation as a medium through which their priesthood may be expressed, it is equally important that they should be identified with, and take an active share in, the evangelistic action of the Church also.  

Priesthood is defined according to actions: "It is the task of every

---

4Eastwood stands as a classic example of how the "priesthood of all believers" is adduced for its pragmatic value; that is, it is seen as a tool to further one's agenda.

5Eastwood, Priesthood (1962), 252.
Christian to draw men nearer to Christ, to be, in fact, a priest."\(^6\)

Secondly, it is seen as the driving force behind all Reformation churches, and therefore virtually equivalent to the doctrine of justification by faith. "The History of the Reformation, the History of Puritanism, and the History of the Evangelical Revival, are the story of the extent to which Christians have understood and applied the doctrine of the priesthood of believers."\(^7\) Furthermore,

Protestantism is based upon three major emphases: (i) sola scriptura; (ii) sola fides [sic]; (iii) sola gratia. As the Reformers expounded these three truths they found themselves proclaiming the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. . . . These three specifically Protestant emphases lie behind the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.\(^8\)

In Eastwood's system the "priesthood of all believers" is seen as the final goal and highest principle towards which the Reformers moved, rather than as one means to a higher end.

Modern Roman Catholicism has been racing to show that they do not ignore the priesthood of all Christians. In his inaugural address at Tübingen, Hans Küng proclaimed: "The doctrine of the universal priesthood is one of the basic truths of Catholic ecclesiology."\(^9\) More recently Roman scholars have wrestled with the Vatican II teachings on the relationship of the priesthood of the baptized to the ordained


\(^7\)Eastwood, *Priesthood* (1962), 241. One is struck by the strange bedfellows in this assertion. This illustrates Eastwood's failure to distinguish confessional Lutheranism from the radical Reformation, or even from Protestantized Lutherans.


\(^9\)Quoted in Elliott, 1. This address was delivered on 24 November 1960.
priesthood. Philip Rosato analyzed the council's teaching on the twofold (common and ministerial) Christian priesthood. First he notes that "[t]he bishops stressed the participation of each and every Christian in the prophetic, sacerdotal and pastoral identity and activity of Jesus Christ." At the same time the essential distinction between the two priesthoods was maintained, while affirming that they work towards a common goal. He suggests that the Vatican II documents offer four distinct, yet interlocked, approaches to this relationship.

First is the "ontological" view, centering on the concept of "participation":

... the baptized and the ordained are related to each other as a result of their particular ontic share in a common source, the one priest of the New Testament, Jesus Christ. ... In these [Vatican II] texts, the phrases "their own part," which describes the ontic status of the baptized, and "by a special title," which characterizes the correlated yet different ontic status of the ordained, are obviously grounded on a theological comprehension of baptism and orders, according to which these separate acts of the Church generate not two independent priesthoods, but two distinct modes of participating in one priesthood, that of Jesus Christ. ...

In other words, while it is important that the two modalities of Christian priesthood not be confused, since each is ontically different from the other, it is even more important that they not be disjoined, since each is ontically related to the other due to its equally valid foundation in Christ's priestly person and activity.

This unity of participation in Christ's priesthood is expressed most intensely in the Eucharist. The common goal is to make Christ present

---

10 Vatican II teachings which distinguish the "ministerial priesthood" from the "common priesthood" are scattered throughout various documents, the most important of which being Lumen Gentium. For specific references see Philip J. Rosato, "Priesthood of the Baptized and Priesthood of the Ordained," Gregorianum 88.1-2 (1987): 215-66.

11 Rosato, 215.

12 Rosato, 221.
to the world through their "differentiated co-existence in him." The baptized form the "cell," Christ's body, while the ordained serve as the "nucleus" of the cell, representing Christ's headship.

A second approach is termed "existential," whereby "the ordained are reminded that, although they are indeed authoritative shepherds of the laity, they are also their brothers and must therefore act as such among and for them." This stresses the complementary activity of the two priesthoods as brothers.

Yet, within this free communion, there is diversity: it is the laity who, as the cell of the ecclesial body, are particularly free to extend the life of the cell into the world, while it is the clergy who, as the nucleus conducting the cell's growth, defend its interior union as it reaches out beyond itself.

These respective functions are termed "apostolic" and "ministerial" respectively. The distinction is thus inward-outward. "The ordained brothers exercise their authoritative preaching office within the Church, so that their baptized brothers, one in mind and heart, might broadcast to the world the Gospel message of the salvific love of Christ."

A third approach, the "practico-socio," evidences the trend of Vatican II towards liberation theology.

Now it is to be stressed that the priesthood of the ordained, analogous to the nucleus of the ecclesial cell, is to stimulate the priesthood of the baptized to diffuse the vitality of the ecclesial cell into its surroundings. The practico-social approach to the

---

13 Rosato, 222.
14 Rosato, 230.
15 Rosato, 231.
16 Rosato, 236.
correlation of the *sacerdotium commune* and the *sacerdotium ministeriale* emphasizes the apostolic duty of the entire ecclesial organism to reach out to other cells around it which are especially in need of fresh energy and direction. ... Therefore, each of the dual modalities of priesthood must promote the justice of Christ, the priest-liberator, in unjust social environments, since he sacrificed himself by announcing and embodying divine liberation in such circumstances. ...  

Through ethical involvement each mode of the priesthood renders Christ present to others. The ministerial priesthood exhorts the common priesthood to do this task.

Finally: "The eschatological approach to the interrelation between the common and ministerial modes of priesthood emphasizes that the baptized and the ordained are co-ordinated inaugurators of Christ’s messianic kingdom."  

The phrase "the collaboration of many ministries" [in the Vatican text] first refers to the pastoral work of their fellow priests attempting, through authoritative spiritual actions at the nucleus of the ecclesial cell, to enrich the eschatological life already enjoyed by the faithful because the paschal mystery of Christ has been made available to them in Word and Sacrament. Next, it refers to the spiritual activities of the baptized striving, by right of their own participation in Christ’s teaching, sanctifying and shepherding mission centered in the body of the ecclesial cell, to transform the world in ways corresponding to its eschatological goal.

Again the distinction between the two modes of priesthood is made on the basis of the sphere of activity: church or world, inward or outward.

Though Rosato may stretch Vatican II theology to (or beyond) its limits, he is a good illustration of the problems Roman Catholicism has created for itself by using sacerdotal language of the Office of the

---

17 Rosato, 240.
18 Rosato, 255.
19 Rosato, 252.
Ministry. When the common priesthood confronts an ordained priesthood they must work diligently to differentiate the two.  

The Eastern Orthodox face a similar problem, although they have a long tradition of working with a "threelfold priesthood." Christ, the source of priesthood, allows others to participate in him mystically, and also to re-present him iconically. According to John Chryssavgis:

Each of us is Christ to the degree that each of us walks and lives as Christ on this earth. . . . And in living "the life in Christ," in experiencing the mystery that is the incarnation, the crucifixion, and the resurrection of Christ, in partaking of the sacraments that are Christ, every believer also partakes in the three-fold office of our Lord as king, priest and prophet.  

The ordained priesthood is distinct in its responsibilities, and in the degree to which it presents Christ: "the faithful are priests unto themselves and of themselves, whereas the ordained priests have other responsibilities beyond those received by all at baptism." Furthermore, "it [the ordained priesthood] is the sacramental manifestation of the ministry of Christ in and for the Church," and "a priest is literally an icon of Christ." Like Rosato above, Chryssavgis stresses that the source of all priesthood is Christ, and that both the ministerial and the common priesthoods share immediately in his;

20 Strangely enough, the end result is similar to an "everyone a minister" theology, which is hard pressed to find room for the "special minister."


22 Chryssavgis, 375.

23 Chryssavgis, 376.

24 Chryssavgis, 377.
neither is inferior to the other.

The role of the common priesthood, according to Isidore of Pelusium, is "to rule over evil and make of his own body a temple and an altar of purity."\(^{25}\) Speaking individually, the priestly role is "to offer up prayer on the altar of the heart"—whether prayer in the normal sense, or prayer of actions.\(^{26}\) Communally, the priestly role is found in the Eucharist:

Here it is important to remember that at the Eucharist the Christian community as a whole is offering up the only perfect offering, the Body and Blood of Christ. It is not just the ordained priest who makes this offering. . . . At the Eucharist the baptised Christian community as a whole is exercising its priestly role in two different ways. Firstly, it makes the offering (the ordained priest enabling it to do so). Secondly, it partakes fully in consuming the offering or sacrifice (while in the Old Testament this was a right confined to priests).\(^{27}\)

Ultimately, daily growth in the Christian life cultivates the priestly role given at Baptism to the point that one sees all the world as a "sacrament." That is, the priestly individual is projected from church into world, so that he participates sacerdotally in the "sacrament of the world" just as he participates in the Eucharist.

We can hardly claim to have made an exhaustive study of Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox theology—this has been only an introductory survey. Of greater interest is the place of the "priesthood of all believers" in Lutheran theology. This will be

---

\(^{25}\)Quoted by Chryssavgis, 377.


\(^{27}\)Brock, 19-20.
discussed throughout the course of this investigation. At this point, however, we raise two major articles of faith in which the common priesthood holds a hotly debated position among Lutherans: the Office of the Ministry, and the Office of the Keys. Questions in these two areas will help to clarify the issues involved in speaking dogmatically about the priesthood. They also compel one to ask further whether the scriptural use of the priesthood theme can really bear the burden laid upon it by this diverse theological appropriation.

The Priesthood and the Office of the Holy Ministry

A perpetual problem in the contemporary discussion concerning the Office of the Ministry is the relationship of the "priesthood of all believers" to this doctrine. Some theologians attempt to derive the Office from the priesthood; others go to great lengths to distinguish the two. One way or the other the priesthood seems to be considered together with the Ministry. Most often the discussion appears to be a question of how to interpret Luther. For this reason this "exegetical" study found it necessary to delve into Luther's writings in order to weigh his use of the common priesthood against the exegetical conclusions produced in the major portion of this study. In the process, it became apparent that Luther has often been misappropriated in support of propositions which go far beyond his use of the theme. Rather than pursuing further at this point the debate on priesthood and Ministry, we will take it up in detail when introducing the chapter devoted to Luther's writings. This study hopes to contribute to disentangling the common priesthood from the Office of the Holy
The Priesthood and the Office of the Keys

A further relevant question is this: to whom did Christ give the Office of the Keys? A simple question it seems, traditionally answered in response to Rome's claim that they were given only to Peter. Various answers arise: to the apostles, to the Office of the Ministry, to the church, to the priesthood of all believers. This last proposal raises some difficulties which this study intends to address. For if this last is the case, then why the restriction of the public administration of the Keys to the called and ordained Ministers of the Word? Reference to a few representative Lutheran theologians will demonstrate that this last identification is indeed commonly made.

John Reumann writes concerning the role of Minister and layman in Lutheranism: "The whole church, the royal priesthood, has the power of the keys, and even though it elects and ordains ministers, there may be occasions when the priest-layman must function as minister in that office for the brother's sake."28 The question of whether a layman "functions as minister" or not is beyond the scope of this study. Rather, the first clause is at issue. If one accepts that the Keys were given to the church, is one justified, therefore, in making the separate move to ascribe them to the priesthood? That is, is one justified in making the apposition: the church, the royal priesthood? First, we

suggest that "the church" and "the royal priesthood" are not equivalent terms simply because they consist "mathematically" of the same people (are "coterminous"). This would be to confuse meaning with referent. The meaning of each term consists of its referent seen in relationship to something else. That is, each term expresses a particular fact about the people of God. Secondly, one must therefore ask whether the term "priesthood" speaks of the people of God in relationship to the Office of the Keys.

Thus we are driven to ask, what is proper to (the proprium of) the "priesthood"? Edmund Schlink expounds upon Augsburg Confession Article XIV:

This article does not deny the royal priesthood of believers but presupposes it... The relationship between the power of the keys given to all believers and the power of the public ministry can be characterized, with Harless, in this manner that we, on the one hand, "clearly distinguish between the priestly and ministerial call and, on the other hand, seek the essence of the ministry of the Word..."

---

Though "Church" and "priesthood" have the same referent, their components of meaning are different! The components of meaning express the relationships implied in the term. "Church" is ontological, naming an organism, a body of people who are ἐκκλησία "an assembly." This "assembly" is made specific by its peculiar adjectives, "one holy catholic and apostolic." [For Christianity's appropriation of the term ἐκκλησία see A. C. Piepkorn, "What the Symbols Have to Say About the Church," reprinted from Concordia Theological Monthly (October, 1955): 6-7.] The church "is" the communio sanctorum, the "communion of saints" (masc.) created by the "communion of holy things" (neut.). Furthermore, one cannot talk of the composition of the church merely "mathematically." The church is always a priesthood and its Ministers, even though the Ministers remain members of the common priesthood. Conversely, the church is "more than [supra, mehr denn] the Ministers" (Tractate 11). Just what images "priesthood" evokes remains to be discovered in the ensuing exegetical study, yet it is clearly a narrower description of the people of God than "church" is. Furthermore, it possibly includes beyond the "ontological" dimension, a more "functional" application: "priesthood" suggests an activity of "priests." Thus, ascribing the Keys to the "priesthood" implies that the exercise of the Keys is a priestly function. This raises serious difficulties in the doctrine of the Ministry.
in nothing else than in what belongs also to every believing Christian by virtue of his priestly calling" (Kirche und Amt, p. 16). "Ministerial," then, means that in the congregation the preacher of the Gospel serves the priestly commission which God has given the whole congregation.  

From this brief quotation one would assume that the exercise of the Ministry of the Word, the Keys, is in fact the proprium of the priesthood. Yet Schlink later denies that "the public ministry grows out of the royal priesthood of all believers," 31 for "[t]he idea of a transfer of the rights of the universal priesthood to the person of the pastor is foreign to the Confessions." 32 Apparently one is expected to live with the paradox—not in itself an objectionable thought—but the question arises as to whether the Minister is, in fact, exercising a priestly duty (officium) when he practices the Office of the Keys. The first half of the "paradox" may be ill-founded.

The source of this confusion is apparent in Edward Koehler (as just one example):

By faith in Christ all Christians are royal priests before God; "ye are . . . a royal priesthood" (1 Pet 2:9). Because of this fact they are the real owners and possessors of the Office of the Keys, and of all this Office implies. 33

Two things may be noted from this. First, the source of such priesthood

---


31 Schlink, 244.

32 Schlink, 245.

33 Edward W. Koehler, A Summary of Christian Doctrine, 2d ed. rev. by Alfred W. Koehler (St. Louis: Concordia, 1971), 265. It is telling that this is the first paragraph in his discussion of "The Office of the Ministry." He begins with "The royal priesthood of all Christians."
talk is 1 Pet. 2:9—no surprise. Secondly, there is a bald assumption that one can move directly from 1 Pet. 2:9's "royal priesthood" to "the Office of the Keys." No attempt is made to justify this exegesis! It is simply assumed that "royal priesthood" expresses this content.

One expects more from an exegete. William Arndt suggests that 1 Pet. 2:9 may be somewhat apologetic, responding to the derision of pagans and Jews that the Christians do not have a "priesthood." On the contrary, Christianity is heir to all the promises of Israel, every Christian is a priest, and collectively they are "a priesthood in service of a king."34 From the Old Testament allusion he concludes that "priesthood" is concerned first with one's relationship to God. "Their relationship with God was more intimate and direct than that of the ordinary people. . . . In the New Testament every believer has the privilege of appearing directly before God . . . ."35 Secondly, priesthood describes a service: "The high position is given Christians so that they may render service. . . . Sacrifices are to be offered up by them."(1 Pet. 2:5)36 Thirdly, he concludes from 1 Pet. 2:9 that priesthood involves proclamation: "The Christians have been made priests of God for the purposes of a holy propaganda in which the greatness and goodness of the Lord is to be exalted."37

None of these purposes which he finds in the text prepares one

---

35Arndt, 246-47.
36Arndt, 247.
37Arndt, 247.
for the concluding paragraph of his essay.

Finally, a word on truths specially emphasized by our Church on the basis of 1 Pet. 2:9. The individual Christians, as priests of God, are possessors of all the spiritual privileges which God has prepared for His Church. To them belong the Word and the Sacraments, the power of the keys, that is, the power to open and close the gates of heaven and the right to call pastors and teachers. It is true, God has said that all things should be done decently and in order and that there should be the Gospel ministry. In this respect directives were given by God Himself to the Christians as to the manner in which the duties and the functions of the priesthood should be carried out. All the children of God are priests, and to everyone belong the rights and privileges indicated by that term.38

For the sake of decency and order, Arndt notes, the "rights of the priesthood" should be exercised by one, called, Minister (and, incidentally, because God said it should be done this way!).39 In what

---

38Arndt, 249.

39One is tempted to include in this discussion also Walther's seventh thesis on the Amt:

Das heilige Predigtamt ist die von Gott durch die Gemeinde als Inhaberin des Priestertums und aller Kirchengewalt übertragene Gewalt, die Rechte des geistlichen Priestertums in öffentlichen Amte von Gemeinschafswegen auszüüben.

At first sight, it seems Walther is suggesting that what the Minister does is really "the rights of the spiritual priesthood"—hence, the Office of the Keys which the Minister exercises is the possession of the priests. However, at least two points may militate against this interpretation. 1. Dr. Nagel notes the mistranslation of Rom. 15:16 in Church and Ministry. By rendering ιερουργίας as opfern Walther seems to emphasize sacrifice as the "rights" of the priesthood committed to the Office. Mueller loses this connection by translating "ministering." 2. von Gemeinschaftswegen here could mean not "in the name of the congregation"(Mueller) but "for the sake of the communion." Thus, when the Minister "sacrifices" he exercises a priestly right, but is unique in doing it for the sake of the communion. This interpretation is buttressed by the manifold reference to the Confessions on sacrifices of thanksgiving. Cf. C. F. W. Walther, Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt (Zwickau: Verlag des Schriftenvereins der sep. evang.-luth. Gemeinden in Sachsen, 1894), 315-41; C. F. W. Walther, Church and Ministry, trans. J. T. Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia, 1987), 268-88; Norman E. Nagel, "The Doctrine of the Office of the Holy Ministry in the Confessions and in Walther's Kirche und Amt," Concordia Journal 15.4 (October 1989): 438-42.
way is this conclusion drawn from the "priesthood" of 1 Pet. 2:9? Where does Peter ascribe such things to the priests?

Thus we arrive at the question to be addressed particularly in the second chapter of this thesis. What does Peter mean by "priesthood," and how is this related to the rest of scriptural teaching on priesthood and sacrifice? What is it that is given by God to the "priesthood" of the New Testament? These questions can be applied more generally to the entire scriptural teaching on the priesthood. They are concerned with two matters: (1) components of meaning; (2) external entailment. The first asks which parts of the various definitions of "priesthood" apply to the common priesthood of the Scriptures. The second inquires what the context of this priesthood is: for example, how is it made, who makes it, what does it do, how does this context explain its meaning?

The purpose of the exegesis below will be to answer these questions as much as possible.

This exegesis will, of course, have doctrinal implications. The manifold examples of "theologies of priesthood" reviewed above hold in common the supposition that the "priesthood of all believers" is a major theme of Scripture.

In fact, one will find that it occurs only a few times. It is no surprise that very little of the theological assertions made by the Protestant, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Lutheran writers is founded upon exegesis of these scriptural texts. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to attempt a thorough exegesis of the texts, and

---

40 This is not to imply that anything in Scripture is really "minor." However, Scripture does tend to highlight the primary articles of the faith.

xix
then to say doctrinally only what the texts themselves give us to say. In this way we hope to avoid the methodological errors of those who bend the texts to say something they do not, in fact, say.
CHAPTER ONE
THE PRIESTHOOD ACCORDING TO EXODUS 19

Introduction

The interpretation of Exodus 19:3-8 is a classic example of how great a disparity can exist between popular readings of a text and the re interpretations produced by a scholarly minority. It demonstrates how little regard has been given to serious exegesis of the text, while the text is used recklessly to support the ideology of the reader. On the other hand, the few scholarly treatments extant seem to revel in extremism, producing interpretations so esoteric that they have failed to win many converts. Both of these extremes will be demonstrated in this chapter. A responsible treatment of the text, however, will take into account both the advances of modern lexicography and the place this text has held in theology since ancient times. Most importantly, it will strive to understand the significant phrases from the immediate context, and from the theology of the Old Testament as a whole. None of this is finally in contradiction.

The popular uncritical reading of the expression "kingdom of priests" commonly includes two elements: (1) the right of individual access to God; and, (2) the missionary role of the entire nation of

---

1The controversial phrase will be represented for the present by the traditional "kingdom of priests." The enormous variety of alternative translations will be discussed below.
Israel as priest to the nations. Both ideas fill the commentaries. For example, J. Phillip Hyatt writes: "As a 'kingdom of priests' the Israelites were all to have access to Yahweh, and the nation was to serve as priest for the rest of the nations of the world." R. Alan Cole echoes this, though with the stress on the former:

Presumably the basic thought is of a group set apart peculiarly for God's possession and service, with free access to his presence. The thought of acting as God's representative for, and to, the other nations of the world cannot be ruled out.

The stress on the first point is characteristic of "protestantized" appropriations of the text.

The second emphasis is even more prevalent among commentators. Brevard Childs expresses it generally: "Israel as a people is also dedicated to God's service among the nations as priests function with [sic; 'within'?] a society." Just what this priestly "function" entails is explained variously. John Durham offers, "Israel as a 'kingdom of priests' is Israel committed to the extension throughout the world of the ministry of Yahweh's Presence." Thus, according to Durham, the priest "presents" God. For Martin Noth, Israel's "role as the priestly member in the number of earthly states" is the obligation

---


"to do 'service' for all the world." A. H. McNeile even more strongly attaches a "missionary teaching" significance to the text: "A kingdom whose citizens are all priests (cf. Is. lxi. 6) to bring other nations to the worship of God, and to teach them His will."

The "missionary" reading has not been confined to Protestants. Lutherans Keil and Delitzsch also stress the mediatorial aspect of priesthood.

The spiritual attitude towards the nations was the result of its priestly character. As the priest is a mediator between God and man, so Israel was called to be the vehicle of the knowledge and salvation of God to the nations of the world.

Horace Hummel paints a similar picture: "all Israel/church has a priestly mission to all nations; its position among the nations corresponds to that of the Levites among the tribes of Israel." The concurrence of many other Lutherans with this conclusion will be shown below (chapter two) in connection with 1 Peter 2. One of the strongest missionary statements is actually made by a Roman Catholic, Heinz Kruse:

All these reasons converge to show that essentially God's aim and purpose in proposing the Covenant and choosing Israel as his unique "Holy Nation" can hardly be anything else than the salvation of the

---


world's nations by Israel. Through the priestly-pastoral activity of Israel, rescued and instructed by God himself, all other peoples would be brought back to God, instructed and sanctified by the priestly Torah and Cult of Israel.\textsuperscript{10}

The extreme consequences of this view are illustrated by Kruse's next sentence: "Israel certainly was not chosen for the reason of her own merits, as she was not chosen for the purpose of her own religious needs and benefits."\textsuperscript{11} Kruse faults post-exilic Israel for taking Ex. 19:5 "as a blessing for herself, not as a duty."\textsuperscript{12} The proclamation of God's covenant with Israel has now become Law—a description of her duty.

In a great anti-clerical blast, Cyril Eastwood pictures Ex. 19:6 as the high ideal from which Israel steadily declined into a hierarchical priesthood, leading ultimately into the tyranny of the Roman priesthood from which the Reformation has graciously rescued the church.

Every member of the kingdom of priests was privileged to draw near to God in dedication, worship, and service, so that they might learn how their mission to the world was to be fulfilled. . . . These privileges belonged to the Lord's people and not to any exclusive class.\textsuperscript{13}

Eastwood sees Ex. 19:6 as a reflection of a time when no priestly cast existed, when the head of each household functioned as priest. Korah's rebellion against priestly tyranny (Numbers 16) is therefore to be


\textsuperscript{11}Kruse, 132. Emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{12}Kruse, 134.

\textsuperscript{13}Cyril Eastwood, \textit{The Royal Priesthood of the Faithful} (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963), 3.
admired. Eastwood examines all of the tasks of the priesthood, which in his evolutionary model are gradually given up by the people to the Aaronic priests, and implants them in the phrase "kingdom of priests." By shirking these responsibilities, the people gave up their reward:

... all the people of Israel stand in an identical and immediate relationship to God as His pledged servants, and it is an intrinsic part of their service to bring all nations to an awareness of their spiritual destiny. Once they lost sight of this universal aspect of their calling, they forfeited the privileges they had received. 15

One wonders how much of this has been supplied by exegesis of the text.

Beyond the breadth of Christian authors just cited, many Jewish commentators ancient and modern subscribe to the "missionary" reading. According to the Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation, "All the peoples are regarded here as one nation, among whom you will be like kohanim, assigned to God's service and mankind's spiritual education." 16

Nahum Sarna follows the same logic.

The priests are set apart from the rest of the people by dedication to the service of God, by their consecration to a distinctive way of life that gives expression to this intimate involvement with the divine through special duties and restrictions, and by the obligation to serve the people. This concept of priesthood provides the model for Israel's self-image and for its role among the nations of the world. 17

This "universal priesthood" interpretation is seen by conservative Jews

14Eastwood, 18. Eastwood faults Korah only for attacking Moses and Aaron.

15Eastwood, 24.


as characteristic of the "liberal" way of dealing with the destruction of the Temple.

The overwhelming acceptance of this twofold interpretation of the "kingdom of priests" tends to blind one towards the possibility that such notions cannot be substantiated by the text. Is there anything in Exodus 19 which would suggest that Israel's priesthood is predicated in relationship to other nations? What aspects of "priesthood" is one justified in applying to the people Israel? Does "priesthood" refer to priestly functions or to priestly dignity? Are God's words to Israel a promise or a challenge? None of these questions has been addressed by the plethora of authors just cited. On the other hand, a small group of scholars answers these questions in such a way that any notion of "universal priesthood" is lost. As the following study addresses these questions it will demonstrate that God's proclamation of a "universal priesthood" need not be a command, but is, in fact, a promise. Only in this way can the "kingdom of priests" take its proper place in the Old Testament, and only such a Gospel reading is faithful to the context of the passage.

The Form of Ex. 19:3-8

Only recently have "covenant forms" and "treaties" been systematically investigated in order to relate the Old Testament נָשָׁבָת "covenant" to parallels in contemporaneous societies.¹⁸ Ex. 19:3-8 often

serves as a key passage in relating the elements of the Sinai covenant to other treaty forms. The Gattung which is assigned to this section is very significant for the interpretation of the three appellatives given to Israel in Ex. 19:5-6. If some sort of two-way contract is envisioned, then Israel is a "precious possession," "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" only if she fulfills her half of the bargain. Such reciprocity is in the realm of the Law. On the other hand, a unilateral covenant, or some form of divine pronouncement, would make this pericope a proclamation of God's grace in choosing for himself a people. The answer to this question will affect which components of meaning and entailments transfer from the general idea of "priesthood" to its specific application to Israel. Involved in this is whether the "priesthood" of Israel refers to status or function, and whether their "holiness" is given or earned.

The classic application of ancient treaty forms to the Old Testament was done by George Mendenhall. Since Israel's covenant was contracted as a nation, Mendenhall found the international covenants of the Hittite Empire (1450-1200 B.C.) to be the most relevant.19 These covenants were found in two forms: suzerainty, in which a vassal state is bound by oath to a superior; and parity, in which both states are bound by equal stipulations. The suzerainty treaty is considered most applicable to Old Testament forms. Immediately a question is raised: in the מַעַן does not God obligate himself to the people Israel? Does not God promise to save and protect his people? In the suzerainty

treaty, the "sovereign" only helps his vassal when his own interest is at stake. He is under no obligation to do so. Comparing the Sinai covenant with the suzerainty treaty immediately commits one to the position that man's relationship to God is determined by man's pledge of obedience. It furthermore places the burden on man to obey the stipulations of the agreement in order to obtain its rewards.

Certainly there are obvious parallels between the Hittite treaty form and the structure of our pericope. Mendenhall finds at least six ingredients in the suzerainty treaty. (1) In a "preamble" the kingly author identifies himself. (2) In an "historical prologue" the king describes his gracious deeds towards the vassal—the vassal exchanges future obedience for past benefits. (3) The "stipulations" detail the obligations imposed on the vassal in order to protect the interests of the king. (4) Provision was made for the deposit of the treaty in a temple and for periodic public reading, that the populace may remain informed and reminded. (5) A list of gods as "witnesses" was included, who stand behind the treaty with (6) "curses and blessings" which they will award to the actions of the vassal. In many cases two more elements follow: (7) a "formal oath" by which the vassal pledges obedience, and (8) a "solemn ceremony" to accompany the oath. Mendenhall finds all of these elements present in two places: the Decalogue, and the "covenant renewal" of Joshua 24.

Ex. 19:3-8 clearly anticipates the giving of the entire Word of

---

20 Mendenhall, 56.
21 Mendenhall, 58-61.
God from Sinai as it refers to יְּהֵוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים "my covenant" (v. 5). Since none has yet been given it must point forward to all which follows, including the Decalogue. One can easily see how many elements detailed above are present in 19:3-8. The "historical prologue" is represented by God's reference to his saving them from Egypt (v. 4). The "stipulations" are to follow in the Decalogue. Though not here, the commandment is given later that the Torah is to be deposited in the Ark and read to the people yearly. The three phrases of verses 5 and 6 can be seen as the blessings of the covenant. The people respond with a solemn oath of obedience (v. 8), which is later accompanied by a ceremony (Exodus 24, and again in Joshua 24). Seen in the entire context of Sinai, most of the elements of the Hittite treaty are, indeed, present. Yet despite these surface similarities some fundamental problems remain. Georg Fohrer criticized Mendenhall on the following counts: (1) יְּהֵוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים in this context cannot mean "treaty" but "obligation" on the part of God or man; (2) if the historical circumstances are to be accepted, then Israel in the Arabian wilderness would have had no contact with this northern form of Hittite treaty; (3) "I am Yahweh" (Ex. 20:2) does not parallel the preambles of Hittite treaties, which begin, "Thus says . . ."; (4) Yahweh and Israel are not in a position of Lord and vassal, but rather they are intimately related, as Israel is the רְאֵי "clan, family, people" of Yahweh.22

Furthermore, some dangerous conclusions result when the יְּהֵוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים is seen as a two-way treaty, or as an obligation merely on the side of

Israel. Mendenhall rejects the former: "The 'mutuality' of covenant—whereby each party receives as well as gives—is a very recent innovation in the law of contract in so far as it is thought to be that which makes the contract binding, and consequently a necessary characteristic of a covenant."\(^{23}\) Yet he falls into the second error of imposing sole obligation upon Israel, leaving God sovereign and self-determining. James Muilenburg stresses even more strongly the "call to obedience" which our pericope makes. He notes the pronounced "I-Thou" structure of the section—each of God's actions calling for a response in Israel.

The relationship between Yahweh and Israel is set forth in the very structure of the passage . . . Israel is witness to what Yahweh has done for her, that is the message of the first division; now she must confront the call to obedience, and upon her decision rest the fateful promises which bring the unit to a climax: סהל, קלח, שמזיה, ויהיה.\(^{24}\) The burden of the covenant then lies not on the God who initiates it, but on the decision and obedience of Israel.

An intriguing alternative lies in the *Gattung* which Kurt Galling identified as *Erwählungstradition* "election tradition."\(^{25}\) Galling traced the "development" of the election motif through Scripture, and amassed a substantial collection of passages which describe the election of Israel by God in a similar way. Most significantly, he demonstrated that the Sinai covenant is not distinguished in the tradition from the covenant

\(^{23}\)Mendenhall, 51 n. 5.


\(^{25}\)See Kurt Galling, *Die Erwählungstraditionen Israels* (Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1928).
made with the patriarchs. Hans Wildberger applied this *Gattung* more specifically to Ex. 19:3-8. "Wir bezeichnen die Gestalt, die der Erwählungstradition hier gegeben ist, als Erwählungsproklamation." This is significantly different from the "treaty" theories, for now the emphasis is on the action of God in proclaiming the election of Israel as his people! The *Sitz im Leben* of this proclamation is identified with Sigmund Mowinckel's "covenant renewal festival;" and the source of such election formulas is not literary, but "die Proklamation ihren ursprünglichen "<Sitz im Leben>" in einem gottesdienstlichen Akt der Frühzeit Israels gehabt haben muss." As his title indicates, for Wildberger "*Die zentrale Aussage der Proklamation*" is without doubt verse 5b, "you will be to me a *Land* special possession." Israel has gained such a position only through God's "gracious gift": "Dadurch wird unterstrichen, dass Israel nicht schon immer Jahwes Besitz war, sondern dass es das durch einen Akt gnädiger Zuwendung seines Gottes geworden ist." Though much of Wildberger's work is caught up in tracing sources and the evolution of Israelite religion—throughout he is arguing for the ancient nature of this material—his essential thesis is brilliant. He has been able to synthesize God's covenant with the patriarchs with the Sinai covenant by seeing both as promises of blessing on the part of God. The treaty

---

27 Wildberger, 39.
28 Wildberger, 74.
29 Wildberger, 77-78.
theories consistently fail to draw these elements together. Wildberger’s understanding of the מַלְאַךְ הַמַּעֲשֶׂים “kingdom of priests” will be treated below.

Ultimately, the form assigned to this pericope hangs upon one’s understanding of the conditional sentence posed in Ex. 19:5. Of course, at the same time it affects one’s understanding of the condition. The apodosis of the condition, introduced by ו and the imperfect copulative, describes the result of the condition being fulfilled: “then you shall be . . . .” In the protasis lie two conditions. The second reads מָלַקְתּוֹ. The verb מָלַקְתּוֹ in itself has as a central component “to exercise great care over.” The common English translation “keep [my covenant]” seems to add the component of doing what the covenant enjoins. However, in examining the usage of מָלַקְתּוֹ one finds that this added component is always introduced by a second verb in the infinitive. Examples are מָלַקְתּוֹ "to say” (Num. 23:12), and מָלַקְתּוֹ "to do” (Deut. 11:32). In other cases “doing” is conjoined (e.g., וַיַּלַּקְתּוֹ וַיְשַׁלֹּק "and do them” Ezek. 37:24). In Ex. 19:5 the verb simply takes “my covenant” as its object. One might therefore translate “care for, guard, treasure my covenant.”

The point is that the apodosis will be true as long as the relationship with God remains intact, for it is through the that God bestows his gifts.

