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WATCHMAN NEE AND THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

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A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Historical Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Theology

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by

Wai Man Ng

July 1985

Approved by

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Advisor

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Reader

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Reader

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**PART I**

**THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS AS  
AN EVANGELICAL HERITAGE**

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### The Significance of Watchman Nee

Watchman Nee (Nee To-sheng, 倪柝聲) is the only Chinese Christian writer who commands a wide readership in the western countries. Several of his works had been translated into many languages and had become million sellers. For instance his Normal Christian Life, sermons on Romans 1-8 delivered in the European itinerary in 1938-39, has been translated into more than thirty languages. The Release of the Spirit, ran into 500,000 copies in English and in ten other languages early in 1965. His other works are widely read among young people in this country especially those who are interested in the charismatic movement. Cult observers suggest that the phenomenal 'Jesus People' in the sixties had been inspired by the writings of Nee (see Chapter VII, note 5). He is considered a popular writer of spirituality. Some fifty students from a Lutheran college requested a special course devoted to the study his acclaimed three volumes The Spiritual Man (Chapter VII, note 1). The sustained interest in Nee's writings of spirituality is also attested to by the topics of several theses in this country which in one way or another

relate to sanctification (Chapter VII, note 2).<sup>1</sup>

### The Centrality of the Priesthood of All Believers

But is Nee merely a popular writer of spirituality and personal sanctification? A cursory survey of his corpus would indicate that most of his writings fall into the category of ecclesiology instead of spirituality. This is especially true towards the later part of his ministry. In fact, his celebrated work on spirituality and personal sanctification, The Spiritual Man was written at the early age of twenty-five. On one occasion Nee gave testimony about his own ideal and aspiration. He said:

When the Lord called me to serve Him, the prime object was not for me to hold revival meetings so that people may hear

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1

Paul Siu, "The Doctrine of Man in the Theology of Watchman Nee," (Th.M thesis, Bethel Theological Seminary, St. Paul, MN, 1979); Dennis Schiefelbein, "A Lutheran Confessional Critique of the Function of the Union with Christ in the Theology of Watchman Nee," S.T.M. thesis (Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1980); Robert Kingston Wetmore, "An Analysis of Watchman Nee's Doctrine of Dying and Rising with Christ as It Relates to Sanctification," Th.M thesis (Trinity Divinity School, Deerfield, IL, 1983); Lam Wing-hung, The Spiritual Theology of Watchman Nee (Hong Kong: China Graduate School of Theology, 1985). There is so far only one book on Nee's doctrine of the church: James Mo-Oi Cheung, The Ecclesiology of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1972). Two more works on the general theology of Nee: Dana Roberts, Understanding Watchman Nee (Plainfield, NJ: Haven Books, 1980); Norman Howard Cliff, "The Theology of Watchman Nee, Including a Study of the Little Flock Movement Which He Founded", (M.Ph. thesis, Open University, England, 1983). Though Nee explicitly contends that the universal priesthood is 'the contents of Christianity' (Chapter VII, note 17), students of Nee give scanty attention to the conception of the priesthood of all believers in his overall theological scheme. Roberts does not mention it in his chapter on "The Church and Its Work" (pp. 125-53). Likewise, Cheung does not have a section on the universal priesthood in his whole book. Cliff devotes less than one page to the priesthood of all believers in his thesis that amounts to 378 pages ( pp. 145-46.).

more Scriptural doctrines nor for me to become a great evangelist. The Lord revealed to me that He wanted to build up local churches in other localities to manifest Himself, to bear testimony of unity on the ground of local churches so that each saint may perform his duty in the Church and live the Church life. God wants not merely individual pursuit of victory or spirituality but a corporate, glorious Church presented to Himself.<sup>2</sup>

From the foregoing it is clear that what Nee aspires to is to establish a church where every member is actively involved. His Local Church assembly does not have any ordained minister as the other denominational churches. However the Local Church assembly had a remarkable growth from zero to 700 congregations of about 70,000 members within a short period of twenty six years (1923-49).<sup>3</sup> This envious yield is presumably owing to his teaching and implementation of the priesthood of all believers; and as such, Nee's teaching on the priesthood of all believers is worth examining as the model of church growth.

As a popular writer on personal sanctification and spirituality, what is the motivation(s) of his striving for a sanctified life? We suggest that his motivation for a sanctified life is the priesthood of every believer. His antithetical view of the world is bespoken by the content of his Basic Lessons Series (post-baptismal catechism) of 1948 (Chapter IX, notes 91,92) as well as Love Not the World of 1938-41 which betray the Levitical motif of separation-dedication as a theological basis

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2

K. H. Weigh, ed., Watchman Nee's Testimony; CO (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Church Book Room, 1974), pp. 37-38; trans. in the English version (same publisher, same year), p. 47f.; my emphasis.

3

All were all self-supported, self-governed and self-propagated. See Lesile Lyall, Three of China's Mighty Men (London: Overseas Mission Fellowship Books, 1974), p. 64.

for sanctification. And his pursuit for the true knowledge (gnosis), inner light, divine revelation, life of Christ as the goal for personal sanctification resemble that of the pre-Nicene Alexandrian theologians who stressed the differentiation between a gnostic Christian and a carnal believer rather than between a cleric and laity. They both interpreted the priesthood as an ethical-epistemological existence of life.

On the other hand, the universal priesthood is posited as an antithesis over against the salaried ministerial office in the denominational churches imported by foreign missionaries. Nee aspires to reprimarize the church. He wants to model the church according to the apostolic blueprint of the New Testament. In fact, he uses the demise of the universal priesthood to illustrate his conception of the apostate church: The church is apostate, the evidence is the suppression of the priesthood of all believers.

It is the thesis of this study that the priesthood of all believers serves to undergird the seemingly unrelated loci of his theological scheme, namely, personal sanctification and the doctrine of the church. We shall examine Nee's teaching of the priesthood of all believers with reference to his spiritual theology and the doctrine of the church. And since Nee's teaching of the priesthood of all believers has historiographical implication in that the apostasy of the church is indicated by what he considers the intermediary class of clergy and the decline of the universal priesthood, we shall examine the development of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers in western Chris-

tendom so as to provide frame of reference for our examination on Nee's writings pertinent to the doctrine.

### Methodology

This study is divided into two main parts and a concluding chapter of evaluation. Part One is the survey of the development of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers as an evangelical heritage; Part Two is an analysis of Nee's writings pertinent to his teaching of the priesthood of all believers.

The purpose of Part One is to set a biblical, historical and theological perspective for our understanding of Watchman Nee's writings in Part Two and the evaluation in the concluding chapter. We trace the development of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers as an evangelical heritage: a teaching embodied in the canonical corpus, enunciated by the early Christian writers, reasserted and developed by the Reformers. The following reasons merit such an approach.

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4  
For the purpose of our study we are content to define the evangelical heritage as such. It is in line with Ernst Kinder's thought as "something shaped by the Gospel and attuned to the Gospel, the heart of Christianity" (Evangelical. What Does It Really Mean?, translated by Edward and Marie Schroeder [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968], p. 7). In Germany evangelisch pertains to Reformation tradition and is the official name of the Lutheran church. However, Kinder's remark about the word on the American scene as "a broad Protestantism without substance or commitment" (p. 8) should be modified in light of the emphasis of the historic side on the part of some avowed evangelical writers. Bernard Ramm once remarked: "Evangelical theology has its roots deep in patristic, medieval and reformation thought. . . . The Reformation and post-Reformation creeds have been honored by Protestant orthodoxy and in turn passed on to evangelicalism" (The Evangelical Heritage [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1973], pp. 58-59). See also Robert Webber, Common Roots: A Call to Evangelical Maturity (Grand Rapids: Zondervan,

First, Nee aspires to the apostolic model and biblical basis of any theological tenet. The priesthood of all believers is the grace of the New Testament.<sup>5</sup> Thus, a probe into the biblical teachings about the doctrine is essential before we examine his writings.

Second, Nee's vigorous implementation of the doctrine of the priesthood of believers is certainly out of his deep theological conviction and explains the phenomenal growth of his church.<sup>6</sup> However, the scarcity of trained professional ministers, coupled with the immense masses of unbelievers around made the mobilization of laity strategically mandatory. Similar situations occurred in the early church and contemporary mission fields whereby the laymen played a prominent role in the sponta-

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 1978); Donald G. Bloesch, Essential of Evangelical Theology, vol. 1: God, Authority, and Salvation; vol. 2: Life, Ministry and Hope (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978 and 1979 respectively). For a purview of the trend see Robert E. Webber and Donald Bloesch, eds., The Orthodox Evangelicals. Who They Are and What They Are Saying (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1978).

<sup>5</sup>  
 Cheung, pp. 123-26; Dana Roberts, pp. 146-53. Agnus I. Kinnear writes that Nee read through the Bible once a month. Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee (Eastbourne, 1973 Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1978), p. 14. James Chen remarks that Nee read nineteen chapters every day right after his conversion. Meet Brother Nee (Hong Kong: The Christian Publishers, 1976), p. 5.

<sup>6</sup>  
Hsin-t'u Tsao-chiu (Basic Lesson Series--Teacher's version [hereafter BLST]), 2 vols. (Hong Kong: Christian Publishers, 1981), 2:892-96; (ET) (Stephen Kaung), Basic Lesson Series, 6 vols. (New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers [CFP], 1972-1975), 6:175-91. Most of the translation of Nee's work is done by Kaung who is the publisher of CFP and a former co-worker of Nee in China, though he hides himself as 'translator.' Hereafter, trans. by Kaung is cited as CFP.

neous expansion of the Christian faith. In fact, we may safely suggest that whenever and wherever the church exists in an alien and hostile society, the people concept of the church flourishes. The priesthood of all believers becomes a practice and a prevailing doctrine.

Modern conciliar movement illustrates this. Vatican II (1962-65) is styled as the Council of the laity; while the World

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7

Michael Green concludes with his Evangelism in the Early Church (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970): "One of the most striking features in evangelism in the early days was the people who engaged in it. . . . Evangelism was the prerogative and the duty of every Church member. . . . Christianity was supremely a lay movement. . . . The spontaneous outreach of the total Christian community gave immense impetus to the movement from the very outset" (p. 274).

8

Yves M. J. Congar calls it the Council of laity before the audience of an international theological conference. See John Miller, ed. Vatican II: An Appraisal, International Theological Conference, University of Notre Dame: March 20-26 (Appraisal) (University of Notre Dame 1966), pp. 239-40. Theodore Hesburgh writes: "The Lay Apostolate is the Church's answer to the Secularism of our times" (The Relation of the Sacramental Characters of Baptism and Confirmation to the Lay Apostolate [Studies in Sacred Theology, no. 97; Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University, 1946], p. 1). He speaks of the papal support for decades before the Council. The trend is climaxed in Vatican II (1962-65). The unprecedented decree on laity (Apostolicam Actuositatem, 18 November 1965) states: "For the increase in population, the progress in science and technology . . . it is hard to see how the church could make her presence and action felt without the help of the laity" (Austin P. Flannery, ed., Documents of Vatican II [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975], p. 776). For aftermath evaluation, Protestant view see Warren A. Q. Quanbeck, ed., Challenge and Response: A Protestant Perspective of the Vatican Council (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966); conservative Catholic view, see Antony D. Lee, ed. with introduction by Smith Ferrer, Vatican II: The Theological Dimension (The Thomist Press, 1963). For the candid forum featuring many of the resource delegates, see Appraisal. A pre-Council work is Yves M. J. Congar, Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity, translated by Donald Attwater from the 1953 French edition Jalons pour une theologie du laicat (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1963). For a survey of literature consult Leonard Doohan, "Contemporary Theologies of

Council of Churches appointed the 'Committee on the Significance of Laity in the Church' right after the First Assembly in 1948 at Amsterdam which became a permanent regular department after the Second Assembly at Evanston in 1954. Modern conciliar movement in a sense is the response on the part of the church to the onslaught of secularism in a post-Christian era with its exploding population raised up in a culture apathetic towards the Christian faith. Thus the examination of the pre-Nicene period would provide parallels for the elucidation of Nee's situation and background of his writings bearing on the priesthood of all believers.

Thirdly, Nee's articulation of the priesthood of all believers is in polemic against the ministerial office sanctioned by the Reformers. The existence of the ministerial office is

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 the Laity: A Review Since Vatican II," Communio 7 (August 1980): 225-42. The article is helpful in categorising different approaches.

9

A quick review of the movement in the World Council of Churches will be obtained from Hans-Ruedi Weber, "The Discovery of the Laity in the Ecumenical movement," The Layman in the Church, edited by Stephen C. Neil and Hans-Ruedi Weber (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963). The ecumenical tradition accentuates the motif of missio-diaconia and embraces world-oriented ecclesiology. See Hendrik Kraemer, A Theology of the Laity (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1958), especially pp. 127-64. Christ is portrayed as the suffering servant for the world, so should be the people (the laos) of God who participate in Christ's priesthood. He contends that the traditional munus triplex of Christ (prophet, priest and king) get their meaning and right perspective only in the "suffering ministry" (p. 150). As regard to missio, it helps to rally all the communions around a single cause--witness (note that witness, service and unity are the slogans of the ecumenical movement; Weber, p. 381). Kraemer said: "Genuine continuity with the truth (missio-diaconia) is a truer continuity than that with the expression of the past (theological traditions)" (p. 85). Thus the advocacy of the priesthood of believers along this line may induce instant

considered to have deprived the believers of their rights to  
 10  
 serve as priests before God. Both the medieval priests and  
 Protestant ministers are indiscriminately portrayed as the medi-  
 atorial castes between the divine and men. To Nee, Reformation  
 failed because it did not go far enough to discard altogether any  
 mediatorial office. A review of the teachings of the Reformers  
 on the subject is therefore helpful in our evaluation of Nee's  
 teachings.

We now proceed to have an exegetical study of the pertinent  
 verses bearing on the doctrine with special attention to the  
 theological import of the universal priesthood. After that,  
 we will investigate the pre-Nicene church. Our focus is to find  
 out the expression of the universal priesthood in the life of the  
 primitive church and its relation with the special priesthood  
 (ministerial office). Finally we wind up our survey by high-  
 lighting the teachings of the period of Reformation as repre-  
 sented by Luther.

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 unity which the Department of Faith and Order would takes years  
 to accomplish. The literature on the theology of laity is over-  
 whelming; see the exhaustive bibliography (before 1961): Laici  
in Ecclesia (Department on the Laity, World Council of Churches,  
 1961); 1412 entries with topical index.

10

BLST, 2:894-96; CFP, 1972-1975, 6:189-91.

## CHAPTER II

### THE BIBLICAL TEACHINGS OF THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

#### Confusion Calls for an Exegetical Understanding

Hans Kung remarked in his inaugural address at the University of Tübingen: "The doctrine of the universal priesthood is one of the basic truths of Catholic ecclesiology."<sup>1</sup> The late Anglican bishop of Oxford, Kenneth E. Kirk, spoke of the doctrine as "the decisive formula of all non-episcopal Christendom . . . perhaps the major theological problem of the twentieth century."<sup>2</sup> In a book that merited the award of Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, Cyril Eastwood concludes with his study saying that: "The History of the Reformation, the history of Puritanism, and

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November 24, 1960. "The Ecumenical Council in Theological Perspective," (translation by J. W. Kleiner) Dialog 1 (Summer 1962), p. 46. Küng, after expounding the nature of church for about 370 pages (total 489 pages), makes the remarks: "The idea of the priesthood of all believers is also a logical conclusion to what has so far been said about the nature of the church" (The Church, translated by Ray and Rosaleen Ockenden from the Die Kirche, Freiburg, 1967 [New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967], p. 370). The work was an answer to the protest movement of Vatican II; thus both German and English versions were published the same year soon after the Council.

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"The Apostolic Ministry," The Apostolic Ministry: Essays on the History and Doctrine of Episcopacy, edited by K. E. Kirk (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1947), p. 48.

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 all believers."<sup>3</sup>

However, in regard to the exact meaning of the term, different opinions abound. It has been used to support Congregational polity, the Quaker assembly, Pietistic ecclesiolae,<sup>4</sup> and the Methodist commissioning of lay preachers. One writer says that it is a corollary of the doctrine of justification by faith and is important in Luther's theology and to the church that bears his name.<sup>5</sup> Another, on the other hand, does not even consider it one of Luther's fourteen theological tenets.<sup>6</sup> David C. Steinmetz refers to it as principally the right of all Christian brethren to hear confession.<sup>7</sup> Marc Lienhard in a recent work suggests: "It is the priestly action of Christ in the faith of each believer which is basic to the universal priesthood."<sup>8</sup> An author contends that it only pertains to the

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The Priesthood of All Believers: An Examination of the Doctrine from the Reformation to the Present Day (London: The Epworth Press, 1960; Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1962), p. 241. Its companion work is The Royal Priesthood of the Faith: An Investigation of the Doctrine from Biblical Times to the Reformation (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963).

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B. A. Gerrish, "Priesthood and Ministry in the Theology of Luther," Church History 34 (1965):404.

5

L. W. Spitz, "The Universal Priesthood of Believers with Luther's Comments," Concordia Theological Monthly (CTM) 23 (January 1952):15.

6

E. H. Klostsche and Theodore Mueller, The History of Christian Doctrine (Burlington, IA: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1945), pp. 163-87. Klostsche just casually mentions, "laity, as spiritual priests" with regard to the 1520 treatise of To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation, p. 168.

priesthood of the church corporately. <sup>9</sup> But Thomas M. Lindsay proposes that it is about the believer's "directly throwing himself to God". <sup>10</sup> Ernst Best prefers the term 'general priesthood' to the "individualism implied in 'the priesthood of believers' and the false corporateness in 'the priesthood of the church'." <sup>11</sup>

Several reasons exist for the various interpretations. First, Luther, the main exponent of the doctrine, is not a systematician. He wrote extensively, yet not one work is of the nature of a Summa, Institute or Locii. A writer aptly remarks: "He was a 'religious genius,' a man of profound experience and vivid intuition, who expressed what he felt and saw in paradoxical speech. . . . which cannot be reduced to an ordered and coherent system." <sup>12</sup> Most of his treatises were pastoral counsels requested

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<sup>7</sup>  
 The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church (hereafter NIDCC), rev. ed. (1981), s.v. "Protestantism," p. 809.

<sup>8</sup>  
Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ. Stages and Themes of the Reformer's Christology, translated by Edwin H. Robertson from Temoin de Jesus-Christ, Paris, 1973 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1982), p. 130. The believer's priesthood is the active response to the grace of approaching the Father which Christ's intercession makes possible. Similar thought is advanced in C. E. B. Cranfield, "Divine and Human Action. The Biblical Concept of Worship," Interpretation 22 (1958):387-98.

<sup>9</sup>  
 K. E. Kirk, "Apostolic Ministry," p. 48.

<sup>10</sup>  
 Thomas M. Lindsay, A History of Reformation, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), 1:436f.

<sup>11</sup>  
 "Spiritual Sacrifice," Interpretation 14 (1960):297.

<sup>12</sup>  
 Philip S. Watson, Let God be God! An Interpretation of the Theology of Luther (London, 1947; reprint ed., London, 1948), p. 4f. Redundancy and repetitions in Luther's writings are not uncommon because "materials were sent to the printer as fast as he dashed them off, even before the entire tract was completed"

by the church and spoken to particular situations as problems arose. Thus two competent scholars of Luther may have different opinions concerning the same doctrine.

Second, the word 'priest' or 'priesthood' has different meaning and connotation in different periods. The word priest was never ascribed to the Christian minister but to Christ and the people of God in the canonical corpus. Later, it became an exclusive name for the office-bearer. Hans von Campenhausen calls it 'the cause of confusion.'

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 (E. G. Schwiebert, Luther and His Time [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950], p. 439f.).

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See the above views of L. W. Spitz and D. C. Steinmetz.

14

G. Schrenk observes that even Jesus does not call either Himself or His disciples priests; Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT), 10 vols., ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1965), 3:263.

15

Chapter on "The Origins of the Idea of the Priesthood in the Early Church," Tradition and Life in the Church, trans. A. V. Littledale from the German edition Tradition und Leben--Krafte der Kirchengeschichte [Tubingen, 1960] [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968], p. 217. Tertullian was the first to call the bishop sacerdos (priest) in De baptismo 17: "dandi quidem habet jus summus sacerdos qui est episcopus (Of giving it [i.e. baptism], the high priest [who is the bishop] has the right)," Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina (CCL), 1:291, ed. Borleffs; The Ante-Nicene Fathers (ANF), 3:677. Edwin Hatch suggests that the explanation 'qui est episcopus' indicates that the church did not then generally acknowledge the designation. See The Organisation of the Early Churches (2d rev. ed.; London, 1882), p. 142, n. 59. Origen also speaks with hesitation in Comment. in Joann. tom. 1.3: "hoi de anakeimenoι to theio logo kai pros mone te therapeia. . . . Leuitai kai hierois ouk atopos lechthesontai (But those who devote to the divine word and no other employment but the service of God may not unnaturally [emphasis mine]. . . . be called Levites and priests)," The greichischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drie Jahrhunderte (GCS), 10:5, ed. E. Preuschen, Leipzig, 1903; trans. ANF, 10:298. A. Harnack contends that before the year 220 the term was not universally applied to the bishops and presbyters in Carthage; see History of Dogma, 7 vols., translated by Neil

Thirdly, the priesthood of believers, according to Yves Congar is a reality so rich in content that no single aspect or statement is able to exhaust it. He writes:

There is a moral priesthood, which consists in living and doing with a priestly soul, in a spirit of religion; there is a real but wholly inward and spiritual priesthood, that of prayer and and ascetical life; there is a priesthood with a sacramental reference and import, associated not only with righteous life but with baptismal consecration, and whose supreme activity is participation in the eucharistic offering. All these are authentic aspects of the tradition's deposit.<sup>17</sup>

The theology of the laity is a total ecclesiology involving: (1) the relation of the church with the world; (2) an up-to-date pastoral theology; (3) the nature of laity's obligation; (4) the formation and the meaning of the priesthood (ministerial office);

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Buchanan from the 3rd. ed. of Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte (New York: Russell and Russell, 1958), 2:128, n. 2. Tertullian and Origen wrote the above works about the year 198-220 and 226-231 respectively (Quasten, Johannes, Patrology, 3 vols. [Westminster: The Newman Press, 1960], 2:49, 280). However, J. H. Bernard maintains that Tertullian uses the term without any apology or defence. See "The Cyprian Doctrine of the Ministry," in Essays on Early History of the Church and the Ministry (Essays), edited by H. B. Swete (London: Macmillan, 1918), p. 221. Till Augustine, it was very common to call clergy priests. Concerning Rev. 20:6, he writes: "Non utique de solis episcopis et presbyteris dictum est qui proprie jam (emphasis mine) vacantur in ecclesia sacerdotes (it certainly does not refer to bishops and presbyters alone who are already properly called priests)" (De civ. dei, 20.10, Patrologia latina (PL), ed. Migne, 7:676; trans. mine).

16

Congar, Lay People in the Church, p. 129.

17

The appeal to patristic and scholastic texts bearing on the priesthood of believers is a characteristic of contemporary catholic historiography. A classic is P. Dabin, Le Sacerdoce Royal des Fideles dans la tradition ancienne et modern (The Royal Priesthood of the Faithful in Ancient and Modern Tradition), Paris, 1950. Theodore M. Hesburgh builds on his study about the lay apostolate on Thomas Aquinas' Christology--Christ as gratia apitis, thus the church as a Body participates in the priesthood of Christ as the result of the mystical union with the Head. It

and (5) the Christian meaning of history and earthly realities.

The various interpretations are no doubt the result of the sustained controversy of the doctrine of the church since Reformation. Therefore it is judicious to begin our study with the source--the Bible. <sup>19</sup> We start with the exegetical study of the locus classius: 1 Peter 2:4-10 in the New Testament. Then we investigate the real meaning of the spiritual sacrifice of the believers in the New Testament.

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Locus classius: 1 Peter 2:4-10

The Priesthood of all believers is often utilised as an

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is noted that the author finds Thomas' gratia capitis in affinity with Irenaeus' idea of recapitulation (emphasis mine). Thus the teaching of the priesthood of believer is well-entrenched in the tradition of the church. See Theodore M. Hesburgh, The Relation of the Sacramental Characters of Baptism and Confirmation to the Lay Apostolate, Studies in Sacred Theology, No. 97 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1935), pp. 52-65 on Thomas and pp. 71f., 80-82 on Irenaeus.

18

Congar, Lay People in the Church, p. xxvii.

19

The same approach is adopted by Kung for his The Church, and he acknowledges the debt to his exegetical colleagues, p. xiii. The result is an amazingly evangelical treatment.

20

The book of 1 Peter is the centre of dispute for New Testament scholars (C. F. D. Moule, The Birth of New Testament [New York: Harper and Row, 1962], p. 112). The suggestion that 1 Peter is a baptismal homily is put forth by Richard Perdelwitz's Die Mysterienreligion und das Problem des ersten Petrusbriefes (Giessen, 1911); accepted by F. W. Beare, The First Epistle of Peter (2nd rev. ed.; Oxford, 1958); B. H. Streeter, The Primitive Church (New York: Macmillan Company, 1929), pp. 129-34; Herbert Preisker, in his revised edition of H. Windisch's Die Katholischen Briefe (Tubigen, 1951).

F. L. Cross, based on its resemblance with many patristic liturgical texts, and the preponderance of the teachings about suffering (pascho, to suffer), proposes that the book is a paschal Liturgy (pascha, Easter--the feast of both suffering and resurrection of Christ in the primitive church) (1 Peter: A Paschal Liturgy [London: A. R. Mowbray, 1954]). The theory is

edge against the ministerial office. Our purpose in this section is to find out whether the locus classius of the doctrine (1 Peter 2:4-10) warrants such an antithetical altitude; if not, then what is the meaning intended by the writer?

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questioned by C. F. D. Moule, "The Nature and Purpose of 1 Peter," New Testament Studies 3 (November 1956): 1-11; and T. C. G. Thornton, "1 Peter, A Paschal Liturgy?" Journal of Theological Studies (JTS) 12 (1969):14-26. Both critics appeal to the epistolary appendix (1:1-2; 4:12-5:14) which destroy the integrity of a liturgy.

W. C. van Unnik contends that the baptimal allusions (e.g. 1:2, the sprinkling of blood) pertains to the making of covenant in Sinai (Ex. 24). The priesthood of believers (2:9) alludes to Ex. 19: 6. "What happened to the chosen people of old has also been done unto his readers, but within the Christian dispensation" ("Christianity according to 1 Peter" The Expository Times 68 [1956-57]:81). The plentiful allusions to baptism that led Cross to construct the theory of a paschal liturgy (baptism in Easter) only shows the close relation of ethical language and baptismal language which was very common in the early church (Thornton, p. 24f.). "The sacraments were vehicles of the Gospel and the Gospel was sacramental, and the two are virtually inseparable" (Moule, "1 Peter," p. 4). The rich cultic terminology in the passage under discussion is also a good example of the use of liturgical conceptions for didactic purpose.

Early in 1946, Edward Gordon Selwyn suggested that our passage (2:4-10) is the clearest expression of the early Christian Holiness Code, the core of the catechetical materials of the early church and the main source of the epistle. Emphasis of the ethical teaching is on holiness which has affinities with the Law of Holiness in Leviticus. The writer of the epistle conceives the church as the neo-Levitical community. The priesthood and other cultic epithets in chapter 2 should be seen in the wider frame work of the Levitical practice (The First Epistle of St. Peter [London: Macmillan, 1964], pp. 291-98, p. 419) which is epitomised by the exhortation to holiness in 1:15, 16. In this section we are indebted to the Leiden monograph by John Hall Elliott, The Elect and the Holy: An Exegetical Examination of 1 Peter 2:4-10 and the Phrase basileion hierateuma (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966).

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A plenary paper presented to the International Congress of World Evangelization in 1974 may crystallise this attitude:

"One of most ubiquitous institutional structures which has grown in the church through centuries of tradition is the professional clergy, with the resultant clergy-laity dichotomy. The

## Its relation with the ministerial office

## Spiritualization

The word hierateuma (priesthood) appears twice in this passage (verses 5 and 9) in a chain of cultic imagery designated for the Christian community: priesthood, temple and sacrifice. Such sacerdotal qualifications temptingly lead one to assume that any ministerial office is superfluous and objectionable. Now, Christians can stand on their own! One way to tone down the potential antithesis against the particular priesthood of the Old Testament--and by implication the ministerial office--is by way of spiritualization. All these metaphors are just figures of speech. The Christians are not actual priests, but like priests. Lucien Cerfaux suggests that 1 Peter stands in line with the Philonic Alexandrian exegesis in reducing the external, cultic institution to the internal, pious soul via apocalyptic idealization. <sup>22</sup> Likewise Hans Wenschkewitz observes here a

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 very basis of this dichotomy is undercut by the Biblical teaching that the entire church is a people or laity (laos) and all Christians are ministers. . . . and we are all called to the ministry.

A professional, distinct priesthood did exist in Old Testament days. But in the New Testament this priesthood is replaced by two truths: Jesus Christ as our great High Priest, and the church as a kingdom of priests (Heb. 4:14; 8:1; 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6).

The New Testament doctrine of ministry, therefore, rests not on the clergy-laity distinction but on the twin pillars of the priesthood of all believers and the gifts of the Spirit" (Howard A. Synder, "The Church as God's Agent in Evangelism," Let the Earth Hear His Voice. International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland, ed. J. D. Douglas [Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975], p. 359f.).

This is the only paper on ecclesiology out of the fifteen plenary papers. Francis Schaffer had presented a paper entitled "Form and Freedom in the Church"; which is a sermon and challenge

heightened example of the spiritualization of the conception of cult. He writes: "A piling up of conceptions of cult by the simultaneous spiritualization of the notions of temple, priest and sacrifice (is found) in the place of 1 Peter 2:5ff."<sup>23</sup>

However, sheer spiritualization does not do justice to the considerable realism of these images. G. Schrenk remarks: "the image of the temple is made less static and more dynamic by intermingling it with the metaphor of the body. The community is alive by the Spirit. It is edified by constant growth."<sup>24</sup> If the temple is spiritual, then the priesthood should be consecrated too. "It is a hierateuma (priesthood) inasmuch as it offers these sacrifices."<sup>25</sup> In fact, contrary to the prevailing spiritualization of the Alexandrian tradition, early Christians

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rather than a systematic treatment. Later in 1975 and 1978, Synder published two books expounding the basic ideas of the above paper. The first one is entitled The Problem of Wine-Skin: Church Structure in a Technological Age (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press) which ran seven printings within four years. The second is The Community of the King (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press) which went to the third printing within one year. Another popular writer espousing similar ideas is Lawrence O. Richards; see his A Theology of Church Leadership (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), p. 17; A New Face for the Church (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), p. 98.

<sup>22</sup>

Lucien Cerfaux, "Regale Sacerdotium," Revue des Sciences Philosophiques 28 (1939):25f.

<sup>23</sup>

"eine Haufung von Kultusbegriffen bei der gleichzeitigen Spiritualisierung des Tempel-, Priester- und Opferbegriffes an der Stelle 1 Per. 2:5ff." (Die Spiritualisierung der Kultusbegriffe Tempel, Priester und Opfer im Neuen Testament [Angelos 4, Archiv für neutestamentliche Zeitgeschichte und Kulturkunde] [Leipzig, 1932], p. 161); trans. mine.

<sup>24</sup>

G. Schrenk, TDNT, 3:250.

entertained no dicotomy between institutional and personal, external and internal. They considered both the community and individuals as church. "From the beginning Christianity has succeeded in unifying the collective and personal existence."<sup>26</sup>

The Christians are called priests in this passage but not in the Levitical sense and certainly not in polemical rhetoric against the ministerial office. This is forcibly shown by the internal testimony of the epistle and the lexicographical witness of the term basileion hierateuma (verse 9 'royal priesthood').

#### Internal testimony

The non-polemical intention is seen from the later portions of the epistle, 4:7-11 and 5:1-5. The first portion speaks about the ministry of gifts within the community. The gifts (charismata) are divided into 'speaking' (lalein) and 'serving' (diakonein) (4:11), which correspond to the distinguishable orders among the community of 'elder' or 'shepherd' and the 'young' or the 'flock' (5:1-5). The elders (5:1-4) are exhorted not to abuse their authorities over the flock committed to their care. The ministerial office is clearly sanctioned here vested with authority, at least adequate enough to be abused.<sup>27</sup>

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Ibid.; cf. Charles Bigg, Epistle of St. Peter and St. Jude, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh, 1901), p. 134.

26

Congar, Mystery of the Temple, translated by Reginald F. Trevett from the French edition (1958, Paris) Le Mystere du Temple (Westminster, Md: Newman Press, 1962), p. 153.

27

If Selwyn's theory stands: 4:7-11 and 5:2-5 are early church codes about the church unity and order, materials for catechism, then the ministerial order was in vogue (Selwyn, pp. 415-19).

## Lexicographical witness

The nomenclature Basileion hierateuma does not denote any individual, honorific official status. Lexicographically speaking, it is neither 'a priest' nor 'royal.' The word hierateuma is affixed with the substantive -euma which "designate a community . . . has the idea of collectivity while at the same time stressing the aspect of activity."<sup>28</sup> The more accurate translation is 'body of functioning priests.'<sup>29</sup> As regard to basileion William Arnt points out that the adjective ending of -ios (ion) expresses the idea of possession and those with -ikos denote ability or fitness. The priests in verse 9 thus do not possess royal authority but are possessed by the king.<sup>30</sup> This analysis is supported by the context of Exodus 19:6 (the Exodus Formula [EF]) to which it alludes. When a covenant is made, it is the initiator rather than the vassal who proclaims the kingship.<sup>31</sup>

From the above evidence we may infer that the doctrine in this passage does not posit an antithesis to the ministerial office. Rather, the doctrine epitomizes the contrast between the priestly race--the church and the pagan world.

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Elliot, p. 67. For instance bouleuma means 'the sitting of a council', not simply 'a body of senators.'

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Ibid., p. 69.

30

Ibid., p. 244. He points out that the office of a priest is conveyed by hierateia as in Luke 1:9 and suggests that Luther should translate hierateuma for priesterschaft, not priestertum. Bigg concurs: "the hierateuma is royal because it belongs to the King . . . as His own possession (St. Peter and St. Jude, p. 134).

31

For a more detailed discussion of the enactment of

## Its relation with the world

The priesthood of believers as an antithesis against the unbelieving world<sup>32</sup> is seen by the syntactical evidence of the periscope and the overall theological theme of the epistle.

## Syntactical evidence

Syntactically the word hierateuma conveys, together with other images, the spiritual status of the people of God. They are the elected, the holy ones. The theme of election is punctuated by the parallel motifs of lithos (stone, Isaiah 28:16) and hierateuma (EF) in the introductory section of verses 4, 5 which anticipates the fuller exposition in verses 6, 8 and verses 9, 10 respectively. In the lithos section, Christ is described as the Elect and Precious Stone of God; so are the chosen people who, as living stones, make up the spiritual temple. The hierateuma

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 covenant, consult G. A. Mendenhall, "Ancient Oriental and Biblical Law," Biblical Archaeologist 17/2 (1954): 26-46; idem, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," Biblical Archaeologist 17/3 (1954): 50-76; K. Baltzer, The Covenant Formulary in the Old Testament, Jewish and Early Christian Writings (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971); Meredith G. Kline, Treaty of the Great King. The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy: Studies and Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963).

32

The antithesis is spiritual, not sociological. We are told to submit to all authority instituted by God (2:13ff.). Christian eschatology is radically different from the contemporary Essenes, who also aspired to the priestly ideal. For a succinct summary of the Qumran community's eschatology, see van der Woude, article in TDNT, 9: 517-20. The reliable account of J. Starcky ("Les Quatres Etapes de Messianisme a Qumran [The Four Stages of Qumran Messianism]" Revue Biblique, tom. 70 [1963]: 481ff.) is summarized in Matthew Black, The Dead Sea Scrolls and Christian Doctrine (London: Athlone Press, 1966), p. 5f. See also John Pryke, "Eschatology in the Dead Sea Scrolls," in The Scrolls and Christianity, ed. Matthew Black with an introduction (London:

section alludes to EF and reinforces the theme of election. 33 G.

Schrenk observes that the whole periscope depicts the consistent transferral of the predicates of salvation and dignity, namely, possession (God's), temple and priesthood from Israel and

applies to the Christian community. 34 The accent of the people of God being the elect priestly race over against the pagan world is apparent. Thus, E. W. Selwyn contends that the whole book is framed by the Levitical ideals applied to the primitive church.

The church is the neo-Levitical community, a holy priesthood. 35

That the community is portrayed vis-à-vis the world is also shown by the deliberate allusion to EF where the epithet 'kingdom of priests' (mamlākā kohnîm) is paralleled by 'holy nation' (gôy qadoš). As we know, corresponding terms in Hebrew parallelism are mutually explanatory. The understanding of goy qadoš may shed

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S.P.C.K., 1969), pp. 45-57. Both the ethics of early Christians and the Qumran community operated within the Levitical-sacerdotal framework (Matthew Black, The Scrolls and Christian Origins [London, 1961], pp. 15, 82). However, Christians stress freedom, not constriction. Campenhausen writes: "Quite apart from the bond with Christ, this may be countered by the Old Testament doctrine of creation with its faith that receives gratefully all the gifts of natural life from the hands of God" (see the chapter on "Early Christian Asceticism," Tradition and Life, p. 121f.). This attitude is different from Nee's conception of spirituality and his view of the world. See his Love not the World, ed. Angus I. Kinnear (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1968).

33

Elliott, pp. 141-46.

34

Ibid. Cf. Finslay makes similar remarks: "Peter piles up one on the other great Old Testament titles of Israel and applies them to his readers. Portrait of Peter, p. 174, cited in William Arnt, "A Royal Priesthood, 1 Pet. 2:9," 19 CTM (April 1948):243.

35

See Selwyn, pp. 291-98, p. 419.

light on the counterpart mamlākā which may in turn elucidate the meaning of 'royal priesthood' (basileion hierateuma) in verse 9. In EF the word 'holy' (qadoš) is used to stress the distinctive covenant status of Israel compared to all other 'nations' (Masoretic Text 'mmim, peoples). Commenting on the use of gôy in EF, H. Junker said: "The contrast is not against a Levitical priesthood but over against the Gentiles, as is clear from verse 5b 'from among the peoples'." <sup>36</sup> This antithesis bespeaks the actual tension between the world and the kingdom. Only people who live in the environment which outcasts Christians <sup>37</sup> because of their faith may understand.

#### Theological theme

Unlike the Book to the Hebrews, which talks about the supersedure of all that was foregoing; the church in 1 Peter is described as an historical continuity, sharing the suffering of

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"Das allgemeine Priestertum des Volkes Israel nach Ex. 9:6," Trierer Theologische Zeitschrift 56 (1947):11f., cited in Elliott, p. 57. But A. Cody said that the use of gôy here is for the semantic parallel of mamlākā and implies a realistic new relation with other gôyim. It does not intend to show separation but emphasizes the possession of the Promised Land. See "When is the Chosen People Called a goy?" Vetus Testamentum 14 (1964):1-6, especially 4-6. Gerald van Gromingen agrees that Gôy pertains to the political entity without any religious meaning (unlike 'am). However, here it designates Israel a covenant nation (a nation [cf. Cody] yet under a covenant). Only after the fact that Israel is a covenant nation is accepted, the terms gôy and gôyim "increasingly take the meaning of 'gentiles' or 'heathens' in reference to the non-covenant, non-believing peoples consisted as national group" ("Goy," Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, 2 vols., eds. R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, and B. Waltke [Chicago: Moody Press, 1980], 1:154).

37

Unnik, p. 83. He contends that the author does not speak about regular persecutions but sufferings which come from ill-tempered neighbours (p. 80).

Christ as his body on earth. In fact the teaching about suffering is so pervasive that it leads some to construe that it is a Paschal Liturgy.<sup>39</sup> As we have shown, priesthood of believers pertains to the spiritual status of being the chosen people. Yet Christians are chosen to suffer after the example of Christ (2:21), because they are the Messianic servants. Christ as the eschatological Stone had been rejected, so are his eschatological people. Christians are possessed by God because they possess the Word. The possession of the Word at the same time obligates them to assume the awesome responsibility for its proclamation (verse 9).<sup>40</sup> Proclamation leads to rejection and persecution, as shown by Christ. To have the priesthood is to be an antithesis and that adduces afflictions.

As it has been pointed out, the word hierateuma means 'body of functioning priests.' The word is peculiar to the Septuagint and its dependent literatures<sup>41</sup> and should be understood in the light of the cultural milieu of the Dispersion. It is pregnated with mission-consciousness. The Diaspora reality made the people aliens. Removed from the Promised Land and the temple, they had

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E. Kasemann, Das wandernde Gottesvolk (Forschung zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments, Neue Folge 37, 4 Auflage; Gottingen, 1961), pp. 34f.; cited in Elliott, p. 170f.

39

Cf. Cross, note 20 of this chapter.

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Cross, p. 247; Schrenk, TDNT, 3:249.

41

Elliott, p. 64. It appears four times in the Bible: LXX Ex. 19:6, 23:22 (repetition of EF, absent in MT, most likely a later interpolation); 1 Peter 2:5, 9 (both alluded to EF).

an identity crisis. As they were confronted by the pagans among whom they sojourned, they gradually realised the horizontal dimension of being the priests of God. They had to maintain holiness among the pagans as well as to mediate the holy will of God to them. They did not satisfy just being the politeuma--a nation of aliens among foreign soil; they aspired to be the hierateuma--a community with a divine mission.<sup>42</sup> The theology of the LXX translators was indiscreetly borrowed by our author and transposed to the New Israel. To be priests of God is to be holy and separate from the world (1:15, 16); at the same time they have to proclaim the excellences of the One who call them (2:9).

### Summary

The study of the locus classius (1 Peter 2:4-10) shows that the priesthood of all believers does not disparage the ministerial office. The main import of the term in this passage is to denote the holiness, the election of the people of God who in turn are obligated of a mission to the world by proclaiming the Word of God.

### Priesthood and Spiritual Sacrifice

The import of the priesthood of believers is further explicated by the spiritual sacrifice they offer. What makes New Testament believers priests is not their succession to the title and office of the Levitical priesthood which Christ alone has superseded. They are legitimate priests because they have

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42

Elliott, pp. 69, 73-76.

spiritual sacrifice to offer. The concept of spiritual sacrifice is extensively mentioned in the Old Testament and often more highly valued than the cultic sacrifices; even though the general priesthood was scarcely treated, and predicated of no sacerdotal connotation in Jewish tradition. Once the New Israel was ushered in and Christ had done away with the Levitical priesthood, "it was only a short step to the application of Ex. 19:6."

The teachings about spiritual sacrifice are widespread in the New Testament, including: (1) Praise (Heb. 13:15), (2) almsgiving (Heb. 3:16, Phil. 4:18), (3) good works (Heb. 13:16, compare Titus 3:8), (4) evangelism (Rom. 15:16, Phil. 2:17) and above all (5) dedication of oneself (Rom. 12:1). The main thrust is a life-style modelled after the High Priest--Christ in whom for the first time the sacrifice and sacrificer coincide. Whatever the Christians do in faith is spiritual sacrifice acceptable to the Father for the sake of Christ. T. W. Manson

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43  
Note 34 of this chapter.

44  
Isa. 1:11-15; Hos. 6:6; Mic. 6:6-8; Ps. 50:13, 14, 23; 51:17; 141:2; 4:5.

45  
Wenschkewitz said of the general priesthood in the Jewish tradition: "Das Wort 'Priester' wird aber nur aus Erklärung für der Herrschaftsgekanden gefasst, wodurch der friedliche Character der kommenden judischen Weltherrschaft ausgedruckt sein soll" (The word priest becomes but only as declaration for the notion of prepared dominion, whereby the peaceful character of the common Jewish world dominion must be expressed) (Wenschkewitz, p. 43f.; trans. mine). Both Old Testament and Judaism only emphasize the Levitical priesthood. Cf. Best, p. 278.

46  
Best, p. 299.

remarks:

"the priesthood of believers lies in the fact that each believer offers himself as a sacrifice according to the pattern laid down by Christ; and--what is equally essential--that all these individual offerings are taken up into the one perpetual offering made by the one eternal high-priest of the New Covenant."<sup>47</sup>

Christian priesthood has little to do with the cultic practice in the formal worship of the church. If that is the case it only confines the designation to a limited time and space to the Christian activity. In fact, the early church consciously avoids using traditional cultic terminology even to describe the formal worship. The only regular term of Christian worship is synerchesthai (come together) or synagesthai (be gathered together).<sup>48</sup> So long as they are Christians, what they do when they assemble together is worship. Who does it is more significant than what they are doing. If the cultic terminology occurs it is unmistakably used metamorphically.<sup>49</sup> The whole life of the Christian is worship (certainly formal worship is not excluded).

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47

T. W. Manson, Ministry and Priesthood: Christ's and Ours (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1958), p. 64. Cf. Thomas M. Lindsay, The Church and the Ministry in the Early Church (New York: George H. Doran, n.d.), p. 36.

48

Ferdinand Hahn, The Worship of the Early Church, translated by David E. Green from "Der urchristliche Gottesdienst," Jahrbuch fur Liturgik und Hymnologie 12 (1967): 1-44; edited and with an introduction by John Reumann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), p. 36. See also Peter Brunner, Worship in the Name of Jesus, translated by M. H. Bertram from Zur Lehre vom Gottesdienst der im Namen Jesu versammelten Gemeinde in Leitura, Handbuch des evangelischen Gottesdienstes, vol. 1 (Kassel, 1954) (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), pp. 11-22.

49

Hahn, Worship of the Early Church, p.38. The word 'proclaim' (exaggeilete, 1 Peter 2:9), a hapex in New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers, is used eight times for cultic declara-

There is no distinction between sacred and profane, worship and  
 50  
 service.

### Conclusion

The above survey leads us to the following conclusion: (1) The priesthood of believers pertains to the spiritual status of the Christians--the elected and holy people of God, which is the indicative of the priesthood. (2) Subsequent to that is the imperative of the priesthood--to live out the priestly life of self-sacrifice as Christ, the High Priest par excellence. (3) The priesthood of believers obligated the Christians to proclaim the Word, which is both a privilege and an awesome responsibility. It never implies individual honorific, official status. The antithesis is not one against the Levitical priesthood or the  
 51  
 ministerial office but against the pagan world.

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 tion in LXX (Ps. 106:22; 118:26; 55:9, 11). Also the word priest was mentioned scarcely in the non-canonical literatures in the first and second centuries. The early Christians associated the death of Jesus with the priests. On the other hand, they wanted to disengage the sacrificial cultus the word connotes. However, it was noteworthy that nowhere was the Levitical priesthood spoken of disparagingly in these writings (Clarence L. Lee, "Sacerdotal Ethics in Early Christianity," Th.D. Dissertation [Harvard University, 1966], p. 42).

50

Hahn, Worhsip of the Early Church, p. 39.

51

The same non-polemical intention is also attested by other references related to priesthood of believers. (1) Isaiah 61:6a "And you will be called the priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers of our God." The passage is in a context of the advent of the Messiah--the Suffering Servant (61:1-3). Israelites are thus called the priests and servants. The priesthood is expressed in servanthood to the nations. H. C. Leupold writes: "What the priesthood was for Israel, that the Israel shall be to the nations" (Exposition of Isaiah, vol. 2: Chapter 40-66 [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1971], p. 319). The tone is missiological. When the Servant comes all Israelites

become messianic servants too whose commission is to bring all heathen into the fold. No denigration of the Levitical priesthood or the ministerial office is found here.

(2) Rev. 1:6: "And has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father. . . ." The focus here is about the redemptive work of Christ who epoiesen hemas baseliean, hereis. . . . The EF is presented as a product of the saving activity of Christ. Appealing to this verse to repeal the particular priesthood is irrelevant.

(3) Rev. 5:10: "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." The context is the adoration of the Lamb who is worthy to open the seal. The royal status of the community is emphasized, but the term priests receive no comment. Both references above refer to the 'priests' as people of Christ's redemption, not the honour, significance of individuals (cf. Elliott, p. 13).

(4) Rev. 20:6: "Blessed and holy are those . . . called the priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years." It alludes more to Isaiah 61:6 than EF. The motif is millenium rather than redemption. The martyrs of the church are promised priesthood and reign with Christ in the millenium.

In short, all the other pertinent verses do concur with 1 Peter 2:4-10. The priesthood enunciated pertains to the status of the faithful--redeemed people of God. The word never appears in singular nor implies individuals, but always exists in the corporate sense. The horizontal dimension of the priesthood is already mentioned by the prophet in Isaiah 61:6 which is clearly punctuated in 1 Peter. The antithesis is one against the pagans, not the Levitical priesthood or the ministerial office in the New Dispensation.

## CHAPTER III

### THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS IN THE PRE-NICENE CHURCH

#### Introduction

If both the universal priesthood and the ministerial office are affirmed by the Scripture, as we have seen from the last chapter, what then is the relation between the office-bearers and the ordinary members? How did the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers express itself in the primitive church? This period is essential for the parallels it provides in our understanding of Watchman Nee's context. The pre-Nicene church resembles China in many respects in the first decades of the twentieth century. Christian faith was then considered an alien religion. To be an Christian was to be a social outcast. We

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Christianity suffered the low social status as any institutional religions beside Confucism (a quasi imperial 'orthodoxy' sanctioned by the government; all civil bureaucrats had to pass the examination on the 'five classics' of Confucism before they got the jobs) which were under strict government control since Tang Dynasty (A.D. 605-960). A quota was imposed on the number of Taoist and Buddhist priests and they were prohibited to preach and delivered pamphlets in public places (C. K. Yang, Religion in Chinese Society [Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: The University of California Press, 1961], pp. 188-89, 213. When the Catholic missionaries came they unleashed the sustained Rite controversy (worshipping heaven, ancestors and paying homage to Confucius) which in turn induced imperial decrees for the persecution of Chinese believers. In 1720, Emperor Hong Hsi (1622-1722) even wrote on the Papal decree brought by legate Carlo Mezzabarba: "Foreigners are not allowed to engage in

approach the questions by investigating: (1) the corporate authority of the early church (2) the participation of the laymen in the life of the church, and (3) reasons for the demise of the priesthood of believers.

### Universal Priesthood and Corporate Authority

#### The corporate church

In the pre-Nicene church, the priesthood of all believers was expressed in the corporate authority of the church to which the office-bearers were held accountable. By the corporate authority of the church, we do not imply the reduction of the ministerial office to the sheer delegation of the congregation. It only means that the operation of the office-bearers was within the boundary of the universal priesthood of the believers. In fact, the pre-Nicene church affirmed the principle of dual  
<sup>2</sup>  
 priesthoods. Both the clergy and laymen lived in charming unity

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 missionary activities so as to avoid controversies (以後不必西洋人在中国行教, 禁之可也, 免得碍) (cited in Johnathan Chao, "The Development of the Christian Ministry in China," A Life of Ministry, ed. Ronald Y. K. Fung and Carver T. Yu [Essays presented to Philip Teng on his 60th Birthday by Members of the Faculty of China Graduate School of Theology; Hong Kong: China Alliance Press, 1982], p. 283). China was forced to grant free missionary activities in her land to the foreign countries in the Treaty of Nanking in 1842 after the Opium War with Britian. However, Chinese people ever had the feeling that Christianity was imposed on not invited by them. These altitudes assuredly gave incentive to Nee to develop the kind of church polity independent of any missionaries and Chinese pastors (who were then considered helpers of the former). We will return for a more elaborate discussion when we come to Part Two.

2

Calling a cleric priest was common in the ancient church and is still practised in the Episcopalian communions, Roman Catholic church and the Othodox church. Luther calls both the Christians and clerics priests which may account for the confusion on the part of many interpreters of his veiw on

and upheld each other in the trying early hundreds of years. This admirable bond was the direct result of the 'minority status' of Christianity in this period and was reiterated by leading fathers.

### Corporate church in the hostile society

The hostile situation of the primitive church could not afford any antagonism between the clergy and laymen. The continual sporadic persecutions from outside--first the Jews,<sup>3</sup> then the State<sup>4</sup> made the people of God love one another more.<sup>5</sup>

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ministry (Gerrish, "Priesthood and Ministry in the Theology of Luther," p. 419). The validity of the ascription to the minister is endorsed by Lightfoot ("Christian Ministry," Dissertations on the Apostolic Age [reprint from the 1881 rev. ed. (1st ed., 1868) of Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians; London, 1892], pp. 235-38); defended by Gore (The Church and the Ministry [London, 1913], pp. 76ff. and Leslie Houlden ("Priesthood," Lambeth Essays on Ministry, ed. Archbishop of Canterbury [London: S.P.C.K., 1969], pp. 39-50). The Lutheran 'pastor' or Reformed 'minister' may appear anachronistic in this period. It is legitimate to call a minister sacerdos if it means that he serves for the 'sacred' thing (cf. the Holy Ministry). We use both terms interchangeably throughout our study.

3

Moule draws to our attention that the constant Jewish antagonism constitutes the background of New Testament writings (Birth of NT, passim). The case against Paul before the Roman tribunal was to disassociate Christianity from the sanctioned Judaism and made the church an illegal religious novelty (p. 117).

4

Rudolf Sohm, a specialist in Roman laws, remarks that to be a Christian in this period was to be dedicated to death. The crime of a Christian was a thought--his faith, not a convicted deed. He had the burdon to prove himself not guilty of majesta or treason by sacrificing to the image of the emperor ([ET] Outlines of Church History, trans. May Sinclair with intro. by James Luther Adams from the 1893 8th ed. Kirchengeschichte im Grundriss [Boston: Beacon Press, 1962], pp. 12-15). Significant imperial persecutions are as follow: (1) Nero made profession of Christianity a crime in A.D. 64; Paul and Peter martyred. (2) Domitian made profession of faith to State religion imperative in A.D. 95 and Christians were accused of atheism. (3) Trajan's rescript to Pliny in A.D. 112 considered a capital crime for being a

Christian, yet granted pardon upon recantation. Bishop of Jerusalem Symeon martyred. (4) Marcus jested that Christian martyrs died in a spirit of irrational emulation. In A.D. 167 Christians were caught and compelled to sacrifice. (5) Severus forbade conversion in A.D. 202. The persecution was so great in Africa that Christians thought that the end of the world came (Tertullian, Ad Scapulam 3.3 [CCL, 2:1129; ANF, 3:106]). (6) Maximinus (A.D. 235-37) aimed at the clergy in Rome, Egypt and Asia. "Only the rulers of the Churches should be put to death, as responsible for the Gospel teaching" (Eusibius, Historia Ecclesiastica [hereafter HE] 6.28; NPNF[2], 1:274). (7) Decius in A.D. 250 employed all tactics of his preceding emperors in a worldwide persecution. (8) Valerian in A.D. 254 enforced a formal registration of all bishops. Dionysius of Alexandria martyred. (9) Diocletian was notoriously known for his cruelties. A decree directed at the clergy in 300 A.D. made the prisons "filled with bishops, presbyters and deacons, readers and exorcists" (Eusibius, HE 8.6.9; NPNF[2], 1:328). In A.D. 302 a decree ordered destruction of church buildings and confiscation church property; consecrated virgins were consigned to brothels; Christians were put to death wherever they were found.

A comprehensive and substantial account is given in Edward B. Birks, "Martyr," Antig., 2:1118-32. Thierry Ruinart's Acta primorum martyrum (1689; ed. Ratsbon, 1859) is an older classic. O. von Gebhardt's Acta martyrum selecta (Berlin, 1902); R. Knopf-Kruger-Ruhbach, Ausgewahlte Martyrerakten (Tubigen and Leipzig, 1965) are indispensable. A recent critical contribution with intro. of rich bibliographical notes (63 pages) is from Herbert Musurillo's The Acts of the Christian Martyrs (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1972). Arthur James Mason's The Historic Martyrs of the Primitive Church (London, 1905) gives a highly readable and moving narrative at a popular level. A resourceful monography is W. H. C. Frend, Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from Maccabees to Donatus (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965) which is a social historical approach with archaeological evidence yet weak in theological evaluation. Frend stresses the continuity of the Jewish (the Maccabees) and Christian martyrs in their resort to martyrdom as revolts against the secularisation of their religious faith (p. xiii). On the other hand Campenhausen argues for the discontinuity saying that the Jews martyred as a witness to the nations while the Christians did it as in obedience to the laws of God (Die Idee des Martyriums in der alten Kirche [2d ed., Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Reprecht, 1964], p. 3f.). The metaphysical dimension of martyrdom is discussed in F. J. Dolger, "Das Martyrium als Kampf mit dem Teufel," Antike und Christentum (Munster, 1933), 3:177-88 and receives lengthy treatment in William C. Weinrich, Spirit and Martyrdom: A Study of the Works of the Holy Spirit in Contexts of Persecution and Martyrdom in the New Testament and Early Church (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981). Rules for assessment and categories of verisimilitude of each Acta is treated in H. Delehaye, Les Passion des Martyrs et les Genres litteraires (Brussels, 1921). A

The corporate epithets adopted by the church bespoke the mutual love and unity among the believers: they were called 'the brotherhood,'<sup>6</sup> 'bond of hospitality,'<sup>7</sup> 'body of Christ,'<sup>8</sup> 'house

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 critical survey of sources (up to 1938) related to Diocletian's persecution is found in N. H. Baynes, "The Great Persecution," Chapter 19 in Cambridge Ancient History, 12:646-77, 789-95; see also G. E. M. Croix, "Aspect of the Great Persecution," Harvard Theological Review 47 (1954):75-113. Full bibliography on earlier works is provided in L. H. Canfield, The Early Persecutions of the Christians (Columbia University Studies in History, Economic and Public Law, no. 55; New York: Columbia University Press, 1913). Articles see T. W. Manson, "Martyrs and Martyrdom," Bulletin of John Ryland's Library 39 (1957):463-84; Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?" Past and Present 26 (November 1963):6-38.

<sup>5</sup>  
 The heathen writer Lucian describes the love among the Christians: "When he (Peregrinus) was put in prison the Christians took it to heart, and left no stone unturned to have him out again. Then, when that proved impossible, all other kind offices were done him, not half-heartedly, but in business-like fashion and in good earnest, and right from early morning you might see at the goal-door old women waiting about, certain widows, and little children that were orphans. But their official personages even slept inside the gaol along with him, bribing the gaolers" (Life of Peregrinus, 12, cited in Birks, 2:1125f.).

<sup>6</sup>  
 Cyprian, De unitate 9: "haec est in ecclesia noscenda simplicitas, haec caritas obtinenda, ut columbas dilectio fraternitatis imitetur, ut mansuetudo et lenitas agnis et ouibus aequetur (This is the simplicity that ought to be attained, that so the love of the brotherhood may imitate the doves, that their gentleness and meekness may be like the lambs and sheep)" (CSEL, 3,2:217, ed. Hartel; ANF, 5:424). It is noted that Cyprian who is known for his advocacy of hierarchical authority and unity of episcopacy still maintains the primitive concept of the church as a brotherhood. Cf. Ignatius, Ep. Eph. 4 and Ep. Magn. 1 (ed. Bihlmeyer, pp. 83-84, 89; trans. in Jack N. Sparks, The Apostolic Fathers (one-volume edition [eliminating commentary and background information] of the original six-volume work edited by Robert M. Grant [New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1964-68]; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1978), pp. 78-79., 86). Tertullian, De praescriptione 20.8: 'appellatio fraternitatis' (CCL, 1:202, ed. R. F. Refoule; ANF, 3:252. Harnack observes that by the third century clerics addressed among themselves and in their sermons to the laymen as brethren but no layman ventured to call ecclesiastics brethren ([ET] The Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries, 2 vols., trans. and ed. James Moffatt [London, 1904], 2:32). See his excursus on 'Friends

of God,' 'assemblage of the elect.'<sup>9</sup> In fact during the age of  
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(philoi), pp. 25-34. The church as a brotherhood is a major thesis in Arthur C. Headlam's Bampton Lectures, 1920 (The Doctrine of the church and Union [London, 1st ed., 1920; 3d ed., 1929]).

<sup>7</sup> 'Contesseratio hospitalitatis,' Tertullian, De praescriptione 20.8.

<sup>8</sup> Origen, Contra Celsum, 6.48 (Patrologia graeca [PG], ed. Migne, 11:1373; ANF, 4:595). He even one time calls the church: "Hote de ginetai aute e anastasis tou alethinou kai teleilterou Christou somato (when the resurrection of the truer and perfecter body of Christ takes place)" (In Joannem, 10.20 [GCS, 10:210, ed. Edwin Preuschen; ANF, 10:401]). Cf. Dix, The Shape of the Liturgy [London, 1945; Seabury edition with additional notes by Paul V. Marshall, New York: Seabury Press, 1982] p. 246.

<sup>9</sup> Cyprian, De unitate 8: "in domo Dei, in ecclesia Christi unanimes habitant, concordēs it simplices perseuerant (in the house of God, in the church of Christ, men dwell with one mind, and continue in concord and simplicity)" (ANF, 5:424). Cf. Ignatius, Ep. Eph. 6 (ed. Bilh Meyer, p. 84; Sparks, p. 79). Dom G. Dix contends that the biblical 'household of faith' (Gal. 6:9; cf. Eph. 2:19, 1 Tim. 3:15, Heb. 3:5f., 10:21) is realism alluding to the domestic worship and the bishop's throne was simply the seat of the pater-familias (Shape, pp. 18, 23). The architectural plan of the later eastern churches was metamorphised from the big house of the nobles (pp. 22-23). Marshall agrees yet he maintains that early Christians worshiped in tituli (tenement, ordinary house) rather than big noble mansion since there were not many wealthy converts in the early period (cf. Moule, Birth of NT, pp. 135, 158f.). About twenty five of these tenements were discovered (Dix, Shape, p. 766, n. 1, 2). L. W. Barnard suggests that the residence of prominent Christian teachers were the only 'publicly' known Christian places of worship since in Justin's Acts of Martyrdom 3, we read that Christians meet in a number of places 'where each one wishes to and is able' (Justin Martyr: His Life and Thought [Cambridge: At the University Press, 1967], p. 134, n. 3). Anyway, the house of God or ecclesia unequivocally referred to the people in the primitive time. The earliest building designated ecclesia unearthed in Mesopotamia (at Dura-Europos) dated about 232 A.D. was a large rectangular hall, little platform for the bishop without an altar, just a table (A. Lassus, art. "Syrie," Dictionnaire d'archeologie chretienne et de liturgie, 15 [1953]: 1861-1865, cf. J. A. Jungmann, The Early Liturgy to the Time of Gregory the Great, trans. Francis A. Brunner [London, 1960], p. 15, n. 5). The church confiscated during the Diocletian persecution was described "domus in qua christiani conveniebant

persecution, the clergy, serving as imperial targets for the intimidation of the laymen, were foremost to shed their blood of martyrdom. Polycarp and Ignatius were good examples. Several imperial edicts were especially aimed at the clergy.<sup>11</sup> And the laymen loved their leaders dearly and vice versa.<sup>12</sup>

### Patristic witness of dual priesthods

When early Christian writers accentuated either the

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 (the house where the Christians assemble [trans. mine])" (PL, 8:730-32; cf. Dix. Shape., p. 24f.). Till late second and early third century, 'house of God', 'church' began to refer to a physical building: Tertullian, De idolatria 7 (CCL, 2:1106, eds., A.Reiffersheid and G. Wissowa) Clement, Stromateis., 7.5; Origen, Hom. 10 in Librum Iesu Nave 3: "ad Ecclessia venient" (PG, 12:881); Optatus, De Schismate Donatistarum 2.4 (PL, 11:951); most clearly in Cyprian, De opere et eleemosynis 15: "quae (matrona locuples et diues) in dominicum sine sacrificio uenis (who [the wealthy and rich lady] comes to the Lord's house without sacrifice)", CSEL, 3,1:384, ed. Hartel; trans. and emphasis mine); Eusibius, HE 10.2,3 (ed. Schwartz, 9,2:860-862; NPNF[2], 1:370). Cf. F. E. Warren, The Liturgy and Ritual of the Ante-Nicene church (2nd ed.; London: SPCK, 1912), p. 67, n. 3. House church in the New Testament is discussed in Moule, Birth of NT, pp. 125-29. He points out that the church though private yet had a corporate personality.

10

Clement, Strom. 7.5: "Ou gar nun ton to athroisma ton eklekton ekklesian kalo (For it is not now the place, but the assemblage of the elect, that I call the Church) (GCS, 17:21, ed. Otto Stahlin; ANF, 2:530). Thomas M. Lindsay suggests that here we have the earliest trace (A.D. 202-210) of a building set apart for worship (The Church and the Ministry in the Early Church [New York: George H. Doran, n.d.], P. 43, n. 5). We should note that Clement of Alexandria stresses the corporate people rather than the building being the church.

11

Maximinus, Valerian and Diocletian, note 3 of this chapter.

12

For instance, the deep respect and love accorded to the leaders on the part of the church is vividly shown by the moving encyclical of Polycarp's martyrdom which was issued in the name of the whole church at Smyrna (Eusibius, HE 4.15, GCS, 9,1:334-54, ed. Schwartz; NPNF[2], 1:188-93).

particular or the universal priesthood, they at the same time kept the other intact. Tertullian, even in one of his most radical statements, written on behalf of the Montanist sympathizers to rebuke bigamy did not actually disparage the particular priesthood:

Vain shall we be if we think that what is not lawful for the priests is lawful for laics. Are not even we laics priests? . . . It is the authority of the church. . . which makes a difference between the Order and the laity. Accordingly where there is no joint session of the ecclesiastical Order, you offer, and baptize, and are priest alone for yourself. But where three are, a church is, albeit they be laics.<sup>13</sup>

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De Exhortatione castitatis 7.2,3: "Vani erimus, si putaverimus quod sacerdotinus non liceat laicis licere. Nonne et laice sacerdotes sumus? . . . Differentiam inter ordinem et plebem constituit ecclesiae auctoritas et honor per ordinis consessus sanctificatos deo. Ubi ecclesiastici ordinis non est consessus, et offers et tinguis it sacerdos es tibi solus. Sed ubi tres, ecclesia est, licet laici " (CCL, 2:1024f., ed. Kroymann; ANF, 4:54). In his early pre-Montanist work De baptismo 17.1,2, written about 198-200 A.D. (Quansten, 2:280), he writes the same thought: "Dandi [i.e. baptismum] quidem habet jus summus sacerdos qui est episcopus: dehinc presbyteri it diacone, non tamen sine episcopi auctoritate proter ecclesiae honorem. Quo salvo pax est. Alioquin itiam laicis ius est: quod enim ex aequo accipitur ex aequo dari potest--nisi (si) episcopi iam aut presbyteri aut diaconi uocabantur discentes domini! (Of giving it the high priest [who is the bishop] has the right: in the next place, the presbyters and deacons, yet not without the bishop's authority, on account of the honour of the Church, which being preserved. Beside these, even the laymen have the right; for what is equally received can be equally given. Unless bishops, or priests and deacons be on the spot, [other] disciples are called [i.e. to the work])" (CCL, 1:291, ed. 1:291, ed. Borleffs; ANF, 3:677). Tertullian is quite consistent in stressing the proper priestly function of the particular priesthood throughout his life. His accentuation of the universal priesthood is vis-a-vis the particular priesthood. From the above passages he clearly agrees that the hierachical priesthood is an order to be respected and only in the case of emergence that laymen can perform the sacraments by virtue of their own royal priesthood. Note that even the deacons need authorization from the bishop to administer baptism. He once accuses the heretics of paying no due regard to ecclesiastical order and imposed priesthood on laymen (De praescr. 41 [CCL,

First, the context of the above passage was ethical admonition, not church government. The royal priesthood was appealed to as the theological rationale for monogamy, not to discredit the ministerial priesthood. Second, as the passage indicates, only in the absence of the "joint session of the ecclesiastical Order" as in the case of emergence that the laymen might administer sacraments. The author merely points out that the ministerial order is rested on ecclesiastical law, not divine law.<sup>14</sup> Also it should be noted that in the later part of the same treatise he talks about the husband who offers eucharist for his departed wives per sacerdotem.<sup>15</sup>

Likewise, Irenaeus, who taught that "the distinctive manifestation of the body of Christ (is) according to the succession of bishops"<sup>16</sup> at same time maintained that "all the righteous possess the sacerdotal rank."<sup>17</sup>

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 1:221f., ed. Refoule; ANF, 3:263). Cf. Lightfoot, "Christian Ministry," p. 222f.

