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### An Examination of the Passages in the New Testament which Speak of the Royal Priesthood of Believers

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE PASSAGES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT  
WHICH SPEAK OF THE ROYAL PRIESTHOOD  
OF BELIEVERS

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of New Testament Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Divinity

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by

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June 1950

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Reader

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 distance between us, that is to say, we have the  
 same power in respect to the Word and all the  
 sacraments.<sup>1</sup>

The Royal Priesthood of Believers, then, is the very heart-  
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Martin Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,"  
 Works of Martin Luther, translated by Albert G. Steinhauser  
 The Luther League Edition; Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg  
 Press, 1941, II, 282 f.

W. A. Rostrom, Resurgence of the Gospel (Philadel-  
 phia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1948), p. 159.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Martin Luther considered the New Testament teaching of the Royal Priesthood of Believers a fundamental principle of the evangelical outlook of the Holy Christian Church. According to this doctrine, every Christian is a Royal Priest before God. Luther wrote in his essay, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church":

Let everyone, therefore, who knows himself to be a Christian be assured of this, and apply it to himself, that we are all priests, and there is no distinction between us, that is to say, we have the same power in respect to the Word and all the Sacraments.<sup>1</sup>

The Royal Priesthood of Believers, then, is the very heart-beat of Christ's Church on earth, for it grows directly out of the gospel itself and bears fruit in all areas of life.<sup>2</sup>

In the Reformation Martin Luther rediscovered this teaching. For many centuries the principle of the Royal

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<sup>1</sup>Martin Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," Works of Martin Luther, translated by Albert T. Steinhauser (The Philadelphia Edition; Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1943), II, 282 f.

<sup>2</sup>T. A. Kantonen, Resurgence of the Gospel (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1948), p. 159.

Priesthood of Believers had been obscured by the super-structure of the Roman Catholic hierarchy and its false doctrines. It was held that the members of the hierarchy had to mediate between the people and God, and also that they alone were able to bring the means of grace to anybody. It is not unreasonable to maintain that much of the formalism and corruption that crept into the Roman Catholic Church was because it ignored the doctrine of the Royal Priesthood of Believers.

But such had not always been the picture of Christendom. The early Christian Church knew, appreciated and practiced the doctrine of the Royal Priesthood. They believed that this was a teaching rooted deep in the Messianic mission of Christ, and that it was taught by Peter, John and Paul. But they did not stop with that. To them, the Royal Priesthood of Believers was a living force which enabled Christianity to get a foothold in the ancient world, to spread, and to triumph over the fiercest kind of opposition.<sup>3</sup> Mark 16:20 reads: "They went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them." This shows the Universal Priesthood in action, for here is a description of all Christians, not only the apostles. In fact, when persecution struck the Church in Jerusalem, Luke says: "They were all scattered.....except the

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 155.

apostles," and "those who were scattered went about preaching the word." Acts 8:14. T. R. Glover in his graphic description of the growth of the early Christian Church gives this insight into the dynamic power for mission work which is contained in the principle of the Royal Priesthood:

The real conviction of the living Christ was not carried to the world by a book or by a story. Men might allege they had seen the risen Lord; that was nothing till they themselves were known. The witness of the Resurrection was not the word of Paul... nor of the eleven; it was the new power in life and death that the world saw in changed men....The legend of a reputed resurrection of some unknown person in Palestine nobody needed to consider, but what were you to do with the people who died in the arena, the reborn slaves with their newness of life in your own house?....The conviction of the people you knew, amazing in its power of transforming character and winning first the good will and the trust and then the conversion of others, was supported and confirmed by the nature and personality of the Man of Whom they spoke, of Whom you read in their books.<sup>4</sup>

Another factor which caused the Gentiles to wonder was the realization that the Christians had no class of priests. This set Christianity apart from all the pagan religions, including also the mystery religions. Wherever the Roman army had conquered, had entered a far-away country, had met a new people, had become acquainted with a different culture and another religion, there was always a class of

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 156 f., quoting T. R. Glover, The Influence of Christ in the Ancient World (Cambridge: University Press, 1929), p. 96 ff.

priests. The apostles had a prominent place among them and for a time even took care of the alms. Moreover, the believers took part in the temple worship. But the apostles never claimed to be priests.<sup>5</sup> When the Christians fled from Jerusalem, mixing with peoples of many countries and races, it was apparent to all that there was no class of priests among them.