The first phrase of the protasis, מַלַּקְתּוֹ מַלַּקְתּוֹ מַלַּקְתּוֹ, is even more pivotal. Taken most literally it reads simply “really hear my voice.” The infinitive absolute מָלַקְתּוֹ intensifies the force of the verb. In

---

spite of this, the vast majority of English translations offer "obey my voice" or "obey me." The special studies emphasize this even more strongly. Muilenburg traces this infinitive absolute through the various covenantal formulations and concludes: "The demand for obedience lies at the center of the covenant relation, though the freely given mighty acts of grace precede it." Sarna's translation "if you will obey me faithfully" is reinforced by his commentary: "The striving for holiness in the life of the people is to be the hallmark of Israel's existence. . . . Holiness is to be achieved by human imitation of God's attributes." Kruse's translation shows most clearly how legalistic such translations can be: "If you are willing to obey my orders and to keep my Covenant, you will be my special property among all peoples." One certainly does not want to suggest that "to hear one's voice" could not with the necessary entailments imply obedience. Some might argue that this is required because it is God's voice. This, however, would be to allow God only a coercive voice of Law. God's bestowing Gospel voice is to be listened to in faith. It can also be demonstrated that the phrase cannot consistently be translated "obey," while it can always be translated "listen to one's voice." According to Abraham Even-Shoshan's concordance, this phrase occurs 100 times in the Old Testament. In many cases, it describes one person listening

---

31 Muilenburg, 355.


33 Kruse, 129.

to another; here "obey" simply is inappropriate (e.g., Gen. 21:12; 27:8,13,43; Ex. 4:1; 18:19; 23:21; Jud. 20:13; 1 Sam. 8:7,9,22; 12:1; 15:24; 19:6; 25:35; 28:21,22; 2 Sam. 12:18; 13:14; 19:36; Prov. 5:13; Ps. 130:2; Jer. 35:8). In many others, God "listens" to the voice of a man (Gen. 30:6; Num. 21:3; Deut. 1:45; Josh. 10:14; Jud. 13:9; 1 Kings 17:22). It certainly would be improper to suggest God "obeys" man! Most of the remaining passages describe man "listening" to God’s voice. The key to these may be found in passages which parallel this "hearing" with faith terms. In Is. 50:10 this "hearing" is parallel to "fearing" and "trusting" God: "Who is there among you who fears [נָקָה] Yahweh, hearing the voice [יָשָׂא] of his servant, who walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust [נַפְשׂו] in the name of Yahweh, and let him depend [נַפְשׂו] on his God." Similarly Deut. 9:23: "you did not put your trust/believe in him [מָכֹן] nor did you listen to his voice [לְמַעַן] " Finally, note also Deut. 30: 19b-20: "Choose life in order that you and your seed may live—by loving [נָשָׂא] Yahweh your God, by listening to his voice [יָשָׂא], and by cleaving [נַפְשׂו] to him; for this is your life and the length of your days, . . . . To insert obedience here would be to suggest that obedience to the Law brings life. The parallel terms "loving" and "cleaving" suggest rather that faith is the "listening" involved.

This study suggests that the most faithful translation of יָשָׂא in Ex. 19:5 is one like An American Translation: "And now, if you will listen closely to Me . . . ." This has supreme

35 This translation usually renders יָשָׂא as we have suggested.
significance for the understanding of all three phrases which we will presently consider. If the protasis is rendered in terms of obedience, then the appellatives given to Israel are earned by their actions. If it is rendered in faith terms, then God graciously bestows the nature of these phrases on the simple "condition" that one remain in the covenant, that is, "believe." A conditional does not in itself imply that the result is earned. Compare, for example, 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he [God] is faithful and just, so that he forgives our sins and cleanses us from unrighteousness;" and John 8:31, "If you remain in my Word, truly you are my disciples." Such conditionals hold a similar deep structure to the qualitative participles in Mark 16:16, "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved." Such conditionals merely tell of the relationship in which God pledges to work his grace. Thus we may conclude that the protasis of the "condition" be translated: "And now, if you listen closely to my voice and treasure my covenant, you will be . . . " (Ex. 19:5a). Any suggested form which obscures this with legalism is unfaithful to the nature of God's actions with his people, and goes beyond the text of Exodus 19.

The Structure and Relationship of the Covenantal Names

As has been alluded to, the apodosis of the condition includes three phrases describing the promises of the covenant placed on Israel:

It is not possible at this point to reach a conclusion concerning the

One will find also that the New American Bible and the Revised English Bible frequently translate "hear" or "listen" to one's voice.
structure of these verses and the relationship of their phrases, since each will be examined individually below. However, some important questions can be raised.

The place of the phrase וַעֲלָם כָּלָה "for all the earth is mine" is noteworthy. First, it seems to divide the first appellative "special possession" from the second and third, "kingdom of priests" and "holy nation." This impression is reinforced by the emphatic pronoun and repeated predicate phrase, וְהִנָּה "and you will be to me . . . ." Are the second two phrases paired, perhaps even describing two different parts which make up a whole, as some scholars suggest (discussed below)? Or are all three phrases parallel terms applied to Israel, and so three ways of describing the same state in relationship to God?36

Secondly, what does the phrase וַעֲלָם כָּלָה "for all the earth is mine" explain? If it goes with what follows, then it might support the traditional view described in the introduction that Israel's "priesthood" is predicated in relationship to the other nations of the world, and that Israel is to function as priests towards them. If it modifies the preceding, then there is no suggestion at all that "priesthood" is directed towards the world, for only God is in the context.

As noted, these questions will be dealt with as each phrase is examined below. Yet the detailed structural analysis which Muilenburg

---

36 Durham, 263: "The phrases 'special treasure,' 'kingdom of priest,' and 'holy people' are closely related to one another, and although they each refer to the whole of the people who will pay attention to and follow the covenant, they are not to be taken as synonymous, either all three of them or the second two of them."
has performed may shed some light before we proceed. Aside from the pronounced "I-Thou" structure noted above, Muilenburg notes the intertwining of tricola and bicola structures which bring the parallelisms to light. Because the protasis of the condition is phrased as a bicola "if you will listen to my voice and keep my covenant," the apodosis naturally plays out as a bicola. Thus the phrase, "you will be to me a special possession from all the peoples," takes as its parallel the phrase "and you will be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." The intervening phrase "for all the earth is mine" serves further to set apart these two halves of the bicola. This overall literary structure does not necessarily imply that the three phrases are not parallel at a lower level within the apodosis. This overall structure also allows one to examine the even narrower parallelism between 아ֲדֹנָי "holy nation" and מַלְכֵי הָאֱלֹהִים "kingdom of priests" within the confines of the second colon of the apodosis of the condition.

The foundational importance of the designation of Israel as אֲדֹנָי has already been noted, as Wildberger saw fit to entitle his study of this pericope, Jahnes Eigenthumsvolk. In combination with the repeated possessive ל" for me," this word emphasizes that the proclamation of Israel’s nature is in relationship to God. Yet when applied to people, אֲדֹנָי "possession" is somewhat metaphorical, and so to explain this relationship it is necessary to determine the referent of the phrase.

37 Muilenburg, 352-53.
comparison, and then to ask which components of meaning are being stressed by the metaphor. There is substantial agreement on the basic component of "possession" in הָבּוֹת, yet recent epigraphic finds have added data to be considered. Sarna summarizes these finds:

From the city of Alakh on the River Orontes in Turkey comes a royal seal of King Abban that cannot be later than the fifteenth century B.C.E. The term sikiltum, the Akkadian equivalent of segullah, is used in the titles of the monarch in parallel with "servant" and "beloved" of a god. Another text derives from the city of Ugarit. . . . One of the documents in question is a translation into Ugaritic of an Akkadian letter sent by the Hittite suzerain to his vassal Ammurapi, the last known king of Ugarit. Here the Hittite overlord characterizes the latter as "his servant" and "his special possession" (sgilth). Clearly, the biblical designation of Israel as God's "treasured possession" is used in a special sense that has political and legal implications. 38

While the relevance of these parallels to הָבּוֹת for the Old Testament is widely accepted, some reservations must be expressed. The danger of applying such a distant language as Akkadian to biblical Hebrew is clear. Furthermore, one must first accept the application of the Hittite suzerainty treaty to God's הַחַזֶּה with Israel before the Akkadian use of sikiltum in such treaties is deemed relevant. Since הָבּוֹת appears in many different contexts in the Old Testament which do not deal with such a treaty, one must recognize that הָבּוֹת is far broader in use than these isolated examples of sikiltum. In other words, the use of sikiltum in Hittite treaties does not inform the meaning of הָבּוֹת in Ex. 19:5 unless it is first determined that Exodus 19 is such a treaty. The study above has cast doubt upon this association. Secondly, one must consider a significant implication of Israel's being designated as a vassal king: Israel then is an intermediary lord over

38Sarna, Exploring Exodus, 131.
someone lower. Caspari made just such an application,\(^{39}\) and Wildberger pointed to its problems:

> Dann spräche also ist Israel Auftrag und Vorrecht zu, im Namen Jahwes über die Völker zu herrschen, und es wäre an einen aus vielen Nationen zusammengesetzten Weltstaat gedacht, in welchem das Gottesvolk in der Rolle einer privilegierten Führerschicht als Stellvertreter Jahwes seines Amtes zu warten hätte. . . . Aber die Deutung Casparis lässt sich nicht halten: Israel müsste bei seiner Auffassung als eine über die Völker, nicht aus ihnen bezeichnet werden.\(^{40}\)

In essence Wildberger notes that Israel is designated \(\text{יִשְׂרָאֵל}\) in distinction from (\(\text{אָבִי}'\), "aus," "out of") the nations, not in relationship to the nations (\(\text{אֵל}'\), "über," "over"). Israel is not designated vassal lord over the nations, but is placed into a special relationship with God.

It may be more sound to find the significance of \(\text{יִשְׂרָאֵל}\) in its seven other Old Testament occurrences. Deut. 7:6 and 14:2 parallel Ex. 19:5 closely, with the addition of "people": \(\text{יִשְׂרָאֵל סֵם לָנִי}\). Here their election \([\text{יִשְׂרָאֵל}]\) from the other \(\text{םִים לָנִי}\) "peoples" is stressed. Deut. 26:18 stresses that Yahweh has declared \([\text{יִרְשָׁאֵל}]\) Israel this very day \([\text{יהי}]\) to be his "people of possession." Ps. 135:4 again pairs \(\text{יִשְׂרָאֵל} \) with \(\text{וֹדֵנָא}\), "Yahweh chose Jacob for himself, Israel for his own possession." In Mal. 3:17 \(\text{יִשְׂרָאֵל}\) designates the people who belong to Yahweh \([\text{יֵשָׁאֵל}]\) as those who are righteous and will be spared the destruction of the wicked. The final two examples show the secular usage which may be the source of the metaphor. In 1 Chr. 29:3 King David promises to give for the


\(^{40}\) Wildberger, 75. Emphasis original.
construction of the Temple, over and above what he has already given, his "personal treasure of gold and silver." To such a "treasure of kings" in silver and gold the preacher refers in Eccl. 2:8. Thus by יִשְׂרָאֵל Israel is designated a choice and precious treasure, of the kind which is appropriate to the private reserves of a king.41

With this in mind, the phrase "for all the earth is mine" most appropriately fits this preceding phrase. By designating Israel as his possession, God does not imply that he is only some petty local deity; rather, the whole world is his. Yet out of this abundance, Israel is his in a special way. As Cole rightly concludes, "This implies special value as well as special relationship. . . . The word also implies choice or selection, in view of the second half of the verse ('all the earth is mine'), which is virtually full monotheism in its claim." 42 It is also possible that a distinction is made between God's possession of all the world which he created, and Israel as the only people who are really his—all other peoples reject him.43

Preisker offers the following analysis: "If one notes that the verb ἐπικατάστημι means 'to heap up,' and that twice in the LXX ἐπικατάστημι is rendered περισσεύσασθαι (ψ 134:4 and Qoh. 2:8), one may assume that the basic sense of ἐπικατάστημι is not just property in general but 'rich possession.' . . . Hence λαὸς . . . περισσεύσασθαι is 'the people which constitutes the crown jewel of God.'" Herbert Preisker, "περισσεύσασθαι," in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament [TDNT], ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964ff.), 6:57.

Cole, 144-45.

Wildberger, 76-77 would dispute Cole's interpretation. He identifies not with the whole world but with the whole "land," that
This study of הַנֵּסָי has reinforced the conclusion that Exodus 19 is a proclamation of God's gracious choice, defining who Israel is through the covenant, not who they can become if they fulfill their end of the bargain. Furthermore, the nature of הַנֵּסָי suggests that the reference to the rest of the world is made to emphasize Israel's election and treasured status before God. It is not made to define the direction of Israel's priestly functions. Because of the interposition of this parenthetical remark, "for all the earth is mine," it was necessary to repeat the verb "you will be." The preposition בָּעָל "you [not them]" serves further to distinguish Israel from the nations. Only Israel can claim these titles from God, by virtue of God's promises in their covenantal relationship.

in Recent Debate

It is significant that we have only now come to the expression in Exodus 19 which relates to the subject, "the priesthood of the baptized." First it has been necessary to establish the purpose of these words which God has Moses speak to the people Israel. It has been necessary also to determine something of the structure of the passage is, Canaan west of the Jordan. Israel is Yahweh's people of possession in distinction from the others peoples of Canaan who are not his. This would not be objectionable if it were not based on an evolutionary supposition that Israel at this point was monolatrous as opposed to monotheistic. It is further dependent upon the Sitz im Leben to which Wildberger has assigned this Erwählungsproklamation: the supposed origin of the Feast of Unleavened Bread in a yearly covenant renewal festival at the Jordan, at which time the crossing of the river and the possession of Canaan is reenacted. This is unfounded in the text. Furthermore, if the proclamation were made at Sinai, as Exodus 19 states, then such a reference to the land and peoples of Canaan from which Israel is chosen would be nonsensical—they are not yet there to be chosen!
and the place of this phrase within it. This arises from the conviction that the meaning of מְלָכָה לֶגֶן does not lie in the words themselves, drawn out of the text in isolation. Rather they hold a particular function in the immediate context which is qualified by parallel phrases and the overall force of the proclamation. Yet it is now necessary to study the lexical and syntactical difficulties which arise when trying to translate this phrase. Furthermore, its relationship to the following phrase, שַׁלֹּחַ יָה, will affect the translation.

In this century there is a discernible thread of debate over the translation of מְלָכָה לֶגֶן running through various journal articles and monographs. In this section we will examine in order their arguments, and try to determine which contribute to our understanding of the מְלָכָה לֶגֶן and which are incompatible with the conclusions reached above. After this we will examine the ancient versions and the Old Testament use of מְלָכָה לֶגֶן in order to come to a conclusion about the translation of מְלָכָה לֶגֶן.

Ancient authors were not oblivious to the complex problems involved in translating this phrase. Keil-Delitzsch introduces the problem, and anticipates modern debate:

מְלָכָה לֶגֶן signifies both kingship, as the embodiment of royal supremacy, exaltation, and dignity, and the kingdom, or the union of both king and subjects, i.e. the land and nation together with its king. In the passage before us, the word has been understood by most of the early commentators, both Jewish and Christian, and also in the ancient versions, in the first or active sense, so that the expression contains the idea, "Ye shall be all priests and kings" . . . . This explanation is required by both the passage itself and the context. For apart from the fact that kingship is the primary and most general meaning of the word מְלָכָה לֶגֶן (cf. מְלָכָה לֶגֶן, the kingship, or government of David), the other (passive) meaning would
This interpretation differs from much of the modern debate in that they take נﾘן in the sense of "kingship" and yet maintains that this "ruling priesthood" applies to all the people of Israel, instead of to a narrower class of priests. He continues:

... for נ以色列, בַּעֲלָהית, always includes the idea of רוחנ or ruling (בַּעֲלָהית). ... Israel was to be a regal body of priests to Jehovah, and not merely a nation of priests governed by Jehovah. ... The object of Israel's kingship and priesthood was to be found in the nations of the earth, out of which Jehovah had chosen Israel as a costly possession.

At this point perhaps only a few criticisms need to be made. First, his argument rests on his contention that נIsrael cannot refer to the people or realm apart from the king, and that נIsrael has a "general meaning" which must apply in this case. A word study undertaken below will demonstrate that these assumptions are false. Secondly, he imposes the notion of Israel ruling over other nations upon the text without justification. We will examine below the ancient versions, and possible reasons for their translations.

Gottlob Schrenk, writing in 1938, reflects the concerns of his period. His chief interest lies in working out the complex source structure of Exodus 19. He assigns the majority of chapter 19 to J, but finds traces of E, to which he assigns the מְסַיָּמִים phrase. His interpretation, not surprisingly, follows the standard evolutionary line:

The expression "kingdom of priests" comes from a period in which it

44 Keil-Delitzsch, 1.2:96-97.

45 Keil-Delitzsch, 1.2:97.
can mean that all members of the people of Israel should be priests, i.e., a kingdom consisting of priests. In E, therefore, a general outpouring of the Spirit is at least regarded as possible, Nu. 11:29.\(^{46}\)

Schrenk does not see any figurative language in the "kingdom of priests," but rather believes that at this time all Israelites could or did function as priests. While he defends this notion with reference to the sacrifices performed by the _pater familias_ in patriarchal times,\(^{47}\) he ignores the nature of this promise made in Ex. 19:6. Through the Sinai covenant Israel will become a "kingdom of priests." Yet this same Sinai covenant also provides for the family of Aaron to be priests, and describes their nature and functions precisely. The priesthood of all Israel cannot, therefore, be taken in the same literal way in Ex. 19:6.

The earliest of the recent chain of studies remains a classic treatment. R. B. Y. Scott presents more of a summary of the possibilities than an argument for a unique view.\(^{48}\) He notes that no ancient version except for Aquila translates וֹּֽבֵ֥גִ֖יָּה הָֽאֱלֹֽהִ֥ים with "kingdom of priests," nor do the apocryphal and New Testament allusions. He then notes that חַוְּנֵ֥נַי הָֽאֱלֹֽהִ֥ים, though construct in form, may be taken as an absolute, and thus in apposition to חַוְּנֵ֥נַי. Two independent nouns result (as some ancient versions, and Rev. 1:6; 5:10 render). If it is a genuine construct state, it can still be taken in one of two ways: "as in the phrase כֶּֽלִיל 'a fool of a man, a foolish man'; or vice versa as in

---

\(^{46}\)Gottlob Schrenk, "יְרָֽאֵתִי" in _TDNT_, 3:249.

\(^{47}\)Schrenk, _TDNT_, 3:260.

the phrase 'my holy hill.' These correspond to the Septuagint [LXX] "royal priesthood" and the Vulgate "priestly kingdom" respectively. Scott proposes that in the structure of the statement, each phrase has a noun defined by another word or phrase following: "possession" is defined by "from all the peoples," "kingdom" by "priests," and "nation" by "holy." Thus the only possibilities for are "kingdom of priests" or "priestly kingdom."51

Yet both of these are subject to varying interpretations. Scott suggests five:

(i) A kingdom composed of priests, all of whose citizens individually have the right of direct approach to God.
(ii) A kingdom possessing a legitimate priesthood [as opposed to the priesthoods of pagan nations].
(iii) A kingdom with a collective priestly responsibility on behalf of all peoples.
(iv) A kingdom ruled by priests.
(v) A kingdom set apart and possessing collectively, alone among all peoples, the right to approach the altar of Yahweh.52

The first two are rejected as ignoring the collective way Israel is being considered. The third is rejected for reasons we have cited above. "But there is no support whatever for it [Israel's mission as expressed in the servant songs of Isaiah] in the immediate context of Exod. xix 6, where what is emphasized is rather the separation of Israel from all other peoples."53 The fourth is rejected because it introduces

49 Scott, 215.

50 The translation of the LXX Greek is itself in doubt. An alternative will be suggested below.

51 Scott, 216.

52 Scott, 216-17.

53 Scott, 217. Emphasis added.
an idea (a hierocracy) not found in the parallel terms. Scott concludes that the fifth is correct:

Here ... "kingdom" is simply a synonym for "people" and "nation" . . . . The attributive idea "of priests" is to be understood in the light of the many references to the ritual sanctification of the priesthood . . . . לậm in the sense of "the sanctified" is thus a synonym of סֶמֶך. . . . The whole phrase, as recognized by Galling, simply designates Israel as worshippers of Yahweh, a positive counterpart of the idea of separation from the worship of other gods expressed in סּוֹדִי. 54

Scott's treatment is short but deep. Little fault can be found with this interpretation, except that he dismisses opposing arguments without sufficient refutation. Scott also fails to investigate fully the nature of priesthood which is being predicated of Israel. Yet his exegesis will serve as the measuring rod for all succeeding studies.

J. B. Bauer continued the debate with a radically different interpretation. 55 He intends to solve the dilemma with a "stilistischen Untersuchung." First, Bauer identifies לַמִּשְׁמָה as abstractum pro concreto, so that "kingship" can stand for "kings." By using this general term, he feels, the author hopes to strike a sonorous and impressive tone, but without unduly emphasizing individuals. 56 Secondly, Bauer questions whether לַמִּשְׁמָה is to be understood as truly in the construct state, as its form would indicate. For two reasons he

54 Scott, 218-19. The reference to Galling reads as follows: "'Priester' ist bei dieser Umschreibung des Bundes (in v. 5b und 6) nicht terminus technicus, sondern soll die Negation von 6b (heilig=abgeschlossen gegen den Fremdkult) positiv vorwegnehmen und bezeichnet die Israeliten damit als Verehrer Jahwes." Galling, 27.

55 J. B. Bauer, "Könige und Priester, ein heiliges Volk (Ex 19,6)," Biblische Zeitschrift n.f. 2 (1958): 283-86.

56 Here Bauer is following Ed. König, Stilistik, Rhetorik, Poetik (Leipzig: n.p, 1900).
suggests that it may be taken as an absolute: (1) there is a very ancient alternate reading which replaces טֵבְּרַיִם with טָבְּרַיִם; (2) nouns of segholate form appear frequently in the construct state, and in certain cases should be taken as absolute.\textsuperscript{57} Bauer cites three instances where two nouns connected by construct can be taken as absolutes with a pause between.\textsuperscript{58}

Bauer then summarizes the results of his "stylistic investigation" which will apply to Ex. 19:6.

Wir finden eine Teilung in parallele Hälften, mit einem sinngemäß ähnlichen Inhalt; jede der beiden Hälften besteht selbst wieder aus zwei Teilen, nämlich zwei Worten, aber mit dem Unterschied, daß einer gewissen Variatio zuliebe auf der einen Hälfte zwei asyndetische Substantiv steht, dem eine Apposition an die Seite tritt, sei es in Form eines Adjektivs, sei es in Form einer Genitivkonstruktion.\textsuperscript{59}

Exactly this "AB ab" form he finds in Prov. 5:19, Zech. 1:13,\textsuperscript{60} and Ex. 19:6. The content of each half is similar, but the first half consists of two substantives in asyndeton, and the second consists of a


\textsuperscript{58}(1) Ps. 68:17 - פְּרָיִם פִּינְגוֹי he renders "mountains, that is, peaks," instead of "mountains of [many] peaks"; (2) Zech. 1:13 - כְּרֵעֲי נַגְפָּה כְּרֵעֲי מָנוֹלָה he renders, "good words; words, namely [und zwar], comfort"; (3) Prov. 5:19 - for נְצֵרָא בָּעָבָר אֻנִּיר he suggests "a hind, [nothing short of] the joy of love [itself], and a doe of grace" rather than the usual "loving hind and graceful doe." In each case he suggests there is asyndeton which must be resolved with a phrase like "und zwar, geradezu," "that is, namely, in fact."

\textsuperscript{59}Bauer, 285.

\textsuperscript{60}See footnote 58.
substantive qualified by an adjective, or a noun in the genitive. In Ex. 19:6, אֶתְנֶּנֶּן (A) corresponds to מַעְלֵי (a), and בֵּית (B) corresponds to סַגְרֵי (b). Since אֶתְנֶּנֶּן is taken as abstractum pro concreto, and parallel to מַעְלֵי, he concludes "daß das Gottesvolk als ganzes Träger königlicher Macht und Würde ist, der einzelne nur, insofern er zum ganzen Volk gehört." 61 "Priesthood" is similarly qualified by its parallel "holy." And just as "holy" qualifies "nation," "of priests" further describes the royal people: "das heißt nichts anderes, als daß diese Gemeinschaft eine Art Priesterwürde oder Priester eigenschaft an sich hat." 62

This "priestly dignity" describes the election of Israel and their call to true worship: "Hier und öfter liegt der Ton vielmehr auf der Erwählung Israels aus den Heiden, auf der Berufung zum wahren Kult: Der Heilige, der Priester, hat die engste Beziehung zum Kult." 63 Because the gods of the nations are nothing, Israel provides the only true worship, and acts as priests for the nations. Likewise, their kingship is exercised over the nations whom Yahweh subdues for Israel. Bauer ultimately agrees with Scott and Galling in seeing the "election" theme, and designation of Israel as worshipers of Yahweh. However, it seems

61 Bauer, 285.

62 Bauer, 285. He approves the explanation that such "priesthood" consists in these two thoughts: (1) just as priests stand nearer to the deity than the people, so the Israelites stand nearer to Yahweh than the nations; (2) just as priests observe a higher morality and piety, the Israelites are to distinguish themselves by observing the commandments and thereby making themselves into a "holy nation." One can see how the latter turns a blessing into an obligation, and contradicts the "election" theme which Bauer himself asserts. Fortunately, Bauer concedes that this is not the major accent.

63 Bauer, 285-86.
that his last statements go too far in insisting that this priesthood is
to be exercised towards the nations. Being "worshipers" of Yahweh, and
administering his liturgy for others are two different things. In
addition, Bauer's proposal concerning מְסִמְרוֹת simply seems too subjective
and farfetched. That in three passages a construct could be understood
as an absolute, does not prove that it must be so. His "stylistic"
discovery is far from proved. The only factor which makes his argument
worthy of consideration is that it agrees with the renderings of some
ancient versions (see below). However, even there it is not certain
that they are faithful to the Masoretic text; perhaps the translation
"kings and priests" was intended to be a paraphrase. Bauer's
contribution lies in underlining the parallelism between מְסִמְרוֹת and
מְרֹת, and in accenting the themes of election and worship.

Hans Wildberger, who was cited earlier for his "election
proclamation" theory, has his own intriguing interpretation of the
 stm. He focuses his investigation on stm, challenging the
general interpretations of Scott ("a kingdom set apart like a
priesthood") and Galling ("Verehrer Jahwes").

Aber man möchte gern wissen, unter welchem Aspekt hier von Priestern
gesprochen wird, die Gleichsetzung mit "Jahweverehren" ist zu
allgemein, und auch der Gedanke der Separation von der Verehrung
anderer Götter genügt zur Erklärung für die Verwendung gerade dieses
Wortes nicht.

Wildberger explains stm with reference to other passages in which it
does not hold its usual sense. It is used of David's sons (2 Sam. 8:18;
cf. 1 Chr. 18:17), and of a "confidant to the king" (1 Kings 4:5; 2

64 Wildberger, 81.
In these instances it is a "Bezeichnung einer hohen Beamtenwürde," referring to "ein profanes Hofamt," that is, a person in immediate service to the king. So he concludes that יִשְׂרָאֵל in this passage means "dass Israel in einem besonders ausgezeichneten Verhältnis der Gemeinschaft und der Vertrautheit mit Gott steht." Furthermore, the parallelism with יִשְׂרָאֵל suggests that "priesthood" also means being drawn into the sphere of divine holiness.

Returning to the first noun of the pair, יִשְׂרָאֵל, Wildberger rejects the "abstract" meaning of "Herrschermacht" or "Regierungsgewalt" which would designate Israel as "kings," because Yahweh is their king. Rather, since in Ps. 114:2 Israel is designated Yahweh's "(territory of) rule," he takes יִשְׂרָאֵל as "Herrschaftsbereich." He concludes:

Israel als יִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל für Jahwe ist also der Bereich, in dem Jahwe als König herrscht und zwar über ein Volk, dessen Glieder allesamt mit ihm in vertrautom Umgang leben, wie das sonst nur bei Priestern der Fall ist.

He explains that it is not surprising that this designation of Israel quickly fell out of common use, for once the Temple stood, the looser use of יִשְׂרָאֵל was no longer understood.

Wildberger makes many strong contributions. First, he asserts that יִשְׂרָאֵל must not be restricted to the one meaning of "sacral priest." He insists that one must investigate which aspect of יִשְׂרָאֵל is being

---

65 Wildberger, 81.
66 Wildberger, 82. Original is italicized.
67 Wildberger, 82-83. Original is italicized.
applied to Israel. Secondly, he concludes that this "priesthood" describes a special relationship with God, not with other nations. Thirdly, he gives strong support to the translation of הַמִּלְתָּן as "kingdom (people who are ruled)." On the other hand, he is inconsistent in explaining מִלְתָּן as a profane office, or confidant to the king, and then insisting that it refer also to "divine holiness." The parallelism with שֵׁרֵך would suggest that a comparison is being made with a sacral priesthood.

Walter Beyerlin introduces another variation on the theme of מִלְתָּן as "kingship." He refers to Phoenician inscriptions of the fifth-fourth centuries B.C. to illustrate מִלְתָּן. Here mlk is distinguished from mmlkt in that the former refers to the person, and the latter, the office of "king."

The abstract mmlkt, therefore, refers to the king's sphere of activity and his office as a permanent institution rather than any particular representative or holder of this office (cf. also 1 Sam. x. 18). The formula kl mmlkt wkl 'dm, which is used on several occasions in Phoenician inscriptions to describe or address the whole public en bloc, makes it clear that mmlkt is understood here as an organic component of a whole that is greater than the ruling body to which the inhabitants of the state concerned are subject and ally. . . . (This suggests that the phrase mmlkt khnim w'goy kdos in Exod. xix. 6 is also to be understood as a similar synthesis of two allied powers . . . . Thus, in Exod. xix. 6, by all the evidence Israel, the peculiar people of God, is described two ways: a holy nation (i.e. separated for Yahweh) with the kingly office and authority of priests at its head.

Beyerlin suggests that this description of Israel fits the time of "the

---

pre-monarchic sacral tribal confederacy of Israel" very well. An aristocracy of priests rules over an holy nation, although they remain subject to the will of Yahweh, the king who conducts the treaty.

If Beyerlin (and the many who agree with him) is correct, then there is no "universal" priesthood in Exodus 19 at all, but just the opposite: a ruling aristocracy of priests. Beyerlin's conclusions rest precariously upon the significance of his Phoenician parallels. It is questionable how relevant these are for at least three reasons: (1) they date to perhaps a millennium later than the Sinai covenant (if one accepts the ancient nature of Exodus 19);(2) the relevance of Phoenician for biblical Hebrew is debatable; and, (3) the usage of in the Old Testament does not seem to conform to this pattern (see below). Furthermore, there is a logical inconsistency. The priests are not "kings" to which could apply as a description of office, even assuming that they ruled. Beyerlin himself asserts that God is the king who creates the treaty. If there is any organism consisting of "kingship + people" it would be "Yahweh + Israel." Beyerlin, obviously, sees the priests as equivalent to the vassal kings in the Hittite suzerainty treaty; to do so, however, is to distance Yahweh from his people as some disinterested absentee landlord.

Beyerlin's view is presented much more forcefully and

---

69 Wildberger, 80 agrees that this passage is too early for Phoenician influence: "... wenn die Erwählungsproklamation von Ex. 19 in so frühe Zeit hinaufreicht, wie wir meinen annehmen zu sollen, kommt auch allfälliger phönizischer Einfluss nicht in Betracht."

70 Wildberger, 80 objects that the idea of a "Priesterherrschaft" might be proclaimed towards the end of Old Testament history, but that it is inappropriate for pre-monarchical times.
convincingly by William Moran. Moran surveys all the writers above and rejects each one. The objection most significant to his argument is that the genitival בֵּית קָדוֹשׁ "of priests" cannot be adjectival (describing the "kingdom" as "priestly") because of the plural form. On the other hand he finds no grammatical difficulties in referring בֵּית קָדוֹשׁ only to a portion of Israel, even though this produces contextual problems. The rest of his study is devoted to a re-examination of Caspari's thesis that מֶלֶךְ means "king, royalty." He cites 1 Kings 10:20, where a throne was made like that made for no other מֶלֶךְ "king, royal office." The throne of the מֶלֶךְ appears again in Jer. 1:15. In addition he cites numerous passages where he claims מֶלֶךְ means "king" according to the context (2 Chr. 9:21; 12:8; Is. 47:5; Jer. 25:26; Ps. 79:6; 102:23; 135:11). He admits the difficulties involved: "In some examples, therefore, the meaning 'king' seems virtually certain; in others, if not necessary, it removes certain inconcinnities. In a given case one may hesitate."

Next he cites instances where מֶלֶךְ occurs together with נַב, so that the former means "king." Israel is called נַב instead of מֶלֶךְ.

---


72 Moran, 9 - yet he gives no support for this contention.


74 Following Albright here, he cites also Amos 7:13; Ps. 68:33; Lam. 2:2. In all three cases "king" and "kingdom" are equally possible.

75 Moran, 13.
precisely because it is paired with "hebrew_text". This he supports with reference to 1 Kings 18:10; 2 Chr. 32:15; Is. 60:11; Jer. 18:7-8; 27:7-8. In each case the "hebrew_text" and "hebrew_text" together constitute one nation, yet are distinct; in each "hebrew_text" refers to people not territory.

"Re-examined in the light of 1 Kings 18:10 the remaining passages in which "hebrew_text" (haggoy wehammamlaka) occurs, all in prose, acquire new meaning." Other passages, in which "hebrew_text" and "hebrew_text" appear parallel but not joined by "hebrew_text", are "inconclusive," and throw a wrench into Moran's works. In fact, he even cites examples where "hebrew_text" and "hebrew_text" are "simply synonyms," though many of these are poetic passages. "In prose passages, however, which are of greater relevance for the interpretation of Ex 19,6, mamlaka and goy seem to stand in the relation of ruler and ruled." Against the objection that this does not fit the context of Exodus 19, he argues in a circle: "hebrew_text" and "hebrew_text" cannot be synonymous because "hebrew_text" refers to those who are not priests!

Like Beyerlin, Moran finds this description of Israel—a nation led by priests—as most suitable to the pre-monarchical period. Israel is like the nations in consisting of "hebrew_text" and "hebrew_text", yet different in that each part is consecrated to God ("priests" and "holy"). Thus "hebrew_text"

76 See Cody below who postulates this theory in greater detail.
77 Moran, 15.
78 Moran, 16. In these passages, neither "kingdom" nor "king" causes a problem to the sense.
79 Moran, 16-17. He cites Ps. 105:13 (1 Chr. 16:20); Ex. 29:13ff. [sic]; Ps. 79:6 (cf. Jer. 10:25).
80 Moran, 17.
and emphasize Israel’s relationship to God as "personal possession." Though the priests have political power, he insists, this is not the emphasis. Although there is room for others to hold political power (such as the judges), the priests are singled out because of the dependence of Ex. 19:3-8 on the cult. "House of Jacob" (19:3) is an ancient cultic term, dating back to the days of the "amphictyony," which supports the designation of Ex. 19:3-8 as an independent tradition from that time. In this cultic setting, Moran finds it appropriate to single out the priests as possessors of the

Gathered at the central sanctuary, not only is Israel visibly a holy nation, but in these circumstances the role of the priests is especially prominent. In fact, it may be called royal, in so far as ancient Near Eastern royalty was sacral and had a cultic function. This kingship, however, which is not like that of "all the nations," witnesses to the fact that this royalty of priests, like the holy nation, belongs and is subordinate to Israel’s invisible king. 81

Moran’s thesis seems open to the very objection which he raises against Scott’s explanation. "It is that v.6, like 5b, is a blessing, a reward for obedience to the covenant (v.5a), and so must by implication at least promise more than that, if Israel remains faithful to Yahweh, it will be his worshippers." 82 In what way is Moran’s proposal superior? Is it a blessing to say that Israel will be a nation led in the cult by priests any more than to say that as a whole they are worshipers of Yahweh? Moran is correct—here Yahweh is blessing his people—but Moran does not describe an appropriate blessing. Furthermore, in his

81 Moran, 20.
82 Moran, 9.
discussion of נּוֹמֶל, Moran does no more than demonstrate that it can refer to the king or royal office in some contexts, and that the phrase נּוֹמֶל more than likely describes the two parts of the nation. Yet this is not the phrase found in Ex. 19:6; instead it seems to fit his category of passages in which נּוֹמֶל is synonymous with מי! Moran himself demonstrates the beautiful prose style of the pericope, including a genuine parallelismus membrorum.