<sup>14</sup>

H. Koch, "Tertullians Laienstand," Zeitschrift fur Kirchengeschichte 35 (1914):1-8.

<sup>15</sup>

De exhort. cast. 11: "Offeres pro duabus et commendabis illas duas per sacerdotem (emphasis mine) de monogamia ordinatum? (will you commend those two [to God] by the ministry of a priest ordained [to his sacred office] on the score of monogamy)" (ANF, 4:56).

<sup>16</sup>

Adversus haereses 4.33.8: "character corporis Christi secundum successiones episcoporum" (ed. Harvey, 2:262; ANF, 1:508).

<sup>17</sup>

Ibid., 4.8.3: "Omnes enim iusti sacerdotale, habent ordinem" (ed. Hartel, 2:167; ANF, 1:471); cf. ibid., 5.34.3 (ed. Hartel, 2:421f.; ANF, 1:564). Here Irenaeus does not posit a challenge to the particular priesthood. The context of the passage is the rebuke of Marcion's rejection of the Old Testament laws which Jesus did faithfully fulfill as the seed of Abraham.

Therefore there was no resentment to accept a particular priesthood in their midst on the part of the laymen. Together, they united into the 'third race' (tertium genus)<sup>18</sup> in clear antithesis over against the Jews and pagans. The people deeply appreciated the leadership of the clergy in face of the onslaught of State persecution from without and heretical infiltration from within. The laymen had high affection and regards for the office-bearers might they be called apostles, prophets and teachers or<sup>19</sup> bishops, presbyters and deacons.

#### The corporate authority of the early church

The corporate authority of the primitive church basically lies in the conception of her being the 'abode of the Holy

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In fact the law does not enslave but renders spiritual freedom as shown by the sanctioned plucking of ears of the wheat on Sabbath (Luke 6:34). The subsequent words read: "Sacerdotes autem sunt omnes Domini e spostoli, qui neque agros, neque domos herditant hic, sed semper altari et Deo serviunt (And all the spostles of the Lord are priests, who do inherit neither land nor houses but serve God and the altar continually)." Here the priesthood of believers is clearly not expressed in honorific designation (contesting the hierachical priesthood) but a sacrificial life modelled after Christ the High Priest (cf. our conclusion of chapter two, cf. Lightfoot, "Christian Ministry," pp. 218-220; Clarence L. Lee, pp. 6-10). For writers upholding the dual priesthoods down to Medieval Age, see Charles Gore, The Church and the Ministry (London, 1913), pp. 76-86.

18

The non-believers called the Christians tertium genus because unlike the Jews and pagans they had no temple, sacrifice and sacrificial priesthood. See Harnack's excursus on the term, Expansion, pp. 336-52. The laymen were too early then to be relegated to just one of the orders in the church--the third order--after the more superior secular order of ecclesiastics and the religious order of monks. There was no discrimination as regard to the spiritual status in the early church. All belonged to the tertium genus.

19

The two categories roughly represent the general, itinerant and the local, settled ministries respectively. The

evolution of the conception of Christian ministry has an intimate bearing on the priesthood of all believers. The study about the origin of Christian ministry receives sustained interest since the end of last century owing to ecumenical concern for union. J. B. Lightfoot gives a thorough and judicious study (Episcopalean and Independent scholars both appeal to his work) in his "Christian Ministry," Dissertations on the Apostolic Age (reprint from the 1881 rev. ed. [1st ed., 1868] of Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians [London, 1892], pp. 137-238) about the local ministry of bishops and presbyters, deacons. He points out that the terms episcopos and presbyter pertain to governing function and have Gentile and Jewish origins respectively. The rise of episcopacy was the result of a pragmatic need to counteract the schismatics in different places which accounts for its uneven development geographically. Harnack on the other hand concentrates on the general ministry of apostles, prophets and teachers. His Die Lehre der zwölf Apostel; nebst Untersuchungen zur ältesten Geschichte der Kirchenverfassung und des Kirchenrects (Leipzig, 1884) stresses positively the primacy of these charismatic general ministers of the primitive epoch. Cf. Idem, "On the Origin of the Christian Ministry," The Expositor, 3d Series 5 (1887):321-43; Dogma, 1:213ff. Negatively, several years earlier, E. Hatch's Bampton Lectures, 1880 (The Organisation of the Early Church) stuned the Anglican church by proving the kinship between the office of bishop and the secular guild leaders. The bishops were previously the administrators of alms collected from the laymen. The ministerial office is thus deprived of any divine origin, accused the critics. Harnack modifies Hatch's thesis in his article "Christian Ministry," saying that the office of the bishop originated from his being the leader of worship not financial responsibility ( pp. 339-43). Cf. idem, Dogma, 1:204-16. Review on Hatch and Harnack see C. H. Turner, "Ancient and Modern Church Organisation," Church Quarterly Review (July 1887), reprint in idem, Studies in Early Church History: Collected Papers (Oxford, 1912), pp. 33-70; A clear restatement of the contemporary discussion is provided by W. Sanday, "The Origin of the Christian Ministry," Expositor, 3d Series 5 (1887):1-22. In a recent monography Norman F. Josaitis (Edwin Hatch and Early Church Order [Recherches et Syntheses, Section D'Histoire, 3; Gembloux: Duculot, 1971]) discusses Hatch's historical approach (who deliberately leaves out all Biblical data) in the context of contemporary intellectual milieu of nineteenth century Europe and compares the methodology with his critic Charles Gore. Heavily drawn on Harnack, T. M. Lindsay's The Church and the Ministry in the Early Church (n.d.) portrays the non-conformists' affinity with the Montanist and Donatist 'revolts' against the hierarchical church all along history. To Lindsay, the non-conformist ministry is vindicated by historical evidence and is in congruence with the primitive spirit.

More radical than Hatch-Harnack is jurist Rudolf Sohm's Kirchenrect I (Leipzig, 1892), which is summarised in Wesen und Ursprung des Katholizismus (Abhandlungen der Philologisch-

Historischen Klasse der Konigl. Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften, vol. 27, no. 10; Leipzig, 1909). Sohm contends that the church in the first century was a pneumatocracy under the direct authority of the Spirit without any external constriction of ecclesiastical laws. The emergence of office among the people marked the 'fall' of faith which was restored by Luther who symbolically burnt the canon laws. (Abstract of the essay is found in Harnack, (ET) Constitution and Law of the Church [New York, 1910], pp. 175-204; a brief introduction to his thought is provided in the J. L. Adams' introduction, Sohm, (ET) Outlines, pp. ix-xv.). Hans von Campenhausen maintains both the Pauline charismatic and Jewish patriarchal constitutions as component parts of Christian ministries (Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1953; ET, 1969,]). The synthesis is found in Luke and l Perter (p. 296f.). He suggests that the principle of order was first advocated in 1 Clement 40 (p. 96). The proper relation between the office-bearers and the people is discussed in Friedrich Gerke's "The Origin of the Christian Ministry," The Ministry and the Sacraments, ed. Roderic Dunkerley (Report of the Theological Commission Appointed by the Continuation Committee of the Faith and Order; London, 1937), pp. 343-67. He contends that the office is ever standing under the lordship of Christ which is expressed in radical love and bondsmanship (pp. 356, 347). T. F. Torrance accentuates a similar notion of 'sub-ministration' under the Priesthood of Christ in Royal Priesthood (SJT Occasional Papers, no. 3; Edinburg, 1955), pp. 88ff.

On the other side, Charles Gore's The Church and the Ministry (London, 1913) is an avowed apology for the apostolate (ministerial office instituted by Christ upon the Twelve and bequeathed to their successors, the bishops) as an essence of the church (see his appended notes criticising Lightfoot in this respect, pp. 321-25). He is a staunch critic of the Hatch-Harnack position. The notion of apostolic succession is discussed in H. B. Swete, ed. Essays on the Early History of the Church and the Ministry (1918). Gore's high church view is reiterated in K. Kirk, ed., Apostolic Ministry (1946) with the sub-title: 'Essays on the History and the Doctrine of Episcopacy'. The thesis of Shaliach ("for a man's shaliach is as it were himself") is forcefully developed to bring out the concept of apostolate especially by Dix but is refuted by T. W. Manson, (Ministry and Priesthood: Christ's and Ours [1958]) who says that the apostolate of Christ is a grace given to the whole church, not to a special class. The high church position is questioned by the 1920 Bampton Lectures of Headlam, The Doctrine of the Church and Christian Reunion, delivered shortly prior to the Lambeth Conference. Headlam's position is reasserted in Kenneth Carey, ed., The Historic Episcopate in the Fullness of the Church. Seven Essays by Priests on England (London, 1954). The contributors stress that episcopacy is not esse, bene, but plene of the church (cf. 'Fullness' in the title) therefore denying the validity of non-conforming ministry is unwarranted. Note especially the essay

20 Spirit.' Each believer possessed the Holy Spirit that separated him from the world by virtue of baptism whereby they were consecrated to the "royal priesthood."<sup>21</sup> Altogether they formed

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by J. A. T. Robinson who suggests that the eschatological 'present' should overtake any retrospective apostolic succession (pp. 1-22). B. H. Streeter's ecumenical The Primitive Church Studies with Special Reference to the Origins of the Christian Ministry (New York, 1929) tries to reconcile the Congregationalist Didache and Episcopalean Ignatius (*ibid.*, pp. 146-83) and concludes that there was no fixed order in the primitive church which was an organism adapting to its everchanging need (p. 267f.).

American scholars, under the auspices of American Theological Association, and editorship of Richard H. Niebuhr and Daniel D. Williams, contribute a title: The Ministry in Historical Perspectives (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956). For the often neglected orders consult Harnack, ed. Sources of the Apostolic Canons with a Treatise on the Origin of the Readership and Other Lower Orders, trans. Leonard A. Wheatley, with intro. by John Owen (ET London, 1895). J. K. S. Reid, in his The Biblical Doctrine of the Ministry (SJT Occasional Papers, no. 4) suggests that the apostolic function has been redistributed according to the presbyteral system in the presbyterian church. Karl H. Rengstorf's Apostolate and Ministry: The New Testament Doctrine of the Office of the Ministry, trans. Paul D. Pahl from the 2nd ed. of Apostolat und Predigtamt (Stuttgart, 1954) (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1969) maintains the Lutheran stance of the close relationship between the Word and the ministerial office. A catholic yet ecumenical bibliography is provided in Andre Guetard and Marie-Georges Bulteau, eds. International Bibliography on the Priesthood and the Ministry, 1969 (Sacerdoce et Ministere, Centre de Documentation et de Recherche, 1971). A resourceful work of synthesizing recent literatures is Bernard Cook, Ministry Word and Sacraments. History and Theology. (1976; paperback ed., Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).

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Adv. haer. 3.24.1 (ed. Harvey, 2:132; ANF, 1:458).  
Tertullian, De pudicitia 21.16,17 (CCL, 2:1328; ANF, 4:99f.);  
Cyprian, De unitate 9 (CSEL, 3,2:217, ed. Hartel; ANF, 5:424);  
Const. 1, preface (ed. Funk, p. 3; ANF, 7:391). Harnack said that the Holy Spirit and the holy church was inseparable and holiness was the oldest predicate given to the church (History of Dogma, pp.72ff., especially p. 75, n.1 for patristic references).

21

Tertullian, De pudicitia 20 (CCL, 2:1325, ed. Dekkers; ANF, 4:98); Const. 3.16.3 (ed. Funk, p. 211; ANF, 7:431; Jerome, Dial. contra Lucif. 4 (PL, 23:166; NPNF[2], 6:321); Ambrose, De Mysteriis 29, 30 (CSEL, 73:101, ed. Otto Faller; NPNF[2], 10:321). Dix points out that primitive Christians recognised the exclusive

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the church. Every Christian had their respective spiritual gifts to be exercised for the edification of the whole body. Among the brethren some were endowed with charisma veritatis (gift of truth)<sup>23</sup> to expound the Word and performed a public role. However, their gifts had to be recognised and accepted by the church--the abode of the Spirit, before they could publicly officiate. Two things were indicative of this corporate authority of the church with reference to the office-bearers: (1) The confirmation of the office; (2) the sanction of the office.

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operation of the Spirit among themselves while the Logos worked in all men as rational beings, just the reverse for today (Shape, p. 260). Origen writes in De principiis 1.3.5: "The Holy Spirit does not take place at those which, although living, are yet dumb; nay, is not found even in those who are endued indeed with reason, not are engaged in evil courses. and not at all converted to a better life. In those persons alone do I think that the operation of the Holy Spirit takes place, who are already turning to a better life, and walking along the way which leads to Jesus Christ" (PG, 11:150f.; ANF, 4:253). The Spirit is exclusive to the church is also attested by the baptismal creed in the Apostolic Tradition (Hereafter AT), 21.17: "Credis in sp(irit)u s(an)c(t)o it sanctam ecclesiam it carnis resurrectionem? (Dost thou believe in [the] Holy Spirit in the Holy Church, And the resurrection of the flesh?)" (ed. Botte, p. 86; trans. Dix, p. 37); cf. Dix, Shape, p. 260, note 7.

22

Cf. Spitz writes: "The universal priesthood of believers is the Christian Church on earth, the Communion of Saints" ("The Universal Priesthood of Believers with Luther's Comments," p. 1). Lewis' thought is encored by Doohan's thesis of his article: being the church in its fullness is the spirituality for laity. After surveying all representative theologies of the laity by contemporary Catholic writers, he suggests: "Instead of looking for of a theology of laity, we need a theology for laity. The task is not to specify the lay mission, but to educate to awareness of who we are in baptism. . . . When I speak of laity as integrally Church (emphasis mine), I mean they live but the full reponsibility of their baptism and confirmation" ("Contemporary Theologies of the Laity," p. 242).

23

That the ministerial office was essentially concerned with the preaching of the Word is consistently attested by the following witnesses: (1) Irenaeus (A.D. 180): "Quapropter eis qui

The confirmation of the office

In the case of the primitive apostles, prophets or teachers who travelled from place to place to preach or intended to station themselves in a local community to teach, <sup>24</sup> the congregation had to accord them high respect. Nevertheless, the congregation had the responsibility to verify the authenticity of their ministry by spiritual discernment. The Didache states

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in Ecclesia sunt presbyteris obaudire oportet, his qui successionem habant ab Apostolis, sicut ostendimus; qui cum episcopatus successione charisma veritatis certum secundum, Patris acceperunt (We ought to listen to the presbyters who are in the church, to those who have succession from the apostles as we have shown; those together with the episcopate have the certain gift of truth according to the good pleasure of the Father)" (Adv. haer. 4.26.2, ed. Harvey, 2:236; my trans. and emphasis, cf. ANF, 1:497). (2) Hippolytus (A.D. 230 in Rome): "We, as being their (apostles) successors, and as participators in this grace, high-priesthood and office of teaching, as well as being reputed guardians of the Church" (Philosophumena preface, PG, 16,3:3020; ANF, 5:10). (3) Gregory of Nyssa wrote about the consecration of a bishop in A.D. 376: "While but yesterday he was one of the mass, one of the people, he is suddenly rendered a guide, a president, a teacher of righteousness, an instructor in hidden mysteries ("On the Baptism of Christ," PL, 46:581; NPNF[2], 5:519). (4) Constitutions of the Holy Apostles 8.10 (bidding prayer for the faithful): "Let us pray for every episcopacy which is under the whole heaven, of those that rightly divide the Word of Thy truth" (ed. Funk, p. 489; ANF, 7:485).

24

H. Greeven suggests that the prophets and teachers were not itinerant because they were not mentioned in 1 Cor. 9:5 ("Propheten, Lehrer, Vorsteher bei Paulus. Zur Frage der 'Amter' im Urchristentum," Zeitschrift die Neutestament Wissenschaft 44 (1952):7, cited in Campenhausen, Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power, p. 61). Harnack maintained that the triad carried a general and itinerant ministry of the word for the whole church. They were regarded commissioned and endowed by God. They were the real leaders of the people (Dogma, 1:213). In the Didache, we have the transition period when the prophets and teachers were being supplanted by the bishops and deacons (15.1,2), while the apostles and some prophets were still in their traditional itinerant ministries. Cf. Robert M. Grant, Augusta to Constantine: The Trust of the Christian Movement into the Roman World (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 146.

clearly about the general practice of the church:

Thus whoever comes and teaches you all the aforesaid things, receive him. And if the teacher himself turns aside and teaches another didache which undermine the aforesaid, do not listen to him (11.1,2).

Every apostle who comes to you should be received as the Lord. But he should not remain more than one day . . . should receive nothing but bread . . . if he requests money, he is a false prophet (11.4-6).

And not everyone who speaks forth in the spirit is a prophet, only if he has the kind of behavior which the Lord approves (11.7).

Similar exhortation was also found in the writing of Hermas who

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resided in Rome. Christians were not docile and passive. They

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Ed. Bihlmeyer, p. 6f.; trans. Sparks, p. 315f. The Didache is important for the understanding of the ministry in the early church and indirectly on the priesthood of all believers. The appearance of the Didache in 1883 synchronised with the works of Hatch (1882), and Lightfoot (1881) on the ministry. Instantly the document became "the spoiled child of criticism" (F. E. Vokes, The Riddle of the Didache. Fact or Fiction. Heresy or Catholicism [London: SPCK (for the Church Historical Society) 1938], p. 146) and was utilised by contestants to justify their respective positions. Both Harnack and Lindsay (Harnack, Lehre der zwolf Apostel and Dogma 1:213ff. and Lindsay, Church and Ministry, pp. 171ff.; see note 19 of this chapter) accentuate the charismatic Independent polity. Gore, on the other hand contends that the silence of the teaching about ordination indicates that the prerogative of the ambulatory episcopal prophets (forerunners of prophetic bishops) was withheld from local officers (The Church and the Ministry, p. 258f.). Vokes suggests that it was a Montanist defence of the 'New Prophecy' (p. 220). For the survey of older literatures on the Didache, see Philip Schaff, The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles or the Oldest Church Manual (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1890), pp. 140-55, 297-320. The literary history is discussed in detail in Vokes (pp. 27-87). Jean-Paul Audet's La Didache Instruction des Apotres (Paris, 1958) provides a rich bibliography on journal articles. The liturgical significance is examined in Arthur Voobus, The liturgical Traditions in the Didache (Stockholm, 1968).

26

Mand. 11 (ed. Gebhardt, pp. 161-63; Sparks, pp. 198-201; cf. Grant, Augusta and Augustine., p. 147. Campenhausen observes that when Paul asked the congregation to test the Spirit, he never addressed to a special group of people as though they alone be responsible to the well-being of the whole body. "There is no pneumatic aristocracy in a congregation" (Ecclesi-

had to discern about the Word preached to them which they also possessed--in fact obligated to proclaim to the world themselves.

In the case of the settled ministry of bishops, presbyters and deacons, the suffrage of the congregation was a prerequisite for their ordination. Choice and consecration together constituted the sacerdotal authority.<sup>27</sup> Even a congregation of twelve was entitled to choose their own bishop.<sup>28</sup> Both the discernment and suffrage demonstrated the corporate authority of the church and the priesthood of all believers.

#### Sanction of the office

If the office-bearers left the church, they de facto forfeited their offices such as the schismatics and heretics. Once they left the abode of the Spirit--the church, they did not have the Holy Spirit; all their sacraments were rendered inefficacious.<sup>29</sup> Their consecration was considered illegitimate.

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astical Authority and Spiritual Power, p. 63).

<sup>27</sup> Tradition and Life, p. 222. But Bernad suggests that Cyprian considered the consensus of the participating bishops were essential in the ordination of a bishop. The suffrage of the people merely gave assent and shared the responsibility of the election. However, he agrees that the two were not divorced from one another until the fourth century (Essays, p. 231). The pre-eminence of the imposition of hands was questioned by Hatch who points out that according to Jerome (Letters 146 to Evangelus), the bishop of Alexandria once elected by the presbyters, was conducted (without imposition of hands) to sit on the chair; "he is thereupon bishop de facto" (Hatch, p. 134). Cf. PL, 22:1194: Presbyteri semper unum ex se electum in excelsiore gradu collocatum, Episcopum nominabant (the presbyters always named as bishop one of their own number chosen by themselves and set in a more exalted position; trans. NPNF[2], 6:288).

<sup>28</sup>

Harnack, Apostolic Canons, pp. 7-10.

<sup>29</sup>

Cyprian, Ep. 69.11: "quo in loco (John 20:21-23, just

The Council of Nicea (A.D. 325) stipulated that all schismatics entering the the ranks of the Catholic clergy had to be ordained  
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 anew. No one could give what they did not possess. They were  
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cited) ostendit eum solum posse baptizare et remissionem peccatorum dare qui habeat sanctum spiritum. . . . si autem foris cuncti haeretici et schismatici non dant spiritu, sanctum . . . remissionem peccatorum dari eos posse quos constet spiritum sanctum non habere (In which place He shows, that he alone can baptize and give remission of sins who has the Holy Spirit. . . . But if heretics and schismatics who moved outside (the church) have not the Holy Spirit . . . that remission of sins cannot be given by those who, it is certain, have not Holy Spirit)" (ed. Hartel, 3,2:759f.; ANF, 5:400, emphasis my rev. trans.); cf. ibid., 69.7. Both the heretics and schismatics are indiscriminately considered outside the church (Ep. 55.24, 73.2 [ed. Hartel, 3,2:642f., 779f.; ANF, 5:333f., 779f. ). But Irenaeus does separate the two and is comparatively mild towards the schismatics (Adv. haer. 3.11.9, 4.26.2 [ed. Harvey, 2:50f., 2:36; ANF, 1:429, 497). Campenhausen contends that when Augustine articulates the concept of dominicus character indelibilis of the priest to refute the Donatists he only suggests that the priesthood is independent of the character of the priest not independent of the community (contra Cresconium 2:13: "Neque enim episcopi propter nos sumus, sed propter eos, quibus verbum et sacramentum dominicum ministravimus [But we bishops are not (dependent) on our own, but on him whose word and sacrament we administer]"; Tradition and Life, p. 226; text in CSEL, 52,2:371, ed. M. Petschenig; trans. mine).

30

Canons 8 (Novatians), 19 (Paulianists, followers of Paul of Samosata) (Mansi, 2:688f., 691f.; NPNF[2], 14:19,40). The origin of the prohibition of reordination in the 'ecclesiastical canons' in Const. 68 ("Si quis episcopus vel presbyter vel diaconus secundam ordinationem acceperit ab aliquo, deponatur et ipse qui eum ordinavit, nisi ostendat ab haeticis se ordinationem habere; a talibus enim baptixati vel ordinati nec fideles nec clerici esse possunt [If any bishop, or presbyter, or deacon, receives a second ordination from any one, let him be deprived, and the person who ordained him, unless he can show that his former ordination was from the heretics; for those that are either baptized or ordained by such as these, can be neither Christians nor clergymen]" [ed. Funk, 585; ANF, 7:504]) is unknown, probably a recent one (Riddle's suggestion, ANF, 7:504, n. 8); or may it be early (E. Hatch, art., Antiq., 2:1520), it does not contradict the Nicene canons because it only refers to those officers' transferral of parish, not about schismatics and heretics. As late as A.D. 461 a Galatian inscription witnesses a presbyter twice ordained: "dis genomenos presbusteros" (Corpus Inscriptorum Graecarum, ed. W. Dittenberger [Leipzig, 1920], no.

indicted as anti-Christ<sup>32</sup>s; ran into shipwreck<sup>33</sup> and deserved  
 excommunication.<sup>34</sup> The corporate authority of the church that  
 confirmed the office could at the same time inflict sanction  
 against those office-bearers who acted in opposition to the  
 church. The particular priesthood was an office serving as a  
 ministerial functionary vis-a-vis the universal priesthood of the  
 brethren. In fact, without a definite congregation, the duly  
 consecrated priest's ordination became ineffective and  
 meaningless.<sup>35</sup> Hans von Campenhausen observes that not a single

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 9259, cited in Hatch, art., Antiq., 2:1520).

31

Note 27 of this chapter. Note that the corollary of the  
 principle is advocated for lay baptism by Tertullian in De  
baptismo 17.1,2, note 13 of this chapter.

32

Cyprian, Ep., 69.1: "universos qui de ecclesia exissent  
 quique contra ecclesiam facerent, antichrstos appellauit  
 ([Apostle John] pronounced all those who had gone out and acted  
 against the church anti-Christ<sup>s</sup>)" (ed. Hartel, 3:771; trans.  
 mine).

33

Ibid., 52.1: "Euaristum de episcopos iam nec laicum  
 remansisse, cathedrae it plebis extorrem et de ecclesia Christi  
 exulem per alias longe prouincias oberrare et ipsum ueritatis ac  
 fidei naufragum factum circa quosdam sui similes paria naufragia  
 concitare (Euaristus from being a bishop has now not remained  
 even a layman; but, banished from the see and from the people,  
 and as exile from the Church of Christ, he roves about far and  
 wide through other provinces, and, himself having made shipwreck  
 of truth and faith is preparing for some who are like him, as  
 fearful shipwreck)" (ed. Hartel, 3,2:616; ANF, 5:325).

34

Ibid., 3.3, ed. Hartel, 3,2:472; ANF, 5:366.

35

Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451), canon 6 reads: "If any  
 one have been ordained without a charge, the holy Synod decrees,  
 to the reproach of the ordainer, that such an ordination shall  
 be inoperative (akuros cheirotomia), and that such shall nowhere  
 be suffered to officiate" (Mansi, 7:394f.; trans. NPNF[2],  
 4:271). Absolute ordination was here attested untenable as late  
 as the mid fifth century. The focus of ordination was not to  
 confer a character indelebilis to the ordinand but to usher a  
 brethren for the service of the brethren. This practice was later

bishop appealed to his consecration for a privileged position over  
the laity in the first three hundred years.<sup>36</sup>

From the above we may infer that the office-bearer was only the spokesman, of the community he served. As Lightfoot aptly puts it: "The minister is thus regarded as a priest, because he is the mouthpiece, representative, of a priestly race."<sup>37</sup> This inference is further strengthened by the active involvement of the laymen in the ministries of the church. Evidence shows that they even engaged in those works which were later prohibited by the hierachical church namely teaching and preaching, exercising discipline, baptising, administrating Eucharist.

#### Participation of Laymen in the Life of the Church

##### Teaching or preaching

Early Christians laymen took seriously their priestly responsibility to reach out to the world and shared their faith through personal contact,<sup>38</sup> evangelistic itinerary which<sup>39</sup> resulted in the planting of churches even in distant lands.<sup>40</sup>

known as the titulus beneficii (title of service).

<sup>36</sup>

Tradition and Life, p. 222.

<sup>37</sup>

Ibid., p. 225.

<sup>38</sup>

Origen, Contra Celsum 3.51 (PG, 11:988; ANF, 4:484).

<sup>39</sup>

Ibid. 3.9 (PG, 11:932; ANF, 4:486).

<sup>40</sup>

The churches in north Ethiopia (Socrates, HE 1.19, [PG, 67:125-29; NPNF[2], 2:23] Sozomenus, HE 2.24 [GCS, 50:83-85, ed. J. Bidez; NPNF[2], 2:274), Black Sea (Socrates, HE 1.20 [PG, 67:129; NPNF[2], 2:24f.]) and Serapis of Egypt (Jerome, Letters 107.2 [PL, 22:870; NPNF[2], 6:190]) were planted by laymen.

Evidence shows that they also engaged in the didactic ministry inside the church. The church order of Apostolic Tradition (c. A.D. 217) witnesses the laymen serving as instructors for the catechumens.<sup>41</sup> If they had the gift of teaching they could preach to the congregation as far as they did not preached before a bishop.<sup>42</sup> A good example is the author of 2 Clement, which was evidently a sermon delivered by a layman.<sup>43</sup> In fact, some bishops were seeking able laymen to preach to the people.<sup>44</sup>

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41

19.1: "Cum doctor post precem imposuit manum super catechumenos, oret et dimittat eos. Sive clericus (ekklesiastikos) est qui dat (doctrinam), sive laicus (laikos), faciat sic (After the prayer [of the catechumens] let the teacher lay hands upon them and pray and dismiss them. Whether the teacher be an ecclesiastic or a layman let him do the same)" (ed. Botte, p. 76; Dix, p. 30). Origen describes the active involvement of laymen in helping the catechumens: "The Christians . . . tested the souls of those who wish to become their hearers, and having previously instructed them in the private, when they appear (before entering the community) to have sufficiently evinced their desire towards a virtuous life, introduced them then, and not before, privately forming one class of those who are beginners . . . and among these there are certain persons appointed to make inquiries regarding the lives and behavior of those who join them, in order that they may prevent those who commit acts of infamy from coming into their public assembly" (Contra Celsum 3.51 [PG, 11:988; ANF, 4:485f.]).

42

Origen was accused of preaching before the bishop only, not preaching itself ("to paronton episkopon laikous homilein"; Eusibius, HE 6.19.17 [ed. Schwardz, 9,2:564; NPNF[2], 1:268). Leo first prohibited laymen to preach (Letter 119 (92).6, 120 (93).6; Mansi, 6:242f., 250f.; NPNF[2], 12:87, 90. Till the Council of Quinisext (A.D. 692), laymen were 'cut off' for forty days if they preached and taught publicly (canon 64; Mansi, 11:971; NPNF[2], 14:394).

43

Text in ed. Bilhmeyer, pp. 71-81; Sparks, pp. 60-70. The writer being a laymen is attested by the manner that he addressed his audience: "We are being admonished by the elders" (17.3); "nor did we believe and obey the elders who preached to us (17.5).

44

Eusibius, HE 6.19.18 (ed. Schwardz, 9,2:565).

This practice eventually was institutionalised in the Catechetical School of Alexandria<sup>45</sup> which distinguished the difference between an unthinking believer and a gnostic Christian more than the laity and clergy.<sup>46</sup>

#### Church Discipline

As regard to laymen's participation in church discipline, the classic example was Paul in 1 Corinthians 6 which was followed by Clement of Rome. The main purpose of 1 Clement was to remind the believers at Corinth to obey the officers who should not be removed lightly (c. 44). However, Clement did not question the disciplinary authority of the community. He said, "I will go wherever you wish, I will do whatever the congregation commands."<sup>47</sup> Polycarp also appealed to the whole church to restore a deposed presbyter.<sup>48</sup> This tradition continued in Rome till mid-third century. In a letter addressed to Cyprian, the Roman clergy called an assembly composed of bishops, presbyters, deacons, confessors as well as some faithful laymen to deal with the case of the lapsed.<sup>49</sup>

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45

Sanday, "Christian Ministry," p. 17.

46

Kung, The Church, p. 8. Clement suggests that the mark of a royal priest is the gnosis he possesses. He writes: "Now the excellence of knowledge is evidently presented by the prophet when he says, 'Benignity and instruction, and knowledge teach me,' . . . He is then, the truly kingly man; he is the sacred high priest of God." (ed. O. Stahlin, GCS, 15:28; ANF, 2:533).

47

C. 54.2, ed. Bihlmeyer, p. 64; Sparks, p. 47.

48

Ad. hil. 11, ed. Bihlmeyer, p. 118f.; Sparks, p. 134f.

49

Ep. 30.5 (A.D. 250): "deinde sic conlatione consiliorum cum episcopis presbyteris diaconis confessoribus pariter ac

Another form of laymen's disciplinary authority was depicted by the priestly status of the confessors--those faithful believers who survived the persecutions. They had the rank of presbyters without ordination. One even became a bishop because of his confessorship (martyrii). These confessors were considered spiritual men who could grant absolution. In fact,

stantibus laicis facta lapsorum tractare rationem" (ed. Hartel, 3,2:552).

50

Hippolytus Apostolic Tradition 9 (ed. Botte, p. 64; Dix's text is 10.1, p. 18).

51

Valentinus the gnostic, a likely candidate to the bishopric broke away with the church because a confessor took the seat. Tertullian, Adv. Valent. 4.1: "Superauerat episcopatum Valentius, quia it ingenio poterat et eloquio. Sed alium ex martyrii praerogatiua loci potitum indignatus de ecclesia authenticae regulae abruptit (Valentinus had expected to become a bishop, because he was an able man both in genius and eloquence. Being indignant, however, at another obtained the dignity by reason of a claim which congegessorship had given him)" (CCl, 2:755; ed. Kroymann; ANF, 3:505).

52

The encyclical sent out by the martyrs of Lyons described the confessors: "They defended all, but accused none. They absolved all but bound none" (HE 5.2.5; ed. Schwartz, 9,1:430; NPNF[2], 1:218). Tertullian challenged the right of a Pontifex Maximus to grant absolution to deadly sins by appealing to the disciplinary prerogative of the spiritual men in the church who were indeed the true successors to Peter (De pudicitia 21). Martyrs were thought of receiving supreme revelation of God in the last moment before they died for their faith. Thus those who survived persecutions were also considered to possess the gift of prophecy whose pronouncement might absolve the penitents (Frend, The Donatist Church. A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa [Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 126ff.]). This view was widely held till the time of Augustine in whose De Anima 1.12 we learn that the Acta of the Montanist Passio Perpetua et Felicitas was almost reckoned a canonical work (Quasten, 1:181f.; Frend, Donatist Church, p. 126, n. 3). For the discussion of the primitive penitential system and the involvement of laity see F. E. Vokes, "Penitential Discipline in Montanism," Texte und Uutersuchungen, Studia Patristica, vol. 14, part 2 (Berlin, 1976), pp. 63-76. Vokes contends that the Pontifex Maximus in De pudicitia 1 was Callistus (p. 75).

even after the age of martyrdom, Christians who exhibited personal holiness, exemplary faith and charity might absolve down to the twelfth century. That was the portrayal of the corporate authority of the church expressed in an individual "in virtue of his fellowship in that ecclesial Body, through faith and charity."<sup>53</sup>

### Baptism

As regard to lay baptism, we do not have any positive evidence. Nevertheless, the principle enunciated by Tertullian held true for all time, namely in emergence laymen could administer baptism because "what is equally received can be equally given."<sup>54</sup> The active involvement in baptism on the part

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53

Congar, Laymen in the Church, p. 218.

54

De Baptismo, 17.2; see n. 3 of this chapter. Catechumens were baptised by laymen during sea voyages; Iberian Council of Elvira, c. A.D. 306 (Councilium Liberatnum, c. 305), canon 38: "Peregre navigantes, aut si ecclesia in proximo non fuerit, posse fidelem, qui lavacrum suum integrum habet, nec sit bigamus, baptizare in necessitate infirmitatis positum catechumenum; ita ut si supervixerit, ad episcopum eum perducatur, ut per manus impositionem proficere possit (During a sea voyage, or in gerera; if no church is near, a layman who has not soiled his baptisma; robe [by apostasy], and is not a bigamist, may baptize a catechumen who is at he point of death; the bishop ought afterwards to lay hands on the newly baptized, to confirm him)" (J. D. Mansi, ed., Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio [Florence, 1759-98; Paris, 1903], 2:12; trans. in [ET] Charles J. Hefele, A History of the Christian Councils, 5 vols. [2d rev.; Edinburgh, 1894-96], 1:152). Jerome grants the validity of lay baptism in Dial. contra Lucif. 9: "if necessity so be we know that even laymen may, and frequently do, baptise" (PL, 23:173; NPNF[2] 6:324). The principle of this exceptional case is enunciated in an ecumenical agreement in 1937: "In Churches where such exceptions are allowed the principle is maintained that the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments are acts of the Church performed by Christ's commission, and on this ground it is held that the absence of an ordained minister is permissible" ("Report of the Theological

of the laity lay in much more than merely being the officiant of the rite in the aforesaid emergency provision. Actually, Laymen taught the proselytes about the Christian faith which the latter had to confess at actual baptism.<sup>55</sup> They fasted and prayed together with the candidates prior to baptism and were present when the actual moment came as witnesses. After the rite they led the neophytes to the brethren for the first Eucharist. As such, "it is not unreasonable to assume that these witnesses put questions to the baptised, heard their confession of faith and baptised them."<sup>56</sup>

#### Eucharist

The only explicit witness of lay administration of Eucharist is reflected in the Ignatian Epistles. People celebrated the sacrament in the absence of the office-bearers. The practice was reproved in mild admonition: 'Breaking one loaf';<sup>57</sup> 'Be eager, therefore, to use one Eucharist';<sup>58</sup> 'A valid Eucharist is to be defined as one celebrated by the bishop or by representatives of his.'<sup>59</sup> The mild language suggests that the Eucharistic unity around a bishop was a goal, not the

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Commission," Ministry and Sacraments, p. 30).

<sup>55</sup>

See n. 3 of this chapter.

<sup>56</sup>

L. W. Bernard, Justin Martyr, p. 139. Cf. Justin, 1 Apology 65 (ed. Gildersleeve, p. 61f.; ANF 1:185).

<sup>57</sup>

Ep. Eph. 20:2 (Sparks, p. 84).

<sup>58</sup>

Ep. Phil. 4 (Sparks, p. 105).

<sup>59</sup>

Ep. Sym. 8.1 (Sparks, p. 112f.).

60

departure.

In fact, that goal was to enhance the very corporate nature of Eucharist. All were celebrants. The bishop was only the presiding celebrant whose role was to lead and guide whom Justin called 'the president of the brethren' (proestoti ton adelphon).<sup>61</sup> The oblation was considered the gift of the whole church, brought by the communicants, and offered to God as sacrifice of thanksgiving through the hands of the bishop.<sup>62</sup>

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60

R. M. Grant, After the New Testament, Chapter 3 "Scripture and Tradition in Ignatius of Antioch" (first published in Catholic Biblical Quarterly [1963]; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 50. In the above chapter Grant argues for the Pauline heritage of Ignatius whose literary style to expound the Christian faith in Jewish mode is misunderstood by the critics as innovator. Leitzmann takes the unity motive seriously and concludes that "in Ignatius, we find the completed monarchical episcopate, and the custom was regarded as authoritative in both Syria and Asia Minor." ([ET] A History of the Early Church [Cleveland, New York: The World Publishing Company, 1961], 1:248).

61

1 Apology 65, (ed. Gildersleeve, p. 62). C.F.D. Moule remarks that the word 'ho proestos' implies "as though there might be different persons on different occasions" (Worship in the New Testament [Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1961], p. 30). But Bernad suggests that the word means ruler of permanent status (p. 133; cf. T. Jalland, "Justin Martyr and the President of the Eucharist," Studia Patristica 5 [1962]:85). Justin withheld the term episcopos so as to avoid unnecessary pagan suspicion in his apology. He considered the offering of the Eucharist by the people of God--the high priestly race as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Malachi 1:11 (Dial. 116.3).

62

Based on the Roman canon in Hippolytus' Apostolic Tradition, Dix observes that we have a progressive action of the Eucharistic offering. The laity prosenegkein the prosphora, the deacons anaphereio it to the bishop who in turn prospherien it (Shape, pp. 110ff.). The offertory-prayer-communion progression is an integral whole of the rite throughout which the laymen actively participated. When Clement of Rome denounced those who usurped the functions of the clergy, he treated the case as one of disorder, not sacrilege (1 Clement 40 [ed. Bilh Meyer, p. 57]; cf. Lightfoot, p. 230). The corporate nature of the Eucharist has received sustained interest in recent decades. In

## Conclusion

We conclude for our discussion so far in this chapter: The early church held the principle of two priesthoods. A particular priesthood was instituted as ministerial functionary of the Word (that was why they had the charisma veritatis) vis-a-vis the royal priesthood of the believers in the church. It was theologically tenable and historically attested that a believer could perform any kind of ministries pertained to the church by virtue of his baptismal consecration, because the church was the abode of the Spirit, communion of saints.

In our next section we will examine the reasons for the decline of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers in subsequent eras.

The Demise of the Priesthood of All Believers  
in Subsequent Eras

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fact the lay renewal to a certain extent is a corollary of the liturgical renewal, which in turn essentially is the contemporization of ancient liturgical life. Significant works in our period are Dix, The Shape of the Liturgy (1945); Werner Elert, Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries, trans. N. E. Nagel (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966). Hans Lietzmann, Mass and Lord's Supper, trans. D. H. G. Reeve with intro. and further enquiry by Robert D. Richardson from Messe und Herremahl--Eine Studie zur Geschichte der Liturgie (Berlin, 1926) (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979). J. Jungmann, The Early Liturgy to the Time of Gregory the Great, trans. Francis A. Brunner from Missarum sollemnia (Wien, 1948) (London, 1960); The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development, vol. 1, trans. Francis A. Brunner (New York, 1950). A systematic approach with special attention to the meal motif of Eucharist is Geoffrey Wainwright, Eucharist and Eschatology (London: Epworth Press, 1971); appended with rich bibliography.

There were three major reasons for the subsequent decline of the doctrine of the universal priesthood of believers: (1) Infant baptism and lower requirement of church membership; (2) Secularisation of the concept of church order; (3) Sacrificial interpretation of the office.

## 63

Infant Baptism and Lower Requirement  
of Church Membership

Initial high requirements for admission

Early converts had to go through three years of catechumenate before they were admitted candidates for baptism. As catechumens they were dismissed before the worship service started. Their names illustrate the categorical difference from the baptised believers. They were called 'hearers,' 'servants'

## 63

The earliest patristic evidence of infant baptism is from Irenaeus, Adv. haer. 2.22.4: "Omnes enim venit per semetipsum salvare: omnes inquam, qui per eum renascuntur in Deum, infantes, et parvulos, et pueros, et juvenes, et seniores (For He [Christ] came to save all through means of Himself--all, I say, who through Him are born again to God--infants, and children, and boys, and youths and old men)" (ed. Harvey, 1:330; ANF, 1:391). Tertullian speaks of the necessity of having sponsors for the infants to be baptised (De Baptismo 18.4 (CCL, 1:293, ed. Borleffs; ANF, 3:678). It was mainly owing to Augustine's doctrine of original sin that infant baptism became popular. Prior to fifth century, infant baptism was the exception rather than the rule in the Syrian Church (NIDCC, s.v. "Baptism," by Donald M. Lake, P. 100). The focus of our study is only to find out the bearing of infant baptism on the decline of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.

## 64

Hippolytus, AP 17.1 (ed. Botte, p. 74; Dix, p. 28). According to modern research, the inception of institutional catechumenate was around A.D. 200 (Alois Stenzel, "Temporal and Supra-Temporal in the History of the Catechumenate and Baptism," in Adult Baptism and the Catechumenate [Councilium, no. 22; New York, Paulist: 1967], p. 33). The stages and progression of the catechumenate is succinctly delineated in E. H. Plumptre's art.,

## 65

'Audientibus', Cyprian, Ep. 18.2 (ed. Hartel, 3,2:542;

66 (not sons), and 'aliens.'<sup>67</sup>

It is instructive to look at the Eucharist service subsequent to a baptismal rite to which the neophytes participated and see how they were treated differently as members of the Church. Justin recorded such a service:<sup>68</sup>

Having thus baptised the one who has been convinced and has given his assent, we escort him into the assembly of those who are called brethren. Then they earnestly offer common prayers for themselves, for the one who has been enlightened, and for all men everywhere: that having learned the truth, we may be deemed worthy according to our commandments, so that we may be saved with an everlasting salvation. Our prayers being ended, we greet one another with a kiss. Then bread and a cup. . . . (the Eucharist follows) (1 Ap. 65).

Several things happened to them the first time. Being just consecrated to the royal priesthood via baptism, they at once had the responsibility and privilege to engage in the priestly intercession before the celebration of Eucharist. Second, they were addressed 'enlightened' and 'saved.' Thirdly, they could

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ANF, 5:293); canon 1 of the I Nice 325 A.D. (Mansi, 2:658f.; NPNF[1], 7:31).

66

'Dei servi', Tertullian, De spectaculis., 1:1 (CCL, ed. Dekkers, 1:227; ANF, 3:79). In contrast he calls the Christians 'testificati et confessi' (who have testified and confessed); Augustine, Tractate 11.4: "they are already of the great house; but from servants let them become sons (CCL, 36.112, ed. A. Mayer; NPNF[1], 7:75). However, Stenzel tends to stress the solidarity between a faithful and a catechumen. He points out that Augustine did at one time address a particular catechumen as Christian (Sermon 46.31 [CCL, 41:557]; cf. Stenzel, p. 37). But we should note that Augustine was a post-Nicene father who lived in the period when the antithesis between the Church and the world was fading out.

67

Chrysostom, Hom. 2 Cor. 2.6: "the Catechumens are as yet aliens . . . they are not yet of the Body of Christ . . . still divided from the spiritual flock" (PG, 61:399; NPNF[1], 12:282).

68

Ed. Gildersleeve, p. 62; trans. Bard Thompson, Liturgies of the Western Church (1st ed., 1961; reprint, Philadelphia:

enjoy the kiss of peace in the assembly and communicate. All these could only be attained at a lapse of three years after they became converts!<sup>69</sup>

The delay of admission was by no means an act of apathy. In fact all the members actively instructed and nurtured them. The main concern was to maintain the holiness of the Church, to "prevent those who commit acts of infamy from coming into their assembly."<sup>70</sup> All the rules of morality binding on the clergy were reckoned binding on the laity. This was the norm of the primitive Church, reasserted by Montanist Tertullian.<sup>71</sup>

But to be fair, was that kind of holiness required of admission to the Church in the New Testament? When Tertullian advanced the sacerdotal ethics binding on all Christians by appealing to their royal priesthood, what was the source of this aspiration? To answer these questions, we have to give a quick survey of the evolution of the conception of priesthood.

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Fortress Press, 1980), p. 8.

<sup>69</sup>

Some might advance fast if they were diligent to learn. AP 17.2: "But if a man be earnest and persevere well in the matter, let him be received, because it is not the time that is judged, but the conduct" (ed. Botte, p. 74; Dix, p. 28). If they died in martyrdom before baptism, they were considered baptised in blood (Hippolytus, AP 19.2 [ed. Botte, p. 76; Dix, p. 30]; Cyprian, Ep. 73.22 [ed. Hartel, 3,2:795f.; ANF, 5:385]). The long probation is criticised by Wainwright on the basis of the meal motif of Eucharist (thus invitation) (p. 130) but reasserted by Stenzel who suggests: "If we are justified in speaking of a 'post-Christian age', then a return to a genuine catechuminate for adults is absolutely necessary" (p. 35).

<sup>70</sup>

Contra Celsum 3.51 (PG, 11:988; ANF, 4:485f.); cf. note 41 of this chapter.

<sup>71</sup>

Cf. n. 13 of this chapter.

Ethical intensification of the word "priest"

As has been shown, the word "priest" is never ascribed to the office-bearers, but to Christ and the believers in the New Testament. The word basically pertains to the spiritual status of the Christians, the holy, elected people of God in Christ.<sup>72</sup> And a priestly life was a life conforming to the life of Christ the High Priest, namely self sacrifice.

This Christological accentuation was later superseded by an ethical orientation. It began with the Jewish Christian writings<sup>73</sup> of the second century such as the Didache, Epistle of Barnabas, and the Sheperd of Hermas. Though these writers were disinterested in the formal cultic aspect<sup>74</sup> of the Levitical priesthood, nonetheless they utilised the sacerdotal imagery to foster the ethical ideals.<sup>75</sup> A priestly life was predicated of

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See chapter two. Cf. Lightfoot, p. 210f.

73

By Jewish-Christian literatures, we mean those who wrote in Jewish-Semitic form rather than in Hellenistic frame of reference. The theology of these writers are treated at length by Jean Danielou's The Theology of Jewish Christianity, trans. John A. Baker (London, 1964). For their literary characteristics, see pp. 1-11.

74

The fact that the Levitical priests were seldom mentioned was due to the fresh memory of the death of Jesus who died at the plot of the priests. The first chapter of Clementine Recognition recalls the complicity of the Jewish priesthood (GCS, 51:6-50, ed. Rehm; ANF, 8:75-97). Cf. Justin, Dial. 117 (CAC, 2:416ff., ed. Otto).

75

For instance, the story of the budding of Aaron's rod (Num. 17). is used in 1 Clement (c. 43 [ed. Bilhmeyer, p. 58; Sparks, p. 41f.]) to authenticate the ecclesiastical order, while in Hermas it is used to drive home the significance of a pure heart and the keeping of the precepts of the Lord (Simil. 6 [ed. Gebhardt, pp. 82-90; Sparks, pp. 222-31]). In the New Testament baptism is considered to confer the holy status of priesthood on believers (1 Peter, cf. n. 20 of chapter two; n. 21 of chapter

separation from this world; possessing enlightened moral judgment and discipline of holiness. Till the third century this tradition received theological formulation from Montanist Tertullian and the Alexandrian theologians.<sup>76</sup> The former's vigorous ascetism and the latter's cultivation of the gnosis became the standard mode of a priestly life. A priest was one who could live up to a certain ethical standard. One had to merit the designation of 'priest'. Thus priesthood changed from a spiritual status in Christ and the evangelical imitation of Him to an ethical-epistemological way of life.

#### Infant baptism and abdication of the priesthood

In Tertullian's time, the high ethical demand already posed acute pastoral problems to the Church in Rome and made Callixtus

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 three); but in 2 Clement, baptism imposed on new law on which rests eternal life. The author writes: "For after we have passed out of this world (baptism) we shall no longer be able in the next either to confess or to repent. So, brethren, if we do the will of the Father and keep the flesh pure and keep the commandments of the Lord, we shall receive eternal life " (c. 8.3,4 [ed. Bihlmeyer, p. 74f.; Sparks, p. 64]). For the discussion of the Didache, Epistle to Barnabas, and Hermas the Sheperd, see Lee, pp. 62-84; on Ebionites and the Syriac tradition, pp. 88-126 and 127-46.

76

Tertullian rebukes bigamy by appealing to the priesthood of all believers. Since laymen are priests they should observe the same ethical precepts binding on the clergy; cf. n. 13 of this chapter. Clement of Alexandria writes: "It is possible for men even now, by exercising themselves in the commandments of the Lord and by living a perfect gnostic life in obedience to the Gospel, to be inscribed in the roll of and the Apostles" (Strom. 6.13 [ed. Stahlin, p. 485f.; trans. Lightfoot, p. 221). Origen speaks of those Christians who devote their entire lives to the Word and worship as priests and Levites; those among them with distinguished service are high priests; and the nominal Christians as the tribes who merely present the first fruits and tithes (In Joann. 1.3 [GCS, 10:5, ed. Preuschen; ANF, 10:298]). Initially the Alexandrian emphasis of gnosis and dedication did

pronounce some remedial measures. The situation deteriorated with the prevalence of infant baptism in the later ages. Men grew up to be Christians just like they grew up to be citizens. They were complacent to embrace an ethical standard no worse than their neighbours. The severe sacerdotal ethics rendered them impotent to identify with the designation as the royal priests of God. If the high morality, as Tertullian suggested, applied to all who possessed the epithet of priest they rather relinquished the designation and the status to the professional clergy who were expected to uphold the austerities of the sacerdotal ethics.

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### Secularisation of the Concept of Church Order

#### The Biblical Concept of Ministerial Order

As has been pointed out earlier, the New Testament warrants

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 serve to delay the ascension of any sacerdotal class in the Church via office. But once the Church was filled with nominal Christians especially in the post-Constantine era, it discouraged the laymen to aspire to their priesthood. Indeed ordinary Christians hardly merit such a sacerdotal designation.

77

We might consider bishop of Rome Callistus (A.D. 217-222) a practical bishop who provided a 'second chance' to those despaired penitents of deadly sins (adultery, murder, and apostasy) whose alternative was driven further away from the Church of God (see Tertullian, De pudicitia; cf. n. 52 .

78

It is the conclusion of Clarence L. Lee's Sacerdotal Ethics in Early Christianity, see pp. 262-64. The demise of the universal priesthood was not so much the result of the sacrificial interpretation of priesthood but "it was more a case of the layman forfeiting his right to approach God as a priest by allowing his priestly integrity to be equated with a discipline which he could not hope to maintain" (p. 140).

79

By secularisation we mean the increasing emphasis of the relation with the saeculum on the part of the church. It stresses

a distinct order among the people to lead and teach. However, this order is radical from the contemporary secular organisations in two outstanding features. First, it is qualified by

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servanthood. The fact that Jesus did not reward the disciples after they made their commitment to follow Him indicates that the office calls for personal humility and sacrifice rather than

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confers honour on the office-bearers. The essential thing of

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the visible, tangible and institutional aspects of the church to the point of eventually juxtaposing the invisible and visible. In Sohm's term, here we begin the phase of 'Catholicism.' The logical results of this development in due time are the following phenomena: (1) There was no distinction between the visible and invisible church, church and State. (2) Papal authority represented the headship of Christ. (3) Power of the keys substituted the power of the Word. (4) Enforcement and compulsion were used to promote spiritual and moral duty. (5) Canon laws became the religious laws. (See Sohm, Wessen und Urprung des Katholizismus, pp. 345ff.).

80

See p. 20.

81

Gerke, pp. 344-47; Reid, pp. 1-3. Gerke's theory of the origin of Christian ministry departs from the model of Christ--the servant of God. It has the advantage of combining the strengths of both the the High church (Gore, AP writers) and the spiritualist (Sohm, Harnack, Hatch) interpretations and at the same time instills a link between the two. The office is instituted at the very beginning, not a subsequent lapse, but it operated in servanthood which is at variance with all contemporary institutions. It affirms the primacy of both the visible expression of the ministry and the corporate authority of the spiritual community. The difference among the three approaches is that Gerke takes off from the incarnate Christ in whom we have the perfect integration of visible and invisible. The Harnack-Hatch departs from the Spirit. And while Harnack holds the critical view of the late authorship of the Pastoral Epistles, and dwells at length on the church orders of some obscure locations (Didache, The Apostolic Canons), Hatch unapologetically passes over all canonical documents. The High churchmen departs from the Apostles, the supposed forerunners of the bishops and elevates the visible, institutional dimension of the ministry.

82

Rengstorf, p. 29f. It is interesting to note that the same saliach motif: "š<sup>h</sup>elûh<sup>h</sup> š<sup>h</sup>el 'ādām k<sup>h</sup>emôh<sup>h</sup>" (the ambassador of

the Damascus experience of Paul was not that the apostle saw  
 Jesus, but his yes and surrender to Christ's call.<sup>83</sup>

Second, the ministerial order stands under the authority of the Word which the officers are called to preach. It is not their status that validates the message but the content of what they proclaims guarantees their authority.<sup>84</sup> The Twelve were not designated the position Apostles (Apostolate) as the result of their habitual relation with Christ, and from there it follows that by virtue of the office of Apostles whatever they preached were authoritative. As a matter of fact, the term Apostles (Apostolate) was first accorded to the Twelve in a mission on which they acted as convoys of Jesus (Mark 6:7-12).<sup>85</sup> They were called Apostles because they were the ministerial functionaries of the Word. And since the Word is given to the whole church, indirectly the office-bearers also stand under the corporate authority of the congregation. The epithet 'Twelve' represents the embryonic church--the twelve tribes of the New Israel, the apostolate thus befalls the whole church. "The whole church stands alongside the apostles post eventum Christi; and

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 a man is like the man himself) (Mishnah, Beradot 5.5, cited in Rengstorf, p. 26ff.) adduced in AM to enhance episcopal leadership (passim, see note 19; it is used by Rengstorf here to demand servanthood.

83

Rengstorf, p. 48.

84

Vanstone, "The Ministry in the New Testament," in Historic Episcopate, p. 31. He points out that about five hundred believers had seen Christ but they were not designated apostles.

85

This is the suggestion of Hort, The Christian Ecclesia (Macmillan, 1897), p. 28. Cf. Reid, p. 5f.

the church has its commission and duty to proclaim Christ. This<sup>86</sup>  
is the ministry of the whole church."

Nevertheless, as the church encountered tremendous  
adversities of persecutions, heresies, and schisms in the early  
hundreds of years, the role of the office-bearers heightened.  
Gradually the church developed a new conception of the  
ministerial order. The office-bearer in time became the center of  
unity of the whole church; the depository of the apostolic truth<sup>87</sup>  
and the vicegerent of Christ.

#### The Office as the Center of Unity

Persecutions no doubt drove many Christians apostate, but  
made many bishops and presbyters honourable martyrs. Ignatius,  
Polycarp and Cyprian, together with the office they held, were  
highly respected. They became the models for emulation. On the  
way to martyrdom the bishop of Antioch wrote to various churches  
pleading a visible unity around the episcopate in time of  
tribulation. In the light of the context, Ignatius' motivation  
for advancing moniscopacy was certainly not self-serving and  
probably commanded very warm and positive reception on the part<sup>88</sup>  
of the recipient churches because of his exemplary life.

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86

Reid, p. 44.

87

Lightfoot, pp. 198-209.

88

George H. William remarks that Ignatius demanded  
obedience to the bishop on the part of the people because the  
bishop should be the image of Christ (morally). It is not an  
arrogant asertation but an awesome episcopal responsibility. And  
he was soon going to demonstrate that by a Christ-like martyrdom  
(Historical Perspectives, p. 30f.). Ep. Rom. 2:1 "ean gar  
siōpēsēte ap' emou, egō logos theo ean de erasthēte tēs sarkos

However, the office of the bishop was intensified in such a manner that the Pauline idea of soma was made political. <sup>89</sup> The empirical unity was no longer among the individual communities but in one bishop. The office became the principle power to dispose of the Word and Sacraments. The Word reveals its truth only in the assembly presided by the bishop. The bishop was the center of unity of the whole church.

#### The Office as Depositary of Apostolic Truth

Heresies, predominantly the docetic gnosticism, made the church to reassert the tangible aspect of her faith and stressed tradition, institution. Officers were considered the guardians of

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mou, palin esomai phōnē (For if you are silent about me, I am a word of God; but if you love my flesh, I shall again be only a voice [echo])" (ed. Bihlmeyer, p. 97; Sparks, p. 99; cf. Ep. Trall. 2.1). The stylistic language of Ignatius lead to conflicting interpretations of his letters. Grant observes that he "is an exception to the early Christian rule against stylistic vigor" ("Ignatius of Antioch," p. 52; for his view on Ignatius, see n. 60 of this chapter). Streeter attributes his seemingly presumptuous language to "prophetic seizure" whereby the bishop believed that he was under the control of the Spirit to speak (p. 171f.). Walter Baur characteristically construes the Sitz im Leben of a desperate cleric fighting for a life and death battle against his overwhelming enemy (Baur's thesis is that the prominence of 'heretics' induced the purge and intervention by the 'orthodox party' (Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity, trans. a team from the Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins and ed. Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel from the 2d ed. of Rechtgäubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum in Beitrage zur historischen Theologie 10 [Tubigen, 1934] [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971], p. 64). John Owen flatly denounces Ignatius who was "scarcely rivalled by the claims and policy of a Hildebrand in the darkest period of the Middle Ages" (intro. essay in Harnack, Apostolical Canons, p. cviii).

89

Gerke, pp. 365-67. Note that the unity around the bishop first fostered by Clement of Rome is concordia (c. 40, each according to his respective order in the celebration of Eucharist), but now Ignatius advances unity in term of monarchia. Also Gerke notices that in Ignatian Epistles the verbs

the apostolic faith. In fact the term apostolic succession was first advocated in gnostic literature.<sup>90</sup> And the bishops felt that it was their pastoral responsibility to counter-claim and rebuke the menacing challenge of the Gnostic heretics who claimed<sup>91</sup> to have historical relation with the Apostles.

The succession was thus originally historical, namely succession from the apostles, not of apostles.<sup>92</sup> Irenaeus put forth the list of Roman bishops and argued: "In this order, and by this succession, the ecclesiastical tradition from the apostles, and the preaching of the truth, have come down to us".<sup>93</sup> As time went on this historical succession turned out to be a dogmatic one in the sense that the succession rested not on the church over which the bishops presided, but the bishops succeeded to the apostles on their own right. Hippolytus first suggested that the gift of Spirit of the apostles was inherited

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diakonein (to serve) and kopian (to labour) once frequently refer to the works of the apostles no longer apply to the real clergy (bishops and presbyters), and kopian designate the inferior office of deacons only .

90

The actual phrase 'apostolic succession' first occurs in the Gnostic Epistle of Ptolemy to Flora (c. A.D. 160 in Epiphanius, Haer., 33.7 (PG, 42:568; cf. Dix, "Ministry in the Early Church," in AM, P. 202).

91

AM., pp. 201-13; C. H. Turner, "Apostolic Succession," in Essays, pp. 97ff.; Lightfoot, p. 203f. It was the anti-Gnostic bishop of Rome Hegesippus (c. A.D. 175) first advocated the episcopal succession (Dix, "Ministry in the Early Church," AM, p. 204).

92

Lindsay, Church and Ministry, p. 311; Turner, in Essays, p. 133).

93

Adv. haer. 3.3.3: "Hac ordinatione et successione ea quae est ab Apostolis in Ecclesia traditio et veritatis praeconatio pervenit usque ad nos" (ed. Harvey, 2:11; trans. ANF, 1:416).

by the bishops as individuals.

Once the church had tradition, the officers had the mandate from the people to ensure that they were guarded, expounded and transmitted properly. <sup>95</sup> The institutional church was thought of being created and maintained for this very purpose--to transmit the apostolic tradition. <sup>96</sup> This altitude was further hardened in

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Two significant passages are: (1) The ordination prayer for the bishop: "ton doulon sou touton hon exelexō eis episkopēn . . . archierateuein soi amemptōs leitourgounta . . . to pneumatī tō archieratikō echein exousian aphienai hamartias (Thy servant whom Thou hast chosen for the episcopate . . . as Thy high priest, that he may minister blamelessly . . . by Thy high priestly Spirit, that he may have authority 'to forgive sins' [ed. Botte, p. 44; Dix, p. 4). (2) Philosophumena preface: "tauta de heteros ouk elegxei ē to en ekklēsia paradothen hagian pneuma, hou tuchontes proteroi hoi apostoloi metedosan tois orthōs pepisteukosin hōn hēmeis diadochoi tugchanontes, tēs te autēs charitos metechontes archierateias te kai didaskalias, (none other than the Holy Ghost who has been transmitted in the Church. The Apostles received Him first, and imparted Him to those who had believed aright. We, their successors who partake of the same grace and high-priesthood and the Holy Spirit and teaching office) (PG, 16,3:3020; trans. Turner, in Essays, p. 48). Note that both of the above passages stress the bishops as individuals directly succeed to the gift of the Spirit. Harnack suggests that the idea of the transmission of gift of truth via succession of the office was only in vogue after the episcopal office became monarchical (Harnack, Dogma, 2:69). For a thorough discussion on apostolic succession consult Turner's classic essay ("Apostolic Succession," in Essays, pp. 95-214; pp. 197-206 provide a handy collection of the 'succession' language of both the early Christian and non-Christian writers).

95

Campenhausen, Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power, p. 78f.

96

Harnack, Dogma, 2:2, n.1. He calls this 'deification of tradition' the essence of Catholicism. And since the institutions can not be appropriated inwardly, obedience to the legal ordinances substitutes faith and piety to the Gospel. He observes that the primitive ante-mundane emphasis of the church--the Holy church, with her origin and destiny in heaven was discredited by Gnosticism which was only held tight by Clement of Alexandria and restored by Augustine (Dogma, 1:153).

face of the schismatic groups whose enthusiastic tendency usually had no due regard for traditions. <sup>97</sup> The schismatics indeed pushed the church to aggravate the role of the officers to provide the visible unity and historical continuity to the church. <sup>98</sup> The office-bearers now related more to the tradition than to the people they pastored. The ministerial office became the custodian of the primitive truth.

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97

Schism as a rule, usually unleashed by the enthusiastic puritan groups and their kinship to one another is well accepted among scholars. Novatians, Donatists were found numerous where the Montanists had been populous (Harnack, Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums, (4th ed., 1928), 2:932, cited in Vokes, p. 62). Hatch describes Montanism as "the first, though not the last, rebellion of the religious sentiment against official religion" (Organisation, p. 125). R. A. Knox, Enthusiasm (Oxford, 1950), chapters 3,4 on the connections between Montanism and Donatism; and Donatism and Anabaptism. Frend styles Montanist Tertullian as the father of Donatism more than a Catholic apologist and the Donatist revolt (underline mine) in turn is the prototype of Protestant schism (Donatist Church, pp. 124, xi). However, Frend's last statement needs some qualifications. Protestantism as expounded by the Reformers differs from Montanism in the following: (1) It stresses sola gratia rather than austere ascetism. (2) It stresses sola scriptura rather than enthusiasm. Protestantism restored the center of the Gospel while Montanism set the circumference. The only thing Protestantism is akin to Montanism is the primacy of personal faith and piety to the Gospel rather than loyalty and obedience to an institutional church. They both maintain that the church is communio sanctorum.

98

In response to the schismatic Novatians and Donatists it is evident that both Cyprian and Augustine developed an ecclesiology and sacramental theology which inspired medieval Catholicism. Cyprian suggests that the church is in the bishop (Ep. 66.8 [ed. Hartel, p.732f.; ANF, 5:374f.; cf. De unitate 2, Epp. 43, 46, 55, 67) while Augustine advances the character indelebilis of the priest (c. Cresc. 2.13 [CSEL, 52,2:371, ed. Petschenig]). Even though Campenhausen observes that the doctrine of character indelebilis originally was intended to make baptism independent of the moral character of the officiants, not the priesthood independent of the people, it was only a short step to the medieval stance of a categorical difference between the laity and the clergy (Tradition and Life, p. 225f.; cf. n. 29).

## The Officer as the Vicegerent of Christ

While the assumption of Ignatius' supremacy of the episcopate still remained lofty and vague it became a substantiated, patent, and ecumenical reality in Cyprian. <sup>99</sup>

After Cyprian was baptised only two years he was advanced to the bishopric to guide a church vexed with internal dissension and threatened by imperial persecution. Being a jurist whose instinct was law and order, he articulated the pre-eminent role of the episcopate to enforce peace and unity that the church needed badly. He considered the bishop exclusively a representative of Christ to the congregation. The bishop was the indispensable channel of divine grace and indispensable bond of Christian brotherhood. As the local governor was reckoned representative of the Emperor, the bishop was treated as the <sup>100</sup> vicegerent of Christ in heaven.