Why then does he refuse to allow נּוֹמֶל to be parallel with מי simply on the grounds that this is prose, not poetry? On the positive side, Moran supports the thesis that Israel is described as a whole, and in relation to Yahweh rather than to other nations.

83 Moran, 19.

84 Childs, 374 agrees that Moran’s conclusions concerning נּוֹמֶל do not apply to this passage: "Moran has established the probability of mamleket occasionally carrying the meaning of ‘king’, although some of his examples are hardly convincing (II Chron. 32.15). However, the parallelism of the three Hebrew terms speaks against seeing an expression of totality in only the last two. Moreover, his actual interpretation of the priestly role appears to me most unlikely in the context of Ex. 19 and conflicts with the theology of the chapter as a whole." Further objections are raised by John H. Elliott, The Elect and the Holy (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), 54 n.1: "(1) Does not the par. memb. of Ex. 19:3b-6 which Moran himself has so carefully described (p.19) allow, if not encourage, that נּוֹמֶל and מי be seen as synonymous parallel members? (2) In the determination of the meaning of נּוֹמֶל, the context of the covenantal formulation ought not be overlooked. When a covenant is ‘cut,’ is it not usual that the initiator of the covenant proclaims his kingship over the second party (or the 'ruledness' [= 'Kingdom'] of the second party) rather than that the kingship or royalty of the vassal be announced? ... (3) Is there not too little evidence concerning the nature of the ancient Israelite amphictyonic league and its priesthood to demonstrate that 'the role of the priests is especially prominent' (p. 20)?"
Georg Fohrer seems to repeat and expand the Moran-Caspari line. He agrees that ḫṣ and ḫ designate respectively "Herrscherscher" and "Beherrschten." He supplements Moran with a list of passages in which ḫ occurs together with יִנְדֶ "king" (Gen. 17:6; 35:11; Ezek. 37:22; Hag. 2:22; Ps. 46:7). He notes that these passages, as well as most cited by Moran, are relatively late in the evolutionary scheme (those in Genesis are from "P"). This accords with the existence of so many extra-biblical inscriptions from later times in which יִנְדֶ means "prince, king." Therefore, יִנְדֶ cannot be parallel to יִנְדֶ in sense and content, but only in syntax. He notes the inconsistency in using יִנְדֶ "kingship, kings" for literal "priests" who could not really be called "kings"—thus he parts with Moran. "Wie die Nation heilig sein wird, so seine māmlakā, d.h. sein Königtum bzw. sein König, priesterlich." The genitive "of priests" functions epexegetically where Hebrew lacks an appropriate adjective "priestly." Therefore, Ex. 19:6 promises that Yahweh will create a holy, consecrated nation, with a priestly king. Yahweh will provide a ruler who is "heilig in gesteigerter Weise und in hervorragendem Maße." Such a promise suits exilic times, he postulates, when the priestly code was formulated, and when Ezekiel pejoratively labelled the wayward king נֶבֶל "petty king,

---


86 Fohrer, 360.

87 Fohrer, 361. Moran did not delve into these parallels.

88 Fohrer, 361.

89 Fohrer, 362.
Fohrer's study is a mixed blessing. Though supporting Moran, he actually demonstrates the flaws in Moran's argument. He demonstrates that syntactically בְּנִי הָאָרֶץ must modify מֶלֶךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל in the same way that מֶלֶךְ modifies "נֶֽאֶר. Therefore, if מֶלֶךְ means "king," then one must translate "priestly king," not "royalty of priests" as Moran contends. In the evolutionary scheme, Fohrer has certainly found a more suitable Sitz im Leben, for מֶלֶךְ as "king" would be wholly inappropriate in the pre-monarchical setting, which Moran proposes. Thus, if Ex. 19:3-8 actually belongs in the Sinai setting as it claims, then מֶלֶךְ cannot mean "king"! Furthermore, one need only demonstrate that מֶלֶךְ means "kingdom" and the rest of Fohrer's analysis stands, producing the translation "priestly kingdom." Fohrer has demonstrated that מֶלֶךְ can only mean "king" in an evolutionary scheme, and at a late date in the same.

One final author argued extensively that מֶלֶךְ and נֶֽאֶר belong together as king and people. Aelred Cody attempted to produce a key to when Israel is designated נֶֽאֶר instead of מֶלֶךְ. The problem is that the Old Testament writers usually reserve נֶֽאֶר for heathen peoples. He finds seven contexts where Israel is termed נֶֽאֶר: (1) in a generalization applicable to all nations equally; (2) of Israel growing up into the

---

90 It seems that Fohrer's ultimate purpose is not to shed light on the meaning of the מֶלֶךְ נֶֽאֶר, but to solve the source problem! His final conclusion is that the passage shows deuteronomistic influence, and fits the traditions of the holiness code. See Fohrer, 362.

status of a nation; (3) in the context of taking possession of the land; (4) on the lips of foreigners; (5) in words of rejection by God; (6) in order to make a parallel with בּוּ; (7) in parallel with a word expressing rule or sovereignty. The first five are united in that they all consider Israel as one of the בּוּ of the earth. Cody places Ex. 19:6 into the seventh category: "גּוֹי and המלך belong together naturally as two complements constituting a unity which possesses a land and which, established on that land, enters as a sovereign nation into relations with the world at large." The last point derives from his contention that בּוּ is linked with territory, government, and foreign relations, while בּוּ speaks of internal relations and the relation of the chosen people to God.

Cody's analysis is helpful in demonstrating that Israel is not only termed a בּוּ when ממלכה also appears. Unfortunately, Cody fails to see that his first three categories are just as applicable to Ex. 19:6 as his last! Could not Israel be designated בּוּ here because of the transitional nature of its relationship with God at this point? In the very context of the Sinai covenant Israel is moved from being one of the בּוּ to being God's chosen בּוֹ. The uniqueness of Israel is predicated via the modifiers of בּוּ, rather than by the more pregnant term בּוּ alone. Secondly, Israel is still "growing into a nation" like the others, and is just about to take possession of the land. Perhaps Israel is called a בּוּ because they were in themselves no different than

---

92 Cody, 1-2.
93 Cody, 3-4.
any other nation until God chose them. Hereafter, as Deuteronomy indicates, they may be called קַנְצָה by virtue of this election. Cody apparently fails to see this possibility because he does not accept that the pericope belongs in the historical context which Exodus provides.\footnote{In Aelred Cody, \textit{A History of the Old Testament Priesthood} (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), 178, Cody combines Moran and Fohrer to place Ex. 19:6 into post-exilic times: "In a certain modified but nevertheless quite real sense he [the high priest] had become to the restored Jewish community what the kings had been to the pre-exilic community. It may well be that it is just this situation, elevated to the level of ideals, that is reflected in Exod. 19:6's "words of God addressed to the people ... . If so, \textit{mamleket kohanim} in this text means a nation whose rulers are priests."}

Finally, at the risk of generalizing about "Jewish interpretation," we must consider a few examples from Jewish authors.\footnote{See Elliott, 102-7 for a survey of the Rabbinic literature.} The unifying factor among these writers seems to be the failure to comprehend any figurative or looser usage of קָנְצָה. Either they follow the Moran line and see a hierocracy of priests ruling over the holy nation, or they see an egalitarian destruction of class structures which proclaims every man a priest. For example:

While vs. 5 was addressed to the people in general, this [v. 6] was the message to the spiritual élite . . . . Vs. 5 was for all the people, while this refers perhaps to Moses and Aaron: Aaron was to receive the priesthood, and Moses and his heirs royal sovereignty, whereas their tribe, the Levites, would be a 'holy nation'.\footnote{\textit{Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation}, 61.}

On the other side: "Before they made the Golden Calf all Israelites were fit to eat of the sacred food. But when they made the Calf this privilege was taken from them and given to the kohanim (priests)."\footnote{\textit{Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation}, 62.} The
"mission to the nations" view is also represented: "All the peoples are regarded here as one nation, among whom you will be like kohanim, assigned to God's service and mankind's spiritual education." There is even a version of Übertragungstheorie, in which the high priest functions at the altar because all the Israelites could not sacrifice at once for practical reasons.

The conception of an unreconcilable dichotomy between universal priesthood and Aaronic priesthood characterizes modern Jewish exegesis similarly. Daniel Schwartz argues that "universal priesthood" contradicts "the usual biblical norm of priesthood limited to those of a particular (Aaronite) descent." His definition of קֹדֶשׁ is made too narrow by including the component of "Aaronic" in all uses: "For everywhere, or almost everywhere, in the Hebrew Bible, priests are Aaronite priests." Therefore, all the people cannot be called

---


99 Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation, 64. Philo argues that at Passover the individual Israelite gets to exercise his true priestly character by slaughtering his own animal. See TDNT, 3:248.

100 The opposing interpretations appear in Sarna and Even-Shoshan. In his concordance (p. 674), Even-Shoshan categorizes Ex. 19:6 as a passage in which קֹדֶשׁ means "kingship, rule of a king". On the other hand, Sarna, JPS Torah Commentary, 104, comments: ". . . the priest's place and function within society must serve as the ideal model for Israel's self-understanding of its role among the nations. The priest is set apart by a distinctive way of life consecrated to the service of God and dedicated to ministering to the needs of the people."


102 Schwartz, 529.
"priests." He follows the familiar line of argument, limiting נְדִי to a ruling class of priests. He clearly demonstrates the opinion that נְדִי can never be figurative.\(^{103}\) Such universal spiritualizing interpretations could only arise after the Temple was destroyed and the Jews needed to function without an Aaronic priesthood. Christianity is the ultimate radically-Hellenized form of Judaism, in which 1 Peter 2 could proclaim such a spiritualized priesthood.\(^{104}\) This interpretation needs little refutation. One need simply note that proclaiming all Israel a "priestly kingdom" does not preclude the operation of the Aaronite priesthood, for the former expression is merely a figure of speech, a metaphor.

**םְדִי in the Ancient Versions**

The preceding discussion of modern studies equips us to understand the variety of readings extant in the ancient versions. The wide range of opinion which has been demonstrated above is also present in these versions. Two points will soon become apparent: (1) the chronological and cultural proximity of ancient times did not guarantee a uniform interpretation of the text; (2) the ancient versions were as much interpretative paraphrases as literal "translations" of the text. One cannot always be certain that a version intended to be translating word for word—perhaps it meant to offer only the sense of the passage,

\(^{103}\) Since נְדִי in Hebrew has no etymological connection with "holiness," he argues that there can be no figurative use. Whereas in Greek ἱερεύς "priest" is derived from ἱερός "holy," leaving room for a "spiritualizing" interpretation. Schwartz, 531.

\(^{104}\) Schwartz, 532.
influenced by a new setting, culture and experience. In other words, the rendering by an ancient version of the Masoretic Text [MT] into another language does not necessarily prove that the Hebrew text itself can be understood that way by the normal rules of grammar. The nature of the new language, or the ideology of the translator may have had more influence on the version than the Hebrew original.

The Septuagint [LXX] renders Ex. 19:6a in this way: \( \text{σωσόθε μοι βασιλείου ἱεράτευμα καὶ ἐθνος ἄγιον.} \) A comparison with the MT readily shows that this follows the Hebrew word for word, except in its translation of the pertinent phrase, מֶלֶךְ הַנְּחָיָה. Though corresponding in word order, the couplet βασιλείου ἱεράτευμα seems to reverse the function of the words.105 Traditionally, βασιλείου is taken as the adjective "royal," modifying the ἱεράτευμα "body of priests." In this case, the relationship is the opposite of the Hebrew, in which "of priests (=priestly)" modifies "kingdom." If, however, מֶלֶךְ הַנְּחָיָה could mean "kingship, royalty of priests," then "a royal priesthood" would be a reasonably accurate translation. Does the Septuagint, therefore, support this understanding of the Hebrew text?

Unfortunately, the Greek text itself is not that clear. While it seems natural to take the Greek as a "literary chiasm," adjective - noun || noun - adjective, "the close correspondence of the Greek version to the Hebrew original argues that such a chiasmus was not intended but

---

105 The present discussion of βασιλείου ἱεράτευμα will confine itself to the relevance of this Septuagintal construction for our understanding of the Hebrew original. The particular theological significance of each Greek term will be taken up below in connection with 1 Pet. 2:5. In that setting, of course, βασιλείου ἱεράτευμα is in the original text, as Peter quotes the Septuagint.
rather that this term was intended as the Greek equivalent for יושבב. For βασιλεία also serves as a noun meaning "kingdom" or "royal residence." If this is the case then the parallelism of the Hebrew original (noun - modifier || noun - modifier) has been lost. Instead we have two independent nouns ("kingdom, priesthood") joined to a third modified by an adjective ("holy nation"). Of the twenty-seven occurrences of βασιλεία in the LXX outside of this passage (and its parallel in Ex. 23:22 [LXX only]), only two are well-attested adjectival uses (Sap. 18:15; 4 Macc. 3:8). One can almost certainly claim, therefore, that βασιλεία is to be taken here as a noun. 107

In what way could this translation reflect the environment of the Jewish diaspora in Alexandria? Certainly "a kingdom, a priesthood" is not totally unfaithful to the MT; yet by striking doubly with these two nouns it presses for a stronger identity within the diaspora community. The absolute noun "priesthood" is far stronger than the adjectival use of מנהיג as "priestly." "As the holy People of God, Israel was thought to have a priestly obligation toward her environment; namely that of remaining holy and faithful to the one true God." 108 Instead of the one collective term יושבב, the LXX offers two: βασιλεία "kingdom" and ἱεράτευμα "body of priests." The repetition of the phrase in Ex. 23:22 without correspondence to the MT suggests that this phrase held particular significance for the Alexandrian community of the

106 Elliott, 63.

107 See Elliott, 70–73. The problem will be taken up in greater detail below in connection with 1 Pet. 2:9.

108 Elliott, 74.
translators. The diaspora conditions provided such intimate interaction with heathen peoples that the Jewish community needed to stress its unique corporate identity.

The Aramaic Targums offer corroborative evidence that βασίλειον ἱεράτευμα is to be taken as consisting of two independent nouns. Yet their translations vary greatly in meaning from the LXX.109 Targum Onkelos reads:

אך מזון קָמַה מַלְכִּים וַתְּרִים

Not only are the relevant nouns clearly independent, in the absolute state, but the abstractملכין has been replaced by the concrete "kings." The Palestinian Targum reads the same (except that it replaces לֵשם and עָמָה with קָמַה). Targum Pseudo-Jonathan embellishes this with "kings wearing the crown and officiating priests" (מלכין ותְּרִים וָכִלָּא וְנַוכְּנִים). Its characteristic midrashic comments leave no room for a figurative interpretation. Finally, Elliott notes a recently discovered Aramaic version, Codex Neofiti I, which may be "the most ancient redaction of the Aramaic versions of the Pentateuch."110 It renders the relevant phrase with מלכין ותְּרִים וָכִלָּא וְנַוכְּנִים. The significant difference is the conjunction ו which makes explicit the independent nature of the nouns "kings and priests," whereas the later Targums read "kings, [and] priests."

The commonalities of the Targum translations can be summarized thus: (1) all four read "priests" like the MT, as opposed to the LXX

109 The following Targum references are taken from Elliott, 76-78.

110 Translated from the Latin quote in Elliott, 77.
"priesthood, body of priests"; (2) all four read "kings" instead of the MT and LXX "kingdom"; (3) all four modify the construct state of the MT to produce two distinct nouns; (4) all four replace the MT יָה with קְנֵי or the Aramaic equivalent קְנֵי. It is possible to understand the first three modifications in the same way we have approached the LXX: they make an even stronger statement about the people in the diaspora, that even more than the LXX "a kingdom, a priesthood," they are "kings and priests." Such an explanation would have the Targums running against the collective meaning of the MT's "kingdom." It also does not explain why the Palestinian Targum reads this way.

The comments of Targum Jonathan suggest a more likely purpose. "Kings and priests" was not seen as applying to the people, but as referring to the official classes. "Was a tripartite division of the folk implied, i.e. a folk composed of kings, priests, and a remaining holy nation?" This seems most likely. It could be seen two ways: either as a description of the current state of the nation, or as an eschatological promise for the restoration of the true Israelite nation with a legitimate king and priesthood. Thus it is likely that the Targumic reading "kings" is not support for the contention that יָהוּ means "kingship, royalty," because (1) contemporary circumstances and hopes probably influenced the translation, and (2) these "kings" are conceived of as distinct from the priests. The modification of יָה to קְנֵי is a logical one, since they might have felt יָה was not the proper

111 These observations are a modification of Elliott, 77.

112 Elliott, 78.
term for Israel. The fact that they did not find נֶפֶל incompatible with נֶפֶל argues against those who suggest נֶפֶל and נֶפֶל go together as king and people.\(^{113}\)

The Septuagint and Targums illustrate sufficiently the tension between simple translation and the influence of ideologies. The same factors have produced the following variety of versions:

- Aquila: "kingdom of priests" (βασιλεία ιερέων)
- Symmachus and Theodotion: "kingdom, priests" (βασιλεία ιερείς)
- Syrohexapla: "kingdom, priests"
- Peshitta: "kingdom and priests"
- Sahidic and Armenian: "kingdom and priesthood"
- Bohairic: "holy kingdom"
- Old Latin: "most holy kingdom" (regnüm sacratissimum)
- Vulgate: "priestly kingdom" (regnüm sacerdotalis)\(^{114}\)

While the translation "kingdom of priests" or "priestly kingdom" is not unrepresented, the tradition of separating the terms into two independent nouns seems to predominate. This trend continues in apocryphal, pseudepigraphical, and other allusions to the phrase from Exodus:

- Jubilees 16:18 - "a kingdom and priests and a holy nation"
- Jubilees 33:20 - "a priestly and royal nation for possession"\(^{115}\)

\(^{113}\)Elliott, 77 misses this significance, for he sees the substitution of נֶפֶל merely as a reflection of the milieu of the "Deuteronomist."

\(^{114}\)See Elliott, 78 n.1; and Schrenk, TDNT, 3:249. The readings of Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion cited in the text are confirmed by F. Field, ed., Origenis Hexeplorum, 2 vols. (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1964 repr.), 1:114. Schrenk’s listing is confusing and seems to be in error. For Symmachus and Theodotion he gives the reading of Aquila, βασιλεία ιερέων. For Aquila he gives only a Latin translation regnum sacerdotum instead of the Greek original. Likewise, he cites the Syrohexapla in Latin regnum sacerdotes, and the Syriac Peshitta in Greek, βασιλεία καὶ ιερείς!

\(^{115}\)This text is extant only in Ethiopic, which apparently is based on a Greek translation of the Hebrew original. See Elliott, 79 n.1.
2 Macc. 2:17 - "It is God who saved his whole people and has given back to all of them the inheritance and the kingdom [τὸ βασιλείον] and the priesthood [τὸ ἱεράτευμα] and the holiness [τὸ ἅγιασμὸν]."

Philo (De Sobrietate 66) - βασίλειον καὶ ἱεράτευμα θεοῦ "God's royal residence and body of priests".117
Philo (De Abrahamo 56) - βασίλειον καὶ ἱεράτευμα καὶ ἀθνὸς ἅγιον "royal residence and body of priests and holy nation."118

These allusions to Ex. 19:6 are significant in that they demonstrate that the pertinent terms were seen as titles of honor placed on Israel—a blessing not an obligation. This, of course, is apparent more from the context of each than from the brief quotation given above.

Both these versions and allusions make it virtually conclusive that the LXX βασίλειον ἱεράτευμα is to be taken as two independent nouns, "kingdom/royal residence, body of priests." First, this suggests that the LXX understood πατρίδα as "kingdom, royal domain," rather than "royalty" which βασίλειον as an adjective "royal" would suggest. Secondly, it lends great support to the contention of chapter two of this thesis that in 1 Peter 2 also βασίλειον should be taken as a noun. The arguments relevant to that context will be reviewed at the appropriate time.

The Old Testament Usage of קפעל

We must, finally, conclude this discussion of the קפעל by pursuing the meaning of קפעל in the Old Testament, in order to investigate in detail the claim that קפעל must mean "kingship" in Ex.

---

116 The context is the Feast of Purification of the Temple.

117 In context, Philo understands Israel as the βασίλειον the "royal residence" where Yahweh the King dwells. Elliott, 97.

118 These allusions are drawn from Elliott, 78-101.
19:6. The key may in fact lie in the distinction between the four abstract nouns derived from the root יס, as described by K. Seybold.119

(1) יספ: This noun is related most closely to the verb יס "to rule." It refers to the function of ruling, therefore "das Königsamt, die Königswürde, die 'Stellung als König' . . . , das Königsein, das königliche Handeln, das Regieren im allgemeinen."120 It is used in the context of a king's name, or the paraphernalia associated with kingship: throne, palace, insignia, capital city. It can also be used of the kingship of Yahweh. It is the most abstract of these four, designating in general the matters to do with kingship and ruling.

(2) יסח: Verbal derivations of this form usually refer to an action and its result, place, manner and means of procedure, and ultimately the Werkzeug "instrument" of the action. Thus יסח designates "das funktionale System 'Königtum' nach den genannten Aspekten als Herrschaft, Residenz und Regierung, Machtapparat, kurz: als Institution zum Ausdruck zu bringen."121 Therefore it appears as the most usual expression for "die monarchische Staatsform ('Königreich')." Quite naturally, then, יסח is able to designate the king (as abstractum pro concreto), his dignity and power of ruling, and the sphere in and over which he operates ("kingdom"). In this way it is broader than the previous term. When used of a people or territory, it


120Seybold, TWAT, 4:940.

121Seybold, TWAT, 4:941.
always emphasizes the role of the institution of kingship.

(3) המלך: This term developed under Aramaic and middle Hebrew influence, and in later writings supplanted המלך almost entirely. Seybold suggests that the sharper sound made it the preferred designation for an institution dominated by foreign powers. "Die Bedeutung ist von der von mamākāh nicht zu unterscheiden: 'Königreich' (als Rahmen begriff)." 122

(4) המלך: Appearing only nine times, this appears to be a mixed form of the previous two nouns. Seybold will not rule out the possibility that it is to be attributed to the Masoretes, perhaps as an uncorrected קסיב form. In sense it is no different from the previous two. 123

Thus the four abstract noun forms fall into two basic categories: המלך stressing the function of kingly rule, and the other three nouns referring to the institution of a monarchical state. If in Ex. 19:6 the act of ruling were intended, perhaps המלך would be less ambiguous than המלך. Yet a more comprehensive examination of המלך is required.

One cannot deny that המלך is, in fact, used to refer to both aspects of the institution of the monarchical state: kingship and kingdom (as both a territory and a people). Of its 117 appearances in the Old Testament, Even-Shoshan’s concordance assigns the meaning "royal power, rule" to 41 and the meaning "kingdom" to 76. 124 While one could

---

122 Seybold, TWAT, 4:942.
123 Seybold, TWAT, 4:942.
124 Even-Shoshan, 674. Specifically, the meanings he gives are (1) המלך "kingship, reign of a king"; and
debate the assignment of individual passages, his is a fair assessment. However, only a small number of these mean unambiguously “royal power, rule.” In most of these the כֶּסֶף is mentioned in connection with the name of the ruler, as his possession. For example, “Yahweh the God of Israel gave the kingship over [לְךָ] Israel to David” (2 Chr. 13:5). When כֶּסֶף is used as the genitive of a construct chain it appears to function as the adjective “royal, pertaining to the king/reign”: “they set the king upon the royal throne [כֵּסֶף כָּכָם]” (2 Chr. 23:20).

There are far more passages in which כֶּסֶף according to context must refer to the territory or people ruled. Six times כֶּסֶף appears with יהוה and is clearly parallel to it, not complementary: “They wandered from nation to nation [לְמָזוֹן] and from [one] kingdom to another people [נָלַים]” (Ps. 105:13); “the nations [לְנָלַים] made

(2) אֶרֶץ הַמְּסָפָר וּדֹמֶן וְיוֹשֵׁבָם "the land of the king and the people who live in it.”

125 Cf. 1 Kings 9:5 “the throne of your kingship over [לְךָ] Israel.” It is also used of the “kingship” being placed upon someone: “just as the kingship was firmly upon him [Amaziah]” (2 Chr. 25:3); “to strengthen the rule in his [Pul of Assyria’s] hand” (2 Kings 15:19); see also 1 Sam. 24:21; 28:17; 1 Kings 2:46; 2 Kings 14:5; 2 Chr. 13:8; 17:5. It refers to the “reign” of Yahweh and of his chosen one: “yours is the kingship, O Yahweh” (1 Chr. 29:11); “the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah” (Jer. 27:1; 28:1); “your [David’s] kingship shall endure before me forever” (2 Sam. 7:16). Saul’s “kingship,” however, was taken from him: 1 Sam. 13:13, 14. The “kingdom” did not end when Saul’s “reign” did.

126 Similarly: “Athaliah . . . destroyed all the royal offspring [לְלִפְתָּה]” (2 Kings 11:1 || 2 Chr. 22:10); “it is the king’s sanctuary and the royal temple [כֵּסֶף כָּכָם]” (Amos 7:13). See also Deut. 17:18; 2 Sam. 7:13.

127 Here כֶּסֶף is parallel to both יהוה and נלים, and is paired not with the former but the latter! 1 Chr. 16:20 is identical.
an uproar, the *kingdoms* tottered*" (Ps. 46:7);\(^{128}\) "I will show your
[Israel's] nakedness to the nations [מִרְמָה], and your disgrace to the
*kingdoms*" (Nah. 3:5); "it [Egypt] will be the lowest of the *kingdoms*,
and it will not raise itself up above the nations [מִרְמָה]" (Ezek. 29:15;
cf. v.14). Often it refers to territory captured by the sons of Israel,
or crossed on their journeys: "and the rest of Gilead, and all Bashan,
the *kingdom* of Og, I gave to the half tribe of Manasseh" (Deut. 3:13).\(^{129}\)
It is the domain which a king rules: "the *kingdom* was at peace under
him" (2 Chr. 14:4).\(^{130}\) Frequently "kingdoms" are compared with other
"kingdoms": "Babylon, the beauty of the *kingdoms*" (Is. 13:19).\(^{131}\) Most
significant are those in which Israel is compared with "all the kingdoms
of the earth."\(^{132}\) In most cases the people of the realm are meant as much
as the territory: "I will not tear away the whole *kingdom*, but I will
give one tribe to your son" (1 Kings 11:13). Many more passages could
be cited in these categories. The rest of the occurrences of נֵאוֹם make

---

\(^{128}\) See also Is. 13:4. An "uproar" is more appropriate to a crowd
of people like a "kingdom" than to a "royal power."

\(^{129}\) Similarly: "you gave to them [Israel at the time of the Exodus]
*kingdoms* and peoples [מִרְמָה]" (Neh. 9:22); "thus Yahweh will do to all
of the *kingdoms* over which you are about to cross" (Deut. 3:21). See
also Deut. 3:4,11 and Amos 8:2.

\(^{130}\) Likewise: "he [Hazor] was the chief of all these *kingdoms*"
(Jos. 11:10); "Solomon was ruling all these *kingdoms*" (1 Kings 5:1);
"you are God, you alone, of all the *kingdoms* of the earth" (2 Kings
19:15).

\(^{131}\) Likewise: "all the kings and all the *kingdoms* of the earth"
(Jer. 25:26); "the *kingdoms* of the idols [compared with Jerusalem and
Samaria]" (Is. 10:10).

\(^{132}\) Deut. 28:25; 2 Kings 19:19; Is. 23:17; 37;16,20; Jer. 15:4;
24:9; 29:18; 34:1,17.
perfect sense with either meaning, and thus must be left out of the argument.

The phrase מְכַלֶּ֑ה מְחַנֵּֽי in Ex. 19:6 demonstrates none of the characteristics determined above for passages in which מְכַלֶּ֑ה unambiguously means "rule." There is no reference to a king by name, nor the "hand" of his power. Nor does it appear here as a genitive describing some piece of the king’s paraphernalia as “royal.” On the other hand it fits marvelously with those passages in which מְכַלֶּ֑ה and even יִנְךֶ֑ה are used in parallel as synonyms. Since the term is addressed to Israel, it is only natural to assume that Israel is addressed as a "kingdom" (like other kingdoms) as in so many other passages. The characteristics of Ex. 19 which parallel those passages cited in the second category above are endless. Though such a word study cannot prove conclusively that מְכַלֶּ֑ה means "kingdom" in Ex. 19:6, it certainly demonstrates that the context is more like those in which "kingdom" is the required translation.

The Nature of the "Priestly" Metaphor - A Study of מְכַלֶּ֑ה

The parallelism of the phrase מְכַלֶּ֑ה מְחַנֵּֽי suggests that "kingdom" is modified by "of priests" in the same way that "nation" is modified by "holy" (see above). The genitive מְחַנֵּֽי functions as an adjective "priestly" where the Hebrew language lacks one. In the context of Exodus, God will soon institute the Aaronite priesthood as an office. Therefore, מְכַלֶּ֑ה applied to all the people Israel cannot

133 This further rules out understanding the LXX βασίλειον ἱεράτευμα as "royal priesthood," "priesthood in service to the king."
mean that all are "priests" or "priestly" in the literal sense of this office. "Priestly" is a figure of speech, a metaphor, by which certain components of meaning of the term "priest" are applied to Israel in order to describe the honor God bestows. In the nature of metaphors, not all components of meaning are applicable, otherwise it would be simple identity. In order to determine the significance of calling Israel "priestly" we must investigate which aspects of "priesthood" are being applied to Israel in the metaphor.

Thus we must investigate the meaning of קֹהֶן. Etymological studies have produced little consensus concerning the origin of the word. Roland de Vaux offers one suggestion:

The etymology of kohen is not known. It has been suggested that it is related to the Akkadian verb kanu, from the root k'n, which in the Shaphel, means "to bend down, to do homage." It is more common, though, to connect it with the root kwn meaning "to stand upright"; the priest would then be a man who stands before God (cf. Dt 110:8) like a servant. But all this is uncertain. Cody considers and rejects the significance of the Arabic cognate kāhin, for "[t]he Arabian kāhin was essentially a soothsayer" and did not sacrifice. The relationship may in fact be reversed: "The Arabic word itself may well be derived from a North-West Semitic language—if not

134 For example, when Jesus calls Herod "that fox" (Luke 13:32) he does not mean that Herod is literally that animal. One must determine which components of meaning of "fox" are intended by the metaphor. Is Jesus implying that Herod is short, with red hair and a long tail? More likely Jesus was referring to the characteristics of the fox which the ancients stressed: "base and wicked." See J. P. Louw, Semantics of New Testament Greek (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 55.


136 Cody, History, 15.
directly from Hebrew or another 'Canaanite' language, then perhaps through Aramaic—with a modification of its meaning ..."  

137 Cody hesitantly suggests another etymology, from the Syriac verb kahhen: "Is kōhen, together with its Ugaritic and Phoenician cognates, a word originally meaning something like 'one who brings abundance, well-being, prosperity,' ...?"  

138 This third possibility does not seem helpful for Exodus 19, though the first two fit well with the suggestion that the are "worshipers of Yahweh." These suggestions can only be accepted with great caution, however, since etymology is of little value for the meaning of a word as common as "priest."  

139 Further reserve must be held with respect to the relevance of comparative religions. "Caution must be used in employing ancient Near East material because of different cultural and sociological contexts existing throughout the ancient Near East."  

140 Yet, despite the truth of this for most of the Old Testament, Ex. 19:6 presents a unique problem: Israel was not yet a nation with a totally distinct culture, nor was the priesthood yet established as an office as it would be in Exodus 28! When the children of Israel heard the phrase , what image

137 Cody, History, 17-18.
138 Cody, History, 28.
139 Consider, for example, that the English word "priest" is not etymologically related to any ancient word for "priest," but instead to the Greek word ἐπίσκοπος "elder." ἐπίσκοπος was used for ministers in the Christian church, and as the ministry came to be understood in terms of sacrifice, "priest" and its modern cognates came to function as a designation for all sacrificial "priesthoods."

would arise in their minds? Surely not the Aaronite priesthood, for they had as yet not experienced it. What would be the source of their conception of "priesthood"?

An interesting problem is raised by the presence of "priests" among the camp of Israel while at the foot of Sinai. Ex. 19:22 refers to "the priests who come near to Yahweh" and 19:24 to "the priests and the people." Though critics simply dismiss this as an anachronism, it is very hard to imagine a "redactor" making such a blunder. Sarna proposes the explanation offered by the Jewish commentators, that the first-born sons functioned as priests among the Israelites until they were replaced by the Levites and Aaronite priests. Another suggestion is that it refers to the pater familias: "In the beginning men served at sacrifice as their own priests (Gen. 4:3; Job 1:5), but already in Noah's time priestly ministration had become the responsibility of the patriarchal family head (Gen 8:20; cf. Gen 12:8; Job 1:5; Ex 19:22, 24 in subsequent periods)." Ultimately, one can only conclude that among the Israelites were some who functioned as "priests" already, and who thought themselves fit to approach God at Sinai. With the institution of the Aaronite priesthood, this other "priesthood" ceased.

---

141 However, we will suggest below that Israel may have been intended to grow into a fuller understanding of her priesthood in light of the Aaronite priesthood which she would soon know better than any other.

142 See Cody, History, 52.

143 Sarna, JPS Torah Commentary, 110. For the redemption of the first-born see Ex. 13:1-2,13; 34:20; Num. 3:11-13; 8:16-18.

144 J. Barton Payne, "יִדְנָד" in TWOT, 1:431.
Thus one source of the priestly metaphor might have been those who functioned as priests already in the Israelite community: characterized by consecration to the Lord (Ex. 19:22), the ability to draw near to Yahweh (Ex. 19:22,24), and possibly the responsibility of sacrifice. But it is possible that the metaphor refers to a more general concept of "priesthood" which the Israelites would have shared with the ancient world. Perhaps the most significant illustration would be the character of "priesthood" in Egypt, where all the Israelites grew up.\textsuperscript{145} Leopold Sabourin describes this in his comparative study of priesthood.\textsuperscript{146}

In theory Pharaoh, as God-incarnate and the mediator between heaven and earth, performed all religious acts. In practice, the priests performed the rites and cared for the temples in his name. Most of the pantheon of gods were local gods, residing in manifold temples, staffed by a chief priest and many lower priests. Only priests of higher rank were permanently on duty, while the majority were "temporary personnel" divided into monthly shifts. Sabourin distinguishes two main categories of priests. (1) Those called \textit{Wab} "pure, clear" were bound to a special 'purity' as called to touch daily the divine statue or carry it in procession on the sacred ship." (2) Those called \textit{hry-\(\hat{h}\)b(t)} "holder of the ritual book" acted as "scribes" to write the books and "readers" to recite the liturgical hymns and conduct the sacred

\textsuperscript{145}Egyptian priests are mentioned in Gen. 47:22,26.

ceremonies.\textsuperscript{147} The office was usually hereditary, yet there was an "ordination" rite. "At Thebes, after the ritual bath in the sacred lake, the new priest was again sprinkled with water in the temple itself, and following this symbolic baptism his hands were anointed, which simply means that he was officially appointed to his office."\textsuperscript{148}

The obligations imposed on the priests are significant:

Being by office guardians of the divine Presence, the Egyptian priests had to safeguard the ritual purity of those who approach the deity and touch the sacred effigy. Twice a day and twice during the night, reports Herodotus, the temple officials bathe in cold water. They also wash the mouth with a little natron diluted in water and shave the entire body every other day "so that no impure fleas or vermin shall impede them in the practice of their religion"[Hist. 2.37]. To further contribute to bodily cleanliness they received circumcision and had no sexual relations, at least during the periods of their actual service in the temple.\textsuperscript{149}

One could go too far with these remarkable parallels, yet one cannot dismiss too quickly the likelihood that such things characterized the Israelites' views of priestly character: holiness, purity, and the prerogative of coming near the deity.

The functions of the Egyptian priests are of similar interest. "The Egyptian priests were neither mediators, like the king, nor ministers of sacrifice, nor exponents of beliefs and morals."\textsuperscript{150} Instead, one finds three distinct functions. (1) They were to provide the proper conditions for the deity to become incarnate in his statue each morning.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{147}Sabourin, 83.
\item \textsuperscript{148}Sabourin, 84. One cannot help but think of Christian Baptism by which the Christian is "ordained" into the common priesthood! See chapters 2 & 3 below.
\item \textsuperscript{149}Sabourin, 85.
\item \textsuperscript{150}Sabourin, 86.
\end{itemize}
This involved caring for the temple ("the palace of the god"), feeding, washing, and dressing the god via his idol. Later in the day they conducted two services, with holy water, incense, libations, and so forth. At regular intervals they led out the god in procession. (2) More of the priests could be involved regularly in probing the sacred texts. (3) Through their occupation with the written word they became experts at "secondary applications of wisdom"—astronomy, history, medicine, and the like.\textsuperscript{151}

These functions appear to be less than completely relevant to Israel. The care of an idol is strictly forbidden in the Decalogue.\textsuperscript{152} Though they were all to be devoted to the Torah, not all could be involved in reading and teaching the Word (the Levites would be assigned this task). Yet it is significant that (animal) sacrifice was not associated with priesthood in Egypt. Probably the Israelites would not have thought that they were all to perform such sacrifices. The "obligations" of the Egyptian priesthood are far more important. The attributes of "holiness," "purity," and "nearness to God" emphasize that "priestly" is more a description of who they are than what they do.

While God called his entire chosen people "priestly," he also instituted an official priesthood in Aaron and his sons. What is the relationship between the two? Israel was designated "priestly" as a collective unit, and by means of God's gracious covenant. When the

\textsuperscript{151}These three functions are described in Sabourin, 86–92.

\textsuperscript{152}However, the theology of Egypt may help explain the golden calf episode of Exodus 32: perhaps Israel sought to make Yahweh incarnate, rather than simply to worship another god.
covenant was broken by disobedience, God provided a means of restoring his people to himself through the sacrifices of the Aaronite priesthood.

The high priesthood was instituted by God to provide for the continuance of His gracious relationship with His people by means of the substitutionary and mediatorial office of the high priest. The acts performed by the priest were not acts of merit which initiated or impelled God's grace. The value of the cultic acts was derived from the gracious appointment of the priestly office itself as well as the entire sacrificial system. . . . The office of the high priesthood began with Aaron at Sinai within the context of the covenant.153

The high priest himself was only able to approach God because God provided an external means for him to cover his own sinfulness and come near the holiness of God.

Thus at the outset the garments enabled Aaron to exist in the sphere of holiness in the presence of Yahweh. . . . Nor was the sanctity which was required of the high priest conferred by a magical rite. It was conferred "in, with, and under" the garments according to God's direction and promise in connection with the sacrificial blood with which they were sprinkled.154

Israel was "holy" and "priestly" by God's grace in the covenant. When sin ruptured the relationship, God provided for absolution in the priesthood.

The charge of the Aaronite priesthood and the Levites also involved the daily care of the people: teaching the Torah, daily prayer and sacrificial offerings, in short, the liturgical life of Israel. One could almost characterize it as "Word and Sacrament Ministry." According to the tasks of the priestly office, the Aaronite priesthood holds much more in common with the New Testament Office of the Ministry

153 Schrieber, 178.

154 Schrieber, 181.
than with the common priesthood in both Testaments.\textsuperscript{155}

**Priestly "Holiness"**

We have noted the centrality of "holiness" in the Egyptian type of priesthood. We have also seen how tightly knit the expressions "priestly kingdom" and "holy nation" are. The Aaronite priesthood was also characterized by a "holiness" conferred by God. Though Israel could not have thought of this priesthood at the very moment when Ex. 19:6 was proclaimed, in future generations this would become the primary concept of "priesthood" which they could see reflected in themselves. It is not inappropriate to consider the passages which characterize this priesthood with holiness.

The special strictures placed on the priests are justified with the pronouncement, "they shall be holy to their God [\textsuperscript{156}] (Lev. 21:6). This holiness is conferred by God: "Consecrate him [\textsuperscript{156}], for he offers the bread of your God; he will be holy [\textsuperscript{156}] to you, for I Yahweh, who sanctifies you [\textsuperscript{156}], am holy [\textsuperscript{156}]." (Lev. 21:8). Thus the obligation is concluded, "for he is holy to his God [\textsuperscript{156}]" (Lev. 21:7b). The high priest's turban bears the inscription "Holy [one] to Yahweh [\textsuperscript{156}]". (Ex. 28:36;

\textsuperscript{155}See Hummel; also Paul L. Schrieber, "Priests Among Priests: The Office of the Ministry in Light of the Old Testament Priesthood," Concordia Journal (July '88): 215–28; also Tractate, par. 26. This does not contradict the teaching of Hebrews that the priesthood is fulfilled in Christ. "Fulfillment" does not mean "end"; what ends is the shedding of blood. Opposition to seeing the Ministry as "priesthood" usually is rooted in a misunderstanding of the Old Testament priesthood and sacrifice as a pagan notion meant to buy off an angry God with sacrificial works.

\textsuperscript{156}Cf. Lev. 21:12,15,23; 22:16
39:30). Therefore Aaron can be called, "the holy one of Yahweh [הָעֵדֶת יָהֹウェָה]" (Ps. 106:16).

All holiness stems from the holiness of God. In worship he is acclaimed thrice holy: "Holy, holy, holy [שְׁמֹעֲנֵהוּ] is Yahweh of hosts" (Is. 6:3). God’s holiness always calls for worship (Psalm 99). Isaiah is particularly fond of calling God "the Holy One [simply שְׁמֹעֲנֵהוּ]" (Is. 40:25, et al).157 Most significant is Is. 43:15, "I am Yahweh, your Holy One [כָּבָד יָהֹウェָה], the Creator of Israel, your King [כְּבָד יָהֹウェָה]."158 Because God is holy, he expects his people to be holy also: "Consecrate yourselves [קְדֹשֹׁת] for I am holy [כָּבָד] ... thus you shall be holy [כָּבָד] for I am holy [כָּבָד]" (Lev. 11:44-45). The "holiness code" (Leviticus 19-24) is introduced with this same theme: "You shall be holy [כָּבָד], for I, Yahweh your God, am holy [כָּבָד]" (Lev. 19:2).159 The camp of Israel must be holy for their holy God walks among them (Deut. 23:15).

That which belongs to the Lord is holy. A festival day is holy because of its consecration to the Lord (Neh. 8:9-12). The Nazirite, dedicated to the Lord, is holy (Num. 6:8). The company of heaven are called "holy ones."160 God’s people are characterized by holiness, so that "holy ones, saints" can be a shorthand for "believers."161 God will

157 See also Ezek. 39:7.

158 See also Ps. 89:19 where Yahweh is called "the Holy One of Israel" and possibly also "our King." These names for God form a marvelous counterpart to the "priestly kingdom and holy nation" of Ex. 19:6!

159 See also Lev. 20:7,26; Num. 15:40.

160 E.g., Job 5:1; 15:15; Ps. 89:6,8; Hos. 12:1; Zech. 14:5.

161 See Deut. 33:3; Ps. 16:3; 34:10; Is. 4:3; Dan. 8:24.
show who are his; the choice of God makes one "holy" (Num. 16:3-7).

Only the contrite are able to stand before a holy God (Is. 57:15).

Sinners flee from the Holy One (Is. 1:4), and the unforgiven cannot stand before him (Jos. 24:19). They are holy through God's salvation: "and they will call them, 'The holy people [יָתָּר כִּי], the redeemed of Yahweh'" (Is. 62:12).

The last few references point to the conclusion that holiness is a gift of God, accomplished through the forgiveness of sins. It is not a status achieved through a life of "sanctification," that is, good works, but belongs to justification. God accomplishes it for the people Israel through his covenant: "The Lord will establish you [יתֵן לְךָ] for himself as an holy people [יָתָר כִּי] just as he swore to you" (Deut. 28:9).162 What do these passages suggest that "holiness" consists in; that is, what are its components of meaning? Keil-Delitzsch argue that "it cannot be shown that יָתָר ever means 'separated,'" but rather "the primary meaning of the word is, 'to be splendid, pure, untarnished.'"163

This condition is achieved through the forgiveness of sins:

It was not made this [holy], however, by being separated from the other nations, for that was merely the means of attaining the divine end, but by the fact, that God placed the chosen people in the relation of covenant fellowship with Himself, founded His kingdom in Israel, established in the covenant relationship an instrument of salvation, which furnished the covenant people with the means of obtaining the expiation of their sins, and securing righteousness

162 This verse continues with a clause introduced by יַהֲנֵה: "when you keep the commandments of Yahweh your God and walk in his ways." This is another way of saying, "when you remain in the covenant."

163 Keil-Delitzsch, 1.2:99.
before God and holiness of life with God . . . 164

Once they have been made holy by the forgiving grace of God, they will live a sanctified life. This explanation is in accord with the passages just cited, which show how God makes his people holy and then demands that they be holy. The "holy life" does not earn their priestly character, but flows from it.

Moses himself provides the most splendid description of this covenantal relationship, in words which echo Exodus 19:

This day you have declared Yahweh to be your God, so that you may walk in his ways and treasure his statutes, and his commandments, and his laws, and listen to his voice. For Yahweh today has declared you to be his especially treasured people just as he promised you, to keep all of his commandments, so that he may set you on high above all the nations which he has made, for praise and for renown and for beauty, and that you may be a holy people for Yahweh your God just as he promised (Deut. 26:17-19).

This passage repeatedly emphasizes that Israel's status is in relationship to God. The final description of Israel is reminiscent of the garments created for the high priests, "for glory and for beauty" (Ex. 28:2). Israel as a "priestly kingdom and holy nation" will serve as "holy garments" for Yahweh! This is accomplished as they worship him by receiving his gifts and respond in praise. Thus "Ex. 19:6 signified basically the holy nation who worshiped YHWH alone and thus belonged exclusively to him." 165

164 Keil-Delitzsch, 1.2:100.
165 Elliott, 58.
The "Sacrifice" of the Priestly Kingdom

Although Israel is termed "priestly" with reference to its character and dignity before God rather than in functional terms, as we have shown, it is possible to conceive of a "sacrifice" which God requires of his priestly kingdom. For this sacrifice is not an action but a state, the condition in which one is acceptable to God, and ready to receive his gifts. Because this "priesthood" is conferred through the covenant, it is possible for the Scriptures to speak of the life in the covenant as a "sacrifice." It is at this point that the "priestly kingdom" may become somewhat individualized. Although it is primarily a collective term, it is difficult to conceive of a relationship before God which is solely collective. Because the covenant involves sin and forgiveness, the individual is also involved.

How is this sacrifice described? "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Ps. 51:19). The prophets repeatedly cry out that God rejects sheer sacrificial works which are not accompanied by this attitude of contrition and faith. "Does Yahweh have as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in listening to the voice of Yahweh? Indeed, listening is better than sacrifice, and being attentive [is better] than the fat of lambs" (1 Sam. 15:22). God goes as far as to reject such sacrifices hyperbolically: "For on the day when I brought them out of Egypt, I did not speak to your fathers nor did I command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifice, but rather I commanded

166 For a "contrite heart" see also Is. 57:15; 66:2.
them this word, 'Listen to my voice!' (Jer. 7:22-3).\textsuperscript{167} Similarly a life in the covenant is an acceptable sacrifice:

With what shall I approach Yahweh, and bow before God on high?
Shall I approach him with burnt offerings, with yearling calves?
Does Yahweh delight in a thousand lambs, in ten thousand rivers of oil?
Should I give my first-born for my rebellion, the fruits of my body for the sin of my soul?
O man, he has declared to you what is good, and what does Yahweh desire from you except to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? (Mic. 6:6-8)

Similarly, "For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings" (Hos. 6:6). Instead of sacrifices and burnt offerings, the man of God says, "I delight to do what is acceptable to you, O my God, your Torah is in the midst of my heart" (Ps. 40:9).\textsuperscript{168}

One can see that "sacrifice" is used in a figurative sense in these passages, almost like the use of "priests" in Ex. 19:6. The metaphorical priesthood has its metaphorical sacrifices. These passages stress that the "priestly" state before God is one of humility, contrition, and faith, taking delight in God's Torah, and walking in God's ways. These passages, which are the only ones which at all describe the "activities" of the priestly kingdom, make no mention of preaching to the nations, or interceding for them;\textsuperscript{169} nor do they suggest that every Israelite may perform the duties of the Aaronite priesthood.

\textsuperscript{167} See also Is. 1:11; Jer. 6:20; Hos. 8:13; Amos 5:22-24.

\textsuperscript{168} These passages are echoed in the New Testament several times: Matt. 9:13; 12:7; Mark 12:33; Heb. 10:5-7.

\textsuperscript{169} This is not to say that they should not have and did not do these things; but that was not part of God's blessing them as priestly.
God asks of his people only that they be open to his gift: the blessing of being "priestly" and "holy" through his forgiving grace.

**Summary**

Has this study confirmed the common twofold understanding of Israel's priesthood as unlimited access to God, and mediation for the nations? The former can be affirmed in part, but the latter not at all. The context shows that Israel's priestly character is in relation to God alone. The nature of this relationship is determined by one's understanding of the נֵבֶט "covenant." If it is two-way, with God and his people both doing their parts, then it is of the Law and not of the Gospel. If it is a one-way obligation, then the obligation is on God's part, for he is the one who promises. The designation of Israel as a "priestly kingdom" is a promise of God. This name is not given on the "condition" of obedience, nor is it a dignity which they can earn. The only condition is remaining in the covenant and listening to God's voice, for this was the means which he provided to give his gifts. All three terms which God applied to Israel were the blessings of the gracious covenant which he instituted that day.

Our investigation of the terms in detail has revealed the nature of this covenantal promise. The first, נֵבֶט, is not a designation of vassal lordship borrowed from Hittite treaties (Sarna), but rather a term designating a king's most precious personal treasure. Secondly, the phrase מֵאַלְמַת מֵאִים at heart may be understood as Scott and Galling have, designating Israel as "worshipers of Yahweh." Similarly, Bauer noted that it was a call to the true cult, thus a term of election and
worship. Wildberger has demonstrated that מִלָּה need not be restricted to the narrow Aaronite priesthood. Unwitting help was provided by Fohrer in demonstrating that בְּנֵי נֶגֶד functions adjectivally as "priestly" where Hebrew lacks such an adjective. A detailed investigation of מַעֲלֵה has shown that there is no reason to impose the meaning "kingship" on this passage; instead it means "kingdom" as the people who are the sphere of Yahweh's kingship. From Egypt, Israel may have gained the understanding of priesthood as holiness, purity, and the prerogative of coming near the deity. From the Aaronite priesthood they would come to see that it implied holiness given by God. In both cases, "priesthood" was more a matter of being than doing. Finally, the phrase שְׁרוּ עֲנָי by its parallelism strengthens the conclusion that holiness is the main point of comparison in "priestly."

In conclusion we offer a translation of Ex. 19:5-6a which results from this investigation:

And now if you will listen closely to my voice, and treasure my covenant, you out of all the peoples will be for me a treasured possession (for all the earth is mine), and you will be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. This great blessing of God's is not an obligation of duties upon his people, nor is it a goal towards which they must strive. Rather, the holiness it suggests is conferred by the forgiveness of sins available in the covenant. As forgiven people of God, Israel can then approach him in worship to receive further of his gifts and to respond in praise and thanks. Thus Israel's "priestly" character is a description of their worshipful relationship to God through the forgiveness which he provides in the covenant.
EXCURSUS 1:

THE "PRIESTS" OF ISAIAH

Isaiah 61:6

Of the three phrases which describe Israel in Ex. 19:6, only two recur with any kind of frequency: Israel as God's "peculiar treasure" appears another five times;\(^1\) and Israel as "holy nation" recurs the same number.\(^2\) The phrase "kingdom of priests" is not found again. We find only the designation of all Israel as "priests" in Is. 61:6:

חֶלְדוֹת בְּנוֹת יְהוָה תְּכֵנַת הָעָם יַעֲשֵׂה אָבוֹתֵינוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל

"And you shall be called priests of Yahweh;
it shall be said of you, 'servants of our God.'"

Is this passage a direct reflection upon the theme from Exodus? May one import into Isaiah the meaning of that Sinai proclamation? What is unique about the Isaianic prophecy, and what can it add to the biblical theology of "priesthood"? To answer these questions we must pursue the exegesis of Isaiah 61.

Many scholars uncritically inject into this verse their entire theologies of "universal priesthood." August Pieper, for example:

The promise given in Ex. 19:6 is described in the first half of this

---------------------------------------------
\(^1\)Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Ps. 135:4; Mal. 3:17. Also LXX of Ex. 23:22.

\(^2\)Though שִׂרְאִים occurs only in Ex. 19:6, שִׂרְאִים occurs in Deut. 7:6; 14:2,21; 26:19; 28:9.
verse as being ideally fulfilled. In the church of the New Testament there is no longer a specially designated class of priests, but the church consists entirely of functioning priests, who without any special human mediation stand before God as true priests and offer up true, spiritual, God-pleasing sacrifices, 1 Peter 2:9; Romans 12:1.3

We do not suggest, in the manner of historical critics, that the various occurrences of "priesthood" in Scripture cannot be recognized as coherent. However, it remains to be demonstrated whether the mention of "priests" in Is. 61:6 fits into this pattern. Furthermore, analyses like the quotation above fail to do justice to what is in this passage when they derive an interpretation from elsewhere.

Similar to this are explanations which refer to Israel's "mission of mediation":

Israel has been presented as the mediator between Yahweh and the nations; that position is here defined as the priesthood, which in Israel had the office of offering sacrifices and prayer in the name of the people and presenting and explaining the law of Yahweh.4

Certainly this is broadly true of what Isaiah teaches in the wider context. "Israel is to have a mission to the world: to proclaim the glory of the Lord among the nations (43:21, 66:19)."5 Yet one would be justified in applying this interpretation of priesthood to Is. 61:6 only

3August Pieper, Isaiah II, trans. Erwin E. Kowalke (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1979), 607. Similar is Edward J. Young, The Book of Isaiah, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 3:462-63: "The Church of the new covenant possesses no outward priesthood, but every member is a priest before God and needs no human mediator other than the God-Man Jesus Christ. The offerings each priest brings are spiritual, for each is to present himself as a living sacrifice (cf. Rom. 12:1)."


if it could be shown that the context of this whole chapter is missionary. Otherwise, there must be another significance to the comparison with priests.\(^6\)

One major crux of interpretation is the identification of the "strangers" and "foreigners" (v.5) who seem to stand in distinction to the "priests" of verse 6. Many commentators take these to be Gentile converts because of the prophecy in chapter 60 that the nations will come to God's light. H. C. Leupold suggests that the conversion of the Gentiles will change their relationship with Israel: "Not that the former enemies will have been subdued or conquered but they shall have come in a spirit of cheerful cooperation so as to take the more menial tasks off Israel's hands that the people whom God had once chosen as his own might more effectively fulfill its spiritual destiny."\(^7\) One cannot help seeing this as "cheap or mercenary" no matter how much Leupold protests.\(^8\) August Pieper recoils at the implications of this for the church:

It leads to un-Scriptural conclusions to suggest that the services of the kōhanim (priests) and of the meshārethim (servants or ministers) in the New Testament church . . . are assigned exclusively to Jewish Christians who are to render the spiritual service of priests, while the gentile Christians serve mainly as Gibeonites, as hewers of wood and drawers of water.\(^9\)

---

\(^6\) Elliott qualifies his previous statement in this way: "In this sense the comments of those scholars who find a mediatorial motif implied in v.6 are partly justified. Nevertheless, such a motif is not primary and is only inferable from context."


\(^8\) Leupold, 2:324.

\(^9\) Pieper, 607-8. Yet Pieper goes on to defend this very view,
Nor would such a picture fit the overall theme of this part of Isaiah, which describes the new Israel in such a way that Israel and the nations partake equally of God’s kingdom. These difficulties will be easily removed if it can be shown that these "strangers" and "foreigners" are not part of the church.

Though Isaiah 61 is certainly a prophecy of the New Testament church and the coming of the Messiah (cf. Luke 4:16-30), it has also a more immediate referent: it is part of the overall Gospel of Isaiah in answer to his earlier prophecies of Israel’s exile. Isaiah is promising a return from exile and restoration of Israel in history, and yet with prophetic vision describing the "new Israel" of the messianic age with the same restoration language. Despite his view of the author’s place in history, Claus Westermann sees the central theme of this chapter clearly:

Trito-Isaiah was aware that he had been sent ‘to comfort all who mourn’, and what gave these their comfort was the great change described in the ‘insteads’ of v. 3b. Verses 4-11 go on to say how, and in what, this change in Zion’s favour is brought about. It is brought about by the re-building of the city (v.4) and the restoration of her honour (v.7). Both of these things God accomplishes on her behalf (v.8), and the whole world must

moderated only by his contention that this is only an idealized picture, presenting the pre-eminence of Israel in the church, without suggesting an absolute dichotomy of ecclesiastical tasks based on race. Again this contradicts his thesis (quoted above) that the verse alludes to the "priesthood of all."

10Luther takes a more figurative approach: "Aliens shall stand and feed your flocks" and "foreigners will be your plowmen and vinedressers" refer to Gentile Christians in the Office of the Ministry. Thus, these Gentile converts are not performing "menial tasks" but are doing the same thing as the Jewish Christians who are "priests," teachers in the public office. Martin Luther, Luther's Works, American Edition, vol. 17, ed. Hilton C. Oswald (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972), 337; Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Weimar Edition (Weimar: n.p., 1883- ), 311:522.
acknowledge it (v.9). Finally, in v.11, the whole change is once more represented as due to God's saving work.11

The key is that this is "change" language: Isaiah describes a great reversal of fortunes accomplished by God's hand when he returns his people from exile. The beneficiary of this reversal, as Westermann has noted, is more specifically "Zion." This evokes all which Isaiah has done with the Zion motif. The present passage sits in the heart of the great promises of restoration made to Zion (chs. 60-62) in exchange for the devastation suffered in exile. These promises culminate in Is. 62:1-4, when Zion is blessed with a new name.

Each verse of the more immediate context describes this great reversal. The "captives" receive "liberty," the "prisoners" get "freedom" (v.1). Those who "mourn" receive "comfort" (v.2), and a "garland" instead of "ashes" (v.3). The ruins of Jerusalem and all Israel will be rebuilt, though they have been desolate for generations (v.4). Instead of the people of Israel slaving in the fields of foreigners, the foreigners will now serve Israel (v.5). Instead of Israel being plundered by the nations, Israel will now consume the wealth of the nations (v.8). In place of a double portion of "shame" they receive a double portion of "land" (v.7). All this is the promised "recompense" of Yahweh (v.8) so that the nations will recognize that Israel is the blessed people of Yahweh (v.9). All of this is recognized as the salvation given by God (vv. 10-11).

The contrast is plainly made between Israel's servitude under the nations in exile, and the nation's servitude to Israel in restoration.

The Gentile laborers (v.5) are not the converts of chapter 60, but the former oppressors of Israel in exile. Though this reversal was fulfilled literally, (in the rebuilding of the Temple [Ezra 6:1-12], for instance) it is more a part of the imagery Isaiah uses for the great joy and fortune of the salvation Yahweh will effect. Part of this imagery is the designation of Israel (in both national and *coram Deo* senses) as "priests." The point of comparison is made in verse 6b: "you will eat the wealth of nations." As Elliott recognizes, "The *tertium comparationis* is thus the material support which the Levites received from the other eleven tribes in Israel. The priestly character of Israel in this case is primarily that of reception of a 'due' from the Gentiles." The primary referent may therefore be Deut. 18:1-5, which describes the subsistence of the Levites and priests.

In what way is Is. 61:6 related to Ex. 19:6? It is difficult to establish any textual link, for the only point of contact is the word "priests" used of Israel as a whole. Moreover, the point of comparison in each case is different: in Ex. 19:6 the designation of the kingdom as "priestly" denotes the people's "holiness" and "purity" under the covenant, and their status as worshipers of Yahweh; in Is. 61:6 "priests" describes their position of privilege among the nations.\(^{12}\)

\(^{12}\)Elliott, 60. See also I. W. Slotki, *Isaiah* (London: Soncino Press, 1949), 299: "As the priests subsisted upon what the Israelites allocated to them, so the priestly nation will be supported by the other peoples since it is dedicated to the Divine service."

\(^{13}\)See Elliott, 61-62; similarly R. B. Y. Scott, "A Kingdom of Priests (Exodus xix 6)," *Oudtestamentische Studiën*, no. 8 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1950): 213, "That verse continues: 'You shall eat the wealth of the nations', making it apparent that the writer has in mind the privileges of priests rather than their religious office."
Whereas Ex. 19:6 used a general concept of "priesthood" as the source of the figure, Is. 61:6 refers specifically to the Israelite institution of Levites and priests. Yet this verse confirms our conclusion that the point of comparison with "priests" is status (who the Lord says they are) not function (what the Lord gives them to do). No mention is made in this chapter of mediatorial, sacrificial, or missionary functions, despite the contentions of so many commentators. In fact, the opposite is more the case: Israel's new status is created at the expense of the nations! Israel is to revel in their glory, consume their wealth, and be served by their people. Furthermore, the only action going on is that which God does.

With some reserve, Is. 61:6 may be included among those passages which speak of the common priesthood. Though not consciously echoing Ex. 19:6, it does use "priests" metaphorically and with some similarity. Through the saving action of God, his people will be blessed with the privilege and status of being "priests." Again it is a communal designation, applied to Israel as a whole. It says nothing of individual rights or ministerial functions. Rather, it describes God's answer to the down-trodden status of his people on earth: through his work they are blessed.

Isaiah 66:21

"And I will also take [some] of them for priests [and] for Levites, says Yahweh."

This verse comes into consideration only because under some interpretations it might refer to a "universal priesthood," and because
it is one instance where "priests and Levites" are used in a less than ordinary way. However, two points immediately suggest that this is not referring to a "universal priesthood": (1) we have here a rather precise, technical expression, "the priests and the Levites," rather than just "priests," or "priestly"; (2) the partitive in the expression "from them" suggests that only some of the group in question are priests and Levites. Nevertheless, there are ways in which this could be relevant.

In the immediate context, the conversion of the nations is envisioned by means of the Jews scattered among them in dispersion. Those Gentiles who are converted will come to Jerusalem, bringing with them the diaspora Jews as an "offering" in the house of the Lord (vv. 19-20). This image once again refers to the glorification of Zion. To whom does the pronoun "from them" refer — to the returning diaspora Jews, to the converted Gentiles, or to both? Slotki finds only one answer in accord with the institution of the priesthood: "Some commentaries hold that converted Gentiles as well as the returning Israelites will, by Divine decree, be appointed as priests and Levites; but this is improbable since it is contrary to the laws of the priesthood." Instead, for him it must mean that the diaspora Jews who

---

14 It is even conceivable that "from them" refers to all the nations of the world from which the converted Gentiles and diaspora Jews would be chosen as "priests and Levites," i.e., "believers." In this case, this verse would refer to a "universal priesthood." The principal objection to this is that it provides no explicit antecedent for the pronoun in the text.

15 Slotki, 325.
are of the right families will be restored to their rightful status. This, however, destroys the radical nature of this promise, and perpetuates the distinction between Jew and Gentile in the new Israel. Furthermore, as R. N. Whybray objects, "those returning from dispersion would already be divided by heredity into laymen, priests, and Levites, although the latter would have been unable fully to perform their functions up to their return."

The alternative is that this is a proclamation that Levites and priests would be taken from the Gentiles who are converted as well. This radical statement emphasizes that there will be no distinction of status in the new Israel based on being Jew or Gentile. It is a picture of the new Israel couched in language of the old. The next two verses stress the theme of divine service. Being chosen as priests and Levites is the strongest way of expressing that "all flesh shall come to worship before me" (Is. 66:23). "The Lord will welcome the offerings of the gentiles; He will let the gentiles lead the entire spiritual Jewish Diaspora to the church; and He will make them, the unclean gentiles, even to be His priests and Levites." 

Clearly this passage is not equivalent to those which declare all believers to be "priestly." Yet there is a similar thought: because of the impact of the Gospel, things like race and lineage cannot separate 


17Pieper, 702. According to Young, 3:535, Calvin took this as a promise that Gentiles would serve as preachers of the Gospel in the New Testament (as Luther had interpreted Is. 61:6). This is intriguing, yet the emphasis still seems to be that the Gentiles are declared as not inherently disqualified from the pastoral office by their being Gentile.
man from the worship of Yahweh. The Gospel radically alters man's status before God. When Isaiah prophesies that in the new Israel priests and Levites will be taken from the Gentiles, he simultaneously declares that there is no difference between "Jew and Greek," that no one is inherently disqualified before God for his service. 

---

18 Pieper, 703: "The point is that the gentiles will be raised to equal standing with Israel before the Lord."
CHAPTER TWO

THE PRIESTHOOD ACCORDING TO 1 PETER 2

Introduction

Central to any doctrine of the "priesthood of all believers" is this passage. Only here in the entire New Testament is ἵεράτευμα "priesthood" mentioned (vv. 5,9). Only here is it expounded. Thus if one wishes to know what Christian priesthood entails, this is the place to look. The context calls for close attention. As we have repeatedly seen, the term is too often lifted from these verses and given a meaning to fit the purposes of the user. Sheer momentum has stifled any re-evaluation of the text.

From the surprisingly few exegetical examinations ever devoted to this question it becomes apparent that for the most part the popularity of this traditional interpretation of 1 Peter 2 has provided the chief canon of acceptance. Such a situation suggests the stifling influence of a theological slogan and a less than critical reception of an assumed consensus.¹

This challenge prompts the reinvestigation this chapter will attempt. Beginning with the inner workings of this pericope, this study will

¹John Elliott, "Death of a Slogan: from Royal Priests to Celebrating Community," Una Sancta 25.3 (Michaelmas 1968): 20. Elliott points out the dangers of the "traditional" interpretation: "The history of the development and use of this notion of the universal priesthood, at least in its post-reformation phase, is for the most part, a history of Christians turning in upon themselves, exulting in their individual rights and privileges, extolling the equality of sheep and shepherd, and disregarding all too frequently their common responsibility toward the world from which they envisioned [sic] themselves separated" (20).
spiral outwards to the themes of 1 Peter as a whole, and from there into
the context of the entire New Testament.

It may be profitable to begin with at least one view of the
purpose of 1 Peter as a whole. The central theme of "suffering" is
obvious, despite the arguments over the nature of this suffering. The
epistle purports to be directed to the "Diaspora" in various regions of
inner Asia Minor (cf. 1 Pet. 1:1). John Elliott points out the
pressures laid upon adherents of "an exotic Jewish sect from the East"
in this remote part of the Empire. "Incomprehensible language, strange
habits, and the worship of foreign deities put the civic loyalty of such
aliens into grave question. Accordingly, restrictions were placed on
their legal and social rights, and they bore the brunt of covert as well
as overt social discrimination." Such oppression resulted in great
suffering for the Christians. Suffering led to doubt and
disillusionment concerning the actuality of salvation. Peter's strategy
is to point them to the source of their confidence:

In response to this waning of self-confidence and hope in divine
deliverance, 1 Peter attempts to head off the defection and
disintegration of the Christian community in Asia Minor by
reaffirming the great blessings believers have already experienced
through their conversion.\footnote{John Elliott, "Salutation and Exhortation to Christian Behavior on the Basis of God's Blessings (1:1-2:10)," \textit{Review and Expositor} 79.3 (1982): 415. Elliott denies the need to resort to "official persecution" as the source of the suffering in 1 Peter. Thus there is no need to place the epistle into the reign of a particular emperor.}

\footnote{Elliott, "Salutation", 416. This general purpose (if not the details) is supported by Frederick Danker, "1 Peter 1:24-2:17—A Consolatory Pericope," \textit{Zeitschrift für die neutestamentlichen Wissenschaft} 58:1-2 (1967): 93-102.}

This proposed scenario already suggests that the content of 1 Pet.
2:1-10 be construed as a blessing meant to alleviate the sense of suffering which the Christians felt—a proposal which is quite in accord with the content of the letter. Interpretations which see here only rights, privileges, or duties, miss the comfort which Peter intends to provide.

**Defining the Unit: 1 Peter 2:1-10**

The selection of verses 1-10 as a unit is not arbitrary; many studies choose 2:4-10. However, it rings strange to begin the unit πρὸς ὅν "to whom" (v.4a). Verses 4-10 are intimately mated with 1-3, where one finds the antecedent of that divine pronoun. The pericope is staked out by the οὖν "therefore" of verse 1 and the ἀγάπητοι παρακαλῶ "Beloved, I exhort . . ." of verse 11. Yet οὖν (v.1) also mates this block to the previous chapter, and the exhortation of verse 11 presupposes its own "therefore." One cannot ignore the way in which this pericope reaches backwards and forwards through the epistle. Any interpretation of ἵερατεύμα must take seriously the pericopal mold into which it fits, and its inter-relationship with the rest of the epistle.

In the only major exegetical treatment of 1 Peter 2, John Hall Elliott went to great lengths to schematize the structure of verses 4-10. Yet it is unfortunate that he failed to see the significance of verses 1-3. These three verses are essential in creating the link between the baptismal language of 1:22-25 and the "statement of the

---

nature and function of the Church,"\(^5\) created in 2:4-10. J. N. D. Kelly sees the connection: "This involved section [2:1-10] flows logically and naturally out of i.13-25, gathering up the exhortation set down there and eloquently unfolding some of the implications of being a baptized Christian."\(^6\) Furthermore, "The particle therefore (oun) is resumptive, referring back to i.22f. and reminding the readers that in their baptismal rebirth they have already ... ."\(^7\) Thus 2:1-3 lays the foundation of all which follows upon the baptismal exhortation of the previous section.