Such an imperialist view was expressed in pomps after Constantine. Bishops were authorised to sit in civil court. <sup>101</sup>

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99

Lightfoot, p. 205. The lofty and vague formulation of Ignatius lead to different interpretations: moral exhortation (William), stylist technique (Grant), polemical rhetoric (W. Baur) and 'prophetic seizure' (Streeter); cf. n. 88. Cyprian's struggles with the confessors, the presbyters of his own church, rival bishop and Stephen of Rome established the independence of the episcopate above any local and external challenges. The episcopal office became "an absolute incontrovertible decree of God" (Lightfoot, p. 208).

100

Lindsay, Church and Ministry, p. 309. He contends that Cyprian derived his theory of ministry from the Roman ideas of authority and imperial rule rather than a misinterpretation of the Old Testament priesthood (p. 334f.; for the sacerdotal interpretation of ministry see Bernard, in Essays, pp. 228ff.).

101

The so called quiedtia episcopalis, Jungmann, Early Liturgy, p. 131.

In the celebration of the pontifical High Mass, the celebrant was preceded by the ceroferarii (torch bearers) from the sacristy to the altar. <sup>102</sup> Two deacons accompanied the bishop wherever he went to 'support his forearms'. <sup>103</sup> Clerics passing the episcopal throne genuflected before the bishop. <sup>104</sup>

Indeed, the ecclesiastics were elevated to a level which was thought of having some of the attributes of a divinity--a common feature in the contemporary civil order. <sup>105</sup> The reason prohibiting a layman to celebrate the Eucharist was simply that he did not have the necessary dignity (axia) possessed by an officer. And the officer who had that dignity was called a 'god upon earth'. <sup>106</sup>

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102

Ibid., p. 133.

103

The rubric states: (deducunt eum) si opus est, eius brachia sustentantes (the work is as [leading him] supporting his forearms), ibid., p. 131.

104

Ibid.

105

Hatch, p. 140.

106

Const. 3.10: "all' oute laikois epiprepomen poiein ti ton heiratikon ergon. . . dia gar tes epitheseos ton cheiron tou episkopou didotai he toiaute axia (Neither do we permit the laity to perform any of the offices belonging to the priesthood; laying on of the hands of the bishop)); Ibid. 2.26.4 of the bishop: "houtos humon epigeios theos meta theon (he is your god on earth after God) (ed. Funk, pp. 201 and 105; trans. ANF, 7:429 and mine). The civil order derived its pseudo-divinity from the fact that it was the extension of the Emperor who was considered a deity. Two anecdotes bespeak the deity of the Emperor: (1) In July 44 B.C. during a celebration of the games in honour of Caesar who was murdered four months ago, an unexpected comet appeared in the sky which was held as evidence of Divus Julius--god Caesar now in heaven! (J. P. V. D. Balsdon, ed., Romans, p. 200f., cited in Green, p. 42). (2) The dying Vespasian jokingly exclaimed: "Vae, puto dus fio! (Alas, I suppose I am becoming a god!) (Suetonius, Vesp. 23, cited in Green, p. 288, n. 71).

The Sacrificial Interpretation of the Office

The rift between the clergy and laity was definite and irretrievable when the officer was acknowledged a priest endowed with some exclusive power to effect the magical-sacramental action in the cult. Now the officer no longer became the ministerial functionary performing the service of the whole church, but his special service, independent of any charge of the community.<sup>107</sup> This was a common conception of any pagan priesthood. The pagan priests were attendants of the deities rather than the leaders of corporate worship.<sup>108</sup> The progression of the sacrificial accentuation of the ministerial order can be delineated as follows.

Initial Metamorphical Use

Primitive Christians stressed the immaterial feature of their worship. Athenagoras proudly wrote: "God has no need of blood-oblations, nor of the smell of flowers and incense, because

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107

Campenhausen, Tradition and Life, p. 218.

108

It should be noted that for the pagans a temple is simply the shrine of the deity while a church for the Christians is a building--a private house then--for the public worship of the faithful. The priests were there to take good care of the statues of the deity. Kenneth Kitchen remarks: "The Egyptian temple was the house of its god in quite a literal sense. . . . The whole sacred precinct was shut in by massive mud brick walls, pierced by one or massive gateways. . . . Finally came the sanctuary containing the shrine of the gods, its doors bolted and sealed, guarding the cult image within. . . . Their main contact with the only on high days of festivals, when the gods went forth in glittering array on stately processings (art. "Land of Egypt," Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, 5 vols., ed. M. C. Tenney [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975], 2:254.

He Himself is the perfect perfume, without want or blemish." <sup>109</sup>  
 The early cultic association between Christian ministry and  
 Mosaic ministry were metaphorical. The Didache (c. 13) spoke  
 about the high priesthood of the prophets inasmuch as the people's  
 gifts (thusia) presented to them were first-fruits. <sup>110</sup> In the  
 case of 1 Clement (c. 40.5) the bishop, presbyters, deacons were  
 compared to the high priest, priests, and Levites to portray the  
concordia of the whole church in public corporate worship. <sup>111</sup>

#### Polemical use

However, the polemic against the Jews and Marcionites  
 adduced the growth of analogy between the Christian Eucharist and  
 the Old Testament sacrifice. Thus Justin in his Dialogue with  
Trypho (c. 116) called the Eucharist a Christian sacrifice, the  
 fulfillment of Malachi 1:11 and the Christians were high priestly  
 race. The presiding celebrant was by implication the high  
 priest. <sup>112</sup> Likewise Irenaeus (Adversus haereses 4.18.4) spoke  
 of the gifts of the people as the first fruits (presented to the  
 priest) to affirm the created order. <sup>113</sup>

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 109

Legatio (Supplicatio pro Christianis) 13 (CAC, 6-7:58,  
 ed. Otto; trans. Jungmann, Early Liturgy, p. 45). See also the  
 non-cultic accent of Christian worship, see p. 13.

110

Ed. Bilh Meyer, p. 7; Sparks, p. 317.

111

Ed. Bilh Meyer, p. 57; Sparks, p. 40. Clement still  
 reserves the effectual high priesthood to Christ (c. 36.1, c.  
 61.3 [ed. Bilh Meyer, pp. 55, 69; Sparks, pp. 37, 52]).

112

Ed. Otto, CAC, 2:416; ANF, 1:257.

113

Ed. Harvey, pp. 2:204-208; ANF, 1:485f.). Tangible gifts  
 of bread and wine were staple food in the agricultural society  
 and were appropriate token of expressing thanksgiving. Without

## Ministerial Use

By the time of Hippolytus, the sacrificial duty of the officer was clear and unequivocal. In Apostolic Tradition, the bishop was endowed with the spirit of high priesthood and one of his job was to "offer to Thee the gifts of Thy holy Church." 114

Nevertheless, these analogies did not give rise to sacerdotalism and created a special sacerdotal class separate from the laity. 115 The main reason withholding the emergence of sacerdotalism was the understanding of Eucharist as a corporate sacrifice of thanksgiving of the whole church. 116 The presiding

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 tangible gifts the corporate act of worship might degenerate into personal feeling of devotion. The early Christians, having been released from paganism had strong desire to offer thanksgiving to God. "Gratitude towards God is the characteristic feature of their piety" (Jungmann, Early Liturgy, p. 44).

114

C. 3, the prayer for the consecration of a bishop (ed. Botte, pp. 42-46; Dix, pp. 4-6).

115

Lightfoot gave a concise and lucid survey of the sacerdotal thought from Clement of Rome to Cyprian (pp. 215-26) and concludes: the latter sacerdotalism was due to heathen influences more than Old Testament influences (p. 216). Gordon J. Wenham observes that the Old Testament priests were mainly teachers of the Law and Leviticus was the manual of worship for the laymen: "They (the priests) tell them when to go to the sanctuary, what to bring, and what he may expect the priest to do when he arrives" (The Book of Leviticus [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979], p. 3). T. F. Torrance also points out the didactic function of the Mosaic ministry. The Ten Words (two tablets) were put in the Holy of Holies and occupied the very center of the Tabernacle and Temple. The sacrifices were cultic signs to respond to the Word of God (The Royal Priesthood, pp. 1ff.). So long as the ministry of the officer remains one of the Word which calls for the exercise of faith and discernment on the part of the faithful, sacerdotalism can hardly arise. A minister of the Word can not function without the people.

116

Modern research suggests that Eucharist was derived from the chaburah or religious meal celebrated by all pious Jews before any festival or Sabbath in which Jesus instituted the

priest did not perform the liturgy of his own order but the service of the whole church. The presiding celebrant's prayer of thanksgiving was said on behalf of the congregation who responded with a unison Amen.

However, in Cyprian, the celebration of the Eucharist became the prerogative of a cleric. In one of his earliest letters he described the nature of the office overwhelmingly in sacerdotal terminology: "Since everyone honoured with the holy priesthood and ordained to clerical ministries ought only to serve the altar at the sacrifices, and ought to apply himself wholly to intercessions and prayers." We hardly find any

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 Lord's Supper. A succinct account of the meal origin is given in William D. Maxwell, A History of Christian Worship: An Outline of Its Development and Forms (Oxford, 1936; paper back ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book, 1982), pp. 5-7. Dix gives a lengthy discussion in Shape of the Liturgy, pp. 48-102. Lietzmann suggests duality of origin: (1) Agape--Jerusalem tradition of the table fellowship of chaburah reflected in Didache; (2) Mass--Pauline tradition of sacrificial memory reflected by Hippolytus (AT). This view is criticised by Robert D. Richardson: (1) The expectation of parousia is common to two traditions which implies that both derive from one origin. (2) The ipissima verba of Jesus used by Lietzmann to differentiate two sources may be only two recollections for the same event on the part of the writers to explicate "the full significance of such a culminating moment in history . . . too deep for adequate expression in one form of words" (Hans Lietzmann, Mass and Lord's Supper, trans. D. H. G. Reeve with intro. and further enquiry by Robert D. Richardson from Messe und Herremahl--Eine Studie zur Geschichte der Liturgie (Berlin, 1926) (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977), p. xxiif.

117

Justin, 1 Apology 65: "hou suntelesantos tas euchas kai tēn eucharistian pas ho parōn laos epeuphēmei legōn Amen (When he (president) has finished the prayers and the thanksgiving, all the people present shout their assent, saying Amen)" (ed. Gildersleeve, p. 62; trans. Thompson, Liturgies of the Western Church, p. 8).

118

Ep. 1.1: "Quando singuli diuino sacerdote honorati et in clerico ministerio constituti non nisi altari et sacrificiis deseruire et precibus adque orationibus uacare debeant" (ed.

discussion of the officer as the minister of the Word in his writings.

Before long, Ambrose made the congregational Amen become the ratification of a thing done: 'so it is.' Instead of being the corporate summing up of a petition, it is the acknowledgement of a miracle accomplished. <sup>119</sup> Eucharist increasingly became a

commemoration of a past event reenacted by the priest who personified Christ in the passion. <sup>120</sup> The most significant Christian activity--worship--now changed into a one-man play while the laymen came as spectators. And this man was vested with

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Hartel, 3,2:30; trans. Bernard, in Essays, p. 226). Cf. Ep. 57.3: "Ut sacerdotes qui sacrificia Dei cotidie celebramus (We as priests who celebrate daily the sacrifices of God) (ed. Hartel, 3,2:625; trans. mine). There are too many references, see Essays, p. 288f.

<sup>119</sup>

De mysteriis 54: "Ante benedictionem verborum caelestium alia species nominatur post consecrationem corpus significatur. Ipse dicit sanguinem suum. Ante consecrationem aliud dicitur, post consecrationem sanguis nuncupatur. Et tu dicis 'amen', hoc est 'verum est'. Quod os loquitur, mens interna fateatur; quod sermo sonat, adfectus sentiat (Before the blessing of the heavenly words another nature is spoken of, after the consecration the Body is signified. He Himself speaks of His Blood. And you say Amen, that is, ita factum est (It is true). Let the heart within confess what the mouth utters, let the soul feel what the voice speaks)" (CSEL, 73:112f., ed. Otto Faller; NPNF[2], 10:324f.). Bate observes that Ambrose's perilous phrase marks a departure from the Hippolytan tradition and indeed a watershed in liturgical history (Herbert N. Bate and Francis C. Lees, Thoughts on the Shape of Liturgy (Alcuin Club Tracts 24; London, 1946), p. 32.

<sup>120</sup>

Jungmann vividly describes the allegorical re-enactment of the passion: "In the action of the assisting clerics, who step back at the start of the preface, is seen the flight of the disciples. In the celebrant's extended hands our Lord is seen agonizing on the cross with arms outstretched. . . ." (Roman Rite, 1:135); cf. Thompson, p. 48. Dix attributes the memorial emphasis of the Eucharist to the reconciliation of time after Constantine when the church was denuded of her initial eschatological aspiration. See his insightful discussion in

spiritual power that induced the reverence even from the heavenly host:

The orders of the heavenly host, although they enjoy beatitude and want nothing to the sum of felicity, still revere the glory of a priest, wonder at his dignity, yield to him in privilege, honour his power.<sup>121</sup>

The sacrament of Eucharist was deprived of its original corporate nature and solely became the service of the sacerdotal priesthood who held sway over the laity.

### Conclusion

The foregoing discussion about the universal priesthood of all believers in the pre-Nicene church leads us to the following conclusion: (1) The doctrine was vital in the pre-Nicene period. This was mainly owing to the hostile situation and the 'minority status' of the church. During such an adverse environment, the people concept of the church--the eschatological laos of God--came to the fore. Laity were actively involved in all kinds of ministries. The ante-mundane character of the church was maintained by the vigorous practice of the sacerdotal ethics.

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Shape, pp. 303-19. His view was challenged by Thomas Talley's "History and Eschatology in the Primitive Pascha," Worship 47 (1973):212-221. Talley contends that the ancient Pascha was also concerned with the historical suffering of Christ (p. 214). Paul Marshall's "The Little Easter and the Great Sunday," Liturgy 1/2 (1980):27-31, suggests that the insistence of the celebration of the Easter on Sunday on the part of the western church was to temper the historicizing tendency of the paschal fasts (p. 30).

121

Bernard, Instructio Sacerdotis 9: "omnis sancti beatorum spirituum ordines, quamvis perfruuntur beatitudine, ut nihil eis desit a summa felicitate; gloriam tamen sacerdotis reverentur, admirantur dignitatem, cedunt privilegio, honorant potentiam" (Sancti Bernardi opera omnia, ed. Curis D. J. Mabillon [Paris, 1839], 2:1061; trans. Hatch, Organisation, p. 128).

Priesthood of believers was expressed in terms of separation-dedication. (2) The subsequent demise of the doctrine also witnesses the demise of the Word. The secularization and sacrificial interpretation of the office made the officer a custodian of primitive tradition and dispenser of grace rather than the teacher of the Word to the people. Henceforth, the officers separated themselves from the laity by virtue of their exclusive character indelebilis. They were no longer ministerial functionaries instituted among the brethren.

These two observations are helpful in our understanding of Nee's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Living in the same hostile Chinese society in the early twenties of this century, Nee makes the austere discipleship binding on any one who assumes the epithet of Christian. He does not separate justification and sanctification.<sup>122</sup> Also, in the very primitive period when the Chinese church or Nee's church had not yet developed creeds, traditions and institutions of their own, the primacy of the Word was intact. However, the Word of God does not come from the ministerial office, but from any spiritual men of holy lives. In fact the purpose of the cultivation of spiritual men is for the release of the Word of God.<sup>123</sup> The ministerial system belongs to the denominations. We should return to the pure

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122

Dennis P. Schiefelbein, "A Lutheran Confessional Critique of the Understanding and Function of the Believer's Union with Christ in the Theology of Watchman Nee," (Th.M. Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1980), pp. 46-76.

123

Wing-Hung Lam, "Watchman Nee's Concept of Ministry," in A Life of Ministry, pp. 331-34.

Word of God. The Word can work, or more precisely, can only work, through holy lives--the release of the Spirit through the broken soul. We will come back for an intensive analysis in Part Two. In the mean time, we should note that for the Reformers, the primacy of the Word requires the ministerial office for its public proclamation. The Word not only reasserts the universal priesthood but also affirms the particular priesthood. That is the focus of our next section.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS IN THE REFORMATION

#### Introduction

##### Significant Development of the Doctrine

Reformation is an indispensable period for any study of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. T. M. Lindsay suggests that the doctrine is the core around which almost all the distinctive principles of Reformation group; "a touchstone of what true Christianity is".<sup>1</sup> Philip Schaff considers it the 'social and ecclesiastical principle' of Reformation--the source<sup>2</sup> of religious and civil liberty in most Protestant countries.

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Lindsay, History of Reformation, 1:444; 347. So he discusses it (pp. 435ff.) prior to sola fidei (pp. 444ff.) and sola scriptura (pp. 453ff.). Cyril Eastward follows this line of interpretation in examining the seven external marks of the true church of Luther (Priesthood of All Believers, pp. 1-65). Cf. Richard R. Caemmerer: "The royal priesthood is not a doctrine separate from the other great facts of the Christian religion, but it is a logical ingredient in our faith as a whole" ("The Universal Priesthood and the Pastor," CTM 19 (1948):561.

2

The objective principle is Scripture over tradition and the subjective principle is Christian people over exclusive priesthood (Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, 8 vols. [New York, 1889-1910], 7:10, 14). B. A. Gerrish says that it is the third principle of Reformation but deplores the distortion of an individualistic interpretation (The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritage [Chicago and Edinburg: University of Chicago and T. and T. Clark, 1982], p. 4). Usually we hold two Reformation principles: the formal principle (sola scriptura) and the material principle (sola

Reformation did not merely revive the evangelical character  
of the early church,<sup>3</sup> but surpassed it.<sup>4</sup> It is especially true  
for the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. The early  
fathers mainly interpreted the doctrine in an ethical-epistemolo-  
gical way emphasizing the separation-dedication aspect. But the  
Reformers tied in the universal priesthood with the priesthood of  
Christ,<sup>5</sup> sharing the various offices as his body on earth  
such as teaching, interceding and a sacrificial life.<sup>6</sup> Since  
Reformation, universal priesthood became a crystal clear evangel-  
ical heritage.

#### Luther and the Priesthood of All Believers

Our study in this chapter is delimited to Luther for the

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gratia and sola fidei).

<sup>3</sup>  
Harold J. Grimm, The Reformation Era 1500-1650, 2d ed.  
(New York and Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup>  
Harnack observes that Reformation not only restored the  
Pauline theology but "passing beyond the early church a important  
points" (Dogma, 7:169, note 1).

<sup>5</sup>  
See p. 62. Irenaeus did mention: "all the righteous had  
the sacerdotal rank" (Adv. haer. 4.8.3; see chapter II note  
17). However, he did not develop its Christological ramifica-  
tion. On the other hand, heavily drawing on the Levitical  
motif of separation and right judgement, Tertullian and the  
Alexandrian theologians advanced the sacerdotal ethics and a  
gnostic existence. The pre-Nicene patristic articulation of the  
doctrine of the priesthood of believers was predominantly  
Levitical (in the ethical-epistemological sense) rather than  
Christological.

<sup>6</sup>  
Herman A. Preus, "Luther on the Universal Priesthood and the  
Office of the Ministry," Concordia Journal 5 (1979):57. L. W.  
Spitz, "The Universal Priesthood of Believers," in The Abiding  
Word, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958),  
1:322.

following reasons. First, he is the Reformation, the father of Protestantism. In fact, a writer even contends that the 'acid test' of any work on Reformation depends on the author's capacity to expound Luther. Free Churchmen yield deference and acknowledge their indebtedness to him, while a Catholic historian styles him as "a common authority" among other Reformers. Therefore, an intensive study on Luther's view would be a profitable alternative to an extensive survey of all the Reformers.

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7  
Harnack, Dogma, 7:170.

8Hugh T. Kerr (Calvinist), ed., A Compend of Luther's Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, n.d.), p. xii.

9  
James Atkinson (Anglican), The Great Light: Luther and Reformation (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 11. He unabashedly congrues with Harnack: "The Reformation is Luther and Luther is the Reformation."

10  
An ecumenical report submitted to the Archbishop of Canterbury by a group of Free Churchmen which is said to be "ecumenical in the finest sense . . . rests on the insights and words of Martin Luther" (R. Newton Flew and Rupert E. Davies, eds., The Catholicity of Protestantism (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, [1950]), p. 5.

11  
Joseph Lortz, The Reformation: A Problem for Today, trans. John C. Kwyer from Die Reformation als religioes Anliegen heute (Trier) (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1964), p. 205. His irenic approach to Luther is epoch-making in Catholic Luther studies which John Dolan remarks: "The polemic of Cochlaeus, which had filtered down to the twentieth century through Denifle and is still resurrected in some dark corners of catholicism was laid to rest" (History of the Reformation. A Conciliatory Assessment of Opposite Views [New York, 1965], p. 45; his evaluation on Lortz, pp. 45-47). Lortz's 2 vols. magnum opus (ET) The Reformation in Germany, trans. R. Walls (New York: Decler Co., 1968) is capsulised in (ET) How the Reformation Came?, trans. Otto M. Knab (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964). This conciliatory altitude is also reflected by the the affirmation of the important doctrine of Reformation--priesthood of all believers, and its vigorous implementation such as the liturgical renewal and the Catholic Action (a generic term for all

Second, Luther was not only the first one who proclaimed  
 12  
 the doctrine, but persistently maintained it throughout his  
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 career. The lingering consequences of the Wittenberg tumult  
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sanctioned lay voluntary agencies). Congar contends that the  
 conception of societas fidelium had been a patristic and  
 scholastic tradition. The problem of Reformation was not the  
 innovation of the doctrine of the church as the assembly of the  
 faithful but developed it "most one-sidedly" (Lay People in the  
Church, p. 25; see chapter II, pp. 22ff.).

12  
 Philip Schaff, Creed of Christendom, 3 vols. (6th ed.,  
 rev. and enl.; New York and London, 1919), 1:218. But Schaff  
 contends that "in practise it (the doctrine) was confined to the  
 civil rulers, and carried out in a wrong way by making them the  
 supreme bishops of the church." Such an alleged Erastianism is  
 refuted by L. W. Spitz, "Luther's Ecclesiology and His Concept of  
 the Prince as Notbischof," Church History 22 (1953):113-41.  
 The princes' role was just temporal; see Martin Luther, D. Martin  
Luthers Werke (Weimar: H. Bohlau, 1883-; hereafter WA),  
 26:196ff.; Luther's Works, 55 vols., eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and  
 Helmut T. Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955-;  
 hereafter LW), 40:263ff. Luther first used the phrase in a  
 letter to Spalatin in December 18, 1519: "Deinde valde me urget  
 petrus Apostolus l. pe. 2. dicens nos omnes esse sacerdotes, idem  
 Iohannes in apocalypsi, Ut hoc genus sacerdocii, in quo nos  
 sumus, prorsus non differre videatur a laicis nisi ministrio, quo  
 sacramenta & verbum ministratur. Cetera omnia sunt equalia, si  
 ceremonias & humana statua demas (Thereafter 1 Peter 2 presses me  
 hard saying that we all are priests, the same [teaching] is in  
 the Apocalypse, that all are a priestly race, in which we belong,  
 it seems that (a priest) does not differ at all from the laymen  
 except the ministry, which is the ministry of the Word and  
 sacraments. All the rest are equal if you take away the  
 ceremonies and human position)" (WA, Briefwechsel, 1:595; trans.  
 mine). This is about a full six months before the renowned  
 "Address to the German Nobility" as Schwiebert observes (Luther  
and His Times, p. 447). Luther's first sermonic reference to the  
 universal priesthood is in his "Long Sermon on Usury" (Sermon on  
 dem Wucher, WA, 6:33-60) which "wiped out with one stroke any  
 special merit in the work of a regular or secular clergyman"  
 (p. 451). For the early formulation and sources of the doctrine,  
 see Wilhelm Brunotte, Das geiiliche Amt bei Luther (The Holy  
 Ministry According to Luther; Berlin, 1959), pp. 134-37.

13  
 For instance, the doctrine of universal priesthood is  
 treated at length in his eight sermons (1535) on Psalm 110 (WA,  
 41:79-239; LW, 13:227-348).



second generation Reformers, Luther had to blaze the trail in the Reformation and met the challenge of some of the finest papal polemicists such as Eck and Emser, virtually single-handedly. Later he opened another battle-front with the enthusiasts many of whom were his former colleagues. The fact that his formulation of the doctrine of universal priesthood was hammered out in two battle-fronts of Roman Catholicism and Enthusiasm gives us both the center and circumference of the doctrine in good balance.

Thirdly, and the most significant of all with reference to the purpose of our study, Luther's development of the universal priesthood is closely related to his theology of the Word--in fact we may venture to say, a corollary to the latter. The Word not only constitutes the church as it engenders faith among the hearers, it also comes before the Spirit. The external, visible means takes precedence over the internal, invisible operation of the Spirit in one's heart. That calls for the validity and legitimacy of the ministerial office.

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the Augsburg Confession was attributed by Schwiebert to the "atmosphere of strain and uncertainty and the constantly shifting tides of political circumstance which surrounded its composers" (Luther and His Times, p. 728). On the other hand, Werner Elert suggests that it was rather a personal conviction on the part of Melancthon. "For him the idea of the universal priesthood had only a minor significance" ([ET] The Structure of Lutheranism, 1, trans. Walter A. Hansen [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962], p. 342). But he did talk about the priesthood of believers in the Loci of 1521: "We are priests because we offer ourselves to God and because we importune forgiveness of our sins" (Wilhelm Pauck, Melancthon and Bucer, LCC, vol. 19 [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969], p. 147). Carl Meyer observes that he also granted the right of congregations to call their pastors (Robert Stupperisch, Melancthon's Werke in Auswahl [Guttersloh, 1951-], 1:201-3, cited in Meyer, "Apostolicity and Ministry: A Lutheran View," CTM 43 [1972]:80).

On the other hand, akin to the enthusiasts of the Reformation era, Nee stresses the primacy of inner light, personal sanctification and spiritual aptitude of the preacher. Any Christian may come forth and speak in the Christian assembly if he is so moved by the Spirit albeit a layman, even though that kind of 'Liturgy of the Holy Ghost' had been on the decline early in the beginning of second century.

The repristination of the New Testament church leads Nee to the belief that all historical processes are relative. As a matter of fact, the advocacy of the priesthood of all believers

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Nee confines the meeting as a church to the 1 Corinthian 14 type of mutual edification. The meeting of preaching by a preacher alone is 'apostolic' type which is geared to evangelism for the non-believers or in-depth teaching by external apostles to the local churches (Kung-tso ti tsai-szu [Rethinking the Work; Taipie: Gospel Book Room, 1981], pp. 306ff.; trans. The Church and the Work, 3 vols., vol.2: Rethinking the Work (CFP, 1982), pp. 219ff. The apostles have no official relation with any local churches. The spiritual oversight of the local church is exclusively in the hands of the lay elders. However, the full-times workers--the apostles are usually received and respected because of their spiritual authorities which are demonstrated by the fruits of their work. We will come back for an analysis of this peculiar polity in Part Two.

17

Henceforth, it would be an exceptional and isolated instances (L. Duchesne, [ET] Christian Worship: Its Origin and Evolution. A Study of the Latin Liturgy up to the Time of Charlemagne, trans. M. L. McClure from the 3d ed. Origenes du Culte Chretien [London: SPCK, 1903], p. 48f.

18

Pelikan attributes the cordial reception of the sect type (the dualism of the ecclesiastic model of the 'Christian Society'--church and sect) on the part of Troeltsch to his historical relativism (Obedient Rebels: Catholic Substance and Protestance Principle in Luther's Reformation [New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1964], p. 38). See Troeltsch, ibid., 2:691ff. The definition of Church and Sect is concisely given on 2:461.

19

seems to serve as the catchword for his view of history. Like all sectarians and enthusiasts, the external, created world are not taken seriously. The ministerial office is thought of as the product of human organisation and falls short of the example of the pristine church. The Word as the Spirit of God can only be mediated to the spirit of man (not external, visible means; not even the soul) when his soul is utterly 'broken,' making a free passage through which man may begin to grasp the message of the Scripture--sort of communicatio idiomatum.

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Therefore Luther's understanding of the priesthood of all believers will provide us a good paradigm in approaching Nee. We begin with the theology of the Word as it relates to Luther's conception of the priesthood of Christ, then we proceed to examine the authority of the universal priesthood and the

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It should be noted that Nee's Lesson (catechical lecture) on the priesthood of all believers: 'The Ministry of Priesthood' (BLST, 2:883-896; CFP, 6:175-91) is actually a comprehensive overview of history from creation to millennium. The ordinance of priesthood even extends to eternity in reality (though not in name) after the millennium because the essence of priesthood is to serve God whole-heartedly. The priesthood accorded to Israel was lost owing to their lapse--or being the priests or servants of golden calf rather than God. The institution of the Levitical priesthood was the preemption of the universal priesthood, and far from the design of God. However, the priesthood was restored to the church in the New Testament time. What was lost by the Israelites was recaptured by the church. There should be no more 'mediatorial class' standing between the people of God and God himself. Every Christian is called to be priest whose vocation is to be his servants for ever. We will come back for an analysis in the light of his overall theology and his historical context in Part Two.

20

This is the theme of his The Release of the Spirit (Cloverdale, IN: Sure Foundation, 1965), which narrates the steps for the reaching 'brokenness'--a capsule of his three vols. Spiritual Man (see chapter VI note 4).

validity of the ministerial office.

The Universal Priesthood and the Theology of the Word

The primacy of the Word

Luther's understanding of the priesthood of all believers is closely related to his theology of the Word which is fundamental to all his theological motifs such as the justification by faith<sup>21</sup> and theology of the cross.<sup>22</sup> It is the Word that promises that man is justified by grace through faith. It is the Word that deludes the wise men of the world and renders the theology of glory too presumptuous. Away from the Word, a medieval theologian sees what he has comprehended (intellecta conspicit) but finds no Christ. But in faith, a simple Christian comprehends what he has seen (conspecta intelligit) in the Word bearing witness to the suffering Christ and finds the salvation

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"Never imagine you have rightly grasped a Lutheran idea until you have succeeded in reducing it to a simple corollary of the forgiveness of sins" (Watson, Let God be God, p. 6f.). Vilmos Vajta contends that 'justification by faith' is basic to Luther's theology of worship rather than conducive to his liturgical indifference as some scholars suggest ([ET] Luther on Worship, trans. and condensed by U. S. Leupold [Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958], p. xi). The justification motif is considered a continuity and development rather than a break with late medieval theology in recent Reformation studies. See Heiko Oberman, The Harvest of Medieval Theology. Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1963; reprint ed., Durham, NC: Labyrinth, 1983), pp. 146ff. Idem, Forerunners of Reformation. The Shape of Late Medieval Thought (1966; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), pp. 123-203.

22

Walter von Loewenich is a strong advocate of this view. See his (ET) Luther's Theology of the Cross, trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1967). Also see John Dillenberger, God Hidden and Revealed (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1953).

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of God. The God of grace is hidden in His Word and can only be  
24  
found through faith.

The Word is the arbiter of all traditions and the teachings  
25  
of the church. It is the Word that did all the work of  
26  
Reformation. And Luther would rather have all his writings  
obliterated should they hinder people from reading the  
27  
Scripture. Hermann Sasse aptly observes: "The entire

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Heidelberg Disputation (1518), theses 19ff. (WA, 1:353-74; LW, 31:52ff.). See Lennart Pinomaa, (ET) Faith Victorious: An Introduction to Luther's Theology, trans. Walter J. Kukkonen (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963), pp. 1ff.

24  
Without faith, the Word becomes the Law of demand, thus condemnation; with faith the same Word becomes the Gospel of gift, thus salvation. The renowned dialectic of Law and Gospel does not pertain to specific parts of the Bible but the different stances or viewpoints--faithless or having faith. See Pinomaa, ibid., p. 104; Regin Prenter, (ET) Spiritus Creator, trans. John M. Jensen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1953), p. 115; Gerhard Ebeling, (ET) Luther. An Introduction to His Thought, trans. R. A. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), p.104. This dialectic was Pauline in origin but Luther applies it beyond the contrast of two covenants; it became a general hermeneutic principle (Ebeling, p. 100f.).

25  
The primacy of the Word does not mean the negation of all traditions but constantly comparing them with the Bible. This is the meaning of ecclesia reformata semper reformanda. See Emile G. Leonard, A History of Protestantism. 1: The Reformation, trans. Joyce M. H. Reid, ed. H. H. Rowley (London: Thomas Nelson, 1965), p. xiif.

26  
"Ich bin dem ablas und allen papisten entgegen, aber mit keiner gewalt, ich hab allein gottes wort getrieben, geprediget und geschrieben, sonst hab ich nichts gethan . . . das wort hatt es alles gehandelt und autzgericht (I opposed indulgences and all the papists, but never with force. I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing . . . the Word did everything)" (The Second Sermon, March 10, 1522, Monday after Invocavit, WA, 10/3:18.13-19.2f.; LW, 51:77).

27  
Preface to the Wittenberg Edition of Luther's German Writings, 1539, WA, 50:657f.; LW, 34:283f.

Reformation was for Luther, as far as he was concerned nothing but the consequence of this faithful teaching of the Scriptures." <sup>28</sup>

In fact, the centrality of the Word epitomises the theological approach of all the Reformers in marked contrast to the preceding scholastic theology. <sup>29</sup> This different approach is clearly seen from the different conceptions about the priesthood of Christ. For medieval Catholicism, the priesthood of Christ was mainly sacrificial and exercised through the sacerdotal priesthood acting as his vicar on earth. For Luther, Christ's priesthood was involved in the proclamation of the Word or the gospel of God which was shared by all bearers of the royal priesthood. Therefore we may say that the restoration of the Word is the restoration of the priesthood of all believers which is as true as the demise of the Word precipitates its decline (see our conclusion for the foregoing chapter).

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"Luther and the Word of God," in Accents in Luther's Theology. Essays in Commemoration of the 450th Anniversary of the Reformation, ed. Heino O. Kadai (St. Louis and London: Concordia Publishing House, 1967 [hereafter Accents]), p. 51. John Headley calls the Word "constitutes the core of Luther's theology" (Luther's View of Church History [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963], p. 19). Th. Engelder stresses the sole dependence on the Word throughout his Reformation career. See "Luther the Reformer," CTM 17 (1946):13-20. Luther implemented the preeminence of the Word in the parish of Wittenberg: Three expositions from Old Testament, Epistle and the Gospel on Sunday; catechism was for Monday and Tuesday; Gospel again on Wednesday and Saturday; Thursday and Friday were reserved for the Epistles. See Carl Walter Berner, "The Word Principle in Martin Luther," CTM 19 (1948):21.

29

Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Historical Theology. An Introduction (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), p. 210. For the succinct views of respective Reformers see pp. 210-28.

The priesthood of Christ and the ministry  
of the Word

The medieval sacerdotal priesthood

The medieval church understood Christ's priesthood as  
30  
predominantly sacrificial. A Tridentine decree states:

. . . though He was by his death about to offer Himself once upon the altar of the cross . . . nevertheless, that His priesthood might not come to an end with His death, at the last supper, on the night He was betrayed, that He might leave to His beloved spouse the Church a visible sacrifice, such as the nature of man requires, whereby that bloody sacrifice once to be accomplished on the cross might be represented . . . and its solutary effects applied to the remission of those sins which we daily commit. . . .  
(Session 22,1).

Christ came to sacrifice himself for the world and bequeathed to the church that sacrifice to be performed perpetually. That was all concerning his priesthood. The prophetic aspect was totally ignored.

For the administration of the benefits of that sacrifice, a priesthood was instituted by Christ in the persons of the Apostles and their successors. The sacerdotal emphasis of their priestly responsibility was shown by the conduct of ordination--a progressive one recapitulating those of the Apostles: 1. The imposition of hand (chosen for the Apostolate); 2. 'tradition of instruments' in which the chalice was handed to the ordinand

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". . . etsi semel se ipsum in ara crucis morte . . . quia tamen per mortem sacerdotium ejus extinguendum non erat, in coena novissima, qua nocte tradebatur, ut dilectae sponsae suae ecclesiae visibile, sicut hominum natura exigit, relinqueret sacrificium, quo cruentum illud semel in cruce peragendum repraesentaretur . . . atque illius salutaris virtus in remissionem eorum, quae a nobis quotidie committuntur. . . ."  
( H. J. Schroeder, Canons and Decrees of the Councils of Trent. Original Text with English Translation (St. Louis: Herder Book, 1941), p. 417f.; trans. p. 144.

(receiving the power of consecration at the night of betrayal);

3. Second imposition of hands (receiving power of absolution  
31 after resurrection). 32 Another Tridentine canon stipulates:

Sacrifice and priesthood are by the ordinance of God so united that both have existed in every law. Since therefore in the New Testament the Catholic Church has received from the institution of Christ the holy, visible sacrifice of the Eucharist, it must also be confessed that there is in that Church a new, visible and external priesthood, into which the old has been translate.

The Levitical priesthood of the Old Dispensation was transposed to the New Israel. Like their antecedents the priests separated themselves from the people. They enjoyed a sacramental status--  
character indelibilis--because of their proximity to the  
33 Sacrament (Eucharist). Angels revere them. Even Mary, the  
34 mother of God is contemplated as inferior to them.

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31

John Bligh, Ordination to the Priesthood (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1956), p. 27.

32

Session 23,1: "Sacrificum et sacerdotium ita Dei ordinatione conjuncta sunt, et utrumque in omni lege exstiterit. Cum igitur in novo testamento sanctum Eucharistiae sacrificium visibile ex Domini institutione catholica ecclesia acceperit, fateri etiam portet, in ea novum esse visibile et externum sacerdotium, in quod vetus translatum est" (Schroeder, p. 432; trans. p. 160).

33

"Atque missas suas (quae summa est perversitas) cui sacrificium offerat . . . quale est sacramentum, tales et habeat sacerdotes (And the mass, by an extreme perversity, is offered as if it were a sacrifice. . . . The result is that this sacrament and those priests stand on the same level)" (On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church, 1520, WA, 6:565.4-9; tran. Bertram Lee Woolf, Reformation Writings of Martin Luther, 2 vols., translated with introduction and notes [New York: The Philosophical Library, 1963-56], 1:315).

34

In a pastoral letter of 1905, the archbishop Katschthaler of Salzburg remarks: "Mary once brought the holy Child into the world. But lo the priest does this not once but hundreds and thousands of times, as often as he celebrates Mass. There in the stable the holy Child that was given to the world through Mary

The priesthood as the ministry of the Word

On the other hand, Luther had a different view with regard to the priesthood of Christ which was chiefly concerned with the Word. This prophetic accentuation of the priesthood was bespoken by the central role the sermon played in the Eucharist. It was Christ the priest exercising his priesthood through the sermon. Luther identified the anamnesis with the sermon because the remembrance was also part of God's continual redemptive work, not our work for God. He wrote:

we observe in this Sacrament the remembrance of His covenant. . . . It is not our institution or work but His alone; and He performs it through us and in us. The psalmist is not speaking of an inward remembrance in the heart but of a public and expressed remembrance, of which Christ says (1 Cor. 11:24): "Do this in remembrance of Me." This takes place through preaching and the Word of God.

The preaching of the Word itself was the means of grace.

The Word was no longer just the 'prevenient grace' preparing one

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was small, susceptible to suffering and death. Here on the altar, under the hands of the priest, it was Christ in his majesty, immune to suffering and death, as he sits in heaven at the right hand of the Father, gloriously triumphant, perfect in every respect" (Carl Mirt, Quellen zur Geschichte des Papsttums, 3d, p. 104, cited in Karl Holl, [ET] What Did Luther Understand by Religion?, trans. F. W. Meuser, W. Wietzke and ed. James Luther Adams, Walter F. Bense from the essay "Was verstand Luther unter Religion?" in Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte, 1:1-100 [7th ed.; Tübingen, 1948] [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977], p. 22).

35

". . . hielt man inn diesem sacrament das gedechtnis seines bunds. . . . Denn es nicht unser stiftt noch werck, sondern sein allein ist, Und er thuts durch und inn uns. Denn es redet vom heimlichen gedechtnis im herssen sondern von dem offentlichen mundlichen gedechtnis, darin christus sagt: 'Sloches thut zu meinem gedechtnis. Welchs geschicht durch die predigt und wort Gottes" (Psalm 111, 1530, WA, 31/1:417; LW, 13:377). For the relation between the sermon and the Sacrament, see Vajta, Luther on Worship, pp. 82f.

for the Sacrament. It became a divine message of love to man. The Word recounted the past and demanded a present response. Both were the priestly work of Christ, past and present. In fact, the mass was basically a testament--a promise; and the elements were the signs forming the sacrament. Theoretically speaking a testament could exist without the sign. The promise itself was sufficient: "Since a greater power resides in a word than in a sign, so more power resides in a testament than in a sacrament; for a man may have, and use, a word or testament without a sign or sacrament."<sup>37</sup>

If the Sacrament was subservient to the Word, much more were the priests who administered the Sacrament. They were merely the ministers of the Word.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, ordination as a sacrament, which separated the clergy from the laity, was only a later aberration without any primitive patristic witness except

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Gustaf Aulen, Reformation and Catholicity, trans. Eric M. Wahlstrom (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), p. 322f. Medieval concept of grace was an infused, transforming power bestowed on man through sacraments, but for Luther, grace was favor dei, confronting man through God's Word or Gospel (Gosta Hok, "Luther's Doctrine of the Ministry," Scottish Theological Journal 7 (1954):16.

37

"Atque ut maior vis sita est in verbo quam signo, ita maior in testamento quam sacramento, Quia potest homo verbum seu testamentum habere et eo" (WA, 6:518.17-9; Woolf, 1:240).

38

"Sacerdotes vero quos vocamus ministri sunt ex nobis electi, qui nostro nomine omnia faciant, et sacerdotium aliud nihil est quam ministerium (Those whom we call priests are really ministers of the word and chosen by us; they fulfil their entire office in our name. The priesthood is simply the ministry of the word)" (WA, 6:564.11-3; Woolf, 1:314). Those calling ordination a sacrament and the role of a priest as sacrificer "knew nothing of the church in its essence; nothing of the priesthood; of preaching of the word; or the sacraments" (WA, 6:564.11-3; Woolf, 1:315).

Dionysius (pseudonym of a fourth-century writer) who "showed hardly any signs of solid learning".<sup>39</sup> The job of a priest was to proclaim the Word which belonged to the whole church rather than holding sway over the laity by virtue of his sacerdotal authority.<sup>40</sup> That a priest was a minister of the Word was further expounded in his sermons on Psalm 110 (1535) where the priesthood of Christ was chiefly depicted in terms of his prophetic ministry.

#### The priesthood of Christ (Psalm 110, 1535)

Luther re-worked his favourite Psalm 110 into eight sermons in 1535 preached in May and June. From this psalm we have a comprehensive view of the priesthood of Christ, which is didactic rather than sacerdotal. In fact, Luther seemed to imply that Christ's sacrifice was subordinate to his prophetic ministry in the sense that Christ preached the promise of the Gospel which he fulfilled. His treatment of the nature of the priesthood of Melchizedek, and the scepter of the Priest-King confirmed this.

#### Nature of the priesthood

There were three priestly functions namely teaching or

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"Cum ferme nihil in eo sit solidae eruditionis" (WA, 6:562.4; Woolf, 1:311).

40

The tyranny of the mediatorial priesthood over the laity is most clearly seen by the infliction of interdict (See p. 101). Sohm cynically remarks: "There is only one Christian in the full sense of the word, namely the Pope, because he alone has immediate relationship to God and to His Word" (paraphrased by Harnack; Harnack, Constitution and Law, p. 185).

preaching of God's Word, sacrificing and interceding.<sup>41</sup> The Levitical priests never fulfilled the first, because they only preached about the Law and did not touch upon the promise of the Gospel. That inadequacy was temporarily made up by the ministry of the prophets and ultimately accomplished by Christ the High Priest.<sup>42</sup> Luther wrote:

. . . the priest did not fulfill the teaching office among the Jews as much as the prophets did. God especially raised them up and assigned to them the task of preaching the Law in accordance with its right use and purpose: to rebuke sin and to urge people to repentance. In addition, they enlarged upon the promise concerning Christ which was given to the patriarchs, and prophesied marvelously concerning His true priestly office.

As a matter of fact, the second (sacrifice) and the third (intercession) priestly functions sprang from the first--the preaching of God's Word or gospel. The gospel was Christ, the promise of God for sinners. Sacrifice and intercession were the types of the promise--one who sacrificed himself and interceded for men. When Christ came the external Aaronic priesthood was abrogated.<sup>43</sup> There was no more sacrifice. However, the priestly function of preaching the Word continued. "Although He has ascended to heaven and no longer preaches on earth in person, He

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41

WA, 41:183.18ff.; LW, 13:315.

42

". . . Lere ampt mehr durch Propheten denn durch die Priester bey inen ist ausgericht worden, Welche Gott sonderlich dazu erweckt und gegeben, das sie beide, des Gesetz predigt nach seinem rechten brauch und werck, Remlich, die Sunde zu straffen und zur Busse zu treiben gefuret und darneben die verheissung von Christo (den Vetern gegeben) weiter ausgestrichen und von seinen rechten Priesterhumb herrlich geweissagt" (WA, 41:186.23-30; LW, 13:317).

43

Ibid.

has not stopped speaking through the apostles and their  
<sup>44</sup>  
 successors."

Melchizedek the preacher

Melchizedek was an outstanding figure in Psalm 110. The Roman church made a case of his bringing bread and wine as the type of mass. Luther retorted that the elements were merely a  
<sup>45</sup>  
 festive meal for Abraham. After Jerome he considered Melchizedek the patriarch Shem. From there, he portrayed him as a  
<sup>46</sup>  
 faithful preacher of the Word, a true priest:

After his father Noah, from whom he had heard and received God's Word, he was without doubt the chief and true pope; and God's Word was transmitted by him to the other patriarchs, such as Abraham and Isaac. . . . No doubt God gave him such along life that through him the Word of God and the church might continue during those days.

Note that Luther did not ascribe any sacerdotal significance to 'the priest of the Most High.' His priestly honour was to propagate the Word received from the ancient fathers.

The scepter of the Priest-King

The scepter was the visible, outward sign of the kingdom of the Messianic King which was the preaching of the Word. He wrote:

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<sup>44</sup>

WA, 41:196; LW, 13:324.

<sup>45</sup>

See his commentary on Genesis 14:18, WA, 42:538ff.; LW, 2:385ff.

<sup>46</sup>

"Nach seinem Vater Noah, von dem er Gottes wort gehoret und empfangen, der Oberst und rechter Papst gewesen und Gottes wort durch in zu den andern Vetern (als beide, zu Abraham und Isaac) geschehen. . . . Und on zweivel darumb auch im so langes leben von Gott gegeben ist, das durch in Gottes wort und die Kirche zu der zeit erhalten wurde" (WA, 41:177.12-7; LW, 13:310f.).

" . . . this scepter is nothing else than the office of the public ministry, which the Lord Christ began Himself and later on commanded to be extended by His messengers, the spostles and their successors, and to be continued until the Last Day." The power of the kingdom of the Priest-King is the spoken word "sounding forth among the people about this king and thus entering their hearts so that He may be known and accepted." 47

### Conclusion

It suffices from the foregoing to conclude that the priesthood of Christ is mainly expressed by His proclamation of the Word as the promise of God which He fulfilled. On the other hand the preached Word amplifies Christ. The incarnate Word is distributed through the Word-in-use. 48 Whoever has the Word has Christ, and participates also in His priestly dignity.49 This

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47

" . . . ist dieser Scepter nichts anders denn das offentliche Predigamt, so der Herr Christus selbs angefangen und hernach durch seine Botenm die Apostel und ire nachkomen immer weiter auszubreiten befohlen hat bis au den Jungsten tag"; "das es von diesem konig unter die leute erschalle und also ubb die hertzen kome, das er erkand und angenomen werde" (WA, 41:123.34-7; 124.10-2; LW, 13:265f.). Note that the preaching of the Word, the proper ministry of the priesthood of Christ, is delegated to both the ministerial office and the bearers of the universal priesthood. This gives rise to the delegation and institution theories of the ministerial office which we would discussion in a later section. And the ministry of the priesthood (Christ's, universal, ministerial) is basically the ministry of the Word.

48

Thomas G. Wilkens, "Ministry, Vocation and Ordination: Some Perspectives from Luther," The Lutheran Quarterly 20 (1977):66.

49

On the other hand, as a result of understanding Christ's priesthood mainly as sacrificial, Roman Catholicism exalts the hierarchy whose existence is to continue the acta et passa Christi (Thomas, Summa Theo., 3, prol.). Congar said: "By God's institution the role of the hieracrcy is to bring us the fullness

is the substance of the priesthood of believers.

### The Authority of the Universal Priesthood

The authority of the universal priesthood comes from the possession of the Word which confers upon the Christians threefold rights and responsibilities: 1. Having direct access to the Word, Christians can stand before God as priests without any mediator except Christ; all have the same standing before God. 2. As priests of God Christians receive the right of intercession and substitution on behalf of the brethren and the world. 3. They have the priestly responsibility to propagate the Word which they have received.

### The Authority of Standing before God

To postulate the universal priesthood of believers as an

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of the Pascha, of the Incarnation; the role of the faithful thus quickened by Christ is to spread this quickening in the world" (Lay People, p. 108). Though the Christians are called priests but in a categorically different sense from the sacerdotal priests. The hierarchical priests pertain to the power of Christ serving as mediators from whom the faithful are engendered (the royal priests) via sacraments. The royal priests pertain to a form of life through which the world is drawn to Christ (p. 111).

50

These three strands bespeak the expression of the priesthood with reference to God, to other people and to the Word respectively. Wilhelm Brunotte suggests four emphases: 1. Equal standing before God by baptism through faith. 2. No mediator but Christ and has access to the Word. 3. The office of sacrifice in terms of dedication to the praise and obedience of God, and bear the cross. 4. To propagate the gospel one has received. See (Das geistliche Amt bei Luther [Berlin, 1959], pp. 137ff.). These have been summarised by Gordon Rupp in Neil and Weber, eds., The Layman in the Church, p. 139. Our arrangement is to stress the corporate dimension which Paul Althaus forcefully contends: "The church is founded on the priesthood of Christ. Its inner structure is the priesthood for each other" (The Theology of Martin Luther, trans. Robert C. Schultz from 2d ed. of Die Theologie Martin Luthers [Gutersloh, 1963] [Philadelphia:

antithesis over against the particular priesthood was never the intention of Luther. As Lindsay points out, to Luther, the germ of the doctrine was up in his mind long before the showdown with Rome as the result of his long, lonely and earnest search for justification before God. Luther tried to explain this experience (justification by faith) in old phraseology but failed. It was the circumstantial polemic with Rome that "forced itself upon him and compelled him to test it."<sup>51</sup> The priesthood of believers depicts the fact that faith alone enables man to stand coram Deo (like a priest); all other merits, mediation, are of no avail.

The medieval sacerdotal priests not only separated themselves from the people but also were able to alienate them from God by withholding the sacraments. As in the case of an interdict, by a stroke of pen, so it was believed, the Pope could prevent the whole nation from approaching God: the babies were denied baptism, dying men extreme unction, young people

Fortress, 1966], p. 313f.).

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51

Lindsay, History of Reformation, 1:437; see pp. 435ff. Early in his Dictata on the Psalms (1513-15) Luther already contemplated the church as successione fidelium: "Quia ecclesia semper nascitur et semper mutatur in successione fidelium, alia et alia et tamen semper eadem (The church is perpetually born of believers; yet the church is always the same)" (WA, 4:169.30-3, trans. Wilhem Pauck, Heritage of Reformation, p. 39). The polemical use of the terms priest and priesthood is analysed by George W. Hoyer's article "Christianhood, Priesthood, and Brotherhood," in Accents, pp. 148-98. The study concentrates on Luther's three Reformation treatises. He concludes that Luther did not really exegete the pertinent verses but made use of the semantic similarity of the words for polemical purpose.

matrimony, penitents absolution.

But now with the royal priesthood appropriated through faith by baptism, every Christian can boldly stand before God without any human mediation. Coram Deo all are equal. "There is neither priest nor layman, canon or vicar, rich nor poor, Benedictine, Carthusian, Friar Minor, or Augustinian." Our faith in the Word consecrated us priests:

. . . the Holy Spirit teaches us that ointment, consecration, tonsures . . . do not make priests or give power. Rather, priesthood and power have to be there first, brought from baptism and common to all Christians through the faith which builds them upon Christ. . . .54

. . . all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them except that of office. . . . because all have one baptism, one gospel, one faith and are all Christians alike; for baptism, gospel, and faith alone make us spiritual and a Christian people.55

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52

Lindsay, History of Reformation, 1:440.

53

Lectures on Galatians, 1516-17 (gloss on 3:28), WA, 57:28.15; as cited in Gordon Rupp, The Righteousness of God. Luther Studies (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), p. 200.

54". . . der heylig geyst unss leret, das nit ole, weyhen platten. . . priester meche und gewallt gebe, bondern priesterschafft unnd macht muss tzuvor da seyn, auss der tauffe mitt bracht, alle Christen gemeyn durch den alawben, der sie bawet auff Christum. . . ." (Dr. Luther's Retraction of the Error Forced Upon Him by the Most Highly Learned Priest of God, Sir Jerome Emser, Vicar in Meissen, 1521, WA, 8:253.24ff.; LW, 39:236f.).

55

To the Christian Nobility, 1520: ". . . alle Christen sein warhafftig geystlichs stands, unnd ist unter yhn kein unterschend, denn des ampts halben allein, . . . das wir eine tauff, ein Evangelium, eynen glauben haben, unnd sein gleyche Christen, den die tauff, Evangelium und glauben, die machen allein geistlich und Christen volk" (WA, 6:407.13-9; LW, 44:127). Note the characteristic juxtaposition of priest, baptism and Christian, which according to Storck, refers to "the sole basis of the universal priesthood (which) is being defined by the Word of God, namely 'priest, the baptised and Christian, all one thing'" (ist das Bestimmtwerden vom Worte Gottes die alleinige Grundlage fur das allgemeine Priestertum. Es ist namlich 'alles

In the assembly, all Christians offer their prayers,  
 56  
 thanksgivings as sacrifices along with Christ. To have God is  
 57  
 to worship Him (Habere Deum est colere Deum). The prayers and  
 praises in the mass are in fact the "priestly action of Christ in  
 58  
 the faith of each believer." It is the expression of Christ's  
 unceasing priestly intercession before the Father permitting the  
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eyn ding, priester, getauffte, Christen') (Hans Stork, Das allge-  
 meine Priestertum bei Luther, Theologische Existenz Heute, Neue  
 Folge 37 [Munich, 1953], p. 19; the citation is from An  
 Exhortation to the Knights of the Teutonic Order, 1523, WA,  
 12:317.10; trans. mine).

56

Two passages from A Treatise on the New Testament, that  
 is the Holy Mass, 1520 may illustrate this: 1. "Was sollen wir  
 den opffern? Uns selv und allis was wir haben mit vleyssigem  
 gepeet, wie wir sagen 'dein will geschehe auff der erden als ym  
 hymel', Hie mit wir uns dargeben sollen gottlichem willen . . .  
 dartzu yhm lob und danck opffern auss gantzem hertzen (what  
 sacrifices, then, are we to offer? Ourselves and all that we  
 have, with constant prayer, as we say, 'Thy will be done, on  
 earth as it is in heaven.' With this we are to yield ourselves  
 to the will of God . . . In addition we are to offer him praise  
 and thanksgiving with our whole heart)" (WA, 6:368.5-9; LW,  
 35:98). 2. "So wirts klar, das nit allein der priester die mess  
 opffert, ssonder eynis yglichen solch eygener glaub, der ist das  
 rechtt priesterlich ampt, durch wilchs Christus wirt fur gott  
 geopfert, . . . und sein also alsampt gleych geystliche priester  
 fur gott ("It becomes clear that it is not the priest alone who  
 offers the mass, but the faith of each believer. It is this  
 faith that constitutes true priestly office by which Christ is  
 sacrificed before God, . . . and we are then also spiritual  
 priests before God)" (WA, 6:370.7-10; trans. Lienhard, Luther:  
 Witness to Jesus Christ, p. 129)".

57

WA, Tischreden, 5:47.15, no. 5292. Based on this  
 concept, James Moffatt contends that Luther's idea about worship  
 stems from "a genuine response of man's soul to the living God"  
 ("Luther," in Nathaniel Michlem, ed., Christian Worship [1936;  
 reprint ed., London: Oxford University Press], p. 136). However,  
 some Lutheran liturgiologists such as Peter Brunner stress  
Gottesdienst (service of God) as subjective more than objective  
 genitive. He only gives about 17 pages (pp. 197-213) for the  
 chapter entitled "Worship as the Congregation's Service before  
 God," while 71 pages (pp. 126-979) is devoted to the chapter  
 "worship as a Service of God to the Congregation."

believer to respond to grace in approaching God.

#### The Authority of Intercession and Substitution

The Word as the promise of God's salvation sweeps away any mediators standing between one and God. As a consequence, it creates an authentic brotherhood. Every Christian can stand before God together with other believers without any mediation except Christ because they all are priests. This common possession of the royal priesthood recapture the personal dimension of communio sanctorum which was destroyed totally by  
59  
moralism in the medieval church. Furthermore, since this fellowship was of a priestly race, it is replenished with mutual intercession and substitution which highest expression is the willingness to bear the cross for one another, after the example of the High Priest.

#### Communion of saints

The medieval understanding of the communion of saints were predominantly either the participation of the holy things--the benefits of the sacrifice in the mass, or the participation of the merits of some 'super spiritual' Christians who separated themselves from the ordinary ones such as the monks. In both

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58

Lienhard, Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ, p. 130. Here we observe clearly that the universal priesthood is bound up with the priesthood of Christ, a feature unheeded in the early patristic writings.

59

See the penetrating discussion of Paul Althaus, The Theology of Luther, pp. 294-322; also his earlier work communio sanctorum: Die Gemeinde im lutherischen Kirchengedanken (Munich, 1929).

cases, the word saints was used as objective genitive and was a neuter noun. The merit-recipients thus only related to other Christians out of their selfish pursuit of salvation. On the other hand those Christians who were able (so to speak) to bestow merits to the treasury of the church might form a special class and act as mediators for the others. <sup>60</sup> Any act of love was

considered sort of merit. There were hardly any genuine fellowship in the biblical sense. But now because all Christians are made priests in their common possession of the Word, whenever one one sings the Psalter, the whole Christian church sing with

him. <sup>61</sup> As one passes the valley of death, the entire church

accompanies him. <sup>62</sup> The Christians are one body: "As the grains

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60

Althaus, Theology of Luther, p. 303.

61

Preface to the Psalter, 1545 (1528): "Wenn einem solche wort gefallen und sich mit im reimen, Das er gewis wird, er sey im der Gemeinshaft der Heiligen, und hab allen Heiligen gegangen, wie es im gehet, weil sie ein Liedlin alle mit im singer. . . . die heiligen christlichen Kirch gemalet sehen mit lebendiger Farbe und gestalt, in einem kleinen Bilde gefasset, So nim der Psalter fur dich, so hastu einen seinen, hellen, reinen, Spiegel, der dir zeigen wird, was die Christenheit (When these words please a man and fit his case, he becomes sure that he is in the communion of saints, and that it has gone with all the saints as it goes with him, since they all sing one little song. . . . if you would see the holy Christian church painted in living color and shape, comprehend in one little picture, then take up the Psalter. There you have a fine, bright, pure mirror that will show you what Christendom is)" (WA, Deutsche Bibel, 10/1:103.27-105.9; LW, 35:256f.).

62

Fourteen Consolation, 1520: ". . . Scilicet nobis Christus noluit mortis viam esse solitariam, quam monis homo horret, sed comite tota Ecclesia viam passionis et mortis ingredimur (Christ does not want us to be alone on the road of death, from which all men shrink. Indeed we set out upon the road of suffering and death accompanied by the entire church) (WA, 6:132.13-5; LW, 42:163). Because of communion of saints, the cemetery is no longer a scare experience, it becomes "an honorable, almost a holy place, so that one could walk there with fear and all

of corn are milled they are blended with one another. None of it keeps its own flour, but it is mixed with that of others and is made of it." <sup>63</sup> Being a member of the body one has what each one <sup>64</sup> among the body obtains.

The substitutionary authority of the royal priesthood

The Word as the promise of God's salvation also liberates one from the anxiety of doing all he can in order to secure his eternal life. Now each Christian works for the welfare of others out of love. The sufficiency of the Word makes a Christian "a perfect free lord of all, subject to none." However, his love <sup>65</sup> makes him "a perfect dutiful servant of all, subject to all." A

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reverence, because doubtless some saints are lying there" (Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague, 1527, WA, 23:375.31, as cited in Elert, Structure, p. 236f.).

<sup>63</sup>

"Die korner, die tzermalen werden, so sprengen sie sich ynn einander, deyns behelt mel bey yhm, sondern mengens ynn eynander, bis es syn ding wird" (WA, 12:488; trans. Pauck, Heritage, p. 32).

<sup>64</sup>

"It is enough for me as member of his body and have as many rights and as much honor as all others" (WA, 15:607; as cited in Althaus, Theology of Luther., p. 303, note 29). "Faith, hope, love, and other gifts and graces, which through love become the common property of all" (Fides, spes, charitas, aliaeque gratiae et dona, quae omnia communia fiunt per charitatem) (Fourteen Consolations, 1520, WA, 6:131.4-6; LW, 42:161).

<sup>65</sup>

Freedom of a Christian, 1520: "Chrastianus homo omnium dominus est liverrimus, nulli subiectus. Christianus homo omnium serus est officiosissimus, omnibus subiectus" (WA, 7:49; LW, 13:344). The treatise expounds the royalty and priesthood of Christians in terms of spiritual freedom which is characterised by servanthood or substitution (for others). See especially WA, 7:56ff., LW, 13:354ff. Cf. chapter III section on "the biblical concept of ministerial order." This freedom to serve others is expressed in Christian vocation. For literature on vocation see chapter IV note 115.

royal priest needs no one except Christ yet at the same time it exists for everyone for the sake of Christ. Such a notion of the priesthood comes from our 'joyous exchange' with Christ--the High Priest<sup>66</sup> who was the type of the whole external priesthood. In conformity to Christ Christians fulfill their priesthood in a spiritual way as the New Testament materialised the Old in an inward and spiritual way.<sup>67</sup>

Of this spiritual priesthood, the idea of substitution<sup>68</sup> comes to the fore:

Not holy are we the freest of kings, we are also priests forever, which is far more excellent than being kings, for as priests we are worthy to appear before God to pray for others . . . Christ has made it possible for us . . . (to be) his fellow-priests. . . . pray for one another, and do all things which we see done and foreshadowed in the outer and visible words of priests (Freedom of A Christian, 1520):

Out of genuine faith and love, Christians exercise the royal

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"Quemadmodum autem Christus priogenitura sua has duas dignitates obtinuit, ita impartit et comunas easdem facit cuilibet suo fidei matrimonii praedicti iure, quo sponsae sunt quaecunque sponsi sunt. Hinc omnes in Christo sumus sacerdotes et reges (Now just as Christ by his birthright obtained these two prerogatives [the kingship and priesthood], so he imparts them to and shares them with everyone who believes in him according to the law of the above-mentioned marriage, according to which the wife owns whatever belongs to the husband)" (WA, 7:56.35-8; LW, 13:354).

67

Even Christ's kingdom and priesthood are inward and spiritual and only revealed to those who have faith: "Ita nec sacerdotium eius consistit in vestium gestuumque pompa externa, quale fuit humanum illud Aaronis et nostrum hodie Ecclesiasticum sacerdotem, sed in spiritualibus, per quae in coelis invisibili officio pro nobis apud deum, ibique se ipsum offert et omnia facit, quae sacerdotem facere portet (Nor does his priesthood consist in the outer splendor of robes and postures like those of the human priesthood of Aaron and our present-day church; but it consists of spiritual things through which he by an invisible service intercedes for us in heaven and does all things a priest should do) (The Freedom of a Christian, 1520, WA, 7:56.26-30; LW, 13:354). Typological understanding (thus inward, spirit-

priestly responsibility in mutual conversation and consolation

69

for one another. They also administer absolution to fellow Christians who make confessions to them in the name of Christ. People receiving the words of absolution should take note that "what they are doing, Christ is doing (quando ipsi faciunt,

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Christ fecit)." The Christian priests "do not want to go to heaven alone but rather wish to bring along the most sinful

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 ual, pertains to faith) is basic to Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers (Hok, ibid., 22ff.). L. W. Spitz makes use of the same typological approach to explicate the priesthood of believers and draws rich spiritual ramification from the patriarchal priest (Abraham) and the external Old Testament priesthood. See "The Universal Priesthood of Believers," in The Abiding Word, 1:321-41; idem, "The Universal Priesthood of Believers with Luther's Comments".

68

"Nec solum reges omnium liberrimi, sed sacerdotes quoque sumus inaeternum, quod longe regno excellentius, quod per sacerdotium digni sumus coram deo apparere, pro aliis orare . . . Ita Christus nobis obtinuit, . . . alter pro altero orare et omnia facere, quae videmus visibili et corporali officio sacerdotum geri et figurari" (WA, 7:57.24-33; LW, 31:355). Cf. WA, 7:57.24ff.; LW, 31:355; Althaus, Theology of Luther, p. 314, note 86.

69

Smalcald Articles 4, WA, 50:241; Theodore G. Tappert, trans. and ed., The Book of Concord (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), p. 310.

70

A sermon preached on April 23, 1536, WA, 41:546, trans. Paul D. L. Avis, The Church in the Theology of the Reformers (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1981), p. 101. The authority of absolution on the part of laity comes from the common possession of the keys: "The ministry of the word belong to all. To bind and loose clearly is nothing else than to proclaim and to apply the gospel. For what is it to loose, if not to announce the forgiveness of sins before God? What is it to bind, except to withdraw the gospel and to declare the retention of sins? . . . The keys are an exercise of the ministry of the word and belong to all Christians" (Concerning the Ministry, 1523, WA, 12:169-95ff.; LW, 40:27f.). For the interpretation of the keys see Hok, art. cited, pp. 26-33.

people if they are able." <sup>71</sup> This selfless substitutionary <sup>72</sup>  
priesthood fulfills the law of Christ who died for sinners. It  
moves one even to the point of death; thus completes the priestly  
sacrifice of Christ. <sup>73</sup> Indeed this priesthood bespeaks the  
innermost being of the church. <sup>74</sup>

### The Authority to Propagate the Word

The possession of the Word obligates one to proclaim it to  
others. Commenting on the locus classius on the royal priesthood  
of believers (1 Peter 2), Luther wrote about the priestly office:

A priest must be God's messenger and must have a command from  
God to proclaim His Word. . . . And your preaching should be  
done in such a way that one brother proclaims the mighty deed  
of God to the other, how you have been delivered through Him  
from sin, hell, death, and all misfortune, and have been

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71

WA, 1:697 as cited in Althaus, Theology of Luther,  
p. 311.