In his structural analysis, Elliott sees verses 4-10 broken into two major parts: the Old Testament allusions of verses 6-10 are the heart of the section, with verses 4-5 functioning as a summary of what follows. "For this structure suggests that we are dealing with a type of parallelism in which vv.4-5 were accommodated to the formulation of the passages in vv.6-10 and not vice versa."\(^8\) Even without reference to such redactional suppositions, it is helpful to see the parallels between the two sections, taking verses 4-5 as an abstract of what Peter intended to prove through the citations in verses 6-10. "That is, vv.4-5 offer an interpretation of the OT passages adduced in vv.6-7 and


\(^6\)J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981 [orig. 1969]), 82. The question of baptismal language will be dealt with at length in the next section.

\(^7\)Kelly, 83.

\(^8\)Elliott, *The Elect and the Holy*, 17.
Virtually every word in the first section recurs in the second: "stone," "rejected," "chosen," "precious," "holy," "priesthood." The parallels between verses 4 and 5 are similar to those between verses 6-8 and 9. Furthermore, verse 4 is parallel to verses 6-8, and verse 5 parallel to verses 9-10. Common thematic material unites verses 4 and 6-8 around the λίθος, and verses 5 and 9-10 around λαός. We may therefore diagram this pericope as follows:

:1-3 Therefore, in view of your Baptism consider what you are in relation to Christ, and to unbelievers:

:4 Christ the living stone
   rejected by men
   but chosen and precious to God;

:5 you, likewise, as living stones
   are a Spiritual house, a holy priesthood, sacrificing;

:6-8 to those who reject him, Christ, the cornerstone, is a stumbling block;

:9-10 but you who are baptized are chosen by God to be his priestly people, to proclaim what he has done.

For this study four broad points are particularly relevant: (1) what the people are is a gift of Baptism; (2) what they are is related to what Christ is; (3) what they are is contrasted with unbelievers; (4) the intricate parallelism suggests that correspondence may be found between each half of the many pairs, even when vocabulary is not identical. The specifics will be explored as these verses are considered in detail.

**Verse 1**

The key to verse 1 is the participle ἀποθέμενοι. By "using a word that often refers to taking off and laying aside clothes (e.g., Acts 7:58), [Peter] pictures the believers as having cast aside or

---

'gotten rid of' the vices of the old life as if they were a soiled garment." The aorist tense stresses the simple fact of the action when this occurred - Baptism.

The Pauline texts clearly show that the image behind it is that of stripping off one garment in order to don another. The early Christian practice of baptism by immersion entailed undressing completely; and we know that in the later liturgies the candidate's removal of his clothes before descending naked to the pool and his putting on a new set on coming up formed an impressive ceremony and were symbols of his abandonment of his past unworthy life and his adoption of a new life of innocence (Hippolytus, Trad. apost. xxi; Cyril of Jerusalem, Cat. myst. ii.2; Procat. 4).

Yet Peter does not speak of "donning another" garment - or does he? Perhaps Peter is implicitly suggesting that the new robe they don will be a priestly garment! In the first word of the pericope we already find a possible link between Holy Baptism and Holy Priesthood - but that story must wait.

Verses 2-3

Verse 2 begins with a phrase echoing the rebirth imagery of 1:3,23 - ὡς ἄρτι γέννητα βρέφη "as new-born babies." One need not postulate that Peter's audience were so very recently converted, nor is this image simply derived from the comparison of the Word to "milk."

10Peter H. Davids, The First Epistle of Peter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 79-80.


12Kelly, 83-84.

13Many "liturgical theories" place the actual Baptism just before this passage, usually between 1:21 and 22. See the discussion below. Kelly's retort is no better: "The adjective need mean no more than that the Asian communities included a substantial proportion of fairly recent converts (as is likely if the letter is early)" (84).
Edward Selwyn reduces the imagery to the latter: "What the author wants to express is the ardour of the suckled child." 14 No, the hapax ἀρτιγέννητα must be interpreted like its verbal counterpart ἀναγέννάω "to be born again" (1:3,23), which in turn leads back to John 3:3, γεννηθῇ ἄνωθεν "be born again/from above"—Holy Baptism. Baptism is a reference point not only for the recent convert, but for every Christian every day of his life.

Peter then carries this image forward, creating "milk" imagery based on the "rebirth" of Baptism. Having "put off" all δόλον "deceit," they now should crave for the milk which is ἄδολον "free from deceit, unadulterated, pure." Their baptismal life is radically changed. The trend today is away from the AV rendering of λόγικόν γάλα "milk of the word" in favor of "spiritual" (as opposed to physical) on the analogy of Rom. 12:1. 15 However, in view of the λόγος/ῥήμα talk of 1:22-25, the AV is actually preferable. 16 God's Word is the true, unadulterated milk which gives growth. By remaining in the Word-milk (or perhaps "by means of" the milk), which in Baptism translated them into the Kingdom, they will "grow up" into salvation. Baptism pervades this section.

Peter grounds their condition before God in the fact of their

14 Selwyn, 154.

15 So Selwyn, 155; Davids, 83; Francis Wright Beare, The First Epistle of Peter (Oxford: Basil Blackwell), 115; et al.

16 Kelly, 85, notes that in all the examples adduced to support "spiritual", λόγος is never far from the surface. See also C. E. B. Cranfield, The First Epistle of Peter (London: SCM Press, 1954), 45. Elliott, The Elect and the Holy, 204 coins the phrase "Logos-milk" to avoid the concrete "Word" and yet maintain the connection with λόγος. There is a decidedly gnostic bias in supposing that the Word is more desirable when it is apart from the material.
Baptism. Thus εἶ (v.3) must be translated "since";\(^{17}\) the aorist of "tasted" stresses the action without regard to its time or quality. He quotes Ps. 34:8 in this context, a psalm which recurs throughout the letter (1:15-18; 3:10-12). It is possible also, since Psalm 34 was associated with many early eucharistic liturgies, that Peter is referring further to the Communion which followed Baptism.\(^{18}\) Such a view is espoused by those who wish to see the "Eucharist" as one of the sacrifices of the priesthood. Even if this reference is legitimate, the direction is reversed. This "tasting" is the basis from which their priesthood springs, not the offering of the priesthood. It is dangerous to project back onto the New Testament the sacrificial/"eucharistic" perversion of the Sacrament of later times.

**Verse 4**

The antecedent of πρὸς ὧν "to whom" (v.4) is the κύριος of the previous verse. What πᾶς was in Psalm 34, Christ is in Baptism; κύριος links the two. The little relative pronoun is the focus of all that will be said. There is a subtle irony in the tension between "living stone" and "rejected by men." The resurrection of Christ overcomes his deadly rejection; his resurrection is the basis for what his people are. These verses are a gold-mine for the exegete—Elliott devotes much of his monumental study to the "λίθος-complex." For our

\(^{17}\)Kelly, 86: "For seeing the Greek has εἰ (lit. 'if'), where the participle is not conditional but, as frequently in the NT (Cf. i.17; Mt.vi.30; Lk. xii.28; Rom.vi.8; etc.), states as a supposition what is actually the case."

\(^{18}\)Kelly, 87.
purposes, however, we concentrate on the last two words of the verse: 
κλεκτόν ἐντιμον "chosen, precious." The adjectives given to Christ by God will be transferred to God's people in verses 7 and 9. The grace of God is such that what is said of Christ is said of his people.

The first adjective, ἐκλεκτός, is derived from the verb ἐκλέγωμαι, an enormously important word in the Old Testament. The external entailments in these Old Testament uses will help us to understand its use in 1 Peter. In the LXX it is used 108 times to translate ἸΗΒ "to choose, elect." Of the 164 occurrences of ἸΗΒ, 92 times God is the subject. Central to this choosing is "the concept of election in the sense of the designation of Israel as the people of God." Likewise, the rest of New Testament usage is relevant. In the Gospels ἐκλέγωμαι is used exclusively of Jesus choosing the twelve, in Acts of the election of various leaders; but in Paul and James we see the election of the community. Paul emphasizes the radical grace of God in "choosing" the "foolish" and "weak"—thus it is entirely God's doing that we are in Christ (1 Cor. 1:26-30); similarly, in James 2:5 God chooses the "poor." Most significant, however, is Eph. 1:3-5:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who blessed us in Christ with every blessing of the Spirit in the heavenly places, even as he [God, Father] chose [ἐξελέξατο] us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world to be holy [ἅγιοι] and blameless before him, in love having predestined us to adoption as sons [υἱοθεσίαν] for him through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will.

Notice the connection of "choose," "holy," and "adoption." The grammar

---

of these verses suggests that "adoption" is equivalent to the "election" which makes one "holy" and "blameless" before him.

Like the verb, the adjective ἐκλεκτός is most often used for ἡγεῖον (in passive constructions, "chosen"). G. Schrenk finds three "religious" uses of ἐκλεκτός in the LXX: (a) "The word is closely related to ἡγεῖον [holy] and is sometimes used for it"; (b) "In keeping with the relation to ἡγεῖον is the common cultic use of ἐκλεκτός. This may be seen in σμόρνη ἐκλεκτή with ref. to the holy oil of anointing, Ex. 30:23"; (c) "The express religious concept of election. This occurs in relation to ἐκλεκτός in four forms, men of God in salvation history, the land, the city and the people." In all of these cases it is the religious external entailments which give ἐκλεκτός its "religious" connotations. These same entailments in 1 Peter allow these ideas to be carried through. Furthermore, because this section of 1 Peter contains one of the mostly tightly packed collections of Old Testament citations in the New Testament, one is certainly justified in recognizing the Septuagint flavor in these verses. In the Gospels, ἐκλεκτός is an eschatological term, in both parables and apocalyptic discourse. Like Peter, Luke uses it of Christ, and always in connection with the way of the cross. At his Transfiguration God calls Christ "my Son, the Chosen [ὁ ἐκλελεγμένος]" (Luke 9:35); this appellation is ridiculed by the

---

20 In anticipation of future conclusions, consider the connection between Baptism and priesthood: both involve "anointing", literally or figuratively. For Baptism as an "anointing" with the Holy Spirit, see 2 Cor. 1:21–22; 1 John 2:20,27; and the anointing of Jesus complex: Is. 61:1; Mark 1:10; Luke 4:18; Acts 4:27; 10:38. Such thoughts already appear in ἐκλεκτός.

crowds as Jesus hangs on the cross, "let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One [δ ἐκλεκτός]" (Luke 23:35).

Paul uses ἐκλεκτός both of the community (Rom. 8:33; 2 Tim. 2:10; Tit. 1:1) and of the individual (Rom. 16:12), as a word of comfort and promise. John speaks of the Church as the ἐκλεκτή (2 John 1,13), and of the faithful hosts of the Lamb as κλητοὶ καὶ ἐκλεκτοὶ "called and chosen" (Rev. 17:14). Most fascinating, however, is Colossians 3. The early verses reek of Baptism: dying and rising with Christ, putting aside wrath and malice, putting on the new renewed self. Then comes the οὖν—in other words, "on the basis of all that you have been made through baptismal rebirth . . . ." Col. 3:12 - "Therefore, clothe yourselves, as the chosen [ἐκλεκτοὶ] of God, holy [ἁγιοί] and beloved, with a heart of compassion, kindness, . . . ." There is much here parallel to 1 Peter 2, particularly the connection of ἐκλεκτός with ἁγιος. "Election" talk is the theme of 1 Peter, for in 1:1 his addressees are called ἐκλεκτοίς, and in 5:13 in line with this we have συνἐκκλεκτή "fellow elect." Thus the connection:

Baptism → elect & holy

One should not be surprised, then, that Elliott entitled his monograph on the pericope The Elect and the Holy. Elliott, of course, begins with verses 6-10, where he concludes "that not a word but rather a theme is the one characteristic common to these OT passages; namely the theme of election." Since he sees verses 4-5 as dependent on the following, election is likewise the theme of those verses.

---

22 Elliott, The Elect and the Holy, 141.
That the motif of election occupied the foreground of vv.4-5 is seen (1) in the emphasis given the phrase in v.4b: παρὰ δὲ θεῷ ἐκλεκτόν ἐντυμον. . . . Of the entire λίθος complex, it is the phrase from Is. 28:16 (=v.6b) which the author gives first rank, a phrase concerning the electedness of the Messiah. (2) Verse 5 describes how the believing community corresponds to the Lord described in v.4. In v.5, also the motif of election is paramount.23

We shall soon find, therefore, that, in addition to the baptismal motif, the election of God’s people is founded upon and derived from the election of Jesus as the Messiah (which also for him occurred at Baptism!).

**Verse 5**

In verse 5 we find the first description of the people of God resulting from their election. First is οἰκοδομεῖσθε "you are being built up"—divine passive. Some would take this as a passive imperative, "be yourselves built up" (RSV), or even as a middle imperative, "build yourselves up." Peter Davids responds:

The Christians are not naturally "living stones," but become such as they are joined to Christ in conversion and baptism (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18), for it is only as they come to him that this building is possible. . . . It is God, of course, who is building them together into this edifice of the end times; thus the verb ("are being built") is descriptive, not imperative ("be built" or "let yourselves be built," neither of which fits smoothly into the context).24

The work is God’s, and he works through Holy Baptism, his Means of Grace.

---


24Davids, 86-87. Further proof of this conclusion is given by Peter’s odd use of the imperative. Until 4:12 all of the imperatives are aorists; after that they are presents. This has often led to suggestions of a change of source at that point, whether by Peter or by a "redactor." See the liturgical theories below.
The building God creates through these means is first οἶκος πνευματικὸς "a Spiritual house." Concerning the adjective, it cannot be said better than Elliott does. Therefore, permit this lengthy quotation:

πνευματικὸς does not mean "spiritual" in the metaphorical sense of "immaterial," "non-external," "geistig" or "geistlich," or "heavenly." Rather πνευματικὸς is meant in the non-metaphorical, real sense of "Spiritual," "caused by or filled with the Holy Spirit." πνευματικὸς occurs twenty-seven times in the NT. "In none of the twenty-five cases (twice in I P)," points out Engelbert Niebecker, "does it have the meaning 'symbolisch,' 'uneigentlich,' 'nicht wirklich,' 'nur bildlich.'" Rather, this term designates primarily "that which belongs to the sphere of the Holy Spirit." ... "Spiritual" describes something which comes to man from beyond, which comes to him as a gift. This gift is the Divine approach to man embodied in the presence of the Spirit.25

Therefore an οἶκος πνευματικὸς is "a house in which the Spirit dwells," where he does his work and bestows his gifts. One is reminded of the Spirit descending upon Jesus at his Baptism. In Baptism one becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit. In Baptism he places his name upon his chosen child. It is not necessary, therefore, to argue whether "spiritual house" is equivalent to "spiritual temple." The whole point is that the Holy Spirit dwells in the Christian, for he is in the name placed upon the Christian in his Baptism.

There is a good reason why we have only now reached ἱεράτευμα "priesthood." It needs to be seen in its proper place, following what leads to it. As Elliott has demonstrated, "elect and holy" is the theme of the section; "priesthood" must be seen in harmony with this. ἱεράτευμα occurs in the New Testament only here and in verse 9. Most likely the use of this rare word already here is proleptic of the

---

25 Elliott, 153-54.
quotation from Ex. 19:6 (LXX) in verse 9. ίσράτευμα is a late term, entirely absent in profane Greek literature. We know of its use only six times before the New Testament: Ex. 19:6; 23:22 (LXX), Greek Fragment 67, 2 Macc. 2:17, and Philo (2x).⁵⁶ The Exodus passage is the root of all of these passages, as we have already noted in our first chapter. It is so influential that Elliott terms ίσράτευμα (together with βασίλειον) the "Exodus Formula (EF)." At its heart is the root ίσρ-, from which ίσρός "holy," ίσρόν "temple," ίσρεῦς "priest," and others, are derived. The suffix -εύς attaches to a "nomen actoris," naming one who does a specific function (as in ίσρεῦς "priest"); the verbal equivalents in -εύω denote "to function in a certain capacity" (as in ίσρατεύω "to serve in priestly capacity"). From such verbs are created substantives in -ευμα, which "are intimately related to the action of the verb."⁵⁷

Within this group of -ευμα nouns are those "which have retained not only an active quality but also the personal aspect of the original nomen actionis."⁵⁸ Significantly, these nouns do not relate to single isolated individuals but rather designate a community." Thus, in translation one must maintain all three aspects: action, personal actor, and community. The English "priesthood" is not the best; in German one has the option of Priesterschaft instead of Priestertum, a preference regularly taken in modern translations. In English, however,

⁵⁶Elliott, The Elect and the Holy, 64.
⁵⁸Elliott, The Elect and the Holy, 66.
one must, it seems, be satisfied with a phrase like Elliott's "a body of functioning priests." "Priesthood," the abstract, "office-ial" term is more appropriate to ἵερατεία (Luke 1:9; Heb. 7:5) or ἱερώσουν (Heb. 7:11, 12, 24).

As much as this collectivity is to be stressed, one cannot ignore the fact that this group is composed of specific individuals. Elliott, however, is adamant that there is absolutely no individual reference here. With reference to both occurrences of the word he writes:

It is semantically inadmissible to attempt to reduce either of these words to an individual-distributive classification and thereby to suggest that each individual believer is being depicted as a "king" and a "priest." . . . As the other corporate predicates, both βασίλειον and ἱεράτευμα are only ascribable to the community qua community and only relevant in this context qua substantiva corporativa.

We offer two cautions with this conclusion. First, it is biased by Elliott's presupposition that the "priestly" language of 1 Peter is not in any way related to the priestly and sacrificial language of the rest of the New Testament (to be considered later). Secondly, since he defines this community in terms of function, it is impossible to conceive of the individual not being involved. A community "functioning" completely apart from individuals is about as credible as myths of "communal authorship," or production by committee! It is of utmost significance to remember that Peter is speaking of the priesthood as a community, a people of God; but the text does not exclude the teaching that all Christians are priests, especially if one is to


ascribe to them anything which priests do.\textsuperscript{31}

The activity of this "body of priests" is described in the latter half of verse 5: "to offer up Spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." The verb ἀνεγέγκατε continues the priestly language. The root, ἀναφέρω, means in its constituent parts "to bear/bring up." The usual external entailments bring this into the liturgical sphere: "In the LXX this verb was bound with the object of sacrifice and hence became a \textit{terminus technicus} in the cultic nomenclature: 'to bring up (to the altar) a sacrifice,' 'to offer' (cf. Lev. 14:20, 16:25, 17:5f.; 1 Esdr. 5:49; Is. 57:6; 2 Macc. 1:18, 2:9)."\textsuperscript{32} The object of the verb, πνευματικάς θυσίας, is subject to the same interpretation which the adjective "Spiritual" called forth previously. These are not "immaterial" sacrifices, as opposed to those of Judaism and pagan temples, but they are works done in and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Because the body of priests is indwelt by the Spirit, such sacrifices flow from their hands. What these sacrifices are is not yet explained. One example will appear in verse 9.

One final vocable further emphasizes the sacrificial language:

\textsuperscript{31}Elliott's point is valuable in warning against Protestant individualizing on the basis of this text. "According to one modern Lutheran theologian, the Danish systematician Regin Prenter, 'the universal priesthood is described in that instance where each member of the people can exercise in whole or in part priestly rights and functions.' If this is acceptable as a definition of the idea of the priesthood of all believers, then this idea will have to seek a locus other than the text of 1 Pet. 2:4-10 which depicts not the rights and privileges of individuals but rather the electedness, holiness and worldly responsibility of the corporate people of God." Elliott, "Death of a Slogan," 25.

\textsuperscript{32}Elliott, \textit{The Elect and the Holy}, 167.
εὑροσθέκτονς "acceptable." In the LXX it is used of sacrifices which are pleasing to God (Lev. 1:3); when the people are apostate their sacrifices are not acceptable (Jer. 6:20); but in the last times sacrifices will once again be acceptable (Is. 56:7). Thus in the time of Christ, "sacrifices" are acceptable (Rom. 15:16,31; 2 Cor. 6:2).

Precisely what is modified by διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ is unclear. Are the sacrifices made "through Jesus Christ," or acceptable through him? Elliott prefers the former. Perhaps both are intended; the prepositional phrase would then refer to the entire verse. Since he is High Priest sacrifices are made through him, and because of his sacrifice they are acceptable to God through him.

**Verses 6-8**

In verses 6-10, as noted, we shall see many of the previous themes recurring; therefore we will comment mainly on the new developments. Verse 6 expands on the notion of Christ the "elect/chosen" and "precious" stone via an amalgam of quotations from Isaiah. Verse 7 emphasizes the twofold reaction to this stone which is possible. For those who believe there is ἡ τιμή "honor, precious value." One is reminded of the description of Christ the rock as ἐκτιμῶν "precious" (vv.4,6). What is said of Christ is said of those who believe in him. Those who do not believe, on the other hand, are not transformed into "living stones" (v.5), but stumble over the stone and are offended by it (vv.7,8).

---


Verses 9-10

"Not so you," Peter responds: ύμεῖς δὲ (v.9). The string of phrases which follows is ἡ τιμή "the honor" (v.7) placed on those who are baptized.

In the opening sentence of his letter (see on i.1) he had hinted that the Church is the true Israel, the rightful heir of all the privileges pertaining to the old Israel and all the promises made to it. So here, calling in aid yet another cento of OT texts, he transfers to the Christian community a string of honorific titles which in the original applied to Israel. They are all, it should be noted, corporate in character, denoting the Church as a body rather than individual Christians.35

The first phrase is the heart of the picture; all the rest flows from this. "You are γένος ἐκλεκτόν, an elect race." The chosenness of Christ (vv.4,6) is now explicitly given to Christians, borrowing the phrase from Is. 43:20. The priority of this expression is evident from the fact that Peter interjects this quotation from Is. 43:20 into the middle of the quotation from Ex. 19:6, already begun with ύμεῖς δὲ.36 In view of the previous discussion of ἐκλεκτός we now suggest that the instrument of this "chosenness" is Baptism. By the splash of water God makes his choice. A race is created by the new birth. Thus at a new mountain the Lord has himself a people (cf. Ex. 19:6 and Matt. 28:16). This verse revolves around the state of being into which God's people are called in Holy Baptism.

35Kelly, 95-96.

36See Elliott, The Elect and the Holy, 142. Note that in Is. 43:14-21 it is "the Holy One of Israel" who redeems his chosen people from Babylon. His holiness becomes theirs. In the latter half of v. 9 Peter draws in part on Is. 43:21 (LXX), "my people, whom I chose to declare my wonderful deeds."
Finally we arrive at βασίλειον ἱεράτευμα, understanding that what it evokes stems from the election of God. We already know ἱεράτευμα in light of its discussion in verse 5. βασίλειον brings new problems. Obviously this word pair is lifted directly from the LXX version of Ex. 19:6’s ἱερατεία Βασιλείας “kingdom of priests, priestly kingdom.” How then does 1 Pet. 2:9 come to speak of "a royal priesthood"? We have considered this in chapter one with reference to the Septuagint translation. However, we shall review the argument for its impact on the present passage. Elliott deals with this issue at great length. Traditionally βασίλειον has been taken as an adjective, "royal." Selwyn summarizes his extensive investigation:

βασίλειος as an adjective meaning "royal" is not rare in the Greek tragedians, but seems to connote a more intimate and personal relationship than βασιλικος, and to be almost equivalent to τοῦ βασιλείου. If St. Peter took βασίλειον in Ex. xix.6 as an adjective, he would have meant by it "a priesthood in the service of a king", i.e. God.37

Elliott cites three points used to support this rendering. (1) in normal syntax nothing suggests it to be anything but an adjective. Taken with the next phrase one has a chiasm: adjective-noun:noun-adjective. (2) Nowhere else does βασίλειον occur as a substantive connected immediately to another substantive. (3) In those times it was common for a cultic group to form an alliance with a king.38 Most writers emphasize also that the rhythm of the verse is served best by a combination of adjective and noun here.39

37Selwyn, 166.

38Elliott, The Elect and the Holy, 72.

39See e.g. William Arndt, "A Royal Priesthood, 1 Pet. 2:9,"
In favor of the substantive reading Elliott offers three points. (1) The LXX is faithful to the MT in all parts of this verse. The nominal form הָרָא הַרְודָא "kingdom" would thus suggest that βασίλειον is nominal. (2) Statistically, the LXX elsewhere uses βασίλειον 24 times as a substantive and only twice as an adjective. (3) All Versions, and allusions to Ex. 19:6, treat the first member of this chain unambiguously as a noun. Selwyn adduces massive evidence: in classical Greek it most often means "palace"; Polybius uses it for "royal city, capital"; in 2 Macc. 2:17 we find τὸ βασίλειον καὶ τὸ ἱεράτευμα; in Philo, βασίλειον καὶ ἱεράτευμα; in the fathers it is always a noun except when quoting this passage. Likewise the other New Testament evidence supports this nominal form: Rev. 1:6, βασίλειαν.

Concordia Theological Monthly (19 April 1948), 245; Beare, 130-31.; Davids, 91. In a review of Elliott's The Elect and the Holy, Frederick Danker vehemently objects to Elliott's construal of βασίλειον as a noun. Taking Isaiah 43 and 44 as the prime source of this pericope, he views "possession" by God as the theme. "Since God is Israel's king, Israel is to belong to Him, as a ἱεράτευμα that is properly the King's possession. Thus βασίλειον is best understood as an adjective rather than as a substantive, aside from the fact that a cosubstantival phrasing βασίλειον, ἱεράτευμα is intolerable in a context in which the adjectives ἐκλεκτόν and ἁγίον modify their respective nouns. ... If βασίλειον is interpreted as an adjective, and if its position is recognized as giving special force to its qualitative accent, the meaning of 1 Peter 2:9 is clear. 'A royal body of priests,' or 'a body of priests belonging to the King,' echoes the thought 'a people for His own possession.'" Frederick Danker, "Brief Study," Concordia Theological Monthly 38.5 (May 1967): 331. This interpretation requires the following scenario: Peter departed from the original sense of the LXX, lifted the phrase from Ex. 19:6 (LXX) and reinterpreted it according to Isaiah 43 & 44.

40Elliott, The Elect and the Holy, 73. This evidence assumes, of course, that Peter used the LXX in its original sense, without reinterpretation.

41Selwyn, 165-66.
ιερεῖς "a kingdom, priests"; Rev. 5:10, βασιλείαν καὶ ιερεῖς "a kingdom and priests." The only other New Testament example of this precise form βασίλευν occurs in Luke 7:25 where it is clearly a noun, "royal palaces." 42

Assuming that the weight of evidence favors βασίλευν as a noun, how does that help our investigation? ... βασίλευν in Ex. 19:6 and 23:22 would best be taken as meaning either 'kingdom' in the sense of the people under the rule of God the King (as intended in the MT) or 'royal residence' in the sense of the people in whom God has made His dwelling-place ... ." 43 Though the former agrees with our exegesis of Ex. 19:6, the latter possibility brings a provocative twist in this context (perhaps it is a double entendre). βασίλευν would then be parallel to οἶκος πνευματικός (v.5). This "chosen race" is the place where God has graciously deigned to dwell. "Thus the royal house of the Eschaton, the elected βασίλευν of the Messianic Age, is the house created and sustained by the Divine Spirit. The house of the Divine King is in reality the house of the Divine Spirit." 44 Again the baptismal allusions grow.

One now can see ιεράτευμα as just one pearl on the string of this verse. "Each metaphor qualifies and is qualified by the other metaphors,

42 Ernest Best argues (unconvincingly) that βασίλευν should be taken as a noun, but with the meaning "body of kings," in accord with the other phrases in the group. Ernest Best, "1 Peter II 4-10 - A Reconsideration," Novum Testamentum 11 (1969): 270-93.

43 Elliott, The Elect and the Holy, 73.

44 Elliott, The Elect and the Holy, 159.
all of them together pointing to realities lying behind them all."\(^{45}\)

Just as in Ex. 19:6 the noun "priests" served adjectivally, "priestly," so too here "priesthood" is a noun metaphor which modifies the rest of the string of appellations given to the new Israel. In this string, ἴεράτευμα prompted the sacrificial imagery of verse 5, and because of its active component will be intimately involved in and defined by the actions of verse 9b.

This "body of priests" is further described as ἐθνός ἁγιόν "a holy nation." (Thus the second half of Elliott's title, The Elect and the Holy.) In what way does the latter phrase modify or add to ἴεράτευμα? As noted before, ἴεράτευμα already contains "holiness" in its root ἴερ-. Is the subsequent phrase ἐθνός ἁγιόν as strictly parallel as we found in Ex. 19:6, to the point of redundancy? In Elliott's thesis, the proprium of "priesthood" is holiness. Thus he applies Ex. 19:6 directly to 1 Peter:

> when Israel is faithful to the covenant then she shall be a kingdom of priests, that is, a holy nation sharing the holiness of her holy God and enjoying the access to Him which is typical of priests.

... An emphasis not upon priestly function but rather upon a priestly relationship to JHWH is the concern.\(^{46}\)

In the context of 1 Peter a caution must be noted. Elliott has frequently emphasized the active sense of the Greek ἴεράτευμα. Though we have seen that Ex. 19:6 stressed the honor and dignity of priesthood, and that 1 Peter 2 is similarly concerned with the status of God's people, Peter also seems to add some resultant functions of priesthood.


\(^{46}\)Elliott, The Elect and the Holy, 62.
Though interpreted by Exodus, 1 Peter cannot be restricted by it. Kelly argues: "But it would surely have been paradoxical for the writer to fasten on this particular image if he had intended to evacuate it of all priestly connotation; and his language in 5 makes it unlikely that he wished to do so."47 Certainly the sacrificial flavor of verse 5 and the task of verse 9b indicate that Peter meant something more with this sacerdotal metaphor. To this we shall return below.

Though "priesthood" involves holiness, ἅγιος stresses it even more clearly, emphasizing the character of God's people. The holiness of Christians is derived from the holiness of God, as Peter indicates in 1:14-16. They are holy not because they in themselves are morally upright, not of their own doing. Rather, God has made them so by cleansing them from sin. ἅγιος "saints, holy ones" becomes a synonym for Christians in the New Testament by virtue of the "Holy Spirit" who dwells in them. Elliott is correct in calling God's people "elect" and "holy"; and the holiness is pushed more explicitly in the adjective ἅγιος, to draw out that component of "priesthood."

On the other hand, many would see "holy" as "set apart for God's service."48 This component of meaning is drawn out far better, however, by the last appellative, λαός εἰς περιποίησιν "a people for possession." These words are a hybrid of Is. 43:21 and Mal. 3:17. λαός, "the word which in the LXX is the designation par excellence of the people of

47Kelly, 98.

48Cf. Kelly, 99; Davids, 92. This common interpretation of "holiness" was discussed above in chapter one with reference to the שִׁיָּדָה שִׁיָּדָה.
God,"⁴⁹ is transferred with its inherent honor (τιμή, cf. v.7) to the new Israel. The implied subject of the verbal noun περιποίησιν is God, as the external entailments in Is. 43:21 confirm. Peter stresses that the New Testament believers have inherited that special relationship with God in which he has chosen them to be his own possession. Again election is stressed. God makes us his own in Holy Baptism, and so we are holy.

After this excursus, saturated with language of "being," describing who they are as God's people, Peter continues with ὅπως "in order that ..." Now the purpose is stated. Remarkably this is not an indicative-imperative sequence; Peter does not say "you are, therefore do." Rather, he explains God's purpose in making them what they are, a role which simply flows from their being. They will proclaim τὰς ἀρετὰς of God. Kelly explains this term: "Instead of mighty deeds the older translations give 'praises'(AV), 'excellencies'(RV), or the like; but the Greek aretai, when applied to a god, does not denote his virtues or intrinsic qualities but the manifestations of his power (TWNT I, 457-61)."⁵⁰ For Israel this was encapsulated in the Exodus events, to which Is. 43:21 points. For the Christian the "mighty deeds" of God are the crucifixion of Christ and his resurrection from the dead, with the salvation procured thereby, which becomes a "mighty deed" for him in Baptism. This is explicated by the phrase "who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

⁴⁹Kelly, 99.

⁵⁰Kelly, 99.
καλέω "to call" refers in the LXX and New Testament to the dramatic change of lordship which God's call works (in 1 Peter see 1:15; 2:21; 3:9; 5:10). The description of this call, from σκότους to φῶς recalls the gift of Baptism. Kelly notes this early Christian imagery: "Their pre-Christian past was regarded as 'darkness', and their baptism as 'enlightenment' (Rom. 13:12; Eph. 5:14; Heb. 6:4; 10:32; Justin I Apol. lxii.12f.; lxv.1; Dial. cxxii.1)."51

The verb used, ἐξαγγέλλετε, deserves special comment, and may serve as the key to the whole question of the proper functions of the priestly body. This phrase offers the only explanation within the text of what the "Spiritual sacrifices" (v.5) are. ἐξαγγέλλω "to proclaim" emphasizes the verbal aspect of the priestly sacrifice. The only other "New Testament" occurrence is in the brief ending to Mark 16, where it is used of narrating the events of Christ's resurrection. Elliott argues that an "orientation 'outward,' to the world, is implied in the words 'that you may proclaim the mighty deeds of Him Who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.'"52 Later in the epistle, he finds the other half of the "Spiritual sacrifice" expounded.

Complementary to this verbal witness and related as to both origin and purpose is the offering of sacrifice, i.e. the leading of a holy way of life. . . . Witness in word and in deed are not alternatives but compose a double task in which the latter complements and corroborates the former. In each case, the proclaiming of God's mighty deeds and the sacrificing of the holy life, the witness is not primarily inner-directed but outer-directed.53

51 Kelly, 100.
52 Elliott, The Elect and the Holy, 184.
53 Elliott, The Elect and the Holy, 186.
Elliott's key point is in the term "witness." For him, this is what distinguishes the priestly "proclamation" from the "proclamation" of the Office of the Ministry.

Proclamation, preaching, is the implication of v.9. Insofar, one might think of a "ministering of the word of God to mankind." However, by the term "ministry" is implied customarily not so much an "outer-directed" witness toward the world but rather an "inner-directed" ministry within the body of the faithful.54

Elliott's answer to the question of the proper functions of the priesthood seems then to be:

This task, described in cultic terms accommodated to the implications of "body of priests," . . . consists in the exercise of a holy life of obedience and well-doing coram Deo and pro hominibus. This activity is basically a witness oriented toward the world and complements a second aspect of the community's responsibility, the proclamation of the word of salvation and mercy. . . . The task of the Chosen People described in 2:4-10 is a corporate witness directed to the world.55

One notes, however, that Elliott has virtually ignored the coram Deo aspect of "proclamation." In stressing the distinction between ministerial proclamation and priestly proclamation he has concentrated on the distinction of indirect object between the Minister's "proclamation" to the faithful and the priests' "proclamation" to the world. However, another distinction is involved: the Minister proclaims the Word of God to the people; the people proclaim it back to God. This form of ἐγγέλλω "proclamation" is liturgical, which prompts one to investigate the context of this Old Testament quotation. The picture painted in Isaiah 43 is forensic: God calls together into assembly all the peoples of the world (Is. 43:9) and asks for witnesses

54 Elliott, The Elect and the Holy, 192.
55 Elliott, The Elect and the Holy, 224.
to testify to his saving actions (vv.10-12). Then he speaks in his own behalf, recalling his deliverance of Israel from Egypt and his destruction of the Egyptians. His purpose is that his people would proclaim these deeds back to him! How do we know that this is the implied external entailment? Because the direction of this desired proclamation is the same as the direction of the burnt offerings, sacrifices, grain offerings, and incense (43:22-24). These are God-directed sacrifices. What God here desires his people to bring to him is the praise of recounting his marvelous deeds.