72

"The cross also gives the church her inner spirit. The  
cross signifies the priesthood, substitution, participation.  
Therefore as regard to her inner composition, the church is  
nothing other than the priestly participation (Das Kreuz gibt der  
Kirch aber auch ihre innere Gestalt. Das Kreuz heisst  
Priestertum, Stellvertretung, Gemeinschaft. Daher ist die Kirche  
ihrer inneren Verfassung nach nichts anderes als priesterliche  
Gemeinschaft)" (Althaus, Communio Sanctorum, p. 42). For the  
relation of the priestly substitution or participation and the  
theology of the cross, see pp. 42-54.

73

Commenting on the holy adornment (the Word) of the  
people of God in Psalm 110:3: "Indeed, the world regards such  
divine and holy adornment as a stench and filth. It must  
persecute His holy priests . . . just as it persecuted Christ the  
Lord. Thus, when Christians willingly sacrifice themselves to the  
point of death for the sake of Christ's honor, in accordance with  
the example which Christ as their Head and High Priest has given  
them, the true priestly sacrifice is completed in them" (Psalm  
110, 1535, WA, 41:157.21ff.; LW, 13:296f.).

74

"The church is founded on Christ's priesthood. Its inner  
structure is the priesthood of Christians for each other"  
(Althaus, Theology of Luther, p. 313f.).

called to eternal life, Thus you should also teach other people how they, too, come into such light.<sup>75</sup>

This ministry is not the public teaching in the church but should be conducted in wherever estates we find ourselves:

Even though not everybody has the public office and calling, every Christian has the right and the duty to teach, instruct, admonish, comfort, and rebuke his neighbor with the Word of God at every opportunity and whenever necessary. For example, father and mother should do this for their children and household; a brother, neighbor, citizen, or peasant for the other.<sup>76</sup>

In fact, sharing the Word for the salvation of others constitutes the highest order of Christians (ordo Christianae Vitae).<sup>77</sup> It is the will of God that He cooperates with Christians through whom "he preaches, show mercy to the poor, comforts the afflicted."<sup>78</sup> Such a ministry is designated the

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75

Sermon on 1 Peter, 1522: "Das gehoret eym priester zu, das er Gottis botte ist und von Gott befelch hatt, das er seyn wortt verkundige. . . . Und also soll ewer predigen gethan seyn, das eyn bruder dem andern die krefftige thatt Gottis verkundige, wie yhe von sund, hell und todt und allem ungluck durch yhn seyt erloset worden und zum ewigen lenen beruffen. Also sollt yhr ander leut auch unterrichten, wie sie auch zu solchem liecht komen" (WA, 12:318.25-32; LW, 30:64).

76

"Post hat ein iglicher Christ zu leren, etiamsi non est in officio, tamen sol ein iglicher Christ den andern lern, die heidenm vater, muter ire kinder und gesind, ein burger, bauer den andern" (WA, 41:212.24-213.1).

77

The proclamation of the gospel is the highest ordo christianae vitae. ". . . when the heart is inwardly justified and at peace through faith in the Spirit, then outward actions soon follow in various ways. First there is confession by the mouth to salvation (Rom. 10:10), and the Word is outwardly preached. . . ." (Deuteronomy 1-34, 1525, WA, 14:681.28-682.3; LW, 9:184f.). See Johannes Aagaard, "Missionary Theology," in The Lutheran Church Past and Present, ed. Vilmos Vajta (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1977), pp.206-12.

78

The Bondage of the Will, 1525: "(Sic per nos) praedicat, miseretur pauperibus, consolatus afflictos" (WA, 18:754.15f; LW, 33:243).

continuation of the mission of Christ on earth: "Christ established upon the earth a comforting and blessing kingdom when He said, 'As my Father hath sent me, so send I you.' He consecrated us all priests in order that one may proclaim to the other the forgiveness of sins."<sup>79</sup>

To summarize, for Luther, the Christian priesthood in essence pertains not only to an individual's direct access to God; it bespeaks of the spiritual reality of the communion of saints. More markedly it concerns the evangelical authority and responsibility to come before God on behalf of the brethren and the world. Indeed this corporate approach "overcame the individualism of the mystics and of Renaissance"<sup>80</sup>. All these are possible because of the internal operation of the Word in the heart of each Christian. It is the Word that constitutes the church into a corporate priesthood. It is the Word that brings the royal priests into conformity with the High Priest. In the next section, we will discuss the relation of the priesthood of believers and the ministerial office with special reference to the external operation of the Word.

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79

Church Postil, 1 st. Sunday after Easter, WA, 49:150, as cited in Uuras Saarnivaara, "The Church of Christ According to Luther," The Lutheran Quarterly (1953):143.

80

Holl, What Did Luther Understand By Religion?, p. 97. Holl sees that Luther's communal approach of religion is seen from his pronounced individualist vantage point: "Because he was so pronounced an individualist who based everything on the personal conscience, he was the principal advocate of the community concept in religion. No one saw more clearly than he the weaknesses and dangers of an exclusive individualism. It was he more than other who overcame the individualism of the mystics and of Renaissance "(p. 97).

The Validity of the Ministerial Office

The doctrine of the ministry is "a two-pronged doctrine" involving the universal priesthood and the ministerial office and their mutual relationship. <sup>81</sup> Our goal in this section is to account for (1) the necessity of the ministerial office and (2) its relation with the universal priesthood. We suggest that the necessity of the ministerial office comes from the external operation of the Word through which the Spirit works. The Word comes to man through external means which calls for a ministerial office as the internal, invisible operation of the Word constitutes the universal priesthood--the church.

The External Operation of the Word

The Word being the historical Jesus

As we have seen earlier the priesthood of Christ is to proclaim the Word. Reciprocally, the proclaimed Word magnifies <sup>82</sup> Christ. The Word assumes the place of the historical Jesus who was obscured by an immense system of mediation in the medieval church. Long before Luther, Scripture was already held in high

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81

Herman A. Preus, "Luther on Universal Priesthood," p. 55.

82

"Es hat fur Luther den Plass und die funktion Iesu Christi ubernommen. Das Wort ist der Christ praesens et vivens, der gegenwartige und lebendige Christus. . . . Dieses Geschehen verkundigt das Wort, das, weil es fur uns den Plass des historischen Iesus einnimmt, mit dessen gegenwartiger Wirksamkeit gleichgesetzt werden kann ([The Word] takes over for Luther the place and function of Jesus Christ. The Word is the present and living Christ, who is ever present and alive. . . . the Word proclaims these happenings, which assumes for us the place of the historical Jesus, is able to have the actual appointed efficacy)" Storck, Das allgemeine Priestertum bei Luther, pp. 7, 9; trans. mine).

honour as the Word of God. But it was Luther who first restored  
 83  
 the gospel to its due prominence in the Bible. Only after he  
 found justification by faith, he said that the Bible was open to  
 84  
 him. It was the subordination of sola scriptura to sola gratia  
 and sola fidei that led Luther assert the Book of James and the  
 85  
 like as 'hay, straw, wood,' because "to read Holy Writ without  
 86  
 faith in Christ is to walk in darkness."

### The Spoken Word

Being 'Christus praesens et vivens' (present and living  
 87  
 Christ) the Word also has divine and human dimensions which are  
 invisible and visible. The invisible, spiritual working of the  
 Word takes place when it is publicly, and visibly proclaimed. For

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 83

"To place Christ in the centre of the Bible, as totally  
 as Luther did, was previously unheard of" (Jan Willem Kooiman,  
 [ET] Luther and the Bible, trans. John Schmidt [Philadelphia:  
 Muhlenberg, 1961], p. 208). For the medieval attitude toward the  
 Bible see Beryl Smalley, The Study of the Bible in the Middle  
 Ages (Oxford, 1941). For a succinct discussion about the Christ-  
 centredness of the Bible, see A. Skevington Wood, Captive to the  
 Word: Martin Luther: Doctor of Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids:  
 Eerdmans, 1969), pp. 169-178; Kooiman, pp. 200-12.

84

Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin  
 Writings, 1545: "Hic me prosus reatum esse sensi, et apertis  
 portis in ipsam paradisum intrasse. Ibi continuo alia mihi facies  
 totius scripturae apparuit" (Here I felt that I was altogether  
 born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.  
 There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself  
 to me)" (WA, 54:186.8-10; LW, 34:337).

85

Spitz, "Luther's Sola Scriptura," CTM 31 (1960):724ff.  
 See also Elert, Structure of Lutheranism, pp. 189-91.

86

Genesis 45-50, 1535: "Legere autem sacras literas sine  
 fide christi, est ambulare in tenebris" (WA, 44:790.11f.; trans.  
 Spitz, "Luther's Sola Scriptura," p. 745).

87

See Storck, chapter IV note 48.

Luther, the Word always meant the proclaimed Word. "The church is building a Mundhaus (mouth or speech house)." Several reasons exist for the necessity of the spoken Word. In the first place, the language of the Scripture was a spoken language. As Sasse observes, the languages of the Middle Ages were basically meant to be spoken, not written. The Bible was intended not so much for private reading as for liturgical usage.

Second, the Word as a promise demands faith on the part of man and as such it presupposes the encounter with the oral Word. "The Gospel is simply a crying and preaching aloud of the Grace and compassion of God . . . and it is properly not that which lies in a book and is put down in letters, but much more the preaching through human lips the living word." It is the faith in positive response to God's Word that completes the promise.

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88

Adventspostille, 1522: "Darumb ist die kirch ein mundhawss, nit ein fedderhaus" (WA, 10/1, part 2, 48.5; trans. Pauck, "The Ministry in the Time of the Continental Reformation," in Ministry in Historical Perspective, p. 114.

89

Article cited in Accents, p. 84.

90

Foreword to 1 Peter, 1523: "Evangelion aber heysset nichts anders, denn ein predig und geschrey von der genad und barmhessikeytt Gottis, . . . Und ist eygentlich nicht das, das ynn buchern stehet und ynn buchstaben verfasset wirtt, sondernn mehr eyn mundliche predig und lebendig wortt" (WA, 12:259.8; trans. Rupp, Righteousness of God, p. 321). Rupp's translation is more vivid than LW, 30:3.

91

Babylonian Captivity of the Church, 1520: "Qyukbet enim facile intelligit, quod haec duo sunt simul necessaria, promissio et fides: sine promissione snim credi nihil potest, sine fide autem promissio inutilis est cum per fidem stabiliatur et impleatur (Promise and faith are necessarily yoked together. No one can believe if there is no promise. If there is no faith, a promise is useless, because faith is its counterpart and completion)" (WA, 6:517.8-10; Woolf, 1:238). Unlike the scholastic static concept of faith which was static as a quality

Faith and promise are like two hands being shaken. As a matter of fact, that God's Word was not proclaimed appeared as the leading of the great abuses of the medieval church.

Thirdly, the Word as the revelation of God is hidden from the world. It must be made alive by the Holy Spirit in proclamation which awakens the soul. Proclamation bridges the gap between the letter of past history and the Spirit of a present revelation.

"The glory and power of the kingdom of Christ is so

infused in the heart, even apart from Christ, it is dynamic in the sense that Christ continues to come, to fight, and to vanquish the adversaries. See Galatians 1-4, 1535, WA, 40/1:228; cf. Vatja, Luther on Worship, p. 8, note 19).

Eastwood, Priesthood of All Believers, p. 3. Cf. The three premises of George A. Lindbeck's article: 1. Justification is sola fidei. 2. Faith comes from the 'external' Word in preaching and sacraments. 3. Therefore the ministry of the Word is necessary ("The Lutheran Doctrine of the Ministry: Catholic and Reformed," Theological Studies 30 (1969): 593.

On Ordering of the Divine Service in the Congregation, 1523: "Drey grosse missbreuch sind ynn den gottis dienst gefallen. Der erst, das man gottis wort geschwygen hat, und alleyne gelesen und gesungen ynn den kirchen (Three great abyses have befallen the service God. First, God's Word is bit proclaimed; there is only reading and singing in the churches)" (WA, 12:35.10-12; trans. Pauck in Niehbuhr and William, eds., Ministry in Historical Perspective, p. 111. The ignorance of the Scripture on the part of the monks was deplorable. In 1526 Melanchthon, as a leading member of the Visitation Commission of electoral Saxony once asked a minister who happened to be a monk earlier whether he taught his parishioners about the Decalogue. The answer: "That book I have not yet been able to get" (p. 133). See the portrayal of the medieval bishops by John Wycliff: "The greater part of our prelate, having but little knowledge of divinity . . . are sometimes obligated to preach, are under a necessity of begging and borrowing the sermons of certain novices, who have invented a new way of preaching; in which there is neither sublimity of style, nor depth of wisdom, but much childish trifling and folly, unsuitable to the dignity of the pulpit" (Robert Vaughan, ed., Tracts and Treatises of John Wycliffe, D.D. [London: The Wycliffe Society, 1845], p. 81).

Here Luther utilises the Pauline dialectic of letter and

hidden that it cannot be recognised, if it is not revealed to the hearer through the word of preaching." <sup>95</sup> Once it has been properly read and interpreted it will freely authenticate itself and confirm to the audience about its message: "(The Word is) as by itself most certain and easily apprehendable, indeed, as its own interpreter." <sup>96</sup>

To summarize, the invisible Spirit works through the visible external Word. Regin Prenter remarks: "The Word as letter is law. . . . it places us alone on our own resources. As preaching, however, the Word is gospel. In the form of preaching it presents

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Spirit of the Old and New Dispensations, and applies it as a general hermeneutic principle. Time gives 'subtlety' to the letter, we need a living faith to appropriate its spirit: ". . . sicut creverunt tempora, ita et litera et spiritus. Nam quod illis tunc suffecit ad intellectum, nobis nunc est litera. spritus et paucis datus, nunc autem est liters, quia revelatus, nisi et nos addamus aliud, scilcet vivam fidem ipsius (. . . as the time increased, so also the letter and the spirit. For, what sufficed them for understanding then is now the letter to us. of Arius was spirit and given to few, but it is now the letter, because it has been revealed, unless we, too, add something, namely, a living faith in the Trinity)" (Dictata, 1513-1515, on Ps. 119:125, WA, 4:365.5-13; LW, 11:497). For a penetrating discussion of the letter and Spirit and Luther's hermeneutic progression, see Ebeling, Luther., pp. 93-109.

95

"Quia adeo abscondita est gloria regni Christi et potentia, ut nisi per verbum predicationis auditui manifestetur, non possit agnosci" (WA, 4:272.22-24, trans. Ebeling, Luther, p. 106).

96

"Ut sit ipsa per sese certissima, facillima, apertissima, sui ipsius interpret" (WA, 7:97; trans. Pauck, Heritage of Re-Formation, p. 40). Thus the inner light of any interpreters is rendered too presumptuous since the Word authenticates itself, not be authenticated by any inspired man. Furthermore, the requirement of proper interpretation excludes some from the public ministry because proper interpretation demands training. "It is however, true that the Holy Spirit has except women, children, and incompetent people from this function, but chooses (except emergencies) only competent males to fill this office" (On the Councils and the Church, 1539, WA, 50:633.12-14; LW, 41:154).

Christ to us as a gift. In the form of preaching the Word is a promise of the coming of the Spirit of God and his work in us." <sup>97</sup>

### The Ministerial Office

If the Word needs external, visible propagation before it works internally and invisibly in the hearts of men, it follows that a corresponding office is indispensable. In fact for Luther the centrality of the Word does not abandon any institutional ministry per se. It only alters the content of ministry. <sup>98</sup> As a writer suggests, the Word indeed becomes the Protestant equivalent of the Catholic episcopate with its final centralization in the Papacy. <sup>99</sup> The legitimacy and validity of the ministry are patent facts of Protestantism. But how does it relate to the priesthood of all believers?

### Interpretations of the origin of ministry

Ernst Troeltsch contends that the two are diametrically opposite entities. The objective institution of the ministry was a later reversion of Luther's former insistence on the spiritual

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Spiritus Creator, p. 115.

98

"The Roman Catholic ministry was to be supplanted by the Church's ministry of preaching" (Hok, art. cited, p. 21). Aulen remarks that since the preacher speaks on behalf of God to man it carries more weight than the Roman priest who come from us to God (Reformation and Catholicity, p. 362).

99

Berner, "Word Principle in Luther," p. 18. The Word now reigns as the Pope but this papacy is shared by all Christians since they all possess the Word. In the medieval time, only the Pope was thought to have access to the Word and his words became the Word. Sohm remarks: "There is only one Christian in the full sense of the word, namely, the Pope, because he alone has immediate relationship to God and to His Word" (paraphrased by Harnack, Constitution and Law, p. 185).

100  
 priesthood of all believers. Others maintain that they are not exclusive to each other yet at the same time not inter-related. The ministry is purely divine instituted, independent and anterior to the universal priesthood. 101 Some argue that the 'special ministry' derives itself from the universal priesthood in the sense that the Christians resign their rights to the office-bearers and the minister is held accountable to the congregation. 102 Still others hold the view that the ministry is

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"Luther was obligated to give up his idea of the Church which he had evolved solely from the standpoint of the priesthood of all and revert to the objective ministry of the Word, which was merely menaced, and not furthered, by handing over questions of organization and discipline to the local congregations (Social Teaching of the Christian Church, 2:592).

101

See Wilhelm Brunotte, Das geistliche Amt bei Luther. His conclusion after the examination of six documents makes the two distinctly separate. The office-bearers have the office instituted by God directly and nothing to do with the universal priesthood of the church and the authority of the Christians' proclamation of the Word is "individual and not expressive (im einzelnen nicht naher bezeichnete)" (p. 112). Also Hok, art. cited: "Ministry is a divine system independent of and preliminary to the universal priesthood, otherwise direct calling would be impossible" (p. 22). See his other essay: "Luther lara om kyrkans ambete," in En bok om kyrkans ambete (Uppsala, 1951), pp. 142-79.

102

It is the so called Übertragungslehre or delegation theory. See J. W. F. Heofling, Grundsätze evangelisch-lutherischer Kirchenverfassung (3d ed.; Erlangen, 1853). The ministry "that which acts on behalf of the community is the organ of the universal priesthood of believers, imbued with the omnipresence and omnipotence of Christ" (p. 234f., as cited in Edmund Schlink (ET) Theology of the Lutheran Confessions, trans. Paul F. Koehneke and Herbert J. A. Bouman from 3d of Theologie der lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften (Munich, 1948) (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), p. 244, note 13. More radical is Sohm who said that "From the church in the religious sense arises only that office which is 'common property of all Christians,' namely the 'ministerial office' that is inherent in the universal priesthood of every believer. This common office, untrammled by any constitutional provisions, exists 'jure divino,' that is, by virtue of the essence of Christianity. . . . the existence of

both divinely instituted and delegated from the universal  
priesthood. The irreconcilable tension is ever present. <sup>103</sup>

Much of the aforementioned confusion of the discussion stems from perceiving the ministry of the Word in the the church being carried out by two distinct vehicles, namely privately by the universal priesthood and publicly by the ministerial office. Actually, the fact of the matter is that "the church is a  
priesthood; but it has an ordained ministry." <sup>104</sup> The ministry  
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the public office in a properly constituted congregation, is a matter of indifference" (Kirchrecht 2:140f., as cited in Schlink, p. 245, note 14; cf. chapter III note 19; emphasis mine).

103

Gerrish, art. cited. He argues that both the delegation and institution theories are the "irreducible elements in Luther's statements on the ministry" (p. 420). Hellmut Lieberg also observes a subordinate strand of delegation theory in Luther. He contends that in the early writings (1520-1523) Luther had a strong accent on the delegation emphasis while the later years stressed more about the institution aspect (Amt und Ordination bei Luther und Melanchthon [Gottingen, 1962], p. 238). This development is overstressed by Lowell C. Green's "Changes in Luther's Doctrine of the Ministry," The Lutheran Quarterly 18 (1966):173-83 but rebuked by Robert H. Fisher, "Another Look at Luther's Doctrine of Ministry," Lutheran Quarterly 18 (1966): 260-71. Green said that the Reformation treatises pulled Luther out from his medieval concept of ministry and stress the universal priesthood which was held back by the tumults of the early twenties and the Peasant Revolt. The increasing emphasis on the authority of the ministers was aggravated in the Saxon Visitations (Green, p. 174f.). For a review of literatures see Brunotte, pp. 9-33. For the discussion of the delegation theory or Übertragungslehre, see Lieberg, pp. 69-103; critique see Schlink, Theology of Lutheran Confessions, pp. 241-47.

104

Robert H. Fischer, "Another Look at Luther's Doctrine of the Ministry," The Lutheran Quarterly 18 (1966):270. Cf. John Reumann, "Ordained Minister and Layman in Lutheranism," Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue 4: Eucharist and Ministry, ed. Paul C. Empie and T. Austin Murphy (Washington and New York: The U.S.A. National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation and the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Inter-religious Affairs, 1970), p. 232. Cf. "The priesthood means the congregation, and the communion of saints" (Althaus, Theology of Luther, p. 314).

exists in the church. But the priesthood is the church. The ministry is only an office (Amt), the public functioning of the rights enjoyed by all believers, not the exclusive prerogative of the ordained ministers. <sup>105</sup> This inference is attested by three observations: 1. Christians have Christ. 2. The call of the congregation is a prerequisite to ordination. 3. The congregation has the responsibility to discern pure doctrine.

### Ministry of the whole church

#### Christians have Christ

Christians have Christ. Thus they have the authority to do whatever Christ bequeathed to the church. "Now he who has faith and is a Christian also has Christ; now if he has Christ, so that everything Christ has is his, he also has the power to forgive sins." <sup>106</sup> Nevertheless, this does not follow that every Christian shares the ministry distributively. Rather he possesses it in the corporate sense as part of the community. <sup>107</sup>

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105

Concerning the Ministry, 1523: "Aliud enim est ius publice exequi, aliud (sic) iure in necessitate uti: publice exequi non licet, nisi consensu universitatis seu Ecclesiae. In necessitate utatur quicumque voluerit (For it is one thing to exercise a right publicly; another to use it in time of emergency. Publicly one may not exercise a right without consent of the whole body or of the church. In time of emergency each may use it as he deems best)" (WA, 12:189.25-7; LW, 40:34). The context is Luther's criticism about the Romanist misuse of the distinction of the power of the keys (pertains to the church) and the use of the keys (pertains to the clergy only) (WA, 12:183f.; LW, 40:26ff.); cf. Gerrish, art. cited, p. 412, note 33.

106

WA, 10/3:394.27, as cited in Elert, Structure of Lutheranism, p. 304f.

107

Lindbeck, "Lutheran Doctrine of Ministry," p. 604. Cf. The participation of the royal priesthood is also qua community, the word royal priesthood is a corporate term, see chapter I.

## The call of the congregation

Like other vocations, to be a minister one must have some specific tasks and charge from an authority. He has to have the call from a specific congregation before he can be ordained a pastor.

For to be a pastor one must have an office and a field of work committed to him. This call and command make pastors and preachers. A burgher or layman may be a learned man; but this does not make him a lecturer and entitle him to teach publicly in the schools (Psalm 82, 1530).<sup>108</sup>

This call bespeaks the corporate authority of the congregation, which for the sake of order, ordained someone to perform the ministry common to all. "Those whom we call priests are really ministers of the word and chosen by us; they fulfil their entire office in our name" (Babylonian Captivity, 1520).<sup>109</sup>

"If we were all to preach, it would be like woman going to market; then no one would want to listen to the other person, and

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108

"Das er christen und priester ist, mus er auch ein ampt und ein befolhen kirchspiel haben. Der beruff und befelch macht Pfarher und Prediger. Gleich wie ein Burger odder Leye mag wol gelert sein, Aber ist drumb nicht Doctor, das er ynn den Schulen offentlich lesen mocht " (WA, 31/1:211.18-22; LW, 13:65). The context is to rebuke Munster and Carlstadt who self-imposed themselves to be preachers without a proper for a specific congregation. Note that the ministerial office is put on the par with other vocation, the lecturer. As Elert remarks: "The pastor's calling is exactly analogous to worldly calling, . . . Every performance of what a calling requires is a service to God. . . . Such a call . . . is bound up with life in a community made up of men, and is designed for the purpose of preserving and shaping this community" (p. 348). The ministerial office is just one of other vocations instituted for the well-being of the brotherhood.

109

"Sacerdotes quos vocamus, ministri sunt ex nobis electi, qui nostro nomine omnia faciant, et sacerdotium aliud nihil est quam ministerium" (WA, 6:564.11-3; Woolf, 1:314).

all would want to speak."<sup>110</sup>

The discernment of pure doctrine

The church exerts a supervisory authority over the minister. This is not because the call of the minister is extended by the church,<sup>111</sup> but the ministry is the common possession of the whole congregation which has the responsibility to assure its proper functioning. Luther wrote (A Christian Assembly or Congregation Has the Right and Power to Judge, 1523):

He (Christ) takes both the right and the power to judge teaching from the bishops, scholars, and councils and gives them to everyone and to call all Christians equally when he says, John 10:4, 'My sheep know my voice.' Again, 'My sheep do not follow strangers, but flee from them . . . ' (John 10:5). . . . Here you see clearly who has the right to judge doctrine: bishops, popes scholars and everyone else have the power to teach, but it is the sheep who are to judge.<sup>112</sup>

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110

WA, 10/3:397.17-9, as cited in Elert, Structure of Lutheranism, p. 341.

111

"The call and election does not imply that the ministry is purely a congregational service or arrangement or authorization. On the contrary, it is precisely because the believing congregation acknowledges this ministry to be an institution, ordinance and authorization of Christ" (Harless, Kirch und Amt, p. 18, cited in Schlink, Theology of Lutheran Confessions, p. 246, note 16). Both the universal priesthood and ministry derive from Christ. The ministry is instrumental to the priesthood of believers rather than derivable from it.

112

"Christus nympt den Bischoffen, gelerten und concilien beyde recht und macht, zu urteylen die lere und gibt sie yderman und allen christen ynn gemeyn, Da er spricht Johan. r: 'Meyne schaff dennen von yhn denn sie kennen nicht der frembden stym. . . . Hie sihestu yhe klar, wes das recht ist, zu urteylen die lere: Bischoff, Pabst, gelerten und yderman hat macht zu leren, aber die schaff sollen urterlyen" (WA, 11:409.20-7; LW, 39:306f.). Lindsay remarks: "Main thought in priesthood was authority and supremacy in judging in all matters of rule and discipline, then the people, the congregation, were the rulers in the last resort" (Church and Ministry, p. 309). Lindbeck

Such a supervisory authority would "cause every preacher to strain every sermon through blood, sweet, and tears."<sup>113</sup>

### Eschatological tension

The foregoing suffices to confirm the fact that the ministry is only a public expression of the priesthood of all believers. However, the ministry is instrumental to the general priesthood rather than derivable from it.<sup>114</sup> Both the ministry and general priesthood do not pertain to individuals, but corporately to the whole church, qua community. The ministry is de iure divino inasmuch as the universal priesthood is de iure divino. The ministry is the ministry of the Word which like the Incarnate Word is both divine and human, invisible and visible. The eternal Word needs temporal manifestation. The tension between the two does not arise from a falsely posited constitutional antithesis in the sense that the increase of one intrinsically entails the demise of the other. Rather, the tension is eschatological--the temporal expression of an eternal truth.<sup>115</sup> The universal priesthood or the church is not invisible

observes that this ideal is severely restricted by the de iure divino of the ministry ("Lutheran Doctrine of Ministry," p. 498).

<sup>113</sup>

Herman A. Preus, "Luther on Universal Priesthood," p. 55.

<sup>114</sup>

Lindbeck, "Lutheran Doctrine of Ministry," p. 559. Cf. Elert said: ". . . precisely where Luther declares expressly that the office of preaching was founded, instituted, commanded, and established by Christ, the statement recurs that this pertains to all Christians" (Structure of Lutheranism, p. 343).

<sup>115</sup>

The difficulty relating temporal and eternal is perennial. The "somewhat vaguely comprehensive as to the relation between Faith and Order" did not result from the dual battle-

in the Platonic-idealistic sense, but in the evangelical-

116

realistic sense. It is the condescending love of God who

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fronts with the Roman Catholicism and the Ansbaptists as Henderson contends ("Priesthood of Believers," Scottish Journal of Theology 7 [1954]: 7). Congar is perceptive in saying that the duality in all doctrines of the church springs from "the difficulty of relating the reality of a spiritual and eschatological salvation to the means of grace which are sensible, social and which exist on the earth (Vraie et Fausse Reforme, p. 368, as cited in Rupp, Righteousness of God, p. 312). For Luther, the relation between the visible and invisible is best described in the following words: "Although the church lives in the flesh, it does not live according to the flesh, as Paul says in Galatians 1 and 2, and in Corinthians 10. So it has its being in a place and in the things and activities of the world, but it is not properly understood in terms of all this . . . . For, as in this life, the church is not without eating and drinking, and yet the Kingdom of God, according to Paul, does not consist of eating and drinking, so the church is not without place and body, and yet the place and body do not make the church and do not constitute it (*Quamquam ecclesia in carne vivat, tamen non secundum carnem vivit, Paulus dicit in Gal. 1 et 2, Cor. 10, Ita in loco, rebus, operinus mundi versatus, sed non secundum hos aestimatur . . . sicut enim ecclesia sine esca et potu non est in hac vita et tamen regnum dei non est esca et potus secundum Paulum, ita sine loco et corpore non est ecclesia et tamen corpus et locus non sunt ecclesia neque ad eam pertinent*)" (WA, 7:719.34ff., as cited in Pauck, Heritage of Reformation, p. 38). Cf. Elert, Structure of Lutheranism, pp. 495-97.

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Elert, Structure of Lutheranism, p. 261. It is invisible as regard to its spiritual essence which can only be comprehended through faith. The 'spiritual' is true understanding, not a specific area of existence, not antithetical to corporeality. "To live in the Spirit means to live in faith. The Spirit and faith are the same" (Ebeling, Luther, p. 106). Therefore, the ministry is considered no different from other vocations (chapter VI note 106). The notion of Ubi et quando visum est Dei (God is wherever and whenever you see; see Prenter's discussion for this concept, pp. 247ff.) put all the occupations on the par with the ministerial office if these are discharged in faith. For Christian vocation see Einar Billing, Our Calling, trans. Concord Bergendoff (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Book Concern, 1950); Gustaf Wingren, The Christian's Calling. Luther on Vocation, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1957); Herman G. Stuempfle, Theological and Biblical Perspectives on the Laity (New York: Lutheran Church in America, 1973); Martin J. Heineken, "Luther and the 'Orders of Creation' in Relation to a Doctrine of Work and Vocation," LQ 4 (1952):393-414; O. C. Rupprecht, "A Remedy for Modern Chaos--Luther's Concept of Our

approaches man veiled in the ministerial office.

To summarize, there is no antithesis between the universal priesthood and the ministerial office. The latter is a ministerial functionary vis-a-vis the former. The priests are mediators of the Word. They manifest this not only in a spiritual manner of mutual love but also by creating an external order to facilitate the free operation of the Word which "would make it possible for them and for all men to be freely nourished by the source of their priesthood, namely, the word." There is no authentic

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 Calling," CTM 22 (1951):820-47.

117

Pastoral ministry is not only one of the seven marks of the church delineated in the 1539 On the Councils and the Church, but intimately related to the rest (preaching, baptism, the Lord's Supper, office of the keys, prayer and public praise) except sacrad cross. ". . . ers wil thun, uns armen, schworchen, bloden menschen zu trost und gut, nicht durch seine blosse, erscheinende, helle Maiestet, Denn wer dundte die selbige in solchem sundlichen, armen fleisch ein augenblick leiden ([God] does not choose to do it through his unveiled, brilliant, and glorious majesty, out of consideration for us poor, weak, and timid mortals and for our comfort, for who could bear such majesty for an instant in this poor, and sinful flesh?" (WA, 50:647.11-4; LW, 41:171). Similarly, Calvin said of the ministry of the Word as God comes to men humanitus: ". . . he prefers to address us in human fashion through interpreters in order to draw us to himself rather than to thunder at us and drive us away" (Institutes, 4.1.5; LCC 21:1018. He gave two more reasons for the God speaking through His ministers. (1) Besides, "this is the best and most useful exercise in humility, when he accustoms us to obey his Word, even though it be preached through men like us and sometimes even by those of lower worth than we" (4.3.1; LCC 21:1054). (2) Furthermore it strengthens the bond among the brotherhood: "For if anyone were sufficient to himself and needed no one else's help (such is the pride of human nature), each man would dispose the rest and be despised by them". Cf. Torrance, Royal Priesthood, pp. 88ff.).

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Pauck, Heritage of Reformation, p. 49. The freedom to institute the external church in accordance with the spirit that motivated them as Christian believers was the substance of Luther's teaching of the priesthood of all believers.

laos without an authentic clergy.

### Conclusion

Two observations may be made from the foregoing discussion in this chapter which are useful in evaluating Nee's teaching of the universal priesthood. In the first place, the Reformers gave a strong Christological basis for the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers which was rooted in the priesthood of Christ who was the fulfillment and accumulation of the Old Testament priesthood whose ministries were teaching, interceding and offering sacrifice. In conformity with Christ the Christians shared His priestly dignity and carry on the priestly mission as His body on earth. Thus the Levitical priesthood is fulfilled by the Christian priesthood in a spiritual manner. Secondly, as regard to church polity, the Reformers maintained the same stance of the early church in holding two priesthoods: the universal priesthood of spiritual estate common to all and the special priesthood of ministerial functionary among and on behalf of the brotherhood. And the congregation had a supervisory authority over the ministry. Both the ministry and the corporate authority of the congregation were esteemed highly.

But for Nee, the universal priesthood was used as a catchword to re-pristiniate the New Testament church, which as he believed, had restored the right of every Christian to serve God as priest. That right had been accorded to the Old Testament

saints but preempted by the Levitical priests (see chapter IV, note 19). The use of the doctrine as a theological rationale to abandon any ministerial office and institution had also previously been advocated by the Enthusiasts. As a matter of fact, this pristinization of the New Testament church betrayed a view of history which was different from the Reformers. It also

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 1967), p. 29.

120

The ministry of the medieval time had a historiographical implication because it reckoned itself as the direct successor of the Apostles. Thus any attack upon the ministry involved the question of traditions and the theology of history. Unlike Zwinglianism and Anabaptists who were influenced greatly by humanism and insisted on pristinizing the church to a fixed time--the New Testament church (Pauck, Heritage of Reformation, p. 45) as the humanists championed the by-gone glory of the ancient Greco-Roman world, the Reformers saw their work a return to the patristic and historic faith. Therefore to appeal to the doctrine as a pretext to abandon the ministerial office (because it was not clearly taught in the Bible, thus a human institution) in order to return to an utopian pristine world like Munster was an abuse of Luther's view of priesthood of believers. It also missed the significant concept of abscondita (hiddenness) of the church and the universal priesthood of believers. The church is hidden in externals of which the ministerial office is one and is perceived only through faith (Elert, Structure of Lutheranism, pp. 255ff., especially pp.258-62). The question of traditions and history of Luther is discussed in Pelikan, Obedient Rebel, and John Headly, Luther's View of History (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963). For Calvin's recognition of the episcopal ministry as the expression (though not the reality) of the apostolic succession, see the J. F. Peter, "The Ministry in the Early Church as Seen by John Calvin," Evangelical Quarterly 35 (1963):68-78, 133-43. For the views of Karlstadt, Munster and other radical Reformers see Gordon Rupp, "Thomas Munzer: Prophet of Radical Christianity," The John Rylands Library 48 (1965-66):467-487; idem, Andrew Karlstadt and Reformation Puritanism" Journal of Theological Studies 10 (1959):308-326; Carl Lindberg, "Conflicting Models of Ministry--Luther, Karlstadt, and Muentzer," Concordia Theological Quarterly 41 (1977):35-45; Hans J. Hillerbrand, "Thomas Munzer's Last Tract Against Martin Luther," The Menneonite Quarterly Review 38 (1964):20-36; George H. Williams, ed., Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, LCC 25 (Philadelphia and London, 1957); Leonard Verduin, The Reformers and Their Stepchildren (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964); Ronald J. Sider, Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt: The Development of

bespoke a different concept of ministry. To Luther, the ministry was essentially Word-hearing. Therefore an external ministerial office was essential. But for Nee as well as for Munstzer, it was Spirit-heart.<sup>121</sup> The ministerial office as an external order seemed to be superfluous.

However, Nee had other reasons to discredit the ministerial office beside his aforementioned concept of ministry. First, the ministerial office was associated with the denominations which were funded and staffed mainly by foreign missionaries. These various denominations appeared divisive to the Chinese Christians who consider 'all are brothers in four seas'. The commencement of his career was contemporaneous with the Anti-Christian Movement in the twenties. Furthermore, China had not been and is not now a corpus christianum of which the church (together with the ministerial office) was considered a recognised institution alongside the family and state. In fact, in all the Chinese religious systems, paid ministerial office is unheard of (see chapter III note 1). Thus the vigorous implementation of the universal priesthood was motivated both by his concept of ministry and the historical context. While Luther's teaching of the universal priesthood was profound yet it has "rarely been fully realised by Protestant churches in the course

His Thought, 1517-1525, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, 11 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974); idem, ed., Karlstadt's Battle with Luther: Documents in a Liberal-Radical Debate (Philadelphia, Fortress, 1978).

121

Lindberg, "Lutheran Doctrine of Ministry," p. 44.

of their history." <sup>122</sup> But Nee's vigorous implementation of the priesthood of all believers not only bore fruit in terms of a phenomenal growth of the 'local church' but survived the severe persecution in Mainland China especially when all the missionaries had been driven away, and ministers were put in prison. Similar to the pre-Nicene church, the minority status of Christianity in China contributed to the vitality of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.

With the biblical (chapter II) historical (chapter III) and theological (chapter IV) perspectives we have acquired so far in our survey and the historical background of Nee we have just briefly mentioned, we are ready to embark on Part Two.

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122

Pauck, in Ministry in Historical Perspective, p. 113. Spitz expresses the same opinion, see his essay in The Abiding Word, 1:331. Richard R. Caemmerer points out that the non-conformists "succeeded better than the established churches in maintaining the principle also in practice" ("The Universal Priesthood and the Pastor," CTM 19 [1948]:571). His article is a centennial review of the status of the doctrine in the Missouri Synod. Kraemer attributes the failure to implement the doctrine was evident from the very beginning, soon after the Reformation. The ignorance of the biblical knowledge on the part of the laity heightened the role of the evangelical preachers to organise the new churches. And the primacy of preaching and the insistence of pure doctrine made the preachers appear theologians and separated from the laymen. See Hendrick Kraemer, A Theology of the Laity, pp. 61ff.

PART II

WATCHMAN NEE'S LIFE AND TEACHING ON THE  
PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

## CHAPTER V

### THE EARLY LIFE OF WATCHMAN NEE

#### From Birth to Conversion

#### The Boxer Uprising and Antiforeignism

##### The Boxers

Watchman Nee was born September 4, 1903 in Swatow, where his father Ni Weng-hsiu was currently serving as the superintendent of the maritime customs. Three years earlier at the birth of his eldest sister in 1900, the most violent anti-foreign riots in the history of China--the Boxer Uprising broke out, claiming a death toll of 221 missionaries (including<sup>1</sup> children). The riot adduced the Allied expeditionary army of eight nations. The palace was burnt down. The royal family fled. And a huge indemnity and other concessions were imposed on China with the conclusion of The Boxer Protocol.<sup>2</sup>

The Boxer Uprising was basically an outburst of the long-incubated anti-foreign sentiment on the part the Chinese people

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D. MacGillivray, A Century of Protestant Missions in China (1807-1907) (Shanghai, 1907), Appendix, viii. The Chinese believers even suffered much higher toll. See K. S. Latourette, A History of Christian Missions in China (New York, 1929), pp. 501-26; Immanuel C. Y. Hsu, The Rise of Modern China (New York: Oxford University, 1970), pp. 465-87; Chester C. T'an, The Boxer Catastrophe (New York: W. W. Norton, 1955).

2

Hsu, Modern China, pp. 480ff.

ushered by a series of defeats and humiliating treaties inflicted on their country in the later half of the nineteenth century.

This antiforeignism was directed at the powerless missionaries and the Chinese Christians in a revengeful manner by those who were after all the most visible symbols of foreign interference.

The hatred of foreigners was well bespoken by a petition to the Emperor for the cause of the Boxers:

In the two hundred and scores of years of our dynasty, to the foreingners who came to China we accord grace. Till the eras of Tao-kuang and Hsien-feng (Emperors, 1820-50, 1851-61) we granted trading with them and permitted them mission works. Initially they operated within agreed confines. However, within these thirty years, they took advantage of our kindness and good will. They turned to be arrogant, bully us as a nation, took away our land, trampled our subjects under their feet, snatched our properties. . . . We people in the nation were angry and choked up with passion. Everybody desires to avenge. That accounts for the burning of churches and killing of misionaries and Christians.<sup>3</sup>

From the petition we learn that the association of Christianity and western imperialism was taken for granted and it still exerts a lingering effect up to this very present moment. The missionaries were indiscriminately conceived by the Chinese,

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Cited in Wang Chi-hsin (王治心), History of Christianity in China (Hong Kong, 1959), p. 234. For antiforeignism see Paul A. Cohen, China and Christianity: The Missionary Movement and the Growth of Chinese Anti-foreignism, 1860-1870 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963). Cohen is negative concerning the missionary enterprise which as he contends, popularised and activated nineteenth century antiforeignism in China. See also Cohen, "The Roots of the Anti-Christian Tradition in China," The Journal of Asian Studies 20 (1961):169-79. A mixed evaluation is Donald W. Treadgold, The West in Russia and China, vol. 2: China, 1582-1949 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1973). Interestingly, works by Chinese scholars seem to have a more positive estimate, see Peter Lin (林治平), ed., Essays of Contemporary China and Christianity (Tapie: Cosmic Light, 1981); Ngai Wei-yang (魏外揚), The Missionary Enterprises and Contemporary China (Tapie: Cosmic Light, 1981).

together with all foreign politicians and traders as 'Yang kuei-chieh' or alien ghosts. This mindset was pronounced during the whole career of Nee. An understanding of such an anti-foreign mentality is essential for our examination of Nee's teaching of the priesthood of all believers, which was, as we had pointed out before, a downright rebuke of the ministerial system implanted by the foreign denominations brought by the missionaries. A cursory account of the events leading to the Uprising would explain the deep antagonism against Christianity on the part of the Chinese people.

#### Foreign imperialism and missionary activities

The antiforeignism was bed-seeded by the Treaty of Nanking in 1842 after the Opium War with Britian. Hong Kong was ceded to Britian. China had to open her five ports to the west for trade and residence with attendant extraterritoriality, whereby the foreigners were tried by their respective consuls. Missionary activities were allowed within the boundaries of these ports of which Foochow and Shanghai later became the centers of Nee's activities. In these ports the missionaries could theoretically "select his residence, erect his chapel, open wide his mouth, and scatter freely both Bible and tracts."<sup>4</sup>

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Cited in Edward V. Gulick, Peter Parker and the Opening of China (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 111. The treaty did not make evangelization easier than before. In Canton, xenophobia was stronger than hostility towards the Manchu. The situation of Canton "had changed from one in which a bland good-humor predominated into one taut with tension" (p. 110). Three other ports opened were Canton, Amoy and Ningpo. Summary of the Treaty was found in Hsu, Modern China., p. 237. Among others, the Chinese had to pay indemnity of 21 million

Then came the Second Anglo-Chinese War in 1858. A ship called Arrow, owned by a Hong Kong resident, registered with the colonial government of Hong Kong while laying off the city of Canton was sought by Chinese officers for an alleged pirate aboard. Twelve Chinese crew members were arrested and in the turmoil the British flags were hauled down. Even though the ship's registration expired at the time of incident, the British government appealed to an ordinance of Hong Kong which stated that expiry was not enforced while the vessel was at sea. Conflict began when the British protest of the Chinese infringement on her extraterritorial right was declined by the local government of Canton. France joined in with the British force on the pretext of the murder of a missionary in Kwangsi province which in fact was not open to the west yet. The Anglo-French armies occupied Peking and the war was ended with the conclusion of the Treaty of Tientsin (1860).

The Treaty of Tientsin marked a new era in the missionary enterprise in China which availed the missionaries opportunities of working in the interiors and their rights to buy lands to

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 dollars: 12 million for military expenses, 6 million for the destroyed opium and 3 millions for the compensation to the British traders. Other western powers followed suit making similiar advancement in these ports demanding the the treatment of the most-favored-nation privilege whereby, concession to one was extended to others. See Hsu, Modern China, pp. 214-69; Peter Ward Fay, The Opium War 1840-1842 (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975). The anti-opium movement in the Parliament of Britian was documented in Wen-tsao Wu, The Chinese Opium Question in British Opinion and Action (New York: The Academy Press, 1928). (Originally a Ph.D. dissertation in Columbia University.) The early anti-opium cause in England was supported by pioneer Protestant missionaries, both English and American, working in China (p. 43).

build churches under the Toleration Clause. However, that clause was arbitrarily inserted by two American missionaries (S. Well Williams and W. A. P. Martin) on their own initiatives, while serving as diplomatic interpreters for their government. Article 29 (the Toleration Clause) of the American Treaty of Tientsin<sup>5</sup> stipulates:

The principles of the Chinese religion, as professed by the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches, are recognized as teaching men to do good, and to do to others as they would have others do to them. Hereafter those who quietly profess and teach these doctrines shall not be harassed or persecuted on account of their faith. Any person, whether citizen of the United States or Chinese convert, who, according to these tenets, shall peaceably teach and practice the principles of Christianity shall in no case be interfered with or molested.

Under the protection of the above treaty missionaries could freely engage in mission work. However, the Chinese people were scornful of any natives turned Christians, who de facto were under the protection of the unequal treaties. They were contemptuously called 'chiao-min' or citizen of a foreign religion. And it was not infrequent that whenever chiao-an or conflicts over religion arose between natives and missionaries or Chinese Christians, the foreign powers stood up to confront the Chinese government with armed force and demanded indemnity by appealing to these treaties.<sup>6</sup>

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Wells Frederick Williams, The Life and Letters of Samuel Wells Williams (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1889), p. 273, as cited in Ralph Covell, W. A. P. Martin. Pioneer of Progress in China (Washington, D.C.: Christian University Press, 1978, p. 93.

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According to the Chinese official archives between 1860 and 1900 there were more than two hundred Chiao-an (教案) or conflicts between natives and missionaries of Chinese Christians. These conflicts were mainly due to (1) the criticisms of the traditional Chinese institutions on the part of the missionaries;

The aftermath and the establishment of the Republic

## Modernisation of China

The aftermath of the riot witnessed an abrupt change of altitude toward the west. Since the Opium War, China had begun the first phase of modernization, the Self-Strengthening Movement. This phase was epitomised by the phrase: Chinese learning for substance (t'i), and western learning for application (yung). However, mere modernisation of weaponry proved a failure in her defeats in the French War in 1884-85 and the Sino-Japanese War in 1894-95. China was unable to defend her tributary state of Annam (Indo-China) against France. Above all the defeat by Japan was most humiliating since Japan had been a former vassal state of her own. A genuine modernisation should include western ideologies and institutions. Then, commenced the second phase of modernization--the Reform Movement. But the reactionary force in the court was strong and they had the sympathy of the local gentry and the literati. To these people modernisation simply meant the abandonment of the 'orthodoxy' of Confuciusism and the diminishing of their power. The Reform Movement was short-lived

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 (2) extraterritoriality (see chapter V note 5) and (3) transaction of leasing and buying land. This information is given by Cheng Shao Kuo (鄭昭喆), a researcher on the archives of Chiao-an. See Peter Lin, p. 132.

7

See Hsu, Modern China, pp. 423-57. For the discussion of t'i-yung synarchy, see John K. Fairbank, "Synarchy Under the Treaties," John K. Fairbank, ed., Chinese Thought and Institutions (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press), pp. 204-31. Fairbank observes that synarchy is the Achilles' heel of the universal Confucian empire. Unlike the previous 'barbarian' invaders, the westerners welcomed synarchic practices but discarded the Confucian ideology.

and dissipated in a disastrous coup in 1898. Many progressive leaders were caught and executed. The rest had to exile themselves overseas. The court was now in the total control of ultra-conservatives headed by Empress Dowager, Tz'u-hsi. In fact, the Uprising was conducted under the patronage of the court. The rioters raised the banner for the support of the Ch'ing Dynasty and the extermination of the foreigners (fu-Ch'ing mieh-yang).

After the utter failure of the Boxers the Chinese had to accept the patent fact that they were deadly far behind the western world. They started to learn from the west from head to bottom. Some turned revolutionary and conceived that the only salvation of China was to have a radical change of government. In 1911, the decadent Manchu Empire was eventually overthrown. A Republic was established.

#### Growth of the church

With the inception of the Republic Christians were no longer second-class citizens (Chiao-min)--freedom of religion granted only as part of the Toleration Clause of the unequal treaties. Now freedom of religion was a constitutional right. Henceforth they were able to buy lands for building churches. During these years people were very receptive to the gospel. Within a short period of fourteen years, communicants jumped from

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Thomas Cochrane records the incident that a group of Chinese Christians bought a piece of land in late Manchu Empire. When they went for registration with the district government they were declined on the pretext that such right was exclusive to the foreigners and confiscated the land they bought. See "Need of the New Era in China," International Review of Missions (hereafter IRM) 1 (1912):295.

96,000 in 1900 to 250,000 in 1914.<sup>9</sup> The church experienced phenomenal growth.<sup>10</sup> College students in Christian colleges jumped from 146 in 1900 to 898 in 1910. That figure was almost double in 1911.<sup>11</sup> Enrollment in Christian colleges was the goal of many parents for their children and an assured ticket for a promising career. Being a Christian became a symbol of progressive thinking and fashionable. However, the identification of the church with wealth, power, opportunity unfortunately gave breed to many self-serving nominal Christians. They were found mostly in large denominations which had hospitals, Christian colleges and other institutions. And we should understand Nee's controversy with the denominations in the light of this alignment beside his Brethren influence.

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9K. S. Latourette, Missions in China, p. 680.

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Comparison of 1899 and (1910):

Chinese Bible woman	180	(1789)
Chinese workers	1657	(7701)
foreign missionaries	1296	(5144)
Believers	37287	(167075) growth by 450%
Independent churches	522	(2955) growth by 550%
Mission depots	954	(3897)

See Jonathan Chao, "Church Growth from the Perspective of the History of the Development of Chinese Church," in Lin, Essays, pp. 305f.

11

Jessie Gregory Lutz, China and the Christian Colleges 1850-1950 (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1971), p. 161. Graduates from Christian schools who received western education were more prone for the new life and democratic ideology of the new era. They usually became very influential and commanded high social prestige. A good and legendary example was the Soonge family portrayed by Sterling Seagrave in his recent title The Soong Dynasty (New York: Harper & Row, 1985). The Methodist Charlie Soong's several children made history in Republic China: His eldest son Tse-van was a renowned banker; middle daughter Ching-ling was wife of Sun Yat-sun, godfather of the Revolution; youngest daughter wedded President Chiang Kai-shek and became the First Lady of the Republic of China.

## Youth and Family

The Christian family

Nee was brought up in his ancestral city Foochow, the capital city of Fukien. As a treaty port, Foochow was one of the earliest regions to be evangelized.<sup>12</sup> Nee's grand father, Nee U-cheng attended a mission school of the Congregational American Board and was baptised in 1857. Later he became the first ordained Chinese pastor with the Congregational church in Foochow which had about half a million inhabitants.<sup>13</sup> Being the son of a pastor, Nee's father, Nee Ung-siu thus received fine Christian education. Nee's mother, Lin Huo-ping was adopted by a wealthy merchant couple who later became Christians. She studied at an

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By 1908 we had four major missionaries societies working in the city: American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (=American Board, entered China 1830) American Presbyterian Missions (1844), Church Missionary Society (CMS, 1844) and Church of England Zenana Mission (1884). See Edward Stanford, Atlas of the Chinese Empire (London: morgan and Scott, 1908), p. xi. Lyall Leslie reports that the earliest Protestant work in Foochow was started by ABCFM in 1847 which was followed by the British CMS in 1850 (Three of China's Mighty Men [London: Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1973; reprint and published jointly by Overseas Missionary Fellowship and Hodder and Stoughton, 1980], p. 50f.).

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He is described by his great-grand-son as "very zealous and loved the Lord" (Stephen Chan [陳終道], My Uncle, Watchman Nee [Petaluma, CA: Chinese Christian Mission, 1982], p. 1). The Fukien Christians were renowned for the dedication for their faith. Charles Hartwell writes that all three other students baptised with Nee U-cheng "subsequently . . . became helpers in the work of the Lord" (Reminiscences [Foochow, 1904], p. 27, as cited in Kinnear, Against the Tide, p. 24. Another writes: "The spread of the Gospel in Fu-Kien has been the result of Native agency. Several of the earliest converts baptized in the city of Fuh-Chow gave up their occupations, and entered into the service of the Missions" (Eugene Stock, The Story of the Fuh-Kien Mission of the Church Missionary Society [London, 1877], p. 264).

American staffed Methodist mission school and was a member of the Methodist church which had half of the communicants in the whole province of Fukien. A survey released in 1922 reports that Fukien was the most 'occupied' province (24 communicants to 10,000 inhabitants) even though it ranked sixth in missionary force (454 persons) of which 33 percent were stationed in Foochow.<sup>14</sup> Fukien also had the highest ordained Chinese ministerial force (21 percent) in the whole country.<sup>15</sup>

#### Trinity college

Nee's father, like all Chinese parents (if they could afford), asked a Chinese scholar to give private session on Chinese classics for his children. And Nee was said always having the highest score for composition.<sup>16</sup> His through training in Chinese classics indeed later well served his literal ministry. In due time he entered the nation-wide prestigious Anglican Trinity College which was mostly staffed by missionaries from the renowned Trinity College of Dublin, North Ireland. It "offers a

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Total communicants were 20,672. The Congregational church was the second largest denomination with communicants 5,136. See Milton T. Stauffer, ed., The Christian Occupation of China, General Survey of the Numerical Strength and Geographical Distribution of the Christian Forces in China, 1918-1921 (Shanghai: China Continuation Committee, 1922), pp. 72f., 87. The China Continuation Committee owed its origin to the first World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910 and was appointed in 1913 by the National Conference which was held under the chairmanship of John Mott.

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F. Rawlinson, ed., The Chinese Church as Revealed in The National Christian Conference, Held in Shanghai, Tuesday, May 2, to Thursday, May 11, 1922 (Shanghai, n.d.), p. 101. Hereafter cited as NCC, 1922.

16

Chan, My Uncle, p. 6.

higher normal training course for middle school graduates, and trains its students both for lower and higher primary school work." <sup>17</sup> Trinity College was in fact a feeder school to local <sup>18</sup> Fukien Christian College. It only took two years for graduates from Trinity to get a baccalaureate degree. Top students from Trinity were sent to St. John's University in Shanghai or abroad for further studies. It was contemplated by all parents as a doorway to State or mission employment for their children who <sup>19</sup> ended up usually with positions of influence. This school was taught in the medium of English in higher grades and had 400 <sup>20</sup> students on the roll. Bible and Greek were among the many <sup>21</sup> subjects covered. Nee always ranked first in the class. He got

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Christian Occupation of China, P. 119.

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Jessie G. Lutz, Christian Colleges, p. 491.

19

When Faithful Luke, brought up an Anglican, who later commenced the Local Assembly in Indonesia, rebaptised in 1923, his uncle urged him to repent (rebaptism was an affront to the Anglican mission school) in order to secure a grant to enter St. John's University (equivalent to Harvard in China) (Kinnear, Against the Tide, p. 76f.).

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Kinnear, Against the Tide, p. 42.

21

Curriculum includes: Bible, Bible reading, moral, Chinese literature, poetry, history, geography, world knowledge, Greek, English, Mandarin, library science, physical education. See Ch'a Shih-chieh (查時傑), A Short Biographies of Chinese Christians, vol. 1 (Tapie: China Evangelical Seminary, 1983), p. 309. He did use Grimm's Lexicon and Robert Young's Analytical Concordance of the Holy Bible (Love Not the World [Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade], pp. 10, 33); though his exegesis is evidently short of a thorough grasp of the Greek syntax and grammar as Dana Roberts points out (Understanding Watchman Nee, p. 147. Also the Bible courses of Trinity should be quite solid since it includes a divinity school (Kinnear, Against the Tide, p. 42).

distinctions for all subjects but failed in Bible courses.

### Conversion and Baptism

#### Conversion experience

Nee was converted to Christian faith during a revival meeting in Foochow, held by an independent woman evangelist Dora Yu in 1920 Spring.<sup>23</sup> His mother was previously a nominal Christian. Just in the early period of the revival meetings she mistook Nee breaking a precious vessel at home and mishandled Nee roughly. But after she accepted Christ as her personal Saviour one evening at the revival meeting, she moved Nee when she asked him for pardon, since it was extremely unusual for a mother seeking forgiveness from the son in the contemporary Chinese society. Later Nee followed her to attend the revival meeting. And he was converted too.

Ever since he became a Christian, he decided to become a faithful follower of Christ. He recounted his commitment:

God required of me therefore that I now regard all my faculties as belonging to Another. I dared not squander a few cents of my money or an hour of my time or any of my mental or physical powers, for they were not mine but His. It was a great thing when I made that discovery. Real Christian

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Chan, My Uncle, p. 8.

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James Chen (陳則信) Meet Brother Nee (Hong Kong: Gospel Publishers, 1973), p. 74. That date is given in Nee's Recounting the Past, a testimony given in 1932 December 4th in the Sunday service, appended in pp. 71-100 which is omitted in the English translation published in 1976. Stephen Chan suggests that it was the end of 1922 (My Uncle, p. 7). Kinnear writes that the conversion took place in the "his eighteenth year" (Against the Tide, p. 52) which would be 1921 unless he follows the Chinese traditional reckoning which designates one year old at birth.

life began for me that day.

Nee also immediately confessed a hidden sin--he cheated in a test on the Bible by writing verses on his palm. That confession would mean that he might be dismissed from Trinity and forfeit the prospect of going to St. John's University or the local Fukien Christian University on scholarship, since it was a school regulation to dismiss any student who were found cheating. He honoured God above all personal considerations. He was pardoned upon confession. This experience had impact on his later teaching about sanctification.

### Rebaptism

Nee, his brother, Huai-tsu, and mother, Huo-ping, received baptism at the hand of Margret Barber's Chinese assistant Li Aiming on Easter Sunday, 1921. He had been baptised as a child into the Methodist church. He later explained the reasons for rebaptism:

The Lord . . . let me understand that it is not biblical for the church to administer sprinkling baptism. As I read the Bible in recent weeks, I see that when Jesus was baptised in Jordon, he came out from the water. I recalled that when I had my baptism by a Methodist Superintendent minister . . . so impatient that I cried . . . I was given a certificate with my name on it and his signature. But I think that is meaningless. If I did not believe in Christ, I could do anything even though I got the certificate . . . That baptism was requested on my behalf by my mother, I was not yet converted. . . . Moreover, the mode of baptism should be immersion.<sup>25</sup>

Two observations should be noted from that above which are also

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Kinnear, Against the Tide, p. 53.

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Nee, Recounting the Past, p. 74f., trans. mine.

characteristic of Nee's teachings. In the first place, he searches Scriptures for the basis of any practice in the church. When he can not find any support from the Scripture as he understands and interprets it, he would challenge it as human traditions. His rejection of the ordained ministerial system is another good example. In the second place, he advocates the primacy of experience. Paedo-baptism is invalid because the candidate can not experience and internalise the meaning of baptism.

Nee's stance on baptism was typical of many contemporary Chinese fundamentalist ministers.<sup>26</sup> To them, rebaptism was more than a theological issue. It served to test one's dedication and faithfulness to truth, even at the risk of running into conflict with the mainline denominations and forfeiting the prospect of going to study abroad or entered the mission universities on grants.

### Spiritual heritage

Dora Yu

Nee was serious with his faith. After another series of meetings by Dora Yu in Foochow, he was so attracted to her

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Wang Tsai (Leland Wang), the leader of the original assembly of the Little Flock at Foochow and founder of the China Overseas Missionary Union also rebaptised by immersion (Nee, Recounting the Past, p. 76); Wilson Wang (王山寺), ed., Leland Wang (published by the editor, 1980), p. 18. The editor is the brother of Leland Wang and one of the original group. Another example is Wang Ming-dao, an independent preacher with the same stature as Nee among the Chinese churches. See Lam Wing-hung (林榮洪) Wang Ming-tao and the Chinese Church (Hong Kong: Tien Dao Publishers, 1982), pp. 47-49; for a brief biography in English on Wang, see Lyall, Mighty Men, pp. 97-143.

message that he withdrew from school for a year (a not serious matter in those days prior to compulsory education) and attended her Bible School in Shanghai. <sup>27</sup> Dora Yu was a medical student turned evangelist on her way to England for medical training. She "received no foreign salary but trust God alone for her needs." <sup>28</sup> She received baptism from Margret Barber <sup>29</sup> and <sup>30</sup> deplored the nominal Christians in the mainline denominations. Her criticisms about the spiritual lethargy in the denominations and independent ministry surely had influenced Nee's future ministry.

#### Margret E. Barber

Barber first came to China as an Anglican missionary teaching at Foochow Anglican Girls School in 1899. <sup>31</sup> On her furlough in England in 1909 she left the Anglican church and received immersion baptism by D. M. Panton of Surrey Chapel, Norwich.

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His colleague and classmate Simon Meek recalls: "Not long after his conversion he stopped studies. All of a sudden he was missing, and no one saw him or knew of his whereabouts. Finally we found out that he had gone to hide himself in Miss Dora Yu's Bible Institute in Shanghai for edification for a few months. He was now a changed man" (A Short Biography of Watchman Nee (n.p., 1970), p. 2, as cited in Norman H. Cliff, "The Life and Theology of Watchman Nee, Including a Study of the Little Flock Movement which He Founded," M.Ph. thesis (Milton Keynes, England: Open University, 1983), p. 10.

28

Kinnear, Against the Tide, p. 30.

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Nee, Recounting the Past, p. 75.

30

Ibid., p. 74.

31

Kinnear, Against the Tide, p. 57. But the date given in the Directory of Protestant Missions in China, 1920 (Edited by Charles L. Boynton for the China Continuation Committee [Shanghai, n.d]) is 1896 (p. 114).

Later she came back to Foochow as an independent evangelist. Her impact on Nee was hard to belittle. "If I did but walk into her room, I was brought immediately to a sense of God."<sup>32</sup> Whenever there arose disputes Nee came to her for arbitration.<sup>33</sup> It was Barber who introduced Nee the writings of Andrew Murray, Jessie Penn-Lewis, D. M. Panton and J. N. Darby. Her life of faith and style of ministry (independence from denominations), like that of Dora Yu greatly affected Nee.

#### Leaving the Denomination

Immersion baptism was an affront to the three big denominations in Foochow, namely Anglicans, Methodists and Congregationals. Henceforth, Nee started to query about the ecclesiastical traditions and sought the Scripture thoroughly for a church model. The presence of many nominal Christians in these mainline churches also made him very upset. Some gambled at home, some even explicitly expressed their doubt about Jesus. But they took communion. Nee was seriously disturbed by these 'Christians.' Moreover, communion was held only once a quarter in many churches which again seemed to be human tradition since the Bible exhorted us to commemorate Christ often. In addition he could not find any biblical support for the exclusive prerogative

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Kinnear, Against the Tide, p. 73.

33

Chen, Meet Brother Nee, p. 86. In his English preface (1938.1.23) of the Chinese version of Rethinking the Work, he writes: "'God's Spirit will only work along God's lines' (M. E. Barber) greatly helped me when I started to seve the Lord years ago. And the truth of it has grown with me all these years" (Rethinking the Work; CO [Taipie: Gospel Book Room, 1983], p. 4).

of the ordained ministers to administer the Lord's Supper. In good conscience Nee had abstained from taking communion for more than one year. In summer 1922, Nee starting taking communion with another colleague Leland Wang (Wang Tse). He recounts that exciting experience:

That evening, we three persons (Wang and his wife), in a small room broke bread and took the cup together. I tell you, I will not forget that night till death, even in eternity. We never felt that we were so close to heaven that evening. That day, heaven was so near to earth! All three of us were so joyous that we cried.<sup>34</sup>

In the same year they held meeting on Sunday. Leland Wang preached. In his absence Nee substituted. The meeting was aiming at the students of Trinity. Eventually in the later part of 1922, Nee and his parents petitioned to withdrew from the Methodist church. Several missionaries and the superintendent of the church came to visit with them and asked them to reconsider the action, but of no avail. He spoke about the severing from the denomination later as obedience to the Bible.<sup>35</sup>

#### Summary and Observations

Some strands of thought had already precipitated his future direction of ministry in this formative period. First, Nee wanted a pristine New Testament church because he could not identify

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Nee, Recounting the Past, p. 79; trans. mine. The date given by Wilson Wang is 1922 summer (Leland Wang, p. 28).

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"The question is not controversy with men about immersion and leaving a denomination. The question is whether we submit to the Bible or not. Rebaptism and leaving the denomination are not great issues, but one of the thousands of obedience. The main thrust of the Bible is obedience" (Recounting the Past, p. 83; trans. mine).

with the mainline denominations. Thus he operated outside the established churches with several dedicated young men. Second, his conception of spirituality was intensely personal and experiential as he saw in the living examples of Dora Yu and Margret Barber. However, embarking on an independent ministry without foreign support was not only motivated by the principle of working by faith and depending on God alone for supply, it was also in part stimulated by the rising nationalism of the tumultuous political situations. The Local Church assembly was only one of the many indigenous groups in fermentation. In the next chapter we will discuss Nee's ministry in the light of this background against which Nee advocated the discard of the paid ministry, which was mostly staffed by ministers who were formerly assistants to missionaries and in most case they were salaried in part by mission fund.

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Other indigenous church independent of the denominations include 'The True Jesus Church' founded by Barnabas Tung in 1909-10 to which "many pastors and members of the Anglican, Methodist and Congregational Churches were drawn into it" (Latourette, Missions in China, p. 808). The Jesus Family was started by Ching Tien-ying in Ma Chuang, Shangtung Province in 1921. See D. Vaughan Rees, The 'Jesus Family' in Communist China (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1973). Ch'a, Short Biographies of Chinese Christians, pp. 217-26.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE MINISTRY OF WATCHMAN NEE

#### The Early Ministry in Foochow, 1923-1927

##### Beginning of the Public Ministry

Nee started his public preaching ministry in Foochow in the aftermath of a revival meeting conducted by Ruth Li (Li Yuan-ju),<sup>1</sup> an educated atheist turned independent evangelist. The response was so remarkable that Nee and others continued preaching after Ruth Li left. Wearing shirts written in gospel message and holding banners, sixty young people paraded singing hymns in the city. Several hundred accepted Christ. The meeting lasted nearly a month. A witness describes:

These young believers (students) were so zealous that during the recess for lunch (half hour) . . . as usual, (they) gathered in the chapel for prayer. Everyday after school, they held evangelistic meetings and invited schoolmates. In Sunday afternoons, they formed gospel bands in reaching out the neighbouring villages. In summer vacation they delivered tracts everywhere . . . writing various gospel messages on many walls. In the evening they preached in the streets, urging people at the peak of their voice for repentance.<sup>2</sup>

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Ruth Li started the Little Flock assembly with Nee in Shanghai in February 1928 and was in charge of the Book Room in Shanghai. See Ruth Li (李淵如) Sister Li Yuan-ju's Testimony and Message (Hong Kong: Christian Publishers, 1975).