The LXX of Is. 43:21 uses διηγεῖσθαι, from διηγέομαι, to translate the original piel of בְּרוֹא. Frequently in the Psalms בְּרוֹא-piel is translated with ἐξαγγέλλω instead, as Peter chooses to do in 1 Pet. 2:9. Perhaps the most relevant parallel uses of ἐξαγγέλλω are not to be found in the Greek tragedians, as Julius Schniewind suggests, but rather in these Psalms. There we find seven out of eight Old Testament uses, all within "cultic" settings. Ps. 9:15(14E) specifically locates the proclamation "in the gates of the daughter of Zion." Ps. 72:28(73:28E) parallels this. In Ps. 70:15(71:15E) the object of proclamation is τὴν δικαιοσύνην σου "your righteousness" and τὴν σωτηρίαν σου "your salvation." Most telling of all is Ps. 106:22(107:22E), in which proclaiming τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ "his works" is identified by the parallelism

56 Julius Schniewind, "ἐξαγγέλλω," TDNT, 1:69 - "We see its secular use in tragedy, the ἐξάγγελος being a messenger who proclaims abroad ... what is concealed from the gaze of the spectators." Therefore the meaning of "publishing abroad" is assigned to 1 Pet. 2:9. But on page 70 he notes the "cultic" use in Psalms. These Psalms in LXX numeration are: 9:15; 55:9; 70:15; 72:28; 78:13; 106:22; 118:13.26.
with θυσίαν δίνομεν "a sacrifice of praise." 57

Could it be, then, that the primary import of this phrase in 1 Pet. 2:9b is likewise liturgical? This liturgical import provides the external entailments of the "proclamation." The "Spiritual sacrifice" described here would then be the faithful extolling back to God in praise his saving work which has first been proclaimed to them. "Saying back to him what he has said to us, we repeat what is most true and sure... The rhythm of our worship is from him to us, and then from us back to him." 58 Surely this is what we have seen in the usage of ἐξαγγέλλω. Elliott's exposition has helped to point out how this liturgical "proclamation" is distinct from "preaching."

From this extended investigation of 1 Pet. 2:1-10 we may conclude

57 Arthur Weiser, The Psalms, trans. Herbert Hartwell (London SCM Press, 1962) repeatedly expresses this liturgical flavor as he extracts the "Sitz im Leben" of each psalm. On Ps. 71:15e he writes: "Just as others come with their sacrifices and offerings, so he comes into the house of God 'with the mighty deeds of God'... to proclaim in the midst of the congregation the righteous acts of God and his saving deeds. He will remember the tradition of God's Heilsgeschichte with which he had become acquainted in public worship from his youth (v.17), and will praise God more and more by means of his hymn and thanksgiving (v.14)" (499). On Ps. 74:28e he notes that the individual "discerns the action of God to which he now joyfully and humbly testifies before the congregation by incorporating his own experience of God in the larger context of the whole redemptive work of God... To bear witness with the thanksgiving to these saving deeds of God he simultaneously regards as his duty and his joy" (516). Again, he proposes the setting of Ps. 107e: "According to v.22 this community thanksgiving was probably recited before the offering of the sacrifice of thanksgiving in the festival cult of the Yahweh community (v.32).... In the first part of the psalm (vv.1-32).... it is still possible clearly to recognize the liturgical, responsorial character of the hymn, with the priests' call for a prayer of thanksgiving (vv.1f.,8,15,21f.,31f.) and the responses (vv.1b,9,16)" (685).

58 Lutheran Worship (St. Louis: Concordia, 1982), 6.
that the *proprium* of the priesthood is **being** and **doing**: being the elect of God through Baptism, and doing Spiritual sacrifices in liturgical response to God. Fortunately, this priestly life *coram Deo* also "spills over" into the liturgy of life, whereby our neighbor gets to overhear! In this way alone might 1 Peter 2:9 speak of "witness* pro hominibus."

**Holy Baptism and 1 Peter**

Central to the previous exegesis has been the recognition that 1 Pet. 2:1-10 flows from Baptism. Throughout this century various hypotheses have arisen concerning the place of Baptism in the epistle as a whole. A brief survey of such theories may be helpful.

One pioneer in such "liturgical hypotheses" is R. Perdelwitz, who argued that

1.3-iv.11 consists largely of a baptismal homily addressed to recent converts with the object of demonstrating the superiority of the Christian sacrament to the initiation rites of pagan mystery cults. As it stands it has been filled out with scraps of instructional and hortatory matter, and prefixed to a letter intended for persecuted Christians living in areas where these cults flourished.60

This begins the tendency to fragment the epistle at these particular points. A critical objection to such liturgical theories is that they fail to explain the epistle as it now stands. Furthermore, Perdelwitz misses the obvious description of the church as the new Israel. If it is apologetic, 1 Peter is an apologetic against Judaism.61

---

60Summarized by Kelly, 16.

61Moule argues that the entire priesthood and sacrifice imagery of the New Testament is an apologetic against both Judaism and paganism,
H. Preisker, in his third edition of H. Windisch’s 1 Peter commentary, offered a more purely liturgical solution. Preisker claimed that 1 Peter is a transcript of a Roman baptismal liturgy. The liturgy is again found in 1:3-4:11. This he analyzes as follows:

1:3-12 a “prayer-psalm,” eschatological in flavour.
1:13-21 a “teaching-discourse,” including creedal phrases pointing to the imminent baptism. The abrupt change to past tense verbs indicates that the baptismal act occurred after 1:21. No details are given because of the disciplina arcani.
1:22-25 a short, sober, “baptismal dedication.”
2:1-10 a festal song in three strophes.
2:11-3:12 an “exhortation” delivered by a new preacher. At 2:21-24 the congregation interrupts with a Christ hymn.
3:13-4:7a a “revelation” given by a charismatic bystander.
4:7b-11 the “closing prayer.”
4:12-5:11 an open service for the whole body of the faithful.

Preisker suggests that "Sylvanus" reworked the liturgy into a letter, which he dispatched to churches in Anatolia in the name of Peter.

F. L. Cross reworked Preisker's plan, shedding the extempore outbursts (which would be odd in a "liturgy"), related many features to second century baptismal rites, and postulated a specific origin: the Paschal Vigil of Easter Eve. Cross offers a unique explanation of the centrality of "suffering" in the epistle. The verb πάσχω "to suffer" occurs twelve times in 1 Peter, and only eleven more in the rest of the New Testament. A sermon of Hippolytus demonstrates that an etymological


63Preisker, adapted from the analysis in Kelly, 17.
connection was assumed between πάσχω and τὸ πάσχα "the Passover." Since Exodus was connected with Easter, and Baptisms were notably performed at the Easter Vigil, he concludes that 1 Peter preserves the liturgy for this service. He finds a specific reference to the Passover lamb in 1:18-19, Exodus language in 1:13 "gird up your loins," and Exodus citations in 2:9-17. The opening prayer is likewise filled with Paschal theology. Further baptismal references include: (a) the express mention of Baptism at 3:20-21; (b) the use of baptismal language in 1:23, 2:2; (c) frequent temporal particles indicating a rite in progress, ἦν and ἥρα; (d) catechetical teaching in 2:3-3:7; (e) creedal language in 3:18-22, (f) "milk" (2:2), which reappears in a baptismal custom in Hippolytus' Apostolic Tradition; (g) "light" (2:9), which holds a special place in baptismal imagery, especially in the Paschal Vigil; (h) possible references to the baptismal formula in λόγου (1:23) and ῥῆμα (1:25); and, (i) the reference to women's adornments (3:3), which echoes Hippolytus' rules for the Baptism of


65 Cross, 27.

66 Kelly argues that in the first three centuries of Christianity there were no creeds in declarative form. Rather a threefold interrogation was given to the baptizand, who would answer "I believe" to each part. The language in 3:18-22, reminiscent as it is of the Apostle's Creed, could refer to the words to which the believers assented in their "interrogation." See J. N. D. Kelly, Early Christian Creeds, 3d ed. (New York: Longman, 1972), 30-61.

67 Cf. Martin Scharlemann, "Why the Kuriou in 1 Peter 1:25?" Concordia Theological Monthly 30.5 (May 1959): 352-56. He argues that in changing θεοῦ of Is. 40:8 to κυρίου in 1 Pet. 1:25, there is a conscious accommodation to the baptismal credo "Jesus is κύριος."
women. Thus he concludes that 1:3-4:11 is a liturgy for Baptism at the Paschal Vigil in Rome.

Virulent responses to Cross's thesis quickly poured forth. C. F. D. Moule finds the "liturgy turned into an epistle" inconceivable:

I do not find it easy ... to conceive how a liturgy-homily, shorn of its "rubrics" (which, of course, were probably oral), but with its changing tenses and broken sequences all retained, could have been hastily dressed up as a letter and sent off (without a word of explanation) to Christians who had not witnessed the original setting.

T. C. G. Thornton objects to the Paschal assumption:

Is it true to say that in the first century Easter was the main season when baptisms were administered? Our first evidence that Easter was considered an especially appropriate time for baptism appears no earlier than Tertullian [De Baptismo, 19], who says that Easter provides the most solemn occasion for baptism and that Pentecost is the next most appropriate day. There are dangers in arguing from Tertullian to first-century practice.

Thornton raises further concern over whether a liturgical setting is required at all. "... [T]he mere fact that 1 Peter uses baptismal language does not make it part of a first-century church service."

Perhaps the difficulty lies in the rather un-Lutheran assumption

---

68 See Cross, 28-35.


70 Moule, "Nature," 4. However, the fact that they are "Christians" means that they have "witnessed" Baptism!

71 Thornton, 20. On the other hand, there are also dangers in taking what Tertullian tells of in the Church as something just started!

72 Thornton, 21.
that Baptism is only of interest at the actual time of Baptism! The evidence is overwhelming that 1 Peter is filled with references to Baptism. Must one create an either-or, that it is either a baptismal liturgy or the baptismal references are merely incidental? David Hill tries to avoid this: "Without going as far as to make of the letter a paschall homily, or seeing in it a discourse which accompanied the rite of Christian initiation, we may still recognize allusions to baptism (mostly indirect, but some of them firmly assured) and features which preserve the ardent tone characteristic of an exhortatory sermon."\textsuperscript{73} Is that only as far as the evidence takes us? Baptism is more than just alluded to; it is the \textit{Grundbegriff} of the entire exhortation. Furthermore, perhaps the role of the "epistle" in the liturgy has been missed. Because the epistles are not private documents, but were intended by the apostolic authors to be read in public worship from the first, they are all liturgical.\textsuperscript{74} Whether this particular message was meant to be proclaimed specifically when Baptisms occurred cannot be resolved. Nonetheless, Baptism is the resource of the exhortation.

Perhaps a further error lies in assuming that all the references to Exodus point to a Paschal setting of a liturgy. Instead, the connection may lie in the thematic connection of the epistle with the


\textsuperscript{74}With the possible exception of Philemon, all of the epistles betray the fact that they were to be read to the congregation in worship. See especially 1 Thess. 5:27; Col. 4:16; Rev. 1:3; 22:18. Even the Pastoral Epistles, though addressed to the clergy, were intended for this liturgical reading, as is evidenced by the plural ὑμῶν "you [all]" in the conclusion of each.
Exodus texts and event. Eduard Lohse notes the Old Testament tenor of the letter: "The entire passage 1:3-2:10 is dominated by the idea of the holy people of God, to which the Christians now belong." The Exodus references build up to the string of terms applied in our pericope. Lohse notes:

J. Danielou (Sacramentum futuri, Paris 1950) has explored the typological connections between 1 Pet. 1:13-2:10 and the book of Exodus. In that process he has called attention above all to the following passages...: those who are baptized are the new people of God who set out on their pilgrimage (1:17) with their loins girded (1:13). They are redeemed by the blood of the Lamb (1:18-19) and drink from the rock that flows with the life-giving water (2:5). Still without justification is Danielou's conjecture that in 1 Pet. 1:13-2:10 we have to do with a baptismal homily that was delivered during the paschal week. It is appropriate to ask, however, whether 1 Peter has adopted traditional material that was used in baptismal homilies in order to utilize it in a discourse to the suffering churches.

In other words, it was not the occasion of a paschal Baptism which called forth the Exodus imagery. Rather it was the commonly used connection of Baptism with Exodus which drew the Exodus typology into an epistle which used Baptism as the foundation of its argument.

There is also a better explanation for the stress on πάσχω than Cross suggested. Baptism is intimately connected to the suffering and death of Christ—consider Romans 6. The mere thought of Baptism is enough to evoke πάσχω; likewise the reverse. Moule argues this way:

---


76 Lohse, 48 n.51.

77 Leaney, 244, lists the parallels he has discovered between Baptism and Passover themes.
As for the baptismal theme, which, as all are agreed, is prominent, there is an obvious congruity between this and the theme of suffering. Suffering is connected with Baptism (through Christ's baptism which meant the cross), and baptism is an epitome of the Christian doctrine of suffering. There is no context where Christian thought more naturally takes baptismal shape than the context of persecution: once again, Heb. 6:4-6 is an obvious parallel.\textsuperscript{78}

David Hill even more lucidly emphasizes the connection between a Christian's Baptism and his subsequent life of suffering.

Acceptance of the consequences of becoming and being known as a Christian was implied in the acceptance of baptism. In short, a Christian's suffering and his baptism are linked because, in accepting baptism, he is affirming willingness to share in the known experience of baptised persons who were commonly, if not constantly, treated with suspicion and hostility. ... The baptismal tone of the letter is due, not to its being substantially a baptismal homily, or the liturgy of a just-completed rite, but to the fact that a Christian's baptism is the point of transition ....\textsuperscript{79}

While it could never be definitively established whether or how much 1 Peter is a direct transcription of a baptismal liturgy or homily, all of these authors demonstrate how closely Baptism is tied into Peter's argumentation. In fact, as Moule and Hill show, the twin themes of Baptism and suffering are not at all at odds. The epistle is not a hodge-podge of earlier disparate sources.

If Baptism is at the heart of 1 Peter, then it must influence any explanation proposed for the definition of "priesthood." The connection of priesthood with Baptism was frequently made in early Christian exegesis. Without digressing too far into a history of the patristic

\textsuperscript{78} Moule, "Nature," 11.

\textsuperscript{79} David Hill, "On Suffering and Baptism in I Peter," \textit{Novum Testamentum} 18.3 (1976): 185. Hill's work suffers, however, from his view of Baptism as a commitment which forms the ground for moral exhortation, rather than as a foundational source of certainty through the action of God.
exegesis of the text, we may find a few examples illuminating. In a catechetical work the seventh-century Syrian Orthodox Patriarch John I speaks of the significance of the baptismal anointing:

With the imprint of this holy oil you are inscribed into the sonship of the heavenly Father; through the mark, or imprint, of this heavenly oil you become the sheep of Christ, a priestly kingdom, a holy people...  

John Chrysostom says that everyone needs to "become king and priest and prophet in the bath of baptism." In an Antiochene baptismal liturgy, this association is made in the prayer before the postbaptismal anointing: "grant through this imprint the union of your living and holy Spirit, and the honour of priesthood and the heavenly Kingdom to those who are sanctified." This bestowal is traced back to the very Baptism of Christ. St. Ephrem wrote in the fourth century: "The Spirit who rested on him at his baptism testified that he was the Shepherd (that is king, following Old Testament usage), and that he had received the roles of prophet and priest through John." Sebastian Brock comments on this connection: "Since Christ's baptism (linked with themes of his death and resurrection) constitutes the fountainhead of Christian baptism, what he received by right, we at our baptism receive by grace." One may push farther therefore and postulate upon all the

---


81 John Chryssavgis, "The Royal Priesthood (Peter 2.9)," Greek Orthodox Theological Review 32.4 (1987): 375.

82 In Brock, 16.

83 In Brock, 16.

84 Brock, 16. Eastern Orthodoxy points to Mary as the archetype of
evidence cited thus far that Peter teaches Baptism as an "ordination" to priesthood. 85

Sacrifice and Priesthood Elsewhere in the New Testament

This chapter has concentrated on 1 Peter 2:1-10 in its attempt to do justice to the depths of this passage. However, before concluding we may test what has been found in 1 Peter by what is said elsewhere in the New Testament regarding priesthood and sacrifice.

Elliott emphatically denies that there is any connection between ἱεράτευμα in 1 Peter and any other New Testament "theologies" of priesthood. 86 "Whereas in 1P ἱεράτευμα is brought into no connection with a priestly function or office of Jesus Christ, in the Apoc. ἱερεῖς [priests] and the EF [Exodus Formula] are placed into a context which

Christian priesthood. Chryssavgis writes: "Significantly, the person who expresses most perfectly this royal priesthood is not actually a man but a woman—the Virgin Mother of God. The energy spent on the anti-apostolic proposition for the ordination of women would be of more benefit to all if it were directed to a more fervent devotion to the Theotokos. The Virgin Mary, however, was never a priest in the ministerial sense" (376).

85This thesis has been frequently misapplied in order to denigrate the Office of the Ministry. For example, Peter Kjeseth, "Baptism as Ordination," Dialog 8.3 (Summer 1969), writes that "the slogan, baptism as ordination, scores well in fidelity to the biblical witness. It asserts the sort of unity within diversity which is characteristic of the earliest patterns in the New Testament and by broadening the scope of ministry to all the baptized has indicated a choice for diversity and freedom rather than exclusivism" (180). He cites approvingly the conclusion that "in virtue of the universal priesthood, in principle, 'laymen' can do everything without 'priests'" (182). Thus he concludes: "The conviction that any one form or 'order' of ministry is divinely intended, undoubtedly, will in this period of transformation continue to wither away" (182). In wielding the slogan "Baptism as Ordination" he fails to ask "ordination to what?" and thus confuses the role of the lay "priesthood" with the Office of the Ministry.

suggests a connection with the kingship and priesthood of Jesus."\textsuperscript{87}

Likewise, he sees no connection with Hebrews:

Heb., as the Apoc., develops the thought of a heavenly cultus, presenting the Church in her consummated form as a celestial people of God, a heavenly cultic community... This conception has nothing in common with 1P which discusses not a heavenly community but rather an empiric earthly reality not distinct from but participant in a historical continuity... In Heb. the coordination between Christ's priestly activity and the priestly or cultic function of the community indeed allows the conclusion that the believers are pictured as sharing in the priesthood of their Lord. Both the priesthood of Jesus and the idea of the Church's sharing in such priesthood are thoughts foreign to the epistle of 1P however.\textsuperscript{88}

Elliott concludes that "the NT contains no unanimous viewpoint on the subject of Christian priesthood."\textsuperscript{89}

Such "logic" is mystifying! This is typical of the redaction critic's presupposition that the "theologies" of individual authors must be contradictory. One need not try very hard to see that the contributions of 1 Peter, Hebrews, and Revelation (which Elliott has correctly isolated) are not contradictory but complementary. Elliott himself recognizes that Peter does not develop the idea of "priesthood" very far, but only uses it in a limited way. Peter's brevity in no way excludes the contribution of the rest of the New Testament to a coherent theology of priesthood; in fact, it confirms the connection! Peter very likely assumed that the rest of the freight which "the priesthood of all the baptized" carried in the early Christian thought-world would

\textsuperscript{87}Elliott, \textit{The Elect and the Holy}, 170.

\textsuperscript{88}Elliott, \textit{The Elect and the Holy}, 170-71.

\textsuperscript{89}Elliott, \textit{The Elect and the Holy}, 174.
come right along with his use of the term.\textsuperscript{90}

Let us consider briefly this common teaching. We begin with Jesus, for priestly and sacrificial language is used far more often of him than of all the baptized. Christ is himself the προσφοράν "offering" and θυσίαν "sacrifice" (Eph. 5:2). He is the ἱλασμός/ἱλαστήριον "propitiation" for the sins of the world (Rom. 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). He is τὸ ἁμνός "the lamb" who takes away the world's sins (John 1:29), specifically τὸ πάσχα "the Passover [lamb]" (1 Cor. 5:7). Not only that, but Christ is also the ἄρχωρφος "High Priest" who enters the Holy of Holies once and for all with this sacrifice (Heb. 2:17; 3:1; 4:14-15; 5:1-10). Frequently, Jesus is spoken of as at once both High Priest and the sacrifice he offers (Heb. 7:1-8:2; 9:11-14, 23-28; 10:1-25; 13:11-12). John shows Jesus as another kind of High Priest, one who offers a prayer of intercession for his people (John 17; cf. Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 9:24; 1 John 2:1). Having elaborated upon Jesus as High Priest, Hebrews then makes the connection that the priestly work of the baptized is made δι’ αὐτοῦ "through him" (Heb. 13:15). These words echo the διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ of 1 Pet. 2:5;\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{90}Minear offers this principle for interpreting metaphors: "Because the metaphorical language in one biblical book is homogeneous with the reservoir of metaphors in the Bible as a whole, readers should consult that reservoir to recapture the full range of reverberations released by a single metaphor" (238).

\textsuperscript{91}Hill, "To Offer Spiritual Sacrifices," 58: "If believers are called upon to offer to God the 'spiritual sacrifice' of their whole lives (2:5) it is because of the intervention of Christ who has already opened up for them access to the Father, that is, restored their right relationship with God." Also C. F. D. Moule, "Sanctuary," 38: "... that sacrifice is, as in [Heb.] chapter 10:2, the self-offering of Christ in obedience to God's will, and (through him and incorporated in him) the offering of obedience, worship, and practical service by the
the connection is made even more clear by the parallel use of ἀναφέρω “to offer up.” Elliott certainly is wrong in maintaining that the priestly theology of 1 Peter is unique in the New Testament.

Heb. 13:15 also gives our first definition of the sacrifice offered by the body of priests. Two elements are mentioned: αἴνεσεως "praise," and ὀμολογούντων τῷ ὄνοματι αὐτοῦ "confessing his Name." One might even assume that all of the ethical exhortation of 13:1-17 is included in this sacrifice. Paul exhorts the Romans to present τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν "your bodies" as a sacrifice to God (Rom. 12:1). Many terms link this verse to 1 Peter: "sacrifice," "living," "holy," "acceptable," λογικός. Paul offers the conversion of the Gentiles as an "acceptable" sacrifice to God (Rom. 15:16). The gifts which the Philippians offered for Paul’s support are an "acceptable" and "pleasing" sacrifice to God (Phil. 2:17; 4:18); Paul’s suffering and death are a "libation" to be poured on top of their sacrifice (Phil. 2:17). Finally, John’s revelation calls the saints βασιλείαν ἱερεῖς "a kingdom, priests" (Rev. 1:6), βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερεῖς "a kingdom and priests" (Rev. 5:10), and ἱερεῖς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ "priests of God and of Christ" (Rev. 20:7).

Peter’s "priesthood" simply cannot be considered apart from this evidence. To the liturgical proclamation of the "elect and holy people" coram Deo which we found in Peter, these passages contribute the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving to God, and loving service to one’s fellow man.

Christian Church itself, verses 15f."
Summary

The *proprium* of the priesthood of all the baptized has been repeatedly emphasized as a *being* and a *doing*, founded upon and growing out of Baptism: being the elect people of God, and doing priestly work. The priesthood of all the baptized is derived likewise from the High Priesthood and once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. Thus the priestly sacrifice is not propitiatory but is a sacrifice of thanksgiving in response to what Christ has done. The sacrifice of the body of priests is *coram Deo*: liturgical praise and thanksgiving to God, extolling back to him the Word of what he has done for and given to men. The work of this priesthood is *primarily* towards God, both in the Liturgy, and in the liturgy of daily life; but such a sacrificial life always spills out in witness towards men outside the community of faith.92

Such an emphasis stresses that the activity of the priesthood flows out of the priestly character which is conferred by God as a *gift*. "Priesthood" is not a lofty goal towards which one strives in the Christian life. This ultimately leads to a legalism which denies the Gospel, as is evident in Brock's conclusions:

(1) The priesthood of all believers is to be understood as a priestly role into which all baptised Christians are meant to grow.

92 Consider this marvelous statement of this aspect of priesthood: "As all Christians are priests (Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6; 1 Pet. 2:9), it would serve well to consider anew the Christian life in terms of priestly service. Emphasis would include the privilege of all, male and female, in the study of God's Word, prayer, sanctified living, fraternal unity, and offering the entire life as a living sacrifice flamed by the fire of the Spirit, to bring the message of reconciliation to the world." Paul L. Schrieber, "Priests Among Priests: The Office of the Ministry in Light of the Old Testament Priesthood," *Concordia Journal* (July 1988): 225.
It is the realisation and actualisation of the full meaning of baptism. . . .

(2) This priestly role which is intended for all baptised believers is something which is made manifest and begins to function only when the individual Christian grows in holiness . . . .

(3) When the priesthood of the baptised is made manifest and starts to be activated and to function, then it results in the proclamation of God's wonderful works . . . .

These conclusions ignore Peter's indicative, "you are a priesthood" upon which is grounded the exhortation which follows. "Doing" must not be made into an action which produces the "being." The bestowal of the honorific title "priesthood" emphasizes that God's gift of "being" righteous precedes all activity before God.

We have come full circle when we note how well this conclusion fits into the purpose of 1 Peter as a whole. In Elliott's scenario:

In general the letter offers consolation and encouragement to Christian resident aliens and strangers suffering from local hostility, slander, and unjustifiable abuse. The strategy of the letter was to counteract the demoralizing and disintegrating impact that such social tension and suffering had upon the Christian sect by reassuring the intended recipients of the distinctive elect and holy community to which they belonged and the new dignity they shared by virtue of their call by God, their sanctification through baptismal rebirth, and their faith in Jesus Christ, the elect and holy suffering servant of God.\textsuperscript{94}

Such a view of 1 Peter rises above moralizing which points the recipients to their own rights, responsibilities, and moral duty (into which scheme the traditional view of a "royal priesthood" fits well). Rather it points to the Gospel promise which lies within God's declaration that his people are a holy and elect body of priests.

\textsuperscript{93}Brock, 21.

\textsuperscript{94}John Elliott, "1 Peter, its Situation and Strategy: A Discussion with David Balch," in Perspectives on First Peter, 65.
EXCURSUS 2:
THE "PRIESTS" OF REVELATION

In view of the monumental study undertaken by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza on "priests" in Revelation alone,\textsuperscript{1} it seems inadequate to deal with these passages in one short note. Yet some treatment is necessary, for Revelation has perhaps been even more the source of an individualistic, triumphalist doctrine of "royal priesthood" than 1 Peter 2 in the traditional form of the text: "and [Christ] hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father" (Rev. 1:6 AV). Yet much of the analysis applied to 1 Peter applies here also. Of the Revelation passages one needs to ask: how do the textual variants affect the meaning of the texts? In what way do they relate to the Exodus 19 - 1 Peter 2 tradition? What is their role in the context of Revelation? How do they contribute to a unified scriptural teaching on the priesthood of all the baptized?

\textbf{Rev. 1:6 and 5:10}

At least half of the difficulties raised by these two verses can be traced to the corrupted reading of the majority (Byzantine) text type which held sway for so long. Therefore, we must consider the evidence

\textsuperscript{1}Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, \textit{Priester für Gott: Studien zum Herrschafts- und Priester motiv in der Apocalypse} (Münster: Aschendorff, 1972). This work is 450 pages long!
which has produced a different consensus in the modern editions. In the latest Nestle-Aland critical text\(^2\) Rev. 1:6a reads as follows:

\[
\text{καὶ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν, ἱερεῖς τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ}
\]

"And he made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father."

Every pertinent word has a variant! In place of the finite verb ἐποίησεν a few manuscripts (046.1854.2053.2062 pc) read the participle μοιῆσαι. This is clearly an accommodation to the previous two verbs which are attributive participles applied to Christ. This disjunction of syntax has the effect of setting this phrase apart from the previous two: "To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by means of his blood—yes, he even made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father—to him belong the glory and power forever."\(^3\) The aorist indicative stresses the completed action by which Christ made his people what they are.

In place of the double accusative produced by ἡμᾶς, one group of manuscripts reads the dative ἡμῖν (A 1678.1854.2053.2062.2080.2344 pc). This completely changes the sense, so that the "kingdom, priests" are made "for us."

\[\text{Wäre nämlich ἡμῖν der ursprünglichere Text, dann erhielt die Aussage von Apk 1,6a einen völlig anderen Sinn: Nicht der Absender der Apk und die Gemeinden, an die er sich wendet, wären dann von Christus zu Priestern gemacht worden, sondern ihnen oder für sie hätte Christus die βασιλεία und die Priester geschaffen und eingesetzt. Apk 1,6a würde dann nicht mehr vom Priestertum aller Gemeindeglieder sprechen, sondern es wäre von Priestern die Rede, die der Gemeinde}\]


von Christus gegeben worden sind.  

With this variant, the "priests" are the clergy, not the people. Strong manuscript support also stands behind the accusative ἢμῶς (N ג a gig vg; Tert Vic Prim). Significantly, no Latin versions read the equivalent of ἢμῖν, nobis, though they might be theologically inclined to prefer this. Most likely the reading ἢμῖν is either a simple error (repetition of the ending ν) or a deliberate attempt to change the double accusative. This text most likely does speak of all as "priests."

The most significant variant occurs with βασιλεῖ-. The distribution of manuscripts and readings may be summarized as follows:

βασιλείαν - p 18 N A C 1611.1841.2053.2062.2329.2344(?) 2377(?)  
βασίλειον - 046.1854.2050.2351 pc  
βασιλεῖς καὶ - ἦ (includes P)

There is hardly any doubt of the better reading here. The earlier and more reliable manuscripts support βασιλείαν "kingdom," together with part of the majority tradition. The majority text type is divided on this variant between the Byzantine class (K) and those which follow the

4 Schüssler Fiorenza, 71.  
5 See Schüssler Fiorenza, 71.  
6 The lightly attested reading ἢμῖν (C 1611.2329 h t vg) may be explained in the same way, though it does not affect the meaning as dramatically.  
7 The abbreviated footnotes of Novum Testamentum, 26th ed., have been expanded via its lists of "constant witnesses" for Revelation.  
A commentary of Andreas of Caesarea (M^A). The other readings are easily explained. Βασιλείουν "royal, or royal dwelling" is an accommodation to Ex. 19:6 (LXX) and 1 Pet. 2:9; Βασιλείς καὶ "kings and" is an attempt to resolve the difficulty of an abstract and a concrete noun joined without a conjunction. The original reading is most likely that of Novum Testamentum, 26th ed., "kingdom, priests." What is the point of this allusion to Exodus here? Unlike 1 Peter, the passage does not seem terribly concerned with the dignity of the people of God. Rather, it is an ascription of praise to Christ for his marvelous deeds. Elliott comments: "the important fact is that the EF [Exodus Formula] has not been used to develop any concept of the royalty or priesthood of the believing community but rather to describe one facet of the saving work of Jesus Christ." This work forms the third phrase of a threefold acclamation of praise and gratitude:

To him who loves us,
and has released us from our sins by his blood,
and he has made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father,
to him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

---

9See Schüssler Fiorenza, 72-73.

10Τιερεις shows a minor variant Ιεράτευμα "body of priests" (2351 pc vg^m^s) which can also be explained as an accommodation to Ex. 19:6 (LXX) and 1 Pet. 2:9. This is confirmed by the fact that the minuscule 2351 also reads Βασιλείουν beforehand, thus accommodating on both terms. N.B. These texts in Revelation provide further proof that the phrase Βασιλείουν from Ex. 19:6 was understood as two independent nouns, thus supporting the contention that in 1 Pet. 2:9 Βασιλείουν is not the adjective "royal" but the noun "royal dwelling place, kingdom."


12This structure has been analyzed by Becker, 30, and also Albert
Christ is praised because of what he has done in achieving salvation. This threefold acclamation describes the cause, means, and result of his work of redemption. His people are now God's "kingdom" and "priests" because of the redemption worked by his blood. "Priesthood" is a beautifully relevant image because of the connection of priests with the use of blood in the Old Testament liturgy. Furthermore, it evokes the sprinkling of blood on God's priestly kingdom in Exodus 24.

The liturgical character of Revelation provides a clue to the meaning of Christian priesthood. Albert Vanhoye tracks this down:

In these diverse passages the title of "priest" fits very naturally into the Book's movement and design, for Revelation has a very decided cultic orientation throughout and makes free use of liturgical terminology. It often mentions the sanctuary and the altar; it presents personages clothed in liturgical garments who pronounce acclamations or intone canticles, and it describes scenes of adoration.\(^\text{13}\)

John's introduction to his revelation placed a blessing on "the one who reads [aloud] the words of the prophecy and those who hear" (1:3). Now he further describes the role of the Christian community in this revelation as "priestly." The priestly role lies in the divine service. Vanhoye goes so far as to suggest that Rev. 1:4–6 is a liturgical dialogue: "To the greeting pronounced by a celebrant who transmits to the faithful 'grace and peace,' gifts of the eternal God, of the sevenfold Spirit and of Jesus Christ, the assembly responds by praising Christ."\(^\text{14}\) This suggested structure points out that the priestly


\(^{14}\) Vanhoye, 283.
sacrifice is praise to God, recounting the deeds of Christ which have made them priests. This is an example of the "proclamation" of God's saving deeds which is given as the priestly work in 1 Pet. 2:10. John and Peter stand together in using "priesthood" as a metaphor for God's people in a liturgical relationship with him, receiving of what is sacramental, and responding sacrificially.  

The appearance of these themes in Rev. 5:9-10 is very much parallel. The topic of the entire chapter is the worthiness of the Lamb to open the seals. Nothing is said of God's people except what redounds to the glory of Christ. Thus the four creatures, twenty-four elders, and the prayers of the saints join in acclaiming:

Worthy are you to receive the scroll and break open its seals for you were slain.
With your blood you purchased for God [men] of every tribe and tongue and people and nation. 
You made them a kingdom and priests for our God, and they shall reign on earth. (Rev. 5:9-10)  

Again Christ is praised as "worthy" because of the work he did in redemption, and the marvelous results this produced for his people. Whatever is said of the "worthiness," "rights," or "privileges" of men on the basis of this text is oriented in the wrong direction, as Elliott perceives:

As inappropriate as it is to interpret the first member of the EF in the general terms of "royal freedom" and "a right to rule," so equally out of place are comments concerning the second member which speculate about the relationship between ordained priest and layman or the layman's limited sharing in priestly dignity. Here we have

15Vanhoye, 285: "We find here, in substance, the doctrine expressed in the Epistle to the Hebrews: the blood of Christ purifies our consciences and gives us the capacity to render worship to God . . . ."

16This structured translation is based on Vanhoye, 282.
two extremes typical of "protestant" exegesis in the former case and Roman Catholic exegesis in the latter. However, both the ideas of freedom and privilege, hierarchy and sacrifice are theological reflections which have nothing in common with our texts.\(^\text{17}\)

When "rights" and "privileges" appear, it seems that the majority text standing behind the Authorized Version still reigns. This is apparent despite the fact that here in 5:10 as in 1:6 the majority reading, \(\text{βασιλείς} \) "kings," must be rejected in favor of \(\text{βασιλείαν} \) "kingdom," on the basis of both internal probability and manuscript evidence.\(^\text{18}\) The problem lies far more in the interpretation of \(\text{βασιλεύσουν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς} \) "they [shall] reign on earth" (5:10b). This will appear again in connection with 20:6; however, it must be noted that: (1) this verb must not be allowed to reinterpret \(\text{βασιλείαν} \) as "reign, royalty," for this would contradict the interpretation of the "Exodus Formula" which prevails everywhere else; (2) "reigning" appears in Rev. 20:6 without reference to \(\text{βασιλείαν} \); (3) elsewhere it appears that the Christian "reign" is over death and sin, instead of death and sin reigning over him (Rom. 5:14, 17, 21; 6:12); (4) when "reigning" is

\(^{17}\) Elliott, 113. For an example of how both extremes are taken up among Lutherans see R. C. H. Lenski, "Kings and Priests" (Burlington, IA: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1927).

\(^{18}\) The "manuscript evidence" is not quite as strong as in Rev. 1:6, yet there is still little doubt:

\[\text{βασιλείαν - Ν Α 1611* .1854.2050.2329.2344 pc latt sy\textsuperscript{Ph} co; Or}
\[\text{βασιλείς - sy h}

The situation is changed only by the lacuna of C and papyrus support in this verse, and the unanimity of the whole majority text behind \(\text{βασιλείς} \). The internal argument is similar: the concrete "kings" seems to be an accommodation to the parallel term "priests." In place of \(\text{iēρεῖς} \) there is a minor variant with the abstract \(\text{iēρατεῖαν} \) "priestly office" (\(\text{Ν 2344} \)), which attempts the accommodation in reverse. The most likely original reading, \(\text{βασιλείαν καὶ iēρεῖς} \), is interestingly identical to the translation of Ex. 19:6 by Symmachus and Theodotion.
taken beyond reign over sin Paul calls it arrogant pride (1 Cor. 4:8); and, (5) this “reigning” always occurs with and through Christ, not independent of him (Rom. 5:17; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 20:6). It appears that the theme of “reigning” is not founded upon the Exodus passage, but rather on the theme of the destruction of sin and death’s rule over men, and man sharing in Christ’s dominion over the same, won through his own death and resurrection. This cannot be the basis for calling Christians “kings” except with very careful qualification.

In this “beatitude” it is made painfully obvious that “priesthood” is a condition given as a gift of God.

μακάριος καὶ ἅγιος ὁ ἔχων μέρος ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει τῇ πρώτῃ ἐπὶ τούτων ὁ δεύτερος θάνατος οὐκ ἔχει ἐξουσίαν, ἀλλ’ ἐσονται ἱερεῖς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ βασιλεύσουσιν μετ’ αὐτοῦ τὰ χίλια ἐτη.

Blessed and holy is the one who has a share in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him for the thousand years.

Those who share in the first resurrection (regeneration, Baptism), will not be subject to the second (eternal) death, but instead receive “priesthood” through Christ. The context is very different from 1:6 and 5:10, for there the subject was Christ, and here it is certain believers.

Several points suggest that Rev. 20:6 is not based on the Ex. 19:6 tradition. (1) Only one term from Exodus appears here, ἱερεῖς, while the first component, “kingdom” is missing. (2) The description is given as a future situation, presumably simultaneous with the “second death” of unbelievers. (3) Not all Israel, or all believers, are the
Thirdly, Luther's teaching on priesthood figures largely in the contemporary debate on the Office of the Ministry. "Contemporary" belies the fact that the modern debate on "priesthood and ministry" reaches back into the mid nineteenth-century. With these two teachings intimately connected, the question arose as to whether the Office is founded on the common priesthood (jure humano), or on divine institution (jure divino). Julius Stahl emphasized the divine institution of not only the functions of the Ministry, but also the Office [Amt], the men who fill it, and the special estate [Stand] to which they belong, without reliance on the local congregation. Johannes Höflich responded that the Word and Sacrament are divinely instituted, and are given to the whole church. Rather than being exercised by a special class, they rest alone on the universal priesthood—the special Office of the Ministry is a human ecclesiastical ordinance. This debate is found in the Missouri Synod in Walther's encounters with Stephan, Loehe, and Grabau. Its lasting significance was to tie the priesthood of believers inextricably to questions of the Ministry, and secondarily, of the church.

More recently, debate has continued to flourish around this

---


9There is a recurrence in the 1940s with those who wanted to show that a parochial school teacher is also a "minister," and it popped up again with respect to lay ministry at the 1989 Missouri Synod convention in Wichita.
predetermined question. In 1959 Wilhelm Brunotte found unity in Luther's doctrine of the Ministry, centered around only divine institution. Three years later Helmut Lieberg concluded that divine institution always appeared side by side with the universal priesthood as its foundation. Lieberg left us with the term Zweipoligkeit "bipolarity" to describe this continual tension in Luther. Paul Althaus based his summary of the Ministry in Luther on this bipolarity:

Luther without hesitation co-ordinates these two derivations of the office of the ministry—the one from "below" and the other from "above." He sees no contradiction in them. ... In the first, he bases the office on the presupposition of the universal priesthood and thus describes it as a mediated office. In the second, he derives it directly from the institution by Christ without reference to the universal priesthood. ... Luther cannot base this office only on its direct institution by Christ. That would obscure the fact that all baptized Christians have received this priesthood from Christ the Priest and that they have both the power and the duty of exercising all the functions of the priest, described by Luther. They all have the authority of the ministry of the word and sacrament.

This "bipolarity" persists in Kurt Marquart's recently-published volume in the Confessional Dogmatics, whose treatment of the Ministry begins with a discussion of "Priesthood and Ministry": "Everything depends on preserving intact this bipolarity. . . . There is a priesthood and there is a ministry. They are not the same, yet both are God-given, and there exists between them a contrapuntal relationship."

---

10 Wilhelm Brunotte, Das geistliche Amt bei Luther (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1959); Helmut Lieberg, Amt und Ordination bei Luther und Melanchthon (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962).

11 See Lieberg, 235-38 for a summary.


13 Kurt Marquart, Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics IX: The
The connection of "priesthood and ministry" was perpetuated in a scholarly debate in 1965-66. B. A. Gerrish, picking up on the Brunotte and Lieberg publications, tried to answer the question, "Why do we need an official ministry in the Church?" on the basis of Luther. In agreement with Lieberg, he found "the delegation- and the institution-theory . . . side by side, unreconciled, but with a definite bias toward the idea of divine institution." Lowell Green soon responded, challenging his "hunt-and-peck" method of quoting Luther, and suggested that Gerrish failed to see the "Change in Luther's Doctrine of the Ministry."

For if we study Luther's writings on the ministry and the priesthood of believers from 1520-25, isolated from his thought in other periods, we can find a strong case for the transferal view. . . . But a reversal set in during the second half of the 1520's, and the office of the ministry was preserved to the developing Lutheran church.

Perhaps the argument finally moved towards resolution when Robert Fischer responded. On the premise that "you cannot get right answers to wrong questions," Fischer analyzed both Green and Gerrish to demonstrate how they had been led astray by a question wrongly put.

---

14Gerrish, 414. By "delegation theory" or "transferal," of course, these writers are thinking of the common priesthood "delegating" what are properly their functions to the Ministers. "Delegation" (Übertragung) does not in itself imply this, for a writer may be referring to Christ himself doing the delegation. Thus when Luther (or Walther) speaks of "delegation, conferral, or transferal" one must ask who is doing the action. It is a question of external entailment.


16Fischer, 261.
"This won't do, because neither of the two 'theories' is legitimate."\textsuperscript{17} His solution is simply to identify the priesthood with the church: "Actually, God instituted both the church and its public ministerial office, and he always works through men."\textsuperscript{18} "The church is a priesthood; it has an ordained ministry."\textsuperscript{19}

Fischer did a great service by questioning the priesthood-ministry dichotomy. However, he still attempted to find one all-encompassing description of the role which "priesthood" plays in Luther's "theology." The investigation will be more firmly founded when it recognizes the multifarious roles the "priesthood" plays in Luther's theological writings. What unites all of these occurrences, as we shall presently see, is the use Luther makes of this common priesthood for the cause of the Gospel. Furthermore, each appearance of the priesthood serves little more than one purpose in the debate at hand. Note Stein's warning against generalizing about Luther: "Luthers Ausführung zum Wesen des Priestertums aller Christen sind zahlreich, manchmal nur partielle Beschreibungen, oft polemisch ausschweifend."\textsuperscript{20}

Thus, in the polemical years, at least, one can only read an entire treatise in context and determine in what way the priesthood of all is

\textsuperscript{17}Fischer, 268.

\textsuperscript{18}Fischer, 269.

\textsuperscript{19}Fischer, 270. Emphasis original.

\textsuperscript{20}Wolfgang Stein, \textit{Das Kirchliche Amt bei Luther} (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1974), 65. This work could be considered a response to Brunotte and Lieberg (cited above). It does a much finer job of considering each writing of Luther in the context of the debate at hand and the history of Roman dogma.
the Gospel answer to a Law situation. To draw any inferences beyond this one conclusion is to mistake the "priesthood of believers" for an Oberbegriff which could be grossly mis-labelled the "third fundamental principle of the Protestant Reformation."21

Antecedents To The Common Priesthood

Late in 1519 Luther first used the expression "we are all priests." One must be careful, however, to note what is new, and what was accepted teaching of the day. Therefore, it is helpful to note at least three teachings which appeared in Luther already before this time. First is the view of the church as a communion, a Christian brotherhood, a sharing of common goods. This is so common in his early writings that one example should suffice.22 In his Explanation of the 95 Theses (1518)23 Luther deals with the Roman treasury of merits (thesis 58). He denies that the saints have superabundant merits for the remission of punishment but affirms that one may perhaps think of the church as "a communion of saints in which each one works for the


22For copious citations see the footnotes in Althaus chapter 22, "The Church as the Community of Saints," 294-322.

23WA, 1:525-628=AE, 31:85-252. References to Luther's writings will be made from the standard text: D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, 61 vols. (Weimar, 1883- ); Briefwechsel, 18 vols. (Weimar, 1930- ); Deutsche Bibel, 12 vols. (Weimar, 1906-1961). Abbreviations used are WA; WA Br, and WA DB respectively. References marked SA are found in Martin Luther, Studienausgabe, 4 vols. (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1979). Where available, reference is also made to the American Edition (AE).
other, as members of one another." However, "the saints did this during their lifetime, and if they were to do it now, it would be accomplished by intercession rather than by the power of the keys." Thus Luther speaks of the saints in language very similar to what he will later say of the priesthood of all.

Secondly, without recourse to the "common priesthood," Luther is able to affirm that Confession and Absolution belongs to the whole church, and may in necessity be exercised by laymen one to another. His sermon on The Sacrament of Penance (1519), while constantly assuming that absolution is pronounced by a [official] priest, nevertheless affirms that it does not depend on the person saying it.

It follows in addition that in the sacrament of penance and forgiveness of guilt a pope or bishop does nothing more than the lowliest priest. Indeed where there is no priest, each individual Christian—even a woman or child—does as much [eben szovil thut eyn iglich Christen mensch]. For any Christian can say to you, 'God forgives you your sins, in the name,' etc., and if you accept that word with a confident faith, as though God were saying it to you, then in that same faith you are surely absolved. So completely does everything depend on faith in God's Word.

One sees that Luther is emphasizing the role of faith and God's Word in

\[24^{\text{WA, 1:607}=AE, 31:216.} \quad \text{"communio sanctorum, quod libet pro altero laborat, sicut membrum pro membrum."} \]

\[25^{\text{WA, 1:607}=AE, 31:216.} \]

\[26^{\text{WA, 2:714-723}=AE, 35:9-27.} \quad \text{This was published in mid-October 1519.} \]

\[27^{\text{WA, 2:716}=AE, 35:12-13.} \quad \text{The words by which the layman pronounces absolution are significant: "God forgives you ...." For when Luther speaks of the Amtsträger absolving, the priest says "I absolve you from your sins ...." WA, 2:717=AE, 35:13. This distinction carries through his whole life. In this document Luther always qualifies statements about lay absolution with statements about the emergency of the situation [notti], when a priest cannot be found.} \]
Confession, so that he must remove confidence in the person of the absolver. His goal is to remove Anfechtung in the believer by removing all doubt in Absolution.

Another relevant aspect of this sermon is that the keys are placed into the hands of every Christian (again without reference to common priesthood). "It follows that the keys or authority of St. Peter is not an authority [gewalt] at all but a service [dinst]; and the keys have not been given to St. Peter but to you and me. The keys are yours and mine [deyn und meyn]." Yet, Luther goes on immediately to speak of the comfort sinners receive from [official] priests by their exercise of the keys! It seems that "possession" of the keys by all Christians means that no one may deny them the right to receive forgiveness! "Possession" means being served by them. This must be kept in mind in later references to the "possession" of the keys by all Christians.

One even finds Luther's bride-bridegroom argument used of the keys without reference to the priesthood. Luther preached on Matt. 16:13-19 for the day of St. Peter and St. Paul at the opening of the Leipzig debate:

> It is true that the keys were given to St. Peter; but not to him personally, but rather to the person of the Christian church. They were actually given to me and to you for the comfort of our consciences. St. Peter, or a priest, is a servant of the keys. The church is the woman and bride, whom he should serve with the power of the keys; just as we see daily that the Sacrament is administered to all who desire it of the priests.29


Possession of the keys again means not being denied their comfort. The keys were given to Peter and every Minister to give their comfort to those whom Christ desires. When Peter or a Minister denies this by making the keys an instrument for ruling or domination then they are in the way of the Law and have deserted Christ's intended use of them for giving out his Gospel gifts. Since Luther is able to say this without reference to the priesthood of all, one might find that he is speaking uniquely of the priesthood when he no longer includes keys in the discussion. This will serve as one gauge in watching his progress.

Thirdly, many authors have noted that the common priesthood was a teaching of the Roman church throughout the middle ages. Jerome spoke of Baptism initiating one into the sacerdotium laici, and this common priesthood was stressed by Tertullian, Origen, Leo the Great, as well as Aquinas. The debate with Emser will demonstrate that this was not denied. What was new in Luther was the assertion that those who are now called "priests," the clergy, are illegitimately so named, for the New Testament does not restrict this term to the few.

Of this third point Stein takes particular note in an excursus on Klaus Tuchel's "misleading" work. He analyzes the history of the

30See Henderson 4-5, though documentation is lacking. For an extensive survey of the history of the teaching see Cyril Eastwood, *The Priesthood of All Believers*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1962), and *The Royal Priesthood of the Faithful*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963).

31See Stein, 63-65: "Preliminary Remarks about the Change in Luther's Terminology concerning Priesthood and Office."

32Stein, 48-52. He refers to Klaus Tuchel, "Luthers Auffassung vom geistlichen Amt," *Luther-Jahrbuch*, vol. 25 (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlaghaus, 1958) which paints Luther as a radical innovator on the Office of the Ministry and the priesthood of all.
relationship between the person of the priest and the forgiveness of sins in absolution. He notes that Thomas Aquinas was the first to speak of the priest as *causa instrumentalis* in forgiveness, yet he still spoke of the Christian becoming a priest in Baptism. Gabriel Biel, not insignificant in Luther's own studies, had denied that ordination gave the priest an inherent *Vollmacht* "full power" to forgive sins. Luther must be seen to stand in this theological line. Stein concludes that everything Luther said in the *Sacrament of Penance* (1519) can be understood in terms of the *mittelalterlichen Laienbeichte* "medieval lay absolution." As we enter now into Luther's writings on the common priesthood we must therefore be careful to note what new help he draws from the Scriptures, and what elements do not pertain exclusively to the priesthood of all.

**Beginnings: 1519**

Luther first spoke of all Christians being priests in a letter to Spalatin on 18 December 1519.\(^{38}\) Of this important document a lengthy quotation is in order. Our translation preserves the difficulties and ambiguities of the original:

> The offices [officia] of a priest, concerning which you inquired of me, I do not know; although, the more I think about it, [I feel] I won't discover what to write except ceremonials. But then the apostle Peter (1 Peter 2) propels me very much, saying that we all are priests [nos omnes esse sacerdotes]. John says the same in Revelation. So this kind [genus] of priesthood in which we are must not be thought to differ absolutely from the laity except with respect to the Ministry, in which the sacraments and the Word are administered. All other things are equal, if you should remove

\(^{38}\)That this is the first appearance of the teaching is affirmed by a number of writers, including E. G. Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), 447; and Stein, 50.
ceremonies and human statutes. And we are quite astonished how Order \[ordo\] receives the name of a sacrament. Aren't these things astonishing to you? But together with Philip in person [we have treated this] much more, for we have treated [it] often and keenly. Consequently, your office will differ in no way from the common offices of laymen, with the exception of the burdens. These things the Roman curia imposes upon all priests without choice. Now it is most important that you consider in what place you have been called. That is: you have been called into the court, just like Esther, where you may serve the people (where you are able) who are ruled from this court. Of all things this is most difficult and most dangerous. Thus you should not hesitate to be the highest and first. But [these duties] are incomparably more excellent than all your offices which anyone is able to prescribe to you, be they canonical hours or whatever.\(^{34}\)

Many things are unclear in this letter, especially the question Spalatin asked. Perhaps he is concerned over whether he must continue with the daily offices of a priest. Luther then would answer that you need not do that to be a priest, for we are all priests. Ordained priests are only different because of the Ministry of the Word. Spalatin should concentrate on the duties of his position in the court. Thus Luther's first use of the common priesthood would be to deny any spiritual distinction between clergy and laity and to point each man to his vocation.\(^{35}\)

The Reformation Polemic: 1520

Six months later what Peter and John taught Luther found its place in the first of his so-called "Reformation treatises": \textit{To the

\(^{34}\)WA Br, 1:595.

\(^{35}\)This interpretation is confirmed by a sermon for Christmas Day, 1520, cited by Schwiebert, 451: "Every calling, he believed, even that of the simplest folk, was of God. In the \textit{Long Sermon on Usury} . . . Luther for the first time stated his view of the 'priesthood of all believers,' which wiped out with one stroke any special merit in the work of a regular or secular clergyman."
Christian Nobility (1520). In this large document it is remarkable how little a role the common priesthood plays—as noted before, there is one main function which it serves in each argument. This appeal has a twofold structure: first he deals theologically with the three “walls” of defense which the pope has set up, and with them suitably demolished, he makes practical suggestions for reform.

The first problem is the corruption of the clergy: they should carry out the reform of the church, but they are too indifferent. Therefore he exhorts the nobility (laity) to help. Hence the second problem (identified as the first “wall”): “when pressed by the temporal power they have made decrees and declared that the temporal power has no jurisdiction over them, but that, on the contrary, the spiritual power is above the temporal.” The “spiritual estate” claim that since they alone are spiritual, the temporal powers cannot hold authority over them. Luther responds: “all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them except that of office”; “we are all consecrated priests through Baptism.” This he proves from 1 Peter 2, Revelation 5, and 1 Corinthians 12. The latter is the most significant at this time, for from it he argues the need for each Christian to exercise his given calling as part of the body of Christ.

The priesthood of all is therefore used to destroy any notion

---

37 WA, 6:404=SA, 2:96=AE, 44:123.
that the clergy are in a higher *Stand* "estate," or that they are essentially different in character before God.

It follows from this argument that there is no true, other [*anderen*](#) difference between laymen and priests, princes and bishops, between religious and secular, except for the sake of office and work, but not for the sake of status [*stands*]. They are all of the spiritual estate [*geistlichs stands*], all are truly priests, bishops, and popes. But they do not all have the same work to do. ... Christ does not have two different bodies, one temporal, the other spiritual. There is but one head and one body.40

The claim was *carentes indelibles*—the answer was "we are all priests."

Now the nobility are freed from the claim of the clergy that they are not subject to the civil authorities, for the exercise of justice is their office.

The second wall, that the pope alone may interpret Scripture, is overthrown by the same weapon, for it is basically the same problem.

We are all spiritual, and so are charged by Scripture to judge doctrine. "The Romanists must admit that there are among us good Christians who have the true faith, spirit, understanding, word, and mind of Christ. ... Besides, if we are all priests, as was said above, and all have one faith, one Gospel, one Sacrament, why should we not also have the power to test and judge what is right or wrong in matters of faith?"41

Judging doctrine is not exclusively clerical, for it is part of receiving the Word, the role given to the priesthood of the baptized. Thus the pope may not claim that it is only his office to judge doctrine. The

---


41 *WA*, 6:412=SA, 2:105=AE, 44:135. Notice that Luther does not say all are equally capable of judging doctrine. He simply denies that such judgment can be reserved for a select few who are considered more "spiritual" than others. This is to deny Baptism.
office of the temporal power is to see to it that all the others fulfill their offices. Therefore, in this dire situation the common priesthood justifies the nobility calling a council for the reform of the church.

Fundamental to an understanding of the next major work, the *Babylonian Captivity*, is a writing which preceded it: *The Treatise on the New Testament, that is, the Holy Mass* (1520). There are really two issues at stake here: what is the precondition for the Sacrament, and can it be considered a sacrifice? In the first case, the clergy through their canon law have so separated themselves from the laity that "they regard laymen as though they were no Christians at all." Because they are not of the "spiritual estate" they are not worthy to offer this "sacrifice." This is the same error as before: they have created divisions within the church where the Gospel allows none. Luther responds that faith is the best preparation, because the essence of the Sacrament is "testament," a promise. Testament and faith are correlatives. The loss of testament as promise (Gospel) is the loss of faith, and this is the first abuse of the mass.

The worst abuse of the mass is then to make it a sacrifice we do to induce God's favor. For if the mass is a sacrifice, then the Gospel is lost. Here, where the Gospel is at stake, the priesthood of all is the answer. The mass, which is in essence testament, can only be considered a sacrifice because of what flows from its gifts: prayers and

---


44 WA, 6:364 = AE, 35:92.
offerings. "We should bring spiritual sacrifices, since external sacrifices have ceased . . . . What sacrifices, then, are we to offer? Ourselves, and all that we have, with constant prayer, . . . ." This sacrifice is defined more clearly when the priesthood of Christ is brought in:

To be sure this sacrifice of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, and of ourselves as well, we are not to present before God in our own person. But we are to lay it upon Christ and let him present it for us, as St. Paul teaches in Hebrews 13[:15], . . . . From these words we learn that we do not offer Christ as a sacrifice, but that Christ offers us. And in this way it is permissible, yes, profitable, to call the mass a sacrifice along with Christ. Luther sees the common priesthood as worked through the high priesthood of Christ. Because this sacrifice is made through Christ, then faith is the proper mark of the priest. "For faith must do everything. Faith alone is the true priestly office. It permits no one else to take its place. Therefore all Christian men are priests, all women priestesses, be they young or old, . . . ." Thus the Gospel is at stake as much in the common priesthood as in the sacrifice of the mass.

This treatise was destined to be only a prelude to another prelude: A Prelude Concerning the Babylonian Captivity of the Church (1520). Luther expected this to spark a full-fledged battle over the seven sacraments of the Roman church. The priesthood of all the baptized as such does not figure in until close to the end, although there are echoes earlier. In his attack on the popish abuse of the

45WA, 6:368=AE, 35:98.


47WA, 6:370=AE, 35:101. Compare this with the designation of faith as a sacrifice in Apology 24.

"Sacrament of the Bread," he concentrates on sacrifice as the third and greatest abuse. Once he has established that it was not in essence a sacrifice but the promise of Christ, he challenges the distinction between private and public masses. For if the reception is the essence, then priest and layman are alike: "As far as the blessing of the mass and Sacrament [res sacramenti "matter, gift" of the sacrament, as opposed to the signum "sign"] is concerned we are all equals, whether we are priests or laymen." 49 The Gospel's gifts do not distinguish persons.

The papists make distinctions of person again in the abuse of reserved cases in confession. When the absolution of certain sins is reserved to a higher person in the hierarchy, then absolution is made conditional upon a person. Thus the sinner is deprived of confidence in the power of the Gospel. Luther responds by denying the pope's claim of exclusive tyranny over the keys. "For this [Matt. 18:18] is said to each and every Christian [omnibus et singulis]." 50 Yet Luther maintains that they are held in "common"—it is not a matter of individual usurpation. "For where does he get this authority [to grant dispensation from vows]? From the power of the keys? But the keys are common to all, and avail only for sins [Ex clauibus? At hae omnibus co(m)munes sunt, (et) super peccata duntaxat ulent]." 51 For the pope

49WA, 6:525=SA, 2:206=AE, 36:54.


51WA, 6:541=SA, 2:225=AE, 36:79. N.B. The Studienausgabe indicates with parentheses what was abbreviated in the original manuscript.
to reserve the keys to himself is to act individualistically and neglect the *commune* aspect.

The most significant part of this treatise, however, is the section on ordination, in which he argues vehemently against distinctions of spiritual essence between Christians. Scripture does not give a promise of redeeming grace to ordination, nor as practiced by the pope is it divinely instituted. The church cannot create sacraments. This is a concern of utmost Gospel significance.

They have sought by this means to set up a seed bed of implacable discord, by which clergy and laymen should be separated from each other farther than heaven from earth, to the incredible injury of the grace of Baptism and to the confusion of our fellowship in the Gospel. . . . Trusting in the external anointing by which their hands are consecrated, in the tonsure and in vestments, they not only exalt themselves above the rest of the lay Christians, who are only anointed with the Holy Spirit, but regard them almost as dogs and unworthy to be included with themselves in the church.52 By so exalting the anointing of their fingers, they blaspheme against Baptism which is the true anointing of the Holy Spirit. They may not rule over the laity, for 1 Peter 2 teaches that we are all equally priests. The papal priesthood rules (Law) to the detriment of the grace of Baptism which makes all priests (Gospel). Anticipating that this may be misunderstood as denying the Office of the Ministry, Luther adds:

... we are all equally priests, that is to say, we have the same power [*potestam*] in respect to the Word and the sacraments. However, no one may make use of this power except by the consent of the community or by the call of a superior. (For what is the common property of all, no individual may arrogate to himself, unless he is called.)53

Luther was not talking about the Office when he brought up the


priesthood; he was talking about the Gospel. But anything can be misapplied.

Closing the year 1520 is the third "Reformation treatise": *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520). This treatise, prompted by Miltitz and prefaced by a letter to Pope Leo X, is his last great conciliatory effort. Of course, this treatise must be understood in terms of the proposed thesis: "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." The first half is a consequence of justification, so that any external laws which promise righteousness stand against the Gospel. Therefore, "It does not help the soul if the body is adorned with the sacred robes of priests or dwells in sacred places or is occupied with sacred duties or prays, fasts, abstains from certain kinds of food, or does any work that can be done by the body and in the body." Nothing but faith makes a Christian.

One benefit of faith is that it unites the soul with Christ, as a bride to her bridegroom. "And if they are one flesh and there is between them a true marriage . . . it follows that everything they have they hold in common, the good as well as the evil." A great exchange occurs: Christ gets sin, death, and damnation; the soul gets grace,

---


life, and salvation. The Scriptures teach that Christ is both king and priest; through marriage with him, all Christians are likewise kings and priests (1 Peter 2). Kingship is described as spiritual lordship over all things, so that all serves him, and does him no harm. It is not so much ruling as being served by all things (receiving). Priesthood is described according to the Old Testament priesthood. It is twofold: "for as priests we are worthy to appear before God to pray for others and to teach one another divine things." The contrary is that he who does not believe is not served by anything. Thus both kingship and priesthood are grace issues: they describe our blessed state when God's gifts serve our good. Once again Luther suggests that the New Testament offers far better names for the Ministers of the Word than "priest." All of this discussion must be understood as an assertion of the "inner man's" liberty and freedom from good works in the sphere of justification. Priesthood is a Gospel expression.

Luther's "Captivity" At The Wartburg: 1521

The greatest challenge to Luther's priesthood argument came from "the Goat," Jerome Emser. This is an especially significant exchange, because Emser was responding to Luther's address To the Christian Nobility (1520) when Emser wrote his climactic challenge in December 1520. Thus Luther's splendidly-titled response, Answer to the Hyperchristian, Hyperspiritual, and Hyperlearned Book by Goat Emser—Including Some Thoughts Regarding His Companion, the Fool Murner


(March 1521), may be considered "Luther's own interpretation" of his former writing.

Emser's challenge revolved specifically around the assertion "we are all priests" and that those who now are called "priests" are not so called in Scripture. The issue was the exegesis of 1 Peter 2. Emser stands behind the traditional medieval reading, and so does not deny that "all Christians are spiritual and are priests." However, he challenges Luther for taking away the name "priest" from the clergy. Emser argues that one must see both the spirit and the letter in Scripture, that the letter is the sheath which holds the sword. Luther has read 1 Peter 2 only according to the letter and so is swinging about an empty sheath. Apparently Emser has interpreted Luther as saying that all Christians are consecrated priests (everyone a minister). Instead, Emser sees in the passage two priesthoods, a "spiritual" one (of all), and an "ecclesiastical" one (tonsured). This is the spirit and the letter.

Luther agrees that the passage does not make all Christians consecrated priests, but asserts that it speaks only of the "spiritual" priesthood. This is both the spirit and the letter of the text. Now Luther must distinguish the priesthood of all from the Office of the

---


61 Stein, 94. Stein also notes that in an exchange with Henry VIII Luther interpreted his Babylonian Captivity (1520). For both, see Stein, 94-101.


Ministry because of Emser's misreading. He admits that the name "priest" is not in itself wrong (for it is simply a form of πρεσβύτερος—he himself continues to use it for the Office), but it has been given a dangerous interpretation. It obscures the fact that the Ministry is to be servanthood. At the same time he must defend the "spiritual" character of all. "Yet all of us in common are church, spiritual, and priests, to the extent that we believe in Christ." 64 Emser had argued that "not all Christians are spiritual, spirituales." 65 Thus he replaces faith in Christ with consecration and tonsure. Again it has come down to the Gospel. Luther adds one more error of Emser's: "You also lie that I have made all laymen bishops, priests, and spiritual in such a way that they may exercise the office without a call. But ... you conceal the fact that I added that no one should undertake this office without a call unless it be an extreme emergency [die eußerste nott]." 66 What Luther asserted because of the Gospel, Emser used against the Office.

Emser quickly responded to Luther's book in July 1521. Luther, plagued by physical troubles at the Wartburg and tired of the debate, was at first not going to respond. When he regained health he decided to end the argument with a sarcastic feigned capitulation: Dr. Luther's Retraction of the Error Forced Upon Him by the Most Highly Learned

64 WA, 7:634. This is mistranslated in AE, 39:159.


Priest of God, Sir Jerome Emser, Vicar in Meissen (October 1521).  The debate had come exclusively to the interpretation of 1 Peter 2, "You are a royal priesthood." Luther noted that Emser certainly had the support of some fathers, and that tradition supports the use of "priest" for the clergy; but Luther's points out that by his very argument Emser admits his position is not Scriptural. In his feigned recantation Luther describes what his only intention had been:

... in all my writings I never wanted more than that all Christians should be priests; yet not all should be consecrated by bishops, not all should preach, celebrate mass, and exercise the priestly office unless they have been appointed and called to do so. This was my final intention.

It is Emser who has twisted his meaning. Luther proceeds to point out all the details in 1 Peter 2 which show that Peter is talking to all Christians. Since Emser argued that the passage refers to both kinds of priesthood, the effect of Luther's investigation is to show that Emser actually asserts "everyone a minister"! The "priesthood" which Luther sees in all Christians is parallel to that in Christ: to be both priest and sacrifice, and thus to sacrifice one's own body (Rom. 12:1).

While at the Wartburg Luther became concerned about the preaching in Wittenberg because of the reported turmoil (he was a called preacher at the city church). Citing a pair of letters Luther wrote, Martin Brecht suggests that he wanted Melanchthon appointed preacher as "an exemplary way of demonstrating the priesthood of all

67WA, 8:247-54=AE, 39:229-38.
believers."  

In fact, what Luther asked was that Philip would hold public lectures after dinner on festival days to which the common people could come. Luther argues that the lack of ordination and tonsure should not be a hindrance, for all spiritual priests may teach. Furthermore, his status at the university authorizes him to teach, and beyond that he requests that the city council would issue Melanchthon a call! His request is made clear by his directions: "I have written to Spalatin that he should push the idea of our Philip lecturing to the people in German on the Gospels; Philip should do it on festival days and in some place like a lecture hall." What is the role of the priesthood in this? No one could object that Melanchthon is not consecrated a priest; being a spiritual priest allows him to teach, and his university office and the call of the council would give him a double mandate to do so publicly.

In a more extensive writing to Wittenberg, Luther addressed his brother Augustinians on the abuse of private masses: The Misuse of the Mass (pub. January 1522). The pope had justified his right to make laws (such as private masses) from Heb. 7:12, arguing that Christ

---


71 WA Br, 2:388 = concionaretur "to speak in public before an assembly." AE, 48:308 translates this "preach."

72 WA Br, 2:390=AE, 48:311. Note the Weimar annotation: "Thus Luther did not think first of all of Melanchthon preaching in the city church, but in the university building or elsewhere." WA Br 2:391 n.8.

transferred his priesthood through St. Peter to the pope. Thus the pope has removed Christ as priest, and has set up his own sacrifices in place of Christ's! On the contrary, the New Testament knows of only Christ as priest, "who has sacrificed himself for us and all of us with him." The corollary is that there is a spiritual priesthood through which all Christians are priests with Christ. What is then common to all men is "prayer, access to God and teaching." Having access to God means being taught by him, being in a Gospel relationship with God.

Now, since the pope's priesthood is fictitious, so are the laws of his priesthood by which he establishes the private mass. This is a serious matter, "for to offer mass as a sacrifice, and to have anointed and tonsured priests as is now the custom, is nothing else than to slander and deny Christ and to abrogate and remove his priesthood and all his law." The New Testament priesthood consists of putting one's self to death and offering it to God as a holy sacrifice (Rom. 12:1). This is based on Christ as example. The pope further errs in establishing a new "ministry of the Word" which merely proclaims laws. Instead, the genuine "ministry of the Word" is common to all and involves proclaiming God's mighty deeds of Gospel (1 Pet. 2:9). In every case, Luther opposes the laws of the pope which rob the priests of the Gospel which is theirs in common. The monks will only find comfort as they

75WA, 8:415=AE, 36:139.
76WA, 8:418=AE, 36:142.
abandon laws in favor of the Gospel.

Teaching Through Preaching: 1522

When Luther returned from the Wartburg he addressed the turmoil in Wittenberg with his famous *Invocavit Sermons*. Throughout that year he took many preaching tours to further the evangelical peace. In many of these sermons he expounds on the common priesthood and its sacrifice. In all of these he stresses one's priestly role to the neighbor.

Preaching on Ps. 22:23, "I will proclaim your name to my brothers," he describes works directed to the brother. Our priesthood is based on Christ's. Since he took our sins upon himself, we too must bear the sins of our brothers. For the priestly office is "to bear, to teach, and to pray." Teaching comes from God to man; prayer from men to God, and this prayer should be for the neighbor. Everything one does is for the benefit of the neighbor. In view of the riotous events in Wittenberg, this emphasis is not surprising.