2

Wilson Wang, Leland Wang, p. 29; trans. mine. "I never saw a revival more remarkable than that one in my life" (Nee, Recounting the Past, p. 88f.; trans. mine). The zeal for the gospel can be illustrated by the fact that when Nee planned to start a gospel station on an island infested with pirates.

When the revival meeting was over, they leased a house for assembly. A couple of years later, the core group parted company<sup>3</sup> and continued church planting in other regions. Nee visited Hangchow, and Nanking. At Nanking he worked with the Presbyterian Spiritual Light Publishing Society for several months where Ruth

Li served on the editorial staff before he retreated to a small hut at Ma-hsien, a small village outside the city of Foochow at the estuary of River Min, overlooking the mission station of Barber across the river.<sup>4</sup>

#### Retirement at Ma-hsien and the Literature Ministry

The retirement at Ma-hsien was a crucial period in the life of Nee. Between May 1925 and late 1926 he lived simply and

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About one hundred brethren prayed for his mission and others furnished the expenses (What Shall This Man Do? [Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, p. 1974], p. 28). Sixteen sermons of this period of itinerant evangelistic preaching are collected in the two volumes Full of Grace and Truth (New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers, 1980).

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The core group of six were all gifted men. Leland Wang later became the founder of China Overseas Missionary Union. Simon Meek founded the Local Church in Indonesia. Faithful Luke started the Local Church in Manila. Wang Lien-chun, Watchman Nee and Wilson Wang were much-sought evangelists. According to James Chen, Nee was dismissed by the group because some of them sought ordination and Nee objected (Meet Brother Nee, p. 19). Wilson Wang said that Nee withdrew himself which Nee seems to concur (Wilson Wang, Leland Wang, p. 32; Nee, Recounting the Past, p. 89).

4

It was "a small hut by the river" which Nee had visited for recuperation for his poor health in 1923 and where he felt called to write a book--The Spiritual Man (Shu-ling Jen, 3 vols. [The Spiritual Man; Taipie: Gospel Book Room, 1983], 1:28; trans. [Stephen Kaung], The Spiritual Man, 3 vols. [CFP, 1968], 1:7). The book is cited hereafter as SM. The scenic site is described in Kinnear, Against the Tide, p. 97f.

concentrated on reading, contemplation and plotting future direction except short excursions to nearby cities in early 1926. From the content of The Christian Message he published in this period, we may have some clues of the issues that concerned him and the direction to which he moved. The announcement of the first issue of the magazine reads:

Purpose: We intend in our small monthly, to cater milk to the young, solid food to the old. We emphasize on the salvation of the cross. The spiritual life of the believers is our concern. We implore God that he will empower us so that we may proclaim the entire will of God. As regard to the fallacy of prevalent modernism, we try our best to warn God's children against its danger.

Standard: Bible is our sole standard. If the Bible is pure truth, we will not be afraid of men's objection to stop proclaiming; if it is not in accordance with the Bible we dare to differ with popular opinions.

Affiliation: We do not affiliate with any church. . . . The present indigenous church is but a fashionable movement. But we suggest that God's will for us is to return to the apostolic condition and methods of the early century. Therefore as regard to the problems of the church we foster the goal of the New Testament, giving no heed to the framework of any denomination.<sup>5</sup>

Three observations should call our attention from the foregoing which precipitated his teachings of the priesthood of all believers. First, the magazine stresses the nurturing of believers in biblical knowledge and Christian life which was largely neglected by the contemporary church. In the Local Church assembly, the believers were so thoroughly trained that they could shoulder responsibilities with supervision of the full time workers or elders. Second, in connection of the Christian

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Nee, Watchman Nee's Open Letters (Hong Kong: Christian Publishers, 1980), p. 7f.; trans. mine. The book is a selected collection of the editor's letters in The Christian Magazine and the subsequent Revival magazine.

nurturing, Nee felt the call to refute modernism which were making its impact in some mainline denominations.<sup>6</sup> The inroads of modernism reinforced Nee's suspicions about denominations.

Thirdly, Nee positively strove for the repristination of the New Testament church, free of any traditions brought by foreign denominations. It was the third emphasis that adduced much controversy. After one year he pleaded with his readers for toleration for his 'biblical' view on the question of denominations and maintained unity by quoting Augustine: "in essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all charity."<sup>7</sup>

However the controversies apparently lingered on till the last issue when he recognised that to continue talking about the externals (church polity, mode of baptism) "would turn Christian

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Basically, Nee's theology is fundamentalist. Barber and Dora Yu were conservatives. "We regret that the gospel that men now proclaim is not the gospel of God, not the gospel of grace, but the ideals of men or ideas of reforms in the stead of the message of the cross revealed by God" (Open Letters, p. 2, 1926.2.18; trans. mine). He is especially congenial to the interdenominational China Inland Mission (CIM) founded by Hudson Taylor whom Nee considered a spiritual giant. Charles H. Judd of the CIM worshipped with Nee in the early days of the Shanghai Little Flock assembly started in 1927. Judd was the treasurer of the fundamentalist Bible Union in China (formed 1920) which was established as "a movement toward the conservation in mission work of the fundamentals of the Christian faith" ("The Bible Union of China," Chinese Mission Year Book (CCYB) [1923], p. 96; see pp. 95-101; Latourette, Missions in China, pp. 794-96. Nee remarks that prior to 1920 (alluding to "The Bible Union of China") the messages of salvation, justification and regeneration were hardly heard in China (Shen-te te-cheng che [The Overcomer of God] [Taipie: Gospel Book Room, 1984], p. 99). CIM withdrew from the National Christian Council in 1926 which became politically active and theologically liberal.

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Open Letters, p. 7. "Though you read in Christian Message articles that you do not agree we should not separate from one another especially when we come to the question of denominations (1972.1)" (p. 8).

Message into a magazine exclusively about immersion baptism and severing with denomination." <sup>8</sup> In the sequel of Christian Message--the Revival magazine (new series) published in January 1928 we see a change of emphasis. Church polity was no longer the focus. Personal sanctification and spirituality were up in his mind. <sup>9</sup>

But why was Nee so insistent on the New Testament church model in this period? He broke away from his Methodist church; parted company with his colleagues in Foochow over ordination. Now he wrote against denominations. We suggest that his insistence to return to the pristine apostolic church was in part motivated and responded to the mounting nationalism. <sup>10</sup> In 1922, one year before the revival that gave birth to the first Little Flock assembly in Foochow, we witnessed the unleashing of the anti-Christian movement. In fact, Trinity was closed by a strike temporarily during the revival. <sup>11</sup> The nationalistic passion turned violent on March 27, 1927 when foreign consulates and

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Ibid., p. 13, written in 1927.12.10.

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The themes of Revival: 1928-30--Christ, especially his Life, crucifixion, resurrection and intersection; 1931--the mysteries of God's matter; 1932-34--the principle of spiritual life. See Chan, My Uncle, p. 20. Norman Cliff observes that from 1929 to 1937, Nee's teachings stressed on the spiritual struggle of the tripartite personality ("Watchman Nee--Church Planter and Preacher of Holiness," Evangelical Review of Theology 8/2 (1984): 292f.

10

As a veteran missionary observes: "it was the combination of old Biblical principles and the new ardent nationalism, which influenced Watchman Nee to develop his independent policies" (Lyll, Mighty Men, p. 63).

11

Kinnear, Against the Tide, p. 76.

churches in Nanking were attacked, consulate workers and missionaries were killed.<sup>12</sup> By the end of 1927, the junior school of Trinity College was burnt down and all missionaries in up country evacuated to the coast.<sup>13</sup> The twenties were a time of great change for both Nee and the church in China. A purview of the period is instructive to understand Nee's ecclesiology and his teachings about the priesthood of all believers.

### Nationalism and the Anti-Christian Movement

#### Political Tumult and Disillusion

The hope and expectation brought by the establishment of the Republic did not last long. The acute financial problem forced the government to disband the soldiers quickly who in turn became bandits. Parties were numerous and strife among them profuse in the parliament.<sup>14</sup> The chaotic situation delayed the recognition and loans extended to the new administration on the part of the western powers which again bred anti-foreign sentiment.<sup>15</sup> As have been pointed out, the downfall of the

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See H. T. Hodgkin, "Events in China During 1927 and Their Effect on the Christian Church," China Christian Year Book (CCYB) (1928), p. 9. The vice-president of the University of Nanking, J. E. Williams was killed. "Only after the opening of a barrage by foreign war vessels did the looting and outrage come to an end, making it possible for the foreigners to escape."

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Ibid., p. 11; Kinnear, Against the Tide, p. 114. Only 500 out of 8,000 Protestant missionaries chose to remain in the interior at their own risk (Latourette, Missions in China, p. 820).

14

See A. H. Smith, "General Survey," CCMB (1914), pp. 1-29; the editor's review on China, International Review of Missions (IRM) 2 (1913):14-25.

15

IRM 2 (1913):15.

Manchu Dynasty indicated also the dethronment of Confucianism as the reigning ideology. However, the situation was so bad that Confucianism was revived and being petitioned as the state religion for social stability in 1913.<sup>16</sup> The petition failed owing to the concerted effort of all Christians and the adherents of other religions. In 1916, the nation was temporarily reverted to monarchy under the dictatorship of Yuan Shih-kai and the country was thrown into chaos by the subsequent declarations of independence on the part of the warlords.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, as far as the church was concerned, the tumultuous conditions resulted in more converts. John Mott and Geogre Sherwood Eddy embarked on successful preaching itinerary in China.<sup>18</sup> The situation changed in 1917 with the inception of the World War and the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia.

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The petition was made by serveral progressive scholars under the leadership of Ch'en Huan-chang, who was a han-lin scholar (doctorate in the old educational system) and a Ph.D. of Columbia University in political economy. Another petitioner Yen Fu had translated Darwin's Origin of Species and John Stuart Mill's On Liberty, and part of the Gospel of Mark. Their petition reads: "Morality is the foundation of a nation and the standard of morality depends on religion. . . . China at present is in so much confusion that she cannot afford to let this principle (Confucianism) remain unwritten. Confucianism should be laid down in the constitution as the state religion; by so doing the minds of the people will be restred to a state of stable equilibrium, and the administration of the country will proceed successfully" (H. K. Wright, "The Confucian Revival," CCYB [1914], p. 63f.).

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See Hsu, Modern China, pp. 558-76.

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Latourette, Missions in China, p. 591. Confucianist students attending their meetings conceded that the chief hope for China is Christianity (J. W. Bashford, "Religious Aspect of Affairs and Church in China," CCMB [1914], p. 38).

### The Anti-Christian Movement

The World War disillusioned many Chinese over the Christian culture of the western powers which entered into the conflict for colonies. The despair and despise against the west were reinforced by Lenin's critique of Christianity and western culture. Eventually it led to the anti-Christian movement.

#### The May Fourth Movement and intellectual revolution

As has been said, ever since the inception of the Republic, China was torn internally by inflation, strife and civil wars. The unstable government was unable to resist the aggression of foreign powers. To forestall foreign opposition for his reversion to monarchy, Yuan Shih-kai had accepted the infamous Japanese Twenty-one Demands and signed agreements with Russia and Britain in 1915 which lost her interests in Shantung Peninsula, Outer Mongolia and Tibet respectively. In face of these humiliating treaties and the betrayal of the Republic (monarchy) many intellectuals felt that their country was at stake. When the Allies in the Versailles Peace Conference ruled that the German privileges of Shangtung Peninsula were inherited by Japan, a huge demonstration of about 5,000 students broke out in Peking in May 4, 1919. Then student associations sprang up everywhere to

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The Twenty-one Demands include five groups: 1. recognition of Japan's position in Shantung; 2. special position for Japan in Manchuria and Inner Mongolia; 3. joint operation of China's iron and steel industries; 4. nonalienation of coastal areas to any third power; and 5. control by Japan of China's several important domestic administrations. See *ibid.*, p. 568, n. 43 and pp. 582ff.

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*ibid.*, p. 591ff. See Chow Tse-tsung, The May Fourth

advocate a critical evaluation of existing culture and the reconstruction of a new culture upon which a new and modernised China was built. The movement was imbued with rationalism, utilitarianism and scientism. Between 1917 and 1921, John Dewey and Bertrand Russell lectured in the universities of China. They became patrons of the intellectual movement. Their books were translated and commanded wide readership among students.

Modernisation and development of science were synonyms. And religion was considered the greatest obstacle of scientific development. A belated ideological warfare between scientism and religion in the aftermath of the Enlightenment began in China;

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Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960); idem, "The Anti-Confucian Movement in Early Republican China," in The Confucian Persuasion, edited by A. F. Wright (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1960), pp. 288-312. Hu Shih, The Chinese Renaissance (Chicago, 1934; 2d ed., New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corporation, 1963). Being an avowed disciple of John Dewey Hu served as Dewey's interpreter during his itinerant lectures in China. He was a staunch advocate of vernacular language and literal reform. Biographical information of Hu, see Ssu-yu Teng and John K. Fairbank, China's Response to the West. A Documentary Survey 1838-1923 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), pp. 235-58. The May Fourth Movement is variously called the New Thought Movement, the Chinese Renaissance, the New Thought Tide. During this period, vernacular language became popular and Confucianism was thoroughly being criticised.

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Dewey's lectures were first printed in magazines and newspaper and then published as a book. The book ran through fourteen printings of 10,000 copies each in two years (Lutz, Christian Colleges, p. 179). The influence of Dewey was also evident on Christian campuses. A professor in the Presbyterian University of Shanghai writes, "The natural powers and instincts are God-given and are neither morally good nor morally evil, but they develop into the one or the other, according to the use which is made of them" (James B. Webster, Christian Education and the National Consciousness of China [New York: E. P. Dutton, n.d.], p. 53). Dewey's philosophy of education is pervasive in the whole book, see especially pp. 52ff.

and it was fought with impassioned nationalism.

The anti-Christian activities in 1922 and 1924

The outbreak of the anti-Christian movement was triggered by the convention of the World's Student Christian Federation (WSCF), held in April 1922 at Tsing Hua University near Peking. Their publicity aroused the negative response of the students in Shanghai, who, under the orchestrated effort of the communists, formed the Anti-Christian Student Federation. On March 9, 1922, they put forward an incensed manifesto attacking the WSCF:

We oppose the World's Student Christian Federation because we decide to protect the welfare and happiness of humanity. We now wish to proclaim our real attitude so that the public may know it. We understand that Christianity have created many evils and have committed many crimes.<sup>23</sup>

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The anti-Christian sentiments of the nineteenth century and the twenties of the twentieth century were on different platforms. In the earlier period, it was spearheaded by the Confucian gentry class and the literati out of the fury of foreign (diplomats, traders, missionaries were indiscriminately considered the same) infringement on traditional values and territories. It was sentimental rather than rational. However, the twenties operated on an ideological level. Skepticism and hostility against religion were characteristics of the writings of all the antagonists. Three major objections of religion and Christianity in particular are 1. Religions are superstitious and unscientific, hence socially undesirable. 2. Christianity, to some extent, embodies imperialistic psychology. 3. Religions are irrational, therefore unnecessary. See F. Rawlinson, "China's Reconstructive Purpose," CCYB (1929), p. 9. See also Yu-ming Shaw, "The Reaction of Chinese Intellectuals Toward Religion and Christianity in the Early Twentieth Century," in China and Christianity, Historical and Future Encounter, edited by James D. Whitehead, Yu-ming Shaw and N. J. Girardot (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), pp. 154-82.

23

As cited in Wing-hung Lam, Chinese Theology in Construction (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1983), p. 87. The book is a Ph.D. dissertation on the response of the Chinese Christians to the anti-Christian movement. See also Ka-chi Yip, "The Anti-Christian Movement in China, 1922-1927, with Special Reference to the Experience of Protestant Missions," Ph.D.

Next day a telegram was sent to the students of Tsing Hua University and the entire nation. The movement spread to Peking where the Great Anti-Religion Federation was organised. Religion was said to engender evils worse than "floods and ferocious beasts." In south China, the leader of the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) Wang Ching-wei issued a telegram to the Canton Education Association requesting the eradication of "the poison of religion out of Canton and make the first contribution to the movement."<sup>24</sup> Eventually the movement died out as the initial emotion dissipated. However in summer 1924, it came back with much fervour and loaded with political scruples.

The failure of the Paris Peace Conference to return Shantung and the friendly offer of the Bolshevik Russia to annul all her unequal treaties adduced the ruling party, Kuomintang, to adopt the policy of "alliance with the Soviets, accommodation of the Communists." Members of the Chinese Communist party, formed in 1921 were allowed to join with Kuomintang. Now the primary agenda of the party was the termination of warlordism and the unification of the country as well as the war against imperialism. Communist members such as Chow En-lai were in control of the Political Education Department for the

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dissertation, New York: Columbia University, 1970); N. Z. Zia (Hsieh Fu-ya), "The Anti-Christian Movement in China: A Bird's-Eye View," CCYB (1925), pp. 51-60.

<sup>24</sup>

Chen-kuang tsa-chih (True Light Magazine) 21/10-11 (June 1922):42, as cited in Lam, Chinese Theology in Construction (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1983), p. 89. Wang was the leader the left wing of Kuomintang as Chang Kai-shek was the leader of the right wing. He was the Chief Secretary of Dr. Sun Yat-sun the godfather of the Republic.

indoctrination of the army cadets.

Under the propaganda of the leftists anti-Christian activities became part of the struggle with the encroaching imperialism. In 1924, the Great Anti-Imperialism Federation was formed in Canton and Peking by the Nationalist Party. During the Christmas week, large scale demonstrations were held throughout the nation. Christianity was denounced as the "running dogs" and the "cultural arm" of imperialism. Mission schools were conceived as manufacturing "slaves of the foreigners."

#### The May Thirtieth Affair, 1925

The anti-foreign sentiment reached its peak in May 30th, 1925 when the British guards shot at the demonstrators killing at least twelve Chinese and injuring dozens. The incident started with the strike of the workers in a Japanese cotton-mill in Shanghai in protest of low wages in February. The strike was to not avail. Further negotiation between the management and the workers ended up in turmoil. As a result one died and several

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The International Settlement was the territory leased to the powers and was ruled by extraterritoriality. Nee's Little Flock assembly was at the International Settlement. Anti-foreign activities were not confined to Shanghai but widespread in other big cities. In Shamen (the concession region) of Canton, a conflict between the foreign guards and the protesters in June 23, 1925 resulted in the death of one Frenchmen, four British were wounded while fifty Chinese were killed and a hundred were wounded. In Foochow in January 1925 young Nationalists shut off the business of American fish merchants and forced the closing of the Anglo-Chinese College. Posters appeared everywhere written of slogans: Be Angry! Hate! Kill! The situation was so undesirable that the Consul requested the sending of naval vessels. See Paul A. Varg, Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats: The American Protestant Missionary Movement in China, 1890-1952 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), pp. 187, 185.

were wounded. The Japanese killers were not arrested but the municipal authority imprisoned some Chinese workers for their defying the law of staging demonstration in the International Settlement.<sup>25</sup> On May 22nd, a memorial service was held for the murdered and the arrested. Many of those participating in the service were seized by foreign police. Such rough treatment infuriated the students who later organised a massive demonstration on May 30th and marched toward the International Settlement. The British guards opened fire at the crowd. The brutal shooting of the unarmed students brought the whole country to a frenzy. Similar anti-foreign demonstrations were staged throughout the country.

The May Thirtieth Affair was considered by some as the Boston Tea Party of China.<sup>26</sup> The enrollment of mission schools dropped. Young people went to government schools because they wanted to be trained as Chinese citizens. In December about one hundred and twenty students, including some girls, went to study in the University of Sun Yat-sun at Moscow.<sup>27</sup>

#### Regain educational rights movement

In 1905, China abolished the Civil Service Examination which was mainly based on the aptitude score of Confucian classics. In view of the rudimentary stage of the new educational system, civil service was not accessible exclusively to the

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Fong F. Sec, "Recent Developments in Chinese Government Education," CCYB (1926), p. 237.

<sup>27</sup>

Ibid.

graduates of the government schools. They were open to all students who possessed appropriate credentials. In policy, schools established by foreigners were not required to register with the government for fear that recognition would advocate foreign-controlled education and the delay of the abolition of extraterritoriality.<sup>28</sup> In practice, however, the mission schools were given quasi-recognition in that graduates were employed in state institutions and competitive examinations for scholarship for foreign study were opened to them.

Nevertheless, the presence of the mission schools was ever a deep concern to the nationalists who criticised that the foreign institutions trained foreign subjects rather than Chinese citizens. The missionaries were accused of being the pioneers of colonization work for their respective nations. The church and schools were contemplated as the arms of the imperialist invasion. Apparently their anxiety was justified by a superficial reading of the objectionable title of the survey published by the China Continuation Committee entitled The Christian Occupation of China (1922). Again, fear was generated by the release of the Burton Report (Commission for Christian Education in China) given in a book called Christian Education in China which reads:

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Latourette, Missions in China, p. 644.

29

Edward Wilson Wallace, "The Religious Problem in the Chinese Renaissance," CMYB (1923):157.

The study which the Commission has made . . . has brought them to the conviction that Christian principles may yet become the controlling force in China's life, But whether this will be the case or not will depend in no small measure upon the wisdom and intelligence with which Christian education is carried on in the next few years. If Christian education fails, the growing stream of non-Christian education and of anti-Christian influence will submerge the Christian movement, or reduced it to a place of minor importance.<sup>29</sup>

The fact that the Burton Report recommended that the spirit of Christianity should pervade the whole educational program alarmed many Chinese educators. In the same year, Ts'ai Yuan-p'ei, chancellor of Peking University in an essay entitled "Independence of Education" suggested that the constitutional right of religious freedom had been violated in Christian schools. He proposed:

1. There is no need to put theological subjects in a university curriculum. In the department of philosophy it can include History of Religion and Comparative Religion.
2. No school curriculum should contain the teaching of religious doctrines or prayer.
3. Professional workers should not participate in educational ministry.<sup>30</sup>

In response to Ts'ai's proposal, the National Association for the Advancement of Education in July 1922 passed a

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As cited in Lam, Chinese Theology, p. 107. Ts'ai (1868-1940) was a han-lin scholar and had studied at the University of Leipzig, well-versed in both the Confucian thought and western philosophy. He was appointed minister of education (1912-13) in Sun Yat-sen cabinet, but resigned during the reign of Yuan Shik-kai. In 1915 he and others organized the Socite Franco-Chinois of d'Education at Paris and sponsored a work-study program for Chinese students. Serving as chancellor of National Peking University (1917-27), he was considered the leader of the New Thought movement. A brief biographical sketch and translation of his work is given in Ssu-yu Teng and John K. Fairbank, China's Response to the West. A Documentary Survey 1938-1923 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), pp. 235-58. Teng and Fairbank, ibid., pp. 234-39. For the movement of recovering educational rights see Lam, ibid., pp. 104-12; Lutz, Christian Colleges, pp. 232ff.

resolution calling for the abolition of all religious teaching and ceremonies in elementary mission schools since the children were not yet mature to form their own judgement.

The campaign to restore educational rights resorted to student revolts in 1924. The Holy Trinity College in Canton took the lead in declaring self-government and was supported by the mass media. Eventually the school was closed. Emboldened by the news of the closing of foreign schools in Turkey, and the popular support rendered to the students at Holy Trinity College, students in Nanking, Foochow and other cities stirred up storms. In July, the National Association for the Advancement of Education at its third annual conference resolved that all foreign schools should register with the government and the recognition was accorded on condition of the elimination of all religious courses. The sustained animosity against Christian schools forced many institutions to suspend classes; students left without taking final examinations.<sup>31</sup> At last the movement receded on November 16, 1925 when the Ministry of Education issued the New Regulation delineating stipulations for the registration of the foreign schools.<sup>32</sup> The regulation was generous, flexible and generally supported by all Christian educators.<sup>33</sup>

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As cited in Edward Wilson Wallacen, "The Educational Commission--and After," CCMB (1923), p. 157.

32

The unofficial translation of the New Regulation is found in Edward Wilson Wallace, "Christian Education in 1925," CCYB (1926), p. 227f.

33

The fact that several of the members in the Board of

A nation under one party

In July 1926 Kuomintang commenced the much-delayed Northern Expedition for the unification of the whole nation. <sup>34</sup> By March 1927 all cities south of Yangtze had been taken. Students discarded their books and joined the grand campaign. They volunteered in the nationalist propaganda before and after the military movement. Under the direction of the communist cadres, peasants and workers were organised into unions to support the party. The spectacular success of the Northern Expedition aggravated the nationalistic feeling. Riding on the boiling patriotism, leaders of the restoration of educational rights stirred up hsüeh-ch'ao (student strikes) in Christian colleges. The locations and timing of hsüeh-ch'ao kept in pace with the <sup>35</sup> movement of the southern army. Other foreign institutions were also under attack. The Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party had directed members to disseminate propaganda against the Christian church as the vanguard of imperialism and to incite the <sup>36</sup> populace against the church whenever opportunities prevailed.

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Education were Christians who understood the nature of Christian education and the pragmatic approach of the government in realising the contribution of Christian schools were responsible for the lenience and tactful handling of the case. At the beginning of 1926, the Ministry of Education did issue the order that required schools to register or to be closed down but it was never enforced (ibid., pp. 227-30).

<sup>34</sup>

An admirable summary of the Northern Expedition is given in Hsu, Modern China, pp. 614-24.

<sup>35</sup>

Lutz, Christian Colleges, p. 255. Detail description of the hsueh-ch'ao, see pp. 255ff.

<sup>36</sup>

Ibid., p. 256.

In January 1927, the British concession at Hankow in central Yangtze was surrounded by a mob for four hours. As a result Britian had to relinquish her concession and established an Anglo-Chinese regime over the area with the appointment of a Chinese Director.<sup>37</sup> In the light of the Hankow incident troops of the powers were dispatched to Shanghai to protect their subjects and help evacuation if the situation deteriorated. The movement of foreign troops was again served good propaganda against imperialism on the part of the Nationalists and Communists. On March 24th, violent anti-foreign outbursts claimed a toll of many foreigners.<sup>38</sup> During the year 1927, about 3,000 missionaries left China. Most of them left with the expectation to return soon and out of fear of complicating the most difficult international situation.<sup>39</sup>

By the end of 1928, the nation ended its thirteen years chaos. China was unified under Chiang Kai-shek who was identified by some as "Protector of Faith."<sup>40</sup> He perceived that most of the anti-foreign activities such as the Nanking incident were directed by the communists inside the party. On April 10, 1927 a

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Hodgkin, "Events in China During 1927," p. 6.

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See chapter VI note 13. The Nanking incident was a communist plot to discredit General Chiang Kai-shek by alienating the foreign powers (Hodgkin, "Events in China During 1927," p. 12).

39

C. L. Boynton, "The Evacuation and Return of Missio-  
naries," CCYB (1928), p. 158f.

40

Shirley Stone Garrett, "Why They Stayed: American Church Politics and Chinese Nationalism in the Twenties," in John K. Fairbank, ed., The Missionary Enterprise in China and America (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1974), p. 292.

"purge committee" was organised. The political department of the National Revolutionary army was dissolved. In July the Nationalist government of Chiang declared: "people of all classes and students of private schools may, on no account, deliberately try to destroy a private institution by means of the slogan 'Regain Educational Rights.'<sup>41</sup>" However, the nationalistic sentiment was on the ascent. The Nationalist government, launched the movement of national construction according to the ideology of San Min Chu I or the Three Principles of the People taught by Dr. Sun Yat-sen which was a required course in all grade schools.<sup>42</sup> The ultimate aim of the Nationalist government was not merely the nullification of all unequal treaties of which many missionaries were ardent supporters.<sup>43</sup> Its goal was to eradicate all elements alien to China and to establish a nation which was both Chinese and powerful among other nations.<sup>44</sup> A missionary observer writes: "(the Chinese Church) must align itself with this Nationalist spirit and become Chinese, or it will lose a

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H. C. Tsao, "The Nationalist Movement and Christian Education," CCYB (1928), p. 183.

42

In February 1928 the resolution of the joint meeting of the University Committee and the Political Educational Commission reads: "Our party aims to reconstruct the country by the party and to educate the people to conform to San Min Chu I" (Tsao, ibid., p. 188). San Min Chu I is still a required course in Taiwan today. See Sun Yat-sen, San Min Chu I, trans. Frank W. Price (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1928).

43

Paul A. Varg, "The Missionary Response to the Nationalist Revolution," in John K. Fairbank, ed., The Missionary Enterprise in China and America, pp. 311-17.

44

Ibid., p. 315.

great opportunity." <sup>45</sup> Indeed the mounting nationalism served as a catalyst for the establishment of an indigenous church which <sup>46</sup> was long overdue.

#### Summary and Conclusion

In the light of the foregoing survey of the political vicissitude and rising nationalism, it is not hard to appreciate Nee's severing with the denominations which were mostly staffed <sup>47</sup> by ministers who were former missionary assistants and adopted <sup>48</sup> western ecclesiastical forms. On several occasions Nee in his

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Hubbard to Archibald Black, April 2, 1927, Archives of American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, as cited in Varg, "The Missionary Response," p. 315.

46

The opinion of the mainline churches concerning the nationalist movement may be summed up by C. Y. Cheng, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches who saw that the series of adverse events might contribute to the acceleration for an indigenous church. He writes: "The sleeping lion is beginning to awake. These signs of life are seen, not so much in the political changes, but in the growing national consciousness of the people which clearly indicates a great future for the work of the Christian interprise. Surely the seed of the Christian Church planted in China years ago is breaking through the earth and sending up its sprouts" (Some Problems Confronting the Christian Movement in China as Seen by a Chinese Christian [Shanghai, April 1927], p. 16).

47

"What the Chinese saw and the missionaries took longer to realize was that, quite apart from the foreignness of mission patterns, they had unavoidably offered in the early days avenues of promotion in the church to men who had begun life as missionaries' servants, and who despite the splendid dedication of many of them, nevertheless constituted in practice a 'class' of Christians unlikely to inspire esteem among more cultured and intellectual Chinese" (Kinneer, Against the Tide, p. 179).

48

The editor of Chinese Recorder (CR) comments: "The main difficulty Christianity faces in China is not with message, though that is given with varying and sometimes conflicting views, but with its ecclesiastical organisation" (CR [March 1930]:203 as cited in Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry. Fact-Finders' Report 5: China, ed. Orville A. Petty [New York and

"Open Letters" of the Christian Message alluded to the trials of the church and the contemporary tumult which heightened his sense of the return of Christ. "Let us behold the situation of today to realise how dim it is. Come wind, come weather. Who can be sure about the fate of the followers of the Lord? Vain is the temporary which comes to pass soon. Our eternal glory awaits us ahead (1926.12)." A column was allocated to "prophecy of the time" to to awaken the readers to understand the end time.

"Knowing the Lord is coming soon, we may not be in lethargy but forsake the world (1926.2.18)"<sup>49</sup> It is noteworthy that since the second issue of Christian Message, Nee kept on expounding the the seven churches in the Book of Revelation and talked about the apostate church in the end time. The articles are collected in<sup>50</sup> the title of Meditation on Revelation.

### Looking for Spiritual Alignment, 1928-1936

Home Base at Shanghai

#### The centrality of the cross

At the heat of the Nanking incident March 1927, Nee was writing his The Spiritual Man in recuperation at a town near

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London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1933], p. 39).

49

Open Letters, pp. 4f.

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The articles are in three titles amounting to 676 pages in Chinese: Ch'i-shih Lu Yao-i (Essence of Revelation) (Taipie: Gospel Book Room, p. 1981), an introduction; Meh-hsiang Ch'i shih Lu (Meditation on Revelation), 2 vols., (Taipie: Gospel Book Room, 1982-3). They are significant in understanding Nee's development of the doctrine of the church, since the thrust of the Meditation on Revelation is to account for the apostasy of the church in history as revealed in the seven letters. We will come back for an analysis later.

Wushi, a city about 100 miles away. Like many Christians seeking  
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 peace, Nee went eastbound to Shanghai (foreign troops had  
 already moved in, supra, p. 167) where he met and befriended  
 C. H. Judd of China Inland Mission, treasurer of the Bible Union  
 of China (supra, Chapter VI note 6). In late 1927, they and Li  
 Yuan-ju, Wang Pei-chuen started breaking bread in Wang's  
 52  
 house. Meeting started in February 1, 1928 at Wen Teh Li at  
 Haroon Road in the International Settlement where the May  
 Thirtieth Affair took place three years before. Nee preached  
 twice a day, each lasted three hours. The theme of the first ten  
 days was about spiritual life. Later the sermons focused on the  
 eternal will of God and the principle of spiritual war (God's Eternal  
 Will and the Victory of Christ). At the meeting, the first  
 53  
 edition of the Little Flock Hymnal was released (comprised of

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"After I learnt about the bad news of Nanking (missionaries and staff of consulate were killed) and lost contact with brothers and sisters, I came to Shanghai. Upon my arrival at Shanghai, I discovered that they already came there" (Recounting the Past, p. 92; trans. mine). Shanghai is only about 40 miles eastbound from Wushi.

52

Kinnear, Against the Tide, p. 125f. Miss Wang Pei-chuen was a renowned woman itinerant revivalist and close co-worker of Nee. Witness Lee was converted during her preaching in Chefoo (Kao Wang Hang-hsun, narrator [高以抗], A Short Biography of Sister Wang Pie-chen [Hong Kong: Christian Publishers, 1974], pp. 6, 20). Li Yuan-ju, Testimony and Message, pp. 7-10; Nee, Recounting the Past, p. 92.

53

The designation of the hymnal as Little Flock is may be a clue to Nee's Darbyite heritage. Darby had compiled a hymnal entitled A Few Hymns and Some Spiritual Songs, Selected 1856, for The Little Flock, rev. 1881 and rearranged and further revised (London, 1903). Darby delineates three qualification for a hymn namely basis of truth and sound doctrine, spirit of poetry and "that experimental acquaintance with truth in the affections which enables a person to make his hymn" (p. iv). Nee suggests similar criteria: 1. soundness in truth; 2. poetic form and

eighty hymns). The meeting went on twenty-six days and was attended by forty people half of whom came from other cities. The conference gave birth to the first Local Church assembly in Shanghai and apparently Nee was their undisputable leader.

The meeting of 1928 was designated as the first "Overcomer Conference." It concentrated on the central concern of the Bible, namely Christ, and his crucifixion. Nee intended to have such a conference every year so as to be drawn back to this central theme. From 1928 to 1934, the themes of the conferences were as follows:

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 structure; and 3. "it must induce a real feeling; that is, a feeling which touches spiritual reality" (BLST, 1:241-46; CFP, 1972-1975, 3:90-95). The first example for illustration of good hymns is taken from Darby to which he remarks: "I think rarely in these twenty centuries has there been any hymn which surpasses this one in grandeur" (BLST, 1:249; CPF, 3:98f.). Nee was well read about hymns: "I have read hymns from the first century up to date, more than 1,000" (BLST, 1:245; trans. mine).

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Technically, we may say that the first Local Church assembly came into existence in Foochow in 1923. But the leader at Foochow was Leland Wang who wrote to invite Dora Yu for the revival meeting and the meeting was held in his courtyard. But in 1928, Nee's spiritual perception was much sharpened as he finished writing SM.

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The purpose of the "Overcomer Conference" does not deal with the periphery of the Bible such as "prophecy, church organization, exposition of the Bible, typology, baptism, laying of hands, tongues, miracles and scores of other topics" ("Report about the Third Overcomer Conference," Revival 1933.12.12; reprint in Shen-te Ti Te-sheng Che [The Overcomer of God] [Taipie: Gospel Book Room, 1984], p. 124; trans. mine).

56

The Overcomer of God, p. 1. The addresses of the last conference on "The Victorious Life", September and October 1935 at Shanghai are published recently in a title Te-sheng Ti Sheng-min (The Victorious Life [Taipie: Gospel Book Room, 1983]).

1. The Eternal Will of God and the Victory of Christ, February 1928 (Shanghai).
2. The Covenant and Wisdom of God, October 1931 (Shanghai).
3. Christ is the Centrality and Universality of God, January 1934 (Shanghai).
4. The Overcomer of God, October 1934 (Hangchow)
5. The Victorious Life, September and October 1935 (Shanghai).

The above topics of the conferences suffice to show that the issue most concerned Nee was no longer church polity, or mode of baptism. His main desire was to preach about spirituality and discipleship. This orientation was confirmed again with the topics discussed in the new series of Revival he published in Shanghai. From 1928 to 1930, the topics of Revival were: "Mainly proclaim Christ, especially his life, death, resurrection, intercession, coming in body and kingdom." The nature was "the building up of spiritual life, not engaging in rational debate." The topic of 1931 was: "Mainly discuss about the profound matter of God." The theme of "mainly discuss about the principle of spiritual life" commenced in 1932 till 1934. To Nee, "to know God at the center and live within this center is victory, holiness, and glory, The rest will fall in line."

The reasons for his new orientation are both subjective and objective. First, the struggle with his failing health and the writing of The Spiritual Man made him see Christian faith existentially in a manner that never occurred to him before. Second, he was influenced by the revival movement of the early thirties

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Chan, My Uncle, p. 20; cf. note 9.

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"Report about the Third Overcomer Conference, 1933.12.12," p. 125; trans. mine.

which accentuated the internal, personal aspects of Christian faith. And this emphasis of personal piety is crucial to his teaching of the universal priesthood. As we shall see later, according to Nee, the Word of God could convey to others only through spiritual man. Biblical knowledge, natural talents had no avail, not to mention ecclesiastical status or ordination.

"The Spiritual Man"

The initial idea of writing a compendium about spiritual life "based on the Word and experience" first came to his mind while he rested for recuperation in 1923 (see chapter VI note 4). In early 1926, he fell sickness while he preached in Amoy. The diagnosis confirmed that he had tuberculosis and could survive only several months. "I was not afraid of death. However, as I thought about the lessons that God had taught me these years being not yet written down, (I ask myself,) 'did I want to go to the tomb like that?'"<sup>59</sup> Since then he came to Nanking for recuperation and concentrated on finishing his Spiritual Man. The deteriorating health certainly had affected Nee's spiritual perceptive. He remarks in the preface of The Spiritual Man written on June 24, 1927:

Due to my special experience in the physical body during these few years, it has been given me to know more of the reality of eternity . . . I may say that for two months I lived daily in the jaw of Satan. What battling! What withstanding! All my powers of spirit, soul and body were summoned to contend with hell.<sup>60</sup>

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Recounting the Past, p. 91.

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The Spiritual Man, 1:28f.; CFP, 1968, 1:8f.

In the same preface he acknowledges his indebtedness to writers such as Andrew Murray, F. B. Meyer, Otto Stockmayer, 61  
 Jessie Penn-Lewis, Evan Roberts and Jeanne de la Motte Guyon. Among the foregoing, he singled out Mrs. Penn-Lewis saying that 62  
 "I personally receive great help from Mrs. Penn-Lewis." During his recuperation Nee was able to identify with Penn-Lewis. She too struggled with bad health through which she learnt the truth of the cross. In fact calling the meeting "Overcomer Conference" was probably inspired by Penn-Lewis who edited a magazine called Overcomer. Penn-Lewis also advocated the maintenance of the centrality of the cross which became the theme 63  
 of all the Overcomer Conferences of Nee.

#### China on the eve of revival movement

Another element contributing to Nee's emphasis of internal

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"I have used their writings freely since we all have recieved the same commission from the Lord; therefore I have decided to forego notation their many references" (Ibid., 1:33; CFP, 1:11f.

62

The Overcomer of God, 1934.1, pp. 100 (trans. mine), 96. Cf. Stephen Chan remarks SM is greatly influenced by Mrs. Penn-Lewis (p. 37). He had corresponded with her and Penn-Lewis sent him her The Word of the Cross and The Cross of Calvary and Its Message. Upon reading them, Nee remarks, "I read them most carefully, but though I received help of a kind, to my disappointment they didn't settle my biggest question" (Kinnear, Against the Tide, p. 76).

63

She writes in the opening remarks of the book she mailed to Nee: "We need a 'fixed point', which acts a centre and a goal, and that 'point' in the history of the world--back to the ages before it, and forward to the ages following it--is the Cross of Calvary. It is the central pivot of the dealing of God with the universe in every aspect" (The Centrality of the Cross [Dorset, England: n.d.], p. 1).

spirituality was the revival movement that broke out in the late twenties in China. Several external factors in this juncture were congenial to revivalism: the precarious political situations even after the much celebrated Expedition; dwindling economy in the nation as a whole and the church in particular as the result of the exodus of the missionaries in 1927; and foreign aggression.

The years between 1928 and the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937 was comparatively stable in comparison with the chaotic situation of the past. However the condition was far from unity and peace as one might expect. The stability of the Nationalist regime was challenged by both dissident politicians, and the "new warlords" who were appointed positions in exchange for their nominal support rendered to the Expedition. Cooperations with the central government were contingent on self-interests on the part of these semi-independent generals whose military powers posed a real contest to the administration. In addition, the purge of the party in April 1927 de facto began the civil war between the Communists and the Kuomintang which was only interrupted when the country was threatened by a common

adversary--Japan. Taking full advantage of the domestic problems of China, in summer 1931, Japan made her overture in Manchuria. In order to divert international attention, she sent troops to Shanghai on January 28, 1932. Subsequently a puppet state of Manchukuo was set up in March, 1932. Deeply embroiled in civil strife, Chiang Kai-sheh was unable to afford a foreign war

except to appeal to world opinion. When the League of Nations  
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condemned Japan, Japan withdrew from the League in defiance.

The situation was equally gloomy in her economy. In 1931,  
39 percent of China's population were unemployed and 70 percent  
lived under poverty line; in Shanghai two-thirds of the silk  
filatures had been forced to closed thus throwing about thirty-  
66  
thousand workers out of a job. The distressing economy gave  
rise to many bandits and rebels who took missionaries for ransom.  
In 1930 Roman Catholics alone reported forty-five missionaries  
were in captivity and a bishop and six priests were killed. In  
the same year Chinese Christians connected with the China Inland  
67  
Missions were killed in Kiangsu.

As regard to the church, the blow of the anti-Christian  
movement instantly resulted in an abrupt drop of ministerial  
students. Enrollment of seminarians decreased by 57.3 percent in  
comparion with 1922. On the other hand the financial stringency  
due to the shrinking of foreign funds caused those already in the  
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ministry to drop out. Living in the protracted unstable

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Ibid., pp. 640-49.

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F. Rawlinson, "Trends in Reoganisation," CCYB  
(1931), p. 1f.

67

Ibid., p. 7.

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The following figure is a succint summary from a survey  
headed by Luther A. Weigle (Dean of the Divinity School of Yale  
University) under the auspices of the National Committee for  
Christian Religious Education in China, 1934-1935; and the report  
is released in a book entitled Training for Service in the  
Chinese Church:

1. In 1922 (Burton Report, see above) 14 theological schools  
above senior grade. In 1934, 2 of these for women only; 10 based  
on junior grade preparation.

political situations, poverty, and the threat of foreign aggression people began to consider spiritual matters and aspired to the hope and joy that this world failed to offer.

### Revival movement

The revival movement in the late twenties and early thirties was phenomenal and widespread throughout China. It swept the whole spectrum of society. An observer reports:

Bloodthirsty bandits, rapacious officials, overbearing soldiers, anarchistic students, dishonest servants, communists, polygamists, sedate scholars, hardheaders, business men, rickshaw coolies, beggars, men and women, young and old, city dwellers and country folk were moved to confess and forsake sin, and to make reparation and restitution. In Peiping (Peking) a total amount of more than twenty thousand dollars conscience money was returned.<sup>69</sup>

Many missionaries dated their spiritual lives from recent days and as a result of some of these gatherings rather than their formal Christian lives. Christians of all walks of life, old and young, male or female spontaneously organised themselves into evangelistic bands. By 1933 the Church was growing more through self-propagation than through the work of foreign missio-

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2. In 1922, 48 Bible schools for men. In 1934, 19 still exist, 5 advanced to higher grade schools, 2 merged, 5 unknown.

3. In 1922, 96 men of college grade and 295 of middle school grade totaling 391 in theological schools. In 1934, 26 of college grade and 15 had one year college work and 228 of middle school grade. See C. S. Miao, "Christian Leadership Survey," CCYB (1934-35), pp. 183-85.

69

Paul R. Abbott, "Revival Movements," CCBY (1932-33), p. 178. See also Leslie T. Lyall, A Passion for the Impossible. The China Inland Mission. 1865-1965 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), pp. 112ff.

70 naries. "Churches cold and careless have been reborn and  
filled with flaming enthusiam for witnessing." 71

The revival moved the seat of religion from the head to the heart. Learning doctrine now had yielded to vital personal experience of faith. This personal religion moved in great strides toward an indigenous church. To the Chinese, Christianity henceforth denuded much of its foreignness. The revivals were led by Chinese preachers; people could appropriate the religious experience themselves through repentance. Formalism appeared unpalatable, freedom of expression was treasured. The people insisted on participation and were impatient of ecclesiastical domination. The revival movement, with its primacy of internal, personal religious experience reinforced Nee's pursuit for sanctification which he already had mapped out in his Spiritual Man.

#### Search for Identity

##### Look for an united front

The revivals generated many converts. A subsequent urgent problem was to nurture these zealous believers. In 1931 Nee invited John Sung (known as 'the Moody of China'), his old colleague Leland Wang and other evangelists to a conference in Shanghai. His position seemed too separatist to his friends. 72

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Ibid., p. 114. Lyall also reports that a record baptism occurred in 1936, doubled that of 1926 for the member churches of China Inland Mission (p. 116).

71

Abbott, "Revival Movement," p. 179.

72

Abbott remarks about the Local Church: ". . . their

A second meeting with Sung and Wang was arranged by a good wisher in 1934 but again personality conflicts as well as different stance in church polity rendered the conference fruitless. <sup>73</sup>

### Difficulty with the Exclusive Brethren

Being disenchanted with the denominations imported by the missionaries as well as failing to align with the indigenous native evangelists, Nee was open to affiliate with other religious groups of similar theological stance overseas: separation from the world, the silence of women in worship, an unstructured order of worship with the partaking of the Lord's Supper and so forth. Charles Barlow of Peterborough of England who had met Nee in his business trip to Shanghai before, headed a delegation of seven leaders of the Exclusive Brethren in 1932. On December 6th these visitors celebrated the Lord's Supper with the brethren of Local Church assembly in Shanghai as a token for extending right hand of fellowship to their Chinese brethren.

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purpose to be the destruction of the present Church as moribund, corrupt, and apostate. . . . Wherever they have been able to accomplish their purpose it has resulted in a group of earnest spirits withdrawing from the churches and setting up what is to all intents another denomination" (ibid., p. 180). In Soochow a large group had split off from the Church of Christ in China to form the Local Church assembly. They rented a building opposite a Presbyterian Church, holding service at the same time as their neighbor. See C. Stanley Smith, "Modern Religious Movements: (1) In Christianity," CCYB (1934-35), P. 105. Another missionary remarks of their separatist attitude: "the carnality displayed in the form of spiritual pride by the Little Flock's adherences was, if anything, more virulent than the dull, heartbreaking carnality that already clogged the channels of blessing in the churches" (Charles E. Notson, "Individualism Gone Astray II: The 'Little Flock' of Watchman Ngnee," The Alliance Weekly, November 5, 1952, p. 729. The extreme cases might not represent the personal stance of Nee who was later 'excommunicated' by the Exclusive Brethren of London because he broke bread with other Christians.

They warmly invited Nee to minister to them in Britian. In 1933, Nee visited the Exclusive Brethren in Britian, Canada and America. However, upon learning Nee had partaken of the Lord's Supper with T. Austin-Sparks, the former Baptist minister of the Honor Oak Fellowship in London who re-baptised Margret Barber; and shared the cup with Dr. and Mrs. Thornton Stearns in the United States whom with he was acquainted when they were in the Presbyterian Mission in Chefoo, the Exclusive Brethren registered strong disapproval with Nee. Unpleasant correspondance over the matter of close communion lingered on for two years before Nee and his church were excommunicalted by the Exclusive Brethren on July 30, 1935.

In the letter dated 1935 July 2, Nee and his colleagues replied to the Exclusive Brethren and defended open communion. The letter was published in their church bulletin with the following remarks:

Several years ago seven believers came to Shanghai from Britian, America and Australia, requesting us to break bread with them. Being brethren in the Lord we accepted them, as we accept others from other denominations. Since they were Exclusive Brethren, we made it clear that we only accepted them as individuals, not the group they represented. Later they requested us to have the same exclusive view as they held. . . . The following is our reply. We hope our brethren elsewhere upon reading it may know our stance of fellowship; the reason why we cannot align with the Exclusive Brethren. We hope that our brethren elsewhere do not think of our fellowship in terms of severing with denominations, but to realise that our emphasis is the fellowship in the Spirit.<sup>74</sup>

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"Reply to the London Assembly, 1935.7.2", in Nee, Tsai Ai-chung Chien-tsau (Building In Love) (Taipie: Tien Sheng Press, 1981), p. 158; trans. mine. The text of the letter is reprinted as an appendix on pp. 158-71. The letter is signed by Watchman Nee, Witness Lee and four other elders. Presumably, Nee was the

It was the first time that the Little Flock assembly, which used to exclude others, was being excluded. Citing Roman 14:3, the Shanghai brethren accept all that are accepted by God. They argue that the responsibility of Christians is to safeguard the moral integrity (1 Corinthians 5:10) and sound Christology (2 John). Other than these, we should not practice close communion against those who hold different interpretations of truth. The most important thing is to live a sanctified life in Spirit. Having pure doctrine does not necessarily warrant an intimate relationship with the Lord. Reality is more significant than the form. We should trust the working of the Spirit among those who partake of the Lord's Supper and impose no exclusion arbitrarily. The letter states:

" . . . Fellowship is based on the question of spiritual life and the severing with all fleshly behavior.

May be some will object that by doing so we are without external uniformity. We should know that flesh originally does not tolerate external differences. The flesh likes to see external uniformity. . . . But if we live in spiritual reality and apprehend the various truths in life, being not confined in our mind, then we begin to emphasize the spiritual reality and neglect the external uniformity.<sup>75</sup>

Here once again, the spiritual, internal spirituality takes precedence over the external doctrinal purity. Like the early Alexandrian fathers, Nee differentiates the spiritual Christian

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 one who wrote the letter.

75

Ibid., p. 167. The disenchantment with the London Brethren serves to modify Nee's former strict view on communion. In his conference address in 1934.1.3 Nee mandates the letter of recommendation from brethren coming from outside before they are allowed to partake the Lord's Supper (The Overcomer of God, p. 122). Later he also partook the vast united communion at the closing ceremony of the Keswick with other Christians in other denominations.

and the fleshly Christian rather than layman and clergy (see chapter III note 36).

The spiritual suspension of the doctrinal

The fact that in this period Nee treasured spirituality more than doctrine was also attested by his deference to the ministry of a woman revivalist, Elizabeth Fishbacher. Feeling dissatisfied with his own spiritual life, and somewhat dejected owing to the separation from the Exclusive Brethren, Nee came to Chefoo of Shangtung for the revival meeting held by Fishbacher in autumn 1935. He was so refreshed by her preaching that he telegraphed back to Shanghai, "I have met the Lord," even though he avowedly took issue with women preaching publicly. Right after his spiritual renewal, Nee conducted conferences in Shanghai, Tientsin and Chuenchow in southern Fukien expounding the theme of the victorious Christian life.

Faith bears fruits

After Nee returned from overseas in 1934, he made evangelistic excursions into the interior of China covering regions as remote as Kwangsei, Yunnan and Tibet. Later at Hankow he gave series of Bible studies with several colleagues on The

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Kinnear, Against the Tide, p. 171. Stephen Chan reports that whenever Nee came to M. Barber's mission station, she yields him the pulpit (My Uncle, p. 11).

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See The Victorious Life, cf. note 56; Cheng-ch'ang Ti Chi-tu-t'u Hsin-yang (The Normal Christian Faith), 4 vols., Addresses in the Conference at Tientsin, 1936 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Church Book Room, 1974); "How to Experience Victorious Life," in The Victorious Life, pp. 59-91, was delivered at Chuenchow.

Song of Songs which betrayed his deep affection for Christ. In the same year he got married with Chang P'in Hui, his former lover with whom he acquainted from childhood and a beautiful and lovely graduate of the ivory league Yenching University. Nee had struggled to give up Chang at great pains after conversion because she was then not yet a Christian and appeared worldly and vain. Such an experience and scores of others strengthened Nee's conviction that Christian faith is a matter of life and experience, not merely creedal allegiance. Indeed we cannot really appreciate Nee's existential approach of theology without taking account of these personal testimonies.

#### Summary

The accents of his works in this period will suffice to confirm the inference that due to his struggle with his chronic disease and the writing of The Spiritual Man, Nee began to see Christian religion in an existential manner. This orientation was reinforced by the contemporary revival movement. To Nee

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(ET) The Song of Songs, trans. Elizabeth K. Mei and Daniel Smith (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1965). His indebtedness to the Brethren exegete C. A. Coates is explicit. The text was published till 1945 during the Sino-Japanese War at Chungking, the wartime capital in central China.

79

Nee wrote a hymn concerning the struggle to give up Chang which is collected in the Little Flock Hymnal (128th, 10 stanzas; Chinese text in Stephen Chan, My Uncle, p. 12f. and ET in James Chen, Meet Brother Nee, p. 16f.). Other testimonies include his miraculous recovery from the chronic disease of tuberculosis in 1943 (James Chen, Meet Brother Nee, p. 35f.; Stephen Chan, My Uncle, p. 34). Cf. his confession of cheating at Trinity College at the risk of being dismissed by the school and consequently the destruction of all prospects of further study. Stephen Chan records several of these moving testimonies (My Uncle, pp. 40-45).

Christian faith was a matter of life and calls for serious discipleship rather than just confessional adherence. His primacy of the spiritual life affects his view of the Christian ministry and the concomitant teaching of the priesthood of all believers. The spiritual reality--a personal intimate relation with Christ--is the prerequisite for any genuine and fruitful ministry. There is no distinction between clergy and laity. All are brethren. The difference is between a spiritual Christian and a carnal Christian. In fact, Nee was willing to align with anyone who is dedicated and lived an exemplary life as he clearly had enunciated in the reply to the Exclusive Brethren. For a spiritual renewal he would temporarily suspend his opposition against woman preaching in the public and be ministered by a woman revivalist.

Nevertheless, the severing with the Exclusive Brethren and the rapid growth of the Local Church assemblies had obliged him to give more thought to the doctrine of the church. After all, he had to give answers to both friends and critics who certainly felt uncomfortable to see the exodus of laymen and even ministers who came abandoning their own denominations to join his church.

#### The Fruitful Years: 1937-1941

##### The Church During the Sino-Japanese War

On July 7, 1937 Japan invaded China. Encouraged by her success in Manchuria, the rise of Fascism and Nazism in Europe, Japan assumed that North China would be captured in months before any concerted international sanction was reached. However, the

vast territories of China and the determination to resist on the part of the Chinese people made the intended short war turn out to be a long struggle of attrition which lasted till 1945. The war halted the civil strife between the Nationalists and the Communists at a moment when the latter were about to be exterminated by the former. The eight years resistance thoroughly exhausted the Nationalist government, and opened the way for the seizure of power by the Communists in 1949.

The missionaries chose to stay

Before the outbreak of the Pacific War, many missionaries chose to stay in China and cared for the refugees. When Nanking fell and over 10,000 unarmed persons were executed, the missionaries registered strong protests and urged for conscientious actions on the part of their governments to intervene. Many campuses of mission schools were converted into huge refugee camps under the flags of their governments. In Washington, D.C. a group of American missionaries established the China Information Service in September 1938 to send out mimeographed bulletins to arouse the American people to the justice of China's cause.

Their sacrificial love for the distressed Chinese won the

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See Hsu, Modern China, pp. 676-710.

81Christiana Tsai, Queen of the Dark Chamber (Chicago: Moody Press), p. 155.

82

Varg, Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats, p. 260. That was a small group of missionaries led by Frank Price, professor in the Theological Seminary at the University of Nanking.

admiration and gratitude of the Chinese. "What the missionaries have done in staying by to serve the people will do more good for Christianity in China 10 years of preaching." Even the Communists, who previously played an active role in the mischievous anti-Christian movement, appreciated the genuine love of the missionaries.

### Migration to the interior

Right after the fall of Nanking, the Nationalist government moved the capital to Chungking in the interior. Another wave of migration commenced after the Incident of Pearl Harbour, December 1941. Western concessions became occupied regions. Foreign subjects of countries at war with Japan became "belligerent aliens" overnight. The church was persecuted. In 1943, many missionaries and Christians were put into concentration camps. The saga of the trek to West China on the part of many colleges and universities adduced great sympathy and support of relief from the west. About 10 percent of the college population were from Christian institutions. Their heroic migration to keep the institutions alive under extreme difficulties in a sense

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The words of a Chinese merchant cited in John S. Barr, "The Missionary Situation in China," CCYB (1938-39), p. 173. For detailed report about the relief work of the church, see Varg, pp. 263-82.

84

The Commander-in-Chief of the Eighth Route Army (all communists) said: "The 8th Route Army expresses its thanks and gratitude for the kindness and help rendered to China by the foreign missionaries during her war of resistance, especially to those doctors and nurses who work under great difficulties and dangers. . . . The 8th Route Army has no prejudice against missionaries. On the contrary we welcome them" (Barr, "The Missionary Situation in China," p. 174).

identified with the suffering of the Chinese people.

During this distressing period, we witnessed the vitality of the church. The migration brought the Christian resources of coastal cities to the interior. In 1939 the Church of Christ in China organised a special department reaching out to the minorities in the interior and borderland.<sup>86</sup> Students indicated keen interests in the Christian message. In July 1945, the first summer conference of the National Christian Student Union was held. Revivals occurred among students. A witness reports that it was not uncommon that scores to two and three hundreds came out to kneel before the pulpit to accept Christ.<sup>87</sup> Students of the non-Christian schools responded even more favourably than the Christian schools. "(These students) perhaps only heard about Christianity from its enemies or from those who left an impression that it was only a recipe for eternal life after life.<sup>88</sup> The whole student world is a great open door." Indeed the revivals among these students provided strong leadership for the church and enabled her to remain vital during the communist take

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See Kiang Wen-han, "The Educational Trek," CCYB (1938-39), pp. 179-98; Carleton Lacy, "Immigrant Colleges and Middle Schools," CR 71 (1940):557-66; Lutz, Christian Colleges, pp. 361-95.

86

Lam, Wang Min-tao and the Chinese Church, p. 86.

87

Chao Chun-ying (趙君景少), Man-t'an wu-shih-nien lai chun-kuo ti chiao-hui yu cheng-chih (An Informal Discussion about the Chinese Church in the Past Fifty Years) (Taipie: Chinese Crusade Association, 1981), pp. 14-18. The author was the executive secretary of the National Christian Student Union.

88

Stanton Lautenschlager, "Evangelism among Students," CCYB (1938-39), p. 170f.

over.

Rethinking the Work

After ten years of searching since the establishment of the first church at Shanghai, in 1938 Nee released his definitive views on the doctrine of the church--Rethinking the Work. The book was reckoned of as an overdue apology that Nee felt was owed to his friends. It marked a new conception of the 'externalities of Christianity.' For many years he hesitated to talk about church polity in order to avoid controversies. In fact he withdrew all the books of that nature. However, he now came to the understanding that the Corinthian truth was as inspired as the Ephesian truth. The book was the collection of the addresses given in the Bible studies with his young workers on "the Holy Spirit's pattern in the work of God in N. T. times."<sup>89</sup>

Rethinking the Work met an urgent need of the rapid growth of the Local Church assembly that made his personal counsels no longer as easily accessible to his younger colleagues as before during the uncertain period of the war. It provided practical guidelines for the operation of the church which, being an indigenous institution, and independent of the salaried ministry and impressive church buildings, advanced vigorously in spite of the stringent economy and rising nationalism. Top students of the

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Rethinking the Work; CO pp. 4, 7f. The book has two prefaces, English and Chinese written in 1938.1.23 (pp. 3-6) and 1938.2.15 (pp. 7-11). They are not identical. The Chinese edition was later "greatly abridged and slightly revised" in an English edition translated by Nee and affixed with another preface dated April 1939.

ivory leagues colleges such as Yen Ching, Ching Hua, Peiping Union Medical College and Peking University were drawn to their fold. While the exodus of the missionaries in 1927 slowed down the growth of the mainline denominations, their meetings at Hardoon Road in the International Settlement were crowded with people even on week nights. On the eve of the communist takeover in 1949 the Local Church assemblies had 700 congregations and about 70,000 members since its inception of the first assembly at Foochow in 1923.

#### Preaching Itinerary Overseas

The year 1938 not only witnessed his mature thought on church polity by the publication of Rethinking the Work, but also brought to fruition his long struggle on the issues of personal sanctification and union with Christ. During his European preaching itinerary, he delivered sermons on Roman 5-8 in Copenhagen which are collected under the title The Normal Christian Life. The book is indeed a Keswick classic and has already sold over a million copies in 30 languages.

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Notson, "The 'Little Flock' of Watchman Ngnee," p. 729. Another reports that after the visit of a Little Flock evangelist on campus of a middle school, "students had been flocking to Bible classes. The principle herself had found a new satisfaction and joy as a result of this visit and eagerness to be more truly Christian" ("Little Flock and Middle School Students," CR 38 [July 1937]:465). However, some of those coming to the Little Flock church might be motivated "more in anti-foreign nationalism than in heart-searching and repentance toward God" (Notson, "The 'Little Flock' of Watchman Ngnee," p. 729).

91

Lyall, Mighty Men, p. 64.

92

Norman Howard Cliff, "The Life and Theology of Watchman Nee," p. 354.

He went to London with his manuscript of Rethinking the Work to visit with T. Austin-Sparks at Honour Oak and shared his views on the church. They went together to attend the annual Keswick Convention (theme: Deepening of Spiritual Life in Keswick) at Cumberland and partook the vast united communion service. With the help of Elizabeth Fischbacher and her colleague Phyllis N. Deck, the English version of Rethinking the Work was published under the title Concerning Our Mission in January 1939. 93

His increasing emphasis on the ministry of the church was also reflected by the theme of the conference held in Shanghai on June 11-18, 1940 entitled "The Work of God." In the addresses of the conference Nee tried to integrate the external ministry of the Word, gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians and the internal, personal, spiritual life of the minister in 2 Corinthians. He writes:

The most edifying and helpful is not the gifts or the words of the gifted but the the life displayed by one who has been dealt with by the cross and apprehends the cross from inside which he carries daily.94

(the teachings of) 1 Corinthians are based on the spiritual life of the writer of 2 Corinthians. . . . Why the ministry (the work of God) of today is so poor and shallow? The reason is that the personal experience of the minister is too scanty.95

The primacy of life over gifts was further developed in

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The translation was done by his two friends, Nee abridged and revised. The book was revised and abridged again under the title The Normal Christian Church Life in 1962.

94

"The Work of God, 1940.6.11-18," in Sheng Ti Kung-tso (The Work of God) (Taipie: Tien Sheng Press, 1981), p. 16; trans. mine.

95

Ibid., pp. 25, 27; trans. mine.

another conference at Shanghai in 1940 in which the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were studied.<sup>96</sup> The same idea was reasserted in a seven-day conference in 1942 whereby the judgment of God upon the Christians was seen as a means to purify their lives and brought glory to God.<sup>97</sup>

### The Withdrawal and Come Back: 1942-72

#### Going into Business

In 1942 the distressing economy rendered the livelihood of the workers of his church precarious since they did not have a fixed salary. To solve the financial problem, he entered into business and served as the director of China Biological and Chemical Laboratories (CBC). That decision was not solely a financial expedience, but also motivated by his own teaching in Rethinking the Work. He writes:

. . . in Corinth Paul did not live of the Gospel, he made tents with his own hands. So there are evidently two ways by which the needs of God's servants may be met--either they look to God to touch the hearts of His children to give what is needful, or they earn it by doing part-time "secular" work. To work with our hands may be very good, but we require to note that Paul does not regard that as the usual thing. It is something exceptional, a course to be restored to in special circumstance.<sup>98</sup>

Though it is stated that 'tent-making' is an exceptional case,

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Abraham, Isaac, Jacob Ti Sheng (The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) (Hong Kong: Gospel Book Room, 1976); ET under the title Changed into His Likeness (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1967).

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See The Spirit of Judgment (CFP, 1984), pp. 3-54, especially p. 53f.

98

Rethinking the Work, p. 263; CFP, 1982, 2:187f.

however, the sense of exception is superceded by the preceding  
 statement that it is one of the two legitimate ways. <sup>99</sup> By 1945  
 Nee was so entangled in the business that he was not able to  
 preach after his exposition on the Seven Churches in the Book of  
 Revelation at Chungking. <sup>100</sup> His involvement in the business to  
 the neglect of his preaching ministry incurred grave  
 disappointment and criticism on the part of his congregation  
 members. Nevertheless in 1947 he disengaged himself from CBC  
 and resumed preaching in Foochow. His failures made him recurse  
 once again to the theme of 'brokenness' and personal  
 sanctification. In the same year he delivered the addresses  
 collected in the book entitled Release of the Spirit expounding  
 the practical means to attain sanctification. In 1948, the  
 brethren in Shanghai made gestures for reconciliation and longed  
 for his return. <sup>101</sup> Eventually he returned to Shanghai and resumed  
 leadership. <sup>102</sup> During his absence in Shanghai, Witness Lee

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Stephen Chan remarks that as a matter of fact, not a few  
 workers of the Local Church assemblies were practising 'tent-  
 making' (My Uncle., p. 47).

100

(ET) The Orthodoxy of the Church (Los Angeles: The Stream  
 Publishers, 1970).

101

The desire of the church in Shanghai can be seen by the  
 letter of Stephen Kaung to T. Austin-Sparks, dated 1947.4.16: "I  
 think you will be glad to know that Brother Nee may return to our  
 midst and be received at any moment. To rehearse the past is a  
 painful thing . . . Brother Nee's case was a mortal wound to  
 us. . . . Objections to his coming back to our midst have been  
 gradually eliminated. From all observations hearts are ready,  
 both Brother Nee's and the brethren's. There is even a growing  
 desire among the brethren for Brother Nee's return" (cited in  
 Cliff, "The Life and Theology of Watchman Nee," p. 35f.).