In a *Sermon von dem Tauben und Stummen* (the deaf and dumb man), Mark 7:31-37, Luther emphasizes the role of the man's friends in bringing him to Jesus for healing. Just as Christ stands before the Father and asks him to give us faith, so a Christian appears before the Father in prayer to bid him give another his own faith. "Thus when I see now that you have no faith or a weak faith, I go forth and bid God

---

78WA, 10:106-8. See Brecht, 67 for a description of this preaching tour.
that he would give to you a strong faith."  

For he has crowned, consecrated and anointed us with the Holy Spirit that we all in Christ are especially priests, and may do a priestly office, [that is] to come before God, pray one for the other. Thus may we say all together: Christ has become my priest, who has prayed for me and obtained faith and the Spirit, so that I also am now a priest and should pray further for the world, that God would give faith also to them.

In this way the Christian's faith helps his neighbor much more than the masses, vigils, and brotherhoods of the "great knaves."

Particularly noteworthy is a sermon preached at Weimar on 26 October 1522 based on Matt. 9:2-8, the forgiving and healing of the paralytic. Just as those present in the text marvelled that the authority to forgive had been given among men (Matt. 9:8), so too we marvel today.

So then Christ shows that we all may forgive sins. Thus the Gospel is a preaching which forgives sins. Let the "spirituals" take note from where they take the power alone to forgive sins, for the Gospel makes it clear that we all may absolve. Who will oppress or stop up the Gospel? . . . Whoever now has faith and is a Christian, he also has Christ, and who has Christ, all the goods of Christ are his. Thus he has also the authority to forgive sins.

This sermon emphasizes in most uncertain terms that all Christians have the authority \([gewalt]\) to forgive sins, though it maintains that an ordained priest will usually do it. At length he denies that the pope's priests are any different before God, or that they have exclusive possession of the Gospel. Finally he concludes that we all are priests.

---

79WA, 10HI:308-9.

80WA, 10HI:309.

81WA, 10HI:394-99.

82WA, 10HI:394.
Here on earth before men we must honor the Office, but before God we are all priests. The tension here between the regular procedure of going to one's pastor for confession, and confession to one's neighbor can be explained if one considers the situation of these newly-reformed towns. In the absence of true evangelical pastors, the people must receive comfort from their brothers, and may believe that it is true absolution. As the situation changes, and proper pastors are in place, then the normal procedure will be for them to use the Office. The Gospel is at stake for them. They cannot go on being Christians without receiving forgiveness—it is a life and death emergency.  

Near the end of 1522 Luther undertook to preach through 1 Peter. This is an interesting time to hear his exposition of chapter two. The whole chapter is founded on the works and fruits of the Christian life which flow from Baptism (the theme of 1 Peter): "faith in God and love toward one's neighbor." Luther notes that Peter begins with Christ:

For since Christ is the Groom and we are the bride, the bride has everything that the Groom has, even his own body. ... he also sacrificed his own body for us, which is the highest function of the priestly office. Then he prayed for us on the cross. In the third place, he also proclaimed the Gospel and taught all men to know God and him himself. These three offices he also gave to all of us. Consequently, since he is the Priest and we are his brothers, all Christians have the authority [macht], the command [befehl], and the obligation to preach [predigen], to come before God, to pray for one another, and to offer themselves as a sacrifice to God.

83 For a description of Luther's preaching tours and efforts at this time to see to the ordination of evangelical pastors, see Brecht, 66-72.

84 WA, 12:259-399=AE, 30:3-145.

85 WA, 12:301=AE, 30:47.
Nevertheless, no one should undertake to preach \textit{[predigen]} or to declare \textit{[zusagen]} the Word of God unless he is a priest [in the official sense].\textsuperscript{86}

What Luther says here of imitating the example of Christ does not yet speak with full Gospel clarity. Thus we must die on the cross, for \"[t]he true priestly office is practiced when we sacrifice that villainous rogue, the lazy old ass, to God.\"\textsuperscript{87} The positive side is that Luther is still combatting distinctions among Christians before God which the Gospel and faith cannot tolerate.

\textbf{The Need For Evangelical Ministers: 1523}

In 1523 Luther was presented with two cases in which the need for an evangelical preacher was obstructed by the papal hierarchy. In the first case, the preachers in Leisnig, a small town in Saxony, were customarily appointed by the abbot of the local Cistercian monastery, a man hostile to the Reformation. With Luther's advice, the congregation chose their own priest. When the ensuing dispute with the abbot could not be settled they asked Luther for Scriptural support for their actions. He fulfilled their request with \textit{That a Christian Assembly or Congregation has the Right and Power to Judge All Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers, Established and Proven by Scripture} (pub. May 1523).\textsuperscript{88} Remarkably, the common priesthood appears only once in this defense. What is most important is the proper relationship between the pastor who preaches and teaches, and the sheep who listen

\textsuperscript{86}WA, 12:307-8=AE, 30:54.

\textsuperscript{87}WA, 12:308=AE, 30:54.

\textsuperscript{88}WA, 11:408-16=SA, 3:75-84=AE, 39:305-14.
and judge what they hear.

The treatise presupposes the overarching need for evangelical Ministers. Avoiding false teachers is a matter of the salvation of souls. The need for teachers is founded on the necessity of the Word. "Since a Christian congregation neither should nor could exist without God's Word, it clearly follows from the previous [argument] that it nevertheless must have teachers and preachers who administer the Word." Because the bishops and "spirituals" have given up the Word, the congregation must act on its own to get qualified preachers. This is justified because "every Christian possesses the word of God and is taught and anointed by God to be priest." As priests who have the Word, they have the right to hear it properly taught. For with priesthood comes the responsibility "to confess, to teach, and to spread" the Word. This is done primarily by seeing to the election of evangelical Ministers. Everything hinges on the great need for the Office of the Ministry for the sake of the Gospel; the priesthood of believers must see to it that this need is not unmet.

The situation in Bohemia was similar. The people were torn between the desire for episcopally ordained priests and the reception of both kinds in the Sacrament, which the priests were required to denounce in their ordination. Prompted by the visit of a Bohemian clergyman, Luther wrote them a treatise to alleviate their dilemma: Concerning the Need for Ordaining Ministers of the Church (1523). In

---


90 WA, 12:169-96=AE, 40:7-44. De instituendis ministris Ecclesiae is the Latin title. The translation in AE, 40, "Concerning the Ministry" is
it he argues that, rather than obtaining papally ordained priests by way of deception, they should ordain their own Ministers, as the church historically has done. Once there are a few Ministers, they can establish their own episcopal system so that the bishops may once again see to the ordination of priests.\textsuperscript{91} It is essential to remember that the need for Ministers of the Word is the primary concern. "We do not have priests and we cannot do without them."\textsuperscript{92} Therefore, Luther advises them to elect and ordain Ministers without the Roman hierarchy, and thereafter to return to the people electing and the clergy ordaining.

The first issue is the papal claim that only episcopal ordination can bestow the requisite "indelible character" on the priest, without which there can be no mass or Ministry. Luther's response is to attack papal ordination as an abomination. "In place of Ministers of the Word they ordain priestly functionaries who offer up masses and hear confessions."\textsuperscript{93} Since they are ordained for sacrifice and not the Word, they are really no Ministers at all. By their sacrifice of the mass they reject and destroy the sacrifice of Christ, so that the Gospel is at stake. "Indeed consideration of our salvation necessarily compels us to loose, to say the least, and obscures the whole purpose of the writing: that the need for Ministers in the church overrides the usual order in this emergency, especially when the alternative is a devilish deception.

\textsuperscript{91}WA, 12:194=AE, 40:41.

\textsuperscript{92}WA, 12:177=AE, 40:18. Immediately before this is the sentence, \textit{necessitas non talia curat} "necessity does not worry about such things" which the \textit{AE}, mistranslates as "Necessity knows no law." Luther is not advocating anarchy or the despising of the order, but that in an emergency you simply act, do what is necessary.

\textsuperscript{93}WA, 12:173=AE, 40:12.
abstain from their disgraceful and damnable ordinations."\(^94\) The answer to this denial of the Gospel is to affirm the priesthood of all. This begins with the oft-quoted phrase: *Sacerdotem non esse quod presbyterum vel ministrum, illum nasci, hunc fieri* "A priest is not what a Presbyter or Minister is; the former is born, the latter made."\(^95\) The papists by limiting "priesthood" to the few, deny God his work in giving birth to priests. They deny Holy Baptism by ascribing a special grace to the priesthood through ordination. In this way he proves that there is no special grace or character lacking in men who do not receive the pope's chrism. One is already "qualified" in Baptism to be made into a Minister.

The priesthood of all appears again when Luther argues that all seven priestly "offices" are held in common by Christians. The papal priests arrogate "sacrifice" to themselves. They also turn what should be sacrament into sacrifice (destroying the Gospel). What is sacrificial belongs to all, for "in the New Testament there is no sacrifice except the one which is common to all, namely the one described in Rom. 12:1, where Paul teaches us to present our bodies as a sacrifice, just as Christ sacrifices his body for us on the cross."\(^96\) The papists have stolen another common priestly function when they reserve prayer to themselves, for "since we are commanded to pray for all, certainly all

\(^94\) *WA*, 12:176=*AE*, 40:12.

\(^95\) *WA*, 12:178. Our translation affirms the passivity in both cases, which *AE*, 40:18 obscures.

\(^96\) *WA*, 12:185=*AE*, 40:28. Once again, one might object to the use of Christ as an "example." This tends to disappear in the later writings, in favor of God's Word to us being the first action.
are equally commanded to function as priests.\(^97\) Thus Luther can conclude that "priest" should not be applied to Ministers, since there are better New Testament names, and since it destroys the Gospel and deprives all Christians of their role.

**Expounding The Scriptural Priesthood: 1524-30**

For the next seven years the common priesthood is scarcely found in Luther's polemical treatises. Mostly it appears as the text calls for it in his treatment of the Bible. For instance, in his *Prefaces to the Old Testament* (1523) he identifies Christians as the heirs to the priestly sons' sacrifice: the old man is sacrificed (Rom. 12:1) when the Gospel is preached and believed.\(^98\) Yet it is not completely irrelevant in his debates with the Schwärmer, as many texts hint. When he deals with Joel\(^99\) he comes across "I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh" (2:28). He is reminded of the Romanists who restrict the Spirit to the few, and notes that no such distinction can be made, for all have the Spirit to be priestly.\(^100\) Yet it seems that he thinks also of the Zwickau "prophets" who demand a demonstration of a special level of spirituality. Apparently he views both the papists and the "prophets" as Schwärmer,

\(^{97}\textit{WA}, 12:186=AE, 40:30.\)

\(^{98}\textit{WA DB}, 8:30=AE, 35:248.\) Although he has spoken before of faith as a sacrifice, this is one of his clearest statements that belief in the Word is a use of the preaching of the Gospel which the priesthood is to exercise.

\(^{99}\textit{Lectures on Joel} (1524), AE, 18:77-123=\textit{WA}, 13:89-122.\)

\(^{100}\textit{WA}, 13:109=AE, 18:106.\)
for they both restrict the Spirit to a few.\footnote{Cf. Smalcald Articles III.8:3–6.} The priesthood of all does not allow for either distinction.

The key text for this period seems to be Rom. 12:1.\footnote{For a most detailed exposition of Rom. 12:1 see Luther’s sermon on this text in the 1525 Fastenpostille, WA, 17\textsuperscript{II}:5–15.} This passage explains the paradox in Deut. 12:15, which speaks of meats offered in “all places” instead of just the Temple. Luther identifies this with the Christian sacrificing himself spiritually.\footnote{Lectures on Deuteronomy (1525), WA, 14:645=AE, 9:124.} It arises again in his somewhat allegorical interpretation of Zechariah,\footnote{Lectures on Zechariah (1527), WA, 23:484–689=AE, 20:153–347.} “And every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be sacred to the Lord of hosts so that all who sacrifice may come and take of them and boil the flesh of sacrifice in them” (14:21). “Every pot is sacred” he takes as a reference to the priesthood of all. To “boil the flesh” means to sacrifice the old man in your neighbor by teaching him God’s Word.\footnote{WA, 23:663=AE, 20:346.}

His Lectures on Isaiah (40–66)\footnote{WA, 23:663=AE, 20:346.} (1527–30) are transitional, demonstrating a change even within themselves. Side by side we find preaching/teaching and praise, with the latter slowly pushing out the former. Thus he writes on Is. 43:21 (the passage quoted in 1 Pet. 2:9):

\textit{That they might declare My praise}, that is, to teach and to preach and to praise God, at the same time rejecting everything else. These are the sacrifices and whole burnt offerings that reject all our own offerings before God. To declare the praises of Christ is
the priesthood and kingdom of the Christians.107 These thoughts are continued on 61:6. "This title, priest, must not be applied to a particular person in the New Testament, but those who build up the ruined cities and convert the people are the priests. They bring sacrifices by their public office [publico officio], by teaching and giving thanks. He praises God and teaches the brother. Such a one is a priest."108 As Luther concludes his lectures on Isaiah in 1530, he comments on 66:22.

So today all teachers are priests. Hence the priesthood has been shifted from a single tribe of the Jews to all nations. We are all priests. It is the priest's task to bring sacrifices to God. This he does through prayer, mediation, and worship. Let no one, however, assume the exercise of this function without a call.109

The conciseness of these notes makes this difficult to interpret. However, it seems that the teaching aspect of priesthood is reserved to those who are called, while the priesthood of all is defined more specifically as "prayer, mediation, and worship." This distinction leads into the next section.

**Reaction To Infiltrating Preachers: 1530-32**

The writings of these years cannot be considered apart from the turmoil caused by the Anabaptist "sneak preachers." Though Luther did not write directly against them until 1532, they were apparently a
concern as early as 1528. Provoked by the conditions found in his visitation of Saxon churches in 1530, he wrote a "manual for the Christian prince" based on Psalm 82. Included in the responsibilities of the prince towards the church is the suppression of "private preaching and sacred ceremonies." Uncalled sneak preachers are transgressing the charge of the called Ministers.

It does not help their case to say that all Christians are priests. It is true that all Christians are priests, but not all are pastors [Pfarrer]. For to be a pastor one must be not only a Christian and a priest but must have an office [ampt] and a field of work committed to him [befolhen kirchspiel]. This call [beruff] and command [befelh "mandate"] make pastors and teachers.

He does not defend the Office simply through an argument about "decency and order" (towards which the Bohemian letter [1523] leans), but refers to the requisite "call" and "mandate" of God which confer the Office. Once again he must correct a misunderstanding of his teaching, for the priesthood conferred through Baptism does not yet give the call and mandate of God to preach publicly.

Luther leans more and more towards the reception of God's Word in worship as the office of priesthood. Commenting in 1532 on Psalm

---

110 See Infiltrating and Clandestine Preachers (1532), WA, 3011:518-27=AE, 40:383-94. Not surprisingly, the "common priesthood" does not appear in this document even though they had claimed it as justification for their actions (cf. Psalm 82 (1530) below).


113 Luther notes that Christ would not let the demons he cast out proclaim who he was because they were not called! WA, 211-12=AE, 13:65. It is significant that when Luther writes at this time about The Keys (1530), there is no mention at all of the priesthood of believers. He merely emphasizes the correct use of the keys. WA, 3011:425-507=SA, 4:391-448=AE, 40:325-77.
45:11, "Because he is your Lord, worship him," he writes:

the worship of God is now the adoration of this King . . . . That means laying hold of this King and believing that He is the Son of God, who suffered for us and rose again; moreover, acknowledging Him in reverence, accepting His Word, believing and doing everything through faith in Him, to His glory, so that everything may take place, as Paul says, "in the name of Jesus" (Col. 3:17). In this way we are all priests, clothed and adorned with the same holiness of Christ, whom we receive through faith . . . 114

Similarly, he is prompted by Ps. 51:17 that the "divine sacrifices that are pleasing to God are a contrite spirit and a humbled heart." 115 The Old Testament is giving him the language to express priesthood in the way of the Gospel. "Even confession and thanksgiving is a gift received from elsewhere." 116

A Teaching Come To Maturity: 1533–

Towards the end of 1533 Luther completed another challenge to the pope's private masses: The Private Mass and the Consecration of Priests (1533). 117 The issue was the sacrificial nature of the mass which justified its abominable use in private, and the corrupted ordination which only intended to produce such sacrificers. The priesthood of the baptized would provide an antidote again to these denials of the Gospel. The Gospel is at stake when they rage and rave against Holy Baptism. 118

They boast that their chrism and consecrating produces people more

114WA, 4011:595=AE, 12:289. Once again, Apology 24 is parallel, teaching that faith is the truest worship of God.


holy than Baptism can.\textsuperscript{119} Therefore the true priesthood should exalt their Baptism in opposition.

We have been born of this bridegroom and bride through Holy Baptism and thus have become true clerics in Christendom in the hereditary manner, sanctified by his blood and consecrated by his Holy Spirit, as St. Peter calls us in 1 Pet. 2:9 ... [he cites also Rom. 12:1, Ps. 22:22 and Matt. 12:50]. So we are not only true clerics and priests according to our right as children but also according to our right as brothers.\textsuperscript{120}

Luther never identifies what the sacrifice of the common priesthood is. Instead, he uses "priesthood" to describe what a glorious character we have received through the Holy Spirit. In most clear terms he states what was always the case in the argument with the papacy: there are no levels of spirituality within the body of Christ. This is all the more essential so that one's certainty in the Sacrament be based not on the person of the priest, but on the person and words of Christ.\textsuperscript{121}

Perhaps Luther's most extensive treatment of the true Christian priesthood is found in his sermons on Psalm 110 (May/June 1535).\textsuperscript{122} He is first prompted to speak of the priesthood of all by Ps. 110:3, "After your victory your people will willingly make sacrifice to you in holy adornment." God delivers; his people worship. Thus Luther draws out worship as the reception of and response to the preaching of the Gospel. "Sacrifice" is defined as this true worship, produced by the Gospel. The "holy adornment" of all priests is the reception of Christ's

\textsuperscript{119}WA, 38:227=AE, 38:185.

\textsuperscript{120}WA, 38:229-30=AE, 38:187-88.

\textsuperscript{121}WA, 38:240-41=AE, 38:200.

\textsuperscript{122}WA, 41:79-239=AE, 13:223-348.
gifts, and reflection in praise which will result in others being brought into the kingdom of God.  

When he deals with Ps. 110:4 "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek," he concentrates almost exclusively on the priesthood of Christ. Christ as priest has three functions: teach and preach, sacrifice, and pray—acting as an intermediary between God and men. Preaching the Gospel is the true priestly office, and this is passed first of all to the apostles and their successors. Christ gives his gifts through the Office of the Ministry. In contrast to this picture is the abomination of the papal sacrifice. In this way he arrives at the priesthood of all (almost as an afterthought). Christ is the only priest, yet he graciously bestows priesthood on us. "But he is the only one, and he must be the only one, who brings us to God by his priestly office and shares the office with us. . . . Thus we all, as I have said before, have become the priest's children through Baptism." This priesthood must be asserted because of the papal abomination. Finally Luther maintains the somewhat paradoxical assertion that the priestly work is "teaching, sacrificing, and praying," yet only those in the Office may "preach, teach, and rule."  

124"This is enough—perhaps too much—on this verse. However, we ought to make some remarks about the way in which we Christians, too, are priests." AE, 13:329=WA, 41:208.  
When preaching on John 14-16 (March–July 1537), Luther drew the exercise of priesthood under the fruits of faith (John 15:8). The priestly sacrifice is the honor of God. But the works of the second table also honour God. Therefore all of a Christian's works are priestly. "This not only praises our works as good fruit on earth; but it also elevates them toward heaven and offers them to God as sacrifices acceptable to him for his special honor and his highest service." Ultimately the entire priestly work and office is the worship of God, which takes place continuously through one's entire life. Priesthood can be described just like worship: receiving the gifts of God, and extolling him in praise. It is this life of faith which Luther finds in Abraham as priest:

... we declare that those are true priests who believe the Word of God, offer the sacrifice of praise and of the cross, and do not walk about in long garments but walk about in the gifts and jewels of the Holy Spirit: faith, patience in death, and the expectation of another and better life.

Priesthood is the life of faith.

It is not surprising that the common priesthood should receive final treatment in the Sermon at the Dedication of the Castle Church in Torgau (5 Oct. 1544), a classic exposition of Luther's theology of worship. This is worship: "that our dear Lord himself may speak to us through his holy Word and we respond to him through prayer and

---

The text was Luke 14:1-11, involving the proper use of the Sabbath. In the Old Testament there was a particular day for worship, and a particular people to be priests. But now we all are priests, and our worship is not confined to a particular time or place. We are priests "so that all of us should proclaim God's Word and works at every time and in every place, and persons from all ranks, races, and stations may be especially called to the ministry."\textsuperscript{132} This is to prove that as priests we may choose what day and place to worship, and we have chosen Sunday in this new church. Thus the "proclamation of God's Word" is what goes on in divine service. The place of the Minister is to "preach to the whole congregation" so that the priests may take their place and "come together to hear God's Word and to respond to him by calling upon him together, praying for every kind of need, and thanking him for benefits received."\textsuperscript{133} This is a fitting close to Luther's teaching on the priesthood.

**Summary**

This is the most dangerous part of a study of Luther: to attempt to pull it all together. This conclusion on principle must be brief. One must refrain from trying to organize all of the ways which Luther uses the thesis: "we are all priests." He said what he said when he said it. The purpose of each reference we have tried to bring out. Ultimately, there is little change in Luther's understanding of the

\textsuperscript{131}WA, 49:588=AE, 51:333.

\textsuperscript{132}WA, 49:590-91=AE, 51:335.

priesthood of all. Yet as the controversies changed and the Scriptures taught him, some discernible development appears. Let us proffer a tentative hypothesis.

In the early twenties Luther used the common priesthood to counter the Gospel-destroying claim of the papists that their anointed clergy were in a different spiritual class before God and men. At various times Luther made some very strong statements about the great rights of all believers. Foremost was the preaching and teaching of the Word, for it was this which they lacked under the papacy. They needed the Gospel. However, once there were more evangelical preachers there was less need to press the right to teach. The problems with the clandestine preachers around 1530 probably pulled Luther away from this point. More strongly, however, Luther was compelled by the texts he studied, especially from the psalms, to see the priesthood in the context of worship. Though they were not inherently incompetent to teach, their Gospel posture towards the Word was one of reception. The priesthood was fulfilled when they heard God's Word with faith and responded in prayer and praise, and sacrificial living in their vocation.

Ultimately the role of the priesthood is discovered in the distinction between sacrament and sacrifice. All that it means to be "priestly" is given sacramentally; all which the priesthood does is a sacrificial response. As we saw in our exegetical study, this becomes a question of external entailment. Luther is content to include the use of the Word under the priestly vocation when it is received, or used sacrificially. The sacramental use has been placed into the Office of the Ministry, which uses it for the benefit of the priesthood. Thus
"priesthood" for Luther is first a holy, Spiritual character given by God through Baptism; and secondly, it is a calling to the worship of God through the sacrifice of faith and praise.
CONCLUSION

To conclude this work with a systematic treatment proposing a "doctrine" of the priesthood of all the baptized and its role in the church would be to risk falling into the error which we have rejected throughout. The scriptural teaching on this priesthood is properly exalted when we simply point to the special blessings of God which it describes. This must not be an agenda for reform or renewal hidden behind the banner of the "priesthood of all believers." The only "agenda" is the Gospel, which is rightly served only when the priesthood of the baptized has its place under that Gospel. We shall aim for that perspective by summarizing here our findings from Scripture, and in that way highlighting the role the priesthood plays in Scripture. Only then will the theological issues raised in the introduction find their place.

By all reckonings, Exodus 19 is the origin of the designation of God's people as a "priesthood." Neither 1 Peter 2 nor anything else which the Scriptures say of this priesthood can be understood apart from Exodus. The issues to be unraveled in Exodus 19 are more numerous than one would first imagine. Unless one posits a strictly literalistic interpretation of the proposition, "you are a kingdom of priests," one must treat "priesthood" as in some way metaphorical. A literalistic interpretation, that all Israelites were literally sacrificing priests, requires one to accept either a conflict of traditions over against the institution of the Aaronic-Levitical priesthood, or to argue that in the
"golden calf" episode the priesthood was taken from the people and given to a special class. The latter solution ignores the fact that Aaron took part in the rebellion and yet was forgiven and made high priest. Why would the priesthood be stripped from the apostate people and given to their leader in apostasy? To both solutions one must object that none of the paraphernalia of a sacrificing, cultic priesthood are mentioned in association with the kingdom of priests, only with the later-instituted Aaronic priesthood. Therefore, the "priesthood" given to all must be metaphorical.

To interpret a metaphor, one needs to consider the components of meaning in the source of the metaphor, and then determine which components are being highlighted in the comparison and applied to the target. In this case, what aspects of "priesthood" are applied to the people Israel by God in this covenant? Furthermore, the external entailments of the metaphor must be investigated. Who makes them priestly? For whom are they to be priestly, and what, if any, functions of priesthood are they to perform? On what basis is this priesthood conferred? These are the sorts of questions which we have addressed.

Since the bestowal of priesthood lies within a conditional statement of God's Sinai covenant with his people, it was necessary to ask just how this covenant worked. If God was proposing an agreement whereby he gave the rules to follow so that his people could gain his favor, then "priesthood" is not given but earned. It would then be a description of the covenanters with respect to their holy and obedient lifestyle. Such conclusions, we believe, may result from an uncritical application of parallels from the Hittite suzerainty treaties. The
context of Exodus 19 suggests a different interpretation. The conditional sentence states the means by which God bestows his blessings. Within the covenantal relationship God promises to make his people a specially treasured possession, a priestly kingdom, and a holy nation. These are given by his free grace, and can be rejected by a disobedient people. "Priesthood" is one of the blessings of God's grace in the covenant. In this way, the Sinai covenant is seen in continuity with the patriarchal promises, as another point in the line of God's election of his people, another Erwählungsproklamation.

Traditionally, interpreters have stressed that Israel's collective priesthood was to be exercised over against the nations; that is, they were to intercede for and convert the nations. Though it cannot be denied that Israel should have done this, that cannot be the meaning of the priestly metaphor. The important phrase, "for all the world is mine" (Ex. 19:5b) is connected syntactically and logically to "treasured possession from all the peoples." This stresses the unique election of Israel instead of any other people in the world. Ex. 19:5 shows that the central action of the covenant is God's gracious choice of a people for himself. His great love for his people appears in his metaphorical designation of them as "treasured possession," a term commonly used of a king's private wealth. This biblical use is far more fitting than parallels drawn from the use of cognates in Hittite treaties.

As God continues to describe the people he has gotten for himself through this הֵיכָל, he uses two phrases which show the new character he gives them. They will be a "kingdom of priests" and a "holy nation."
The tight parallelism suggests that neither can be interpreted apart from the other. Some have suggested that כְּפַלַּת יְהוּדָה and כְּפַלַּת נְהָרִי describe two parts which go together to make up the whole nation. Assuming that כְּפַלַּת means "kingship" or "royalty," they argue that in the pre-monarchic period the priests were the rulers over a holy people. Our study of the Old Testament usage of כְַלַּת demonstrated that it can in some cases mean "kingship," but that the necessary external entailments to suggest that meaning are absent from Ex. 19:6. Furthermore, "kingship" would not be an appropriate designation for the leadership of priests, nor is there evidence that they were considered civil rulers. This interpretation would actually work only in a post-exilic setting, in an evolutionary scheme.

Rejecting this, we concluded that in Ex. 19:6 כְַלַּת certainly means "kingdom." The "kingship" belonged only to Yahweh. But how does "of priests" modify it? We found that the parallelism with "holy nation" suggests an adjectival use for the construct chain: "priestly kingdom." This parallelism also suggests which components of priesthood are to be carried through in the metaphor: primarily, "holiness." It emphasizes the priestly character and dignity rather than any particular priestly functions. This was confirmed by an analysis of the concept of priesthood prevalent in the ancient world. A "priest" was one who was dedicated to the deity, set aside for him through ritual action, and kept holy; specific sacrificial functions were not necessary. This understanding would be confirmed as the people witnessed the regulations for their special priesthood, all of which emphasized that they were "holy to Yahweh." Priesthood is predicated of their relationship to
God. Thus the primary meaning of the priestly metaphor is to stress that as a "priestly kingdom for Yahweh" they are his possession, made holy to him through the covenant, and therefore are the people who worship him alone. One could say the "priesthood" is a metaphor for the justified state. "The right of individual access to God" is not so much wrong as twisted. Rights and individualism are antithetical to the privilege of the community which is taken into Yahweh's sphere of holiness through his covenant.

If there were any sacrificial component to the Old Testament common priesthood it would be found in the prophetic call for a sacrifice of the heart. God demands not the mere flesh and blood of animals, but "a broken and contrite spirit." The "sacrifice" he wants is the posture towards him of receptivity. Since the priestly holiness is conveyed by the forgiveness of sins in the covenant, the priestly sacrifice is the contrition and faith apart from which God does not give his gifts.

Only twice more did we find the "priestly" metaphor in the Old Testament: Is. 61:6 and 66:21. Though no textual link can be found with Ex. 19:6, the theological use of priesthood is similar. Though no reference seems to be made to priestly holiness, it does make use of the priestly dignity. These verses paint a picture of the eschatological restoration of Zion, in which the people of God are served by those who once oppressed them, and from these nations they take the priestly prize of first fruits. "Priesthood" is a description of the blessings of the "great reversal" in fortunes which God would effect for Zion. Thus it is again a description of the state of God's people given through his
saving work. No functional aspects were raised.

In his first epistle, Peter makes use of the Exodus imagery to point out how the Christian church is the new Israel. All the blessings of Israel are therefore to be transferred to the church. The decisive change came with Christ. Because of him and his work this deed would be accomplished. Though men rejected him, God chose him. His election becomes the church's election. Though he was a stumbling block to men, he would build the church into a dwelling place for the Spirit—οἶκος πνευματικός (2:5). The honor of Christ became the honor of the church. The phrase traditionally rendered "royal priesthood," βασιλείας ἱεράτευμα (2:9), should instead be taken as two juxtaposed nouns, in line with the ancient versions of Ex. 19:6. βασιλείας therefore means "royal dwelling place," a narrowing of ἱερός to point to the Spirit who dwells in the body of priests. Through the high priesthood of Christ, and by virtue of the Spirit dwelling in them, the church makes acceptable sacrifices to God.

"Priesthood" for Peter is thus a character conferred by God through the work of Christ by the Holy Spirit. As in Exodus, it is only one appellation among many, each contributing to the description of the new Israel. In the context of 1 Peter we saw that Holy Baptism was the place where God created for himself this new priestly people. Laying aside sinful garments, one takes up priestly garments; Baptism is a "priestly anointing," an action whereby God makes his people holy. Just as in Exodus 19 "priesthood" is a holy state produced by God through his covenant, so for Peter "priesthood" is a description of the kind of people God makes through the washing of water. It is a "metaphor" of
justification. "Priesthood" is primarily a description of the nature and essence of God's people, of who they are before God through Christ's work.

Though priesthood is primarily being, not doing, Peter does have some words about the priestly life, and in this way he moves beyond Exodus 19. In 1 Pet. 2:5 he refers to sacrifices in the Spirit through Christ. These are expanded in verse 9. "To proclaim the marvelous deeds of him who called you out of darkness . . ." is usually explained as the ministry of the Word, as evangelism or preaching. However, the septuagintal use of ἐξαγγέλλω and ἀφετάζ in the Psalms unanimously places this action into the "sacrificial" aspect of worship. When God saves his people they respond by declaring back to him what a marvelous thing he has done. This is the life of God's chosen people. First they receive, then they praise. The best praise is to return to God his own words and deeds. Thus the sacrifice of the priesthood is to exalt God in worship by telling him how he saved them. "Priesthood" is realized in the context of the liturgy.

Though the three occurrences of "priests" in John's Revelation lack many of the characteristics of Exodus and 1 Peter, they do fall within the bounds of liturgy. Man's priesthood is only broached in order to extol the Christ who made it so. The priests praise their high priest for making them priests. Never does the glass focus on the glory of man. So little is said of man that on the basis of Revelation one must say only that our priesthood really is a proposition about Christ.

Much of the present misuse of the common priesthood is perpetrated in the name of Luther. For this reason we turned from our
exegetical investigation to a consideration of Luther's use of the teaching. We found that the common priesthood always served a specific role in each theological writing. At each turn the Gospel was at stake. In the debate with Rome, Luther found himself facing a stratification of Christianity which placed clergy on a higher level of spirituality than "ordinary" Christians. This "spirituality" was used to justify temporal lordship, the reservation of absolution, private masses, and other such abuses. Luther argued that to create such levels within the church was to deny the grace of Baptism. Through Baptism all are holy and "priestly." The distinction between clergy and laity is one of office and function, not character. Faithful to the Scriptures, Luther used the common priesthood to affirm the holy and Spirit-enlivened character of all those washed with Baptism, and so justified.

Because priesthood is created by the sacraments, Luther used it to call for the right of reception. Because they were priests, Christians could not be denied the comfort of absolution, as the papists did. Nor could they be denied the preaching of the Gospel and administration of the sacraments. The priesthood needs its Ministers (cf. Tractate 67-69). This leads Luther to speak of the priestly sacrifice as faith, for that is what is engendered by reception.

When he was unencumbered by his opponents' errors, Luther placed the priesthood into the divine service. The priesthood is created through Holy Baptism. The priesthood receives the Word of God as it is preached by the office bearers. Having thus received, they respond in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. If there is a Zweipoligkeit in Luther it involves the poles of sacrament and sacrifice. Without sacrament
there is no priesthood. First they receive. Then the sacrifice flows out back to God. Only with this distinction does Luther finally come to clarity on the relationship of the preaching of the Word to the common priesthood.

One conclusion which can be proffered is that perhaps too much has been said on the basis of common priesthood. At the same time, the magnificent use to which the Scriptures put this metaphor has been ignored. It is a rich application of the Gospel which too often is turned into rights, privileges, obligations, and thus, Law. This occurs when the role of the priesthood is confused with the exercise of the office of the keys. What can be said uniquely of the priesthood is also lost when it is constantly measured against the Office of the Ministry. When priesthood is given its proper place, the gracious action of God in creating for himself a holy people is proclaimed. This is to accord the proper dignity to Holy Baptism.

We have repeatedly come to the liturgy to understand the priesthood. In the liturgy Law and Gospel, sacrament and sacrifice, are most clearly distinguished. In the liturgy the people of God have their life. Luther cannot be said to be unfaithful to Scripture when he uses the priesthood as Peter does. And Peter is only being faithful to the Old Testament. The priesthood of the baptized describes the church of the liturgy, the holy people of Yahweh, his treasured possession, whom he bought with the price of his Son to worship him.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


Bauer, J. B. "Könige und Priester, ein heiliges Volk (Ex 19,6)." *Biblishe Zeitschrift* n.f. 2 (1958): 283-86.


Beyerlin, Walter. *Herkunft und Geschichte der Ältesten Sinaitradi-


Concordia Triglotta. St. Louis: Concordia, 1921.


189


Piepkorn, A. C. "What the Symbols Have to Say About the Church." Reprinted from Concordia Theological Monthly (October, 1955).


"ἀγγέλια, κτλ.," by Julius Schniewind, I:56-73.


"ἐφός, κτλ.," by Gottlob Schrenk, III:221-83.

"περισσός," by Herbert Preisker, VI:57-58.