102

Witness Lee was the leader of the Local Church assembly  
 in Taiwan before he came to the States. His style of patriarchal

assumed leadership in the church. He was a genius in organisation. Under his influence, some kind of hierarchy had been established among the elders who took seats according to seniority. Presumably this practice departed somewhat from his early views enunciated in Rethinking the Work. However, the trend of centralisation rolled on. Two other related incidents helped to encourage this new direction, namely the 'hand over' movement and the 'Jerusalem principle.'

#### Centralisation

##### The 'hand over' movement

As has been said, Nee's motive in running the CBC was not self-serving; but for the financial need for the workers. After he disengaged himself from the business, he took the lead to hand over the whole CBC property to the church according to the teaching of Acts 4. Other believers of the Local Church assemblies followed suit in great enthusiasm. Overnight, Nee's church became one of the most wealthy churches in China in possessing pharmaceutical industry, printing factories and dozens of other properties hitherto privately owned. The movement did cause some troubles among some families when the wives and the husband were not united to hand over all their properties to the church. As regard to the churches (administration and property), the hand over movement was advocated under the banner of the

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 leadership and certain views of the Scriptures incur much controversies. See Neil T. Duddy and the SCP, The God-Men. An Enquiry into Witness Lee and the Local Church (2d; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981); Christianity Today, April 5, 1985, p. 41f.

'Jerusalem principle.'

The 'Jerusalem principle'

After the war, Nee made a significant revision for his doctrine of the church. In the Rethinking the Work Nee exalted the 'principle of Antioch' which may be stated briefly as follows: Each local congregation was in absolute independence of the workers. The first group of workers were sent out in Antioch. The concern of the apostles was not to station in a certain locale. They pioneered onward. After they had planted the church the authority was immediately transferred to local leaders, the elders. <sup>103</sup> The workers or apostles moved on. When the apostles came back to visit these churches, they went as ordinary brethren. If they chose to settle down in that church (in principle the elders had authority to reject them) at most they might act in the capacity as elders among their peer already in the church. The integrity of the locality of the church was to safeguard against the holding sway of the workers over the laymen and the subsequent development of a denomination with a centralised organisation.

However, absolute freedom of the local congregation did not serve good purpose for a more efficient utilisation of resources. Centralised planning and strategy were needed for the formidable evangelization of China. During the war time members of the Local Church assemblies had been dispersed to distant regions. Owing to

the effort of some of these zealous members some churches had been planted and inspired both Witness Lee and Nee for the idea of evangelization by migration. If the church could orchestrate similar migration for the sake of the gospel by sending out families to target regions to plant new churches, in decades China would be evangelized. That strategy called for a centralised coordinating center. That was the 'principle of Jerusalem' and it consequently heightened the authority of the workers or apostles. Nee decided that both Shanghai and Foochow should serve as centers. Christians in these two centers were trained by the workers with the view to be sent out. They should submit to the authority of the workers. Truly, there were no districts among churches, and each local congregation was fully independent. Nonetheless, the Work had centers from which the workers or apostles went out and came back.

104

#### From Kuling to the Prison

Starting from 1948, sensing the imminent coming of the Communists, Nee bought the highland summer retreat in Kuling and converted it into training camp for the training of the young workers who came from all over the country. Several titles come out from the addresses delivered here which are essential in our examination of Nee's teaching of the priesthood of all

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"Ching-hou kun-tso ti lu (The Road of Our Future Work)," Record of a conference in 1948.8.19; as Appendix in Rethinking the Work, pp. 333-53.

105

believers.

On April 10, 1952 Nee was arrested and charged with having committed crimes specified in the government campaign against corrupt business practices. The CBC was exacted a large fine. Since there was no way to pay the fine, Nee was put in prison and CBC was in the due course confiscated by the government. He eventually appeared for a trial on June 21, 1956 for an indictment running to 2,296 pages compiled against him and was sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment with reform by labour. In April 1972 Nee was transferred to an open center in Anhui province where he was received by the Lord on June 1.

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#### Conclusion

The foregoing account of the life of Nee in the light of his historical context will suffice for the following

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Such as (ET) The Basic Lesson Series, 6 vols.; (ET) The Ministry of God's Word (CFP, 1971); (ET) Spiritual Authority (CFP, 1972).

106

Since nearly all the works of Nee were written prior to the Communist takeover in 1949.1.10, we do not attempt to go into details about his life under the Communist regime. For further sources about the persecution of the church under the Communist rule consult the following works: Leslie T. Lyall, Come Wind Come Weather. The Present Experience of the Church in China (Chicago: Moody Press, 1960); idem, Red Sky at Night. Communism Confronts Christianity in China (Chicago: Moody Press, 1970); David H. Adeney, China: Christian Students Face the Revolution (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973); Francis P. Jones, The Church in Communist China. A Protestant Appraisal (New York: Friendship Press, 1962); idem, ed., Documents of the Three-Self Movement (New York, 1963); Jonathon Chao (趙天恩), Chung-kung tui chi-tu-chiao ti cheng-ts'e (Chinese Communist Policy Toward christianity) (Hong Kong: Chinese Research Center, 1983). For the house churches in China, see Raymond Fung, ed. and trans., Household of God on China's Soil (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982).

observations with reference to his teaching of the priesthood of all believers. 1. Anti-foreignism: Nee's teaching of the priesthood of all believers was basically the return to the New Testament model which had not yet a salaried ministerial office, precise formulations of the creeds and elaborate church order as developed in more than a millenium in western Christendom. The pristinaton of the New Testament church, to some extent was an an effort to disassociate the Christian church from western influences. The anti-foreignism of the nineteenth century as expressed by the Boxer Uprising and the anti-Christian movement agitated by nationalism in the twenties obviously appeared to Nee that this indigenous process and pristinaton of the New Testament church were more than desirable. 2. Tumult: Nee's life time was contemporaneous with the most tumultous period in the history of China characterised by foreign aggression, cultural revolution, civil wars and distressing economy. These confusions and unrest intensified Nee's sense of living in the end time. And Nee felt the strong urge to pristinaton the New Testament church among the apostate denominations in order to bear witness to the truth of God in this critical moment in history. 3. Fundamentalism: Nee's spiritual heritage is essentially fundamentalist. Margret Barber, Dora Yu, C. H. Judd, and T. Austin-Sparks were all conservative in their theological outlook. The doctrinal controveries between the liberals and the fundamentalists was transposed to China through the Bible Union in China. This controversy aggravated the distrust of theological knowledge, ecclesiastical establ-

ishment and institution of which an ordained minister well represents and over which the liberals of the mainline denominations were in control. Furthermore the chronic illness and the revival movement in late twenties and early thirties reinforced his fundamentalist pietistic view of religion. And the style of ministry of Margret Barber, Dora Yu--by faith and by life--deeply affected Nee's primacy of the life of the ministry which tended to render the existence of the ministerial office superfluous. In this he was in accordance with the Alexandrian fathers who differentiated the carnal and agnostic Christians rather than the clergy and laymen.

We shall come back with a more thorough evaluation in Part Three. With this cognizance about his historical context we now proceed to examine his works pertinent to the teaching of the priesthood of all believers.

## CHAPTER VII

### NEE'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

#### The Priesthood of All Believers in Nee's Theological Scheme

##### Writer of Spirituality

Nee is reckoned of predominately as a writer of spirituality. Two of his million sellers--Normal Christian Life, and Sit, Walk, Stand (in thirty and twenty two languages respectively)--dwell on the theme of the Christian's spiritual status in Christ. Another million seller, The Release of the Spirit, delineates the practical steps of personal sanctification. These works and the like are widely read among young people in this country especially those who are interested in the charismatic movement. Some fifty students from a Lutheran college requested a special course devoted to the study of his acclaimed three volumes Spiritual Man.<sup>1</sup> The sustained interest in Nee's view of spirituality is further bespoken by three theses at the level of Master of Sacred Theology which invariably deal with his teaching about sanctification. Again, the latest survey of the Nee's thought in Chinese, released in

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Bernard Erling, "The Story of Watchman Nee," The Lutheran Quarterly 28 (May 1976):140.

April 1985 is entitled The Spiritual Theology of Watchman Nee.<sup>2</sup>

Carl Henry attributes the intense interest on the part of Christian youths to the anti-establishment sentiment who find Nee's primacy of personal commitment and discipleship more meaningful than mere reduction of their Christian allegiance to institutional or doctrinal commitment.<sup>3</sup> And the doctrine of sanctification and discipleship are acknowledged weaknesses of the institutional church.<sup>4</sup> Thus according to cult scholars, the phenomenal 'Jesus People' Movement in the sixties, found inspiration from Nee's teachings.<sup>5</sup> The image of Nee as a writer of spirituality and Christian discipleship is reinforced by his death as a martyr in the prison of communist China in 1972. People associated him with the intriguing underground church in mainland China which vitality and remarkable growth under persecution ever inspires the church in the Occident.

#### The Local Church Movement

Another focus of Nee's corpus of writings is his view of the Local Church assembly which has no ordained ministers.<sup>6</sup> He

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See chapter I note 1.

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"Footnotes: Watchman Nee," Christianity Today, May 9, 1975, pp. 31-32. See also Schiefelbein, pp. 3-5.

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Leon Morris, "On Being the People of God," Christianity Today, December 19, 1969, p. 40.

5

Ronald Enroth, Edward E. Ericson, C. Breckinridge, The Jesus People: Old Time Religion in the Age of Aquarius (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 167-169.

6

Two studies on Nee's ecclesiology are James Mo-oi Cheung, The Ecclesiology of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee, 1972 and Norman Cliff, "The Life and Theology of Watchman Nee, Including a Study

deplored the multiplicity of denominations and condemned it as sin. Nee's writings on the indigenous autonomy of the local church provided theological rationale of many contemporary indigenous groups.<sup>7</sup> His church practised the three-self principles of self-support, self-government and self-propagation as early as 1923, long before the Three-Self church in Communist China. Indeed the Local Church assembly heralded the post-denominational and post-missionary church of contemporary China which recently adduces interests on the part of some theological educators who think that the Chinese experience may be relevant to the context of the developing countries.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, Nee's vigorous training of the laymen and emphasis on lay leadership as well as the de-institutionalised

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of the Little Flock Movement Which He Founded," 1983. See chapter I note 1.

<sup>7</sup>  
Chan, My Uncle, pp. 27-9. For instance, another influential Chinese Christian leader, Yang Shao-t'ang (David Yang; 楊紹堂) modifies Nee's views in his Chiao-hui lu-sien (The Course of the Church) (Hong Kong: Christian Witness Press, 1962). While Yang agrees with most of Nee's criticism of the weaknesses of the denominations he also takes issues with the schismatic tendency of the Local Church assembly and points out that in opposing denominations they become another denomination. For the life of Yang see Lyall, see Mighty Men, pp. 13-41.

<sup>8</sup>  
During the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) held at Vancouver in the summer of 1983, two delegates from India who happened to be theological educators in their own countries petitioned to the Department of Theological Education of WCC for a visit to China to learn about the non-denominational and unified church as reference for the church in the developing countries. Eventually an international delegation of theological educators was organised and visited China under the auspice of WCC. See the report by Andrew Chiu (丘恩慶; 丘恩慶); president of Concordia Seminary, Hong Kong), "The Visit of the International Theological Educators to Mainland China," Chi-tu-chiao chao-pao (Christian Weekly), December 23, 1984, p. 5.

church model demonstrated its vitality during the Japanese occupation in China<sup>9</sup> and paved the way for the house church in Communist China.<sup>10</sup> Indeed it is a viable church model in any totalitarian regime in which the institutional church can only survive in subservience to the state.

As has been pointed out, towards the later part of his ministry, ecclesiology and the related subjects became his favorite subjects. Corinthian truths are as important as the Ephesian truth. The writings in the Kuling period (1948) are exclusively concerned with the practical training of the workers and their responsibilities in the churches under their care such as the Ministry of the Word, Spiritual Authority, Church Affairs, Ye Search the Scriptures, and the celebrated catechetical lectures (Basic Lessons Series). Then apparently the theological scheme of Nee embraces two polarities: personal sanctification and corporate church life. It is our suggestion that Nee's teaching of the universal priesthood well serves to undergird these two seemingly unrelated loci. As regard to sanctification, his antithetical view of the world resembles that

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Rees reports that the Little Flock churches spread over in Manchuria wholly untouched by the attempts of Japanese control while the denominational churches at the outset were controlled by a Japanese oligarchy (The Jesus Family in Communist China, p. 117).

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The deinstitutionalised Little Flock church was a great concern to the Communists since they were difficult to control. The same case is with the house churches in China now who refuse to join the government church. See the discussion about the state Three-Self church and underground church by two missiologists (different opinions) in Johnathan Chao and Ralph Covell, "Questions Most Frequently Asked About the Christian Church in China," Theology, News and Notes, December 1984, pp. 9-17.

of the pre-Nicene writers in which the Levitical motif of separation-dedication is punctuated as a theological basis for personal sanctification (see chapter III note 75).

On the other hand, the priesthood of believers is also advocated to rebuke what he called a 'mediatorial caste' of the ministerial system, residue of medieval Catholicism inherited by the Reformation. Therefore we may venture to infer that his teaching of sanctification is the individual, internal expression of the priesthood of believers--a priestly life, which is wholly separated from the world and dedicated to God. His ecclesiology is the corporate, external expression the priestly community on earth. The spiritual theology pertains to the discipline of the priestly life while the church polity is the ecclesiastical implementation of the corporate dimension of the priestly life. The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers acts as a contact point between the two apparently unrelated loci. We will examine Nee's writings as pertain to universal priesthood and then proceed to relate them to his spiritual theology as expressed in his conception of ministry and ecclesiology.

### The Ministry of the Priesthood

The most explicit and direct treatment of the priesthood of believers is found in the last but third lesson of the Basic

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Lesson Series. The basic motif of the priesthood in the lesson

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The Basic Lessons are post-baptismal catechism. The whole series is comprised of fifty two lessons. However, owing to the political situations two lessons are omitted and are released till lately in ET: "The Kingdom" and "The Second Coming of the Lord" (Nee, The Spirit of Judgment [CFP, 1984], pp. 57-65, 67-

is 'serving God'. In the opening remarks, Nee writes: "There is an office mentioned in the Bible called the priesthood. The priesthood is a group of people wholly separated from the world in order to serve God. They have no profession or duty other than the task of serving God." <sup>12</sup> God chooses people to be priests and to serve Him from the creation of the world till eternity. The first priest was Melchisedek who separated himself for the ministry of God. The priesthood continued in the kingdom of Israel. Jesus is a priest before God after ascension. He still wholly serves God. In the dispensation of the church, the priesthood continues. In the millenium, the children of God serve as priests before God and act as kings over the world. Even after the inception of New Heaven and Earth, all the children will do nothing but serve God. They are de facto priests without the ascription of the sacerdotal epithet. Nee concludes:

Here is a most wonderful thing: the priesthood commenced with Melchisedek--who is without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life--and it continues on through the millennium. Its service extends to the eternity to come.<sup>13</sup>

Apparently Nee makes no differentiation between the priesthood as an office as in the cases of Melchizedek, the Levitical priests, Christ the High Priest and the priesthood as the spiritual status

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78). ET of the Basic Lessons Series are grouped into six volumes by CFP. The lesson in CO is entitled "The Ministry of the Priesthood" BLST, 2:883-96; ET is entitled "Priesthood" in CFP, 1972-1975, 6:175-91. For an annotated bibliography of Nee's works in ET up to 1980, see Dana Roberts, Understanding Watchman Nee, pp. 44-60.

12

BLST, 2:883; CFP, 1972-1975, 6:175.

13

BLST, 2:884; CFP, 1972-1975, 6:176.

as in the cases of the Old Testament chosen people and the New Testament saints (see chapter II). Thus understandably, the universal priesthood is ever in antithesis to the particular priesthood or ministerial office.

#### The People of God and the Priesthood

According to Nee, the fact that the Israelites were called the kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:6) means that "every person's occupation was to serve God. . . . In this nation everyone is a priest, the men as well as the women, the adults as well as the children. They do nothing but serve God. This became their sole profession."<sup>14</sup> However, Israelites failed because they worshipped the golden calf. They served idol rather than God. As a result of apostasy, their priesthood was preempted by the Levites whose zeal for the holiness of God made them exterminate their neighbors who committed idolatry.<sup>15</sup> Henceforth there existed two classes of people: the people of God and the priests of God. But God's original design was to make the two one, namely every people of God should be a priest. This is a serious defect when it applies to Christian life. "It was indeed a most serious matter. And is it not still a matter of deep seriousness if a person believes on the Lord and yet fails to function as a

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BLST, 2:884; CFP, 1972-1975, 6:176f.

15

The preemption of the priesthood is implicitly rather than explicitly stated. "Though this was not explicitly stated, yet it was implicitly understood, for henceforth God gave the privilege of being priests to the tribe alone. That which was intended for the whole nation of Israel was now given to the house of Aaron of the tribe of Levi" (BLST, 2:886; CFP, 1972-1975, 6:179).

16  
 priest?" The establishment of the mediatorial Levitical priesthood instantly deprived the people of direct access to God. This prohibition was rendered obsolete when Jesus came. The priesthood of all believers was once again restored to the people of God.

#### The Affirmation of Universal Priesthood

Since Nee held the views that the universal priesthood and ministerial office were in antithesis he ran into sustained controversies with the denominational churches. And Nee considered the controversy with the denominations was material rather than formal. The very essence of Christian faith is at stake if we acquiesce the existence of an intermediary class between God and His people. He writes:

Take note that our controversy is not with the outward form but with the contents of Christianity. We see today the presence of an intermediary class in Christianity--those who are appointed to serve God while the rest of the people are merely members of the church, even though the latter are God's children, they yet depend on the former in their approach to God. . . . We, however, cannot accept this intermediary class, for we will not, as the Israelites of old did, forfeit the grace of God has given the church under the new Covenant.

Let us, then, get rid of of the intermediary class. The best way to abolish it is for everyone to be in that class! We should kneel before the Lord and say, "Lord, I am willing to serve you. I am willing to be a priest."<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, the separation of the people of God from the priesthood was too evident throughout the history of the church. During the time of Constantine, many came to the church and

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 16

BLST 2:887; CFP, 1972-1975, 6:180.

17

BLST 2:891f.; CFP, 1972-1975, 6:185f.

became the people but not the priests of God. People wanted to be Christians but not to serve God. They rather had some spiritual men, namely the priests, ministers to serve God in their stead. Nee aspired to restore the priesthood once again to all believers. He remarks:

I want to show brothers and sisters that, during this last day, it is God's intention to recover things to His original design. He is going the way of recovery. He is going to bring His children to this course. One basic segment of His recovery is for the church to restore the universal priesthood of the believers. All believers are priests as well as people --priests today and oriests in the kingdom to come. God wants priests; He wishes all His people to be priests.<sup>18</sup>

The more frequently the Christians exercise their priesthood and serve God, the clearer we observe the reality of the church.<sup>19</sup>

The church is the body of Christ in which every member should function according to his respective ministry. ". . . if some serve and some do not, if some function as priests and some do not, or if the priesthood is left to one or a few persons, then it is only too clear that this is not the body."<sup>20</sup>

#### Observations

Two observations can be made from the foregoing. In the first place, Nee approaches the universal priesthood in terms of Christian sanctification (being called to serve God) rather

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BLST 2:894; CFP, 1972-1975, 6:188f.

19

"The more the prevalence of the (universal) priesthood, the more clearly we see the church" is the literal translation (BLST 2:895). CPF's translation (The more prevailing the priesthood is, the better the church (6:189) misses the thrust of the statement Nee wants to convey, namely the reality of the church is bespoken by the universal priesthood.

20

The Body of Christ, BLST, 2:909; CFP, 1972-1975, 6:204.

than justification (spiritual status of holiness and election; see chapter II) a feature common to all his writings. As has been pointed out, the basic motif of priesthood is serving God. Like the Levites, Christians should serve God with utter faithfulness to the point of being at odds with their natural affection.<sup>21</sup> The typological significance of the priesthods of Melchisedek and Aaron as a foreshadowing of Christ is not mentioned. Even Christ's priesthood is accentuated in terms of his faithful ministry to God the Father rather than His effecting reconciliation between God and the sinners. In the second place, the universal priesthood is conceived of a material rather than a formal issue. As the history of mankind unfolds in its different dispensations, God seeks man to be priests. From Melchizedek (his genealogy represents the beginning of history) to the millenium, even in eternity there are people serving as priests before God. The separation of the peoplehood and the priesthood is not 'normal.'<sup>22</sup> Justification cannot be divorced from sanctification. Nevertheless, such an anomaly exists throughout the history of the church. The historiographical implication of the universal priesthood is seen by his conception of the apostate state of the church. The church is apostate. The evidence is the

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"May be we pay whatever price is needed for us to serve God. May we deal with all idols. The Levites paid the price by disregarding their personal affection. Such people are worthy to have the priesthood" (BLS 2:895; CFP, 1972-1975, 6:190). Nee had the experience of giving up his girl friend (who later became his wife after she was converted) when he became a Christian.

22

Note the titles of Normal Christian Life, Normal Christian Worker.

demise of the universal priesthood and the ascension of the  
 23  
 Nicholaitans as prophesized in the seven letters of the Book  
 of Revelation (chapters II and III). The Local Church assembly  
 with its emphasis of universal priesthood was contemplated of  
 being called to bear witness to God as His faithful people in the  
 end time. The pristinaton of the New Testament church was the  
 restoration of the original plan of God and the herald of the  
 kingdom to come. These two observations are further explicated  
 in Nee's understanding of the history of the church.

#### Universal Priesthood and the History of the Church

##### The Apostate Church and the Faithful Messenger

God's expectation and the church's failure

According to Nee, the purpose of the church is to be  
 Christ's richness. Jesus and the church together forms the Christ  
 of 1 Cor. 12:12--the corporate Christ. Therefore the church  
 should manifest Christ in her life and testimony: His life,  
 victory and glory. However, only a handful of the children of  
 God are able to gratify God in His expectation. In contrast to

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 23

"During these two thousand years, there have been as many  
 priests as Christians. In church history, we often see a  
 separation between the priests and the other believers. And  
 intermediary class has come between God and His people. This is  
 the work and the teaching of the Nicolaitans" (BLST, 2:891; CFP,  
 1972-1975, 6:185). Nicolaitans are explained as the conquerors  
 (nikos) of the people (laos)--the clergy (Meditation on  
Revelation, 1925-1927, 1:154; The Orthodoxy of the Church, 1945,  
 p. 13). The two titles deal with the history of the apostate  
 church, which as Nee conceived, had already been prophesized in  
 the seven churches of Revelation 2, 3. The former title is a  
 more lengthy treatment. It is noteworthy that early in the mid-  
 twenties before the founding of the Little Flock assembly in  
 Shanghai (1928) Nee had already formulated his conception of the  
 apostate state of the church.

the initial pentecostal church which was made up of people being both the converted sinners and saints of testimony, the church was subsequently made up of two categories of people: those who fail and those who overcome. This deplorable situation is portrayed by the seven letters in the Book of Revelation (chapters II and III).<sup>24</sup>

#### The overcomers in the apostate church

The seven letters are addressed to the messenger (angelos) --a collective epithet representing all the remnants of the church<sup>25</sup> through whom God restores the church to her pristine state. These recipients are called the overcomers who are simply normal Christians. Nee writes:

These seven letters begin with the Lord and conclude with the calling of the overcomers. Who are the overcomers? In what sense they are overcomers? . . . In the Bible the overcomers are ordinary, normal people. All those who do not turn abnormal during the extraordinary time (time when the church is in crisis) are overcomers. Now the average people live below the standard (of God's requirement). . . . Today God calls the overcomers to live according to the initial normal

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24

"Reply to the London Brethren, 1935.7.2," p. 160. This is the most succinct statement of the purpose of the church. Other significant works on the nature of the church are: Meditation on Revelation, 1925-27; Rethinking the Work, 1938; What Shall This Man Do?, 1938-42, pp. 81-93; The Orthodoxy of the Church, 1945; "The Body of Christ," BLST, 2:897-915; CFP 6:193-211.

25

The seven churches have threefold meaning: 1. The empirical churches existed in Asia Minor when the letter were written. 2. The empirical churches prophesized in certain period of history such as the church of Thyatira represents the Roman Catholic in Medieval time and the church of Sardis represents the Protestant church in Reformation. 3. The metamorphical church bespeaking the spirituality of the contemporary church such as the church of Philadelphia signifies brotherhood and fervent love and the church of the Laodiceans signifies the lukewarmness. See Meditation on Revelation, 1:100f.; cf. Orthodoxy of the Church, p. 6.

standard. Like a straight line, God's will never changes. Today men fall and fail, slipping downward, but the overcomers once again restore to the will of God.26

Nee suggests that we are living in the same spiritual  
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 confusion as that of the seven recipient churches. Christians  
 should aspire to one thing--the question of "how should I follow  
 28  
 and serve the Lord?" In other words the overcomers are those  
 Christians who are both the people and the priests of God. They  
 29  
 are the ecclesia ecclesiolae. They are the few and lonely. 30  
 Nevertheless, these overcomers will be kings in the coming  
 kingdom inasmuch as they are priests in the present world. They  
 will be caught up before the tribulation while those Christians  
 who do not take their priesthood (serving God) seriously will  
 31  
 remain on earth during the tribulation to be chastened. "Those

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 26

Orthodoxy of the Church, p. 8; trans. mine.

27

The evidence of confusion was the multiplicity of denominations which amounted to 15,000 according to a survey taken in 1914 (Orthodoxy of the Church, p. 5).

28

Ibid., trans. mine. Note that to Nee, to serve God is to exercise one's priesthood.

29

"Now those overcomers who love the Lord not are not only saved in the world but claim victory in the church" (Meditation on Revelation, 1:123; trans. mine; cf. 1:212).

30

"Inasmuch as a sinner does not wait for the whole world before he accepts the Lord for salvation, a saint does not wait for the repentance of the whole church before he overcomes. . . . Overcomers are lonely people" (Meditation on Revelation, 1:160; trans. mine).

31

Only the saints who serve God will be exempted from the tribulation. See Meditation on Revelation, 1:33f., 215ff. Carnal Christians have to undergo tribulation. "Many Christians already understand the evidence of salvation. They assume that it is the ultimate thing in their life to acquire eternal life. However it is the first step of the road of life! They assume that when the world undergoes tribulation, they will be taken to

who do not serve in the tabernacle (as priests) must be cast out  
 outside the camp."<sup>32</sup>

#### The Ascension of the Nicolaitans

The result of forfeiting the priesthood on the part of the Christians is the emergence of the Nicolaitans. The Nicolaitans are the intermediary class between God and men. They serve God on behalf of the people of God who voluntarily abdicate their priesthood in their favour. They do not preempt the priestly rights of serving God on their own initiatives. In fact they are encouraged by the carnal laymen. "Since the believers have lost the initial love for the Lord, and are disinterested in spiritual things, they indeed eager to have somebody to act in their

<sup>33</sup> proxy." The ascension of the Nicolaitans or clerical class is

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 heaven--a place they have no affection in the past! How is it possible? . . . If the heart of the believers does not reside in heaven, even though he is erupted he knows no precious thing and joy of ruption" (Meditation on Revelation, 2:410). Those Christians who serve God as faithful priests on earth will be exempted from tribulation.

<sup>32</sup>

Ibid., 1:28f.; trans. mine.

<sup>33</sup>

Meditation on Revelation, 1:266; cf. "Though the Bible had been freed (from the clergy), and Protestantism also affirmed the freedom of believers, nevertheless, due to the fact that too many Christians were carnal and did not want to be held responsible before the Lord, it gave rise to the clerical class" (Meditation on Revelation, 2:508; trans. mine). The same opinion has been expressed by Clarence Lee: "it was more a case of the layman forfeiting his right to approach God as a priest by allowing his priestly integrity to be equated with a dicipline which he could not hope to maintain" (Sacerdotal Ethics in Early Christianity, p. 140; see chapter III note 78). Nicolaitans are the people who hold sway over the laymen, see chapter VII note 23).

in direct proportion to the descension or abdication of the priestly responsibility on the part of the laymen. Therefore the history of the apostate church as prophesized in the seven letters of the Book of Revelation in a sense can be seen from the perspective of the inception and development of the Nicolaitans (clerical class) and its concomitant phenomena: Judaization (institutionalization of the church), teaching of Balaam (salaried ministry) and prophesy of Jezebel (creeds).<sup>34</sup>

#### The church at Ephesus and the Nicolaitan behaviour

The church in Ephesus was the only church that did not yield to the teachings of Nicolaitans. However, she lost her initial love for the Lord and displayed the behavior of Nicolaitans by following human leadership. Episcopacy was introduced by Ignatius and bedseeded denominationism.<sup>35</sup>

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34

"In the seven letters we have a line of opposition: Nicolaitans mentioned twice, namely in the church in Ephesus and the church in Pergamus. The Jews are mentioned twice, one in the church in Smyrna, another in the church in Philadelphia. In Pergamos Balaam is mentioned. In the church in Thyatira, we have Jezebel" (Orthodoxy of the Church, p. 18f.; trans. mine).

35

"The contemporary church (at Ephesus) already deviated from the teaching of Christ and the Apostles. Originally elders and bishops were co-terminous. . . . But owing to the ascension of Nicolaitans, they changed the ordinance of the Lord by according special privilege to the workers (ministers), thus established a denomination" (Meditation on Revelation, 1:167). We should note that to Nee denomination signifies human leadership, methods, organisations and nearly anything that falls short of the pristine apostolic church as he conceived of. His controversy with the denominational church was not merely of church polity but one between a spiritual church and carnal church. The Ignatian letter cited by Nee reads as follows: "And the more anyone sees the bishop being silent, the more one should fear him. For everyone whom the master of a hous sends for his stewardship, we must receive as the one who sent him. It is obvious, then, that one must look upon hte bishop as the Lord

The church at Smyrna and Judaism

The church in Smyrna was the church under persecution in the Roman Empire. The affliction served to purify the church because they lost the first love for the Lord. The Jews in the letter (Rev. 2:10) pertained to the Judaization or institutionalization of the church. Baptism and the Lord's Supper simply replaced the old rites of Judaism and were monopolised by the clerical class who assumed the sacerdotal role of the Levitical priesthood. The essence of Judaism was a mundane religion: "the material church building, literal ordinances, the intermediary priesthood, and the blessing of the earth (e.g. good harvest)." <sup>36</sup>

The church became institutionalised and its spiritual and internal nature turned external and hierarchical.

The church at Pergamos and the teaching of Nicolaitans

The marriage between the church and the world

The church in Pergamum symbolised the state church of Constantine. It was the marriage (gameo, marry) between the church and the world after years of flirting gestures. The church now fell to the point of rationalising her Nicolaitan behaviour. "The behavior of the Nicolaitans in Ephesus, owing to the nurturing of Judaizing doctrines of Smyrna now bore the fruit of

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himself" (Ep. Eph., c. 6; Sparks, p. 79). For the Ignatian episcopacy, see chapter III notes 88, 89).

36

Orthodoxy of the Church, p. 19. See Meditation on Revelation, 1:187ff.; Orthodoxy of the Church, pp. 16-25.

37

the teaching of Nicolaitans of Pergamum." At the time of Constantine, ministers got their support from the imperial treasury. That was the practice of Balaam (Rev. 2:14). The Roman church was structured after the secular model. The hierarchy had the same pomp and power as their imperial counterpart. In the apostolic time, the workers of God solely depended on the supply of God. They did not rely on monthly salary. People were born to be Christians. The church was full of non-believers. Nee observes:

Originally the church was made up of brethren and all brethren were priests. However, the influx of so many mixed people made it impossible to expect all to serve the Lord. For the sake of expedience the church appointed certain group of people to take care of the spiritual things. . . . Since many of those who came to church did not know the Lord, those who knew the Lord became experts and the Nicolaitans thus came into being.<sup>38</sup>

39

The teaching of Nicolaitans and the Chinese church

The teaching of Nicolaitans was detrimental to the Chinese church. First, no one, even the catechists or evangelists could celebrate the Holy Communion except the ordained ministers.

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Meditation on Revelation, 1:250.

38

Orthodoxy of the Church, p. 32; trans. mine.

39

After Nee finishes expounding the development of the teaching of Nicolaitans--clericalism in the church in Pergamus, he makes an lengthy excursion about its negative effects on the contemporary church (Meditation on Revelation, 1:253-68). This excursion is made "in God's interests in the Chinese church" (Meditation on Revelation, 1:253; trans. mine). It illustrates his concern for the well being of the Chinese church and we may infer that his teaching of the universal priesthood is in part motivated by nationalism.

40

In 1920 when Nee was converted, only 24 of the 147 missionaries working under the auspices of the seven mission agencies in Foochow were ordained (16%). In 1927 when Nee moved

The highest corporate expression of thanksgiving and worship (the Lord's supper) on the part of all Christians became the exclusive prerogative of a cleric. Second, when Christians abdicate their priestly or spiritual responsibilities in favour of the clergy, they naturally forfeit also the priestly knowledge as a priest should have (Malachi 2:7, "For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge"). In this manner, "the clergy become the ears, eyes and mouths of the laymen. Before long they come to represent the whole body of laity."<sup>41</sup> Thirdly, ordination differentiated the cleric from the laymen and conferred the authority to minister in a parish on the part of the cleric who might turn out incompetent or unfaithful and bring disaster to the flock under his care. God's worker should solely and directly be held responsible to God, not sought ordination and received authority from the hands of men and subsided to be the servant of men.<sup>42</sup>

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to Shanghai only 21 out of the 147 missionaries working under the auspice of 59 mission agencies were ordained. The scarcity of ordained ministers were even more acute in rural area. The result was that some churches had only Holy Communion once a quarter. See Directory of Protestant Missions in China, 1920 (Shanghai, n.d.), pp. 162-64); Directory of Protestant Missions in China, 1927 (Shanghai, n.d.), pp. 252-60. About one third of the ministers in the city churches were part-time. "This may be partially explained on the ground that there are not enough ordained men to go around" (Fact-finders' Report, vol. 5, 2:262. We will come back for a detailed discussion in the chapter on evaluation.

<sup>41</sup>

Meditation on Revelation, 1:254; trans. mine.

<sup>42</sup>

Meditation on Revelation, 1:259. Nee stresses the primacy of the spiritual life of the minister or worker rather than the ecclesiastical status, theological competence or even the gifts.

43            44  
Thyatira,    Sardi    and the teaching of Jezebel

The church in Thyatira represented the Roman Catholic church. The teaching of Jezebel pertained to the tradition of the church and the teachings of the popes rather than the pure Word of God. The rise of the church of Sardi signified the restoration of Reformation. Nee unequivocally affirms the work of Reformation. He writes:

We be careful, do not equate Sardi with the church at the time of Luther's Reformation . . . according to the content of the letter as pertains to the condition of the church, it should not be the church at the time of Reformation, but the church after Reformation. The work and testimony of Luther and his colleagues in his own land and other countries were the direct working of the Holy Spirit. I think that nobody would deny that Luther is the servant of God and would doubt that Reformation is not the work of God. Reformation was a great work. . . . God indeed spoke through the mouth of Luther.<sup>45</sup>

The problem of the Protestant church lay in its subsequent development of many state churches--the duplication of the Roman Catholic church. "Reformation did not return to the pristine church, but changed the ecumenical church (Roman Catholic church) to the state church."<sup>46</sup> More churches came into existence as the

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<sup>43</sup>  
Meditation on Revelation, 2:293-56; Orthodoxy of the Church, pp. 37-44.

<sup>44</sup>  
Meditation on Revelation, 2:356-420; Orthodoxy of the Church, pp. 45-51.

<sup>45</sup>  
Meditation on Revelation, 2:357; Orthodoxy of the Church, p. 46. Nee has genuine deference to Luther. He remarks: "I had read Luther's journal, writings and letters etc. and perceive that his motive and purpose are good. His best accomplishment was the restoration of the truth of justification by faith" (The Overcomer of God, 1934, p. 85; trans. mine).

<sup>46</sup>  
Orthodoxy of the Church, p. 44; trans. mine.

non-conformists sought freedom of worship. These churches had one common feature--they established the church according to different emphasis of doctrines. They all failed to pristiniate the New Testament church.

According to Nee, another failure of the Protestant church was the stress of creeds. To put the creed on the same par with the Bible was the teaching of Jezebel. The Bible cannot be crystalised into certain propositional creeds and be understood cognitively. The truth of the Bible is to be experienced in the life of the spiritual man.<sup>47</sup> The argument that organisation (denomination) and creed can conserve the truth of God in fact betrays the lack of faith in trusting God's protection of His truth. Gradually men will follow the traditions and creeds of their forefathers instead of God's Word which is spirit and life.

48

The church at Philadelphia

The letter to the church at Philadelphia was the only letter that did not entail any words of correction. The prophesy of the church at Philadelphia was materialised in the Brethren Movement of the nineteenth century. The Brethren Movement had the following significant features: (1) They exalted a personal relationship with Christ rather than creedal allegiance as the

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"Understanding the Bible does not depend on grand erudition, wit, research, but the single dedication of a godly man, may he be the poorest and most stupid. He can make it . . . If a believer aspire to be a godly man in all that he do he would not find it difficult to understand the Bible" (Meditation on Revelation, 2:384; trans. mine).

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Meditation on Revelation, 2:420-503; Orthodoxy of the Church, pp. 52-71.

church of Sardi (Protestantism). (2) It stressed the primacy of spiritual life and brotherly love. (3) It pristinated the New Testament church in the sense that they disbanded all denominations and accentuated the spiritual fellowship of all Christians. The Little Flock was contemplated as a similar fellowship in China. Citing John Nelson Darby Nee writes:

The genuine unity is the unity in the Holy Spirit, therefore it must be the result of the work of the Holy Spirit. There is no church that does not base on the kingdom of the Son of God to include all children of God, yet receives the perfect blessing. . . . Unity is the glory of the church. However, if our unity is contemplated for success and be our enterprise, it is but a union. And it denies the nature and hope of the church. The unity of the church is the unity in the spirit. Since this unity is possible in the spiritual matter, so it is perfect among the spiritual men.<sup>49</sup>

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"Understanding the Bible does not depend on grand erudition, wit, research, but the single dedication of a godly man, may he be the poorest and most stupid. He can make it . . . If a believer aspire to be a godly man in all that he do he would not find it difficult to understand the Bible" (Meditation on Revelation, 2:384; trans. mine).

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Meditation on Revelation, 2:420-503; Orthodoxy of the Church, pp. 52-71.

49

Orthodoxy of the Church, p. 60; trans. mine. The influence of the Brethren is evident as far as ecclesiology is concerned. In the Overcomer Conference of 1934.1, Nee spoke of the Brethren Movement as the convergence of two streams: one of spirituality flowing from Madame Gugon (1638-1771), F. Fenelon (1651-1715, leader of French mysticism; published Explication des maximes des saints, 1697 and Traite sur l'existence de Dieu, 1712) and the other of orthodox ecclesiology flowing from Arnold Gottfried who insisted to return to the New Testament church. See The Overcomer of God, 1934, p. 89f. Regarding the 'historical fulfillment' of the letter to the church at Philadelphia, Nee only wrote a few lines in his early work and Darby was not mentioned (Meditation on Revelation, 1925-27, p. 502f.). However, in his later Orthodoxy of the Church, 1945, the work of Darby and the Plymouth Brethren were praised at length, see pp. 56ff. Many of his citation of the Scriptures are Darby's version. Kinnear quotes the letter of Charles R. Barlow saying: "He (Nee) is a hard worker and reads much. He is, too, a great student of J. N. Darby, and has evidently been greatly helped by his

Nee suggests that we witness indeed "the first time (the church) returned to the simple, free and spiritual worship in the

Bible." <sup>50</sup> The accomplishment of the Brethren movement was far beyond the Reformation. He writes:

We thank God. The problem of the church had solution till the Brethren Movement. The status of the children of God (universal priesthood) was restored. . . . The Brethren Movement was not as renewed as Reformation. Reformation was renowned because it aligned with politics. . . . They (the Brethren) perceived two things: one is what we call the institutional world, the spiritual world. The other is what the Brethren called the Christian world (Christendom). They did not only flee from the spiritual world, but also fled from the Christian world which was represented by Protestantism.<sup>51</sup>

Therefore it was the letter addressed to the church at Philadelphia that Christ revealed most of Himself to the church. What the apostle (Paul) emphasized was not that "I know what I believe" but "I know whom I believe." Having a personal relation with

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writings" (Against the Tide., p. 141). However, we find no evidence of Nee's explicit deference to Darby in enriching his life as to Margret Barber and Mrs. Penn-Lewis who happened to be woman preachers as opposed by the Brethren. Moreover, he severed with the London Brethren. On the whole, we may say that Nee, being a self-made student, Nee is an eclectic rather than a staunch student of a certain school. His conception of 'brokenness' and the notion of 'one city one church' are original. For Darby's doctrine on the church, see Clarence B. Bass, Backgrounds to Dispensationalism. Its Historical Genesis and Ecclesiastical Implication (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960); H. A. Ironside, A Historical Sketch of the Brethren Movement (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1942). Bibliography on the Brethren writers, see Arnold D. Ehlert, "Plymouth Brethren Writers," American Theological Library Association Proceedings 11 (1957):49-80.

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Orthodoxy of the Church, p. 56.

51

Orthodoxy of the Church, p. 61; trans. mine. Nee sees that the whole inhabited world and its institutions are under the demonic influence and basically anti-Christian. See Love Not the World, 1938-42.

Christ and in conformation with the heart and nature of Christ is  
 the only source of faith and love. <sup>52</sup>

Only the Philadelphian Christians will be caught up before the tribulation. They were the remnants held in contempt in the eyes of the impressive and powerful denominational churches inasmuch as the simple Christians were being persecuted by the dominating Judaism in the early church.

However, like many spiritual movements which were blessed by God in its initial stage but backslid in the end, the Brethren failed, first because of spiritual pride. Second, they neglected the truth of the local church. It was true that negatively they saw clearly the weaknesses of the apostate church. Nevertheless, they did not perceive that positively the Christian unity and brotherly love was expressed in the local church. They either allowed more than one assembly in a city as the Open Brethren or enforced uniformity for all assemblies in different cities as the Exclusive Brethren. They both violated the principle of one  
<sup>53</sup>  
 assembly in one city.

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 50

Orthodoxy of the Church, p. 56.

51

Orthodoxy of the Church, p. 61; trans. mine. Nee sees that the whole inhabited world and its institutions are under the demonic influence and basically anti-Christian. See Love Not the World, 1938-42.

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Meditation on Revelation, 2:423f., 439.

53

Orthodoxy of the Church, p. 69. The Nee's conception of the local church is an ecclesastical expression of the universal priesthood and is fully treated in Rethinking the Work, 1938. The authority of the local church rests in the elders rather than the workers. We will come back for a detailed discussion later.

## The church at Laodicea

The degraded Philadelphian church becomes the contemporary church of Laodiceans which is characterised by a lukewarm altitude towards spiritual things and the 'opinion of the people.'<sup>54</sup> When the brethren do not submit to the rule of the Holy Spirit they become common people without any spiritual discernment. Popular opinions hold sway in the church of God. Decision is made according to the ballot of the majority. In the present Laodicean church, the Lord is knocking on the door and invites the overcomers inside to share His royal power of the imminent kingdom (Rev. 3:20). The appearance of the church of Laodiceans heralds the coming kingdom. We are in the end time already! The knocking on the door (heart of the church) and the entering of the Lord inside also signifies the importance of the personal, internal aspect of Christian life. The failure of the Brethren is their emphasis of the doctrinal, objective truth to the exclusion of the personal, subjective truth. He writes:

In the Bible there are two lines: one is the line of the Holy Spirit, the other is the line of Christ. One is subjective and the other is objective. One is experience the other is doctrine. If one over stresses the objective truth he is building his castle in the air, touching no reality. If one only remains in the subjective aspect and the working of the Holy Spirit inside himself, he will be dissatisfied (with himself). Therefore we should keep these two in good balance. One makes me see myself perfect in Christ, the other enables me to see that the internal work of the Holy Spirit makes me perfect. The greatest failure of the Brethren is that they over emphasize the objective truth to the neglect of the subjective truth. The failure of Philadelphia made her become Laodicea. . . . "I will go inside" means to alter the

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Nee suggests that laodikeia (Rev. 3:14) is composed of two words meaning opinion (dokeo?) of the common people (laos). The laos here is used in a derogative sense.

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objective subjective.

### Summary and Observations

It is not our purpose at this juncture to evaluate Nee's exegesis about the the passage of Revelation 2 and 3. <sup>56</sup> Our interest is to make some observations bearing on his understanding of the priesthood of believers from the foregoing. Several things should call our attention. First, as has been suggested, the universal priesthood is contemplated in terms of sanctification rather than justification. The history of the church is one of apostasy in the sense that the people of God forfeit their priesthood to serve God. This gives rise to the Nicolaitans or intermediary class--the hierarchical, sacerdotal priesthood of the Roman Catholicism or the Protestant ministerial priesthood. Because Nee operates on the material principle of sanctification <sup>57</sup> rather than justification the clergy of the medieval church and the Protestant are considered the same. They suppressed by the clergy, the Nicolaitans or the intermediary class who have the monopoly of spiritual things. Whereas the same laos in the church of Laodiceans became carnal Christians, both take care of the spiritual matter in the church while the laymen become docile. And this material principle of

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Orthodoxy of the Church, p. 79f.; trans. mine.

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We will evaluate his exegesis and biblical theology in the chapter on evaluation.

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For using sanctification instead of justification as the material principle see Schiefelbein's discussion and critique from the Lutheran confessional point of view.

sanctification makes Nee interpret the laos differently in various contexts. In the church of Pergamum the laos are simply because they yield to popular opinion (rule by ballot) rather than the guidance of the Holy Spirit. To Nee, the universal priesthood is not concerned with a democratic congregational polity but the spiritual life and discipleship of a Christian.<sup>58</sup> Second, the universal priesthood of believers can only be expressed genuinely and freely in a deinstitutionalised church. The inception of the clerical class resulted in the institutionalisation of the church: liturgy, creed, organisation and other institutions and the establishment of many denominations as the result of the effort to preserve certain doctrinal traditions.<sup>59</sup> Thus to Nee, denominations serve to stifle the free expression of the pristine faith which is under the direct leading of the Holy Spirit without any traditions (and thus discrimination). And we should see his controversy with the denominational church as an integral part of his reassertation of the universal priesthood. Now the criteria of serving God (the vocation of the priesthood) depends on some external credentials such as the competence of the knowledge of doctrines, liturgy, and ordination. But to Nee, a genuine and effectual service to

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Therefore it is no wonder that the Little Flock is ended up by the rule of some strong spiritual leaders rather than congregational rule. If the leader is charismatic and authoritarian, autocracy sets in as in the case of Witness Lee. See also Duddy & the SCP, The God-Man: An Inquiry into Witness Lee and the Local Church, pp. 21-29.

59

Cf. The section on "Secularisation of the Concept of Church Order" in chapter III.

God is life and spirit. Only spiritual man can discharge spiritual responsibility. Only life can minister to life. The Bible can never be properly understood cognitively. Understanding God's Word requires obedience and commitment. Therefore Nee conceives of a line of opposition in the apostate church throughout her history and they are interrelated: The Nicolaitans (clerical class versus laity), Judaization (secularisation of the church versus ante-mundane holiness, separation), Balaam (salaried ministry versus working in faith), Jezebel (confessional tradition versus pure Word of God). They all are on the same line of opposing the genuine priests of God who aspire to serve and worship God in spirit and freedom in the pristine state. And that aspiration was fulfilled in the Brethren Movement. Thirdly, to be a royal priest of God is to be an overcomer. The royal priests are ecclesia ecclesiolae, remnants of God through whom God restores the pristine apostolic church. The overcomers are the priests who dedicate themselves to the service of God in this world and share the rule of God in His kingdom in the world to come (Rev. 1:6). They bear witness to the original plan of God among the apostate. In them we see the combination of peoplehood and priesthood. To Nee, his Local Church assemblies are the overcomers in the end time to bear witness to the pristine church. As a body of dedicated priests, Nee and his Little Flock intend to return to the New Testament church whereby every Christian discharges his priestly responsibility in the local church and is a spiritual man. The Little Flock is the corporate and ecclesiastical expression of

the priesthood of believer. To sum up: the priesthood of believers is concerned with sanctification of the Christian life, the deinstitutionalization of the present denominational church, and restoration to the pristine New Testament church.

From the aforementioned three observations we may infer that the priesthood of all believers indeed serves to undergird both Nee's spiritual theology and teaching of the Local Church assembly. In the next chapter we will further examine Nee's teaching of the priesthood of believers with reference to his conception of ministry which is greatly influenced by his spiritual theology.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS AND NEE'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE MINISTRY

Ministry is an important loci in Nee's theological scheme. The very purpose of the nurturing of the spiritual man is to prepare him for an effective ministry.<sup>1</sup> And since the basic motif of priesthood is to serve, and to Nee to serve simply means to minister, therefore it is instructive to examine further the priesthood of all believers with reference to Nee's understanding of the meaning of the ministry.<sup>2</sup> Nee had a high regard for the

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Commenting on the work of the deacons, Nee said: "The word 'deacon' in Greek is the same as that which is translated 'minister,' as in the case of 'the minister of the word.' It means to serve or to manage affairs. One may call it either service or ministry, yet they are the same" (Chiao-hui shih-wu [Church Affairs; Taipie: Gospel Book Room, 1982], p. 1; CFP, 1982, p. 15). For the purpose of our study, the word 'ministry' (singular) in this chapter refers to the ministry of the Word as it is so understood in the Protestant church. Though Nee has a broader definition of ministry: "a ministry is that piece of work which God has particularly called someone to do" (Rethinking the Work, p. 31; CFP, 1982, p. 14), the ministry of the Word or 'that ministry' (Eph. 4:12) comes to the forefront before all other ministries and his teachings about ministry in general applies to 'that ministry' or the ministry of the Word.

2

The prayer at the end of his second preface of The Spiritual Man (1928.6.25): "Holy Father, what you have entrusted to me is now here in this book. . . . Father may you build Your Son's Body, destroy Your Son's enemy, and hasten the coming of Your Son's Kingdom!" (p. 45; CFP, 1968, p. 20). The purpose of the ministry is the building up of the corporate Christ--the church and for 'that ministry' (Eph. 4:12) certain workers are chosen to minister the Word of God. See Rethinking the Work,

ministry. The fact that Nee took issue with the ordained ministerial system was not to depreciate the ministry of the Word, but to uphold the extreme seriousness and reverence required of 'that ministry' in that merely a theological diploma and ecclesiastical ordination have no guarantee to an efficacious ministry through which man's life is changed. In fact, his renowned work Rethinking the Work (or The Normal Christian Worker, 1938) is the treatise on the work of the ministry of the Word. Also, the fact that there is no differentiation between laymen and clergy in the Local Church assembly is owing to the active participation in the various ministries of the church on the part of every member rather than the abolition of the ministry of the Word. Since every member is a minister in the sense that everyone shares the various ministries of the church, even the ministry of the Word, there is no longer any layman in the church. Nee did not repudiate the ministry of the Word in the church. He redefined the concept of ministry.

### The Meaning of Ministry

To Nee ministry is a matter of spiritual reality. To minister to a certain person is to channel the spiritual reality from God through the life of the minister or worker to the life of the one he ministers to. There exists a relationship of life

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pp. 27ff., especially p. 31; CFP, 1982, pp. 11ff., p. 14.

<sup>3</sup>  
Yen ti p'o-sui yu ling ti ch'u-lai (The Release of the SPIRIT; Hong Kong: Hong kong Church Book Room, 1981), p. 108; The Release of the SPIRIT (Cloverdale, IN: Ministry of Life, 1965), p. 81f. Translation hereafter cited as Ministry of Life, 1965.

spiritual reality the minister is called to supply? All activities which are conducted in the Holy Spirit have the spiritual reality. The Spirit is truth, or reality (John 3:24; 1 John 5:7). Worship in the Holy Spirit has spiritual reality. However, worship outside the Holy Spirit is merely formality. Whenever man touches that reality he has life, because life and spiritual reality enjoined together.<sup>4</sup> An efficacious ministry does not depend on how many words we say or how much work we have done. It simply counts on how much the life of God can come out through our life. When the woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years was healed by touching Jesus' clothes, she actually touched the spiritual reality--the life of Christ. As a result she felt the power and was healed.<sup>5</sup> Many people who thronged around Jesus only touched the physical Jesus, not His life. Spiritual reality also means the revelation of God in one's heart that results in true understanding about God. When Peter confessed that Jesus was Christ, the Son of Eternal God (Matt. 16:15-17), he had the real knowledge because he received the

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4  
Shen-ling yu shih-chi (Holy Spirit and Reality; Taipie: Gospel Book Room, 1979; ET under the title The Spiritual Reality Or Obsession, CFP, 1970). Hereafter we follow the ET title between the minister and the one ministered. But what is the

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The purpose of the preacher is to change people's life through what he preaches. Nee once said: "I met a foreign missionary who had heard me preaching. I found out that he was a man who related to the truth of Christ rather than Christ. He spoke to my classmate and colleague concerning how to practise the truth of Christ; how to expound the Bible. My colleague asked him: 'By doing this has anybody moved? Does anybody repent, forsake sins, change his life? Do you have such a power?'" (The Normal Christian Faith, vol. 2: Christ and Christianity, 1936; CO [Hong Kong: Hong Kong Church Book Room, 1981], p. 41f.; trans. mine).

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revelation of the Father. These two instances bespeak one thing concerning spiritual reality: a personal encounter with God in life or spirit.

Then, comes the next question: how does a minister be able to engender the spiritual reality to minister to others? Since spiritual reality is revelation, the minister is only the vessel through whom God ministers to others. God is active and the minister is passive. God gives revelation and the minister receives it and translates it into words to deliver to others. Nevertheless, the appropriation of the revelation or life of God depends on the minister's relation with God. The goal of the Holy Spirit is not solely to endow gifts in order that one can minister to others. His work is mainly working in one's life so that one conforms to the likeness of Christ and through that life the spiritual reality of God can go through. "So it is not merely that a man does certain things or speaks certain words, but that he is a certain kind of man. He himself is what he preaches . . . the difference lies in the formation of Christ within." <sup>7</sup> We should be aware of the fact that "gifts are only the means

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Ibid., p. 18f.

7

What Shall This Man Do?, 1938-42 (Fort Washington, PN: Christian Literature Crusade, 1974), p. 112. Since the purpose of God is to make the personal Christ into a corporate Christ--the church, the sum of all spiritual reality is Christ. Justification, sanctification, patience, humility, gifts and all others are reduced to Christ. "Before God it is not a matter of endowment of Christ; rather, it is God giving Christ himself to us (Christ: The Sum of All Spiritual Things, 1939-40; ET [CPF, 1973], p. 63f.). This strong Christological reductionism renders all ecclesiastical differentiation of laymen and clergy superfluous.

through which I give of Christ to the Body; the ministry (or 'ministration') is what I give of Christ to the Body." <sup>8</sup> When the minister has revelation he has experience with Christ and is able to supply spiritual reality to men. One's spiritual experience is crucial to his ministry. "A ministry that is built upon mere theory leads only to to improverishment; a ministry of life springs essentially from experience." <sup>9</sup>

In fact, the greatest hindrance to one's ministry is his own life. If one's own life cannot be 'broken' in the sense that one's will, intellect and emotion as well as one's body are not in full submission to God, God's life cannot go through via one's spirit and ministers to others because the Spirit works through the spirit or the inner man (sort of communicatio idiomatum) which is encrusted by the outer man. The purpose of one's spiritual experience is to help dismantle the outer man for the passage through which God's life can reach others. He writes:

It is vital that we be broken by the Lord. It is not that the life of the Lord cannot cover the earth, but rather that His life is imprisoned by us. It is not that the Lord cannot bless the church but that the Lord's life is so confined within us that there is no flowing forth. If the outward man remains unbroken we can never be a blessing to His church and we cannot expect the word of God to be blessed by Him through us!<sup>10</sup>

The foregoing statement is indeed a capsule of Nee's understand-

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Ibid., p. 115.

9

Ibid., p. 52.

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Release of the SPIRIT, p. 5; trans. Ministry of Life, 1965, p. 12; emphasis mine.

ing of the ministry and it involves at least two facets, namely the constitution of man and the operation of God's Word. In the remaining part of this chapter we shall further examine Nee's conception of the ministry with reference to these two aspects and observe their bearings on Nee's teachings on the priesthood of all believers.

### Ministry and Anthropology

Nee's anthropology is fully delineated in his The Spiritual Man (1928) in which he embraced the contemporary popular notion of the trichotomous constitution of man namely spirit, soul and body.<sup>11</sup> The traditional dualistic view of man is considered fallen and inaccurate and is responsible for the phenomenon of many immature Christians. He remarks:

To fail to distinguish between spirit and soul is fatal to spiritual maturity. Christian often account what is soulical as spiritual, and thus they remain in a soulish state and seek not what is really spiritual. How can we escape loss if we confuse what God has divided?<sup>12</sup>

### Constitution of Man: Creation and Fall

The tripartite division is clearly seen in the conduct of

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In preface of The Spiritual Man, 1927.6.4, Nee acknowledges his indebtedness to some western writers who hold the same tripartite anthropology such as Andrew Murray (who wrote The Spirit of Christ [Fort Washington, PN: Christian Literature Crusade, 1963]) and Jessie Penn-Lewis (who wrote Soul and Spirit [Dorset, England, n.d.]). See also G. H. Pember, Earth's Earliest Ages (Old Tappan, NJ: n.d.). Anthropology is thoroughly discussed in the three-volume The Spiritual Man which amounts to 694 pages in ET.

12

The Spiritual Man, 1:80; CFP, 1968, 1:22. The proof texts cited for trichotomy are 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and Hebrews 4:12.

the creation of man. When God breathed 'the breath of life' (the spirit) to the body made of dust the living soul is formed as the result of the contact of the two.<sup>13</sup> The three parts have respective functions. The corporeal body comes into contact with the material world and is responsible for the 'world-consciousness.' The soul pertains to one's own self and personality and takes charge of the 'self-consciousness.' The spirit is the part through which we commune with God and is in command of the 'God-consciousness.' Thus "God dwells in the spirit, self dwells in the soul, while senses dwell in the body."<sup>14</sup> The soul acts as the mediator between the spirit and the body. On one hand the spirit can rule over the body through the soul. On the other hand the body is able to entice the spirit via the soul with worldly desires. Since the spirit is in contact with God it is the most precious among the three. Likewise the body is the lowest because it contacts the material world. "The spirit is the noblest part of man and occupies the innermost area of his being. The body is the lowest and takes the outermost place."<sup>15</sup>

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The Spiritual Man, 1:82; CFP, 1968, 1:23.

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The Spiritual Man, 1:86; CFP, 1968, 1:26.

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The Spiritual Man, 1:87; CFP, 1968, 1:27. The association of externality and inferiority is further reiterated by the analogy with the three concentric structures of the temple: the outer court, the inner court and the holy of the holies (p. 90; CFP, 1968, 1:29). The derogatory tone bearing on all external matter can explain his disapproval of ordination, creeds and the ministerial office as an institution. In fact such altitude accounts for his relative view of history, devoid of any realism. Nee wants a church of New Testament, not a church from the New Testament.

Before the fall the spirit controlled the body through the soul which contented itself with the servile position. This normal order was upset when the soul assumed the leading role. The eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil epitomises the pride of the soul. Knowledge is one function of the soul (intellect) and by eating that fruit man's soulical life was elevated. Indeed the question posed by Satan to doubt about God was to induce Eve to exercise her reason (rule by the soul) rather than to remain obedient to God's words (rule by the spirit). The work of Satan in Eden operated from the external to the internal. Nee writes:

The order of his (Satan) working is always such: from the outside to the inside. If he does not start with the body, then he begins by working on the the mind or the emotion in order to get to the will of man. The moment man's will yields to Satan he possesses man's whole being and puts the spirit to death. But not so the work of God; His is always from the inside to the outside. God begins working in man's spirit and continues by illuminating his mind, stirring his emotion and causing him to exercise his will over his body for carrying into execution the will of God.<sup>16</sup>

#### Salvation of Man: Harmony Restored

The fall brought the disharmony of God's created chain of command: spirit, soul and body. The judgment of sin started from the internal spirit and spread to the external body. Adam first experienced spiritual death--alienation from God, then the death spread to his body as he ultimately returned to dust. Adam's spirit fell to the oppression of his soul to an extent that the two merged together and became one. That is why the writer of

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The Spiritual Man, 1:120; CFP, 1968, 1:48.

Hebrews says that God's Word shall pierce and divide soul and spirit (4:12).

Christ's salvation is to restore the original harmony in man through His substitutionary death and resurrection. On the cross Christ suffered in spirit, soul and the body in the substitutionary death for man. His body suffered as Christ was being hung on the cross. His soul suffered as Christ deliberately chose to remain conscious by declining to have the cup of wine and vinegar which would numbed His consciousness. His soul suffered too as shame befell him when He was stripped of all clothes on the cross.<sup>17</sup> The separation with the Father was the suffering of His spirit. Through faith and in union with Christ a Christian experiences what Christ had done in history: the judgment of the spirit, soul and body and resurrection.

Regeneration "is something which happens entirely within the spirit; it has no relation to soul or body."<sup>18</sup> It is the imparting of God's life to the spirit of man.<sup>19</sup> A regenerated Christian is thus under a new chain of command: "the Holy Spirit now rules man's soul and, through the soul, governs his body.

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Nee points out that we usually neglect the suffering of the soul on the part of Jesus which is explicitly bespoken in the prediction of death (John 12:27) and the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:38) as well as Isaiah 53:10-12 (The Spiritual Man, 1:133f.; CFP, 1968, 1:58). If man is tripartite, Christ's passion should be threefold corresponding to the constitution of man in order to redeem man.

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The Spiritual Man, 1:138; CFP, 1968, 1:61.

19

The Spiritual Man, 1:137; CFP, 1968, 1:61.

Because the Holy Spirit becomes the life of man's spirit." <sup>20</sup> He  
 is now a spiritual man, and begins to live a normal Christian  
 life. Regeneration is just the beginning. God continues working  
 in the spirit of a Christian till his old creation passes away. <sup>21</sup>

As regard to one's ministry, the fact that regeneration  
 only takes place at the deepest being--the spirit--bears out the  
 truth that our natural talents (which operate on the level of  
 soul) have no avail in procuring regeneration on the part of the  
 sinners. He writes:

Therefore, every worker of the Lord should realise that our  
 natural talents cannot lead man to regeneration. Christian  
 life and work from the beginning to the end cannot depend on  
 the power of the soul. Otherwise all the fruits (of our  
 effort) remain the the realm of the soul, reaching not the  
 spirit.<sup>22</sup>

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The Spiritual Man, 1:134f.; CFP, 1968, 1:63.

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"God's aim for a regenerated man is to rid him of  
 everything that belong to the old creation (unregenerated body  
 and soul) through this (generated) spirit. It is within the very  
 (generated) spirit all of God's works take place." (The Spiritual  
 Man, 2:356; trans. mine, cf. CFP, 1968, 2:100). In Changed into  
 His Likeness, Nee suggests that the life of Jacob as the type of  
 the organisation of the Spirit in one's life who was renamed  
 Israel (whereas in Abraham we see God the Father's setting the  
 goal, standard of our life while in Isaac we see God the Son's  
 supply, and work of life). There are three significant precious  
 metals in the Bible namely gold, silver and precious stones  
 symbolising the Father, Son and Spirit. In Genesis 2:12 and  
 Revelation 21 we only have the gold and precious stones (three  
 metals however are mentioned in 1 Corinthians 3), no silver. The  
 absence of silver (Gen. 2:21) bespeaks of the original plan of  
 God for the organisation of Christ in our life which becomes  
 precious stones in Rev. 21. Unlike gold and silver, precious  
 stones are not elements, but the result of great catastrophic  
 change due to tremendous heat and pressure. It symbolises our  
 spiritual metamorphosis in the Spirit whereby we are brought to  
 the conformation of Christ. God does not merely give us life  
 (Christ, silver) but let us absorb life (imitating Christ,  
 precious stones). See CO, pp. 204-6.

22

The Spiritual Man, 1:140; trans. mine; 1:140-143 (first

From the above we observe that to Nee, spiritual work is only efficacious in so far as it is done through the spirit, nothing to do with the natural gifts, knowledge and other things within the confines of the soulical life. In Nee's favourite words: "The ministry of 1 Corinthians (gifts and preaching) and indeed of all his epistles, is based on the man of 2 Corinthians (spiritual experience)."<sup>23</sup> In order to appreciate the paramount significance of the spirit in one's conduct of ministry we need further examination on the functions of the spirit and the soul.

### The Soul and the Spirit

#### The spirit

The essence of the spirit is a mystery. It is substantial, personal, and invisible. However we may have a glimpse of the nature of the spirit by observing its threefold functions: intuition, communion and conscience. They are interrelated and interpenetrating.

#### The intuition

Intuition is the senses of the spirit. It is called intuition because "it impinges directly without reason or cause. Without passing through any procedure, it comes forth in a straight manner."<sup>24</sup> In spirit we may know something without any understanding. Intuition is something like "an unuttered and

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half) are not found in CFP.

<sup>23</sup>

What Shall This Man Do?, p. 52.

<sup>24</sup>

The Spiritual Man, 2:446; CFP, 1968, 2:71.

soundless voice strongly opposing what our mind, emotion or volition has entertained, felt, or decided." <sup>25</sup> Intuition is the revelation of the Spirit. When Christians decide to follow God's will, they do not have to ask others or even themselves, but follow the intuition of the spirit. The revelation of the spirit via our intuition is independent of any externality.

#### The communion

Communion pertains to our worship with God. As a man's corporeal body communicates with the material world his spirit communicates with the spiritual world. Different natures cannot communicate. God is the Spirit (John 4:24). The unregenerated cannot worship God. So are those regenerated Christians who come to worship God not in the spirit. In order to apprehend the spiritual things (which can only be conveyed to us by the Spirit to our spirit), we should put our mind in subjection to our spirit and let the intuition do its own job. Nee remarks about 1 Corinthian 2:15: Spiritual man can judge all things because he leans on the Spirit for its knowledge. He is not subjected to the judgment of any man because no one knows how and what the Holy Spirit imparts to his intuition. Again, learning and worldly education are not crucial to spiritual perception. "They are useful, but here they must play a secondary role. They should be under control and not be the controller." <sup>26</sup>

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25

Ibid.

26

The Spiritual Man, 2:477; CFP, 1968, 2:93.

## Conscience

The third function of the spirit is to reprove sin and approve righteousness. It serves as a monitor for God and privately confronts man with His holiness. The conscience does not operate on reason but follows the will of God apprehended through intuition. Conscience speaks for God's will, not reason. Since conscience discerns good and evil, it calls for knowledge. Therefore the deeper the spiritual life and richer the knowledge about the Scriptures, the more sensitive one's conscience will be. However, "in the matter of fellowship God looks not at how much we apprehend of His will but rather at what our attitude towards His will is."<sup>27</sup>

## The Soul

To see the unregenerated soul is in antithesis to the regenerated spirit. Soul is the self-consciousness of man, the seat of one's personality. What constitutes one's personality are three faculties, namely emotion, mind and will.

## Emotion

Those Christians who are not controlled by the spirit are tossed by emotion and live by impulse and whims. Emotion can be subdivided into affection, desire and feeling. Those who are controlled by emotion can hardly bear fruits in their ministry. Christians should crucify their emotion so that the spiritual discernment may not be confused with soulical emotion. However,

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The Spiritual Man, 2:514; CFP, 1968, 2:120.

it does not follow that a spiritual man has no emotion. On the contrary, "the most tender, merciful, loving, and sympathetic of persons is a spiritual man."<sup>28</sup> The purpose of crucifying the soul is to destroy its life not its function.<sup>29</sup>

### Mind

The mind is the organ of thought, the brain in physiology, the nous in psychology. The Nous exists between the intuition of the spirit and the brain of the body. It interprets the intuition and expresses it through the brain. If we say that man's will and spirit are like the citadel which the evil spirits crave to capture, then "the mind is the scene of the battle where the evil spirits clash with God."<sup>30</sup> Therefore it is no wonder that many saints of integrity were heretics in the history of the church. Christians should open their mind because God's truth first goes through our mind before reaching our spirit. Many a time, the truth retained in the mind may appear quite meaningless, however, after the illumination of the spirit, one may apprehend the depth of the truth. "An open mind lets in the truth, but the illumination of the spirit's light renders the truth profitable."<sup>31</sup> They work together.

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The Spiritual Man, 2:639; CFP, 1968, 2:200.

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The Spiritual Man, 2:639; CFP, 1968, 2:201.

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The Spiritual Man, 2:728; CFP, 1968, 3:8.

31

The Spiritual Man, 3:816; CFP, 1968, 3:70.

## Will

The will is the organ of decision. In the universe there are two antithetical wills: God's good and holy will and Satan's defiling and rebellious will. Man was made with the independent free will. Fall was the result of the adherence to Satan's will and acting according to one's flesh. Salvation is the return to God's will. In the whole spiritual transaction of salvation God's will is active in seeking sinners who in this sense appear passive. However, man has to respond actively with his free will to God's seeking in order to be saved. Salvation is the conformation to God's will. He writes:

To say that God will bring man to His will. No doubt this takes a lifetime to fulfill, but even at the outset of salvation God commences working towards that end. Hence when the Holy Spirit convicts a man of sin, that conviction is such that the man would not have a word to say even should God condemn him to hell. Then when that man is shown by God His definite plan in the cross of Christ he will gladly accept it and express his readiness to receive the salvation of God. Thus we do observe that the first stage of salvation is essentially a salvation of the will. A sinner's faith and acceptance is but his desire to take the water of life and be saved.<sup>32</sup>

In the like manner, any ministry should originate with God, otherwise "they are nothing more than will-worshipping."<sup>33</sup> After a Christian has been saved, his will is not yet in perfect union with the will of God. It is renewed and is able to submit to the new spirit, new life, new heart. However if the will rebels it may become the strong adversary of this new spirit.

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The Spiritual Man, 3:834f.; CFP, 1968, 3:80.

33

The Spiritual Man, 3:831; CFP, 1968, 3:78.

To sum up: The soul and the spirit are two antithetical entities. The soul can be an instrument as well as a hindrance to one's ministry. All depends on whether one can separate the two and subject the faculties of the soul to the direction of the spirit. A Christian must dedicate himself as a sacrifice on the altar and then let Christ the priest dissect him into soul and spirit with His Word (Hebrews 4:12) as the Old Testament priest cut the sacrifice into pieces.<sup>34</sup> Then the revelation, life of God can go through the minister and be ministered to people. The revelation or life of God is the Word of God made alive through the life of the minister. In next section we shall examine the operation of the Word of God.

### The Operation of the Word of God

#### The Human Instrumentality

To Nee, the most important work of God on earth is to utter His own word. "If the word of God is taken away, then almost nothing is left of God's work."<sup>35</sup> In the Old Testament God spoke

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The Spiritual Man, 1:324-31; CFP, 1968, 1:193-98. As God divided light and darkness in creation with His Word, God also divides the soul and the spirit in the heart of the Christian. "Hence the noblest habitation of God--our spirits--is wholly separated from the bases of our souls." (The Spiritual Man, 1:328; CFP, 1968, 1:196). Here we see clearly Nee's indebtedness to Mrs. Penn-Lewis who said the strikingly similar words: "To have the work of the cross wrought in us, even to the 'dividing of the soul and spirit', so that we may have an accute spirit-sense for you can 'sense' the meaning of some deep thing of God which you cannot grasp with your intellect" (Centrality of the Cross, p. 51f.).

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Shen hua-yu ti chih-shih (The Ministry of God's Word; [Taipie: Gospel Book Room, 1979], p. 1; CFP, 1971, p. 9.

through His prophets, in the New Testament through Jesus and the apostles. The amazing thing of the Word of God is that it is spoken through human mouths. This human instrumentality of the ministry of the Word has three modes: objective as in the case of the Old Testament prophets; subjective as in the case of Jesus and the combination of both objective and subjective as in the case of the apostles which is the forerunner of all ministers of the Word.

In the Old Testament, the general rule was that God merely used the human voices to convey His Word. A good example was Balaam. When the Word of God rested on Balaam, Balaam spoke passively. "He neither added his own opinion nor mingle his own feeling or thought with God's word."<sup>36</sup> Only those great servants of God like Moses, David, Isaiah, and Jeremiah sometimes could speak with their feelings and their words were recognised by God as his Word. However in Jesus, we have the perfect union of the Word of God and human feeling, thought. "His (Jesus) feeling was the feeling of God's word, and His thought, the thought of God's word. . . . Through our Lord Jesus the word was advanced from revelation to personality."<sup>37</sup> In Jesus, God's Word successfully became flesh. First comes the word then the flesh for the word. In the apostles, we have the combination of the two. "The New Testament ministry is that of the Lord Jesus added to that of the Old Testament prophets. The word of God comes to man as

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<sup>36</sup>

Ministry of God's Word, p. 3; CFP, 1971, p. 10.

<sup>37</sup>

Ministry of God's Word, p. 7f.; CFP, 1971, p. 14.

revelation along with man's feeling, thought and idea. It is consequently God's revelation plus human elements." <sup>38</sup> Since the New Testament ministers are not as perfect and holy as Jesus they must be dealt with first. "He (God) needs to raise them to the level He demands. . . . So God deals with these New Testament ministers in respect to their experiences, words, feelings, cleverness, opinion, characteristics and other areas, in order that His word might be communicated through them." <sup>39</sup> Nee sums up what he considers the true ministry of the Word saying:

When a true minister of the word preaches from the Bible, God is willing to speak to men. . . . In his mouth the word becomes the word of God. It is life and light, not mere letters. How can anyone be so mistaken as to view the ability to preach Bible doctrines and expound Bible types as being the qualification for a minister of the word? One who preaches in that way gives only the outer shell of the Bible to others. He is not recognised as a minister of the word.<sup>40</sup>

The conception of the duality of the Word is evident from the above. The job of the minister is to preach the light and life not the shell, the letters of the Bible. In order to understand this duality we need further to examine Nee's conceptions of inspiration and revelation.

### Inspiration and Revelation

#### Inspiration

Inspiration refers to the fact that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. It is the finished product of both God and

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Ministry of God's Word, p. 9; CFP, 1971, p. 15.

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Ministry of God's Word, p. 9; CFP, 1971, p. 15.

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Ministry of God's Word, p. 106f.; CFP, 1971, p. 94f.; emphasis mine.

man. "Though the Bible was written by human hands and spoken from human mouths, even so, God breathed on it and made it a living book. It became a living word spoken by the living God. This is the meaning of inspiration in the Bible."<sup>41</sup> The act of God's breathing differentiates the Bible from other human writings as the inspired Word of God. Like the creation of the living man which was the result of the combination of the breath of God and the material dust, "the Bible had been breathed by God, it was spoken by God's holy men under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21)."<sup>42</sup> Nee accepted the sixty six books of the Bible as the inspired Word of God. And the ministry of the Word is based on the Bible. He writes:

As we categorically deny that beyond the sixty-six books of the Bible someone could write a sixty-seventh book, we equally reject the notion that men today can receive revelation not found in the Bible or can possess ministry additional to what the Bible permits. We firmly believe God's word is in the Old testament and His word is in the New Testament; we do not intend to add anything to the Bible.<sup>43</sup>

Whoever claims to have revelation extraneous to the Bible is a heretic. The first class of ministers of the Word (Old Testament prophets) spoke God's Word independent of any previous inspired words. But the second class, the New Testament apostles spoke in line of the inspired words of the Old Testament. So today's ministers of the Word, the third class, speak in the light of

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Ministry of God's Word, p. 92; CFP, 1971, p. 83.

42

Ibid., trans. mine, cf. CFP's trans. merely cites 1 Peter 1:21 missing the stress of instrumentality of holy man as Nee intends here.

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Ministry of God's Word, 61, CFP, 1971, p. 57.

both Old Testament and the New Testament.

### Revelation

Revelation refers to the very act of God's breathing. Since the Bible is the combination of both God's breath and human writings, the essential matter of being the minister of the Word is not the acquaintance of the Scriptures as pertains to its material aspect but having the breathing from God (the divine aspect) once again behind the literal words of the Bible.

"Revelation occurs when God reactivates His Word by His Spirit that it may be living and full of life as at the time when it was first written."<sup>44</sup> Inspiration is given only once, revelation is given repeatedly.<sup>45</sup> How does the revelation come upon the minister? How does the minister translate the revelation into words and deliver to his audience? Nee describes the transaction as follows:

First, God sheds light in your spirit, causing a burden in the spirit. The light flashes as a fleeting ray; it requires your thought to fix this light firmly or it will simply fade away. After the thought succeeds in fixing the light, you need to seek for words--perhaps just a few words--which can interpret that light. While thinking, you may think of some words which you later write down. Then you voice the decision or opinion you have in a particular matter. As you express upon inward feeling, decision or opinion, the burden in your spirit begins to diminish. The more you talk, the more the light in your spirit which has been fixed by your thought is released. You are talking in your own words expressing feeling, decision or opinion of your own yet after you have finished speaking God acknowledges it all as His word.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>

Ministry of God's Word, 97; CFP, 1971, p. 87.

<sup>45</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>

Ministry of God's Word, p. 49f. CFP, 1971, p. 46.

God's revelation starts with the light which is the illumination of the spirit. Then the minister utilises his thought to fix that illumination and seeks the Holy Spirit for words to interpret the illumination so that "the spritual thought being transformed into words within me (inner words)."<sup>47</sup> After that the minister needs to search for words to express his inner words.

Thus there are two revelations and two fixings pertaining to the work of God and man respectively. The first revelation comes as light flashing in the spirit of man; the second revelation comes as the inner words. The two revelations complete the process whereby the initial light turns to thought and is later apprehended as the inner words, and is made ready for communication through the outer words.

As regard to the two fixings in which the minister is responsible, the first one is to internalise the light for the minister himself; the second one is for the expression of the inner words to supply others. The effect and efficacy of one's ministry lie in these two fixings: whether the minister's thought is prone to fix the full intensity of the light and whether the minister's knowledge of the Bible is thorough enough to translate his inner words into outer words. Only those ministers whose thought have been dealt with are able to fix the full meaning of the light. Nee cautions:

Our words cannot be strong if our thought is weak. Our ministry will be weak becasue our thought is weak. We are God's channels, and channels determine the volume of water passing through. Channels can be leaky and defective. Either

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Ministry of God's Word, 189, CFP, 1971, p. 163.

we deliver the word of God strongly to the brothers and sisters or we defile God's word and present it in damaged form. How serious is our responsibility.<sup>48</sup>

After the light being fixed and the inner words being granted the last step in the ministry of the Word is to translate the inner words into comprehensible outer words. Merely preaching about the inner words may not be helpful to others because they are so intense and concentrated. Unlike the outer words for expression, the inner words are few. "But what spiritual wealth is hidden in those few words! . . . these few words are life-releasing."<sup>49</sup>

How can we express our inner words received from the Holy Spirit?

Here our knowledge of the Bible comes into play. Nee writes:

". . . if we are familiar with the Bible we can use the words there to help complete the delivery. This is not expounding the Scriptures objectively. It is on the contrary a highly subjective approach to the understanding of the Bible. We are not talking about the Bible but about the revelation we have received. We use the Bible because we find in it things similar to our experience.<sup>50</sup>

The reading of the Bible is a crucial instrument for the

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Ministry of God's Word, p. 178f.; CFP, 1971, p. 155.  
The idea of the minister being the canal had been advocated early in 1926. Nee struggled for the frustrating fact that the lives of people did not change upon hearing God's Word though it was clearly articulated. Nee writes: "When we preach the cross of the Lord, the audience are very attentive and are really moved. yet they do not have what you intend for them. Their lives do not change . . . In other words, the Holy Spirit does not collaborate with you . . . your words cannot impress indelible marks in the life of man, your mouth may flow out some words but your spirit does not outflow life . . . We are not to be an admirable speaker, (our Lord is the one who gives life) but be the canal of life, conveying life to the heart of man" (Shih-chih-chia ti shih-che [The Messenger of the Cross; Taipie: Gospel Book Room, 1980], p. 2f.; trans. mine).

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Ministry of God's Word, 191, CFP, 1971, p. 165.

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Ministry of God's Word, 206, CFP, 1971, p. 175.

ministry. We find appropriate words in the Bible to discharge our burden. "The words in the Scriptures are provided to release our inward burdens."<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless it is useful only in so far as the minister has the inner words to preach.

#### Summary and Observations

From the above we may infer that to Nee, ministry is closely related with his spiritual theology which in turn is based on his view of man. Indeed Nee's whole theological system departs from his trichotomous anthropology<sup>52</sup> which he had already mapped out in The Spiritual Man as early as 1928. The thrust of Nee's anthropology is the strong metaphysical antithesis between the spirit and soul and the conception of communicatio idiomatum. The spirit is regenerated while the soul is unregenerated. One is the point of contact with the spiritual realm the other the

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Ministry of God's Word, p. 207; CFP, 1971, p. 175. The word burden also means inspiration (Hebrew word massa). "The prophet carries out the ministry of the word through his 'massam,' that is, his burden. When there is no burden, there is no ministry of the word. Therefore, a minister of the word must possess burden" (p. 183; CPF, 1971, p. 159).

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The good example is his notion of the salvation of the soul. See Wen ti te-chiu (The Salvation of the Soul) (Taipie: Gospel Book Room, 1979); ET (CFP, 1978). Here we observe how his tripartite anthropology influences his eschatology and soteriology. Carnal Christians cannot be kings with Christ in the millenium. "To lose the soul is not to enter hell, but to inflict pains on it because we cannot rule with the Lord in his kingdom" (p. 34; trans. mine). The theory of the salvation of the soul helps Nee also solve the paradoxical teaching of perseverance of the saints and the loss of one's salvation on the part of the lapsed. The word 'life' in the latter cases are translated 'soul' (Matt. 10:34-39, 16:24-28; Luke 17:26-37, 12:15-21, 14:25-35, 21:5-19; John 12:25; Hebrews 10:38,39; James 1:17-21; 1 Peter 1:3-9, 4:17-19; See Salvation of the Soul, passim).

material realm (body per se is not the contact point with the material world because it does not have self-consciousness). In view of the fact that the soul and the spirit are two different entities and God only works according to the principle of communicatio idiomatum, Nee advocates the notion of 'brokenness' in his understanding of ministry. As has been said, the essence of ministry is to supply the spiritual reality of God via our spirit. And the spirit is the organ through which one is enabled "to know God's word, to discern the spiritual condition of another to send forth God's messages under anointing and to receive God's revelations."<sup>53</sup> However, if God's Spirit is not able to go through our outer man or is contaminated by some impurities of the soul in the process of being released, then all a minister does in the realm of the soul is yielding no spiritual value. A Christian who embarks on evangelistic itinerary may be motivated by his natural temperament: talkative and active. One who loves to preach may be explained by the fact that he enjoys<sup>54</sup> being complimented for his sermons.

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The Release of the SPIRIT, p. 2; Ministry of Life, 1965, p. 9.

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Shih-feng tien wa-shih shih-feng shen ni (Ministry to the House [Temple] Or to the Lord), a pamphlet (Hong Kong: n.p. and n.d.), p. 6. An abridged ET is found in Twelve Baskets Full, 2 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Church Book Room, 1972), pp. 9-21. Inferring from Ezekiel 44: 11, 15f., Nee argues that ministry to the temple is the work of the soul and ministry to God is the work of the spirit. The apostate Levites who still ministered in the sanctuary doing routine work of slaying the sacrifices--a job of activities, sweat and in the limelight. But the Zadokites were real faithful priests who stood and ministered before God--a job out of the sight of man. The fact that they must not wear anything that make them perspire (Ezekiel 44:18) indicates that they minister not by fleshly power (thus sweats came out) but by

Nee's spiritual theology at least influences his view of the universal priesthood in two major aspects. In the first place, the primacy of the spiritual integrity of the minister withholds the rise of sacerdotalism as in the case of the pre-Nicene church which existed in similar hostile historical context that promoted the consciousness of the ante-mundane holiness and destiny of the church. All spiritual men could grant absolution albeit a layman (see chapter III note 53). To Nee, any spiritual man can have a revelation from God directly concerning a certain passage of the Bible and ministers to the life of others in the assembly even though he never had a course on hermeneutics and homiletics as a clergy. The Bible as the literary word in black and white is an external thing. It comes to life only when it is preached by the preacher who has revelation from God. But only a spiritual man can serve as the instrumentality of the Spirit of God. The job of a minister is not to disseminate grammatical-historical data about the Bible in which a cleric would no doubt far excel than the layman. Instead we are called to supply the spiritual reality, life, and revelation (they pertain to the same thing). Unlike cognitive knowledge, the spiritual knowledge comes only from a sanctified life and one's intimate relation with God rather than study. The difference among Christians is one between carnal and spiritual rather than one between the laymen and the clergy.

In the second place, his dialectical view of the spirit and  
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 the spiritual power.

soul (and body) renders the ministerial office as an historical, institutional organisation dangerous and harmful to the spiritual welfare of the church. When the metaphysical antithesis between the spirit and the soul is translated into temporal-spatial category it becomes the antithesis of the internal and the external. God works from the internal to the external--the rebirth of the spirit at the time of justification to the sanctification of the soul in lifetime and the resurrection of the body in parousia. On the other hand Satan works from the external to the internal as in the Fall. And externality is associated with carnality. The association of carnality and externality leads Nee to hold all institutions in suspicion. In fact we may venture to suggest that his historiography and conception of the apostate church, Judaization, the rise of the teachings of Nicolaitan, Balaam, Jezebel (see chapter VII) can be attributed to such an association. Since the salaried ministerial office as a separate class was the result of the historical development rather than an explicit teaching of the New Testament, he simply rebukes it as apostasy. Regarding institutions and organisation, Nee remarks:

David 'served his own generation,' and slept (Acts 13:36). He could not serve two! Where to-day we seek to perpetuate our work by setting up an organisation or society or organisation, the Old Testament saints served their own day and passed on. This is an important principle of life. . . . This Church, never rooted permanently in the earth.<sup>55</sup>

But if the church should never be rooted on earth, how can we

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What Shall This Man Do?, p. 86f. The ministerial office was the result of the teaching of Nicolaitans (see chapter VII notes 33, 34).

express our faith in the material world? How do the spiritual men, the overcomers, the priests of God come to live as a community and bear witness to the eternal will of God here and now? In next chapter we shall examine the Local Church assembly founded by Nee with special reference to its ecclesiastical expression for the priesthood of all believers.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE ECCLESIASTICAL EXPRESSION OF THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

#### Restoration of the Original Blueprint of God

If as has been said that Nee has a derogatory attitude towards all organisation, institution and tradition due to his anthropology, how then is the spiritual community--the church--expressed in concrete ecclesiastical form? To Nee the spiritual men are not separate individuals who merely aspire to personal sanctification, but also are the priests of God, the overcomers, the remnants (they all pertain to the same persons) who hold the line of the original plan of God on earth. There is no conflict between spirituality and ecclesiastical polity in as far as the latter is constructed according to the original blueprint. He writes:

To have the outer without the inner is spiritual death, but to have the inner without the outer is only spiritualized life. And spiritualization is not spirituality. . . . He takes no cognizance of time, and His Will and Ways all bear the stamp of eternity. This being so, God could never act one way at one time and another way later on. Circumstances may differ and cases may differ, but in principle the Will and Ways of God are just the same today as they were in the days of the Acts.<sup>1</sup>

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Rethinking the Work, CFP, 1982, p. 6f. We may say that Nee is more concerned with a pristine church than personal spirituality and sanctification. On one occasion, Nee gave testimony concerning the goal of his ministry. He said:

It is clear that on one hand Nee has a relative view of history in the sense that he does not see any divine imprimatur in historical development. The development of the ministerial office, creeds and various church polities are indiscriminately considered the work of men and thus illegitimate. On the other hand he has a strong historiographical conception of the priesthood of all believers. The history of the church is contemplated as the history of the apostate church which departed from the apostolic church and adduced the separation of peoplehood and priesthood. The apostate church was restored to her pristine state till the time of the Brethren Movement (the church at Philadelphia in Revelation 3 which reasserted the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers).<sup>2</sup> However owing to its emphasis in objective doctrine to the neglect of subjective, -----

"Between 1921 and 1923 there were revival meetings in different places, and many thought that as these meetings were leading people to the Lord they should be regarded as all that was necessary. But God led me to see that His purpose requires those already saved to stand on the ground of unity in local churches, and to represent God's Church on earth and maintain witness to God. . . . When I studied the Acts of the Apostles, I saw that it is God's wish to establish local churches in each city. It was as though a light shone on me clearly and I understood His purpose. . . . What the Lord revealed to me was extremely clear: before long He would raise local churches in various parts of China" (ed. K. H. Weigh, Watchman Nee's Testimony, pp. 31-32; trans. in English version, pp. 30-31).

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Nee does not attribute the reassertion of the priesthood of all believers to Luther. Luther is reckoned of restoring the doctrine of justification by faith and the open Bible (Orthodoxy of the Church, p. 46; The Overcomer of God, p. 86). The restoration of the doctrine of universal priesthood is attributed to the Brethren. "The universal priesthood of believers is a subject which has been preached for over a hundred and twenty years, from 1828 till now. Yet even in our day priestly function is still not a universal fact in the Church" (Church Affairs, p. 78; CFP, 1982, p. 64f.).

personal experience as well as spiritual pride, the Philadelphian church lapsed to the contemporary Laodecian church of spiritual lethary.

It is Nee's aspiration that in the end time his spiritual men are called to bear witness to the pristine New Testament church once again on earth. This aspiration is bespoken by his criticism about the failure on the part of the Brethren to maintain what he conceived the New Testament principle of the Local Church assembly namely "one city one church" (see chapter VII note 53). In other words Nee aspired to the full restoration of all the pristine truth through his Local Church assembly in which the priesthood of all believers received maximum ecclesiastical expression.

This conviction of restoration of the apostolic model is clearly seen by the address delivered in his Overcomer Conference of 1934 in Shanghai. In the address entitled "Who are we?" Nee made an apology the first time for what his church was advocating. Nee felt that his Local Church assembly was not innovative but restorative. Commenting on 2 Peter 1:12 "So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have (emphasis mine)," Nee contends that "the truth you now have" can be translated "the truth of today." And the truth of today was the certain truth of God to be restored at a certain period of time. He writes:

There is no truth that is not recorded in the Bible. . . .  
 But owing to the fact that men are foolish, unfaithful,  
 irresponsible and disobedient many truth are buried in the  
 Bible and hide themselves from men . . . Till the fruition  
 of time God releases certain truth in certain period of time,

so that they are made manifest once again.

Then Nee gives a lengthy account of what had been restored since Luther who first resuscitated the doctrine of justification of faith<sup>4</sup> and concludes:

We know that God's truth is accumulative not superceding, all those truth of the past are the foundation of today. . . . From 1926 onward we had released many messages about the church, the cross and bore witness for these. . . . Later God made us see what is the body of Christ, where is its reality. We had learnt that the life of Christ is one, so is the church. . . . We receive help from Luther, Zinzendorf, the Moravian brethren and the message of Keswick. . . . Today what are we doing here? We emulate John the Baptist in answering men: we are the voice of the wilderness, our work is to address the children of God to return to the central will of God, reckoning Christ as the center of all things and His death, resurrection, ascension as the foundation of all. . . . We acknowledge that in the New Testament the position of the church is exalted and spiritual. We are thankful to the help rendered to us by the missionaries. However, what God had made known to us today is that we should put all things back to the central will of God. Today our work is to return to the church of the Bible (emphasis mine).<sup>5</sup>

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The Overcomer of God, 1934, p. 84; trans. mine.

4

Nee proves himself a student of history in recounting the significant figures and their respective restoration of certain neglected truth in the history of the church: Luther (justification), Calvin, Spener (freedom of worship according to 1 Corithian 14), Zinzendorf (foreign mission), Molinos, Madame Guyon, F. Fenelon (three for spirituality), Arnold Gottried (New Testament church), Wesley brothers and Whitefield (evangelism), the Brethren (convergence of spirituality and New Testament church: Darby, William Kelly, C. H. Mackintosh, B. W. Newton, J. G. Bellett; C. G. Pember and Robert Govett (prophesy and millenium); D. M. Panton, Hudson Taylor, George Muller (three for the union with Christ), A. B. Simpson and A. J. Gordon (faith healing); Pearsall Smith, Mrs. Hannah Smith, Stoknell Evan Hopkins, Andrew Murray, Trumbull (five for the Keswick tradition, victorious life); Mrs. Penn-Lewis (centrality of the cross), Evan Robert (revivalism--the Welsh revival). This list of men betrays Nee's spiritual heritage. Indeed Nee is an eclectic and attracted to the writings of spiritual giants, men or women, Catholic and Protestant. See ibid., pp. 85-100.

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Ibid., pp. 99-102; trans. mine. The restoration mitif

Two things should call our attention here which we shall see more clearly in our subsequent discussion. First, the will of God (here comes Nee's view of history), the centrality of Christ and the New Testament church are considered the same thing. To Nee the repristination of the apostolic church is the exaltation of Christ whose corporate body is the church according to the eternal will of God. The return to the New Testament church with its 1 Corinthian 14 format of assembly is to let the body of Christ function, not to acquiesce to the monopoly of spiritual matter on the part of a certain intermediary clerical class. Second, his church policy of 'one church one city' is an ideal to solve the multiplicity of the denominations brought by the missionaries which as Nee conceived failed to bear witness to the unity of the body of Christ on earth. It was the conviction on the part of Nee to return to the pristine New Testament church polity--the Local Church assembly--in which the integrity of the unity of the body of Christ is maintained and in which every member within the body functions as part of the body and grows. In this chapter our focus is to examine Nee's overarching somatic notion of the church and see how this conception serves to facilitate the priesthood of all believers in the Local Church assembly.

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is pervasive in all Nee's writings and Nee calls it the special ministry of John--the ministry of mending the net. Cf. Peter's ministry for spearheading new frontier (casting a net into the sea); Paul's ministry is the building up of the church (tent maker). See What Shall This Man Do?, pp. 9-18; The Four Ministers of the New Testament (including James); CO (Hong Kong: Gospel Book Room, 1953); the introduction of The Orthodoxy of the Church, pp. 3-10.

The Church As Corporate Christ

The Church in the Eternal Purpose of God

To Nee the church owes its existence to the eternal purpose of God--to magnify His Son, Christ. God brought this to fruition by making the personal Christ to become the corporate Christ--the church. The church becomes the body of Christ by sharing Christ's life. He writes:

He purposes to have people come under the name of His Son and to share the life of His Son so that they become His own children. He designs to use these people for the increase of His Son in order that the personal Christ may also be the corporate Christ. For all the purposes of God are in His Son and all His works are intended to extend His Son!<sup>6</sup>

Sharing Christ's life is not an infralapsarian (after the Fall) remedy. It is the supralapsarian (before the Fall) purpose of God. In fact, the tree of life in Eden signifies the original plan on the part of God that man shall share the life of Christ.<sup>7</sup> However man failed. Christ came to be crucified to solve the problem of sin. But the original plan of God, namely, to share Christ's life was resumed in the church. The church is the corporate Christ made up of people who possess the life of

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<sup>6</sup> Rethinking the Work, p. 27; CFP, 1982, p. 11; Cf. chapter VII notes 21, 24.

<sup>7</sup> "The original purpose of God is that the human soul should receive and assimilate the truth and substance of God's spiritual life. . . . If he would exercise his will by taking and eating the fruit of life, God's own life undoubtedly would enter his spirit, permeate his soul, transform his entire inner man, and translate his body into incorruptibility" (The Spiritual Man, 1:115; CFP, 1968, 1:44). Cf. the absence of silver (symbolising Christ) in pre-fall Genesis 2:12 and the new heaven and earth (Revelation 21) as Christ is expected to be constituted in the life of the Christians (the precious stones), see chapter VII, note 21.

Christ. "God wishes all the redeemed to receive life only from Christ. It is the will of God that all the grace and life in the Head would flow into the Body. All the facts in Christ must become experiences in the Church."<sup>8</sup> The notion of the church being the corporate Christ or the body of Christ greatly influences Nee's church polity which stresses the unity of the church and the participation of every member in the local church.

#### Initiating Into the Corporate Christ

The fact that the church is the body of Christ is illustrated by its rites of initiation which Nee took pains to stress. Salvation is not a personal matter, it is an incorporation into a new community who separate themselves from the world.<sup>9</sup> Like the pre-Nicene church, to baptise is to sever with the pagan world. Every believer should receive baptism upon receiving Christ. Having eternal life is a personal matter. But baptism signifies the incorporation into a new community. Baptism is a public declaration to sever with the world. "Salvation speaks of my leaving one brotherhood, and entering into another. Eternal life merely tells me what I have entered into, but it leaves unmentioned from where I came."<sup>10</sup> In the baptismal rite the candidate also receives the laying on of hands (Heb. 6:2).

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Rethinking the Work, p. 30; CFP, 1982, p. 13.

9

The first eight Basic Lessons are devoted to stress the separation with the world and incorporation into the new community: 1. Baptism. 2. Concluding the Past. 3. Consecration. 4. Public Confession. 5. Separated from the World. 6. Joining the Church. 7. Laying On of Hands. 8. Elimination of Distinctions.

10

BLST, 1:3; CFP, 1972-1975, 1:5.

The laying on of hands signifies union (with the sacrifice, Lev. 1) and passing on of blessing (benediction) which are fulfilled in the Christian's relation with Christ. Christ as the Head had been anointed. The ointment of Christ will pass on to the body--the church--if the church exists as the body in relation to the head.<sup>11</sup> An individual cannot survive spiritually without the body. "Without the Church His Body, I have not the means to live the life I possess as it should be."<sup>12</sup> Even when Paul was called into the mission, God did not tell him what to do, save on the basis of the living church. "He would not lend His support to a merely individual calling and mission. For individualism is sin; it does injury to the Body of Christ."<sup>13</sup> When a Christian is baptised, he is incorporated into a new community, the corporate Christ--the church.

#### The Constitution of the Church

The somatic conception of the church is no mere metaphor, it is a spiritual reality. Though the church is a heavenly body she manifests herself as a mundane entity. When Saul was confronted by Christ on the road to Damascus he was rebuked for persecuting Christ's body, not His disciples.<sup>14</sup> If the church is a body and she manifests herself on earth then it follows that, as pertains to the constitution of the church two

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<sup>11</sup> BLST, 1:91-103; CFP, 1972-1975, 3:17-32.

<sup>12</sup> What Shall This Man Do?, p. 91.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>14</sup> BLST, 1:897f.; CFP, 1972-1975, 6:194f.

things are essential: 1. The exercise of authority because the body is governed and directed by the head. 2. The inclusion of all who possesses the life of Christ. They are de facto the body. Those who do not have the life of Christ should be excluded.

#### The Presence of Spiritual Authority

The ultimate reality of authority is God Himself.<sup>15</sup> Among the three institutions that authority operates, namely the state, family and church, the highest manifestation of authority is in the church as a body in that the head will not abuse its authority to harm the body and reciprocally the body freely and willingly renders full submission to its head.<sup>16</sup> Beside preaching the gospel to others and building up herself, the church is called to manifest the authority of God among rebellious men.<sup>17</sup>

How does the authority of God manifest itself in the church? Theoretically, God's authority is expressed in the corporate authority of the church. This corporate authority is not the congregational consensus, but pertains to the very fact that the church is a body. And every member of the body has to submit to the body. He writes:

As a member of the body, I cannot function independently. The body has its law, and oneness is its authority. I cannot act according to my own wish; if I do, I am rebellious and disobedient to authority; the body is representative of the authority of Christ. If I leave the body and engage in

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15 Spiritual Authority; CO (2d ed.; Taipie: Gospel Book Room, 1979), p. 2f.; CFP, 1972, p. 10.

16 Ibid., p. 71f.; CFP, 1972, p. 76f.

17 BLST, 2:923; CFP, 1972-1975, 6:222.

independent action, I am a rebel.

But how do we know about such body authority which represents the authority of Christ? How is the body authority expressed concretely in the local church? The spiritual authority of the body is represented in the persons of the elders. The elders are chosen among the brethren. They are not the ministers or workers.<sup>19</sup> The elders are the overseers of the church.

### The Boundary of the City

Inasmuch as the spiritual authority constitutes the heavenly component of the church the boundary of the city constitutes its mundane component. If the church is the body of Christ, she should not tolerate division. The body is one. The only legitimate way of making distinction among Christians is the city where they reside. The Bible does not divide the church according to the boundary of nations, provinces, or districts "but simply places of convenient size for people to live together in a certain measure of safety and sociability. In modern

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BLST, 2:926; CFP, 1972-1975, 6:225. Nee's argument for the corporate authority of the body is theological rather than constitutional. The corporate authority is intrinsic to the body as the body. The congregational polity is out of his consideration. The church which abides with the ballot of the majority is considered the Ladicenean church (see chapter VII note 54). This "body consciousness" or "mutuality" is strictly upheld in the assembly of the church. Preaching on the part of one man --the preacher--is prohibited and is not reckoned of as the meeting of the church. See below.

19

Workers are also called apostles. They are full time ministers who engage primarily in pioneer work of church planting or serving as speakers on invitation extended by the local church. The authority of the local church rests in the elders who are mature laymen. See below.

language we should call them cities."<sup>20</sup> From the Bible we are told that on one hand Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in every church (Acts 14:23); on the other hand Titus was advised to appoint elders in every city (Titus 1:5). Nee contends: "Every city is limited to one church, like a husband is limited to a wife. . . . because a church is a local entity. Wherever a locality is not worthy of a church, it cannot establish a church. No locality, no church."<sup>21</sup> Dividing the church according to the city is not only a New Testament model but it will also solve the problem of disunity resulting from dividing the church on other criteria that went rampant in China. In order to fully understand the motive behind Nee's insistence on setting the boundary for the local church according to the parameter of a city we need further to examine the question of unity of the church in the light of the historical context.

### The Unity of the Church

#### Denominations and Divisions

Since Nee's conception of the church is basically somatic, the unity of the church is of paramount significance. However,<sup>22</sup> the Chinese church was divided into myriad of denominations.

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Rethinking the Work, p. 123; CFP, 1982, p. 90.

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Chiao-hui ti lu (The Road of the Church) (Taipie: Gospel Book Room, 1979), p. 13, as cited in Lam, The Spiritual Theology of Watchman Nee, p. 221; trans. mine.

22

As Harry Emerson Fosdick pointed out in one of his sermons in New York, the multiplicity of denominations resulted in the absurd epithet of American-Dutch-Reformed-Chinese Christian (National Christian Conference, 1922 [NCC, 1922], p. 234.).

In western Christendom, denomination originated from the 'free church' idea which is actualized by the separation of church and state. Unlike the state churches which are confessional and territorial, denominational church is rather purposive. Thus it has a sectarian tendency owing to the preservation and propaga-<sup>23</sup> tion of those ideas for which the denomination stands. Being purposive by nature, the denominational church is zealous in world missions. "A sense of mission forms the center of a denomination's self-conscious life."<sup>24</sup> Respective denominations felt the call to transpose what they felt the most biblical church polity and traditions to the mission field. On the mission field of China we witness the unwillingness on the part of many denominations to join with their family members whom oceans and generations had long divided.<sup>25</sup>

This divisiveness was aggravated by the modernist and fundamentalist controversy in the early years of the twentieth century.<sup>26</sup> Social construction and individual conversion became a

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Sidney E. Mead, "Denominationalism: The Shape of Protestantism in America," Church History 23 (1954):295.

24

Ibid., p. 301f.

25

Notably, American Methodists were not able to unite with British Methodists (Searle Bates, "The Theology of American Missionaries in China, 1900-1950," in ed. John K. Fairbank, The Missionary Enterprise in China and America, p. 139).

26

In 1920, the Bible Union of China was formed as "a movement toward the conservation in mission work of the fundamentals of the Christian faith" ("The Bible Union of China," CCYB [1923], p. 96; see chapter VI note 6). The same mentality on the part of the conservatives is also seen in the independent societies and agencies (including faith missions) which sent out 4,170 more missionaries in 1956 than 1952 while the Division of Foreign Missions of National Council of Churches sent out only

perennial debate. The situation became even more heightened with the establishment of the Republic in 1911 when the social construction of China appeared the practical and urgent agenda rather than a theological preference. The theological differences among denominations were difficult to reconcile. In the China Continuation Committee<sup>27</sup> (forerunner of the National Council of Churches) discussion of the matter of faith and order was eliminated so as to preserve unity. When recommendations concerning the uniform translation of the terms of "Holy Catholic Church" in the Apostles' Creed and "Baptism"<sup>28</sup> in the Bible had been reached they were eventually dropped because "as to have voted in favor of the recommendations favoured by the great majority would almost inevitably have split the committee."<sup>29</sup> In

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631. A writer remarks of the situation saying: "Behind this visible cleavage lie theological and other differences that perpetuate the old conflict of 'modernist' versus 'fundamentalist' and carry it from the United States to the rest of the world" (E. Theodore Backmann, "The Vocation of the Missionary," Missionary Vocation, Proceedings, Fourth Biennial Meeting, Association of Professors of Missions and Related Field, 1958 [Chicago: Association of Professors of Missions], p. 44). See similar observations in Harold Lindsell, "An Appraisal of Agencies Not Co-operating with the International Missionary Council Grouping," IRM 47 (1958):202-209; David J. Du Plessis, "Golden Jubilees of Twentieth-Century Pentecostal Movements," IRM 47 (1958):193-201.

27

Formed after the Continuation Committee National Conference held in 1913.3 presided by John Mott. We may consider The China Continuation Committee as the national chapter of the world-wide Continuation Committee, a sequel of the Edinburg Conference of 1910.

28

In Chinese the word baptism can be translated splinkling baptism or immersion baptism. Today the Chinese baptists have their Bible printed in which the word is translated immersion baptism.

29

NCC, 1922, p. 77.

the first National Christian Conference in 1922, the Business Committee failed to reach a statement of faith for the conference after twelve hours of deliberation and finally left testing of faith to the denominations.<sup>30</sup>

The foregoing suffices to portray the rift and divisions among the denominations which Nee and many Chinese considered a curse rather than a blessing to the Christian church in China. Some Chinese Christian leaders saw denominations as "wholesale uncritical swallowing of western forms, interpretations and doctrines."<sup>31</sup> In addition to these denominations imported by the missionaries, the problem of unity was intensified by the coming into being of some indigenous independent churches (to Nee they were no better than denominations) that rose up in the twenties. Nee condemned denominations as sin. He contended that the word haireseis in Galatians 5:19, 20 should be translated sect.<sup>32</sup> And sect was denomination.

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30  
NCC, 1922, p. viii.

31  
Ibid., p. v. Cf. H. Richard Niebuhr, The Social Sources of Denominationalism (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1929).

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BLST, 2:852f.; CFP, 1972-1975, 6:141-44. The translation of haireseis (Gal. 5:20) into sect is possible in so far as it implies strife and divisiveness. However, the word sect so translated is not equivalent to our understanding of denominations. Denominations pertain to the traditions of the church. Denominations do not entail strife. In fact many denominations joined venture in China in their missionary endeavour. See F. F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 249; H. N. Ridderbos, The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia, The New International Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953; tenth printing, 1978), pp. 205f.; Cheung, The Ecclesiology of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee, pp. 129ff.

## Unity and the Body

Organizational unity

Though respective denominations did not yield as far as their theological stance was concerned they did accommodate to one another and engaged in a joint venture for the evangelization of China. The sooner they realised their formidable task in the vast mission field which then constituted one fourth of the world population, the quicker they "furthered a common, basic Protestant Christianity with substantial yearnings toward organizational

<sup>33</sup> unity." A good example was the Young Men's Christian Association which was nonconfessional and actively evangelistic,

<sup>34</sup> especially from 1900 to 1925. The trend of co-operation and union sped up after the anti-Christian movement in the early years of the twenties. In 1922, the National Christian Conference was convened and was heralded as "the birth place of the Chinese

<sup>35</sup> Churches." As a result of the conference the National Council of Churches was formed with a hundred charter members represent-

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Bates, "The Theology of American Missionaries, 1900-1950," p. 139. The co-operation among the various denominations and mission agencies was illustrated by the policy of comity in which agreement was reached that China was divided into various zones and each zone was taken care of by certain mission agencies. Comity avoided the duplication of work. See NCC, 1922, 127ff.; ed. Stauffer, The Christian Occupation of China, pp. 330-44.

34

Other Nondenominational or interdenominational organizations included the major magazine Chinese Recorder, Bible Societies, the Christian Literature Societies and the like. See Bates, "The Theology of American Missionaries in China, 1900-1950," p. 140ff.

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NCC, 1922, p. 39.

ing most of the Protestant denominations. In 1927 the Church of Christ in China (Chung Hua Chi Tu Chiao Hui) was formed which comprised sixteen denominational groups of Congregational and Presbyterian traditions.

Nevertheless Nee disparaged these efforts of organizational unity as carnal and human, "shaking hands over the fence," far short of what he conceived of the pristine blueprint of unity. A genuine unity of the church is not merely organizational union, but an organic unity of the body whereby the body can function as a body. Nee called the prevailing church union 'mid-way expedience.' He remarks:

I acknowledge that over the past few decades many have stressed oneness of the body. Nonetheless, the fruit of this has not been the oneness of the body but oneness of association. . . . The Bible affirms that the body is made of members. In other words, the member is the unit of the

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The National Council of Churches of 1922 was the result of a long tradition of co-operation: The Conferences of Protestant Missionaries of 1890, 1899 and 1907; the China Continuation Committee of 1913. See Latourette, Missions in China, pp. 796ff.

37

Ibid., p. 800; see also Eugene E. Barnett, "Cooperative Christian Activities in China in 1925," CCYB (1926), p. 96f.; A. R. Kepler, "Movements for Christian Unity," CCYB (1928), pp. 84-86. Kepler calls the consummation of the Church of Christ in China "the most noteworthy constructive event of 1927--a year of chaos, disorder and revolution" (p. 84). The organizational unity of the National Council of Churches (1922) and the formation of the Church of Christ in China (1927) roughly coincided with Nee's commencements of work in Foochow and Shanghai respectively and surely had great impact on Nee who considered them as the works of men rather than the unity of the body. See below.

38

"Setting the fence is denomination, holding hands is 'spiritual' fellowship. . . . Today some brethren while maintaining denomination, do not have a good conscience in having no fellowship. Therefore they extend their hands over the fence" (Chiao-hui ti lu [The Road of the Church; Taipie: Gospel Book Room, 1979], p. 106).

body. . . . the unit of Christian fellowship is the Christian.<sup>39</sup>

Unity co-extensive with the body

To see the unity of the church is simply the unity of the body which should not be greater or smaller than the size of the body. And since the body of Christ is a mundane as well as a heavenly reality, the unity of the church should express itself in concrete polity here and now. "The oneness of the body of Christ is not just a future reality in heaven but is also a present fact on earth. . . . To have this Christian oneness manifested on earth now is a matter of the very first order."<sup>40</sup>

Any form of unity that is not co-extensive with the body and cannot express itself in church polity (one church one city)<sup>41</sup> is not real unity. Unity that exceeds the body is well bespoken by the Roman Catholicism and the Protestant state churches which mix up the world and the church. All citizens are baptised Christians. The church exceeds the body and many nominal Christians are found in the church. On the other hand the denominational churches of the non-conformists who had separated themselves from the state church and formed new denominations on the bases of their spiritual leaders and certain doctrinal

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BLST, 2:854f.; CFP, 1972-1975, 6:144f.

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BLST, 2:840f.; CFP, 1972-1975, 6:130f.

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BLST, 2:841-51, 904-907; CFP, 1972-1975, 6:131-41, 201f. The problem of the Brethren of the nineteenth century lies in their failure in expressing the co-extension of the body and the church. The Exclusive Brethren had one church for many cities while the Open Brethren had many churches in one city (Orthodoxy of the Church, p. 69).

emphases actually excluded other Christians and thus split the body of Christ. He writes:

Today there are a great number of so-called Christian fellowships, but their fellowship may not be based on being the members one of another in the body. They may base their fellowship on a ritual (like immersion), a doctrine (like justification by faith), a form of government (like the episcopal), a person's name (such as Wesleyan), a certain system (like the Congregational), or a certain movement (like the Pentecostal).<sup>42</sup>

Nee contended that the unity of Christians is given by the Holy Spirit, not engendered by human efforts. Except the division according to the boundary of the city, all other criteria of dividing the body of Christ is bound to infringe on the seven factors of unity as stated in Ephesians 4:4-6.<sup>43</sup> Dividing the church according to the boundary of city is the minimal external criterion that we cannot avoid as long as we live on earth and are limited by space. It is the only natural, legitimate division and the seven factors of spiritual unity are kept intact.

#### The Ministry of the Body

Behind Nee's insistence on the co-extension of the body and the church lies Nee's conviction pertinent to his teaching about

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BLST, 2:905; CFP, 1972-1975, 6:201. In fact all state churches are denominational churches. When Nee takes issue with the denominational churches the state churches are included.

43

The seven factors are based on Eph. 4:4-6: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God. These are the biblical criteria of unity. Nee also delineates seven corresponding forbidden criteria of unity that are practiced in the history of the church (thus the church is apostate) namely spiritual leaders, instruments of salvation, non-sectarianism (I belong to Christ, not Paul, Cephas), doctrinal differences, racial differences, national differences and social distinctions. See Rethinking the Work, pp. 156-89; CFP, 1982, pp. 112-33.

the priesthood of all believers: every believer as part of the genuine member of the body of Christ, once incorporated into the community, has something to contribute. Whoever becomes part of the body stands under the head Christ and is able to convey what he learns from the head to supply the body. "To serve the body of Christ means to supply to it the life which a member receives from the head; that is to say, he supplies the life of the head to the church."<sup>44</sup> Every Christian is able to engage in the ministry of the church, namely to supply the life of Christ to the corporate Christ--the church (see chapter VIII note 8). This ministry is the vocation of the priesthood to which every believer has been called. He writes:

A church must have room for all the ministers (that is, all the members) to serve the body. The church includes all brothers and sisters, comely and uncomely. All have their respective spiritual usefulness and all are engaged in the Lord's service. The body should not have many useless members. As everyone in the body is a member ought to render his service before God. This is how the church is manifested. . . . if some serve and some do not, if some function as priests and some do not, or if the priesthood is left to one or a few persons, then it is only too clear that this is not the body.<sup>45</sup>

It is clear that the ultimate concern of Nee's strong somatic notion of the church is pastoral. He intended to return to the New Testament church in which every believer ministered. As we shall see the Local Church assembly was structured in such a manner that every believer could minister. Nee's aspiration was to mobilise and cultivate those who were less gifted (having one

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The Body of Christ: A Reality (CFP, 1978), p. 38f.

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BLST, 2:908f.; CFP, 1972-1975, 6:203f.

talent, Matthew 25) to get involved in the local church. Those who have two, five talents are not supposed to monopolise the spiritual matter. The problem of the church is not whether we can have some exceptional Christians of five talents. Rather it rests in the deplorable fact that every Christian has been given one talent but have it buried. If all those who have one talent step forward and serve the Lord the world will surely be turned upside down.<sup>46</sup> Their impact of evangelization will exceed a Charles Finney, a Charles Stanley, a George Whitefield or a John Wesley.<sup>47</sup> Wherever and whenever we see Christians ministering, we see the reality of the church. "When the whole congregation rise up and work and minister, right away you know that there is the body of Christ. Wherever there are three or five, seven and eight people serving God, you find the church."<sup>48</sup> In the subsequent section we will examine the organization of the Local Church assembly and see how it facilitates the universal priesthood.

### The Organization of the Church

One significant safeguard to assure the vitality of the universal priesthood in the Local Church assembly is the differentiation of

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BLST, 2:910-2; CFP, 1972-1975, 6:206-8.

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Church Affairs, p. 91; CFP, 1982, p. 69.

48

Ibid., 79; trans. mine, CFP omits this paragraph. Cf. "the body of Christ (the church) is so spiritual (to the degree) that it can manifest itself on earth" (ibid., p. 92; trans. mine). The context of the citation is the mobilisation of all Christians who have one talent. They are spiritual men because they serve. And because they serve the reality of the church (as the body) is manifested.

the Work and the church. The Work pertains to the building up of the body of Christ (church universal) in Ephesians 4:12. It is carried out by the apostles<sup>49</sup> sent out by the local church. Once the church has been established, the apostle ordains elders to oversee the operation of the local church and he moves on to other places to do his Work. This strict separation of the Work and the church prevents the dependence of the professional minister (worker, apostle) on the part of the congregation as well as the holding sway over the congregation on the part of the worker. Nee called this the model of Antioch.

#### The Antioch Model

##### The apostles

Nee contended that the beginning of the formal sending of workers began in the church of Antioch (Acts 13, 14) which served as a model for the subsequent churches. In Antioch, several gifted men who were filled with the Holy Spirit did not station

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Nee's conception of the Work is based on Eph. 4:12 which actually includes four kinds of worker namely the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers who concern themselves with 'that ministry' in building the universal church. Except the apostles who hold office for the universal church, the other three are merely people endowed with personal gifts (the gift of evangelist not clear, Rethinking the Work, p. 42; CFP, 1982, p. 22f.). These workers do not hold offices in the local church like the elders and deacons. People having the gifts of teaching, prophecy may minister to one another without office in the local church under the oversight of the elders. Since the apostle does not pertain to any personal gift, we cannot have the exercise of the 'apostleship' within the local church. The apostles are established for the Work outside the confine of the local church. Because the apostles as a rule possess the gifts of pastoring, teaching and prophecy as in the person of Paul (otherwise they cannot carry out the Work), they represent the workers of the Work.

in 'the parish' but were sent by the church to do the Work. They acted as apostles because they were directly called and commis-  
 50 sioned by the Spirit and indirectly confirmed and sent by the  
 51 church. They were people of paramount significance. Nee writes:

They were specially commissioned by God to found churches through the preaching of the Gospel, to bring revelation from God to His people, to give decisions in matters pertaining to doctrine and government, and to edify the saints and distribute the gifts. Both spiritually and geographically their sphere is vast.<sup>52</sup>

Though the authority of the apostles was great, they only concerned themselves with the Work, not the church. Once they established the church. They ordained elders among the brethren and moved on. The characteristic of the ministry of the apostles was mobile, not stationary. "Their objective was not one city,  
 53 but 'all the region,'" After the apostles left the believers of the local church did not feel depressed and despaired. Instead, "the disciples filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 13:52). The contemporary popular notion of having a pastor stationed in the parish was not their concern. Nee remarks:

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 50 "Being an apostle, therefore, is not something which is subject to receiving an apostolic gift but is that which is subject to receiving an apostolic commission" (Rethinking the Work, p. 45; CFP, 1982, p. 24f.).

51 Note that the confirmation and sending are not given by the whole congregation but by "a representative company in the church, to men of spiritual experience who were utterly devoted to His service" (Rethinking the Work, p. 88; CFP, 1982, p. 54).

52 Rethinking the Work, p. 44; CFP, 1982, p. 24.

53 Rethinking the Work, p. 92; CFP, 1982, p. 64.

In scripture there is not the slightest hint that apostles should settle down to pastor those they have led to the Lord. There are pastors in Scripture, but they are simple brethren raised up of God from amongst the local saints to care for their fellow-believers. One of the reasons why so many present-day converts are not filled with the Spirit is because the apostles settle down to shepherd them and take upon themselves the responsibility that belongs to the Holy Ghost.<sup>54</sup>

#### The elders

Inasmuch as the apostle is responsible for the conduct of the Work the elders are charged with the responsibility of shepherding the church. The elders are merely local brethren of good reputation who possess spiritual weight, knowledge and understanding, chosen from among their peer to oversee the church. Since they come from the midst of the people over whom they shepherd, they can identify with the congregation and be practical in the conduct of the church. Since they rule in plurality, they learn to submit to one another even in their leadership whereby "they will discover the meaning of bearing the Cross, and they will have opportunity to give practical expression to the truth of the Body of Christ."<sup>55</sup> Negatively the rule by the elders in the local church will avoid the pitfall of autocratic rule on the part of a strong self-serving worker or minister. Positively more workers can be released to plant other churches. Once the church has been established the phase of the Work passes to the phase of the church which is no longer the business of the workers. If the administration of the local

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Rethinking the Work, p. 95; CFP, 1982, p. 65f.

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Rethinking the Work, p. 114; CFP, 1982, p. 83.

church is restricted to the local elders, we can also avoid the inception of the denomination which is the result of the grouping of Christians according to some charismatic leaders or doctrines advocated by these leaders.<sup>56</sup>

The job of the elders is supervising. Once a week they meet for several hours reviewing the business of the church and engage in concerted prayer for the congregation as the high priest prayed for the twelve tribes of Israel.<sup>57</sup> Sometimes they may get so involved in the work of the church that they have to put down their own occupations and be supported by the church.<sup>58</sup> As regard to the day to day business of the church, it belongs to the office of the deacons who work under the direction of the elders.<sup>59</sup>

The Work and the church are kept distinct and separate. There are no local apostles. "If in any place an apostle takes responsibility for the affairs of the local church, he either changes the nature of his office or the nature of the church."<sup>60</sup> The apostle is not even qualified to be an elder. "The post can only be occupied by local men."<sup>61</sup> When Paul stayed in Rome, he

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Rethinking the Work, p. 144f.; CFP, 1982, p. 102f.

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Church Affairs, pp. 12-32; CFP, 1982, pp. 24-36.

58

Ibid., p. 227; CFP, 1982, p. 161. However such case is exceptional. Only apostles are required to forsake their own jobs because they are itinerant.

59

For the office of the deacons, see chapter VI of Church Affairs, pp. 117-48; CFP, 1982, pp. 83-101.

60

Rethinking the Work, p. 301; CFP, 1982, p. 212.

61

Ibid.

rented a house for the Work. Paul did not get involved into the  
 62  
 local church because he was an apostle.

### The Jerusalem Model

#### The Work and the center

In 1948 the organisation of the Local Church assembly underwent significant revision. In the record of a conference with his colleagues dated August 19, 1948, Nee admitted that in the past he did not realise the necessity of a center for the Work. "The church is local but the Work covered a region made up  
 63  
 of many localities." The church at Jerusalem was no different from other local churches as far as it existed as a local church. However, "God's command was in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth, Jerusalem was the center of  
 64  
 the Work." Peter, John and James went out from Jerusalem to do their Work as Apostles. When they returned to Jerusalem they  
 65  
 served as elders. So Paul frequently went forth from Antioch and returned there because the city was the center of another region. The Apostles were never absent from the centers for a long period of time.

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 62

Rethinking the Work, p. 330f; CPF omits this portion.

63

Rethinking the Work, p. 334; trans. mine. This record of conference is appended to the CO of Rethinking the Work, pp. 333-53; not found in CPF.

64

Rethinking the Work, p. 336f.; trans. mine.

65

"The local church is governed by the elders, the center is governed by the elders as well as the workers who serve as elders" (Rethinking the Work, p. 338; trans. mine).

The significance of the introduction of the Jerusalem Model lies in the juxtaposition of the apostleship and eldership in the local church which happens to be the center of the Work. That being the case, the charismatic worker of the center-church may exercise a patriarchal type of leadership in the church which Nee had tried to avoid in his earlier Antioch principle. Indeed it happened in the very person of Nee at the center-church of Foochow where the congregation adored him as a semi-deity. Stephen Chan, the nephew of Nee writes:

When I returned to Foochow in 1948 the most disheartening was that among those who really worshipped God, I found some actually worshipped their idol. We frequently heard about "brother Nee said" instead of "the Bible said". Seemingly what brother Nee said is more authoritative than what the Bible said. If I were to write down all the myths concerning brother Nee I am sure that the small book will become a big work.<sup>66</sup>

### Evangelistic migration

The adoption of the Jerusalem principle was to some extent ushered by the idea of evangelistic migration. Inspired by the

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Chan, My Uncle, p. 50; trans. mine.

67

Other external factors beside evangelistic migration include: 1. The uncomfortable personal experience on the part of Nee who was deprived of the right to preach by the elders at Shanghai while he engaged in business at CBC (see chapter VI note 101). 2. The rapid growth of the church which amounted to about 700 congregations and 70,000 in 1949 required central administration to streamline the resources (see chapter VI note 91). 3. The ascension of Nee's authority after he handed over the whole CBC. Cf. Lam, The Spiritual Theology of Watchman Nee, p. 243f. Beyond the foregoing, we suggest that intrinsically Nee's theology of the ministry and his somatic notion of the church are also responsible for the intensification of the role of the workers. As has been said one of the two constituents for the church is spiritual authority (representing the head of the body). And spiritual authority is demonstrated by the spiritual life of the preacher rather than by the Word he

fact that new churches were planted as the early believers were dispersed from Jerusalem by persecution, Nee and his colleagues thought that the church should send out trained believers to migrate to certain target regions for the sake of the gospel. And indeed during the Sino-Japanese War some Local Church assemblies did spring up owing to the spontaneous effort on the part of some members who migrated to the inland as the coastal lands fell to the Japanese. Before the congregation of Wen Teh Li at Shanghai Nee shared his inspiring vision of the migratory invasion of inland China. He said:

When God scattered the people abroad through persecution, there were some thousands of believers in Jerusalem, and there was a constant movement outward. Yet when Paul returned to Jerusalem, there were the same large numbers of believers. We must not remain stationary, but must move out and make room for others, for as many will be added as move out. Today China has about 450 million inhabitants and only one million Christians. Give all Christians the same training, then send them forth, and we shall see the Church proclaiming the gospel everywhere. They need not wait for persecution. Whether by persecution or not, go forth they must. For many of us, half our time has gone. The remaining half must be spent in taking a straight course. If we are not faithful, the Lord will choose others to go this way; but that would take at least another twenty years. We must save those twenty years for God.<sup>68</sup>

Henceforth both the apostles and 'laymen' were sent out for the Work. No sooner had the new converts than gone through the Basic Lessons in one year they were ready to be sent out.

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preaches (see chapter VIII). It is only a short step to the autocratic rule of a charismatic leader.

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As cited in Kinnear, Against the Tide, p. 234f.

69

Church Affairs, p. 93; CFP, 1982 omits.

The Meetings

## Church Meetings and Mutuality

If we may say that the ideal of one city one church is to maintain the integrity of the unity of the church as a body, then the various meetings of the Local Church are designed to facilitate the functioning of this body. Nee strictly differentiated the meetings of the church and the meetings of the apostles. The acid test for the meeting of the church is whether the meeting is participated by all members in the sense that every believer ministers to the body. Nee writes:

In the early Church there were meetings which were definitely connected with the churches, and others that were just as definitely connected with the Work. In the latter only one man spoke, and all the others constituted his audience. One stood before the others, and by his preaching directed the thoughts and hearts of those who sat quietly listening. This type of meeting can be recognized at once as a meeting connected with the apostolic Work, because it bears the character of the Work, i.e. activity on the one side and passivity on the other. There is no stamp of "mutuality" about it. In the church meetings, "each one hath a psalm, hath a teaching, hath a revelation, hath a tongue, hath an interpretation" (1 Cor. 14:26). Here it is not a case of one leading and all the others following, but of each one contributing his share of spiritual helpfulness. True only a few of those present take part, but all may; only a few are actual contributors to the meeting, but all are potential contributors.<sup>71</sup>

All the meetings on the "round table" principle are church meetings, and all meetings on the "pulpit-and-pew" principle are

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"According to 1 Corinthians 14, this is a purpose found in all the gatherings--that others, not ourselves, may be edified" (BLST, 1:187; CFP, 3:40).

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Rethinking the Work, p. 306f.; CFP, 1982, p. 219f. Apostolic meetings may be directed to non-believers (the evangelistic proclamation of the gospel) or believers (such as the Overcomer Conference).

meetings belonging to the Work.

Based on his strong somatic conception of the church in which "mutuality" must be expressed, Nee attacked the traditional Sunday service. He contended that the three indispensable factors characteristic of all Protestant churches namely a pastor, a Sunday service of preaching by the pastor, and the building where the service was held could be abandoned without hurting the church as a church.

As regard to the necessity of a pastor who preaches in the meeting it does harm rather than good to the body. When people come to the church and they wait for the sermon and to be ministered to they abdicate their priesthood in favour of the worker or pastor. In fact every Christian should come to edify one another through the exercise of the spiritual gift endowed on him (1 Corinthians 14). The failure of the contemporary church as Nee perceived, was to substitute the personal gift of a worker or minister for the gifts of the Spirit (in all Christians). We should trust the power of the Holy Spirit that He will raise up people of various gifts other than that of the worker, so as to build up the body of Christ.

As regard to the prerequisite of a church building in order to hold a meeting Nee thought that it did no justice to the

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Rethinking the Work, p. 318; CFP, 1982, p. 229.

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Rethinking the Work, pp. 294-6; CFP, 1982, p. 209-10.

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"Too many among us have had to be served instead of their serving. To be a priest is not to be served but to serve. And listeners, as we know, are to be served" (Church Affairs, p. 74; CFP, 1982, p. 63).

fact that the church only pertained to the people rather than a architectural structure. The church has only an address on earth not a residence.<sup>75</sup> Since the church meetings by nature are "round table" type, the most ideal meeting place is the home of the believers. Meeting in the homes of the believers can spare the huge expense for the impressive church buildings. Moreover house meeting may appear more inviting to their non-Christian neighbours who hesitate to go to church. See remarks:

The home meeting should be the basic assembly of the church. . . . Once people are saved, immediately start meeting at home. If people are few meet in one home, if many several homes. Once a month or two weeks, the whole church may rent a big place for assembly.<sup>76</sup>

#### Weekly Meetings and the Participation of the Whole Church<sup>77</sup>

It is instructive to see briefly how the foregoing principle of meeting--mutuality--is being implemented in various church meetings in which every member comes as a participant, not spectator or listener. There were five major meetings in the

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Rethinking the Work, 1982, p. 320. Emulating the Philadelphian church in Rev. 3:8 which has not denied the name of the Lord, Nee first called his church in certain city "The Christians assembly in the name of the Lord in xx city" in order to accentuate the fact that the church is the Christians. Later it changed to "xx (name of the place) Assembly." People addressed them Little Flock because they had a hymnal by that name (see chapter VI note 53). However they disliked that name. Cf. Nee published The Christian Magazine and ran a "Gospel Book Room". See Stephen Chan, My Uncle, p. 18; Nee, Recounting the Past, p. 94.

76

Rethinking the Work, p. 330; trans. mine.

77

Two Basic Lessons are devoted to the instruction of the meaning and various meetings in the church: "Assembling Together" and "Various Meetings (BLST, 1:181-91, 193-214; CFP, 1972-1975, 3:33-42, 43-67). See also Church Affairs, pp. 101-116; CFP, 1982, pp. 73-81.

Local Church assemblies, namely, the gospel meeting, the breaking of bread meeting, the prayer meeting, the exercise gifts meeting and the new convert training meeting.

The gospel meeting

Nee thought the best way to offset the sermon-listening mindset on Sunday was to convert the service into a evangelistic meeting. He contended that in the early church the preaching of the gospel rather than listening to the sermons occupied the foremost place. And the gift of evangelism was the first gift to be exercised. The reverse situation indicates the failure of the church.<sup>78</sup> The commission of the church was not for self-<sup>79</sup>edification but for world evangelization. "There should be at least one gospel meeting every week. Set aside the best time for this meeting, either the Lord's day morning or the Lord's day<sup>80</sup> afternoon."

All members of the church are requested to bring their friends and relatives to the gospel meeting. Christians sit by the visitors' sides to help them find the verses, hymns and explain to them new terms. During the meeting Christians pray for

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BLST, 1:193; CFP, 1972-1975, 3:44.

79

"I suppose that in China nobody believe in feeding as I do. However, the commission of the church on earth is not for feeding but for preaching the gospel" (Church Affairs, p. 77; trans. mine). In other place Nee seems to hold both the feeding (for Christians) and preaching the gospel in balance. "The Lord has put the church on earth not only for the purpose of building up herself but also for the sake of gathering in souls to be material for the church" (BLST, 1:194; trans. mine).

80

BLST, 1:194f.; CFP, 3:45.

the non-believers and the speaker and watch out for the response of the message on the part of the visitors. They follow up the visitors till they are converted.

In short, Nee intended to substitute the gospel meeting for the worship service and got every member of the church involved so as to make every Christian minister rather than be ministered as listeners sitting in the pew. He writes: "On Sunday morning the entire body of priests will serve men in preaching in the gospel, and on Sunday evening the entire priesthood will again be serving--except that at this time they shall be serving God in the breaking of the bread."<sup>81</sup>

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#### The breaking of bread on Sunday

Emulating the early church, the Local Church assembly has the breaking of bread every Sunday. The Lord's Day is the anti-type of the Old Testament Sabbath. The passive rest of the Old Dispensation becomes active service in the Spirit in the New Dispensation. "The gospel has come. Man has entered into rest through the gospel. He is now able to serve God."<sup>83</sup> The bread has dual meaning, namely the fellowship with the Lord (1 Corinthians 10) and the fellowship of the believers (1 Corinthians 11). "We break bread to testify that our Lord has already died

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Church Affairs, p. 80; CFP, 1982, p. 65.

82

A separate Basic Lesson is devoted to the treatment of the Lord's day (BLST, 1:215-37; CFP, 1972-1975, 3:69-86).

83

BLST, 1:220; CFP, 1972-1975, 3:74. Therefore to be served by the sermon as listener is not right. Every body should preach the gospel and serve the Lord on Sunday.

for us; we break bread to attest to the oneness of the church." <sup>84</sup> The bread symbolises the spiritual unity of the body of Christ that whoever shares it has actual fellowship with one another though they are scattered in the world. <sup>85</sup> The somatic notion of the Lord's Supper comes to the fore by the literal act of breaking a bread and sharing it among the brotherhood.

### The prayer meeting

The concerted prayer on the part of the whole church is the ministry of the church and her work. Based on Matthew 18:18-20, Nee delineated three principles of the prayer ministry of the church. <sup>86</sup> First, God's will in heaven operates only in the instrumentality of man on earth. Inasmuch as God worked through the personal Christ in the past God today works through His church, the corporate Christ. The prayer ministry of the church is "God telling the church what He wishes to do so that the church on earth can then pray it out. Such prayer is not asking God to do what we want Him to do, but asking Him to do what He

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The basic concept of the Lord's Supper is symbolism, see note 85.

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"It is impossible for me to give the right hand of fellowship to every one of God's children on earth. Yet on each Lord's day, all the children of God touch the one bread. Wherver they may be they touch the same bread as I. In this way I touch all the children of God" (BIST, 1:227; CFP, 3;80). That is why Nee called the Lord's Supper the breaking of bread. Cf. The Didache 9.4: "Just as this loaf previously was scattered on the mountains and when it was gathered together it became a unity, so may your Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom" (Sparks, p. 314).

86

The Prayer Ministry of the Church (CFP, 1973), pp. 7-35.

87  
wants to do." Second, concerted prayer is necessary since two or more Christians signify the reality of the body and their harmony in the Spirit. Thirdly, corporate prayer on the part of the church is not initiated by individual Christians who agree to come together to pray at the same time, at the same place. They are called by God to pray. Corporate prayer is an important ministry of the body of Christ.

### Exercise of gifts meeting

Usually the meeting is held on Saturday evening. The meeting is conducted in the pattern of 1 Corinthians 14. Anybody who has a hymn, revelation, teaching or prophesy (homily) may come foreward to edify one another. Speaking in tongue is allowed in so far as an interpreter is provided. The responsible brothers (elders) who are in charge of the meeting minister the Word. They come half an hour earlier and pray for the meeting. New converts are given opportunities to share so as to identify their gifts. Whenever an apostle happens to pass by the city, he should be invited to minister the ministry of the Word in the meeting as Paul was invited to stay for seven days by the

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Ibid., p. 23.

88

Church Affairs, p. 87f.; CFP, 1982, p. 67f. Nee realises that this unstructured type of meeting is susceptible to either passivity or disorder. He suggests that at least several responsible brothers should prepare to break the ice and take more active role in the ministry of the Word.

89

If he really has the gift the responsible brother should encourage him to do more next time; if his gift is limited, withhold him (BLST, 1:212; CFP, 1972-1975, p. 65).

church at Troas.

The new convert training meeting

One of the reasons contributing to the vitality of the Local Church assembly is the weekly post-baptismal catechemanate that runs for one whole year. In the record of a conference with his co-workers dated in July 7, 1950 Nee spells out the basic purpose of the Basic Lessons: "To the new converts, the first step is to destroy (his old frame of reference). . . . the Basic Lessons serves to let him see the mistake of his past values, inaccuracy of bygone estimate; give him the new outlook, new estimate. All those that are considered precious before should

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be reckoned of now as waste." It is an extensive training course of Christian life rather than the instruction of Christian doctrine covering devotional life, family life, social life and

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church life. The Lessons comprise fifty two topics and all the

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One church or several churches may join to have 'apostolic meeting' for couple of days to a month (Church Affairs, p. 88f.; CFP, p. 68). Note that the apostle can only speak as he is invited by the elders of the local church.

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Kuan-yu ch'u-hsin tsao-chiu tsu-hui (About the New Convert Training Meeting) (Taipie: Gospel Book Room, 1980), pp. 2, 4.

92

The content and progression of the topics are as follows (grouping mine): (1) Baptism, Concluding the Past, Consecration, Public Confession, Separate from the the World, Joining the Church, Laying on of Hands, Elimination of Distinction. (2) Studying the Bible, Prayer, Early Rising. (3) Assembly Together, Various Meetings, the Lord's Day, Hymn Singing, Praise, Breaking of Bread, If Any Man Sin, (4) Apology and Restitution, Restore Your Brother, the Believer's Reaction, Deliverance, Our Life, the Will of God, Managing Your Finance, Occupation, Marriage, Mating, Husband and Wife, Parenthood, Friendship, Recreation, Speech, Clothing and Eating, Asceticism, the Control of the Holy Spirit, (5) Sickness, the Governmental Forgiveness, the Discipline of

churches give the same topic simultaneously. Each session lasts an hour and half and is conducted in small groups by trained instructors. To review the previous Lesson, students are asked whether they have practised what had been instructed, not the content. The Lessons briefly summaries the basic teachings of Nee in a very practical manner.

### Chapter Summary and Conclusion for Part Two

#### Chapter Summary

To Nee the church fulfills the eternal plan of God serving as the corporate Christ through which Christ is magnified and exalted. It is constituted by all who share the life of Christ. In order to build up the body of Christ, some Christians are commissioned to increase the body without (evangelization and church planting) and edifying the body within. They are the apostles. However their work is itinerant and for the universal church. The overseeing of the local church is the responsibility of the lay leaders, the elders who rule in plurality. Since the church is the body of Christ it must uphold the unity by dividing the church according to locality (one city one church). Since it is an organic body Christians are called to mutually build up one another through the exercise of the spiritual gifts given to them. In order to demonstrate to the world that the church is the genuine body of Christ the church must function as a body in the sense that every member should discharge his priesthood to serve

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 God, Resist the Devil, (6) Head Covering, the Way of the Church, Oneness, Love Brethren, Priesthood, the Body of Christ, the Authority of the Church.

God. The church is whenever and wherever Christians are serving God or exercising their priesthood corporately.

### Conclusion

In chapter VII we learned that the basic motif of the priesthood of all believers is serving God. The universal priesthood of believers is related to the Christian life rather than the Christian status in Christ. Nee associates the meaning of priesthood with sanctification rather than justification. When this association is expressed in terms of the history of the church which he considers essentially one of apostasy (Revelation 2, 3), the universal priesthood is loaded with historiographical accent. The characteristic of the apostate church is the separation of the peoplehood (justification only) and the priesthood (sanctification also). As a result we witness the ascension of the clerical class (the Nicolaitans) and the concomitant secularisation and institutionalization of the church. However God maintains His remnants for His church who separate themselves from the world and dedicate themselves to the service of God. They are the overcomers among the lapsed. They are priests in this world inasmuch they will be kings in the millenium. Nevertheless they are simply the normal Christians (to be people as well as the priests of God).

Because Nee's patent antithetical attitude of the ministerial office, in chapter VIII we examined Nee's theology of ministry in the light of his anthropology to find out the reasons why Nee is so negative about external religion of which the

ministerial office is one. We discover that Nee's trichotomous view of man makes him adduce the view that God only works communicatio idiomatum. The essence of ministry is to supply the spiritual reality or revelation from God. This revelation (light, life) can only be conveyed to others through the minister's life whose outer man is broken (submission of the corporeal and soulical life to the spirit) making a passage to release the inner man which is then permeated by the Spirit. The Bible as the literal words is just the instrument to express our revelation from God which is really the Word of God. Since the Bible has the dual nature of divine and human, merely theological and biblical knowledge have no avail to change man's heart. We must let the Spirit of the Word come out to minister to men. And the Spirit only works through men's spirit. Therefore external religion and the ministerial office are superfluous as far as the efficacy of ministry is concerned. Any layman who is serious with his priesthood (he really serves the Lord) can minister the Word because God works indiscriminately through spiritual man albeit a cleric or a layman.

In chapter IX just summarised, we learned that Nee's priests are the remnants in the apostate church. They are called to bear witness to the pristine church which has been contaminated by secularisation. The pristine church of the New Testament is the body of Christ and which should function as the body of Christ in the sense that everybody minister (to be priest and to serve; see above).

From the foregoing we may infer that the priesthood of all

believers undergirds Nee's seemingly two distinct theological foci namely spiritual theology and ecclesiology. The purpose of a spiritual man is to supply Christ the head to the body. Spirituality is not something mystical. Spiritual reality is Christ. Christ is the sum of all spiritual things. Being part of the body of Christ the spiritual man cannot operate apart from the body. He has to submit to the authority of the body and the law of mutuality. Who are the spiritual men? They are the priests, overcomers and remnants of God. pristine Christians. All the above inference may substantiate our thesis: Nee's spiritual theology pertains to the individual, personal dimension of the priesthood of believers while his Local Church assembly is the corporate ecclesiastical expression of that priesthood. In our concluding chapter we further evaluate Nee's teaching of the priesthood of believers in the light of his historical context (chapters V and VI) and the evangelical heritage (Part One).

## CHAPTER X

### EVALUATION

From Part Two we learned that Watchman Nee's teaching of the priesthood of all believers involves every major aspect of his theological scheme such as his anthropology, sanctification, and ecclesiology as well as his view of history. His rigorous implementation of the teaching of universal priesthood in his Local Church assembly resulted in a phenomenal growth from zero to 700 congregations of 70,000 members within twenty-six years (1923-1949) without any mission support. While some missionaries deplored their work in China as 'debacle'<sup>1</sup> upon the seizure of power on the part of the communists and the subsequent confiscation of church property and institutions, evacuation of missionaries and imprisonment of professional clergymen, Nee's church diffused into the homes of the believers and remained vital under the pastoral care of well trained laymen. Nee was a precursor for the advocacy and aspiration for a unified, non-denominational and indigenous church which has materialised in the state Three-Self church and inspired some Christian leaders in the third world. Furthermore the impact of the Local Church assembly

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See the article written by A China Missionary, "First Thoughts on the Debacle of Christian Missions in China," IMR 40 (1951):411-20.

with its accent of the priesthood of all believers are making an impact worldwide. His colleagues and followers is planting churches in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Philippines, America and other countries.

Nee is the first Chinese by far who has been able to command a wide readership in the west. Several of his works have been translated into twenty or thirty languages and became million sellers. He is reckoned of as the indisputable leading theologian among the conservatives in the Chinese church. A Chinese writer remarks of Nee's status:

Mr. Watchman Nee' theological thought is very rich, worthy of a system in its own right. Nee stands in the leading rank among the conservatives in the chinese church. . . . His works have persuasion and imagination, making deep impress on the mind of the readers. He bequeathes to the chinese church a set of welcome theological vocabulary.<sup>2</sup> Regardless whether one supports the Local Church assembly, or opposes such a movement, one cannot deny his significant influences on the Chinese indigenous theology.<sup>3</sup>

The best word to epitomise Nee's teaching of the priesthood of all believers is 'antithetical.' To Nee a priest of God is one who separates himself from the world and dedicates himself to the service of God. He is not only an antithesis to the world but

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"The readers who read the book naturally would feel the sentence structure is different from the ordinary. Moreover some special terms may appear unnatural. . . . The language of our country is not suitable for spiritual writing. Therefore reluctantly I use some terms that are neither foreign nor Chinese so as to express the meaning of the truth. Many of the terminology have been coined by me" (The Spiritual Man, p. 38f.; trans. mine. CFP omits this passage). For instance, the Chinese church calls the follow ministers t'ung kung (one who collaborate in the Work).

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Lam, The Spiritual Theology of Watchman Nee, p. 278; trans. mine.

also an antithesis to the apostate members of the church. He is the 'normal' Christian, spiritual man, overcomer over against the abnormal, carnal Christian who become the people but not the priests of God. The priests are the ecclesia ecclesiolae. The royal priesthood is also antithetical to the ministerial office or particular priesthood. The clerical class is considered a monopoly of the priestly responsibility of serving God. There are no ordained ministers in the Local Church assembly. All are ministers since all are priests and serve God.

#### The Influence of the Brethren

What is the source of Nee's strong antithetical view? Evidence indicates that his antithetical accentuation of the priesthood of all believers betrays the shadow of John Nelson Darby, the Brethren theologian and spokesman. Two of Nee's tenets about the church namely the apostasy of the and the locality had long been fostered by Darby. Darby writes concerning the 'ruins of the church':

I fully recognize that there was an organization in apostolic and scriptural times, but affirm that what now exists is not the scriptural organizational at all, but mere human invention, each sect arranging itself according to its own convenience, so that as an external body, the Church is ruined; and though much may be enjoyed of what belongs to the Church, I believe from Scripture that the ruin is without remedy, that the professing church will be cut off.<sup>4</sup>

As regard to the locality of the church, Darby maintained that the whole assembly of the church was represented by the

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What the Christian Has Amid the Ruins of the Church, Col. Writ., Eccl. 3:417, as cited in Bass, Background to Dispensation-alism, p. 103.

Christians who assemble in a certain city. He writes about the Christians at the city of Corinth at the time of Paul:

. . . although that assembly at Corinth was only a part of the body of Christ, the apostle speaks of the whole body; for the assembly there was, according to the principle of its gatherings, the body of Christ as assembled at Corinth. . . . the Christians of one town were considered as representing the whole assembly, as far as regarded that locality.<sup>5</sup>

Like the Brethren, Nee repudiated all ecclesiastical pretension and proposed to submerge all sectarian distinctions in a simple gathering of believers to Christ. They both professed the biblical simplicity and entertained the aversion to theological systems. Their followers were marked with dedication, zeal and sanctity of life. Both were imbued of the remnant mentality. Their schismatic tendency posed equal concern to their contemporaries.

Having said all these similarities, we should point out that Darby and Nee lived in a totally different context. One was a disillusioned Anglican cleric who renounced his ordination vow

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Darby, Synopsis of the Books of the Bible (new ed. rev.; London, n.d), 4:295f. Once again we should note that Nee goes further than Darby by limiting one city one church and the autonomy of each local church and severed with the Exclusive Brethren which Darby developed in the internal squabble among the Brethren. For the Brethren movement see F. R. Coad, A History of the Brethren Movement (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1968); P. L. Embley, "The Early Development of the Plymouth Brethren," in Patterns of Sectarianism: Organization and Ideology in Social and Religious Movements, ed. Bryan R. Wilson (London: Heineman Educational Books, 1967), pp. 213-243; Harold H. Rowdon, The Origins of the Brethren, 1825-1850 (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1967); W. B. Neatby, A History of the Plymouth Brethren (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910).

and severed with the ecclesiastical establishment. The other lived in a hostile anti-Christian society when missionaries were considered vanguards of the imperialists. The two cities where Nee established his churches--Foochow and Shanghai--were both treaty ports open to the foreigners who resided in China under the protection of extraterritoriality. And Nee's teaching of the priesthood of all believers was conditioned to a certain degree by his historical context. In the following evaluation we shall appraise Nee's teaching of the priesthood of all believers in the light of his (1) historical context; (2) exegetical basis and (3) theological presupposition.

Historical Context: the Minority Status  
of the Priestly Community

Pre-Nicene Antecedents

As has been pointed out, the vitality of the universal priesthood only takes place when the church realises that she is living in a hostile context (chapter I) in which the church begins to reassert her identity as the chosen people of God, predicated of royal priesthood among the nations. The continuous sporadic persecution on the part of the state in the first hundreds of years and the extreme tumultuous years in China intensified the sense of imminence of the parousia. Both the early Christians and Nee strongly felt that they were living in the end time and the church was heading for her eternal destiny. The

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For a appreciative biography on the life and ministry of Darby, see W. G. Turner, John Nelson Darby (London: C. A. Hammond, 1944).

world was doomed to judgment by the wrath of God. On earth the church should separate from the world to maintain her holiness in preparation for the advent of Christ. As a result both embraced an antithetical view of the priesthood of believers over against the world.

Akin to the Montanists and their later kinsmen the Donatists, Nee and his church abhorred and deplored the institutionalization of the church, which as they conceived, had eroded her ante-mundane holiness and identity. They separated themselves into a community, strove for sanctity and anxiously looked forward to the imminent return of Christ and the inauguration of the millenium. Both of them attacked the secularisation of the Catholic or mainline church as a compromise with the world to which the Christians did not belong. They stressed the organic nature of the church. The Christians themselves were the church. As has been said, in primitive Christianity the church was called the brotherhood, bond of hospitality, body of Christ, house of God, assembly of the elect (see chapter III notes 6-10). In fact the earliest evidence of designating a building ecclesia was as late as 232 A.D. (see chapter III note 9).

Since the church referred to all Christians, the body of Christ, a royal priesthood, not an institution and the representatives of the institution--the clergy--we witness a rigorous participation of all kinds of ministries on the part of the rank and file in the early church as well as Nee's Local Church assembly. In the early church laymen preached the gospel

wherever they went. They served as instructors to the catechumens. Evidence shows that the laymen did perform the ministries of celebrating the Eucharist, baptism, preaching and discipline which were prohibited later by ecclesiastical law (see chapter III notes 38-62). All these happened in the Nee's Local Church assembly which aspired to the repristination of the church.

As regard to the notion of the Work and its concomitant itinerant workers suggested by Nee, we also had a pre-Nicene antecedent. Some charismatic ambulatory apostles, prophets and teachers were found going from city to city to plant the church and to minister to the local congregations. These people considered themselves the ministers of the universal church rather than a particular local parish. They authenticated themselves by the possession of charisma rather than by ecclesiastical status (see chapter III note 24). Again, the bishops or elders were chosen among the brethren rather than being transferred from outside. A congregation of twelve was entitled to choose their own bishop (chapter III note 28). Also bishops did not live on salary. Like the brethren over whom they sheperded they had their own trades. Edwin Hatch remarks:

The funds of the primitive communicants consisted entirely of voluntary offerings. Of these offerings those office-bearers whose circumstances required of it were entitled to a share. They received such a share only on account of their poverty. They were, so far, in the position of the widows, and orphans and helpless poor.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed we witness a rejuvenation of the primitive Christianity in

Nee's Local Church assembly as regard to the practice of the  
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 universal priesthood.

#### Chinese View of the Ministry

However, we discover one outstanding difference between the pre-Nicene church and Nee--the rejection of the particular priesthood or the ministerial office in the church. As has been said even Tertullian in his Montanist period did not actually disparage the ministerial priesthood. He endorsed it as an ecclesiastical order and accused the heretics of breaking it at whims (see chapter III notes 13-15). The early church ever upheld the dual priesthoods. The universal priesthood was mentioned vis-a-vis the ministerial priesthood. Nee's understanding of the universal priesthood as an office rather than a spiritual status as well as his theology of the ministry are mainly responsible for this antithetical stance which we shall evaluate in our later section. At this juncture we shall assess his antithetical view in the light of the Chinese context. There are three indigenous elements which are congenial to Nee's positing an antithetical view of the universal priesthood over against the salaried ministerial office. They are (1) culturally the respect for leaders of experience, wisdom and maturity as represented by the elders; (2) socially the low image of the stipendiary ministry

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Similar rejuvenation takes place in the mission field of Africa where the independent movement also had produced phenomenal growth. These 'schismatic' groups grew much faster than the historic denominations. See David B. Barrett, Schism and Renewal in Africa (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968); G. C. Oosthuizen, Post-Christianity in Africa. A Theological and Anthropological Study (London: C. Hurst and Co., 1967).

and (3) strategically the scarcity of ministers in view of the tremendous mission field in China.

#### The Chinese view of leadership

what Nee objected was not the ministry of the Word but the salaried ministerial system. Nee would rather commit the shepherding of the church to several elders--mature lay leaders, chosen among the brethren, nurtured in the church in which they served and whose gifts had long been identified and confirmed by the congregation, than to commit the spiritual oversight of the church to an outside young graduate from the seminary, theologically trained in western mode. He writes somewhat derogatively about the ordination of the young seminary graduates: "Here we have a man, not yet married, at the young age of twenties, just obtains a diploma and coming out from the theological school, or just working for several years and be due for ordination. . . . Is he (qualified) an elder?"<sup>9</sup>

In other words Nee considered that church leadership should come from the congregation members who were trained, nurtured and who had gone through 'the probation' in the local church. As a perceptive writer remarks, "(this polity) is relevant to a culture that respect wisdom, experience and maturity more than youth, energy and zeal."<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the educated seminarians were

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Fact Finders' Report, 5:589.

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Allen J. Swanson, "Independent Churches in Taiwan," in Peter Lin, ed., Essays of Contemporary China and Christianity, p. 258. For a lengthy treatment of the Local Church assembly in Taiwan see idem, Taiwan: Mainline Versus Independent Church Growth (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1970), pp. 57-63, 188-

thoroughly trained but in western categories of the Greco-Latin-Anglo-Saxon tradition. But the ordinary congregation were mostly simple-minded fundamentalists. After an in depth survey and many on-spot interviews the Laymen's Foreign Missions Enquiry released what was known as the Fact Finders' Report which concluded with reference to the above situation saying that the better educated ministers were in fact "so far away from the followers that an impassable gulf has been created."<sup>11</sup> This 'impassable gulf' was no doubt naturally susceptible to the one man government in the local church which Nee tried to avoid.<sup>12</sup>

#### The low image of the stipendiary ministry

In regard to the people's attitude towards the Christian ministry the Fact Finders' Report remarks: "That 'the pastor is a person with no social standing in Chinese society,' in contrast with the teacher or physician or even the Buddhist

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Fact Finders' Report, 5:591; see also David M. Panton, Christian Missions and the Judgment of God (London: SCM, 1953), p. 49f.

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Having received western theological training, the pastor not only appeared to be the most knowledgeable person in the church but also acted as the bridge between the local church and the denomination which leaders were mainly missionaries. If the church operated according to the western model it was very difficult for the ill-trained laymen to catch up with the pastor. As a result the role of the minister was heightened. The same case happened at the time of the Reformation. When the Reformers started to build the evangelical church they hardly found any able laymen to collaborate since at large the congregation were ill-fed and poorly trained. As a result the priest-ridden church simply became the preacher-ridden church. See Hendrik Kraemer, A Theology of Laity, pp. 61ff.

priest, a situation which furnishes food for thought." <sup>13</sup> This observation was endorsed by an experienced missionary who had worked for thirty-eight years in China. He said that among the many foreign things that the missionaries had brought to China, one is the fact that "the pastor a common man over a territorial division of people like himself and asking support from them." <sup>14</sup> In order to understand the low social status of the salaried Christian ministers at the time of Nee we need further to examine the Christian ministry in the light of (1) the attitude towards the traditional Chinese religious priesthood on the part of the Chinese populace at large and (2) the association of the Christian ministry and the anti-foreign sentiment.

#### The traditional priesthood in the Chinese religion

Owing to the perennial suppression of religion by the reigning orthodoxy--Confucianism <sup>15</sup> for more than two millenia, organizational religion never arises as a significant institution in the Chinese society as the church in western Christendom. As a result the religious priesthood in China were relegated to a much lower social status in comparison with the Christian ministers in

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W. C. Beard, "Thoughts after Thirty-eight Years in China," CR 34 (1933):9.

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C. K. Yang, Religion in Chinese Society, pp. 180-217. The suppression of religion on the part of the state is not theological or even philosophical but for socio-economic control. The whole social structure of pre-Republic China was based on the orthodoxy of Confucianism. Moreover the restriction of the numbers of religion was to delimit the expansion of the non-productive priestly class (p. 199).

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Ibid., p. 329f.

western Christendom. For instance, the numbers of Buddhist and Taoist priests were restricted and their activities are regulated by the state (see chapter III note 1). The priests did not participate in formal educational system. And the religious priesthood did not have significant input to the whole ethical system (see note 17).

Being organizationally weak and subservient to the state, religion diffused to some major institutions such as family, state and the like and maintained its vitality as a parasite upon these institutions. It had no independence of its own apart from the institutions it diffused.<sup>16</sup> Every year the emperor sacrificed in the Altar of Heaven in the imperial capital. Every day people burnt incense to their ancestors. But these were performed apart from a distinctive priesthood. It was the emperor who sacrificed to Heaven and the male head of the family who performed the religious rites at home. Moreover, these religious rites did not carry any ethical function on their own rights as in the western church and thus consequently exerted social impact on the part of the priesthood who perform these rites.<sup>17</sup> They

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Ibid, pp. 294-340. A succinct account of the diffused religion in China is found in idem, "The Functional Relationship Between Confucian Thought and Chinese Religion," in John K. Fairbank, ed., Chinese Thought and Institutions, pp. 269-90.

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In Christian faith religion and ethics come hand in hand. But in China, the ethics is Confucian, the religion is sort of syncretism. In the west the spokesman of social ethics and religion in a certain community happened to be the same person of the clergy who was the leader of his parish as well as the community. But in pre-Republic China the spokesmen of social ethics was the local Confucian gentry or literati. In this sense Chinese religious priesthood did not serve any significant social function as their counterparts in the west.

right because it carried no spiritual significance of its own. For example the ancestral worship in itself was not an independent factor that gave to a system of kinship ethics, but rather it used its supernatural premises to justify and enforce the Confucian values designed for the operation of the kinship  
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group.

As a result, there were no laymen in the temples. A renowned sociologist writes, "If the well-known facts of religious life in China are analyzed, the first striking characteristic is the general absence of any membership requirement for worshipping in  
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a temple or convent." Two reasons may account for this absence of 'laity' (and thus no corresponding 'clerical class'). In the first place, the temples were not for corporate worship but for the residence of the idols. Only on the birthdays of the idols or some feasts were the priests invited (employed) to perform the religious rites. In the second place, the inter-faith polytheism on the part of the worshippers made them sort of religious only served to give supernatural sanction of the Confucian concepts of social order rather than to be performed in its own shoppers going around after any idol whichsoever served their own purpose. The relation between the religious priesthood and the laymen (to be exact the patrons) was one of 'over-the-counter-deal.' Once the ritual transaction was finished, their relation

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Ibid., p. 285. The attainment of significance on the part of Buddhism and Taoism in China was due to the dissemination of theological doctrines among the populace rather than their functional position in the society (p. 331).

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Ibid., p. 327.

ended.

The social status of the religious priesthood was so low that usually only people who failed, were dejected and disillusioned entered the priesthood. They were the persons who had unsuccessfully withstood the onslaught from life and decided to "flee into the door of emptiness." Ordination into the monastic life meant degradation for the members of the upper and middle classes. This disparaging attitude toward the religious priesthood is well underscored by a nineteenth century admonition given to the members of a clan. It reads:

As the proverb goes, "A reputable family is one which has no smart servants in its halls, no flowers in its garden, nor Buddhist or Taoist priests coming to call." Recently people have associated with Buddhist and Taoist priests, nominally in order to obtain male heirs and a long life [through religious worship]. Little do they know that such social association might lead to the collapse of the family reputation.<sup>20</sup>

In short, there was never a salaried ministry in China. Therefore the denominational salaried ministry was socially foreign to the Chinese people. And the image of ch'ih chiao (living on religion, in a derogative sense, sort of parasitic) was unmistakably transposed to the minds of the Chinese people. This bad connotation was intensified as the Chinese people associated the Christian ministry with anti-foreign sentiment. To be a Christian minister was ch'ih yang chiao (living on foreign religion).<sup>21</sup>

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Ibid., p. 333.

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For instance Wang Tao who helped James Legge to translate the celebrated The Chinese Classics and proof-read the Delegates Version of the Chinese Bible (New Testament 1852, Old Testament

### Christian ministry and anti-foreign sentiment

Originally Chinese preachers had no identity of their own. They existed as the extension of the foreign missionaries. A missionary wrote in the late nineteenth century:

The native assistants are our eyes, our tongues, our hands, and our feet. They serve as a bridge to bridge over the gap existed between us and our Chinese friends. On one end is the Christians wearing western costumes and bearing western culture; on the other end is the Chinese friends wearing Chinese costumes and bearing Chinese culture.<sup>22</sup>

Being the assistants of the missionaries, they were employed by the missions rather than called and supported by a congregation. Their jobs involved contacting the prospect, catechetical instruction and teaching believers. However the conduct of the Sunday service was in the hands of the missionaries. In 1920, only 8.7 percent of the Chinese ministerial force had been  
<sup>23</sup>  
 ordained. Once they were ordained they had a call from a local

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 1854) was held in contempt by the literati and gentry class. He showed sort of internal conflict and despair in his early journal and letters (Peter Lin, ed., Essays of Contemporary China and Christianity, p. 277). Wang's internal struggle for working for a living in rendering help to missionaries might reflect the strong anti-foreign sentiment in the mid nineteenth century China. For the biographical sketch of Wang Tao, see Teng and Fairbank, eds., China's Response to the West, pp. 135-37. The unequal treaties, the incidents of the Boxer Uprising, the Anti-Christian Movement and the Communist propaganda all leading to the contemptuous sentiment piled up on the salaried Chinese preachers who were considered 'the slaves of foreigners,' 'running dogs,' 'men of no good' (Wilson Wang, Leland Wang, p. 23; Chao Chun-ying, An Informal Discussion about the Chinese Church, p. 11).

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H. Blodget, "May Native Agents be Supported by Foreign Fund?" CR 17 (1886):447, as cited in Johnathan Chao, "The Development of Chinese Ministry in China," in A Life of Ministry, p. 290; trans. mine.

<sup>23</sup>

Ibid., p. 298.

congregation and became their pastor. Then they were no longer the employees of the missions but the pastors of a congregation. However the time for ordination was long and not many churches were able to call a pastor. In 1920, out of 2955 congregations<sup>24</sup> only 584 had their own pastors. And the church which was able to call and to support a pastor was recognised as fully independent.

As a rule, low social status was reflected by low salary scale. The salary of the missionary assistants (employees) were approximately half that of the ordained pastor and lower than the market value.<sup>25</sup> The salary of the Chinese pastor was no better. A considerable number of city ministers had to take a part time<sup>26</sup> job and receive subsidy from mission board. The traditional low social image of the religious priesthood coupled with the employee system, low salary and mission subsidy rendered the Chinese salaried ministry very low social esteem that discouraged many young Christians for the ministry.

The bad situation became worse during the anti-Christian movement and its sequel when nationalism went high (see chapter

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Ibid.

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The low salary afforded the missions to employ more workers as more outposts were developed. In order to discourage switching from one job to another for higher pay, the mission agencies agreed among themselves to enforce the same scale which was generally lower than the market value. Ibid.; J. Doolittle, "Salary of Native Helpers," CR 2 (1870):309-311.

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Fact Finders' Report, 5:263. The average salary of a minister of college education received only \$20-40 in 1937 compared with \$100-180 for high school teacher (W. B. Djang, "Chinese Mind and Organized Church," CR 67 (1936):83. Djang was on the staff in Cheeloo University).

VI note 47). Years of mission-centered rather than church-centered operation of the church organizations (schools, seminaries, hospitals) and the western style of running the local church with the dominance of the missionaries (mostly out of concern for the welfare of the church) took toll. The Christian church (especially the mainline denominational churches which were still staffed and funded by the missions) was considered "a twin sister of western imperialism looked upon as something forced upon China."<sup>27</sup> The church felt the pain of her exodus of leaders to the secular occupations. Some even suggested the organizational church with its stipendiary ministry was a hindrance to the cause of Christ in China. A native Christian remarks:

. . . it is hardly something realized as yet that the organized church as such--a church with a paid ministry and definite membership--is something foreign to China. None of the other religions have ever had anything like it. Consequently, even among church leaders the question is sometimes raised a hindrance to the Christian Movement.<sup>28</sup>

Since young men of of good quality shied away from the ministry the missions had to recruit mediocre substitutes.<sup>29</sup> Once the vicious cycle was ushered, it was hard to break. Nee

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Ibid., p. 84. The strong resentment against the minor status relegated to the native Christians on the part of the missions was reflected by the change of the title of China Mission Year Book to China Christian Year Book in 1926.

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Ibid.

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In 1922 before the anti-Christian movement there were 96 college graduates out of 391 entered into the ministry (24%). But in 1934 only 26 out 522 college graduates in the ministry (5%) (Ibid., p. 83).

criticised such a salaried ministerial system that availed job opportunity to some mediocre ministers: "Not necessarily endowed with spiritual gifts, but merely made up their mind (sometimes because of being penniless [parenthesis Nee, emphasis mine]) they are sent for training (by the missionaries), in preparation for the ministry."<sup>30</sup>

Obviously many Chinese Christian workers were faithful and contented themselves with whatever treatment they got and whatever contempt was hurled at them. However many children of these Christian workers felt resentful. Through the connection of their parents they got a very good education in the Christian colleges, however, once they graduated and became comparatively wealthy some of them either dropped out of the church or kept a distance from the church.<sup>31</sup> Many young people who were thinking of going into ministry had made up their mind that if they had no chance to go abroad to receive theological training they would rather switch to other professions.<sup>32</sup> A student reported that during the reunion party he alone did not receive applause of welcome when he introduced himself as a Ph.D. major in religious education.<sup>33</sup>

The foregoing suffices for us to appreciate why Nee

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Meditation on Revelation, 2:386; trans. mine.

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W. L. Beard, "Thoughts after Thirty-eight Years in China," p. 8.

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C. Y. Cheng, "The Chinese Church of To-day," CR 49 (1918):709.

33

Editor, "Church and Ministry," CR 36 (1935):353.

intended to do away with the salaried ministry because most of the Chinese ministers were funded wholly or in part by foreign funds. To abandon the salaried ministerial office and to repristinate the New Testament was to disassociate themselves from foreign missions. Nee strove to return to the simple pristine Christianity short-circuiting all "its denominational divisions, its ritualistic formality, its inconsistent dogmas, and its unhealthy members. . . ." <sup>34</sup> During the height of nationalism we saw that many young university students came flocking to the Local Church assembly which was supported, governed and propagated by Chinese Christians (see chapter VI note 90).

#### Strategical need

The fact that Nee differentiated the Work and the church in that a worker or a minister was not being bound to a local parish but serving as pioneer evangelist spearheading into the unconquered land and resource person and trainer for the churches

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The words of Ch'en Tu-hsiu as reported in C. Y. Cheng, "Problems and Needs of the Church," CCYB (1931):96. Sounding so familiar as they are from the mouth of Nee. Interestingly these aspirations for a pristine faith are devoid of any western influences but the primitive biblical religion was advocated by the leader of the Anti-Christian Movement, dean of the School of Letters of Peking University who took part in the founding of the Chinese Communist Party (1921) and served as its general secretary until 1927. He was the chief editor of the monthly magazine of La Jeunesse, 'New Youth' (Hsin-ch'ing-nien) which impact upon the contemporary youth was tremendous. Both Nee and Chen appealed to the original spirit of the Bible only. But Nee exalted the Christ of resurrection while Chen "appealed to his readers to eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus so as to receive from Him a new life that would save China from the dark and chilly pit into which she has fallen" (ibid.).

at large did indeed release resources for the evangelization of China and the strengthening of the Chinese church in general. In some sense it appeared somewhat of a luxury for the pastor to preach the sermon to the same congregation every Sunday while so many people died in condemnation every day owing to inadequate evangelists going around preaching the gospel and when many congregations were without a pastor for years. As regard to the priority for evangelism, Nee compared the different situations of London and China:

While I stayed in London I spoke to Mr. Sparks (35) saying, "Our work in China is different from your work. We must concern ourselves with the aspect of the evangelism. You have so many Christians in the region of London, like a Christian nation. But we are not. We must emulate the original (apostolic) work of preaching the gospel." What our brother (Sparks) is doing in London is only 'that ministry' (edification, Eph. 4:12); but we must preach the gospel.<sup>36</sup>

As regard to the churches that had no pastors, the situation was more accute in the rural region that constituted 80 percent of the population. Since the churches in the cities were weak and were unable to support the rural congregations which were mostly comprised of twenty and thirty members and scattered quite a distance from one another, it was very

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T. Austin-Sparks was looked upon as the spiritual authority of Nee. Nee's colleagues advised him to stay out of communist China, he had sought the advice of Sparks: "Well then, let me cable to England asking brother Sparks. He is my spiritual authority. I'll obey his words" (James Chen, Meet Brother Nee, p. 79). Sparks had written a book expounding the trichotomous view of man and sanctification (What is Man? [Cloverdale, IN: Ministry of Life, n.d.]).

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Rethinking the Work, p. 343; trans. mine.

37

E. W. Burt, "The Christian Layman the Key to the Problem of the Church in China," CR 49 (1927):777.

unlikely to have a minister stationed in each rural parish. As a result the conduct of worship service fell into the hands of the laymen who happened to have the most Christian knowledge. An observer remarks: "Without the voluntary help of these humble and obscure lay leaders it would be impossible even to imagine the continued existence of the rural church in North China."<sup>38</sup>

Nevertheless, in many places where worship was supposed to be held but there was nobody being capable to lead, "whereupon coldness creeps in and churches die out one by one."<sup>39</sup> Therefore the workers or ministers best served the church by acting as itinerant 'apostles' (as Nee called them) to train the various congregations than stationed in one particular parish. In face of the scarcity of Christian ministers, it was certainly not doing justice to the church of Christ to fatten one particular congregation while other congregations were left starving to death.

To sum up: The antithetical view of the priesthood of believers against the world on the part of Nee did find its antecedent in primitive Christianity when the church existed in a similar hostile society. Both vigorously implemented the universal priesthood of believers. As regard to his antithetical view against the ministerial office we find no such an antecedent in the pre-Nicene church. And Nee is antithetical attitude towards the salaried ministry was more an indigenous adaptation

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38

Ibid.

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Ibid., p. 778.

in the light of the particular historical context (cultural, social and strategical) of China as well as his aspiration to the pristine New Testament model as Nee interpreted it.

Nevertheless, before long such an antithetical view against the ministerial office created practical problems for the Local Church assembly and had negative repercussions on the Chinese church at large. While we concede that temporally the separation of the Work and the church may help to assure the autonomy and the vitality of the universal priesthood, the problem of such a polity was evident--disrespect of professional ministers on the part of the self-serving strong laymen. Nee personally experienced being rejected and deprived of the pulpit by the elders in Wen Teh Li while he engaged himself in the business of China Biological and Chemical Laboratories. And it is not unusual today among the Chinese churches (especially the non-denominational independent churches) to have a situation in which the minister is being held sway over by a few ambitious laymen. If we examine positively and objectively the nature of the minister in comparison with the dedicated laymen we have to agree that strategically the minister is indispensable for the spiritual welfare of the church. He has the following features that all his congregation lack: full time working for the church; thorough theological training to correctly expound the Word. To deprive him of the conduct of the local congregation in order to avoid his autocratic rule is to throw the baby out with the bath water. And it is indeed a great loss to the church. And in the light of the complexity of modern world and the ascending level

of education on the part of the laity, ordinary laymen without thorough theological training are doomed to failure in the ministry of the Word. Therefore after the Sino-Japanese War (1937-45), Nee already revised his church polity by juxtaposing the Jerusalem principle on his previous Antioch principle. The apostles henceforth operated with a home base--the center. And other local churches had to submit to the direction of the centers.

### Exegetical Basis: Dispensationalist Approach

#### The Peoplehood and the Priesthood

One basic reason for Nee to hold the antithetical view between the universal priesthood and the ministerial office was his idea of the separation of the peoplehood and priesthood on the part of the Old Testament saints and the preemption of the priesthood on the part of the Levites after the people committed idolatry (Ex. 19:6, chapter VII). Therefore what the New Testament saints claim is merely the restoration of the office lost to the particular priesthood. In the Old Testament that priesthood befell the Levitical priests, in the contemporary church it is occupied (illegitimately) by the ministerial priesthood. The office belongs to the people. However several observations from the Exodus passage and the origin of the Levitical priesthood would invalidate Nee's thesis.

First, as has been pointed out in Ex. 19:6 'kingdom of priests' (mamlākâ kohnîm) and 'holy nation' (gôy gadoš) are merely typical Hebrew parallelism. They pertain to the same import: the

people were chosen and holy among the nations. The antithesis was one over against the pagan nations rather than the Levitical priesthood (see chapter II note 36). Our examination of 1 Peter 2:4-10 which evidently alludes to Exodus 19:6 confirms the fact that the nomenclature of royal priesthood (basileion hierateuma) does not denote any individual, honorific official status (for details see chapter II).

Second, as regard to the origin of the Levitical priesthood, that the Levites were ruthless in slaying the herectics pertained rather to the faithful discharge of their priestly responsibilities to guard against any infringement on the holiness of God than to an effort to obtain such a priesthood through "ritual struggles."<sup>40</sup> Prior to the idolatry of the golden calf (Exodus 32) we notice the co-existence of the priesthood and the people as two distinct categories. In Ex. 19:24 we read: "The Lord replied, 'Go down and bring Aaron up with you. But the priests, and the people must not force their way through to come up the Lord, or he will break out against them.'"

The fact of the matter was that inasmuch as the head of the family represented the whole household as priest to mediate between God and the whole household (for example, Abraham, Job) the Levitical priesthood was instituted to represent the whole nation of Israel. This was the representation principle enunciated so clearly in Numbers 3. The fact that the Levites had no

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Johs Pederson contends that the Levites got their priesthood through ritual struggles with other sects. See Israel: Its Life and Culture, vols. 3 and 4 (Denmark: Dyke and Jeppesen, 1963), p. 173.

land or inheritance on earth drove home the very ante-mundane destiny of the chosen people of God. Their portion or inheritance was the Lord Himself. They were strangers, pilgrims on earth. We may suggest that the ministerial office had two major purposes. In the first place, by virtue of the representation principle, it was a heightening of the sanctity and dedication required of all the chosen people. When the Levitical priests offered the daily burnt offering (Lev. 6:9-13) in the tabernacle to keep the fire on the altar burning perpetually, it indeed portrayed the joy and dedication of the whole congregaton of Israel, the covenant people of God.<sup>41</sup> All the chosen people were required to offer burnt offering to God as a sign to the covenant enacted. They did it through the ministerial office of the priests. The Old Testament particular priesthood was the aggravation and intensification of the universal priesthood of the people, not an antithesis.

Second, the Levitical priethood was also an office foreshadowing the office the priest par excellence--Christ.<sup>42</sup> The Israelites were consecrated into a holy nation because the passover lambs were slain on their behalf as substitutionary atonement. Being the type of Christ, the ministerial office of

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They were mentioned frequently with the ger or stranger, orphans and widows in Deut. 14:29; 16:11, 14; 26:12. For the representation principle and the solidarity between the universal priesthood and the particular priesthood (Levitical priesthood), may I be allowed to refer to my work: Andrew Wai-man, "The Relevance of the Levitical Priesthood to the Contemporary Theology of Laity" (Th. M. thesis, St. Louis: Covenant Theological Seminary, September, 1982), especially pp. 22-35.

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Ibid., pp. 35-60

the Levitical priesthood had an indispensable role to play in the overall salvation history of the Christian faith and was never disparaged by the Old Testament prophets. Inasmuch as the Old Testament ministerial priesthood anticipated the incarnate Word before the first advent of Christ through the teaching of the Law and the sacramental use of the sacrificial cultus, the New Testament ministerial office explicates the written Word before the second advent of Christ. The universal priesthood of the saints in the Old Dispensation merely referred to the spiritual status and holiness which was beautifully expressed by the epithet 'kingdom of priests' on the part of the people. The universal priesthood of the people was not to usurp the office of the Levitical priests which was the type of Christ, the High Priest.

But why did Nee consider so lightly as regard to the institutional priesthood of the Old Dispensation? Evidence indicates that his exegesis was influenced by his dispensationalist view of the salvation history in that the church appears just a parenthesis, having no organic relation with the Old Dispensation. According to the dispensationalists, the church is contemplated as a sidetrack due to the failure of Israel to accomplish the will of God. The church did not evolve upon the nation of Israel. As such, the institutional aspects of the Christian church are discarded as irrelevant (while in the nation of Israel the institution was essential). This dispensation-

The summary of dispensationalism by Bass characterises also the writings of Nee: ". . . a rigidly applied literalism in

alist view is also patent in Nee's interpretation of the seven letters in Revelation 2, 3 in which the separation of the priesthood and the peoplehood is utilised as the sign of the apostate church through the history of the church.

### The Seven Churches of Revelation 2 and 3

In his exposition of the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 Nee used the characteristic dispensationalist literalistic hermeneutic to interpret the existence of one lampstand for one church to establish his theory of one city one church so as to furnish an ecclesiastical basis for the expression of the universal priesthood in the local church. However, the fact of the matter is that the word 'one' is metamorphical for the spiritual unity rather than numerical. Then he proceeded to measure all the churches in the history of the church against this principle of one city one church and construed a historiography in which all other ecclesiastical polities were denounced as apostate.

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the interpretation of Scripture; a dichotomy between Israel and the church; a restricted view of the church; a Jewish concept of the kingdom; a postponement of the kingdom; . . . a compartmentalization of Scripture; a pre-tribulation rapture; its view on the purpose of the great tribulation; its view of the nature of the millennial reign of Christ; its view of the eternal state, and its view of the apostate nature of Christendom" (*ibid.*, pp. 13-47). For valid link between Israel and the Christian church see Paul S. Minear, ed., The Report of the Study Commission on Institutionalism, Faith and Order Paper No. 37 (Geneva: Commission on Faith and Order, World Council of Churches, 1963), p. 19f. Bass said that dispensationalism was innovation on the part of Darby and had no witness in historic Christianity. Dispensationalism had undergone modifications and adaptations. A staunch and sophisticated defence of the dispensationalist position is Dallas Seminary. See C. C. Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965).

The seven letters were essentially about prophesy of the whole development of the church. Several reasons presumably invalidate such an exegesis. First, if the seven letters concerned themselves with the different periods of the apostate church in the history of the church in the world why were not the churches outside Europe mentioned at all? Second, if the seven churches were main prophsy how could the letters be understood by the recipient churches?<sup>44</sup> Thirdly, if the seven churches were seven different eras of the history of the church the periodization should be accurate beyond any reasonable doubt. As a matter of fact, even exegetes espousing the futuristic interpretation of the seven churches cannot have a consensus on the exact demarcation of the seven epochs represented by the seven churches.<sup>45</sup> It is clear that Nee's exegetical basis of a

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On one hand Nee conceded that some terms such as Nicolaitans are not empirical (therefore the seven letters are essentially prophetic rather than historical) and hard to verify historically. He said: "What is the meaning of Nicolaitans? Though many people thought that Nicolatan was a historical person, he was the originator of the teaching of evil, that is only an inference. Writers of old and present cannot verify the existence of the person of Nicolaitan, the sins of his teaching. However we know one thing for certain: the Bible never warrants us to interpret itself by the history of the church or other history. The Word of God is self-explanatory, demanding no help from outside. Otherwise except those who are wise, knowledgeable who can understand the Bible?" (Meditation on Revelation, 1:248; trans. mine). On the other hand Nee appended the fulfillment the seven churches by the church history of Europe after the discussion of each church in Revelation 2 and 3. He is indeed reading his dispensational historiography into the exegesis. For the typical dispensationalist interpretation on Revelation 2 and 3 see C. I. Scofield, ed., The Scofield Reference Bible (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 1352f.

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Leon Morris, The Revelation of St. John, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), pp. 15-22. For a succinct summary of various interpretations on the

panoramic historiographical view of the priesthood of all believers is not validated by the context of the text. His another passage bearing on his teaching of the universal priesthood also indicates the dispensationalist literalism.

#### The Somatic Concept of the Church

To Nee the church is the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12; 1 Corinthians 12). That is not merely metaphor but realism. The negative effects of this exegesis are two fold. In the first place, Nee (as well as Darby) conceives of the local assembly of the Christians in a certain city possessing the plenum of the whole church, any decision of the local assembly may be reckoned as binding upon all other assemblies. With this realism accorded to the metaphor of the body, the aforementioned schismatic tendency is intensified. Many Christian bodies that do not concur with the consensus of the Local Church assembly would be anathematized, they are apostate!

In the second place, the somatic realism is further developed into Nee's doctrine of the spiritual authority. No doubt, Nee's somatic realism indeed invigorates the whole congregation and gets everybody involved in the ministry of the church. However Nee contends that inasmuch as the body is corporate it also under the direction of the head which is represented not by the Word but in the persons of the elders and

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 book of Revelation, see E. G. Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 419-24.

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See note 5; cf. Bass, Background to Dispensationalism, p. 120.

the apostles (the role of the latter is heightened since the inception of the Jerusalem Principle). During the baptismal rite the laying on of hands is performed by the apostles who represent the headship of Christ.<sup>47</sup> He goes too far to exploit one of the many metaphors of the church to the neglect of others.<sup>48</sup> The metaphor of the church as 'the pillar and foundation of the truth' (1 Tim. 3:15) is rarely mentioned in all his treatment of the doctrine of the church. And as Luther suggests, whenever and wherever the Word of God is preached audibly or visibly there is the church of God (see chapter four for the primacy of the preached Word). The preacher (apostle) rather than the Word becomes the visible spiritual authority in the church. This somatic realism may explain why in the Local Church assembly which presumes to uphold the practice of the priesthood of believers has room for a patriarchal type of leadership on the part of the charismatic leader. All are priests, but some are more 'priestly' than the others.

In short the exegetical basis for Nee's doctrine of the priesthood of believers is too precarious. Nevertheless, the strength of Nee's teaching of the universal priesthood lies in its practical implementation and its dynamic accentuation rather than the static understanding as too often represented in the traditional discussion of the priesthood of all believers on the

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The apostles represent both the body and the head (BLST, 1:98; CFP, 1072-1975, p. 25f.).

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For the thorough discussion of the various images of the church, see Paul S. Minear, Images of the Church in the New Testament (Philadelphia, 1960).

part of some author. To Nee the thrust of the priesthood of believers an imperative calling for action. As has been said in our conclusion of chapter II, the universal priesthood is primarily an indicative of the spiritual status, but subsequent to that is the imperative, namely "to live out the priestly life of self-sacrifice as Christ, the High Priest par excellence." After all justification and the sanctification are the two sides of the same coin.

### The Theological Presuppositions

#### Priesthood of Sanctification

How can a Christian be a people of God but not the priest of God? Corresponding to the separation of peoplehood and priesthood is the deplorable condition of so many Christians who merely are justified but not sanctified. Nee posits the priesthood of believers at the locus of sanctification rather than at the locus of justification. So is Christ's priesthood which is accentuated in His dedicated service to the Father rather than His substitutionary atonement in his Basic Lesson on "The Ministry of the priesthood." To be a priest is to live out a priestly life. Externally his behaviour should be different from

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49For instance the article of A. J. Maclean, s.v. "Laity, Laymen," in James Hastings, ed., Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, 13 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908-1927; reprint edition, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1971), 7:766-772) approaches the issue by citing all the canonical status, constitutional rights of the laity through out the history of the church. This static accentuation is not irrelevant when Christianity was organizational weak and met with severe resentment in China. In the west Hendrik Kraemer also criticises this approach. The theology of the laity should be accentuated in the action of missio-diaconia rather than to define the canonical relation with

the non-believers (chapter IX notes 91,92). Internally he is in tune to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, having the light, revelation from God. The ethical stress was presumably adduced by the hostile environment when Christianity was held in suspicion if not in antagonism in China, and was intensified by his remnant mentality. And such an ethical orientation was commended by the Chinese people who were generally ethically--conscious. A writer remarks:

The greatest obstacle to the success of the Church is undoubtedly the fact that Chinese have discovered that nowhere, except by what the western people call 'fanatics' or crazy sects (alluding to the Little Flock and the like) is the teaching of Jesus faithfully put into practice. The people find that after their conversion the Christian continue to live pretty much as they had done before.<sup>50</sup>

This ethicisation of the epithet priest resounds that of the Alexandrian theologians who divided Christians into gnostic or carnal rather than clergy or laymen (chapter III notes 45-46).<sup>51</sup> One has to authenticate himself as priest by actual behaviour. Intrinsically it creates the notion of the ecclesia ecclesiolae. Only those who live the life that merits the title 'priest' could be so called. Thus the title of grace becomes the title of work. The priesthood changes from a spiritual status in Christ and the evangelical imitation of Him to an ethical-epistemological way of life. Therefore it is very natural to see Nee advocating the theory of the salvation of the soul. Yes, Nee -----  
the ministerial priesthood (see chapter I note 7).

<sup>50</sup> Lim Boom Keng, "The Crisis of the Organized Church," CR 67 (1936):77.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Dana Roberts, Understanding Watchman Nee, pp. 150-53.

contends, Christians are justified and saved from the hell; but he is not granted the privilege of enjoying the kingdom in the millennium which was only reserved for those who merit the title 'priest.' However, as has been pointed out (chapter III notes 74-76), the removal of the universal priesthood from the locus of justification in the sense that the priesthood is conferred on the believers indiscriminately as a spiritual status, to the locus of sanctification in the sense that the priesthood is the way of life gradually split up the church into two categories. In due time we witness that the church of Constantinian age was stratified into the laymen and the sacerdotal priests (clergy-men) (chapter III notes 77, 78). In Nee's church the dialectic is one between the priests, spiritual men, overcomers and the carnal Christians, the apostate. While in the medieval church the schism was internal and was a matter of church polity. But in the case of Nee the schism is one between his Local Church assembly and other Christian communities.

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#### The Operation of the Word

Another reason for Nee's antithetical view of the universal priesthood against the ministerial office is Nee's conception of the ministry. To Nee the efficacy of the ministry is to convey the life of Christ to the body. And this life is the revelation of Christ channelled through the spirit of the one who ministers to the one to be ministered. The essence of the whole spiritual

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Witness Lee, the successor of Nee, reportedly makes radical schismatic statement as "Judaism is Satanic, Catholicism is demonic, and Protestantism is without Christ" (Christianity

transaction is whether the outer man of the minister be broken so that a passage is created through which the life of God can reach the audience. God works communicatio idiomatum.

As such Nee contemplates that the ministerial office together with its attending austere theological training on the part of the office-bearer (the minister) are superfluous. The Bible as the written words only serves to express our revelation which directly comes from God--to release 'our burden'. Sure, if one does not read the Bible he hardly can have a revelation. He can not 'fix' the revelation without the written Word. However, revelation can befall any spiritual man even though he is not theologically trained or knowledgeable in the cognitive data concerning the Bible. He can have a revelation from God as long as he is 'right' with God. Certainly the more one understands the Bible the better one translates or fixes the light and conveys to others. All tools that lead to our understanding of the Bible should be attained. We should exercise our minds to the utmost in order to have as maximum knowledge as we can. Nevertheless, this is only reading the Bible in the soul. What we need on top of this is reading the Bible in spirit, waiting upon the Lord for revelation. The former is helpful but not indispensable to obtain revelation. The essential thing is the man who reads the Bible. It is no wonder that more than half of Nee's The Ministry of the Word is devoted to the discussion of the preparation for the life

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Today, April 5, 1985), p. 41; see also Neil T. Duddy & the SCP, The God-Men.

of the minister. Before we evaluate the theological presupposition of Nee's doctrine of the ministry, we shall see first the immediate result of such a view of ministry of the Word.

### Strength and weakness

It seems that to Nee this personal direct revelation from God is even higher than the Bible (but not in contradiction with the Bible). The strength of this sort of the 'Word behind the Word' hermeneutic drives home the very nature of the Bible which is both the words of man and the Word of God. Behind the external words there lies another realm that is inaccessible to human intellect and comprehension. And anybody who engages himself in this Holy Office should take good care of himself. "If a man cleanses himself . . . he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work" (2 Tim. 2:21). Nevertheless, the stress of the inner light has the tendency to dwell on a certain proof text taken out of its context. Thus based on his revelation of the fact that Paul rented a house in Rome to do the Work (Acts 28:30, 31) Nee established the Antioch principle saying that even Paul the Apostle did not interfere with the conduct of the church. Later he claimed to have new revelation to inaugurate the Jerusalem principle to set up the centers for the work and requested submission on the part of the local churches in Foochow to hand over the churches to the apostles of the center there.

Biblical view of man and "communicatio idiomatum"

The whole doctrine of the ministry of the Word rests on the notion of communicatio idiomatum which in turn is the logical deduction of Nee's trichotomous view of man. Inspiration (canonical writings) is the result of the combination of divine revelation and human instrumentality. <sup>53</sup> Likewise the ministry of the Word calls for the the collaboration of God and man. Any efficacious ministry of the Word involves the Bible, revelation of the Spirit and the preacher. The maturer the spiritual life of the preacher, the more likely he can understand the divine aspect of the Bible and discharges a fruitful ministry. Nee seems to suggest that the Bible must approach man in its pure divine aspect as God speaks through the written Word if man's life is to be touched and changed. And this divine aspect can only be conveyed through the spirit of man. Before a minister preaches he must experience what the prophets and apostles had experienced before him--receives revelation directly from God.

But cannot God work through material things? Is man trichotomised into different entities of spirit, soul, and body? When a Christian is regenerated is he merely saved only with regard to his spirit, not the soul and body, rendering him sort of partim justus, partim peccator? <sup>54</sup> The original purpose of

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It should be noted that the duality of the Bible should not be mistaken as the dualism of the Neo-Orthodoxy in that some of the content of the Bible is errant. Nee accepts the plenary inerrancy of the Bible. And he holds the view that all revelation cannot be at odds with the canonical corpus. His loyalty about the integrity of the Bible is beyond any reasonable doubt.

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Schiefelbein, "A Lutheran Confessional Critique of the

Nee's writing of the The Spiritual Man is to delineate some practical steps for those who pursue personal sanctification. The result is that he goes into extreme details in analysing the trichotomy of man. But the Bible never analyses man as such. The biblical approach is synthetic, not analytical dissection. When Jesus spoke about regeneration He just pointed out the reality of the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, not described in details how the spiritual transaction was taken place (John 3). As the wind blows so the Spirit works. How the Spirit works is a mystery beyond human comprehension.

Basically man is wholistic. When God created man He instilled the breath to make Adam a living soul (chayyim; Gen. 2:7). According to Nee the plural number of chayyim indicates the two kinds of life engendered by God's breath, namely the life of the spirit and the life of soul. The breath of God was the spirit of man. However once this spirit contacted the body of man it became the soul. Nevertheless, such interpretation hardly has any concurrence on the part of Old Testament exegetes. As a matter of fact, the soul in Gen. 2:7 pertains to the total personality of man. The constituent of dust in the make up of man bespeaks the frailty and lowliness of his origin as other creatures rather than the notion of inferiority on the part of man as opposed to his 'noble' spirit. The trichotomy of man

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 Understanding and Function of the Believer's Union with Christ in the Theology of Watchman Nee," p. 84f.

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See H. Wheeler Robinson, The Christian Doctrine of Man (3d ed.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1926), p. 15; G. C. Berkouwer, Man: The Image of God (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 215; D.

with its disparagement of the corporeal constituent is in fact a Greek idea rather than a biblical concept.

Since man is made up by both the spiritual constituents and the corporeal constituents, it follows that spiritual things can be 'contained' or hidden in things of frailty and lowliness. And the question at hand is how to appropriate the grace of God in the preached Word through faith on the part of the audience. Grace begins to reach out to man when the Word of God is proclaimed albeit through the instrumentality of a wicked preacher. The appropriation of the grace depends on whether the one who listens the preached Word rejects or accepts in faith. And faith is activated by the preaching of the Word. Therefore the Reformers exalted the preaching office in the church. It is not the preacher as man speaking to the congregation. But God comes to man humanitus (Calvin, Institutes, 4.1.5, see chapter IV note 117). To Luther the preached Word is in itself christus praesens et vivens (present and living Christ; chapter IV note 87). And Christ is appealing to the listeners through the spoken Word, offering them grace and promise (chapter IV notes 90-97). If the Word needs to be publicly proclaimed it follows that a public office of the ministry of the Word is necessary (chapter IV note 98).

God is the creator of all things surely God is not bound by the principle of communicatio idiomatum. Indeed as the Reformers

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Kidner, Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary (London: The Tyndale Press, 1967), p. 60f.; H. C. Leupold, Exposition of Genesis, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1963), 1:114-7.

in the sixteenth century agreed and upheld: Ubi et quando visum est Dei (God is wherever and whenever you see). The spiritual realm is the realm of faith. Whenever we have faith we perceive the spiritual reality of the preached Word. Ebeling remarks: "To live in the Spirit means to live in faith. The Spirit and faith are the same" (chapter IV note 116). Spiritual reality is invisible not because it does not reside in corporeality. It is invisible to the faithless. But it is 'visible' to faith. The kingdom of God is hidden amongst men, but only those who have faith find it (Matthew 13).

The Universal Priesthood and The Repristination  
of the New Testament Church

When Nee's anthropology is expressed in terms of human activities it becomes the relative view of history. All externality is carnality. And the indicator of the carnality is institutionalization and organization of the church with the ascension of a clerical class. Nee indeed does not see the divine imprimatur in the unfolding of history. A writer's observation about the dispensationalist view of history aptly describes the same stance of Nee:

There is change, brought about by a succession of divine interruption into history, but no true historical development either within or between the various 'dispensations'. The system is an exaggerated supernaturalism, with interaction between the 'supernatural' and the 'natural' kept to the barest minimum.<sup>56</sup>

As such Nee insists on modelling after the New Testament

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Lefferts A. Loetscher, writes in the foreword to Norman Kraus, Dispensationalism in America (Richard, VA: John Knox Press, 1958), p. 8.

church: the non-salaried ministry, the 1 Corinthian 14 order of service and the like. The preaching of the Word as Nee understands was then based on personal spiritual gift, not office. In fact throughout Nee's treatment of church polity we rarely see the discussion on the later pastoral epistles where the order and structure of church government took shape. And as we know, 1 Corinthians is one of the earliest epistles. Though both the organized and charismatic ministry are mentioned and warranted in the Bible, yet as the church grew larger and larger we witness the rise of organized ministry and the demise of the charismatic ministry.<sup>57</sup> After B. H. Streeter had surveyed all the evidence from the Pauline corpus (he did not even consider Pastorals as Pauline but pseudonymous) he concluded:

The total amount of evidence yielded up by the passages considered above is not large; nor do I claim it is always unambiguous. But it all points in the same direction; and taken a whole it suffices if not to prove, at least to make probable, the fact of a slow but steady movement. And it is a movement away from the state of things implied in 1 Corinthians--where pre-eminence in the Church depends on the personal possession of some spiritual gift (of which "government" is one of the least esteemed)--and towards a state of things where importance is attached to the holding of an office invested with recognised authority.<sup>58</sup>

We are certain that it was at the later time that the people possessing the charisma of pastor-teacher (Eph. 4:12) were accorded the office of the pastor-teacher.<sup>59</sup> This process of

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See Ronald Y. K. Fung, "Charismatic versus Organized Ministry? An Examination of an Alleged Antithesis," The Evangelical Quarterly 52/4 (1980):195-214.

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The Primitive Church, p. 82f.

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But Nee contended that Eph. 4:12 pertained to the church universal, not a particular local church even though he

institutionalization (from personal charismata to office) went on after the Apostles. Before long we know that the ambulatory apostles, prophets and teaches became office-bearers in the local churches (chapter III note 24). The Bible only gives us principle, not examples as the yardstick for us to follow. For instance love one another is the principles which is changeless. However different historical contexts may dictate different expressions of loving one another. The early Christians sold their properties in order to show their love towards one another. But we are not required of such an example to demonstrate our love. Likewise the principles delineated in the worship service in 1 Corinthians 14 were order and mutual edification. The exact conduct of the service was just an example and actual scenes of the the worship service on the part of the nascent church at the city of Corinth. We are not commanded to emulate them. And today mutual edification and order may be expressed by liturgical worship as well.

Throughout the history of the church, we see God's blessing upon many mainline churches though they had their weaknesses as all human beings are weak and frail. God's imprimatur is clearly seen in the history of the church. The Spirit is working through the frailty of the church. Again God does not work communicatio

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delineated seven criteria in the same context (Eph. 4:4-6) for the unity of a local church (chapter IX note 43).

For a thorough discussion of the church as an institution, see Paul S. Minear, ed., The Report of the Study Commission on Institutionalism.

idiomatum but ubi et quando visum est Dei. In connection with Nee's relative view of history, we do not see any social expression of the priesthood of all believers. For some Catholic writers, the laity are the ecclesiastical presence of the kingdom in the world (chapter I note 6) and grace heals nature. To Nee grace and nature are posited in diametrical antithesis because externality is carnality. Owing to the dispensationalist moratorium of the kingdom which is modelled after the Davidic reign-- an outward external political entity but which is yet to come, we do not see any development of the doctrine of Christian vocation on the part of Nee and the Local Church assembly. To Nee, the priests of God concern themselves with the forthcoming kingdom when their royal priesthood shall be consummated. For this imminent kingdom they dedicate themselves for the evangelization of the world. But they do not contemplate their calling as consecratio mundi.

Having analysing all Nee's major tenets bearing on his teaching of the priesthood of all believers we should yield deep respect to him as a servant of God. His Local Church movement was indeed a phenomenon in the contemporary history of the Chinese church. And his accentuation of the priesthood of all believers as a dynamic imperative, calling for dedication and service for the kingdom should be taken seriously.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- Antiq.     A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities. (2 vols.,  
                  ed. William and Samuel Cheetham)
- ANF       The Ante-Nicene Fathers.
- AP         Hippolytus. Apostolic Tradition.
- CAC       Corpus Apostologetarum Christianorum. (Ed. Otto)
- CCL       Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina. (Turnholti:  
                  Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii, 1954ff.)
- CO         Chinese Orginal
- CFP       Christian Fellowship Publishers (ET of Nee's works)
- CCYB      China Christian Year Book.
- Const.     Constitutions of the Holy Apostotles.
- CMYB      China Mission Year Book.
- CR         Chinese Recorder.
- CSEL      Corpus Scripturorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum.  
                  (Editum consilio caesareae vindobonesis. Vienna.  
                  1866ff.)
- CTM      Concordia Theological Monthly. (St. Louis)
- Dix        The Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus. (Ed. Dix)
- Essays     Essays on the Early History of the Church and  
                  Ministry. (Ed. H. B. Swete)
- ET         English translation.
- GS         The greichischen christlichen Schriftsteller der  
                  ersten drie Jahrhunderte. (Berlin Corpus)
- HE         Historia Ecclesiastica.

- ICC            The International Critical Commentary of the Holy Scriptures of the Old and new Testament.  
(Edinburgh)
- Institutes.    Institutes of the Christian Religion. (Library of Christian Classics, vols. 20-21)
- LCC            Library of Christian Classics
- LW            Luther's Works. (The American Edition)
- Mansi         Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio.  
(Ed. J. D. Mansi)
- MT            Massorete Text.
- NIDCC         New International Dictionary of the Christian Church.  
(Revised edition; ed. J.D. Douglas)
- NPNF[1]       Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. First Series.
- PG            Patrologia graeca. (Ed. Migne)
- PL            Patrologiae latina. (Ed. Migne)
- Sparks        The Apostolic Fathers ( one volume work edited by Jack Sparks from Robert M. Grant's [ed.] 6 vols. work)
- TDNT         Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.  
(ET ed. G. Kittel)
- WA            D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe.  
(Weimar, 1883- )
- WA DB        D. Martin Luthers Werke: Die Deutsche Bibel. (Weimar, 1883- )
- WA T         D. Martin Luthers Werke: Tischreden. (Weimar, 1883- )
- Note:         Scriptural abbreviations and quotations are from New International Version, unless stated otherwise.

GLOSSARY

Chiang Kai-shek	蔣介石
Chiao-min	教民
Chiao-an	教案
Ch'ih chiao	吃教
Ch'ih yang chiao	吃洋教
Dora Yu	余度慈
Fu-ch'ing mieh-yang	扶清滅洋
Han-lin	翰林
Hsueh-ch'ao	學潮
Li Yuan-yu (Ruth Li)	李淵如
San Ming Chu I	三民主義
Sun Yat-sen	孫逸仙
T'i-yung	体用
Tsing Hua University	清華大學
T'ung kung	同工
Wang Tsai	王載
Witness Lee	李常受
Yang kuei-chieh	洋鬼子
Yuan Sheh-kai	袁世凱

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