In viewing the experience of early Christendom, one can readily see that Martin Luther advanced no new doctrine in teaching the Royal Priesthood of Believers. Instead, as above stated, he brought to light that teaching which had been believed and lived in the first century after Christ. The great Reformer came to know this principle through his study of the Holy Scriptures, in which are written these sacred words which the early Christians came to learn mostly by word of mouth.

It is the purpose of this thesis to examine the passages of the New Testament which speak of the Royal Priesthood of Believers. Actually, there are only five instances where the Christian priesthood is specifically mentioned. They are I Peter 2:5; I Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6; Revelation 5:10; and Revelation 20:6. All other references

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<sup>5</sup>William Arndt, "A Royal Priesthood I Peter 2:9," Concordia Theological Monthly, XII (April 1948), 241.

to priests or priesthood are either to the priestly office of Christ or to Jewish and pagan priests. However, Kantonen rightly points out:

The thought underlying the principle is so richly supported in other forms of speech both by the teaching of Christ Himself and by the proclamation and practice of the apostolic Church that its validity cannot be questioned nor its importance overestimated.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Kantonen, op. cit., p. 147.

In this passage the Holy Writer in a burst of inspired eloquence shows the true dignity of a Christian. As a contrast to the dark destiny of the unbelieving world, he pictures the blessed state and high privilege of a believer.<sup>7</sup> These words were addressed to "the strangers scattered

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<sup>7</sup>Book of Ephesians, edited with Critical Apparatus by Dr. Michael Pyle, newly revised by Dr. Brian Barlow (London: Edition; New York: American Bible Society, 1970), p. 41. Where § (S.V. resp.) and © (in the Epistles, p. 42) have not been noted with a variant, they agree with the text.

<sup>8</sup>William Smith, "Royal Priesthood of Peter 2:9," *Scriptural Theological Monthly*, III (April 1948), 241.

## CHAPTER II

### I PETER 2:9

The foremost passage that speaks of the Royal Priesthood of Believers is I Peter 2:9. It reads ὑμεῖς δὲ γένος ἐκλεκτόν, βασιλείων ἱεράτευμα, ἔθνος ἅγιον, λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν, ὅπως τὰς ἀρετὰς ἐξαγγείλητε τοῦ ἐκ σκότους ὑμᾶς καλέσαντος εἰς τὸ θάναστον αὐτοῦ φῶς .

This text is well established. The only variant reading is in respect to ὑμεῖς . Minuscule number 69 has the reading ἡμεῖς . However, the better manuscripts favor ὑμεῖς .<sup>1</sup>

In this passage the Holy Writer in a burst of inspired eloquence shows the true dignity of a Christian. As a contrast to the dark destiny of the unbelieving world, he pictures the blessed state and high privilege of a believer.<sup>2</sup> These words were addressed to "the strangers scat-

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<sup>1</sup>Greek New Testament, edited with Critical Apparatus by Dr. Eberhard Nestle, newly revised by Dr. Erwin Nestle (Sixteenth Edition; New York, American Bible Society, 1936), p. 23. "Where Ἡ (E, N resp.) D and Θ (in the Epistles, Ἡ, ΘG) have not been names with a variant, they agree with our text."

<sup>2</sup>William Arndt, "Royal Priesthood I Peter 2:9," Concordia Theological Monthly, XII (April 1948), 241.

tered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia," (1:1), churches which had been founded by Paul. Though it is not definitely stated, perhaps Peter had sometime or another visited these churches.<sup>3</sup>

Peter wrote this epistle to encourage and comfort the Christians who were facing trials and persecutions for their faith. Nero's persecution of Christians in Rome encouraged the enemies of the believers everywhere to take advantage of the slightest pretext to persecute.<sup>4</sup> Halley observes:

It is thought, possibly, that Peter may have written this Letter immediately after Paul's martyrdom, and sent it by Silas, 5:12, who had been one of Paul's helpers, to these churches which Paul had founded, to encourage them to bear up under their suffering, Silas personally carrying the news of Paul's martyrdom to Paul's churches. Thus the Epistle was born in an atmosphere of suffering, shortly before Peter's own martyrdom, exhorting Christians not to think it strange that they had to suffer, reminding them that Christ did his work by Suffering.<sup>5</sup>

There may be some merit in this, but it is only a conjecture. In the first chapter the Apostle describes the blessed hope of an incorruptible inheritance which the followers of Christ have. In the second chapter the writer describes the exalted position and the true calling which the

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<sup>3</sup>Henry Hampton Halley, Pocket Bible Handbook (Sixteenth Edition; Chicago: Henry H. Halley, 1944), p. 506.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 507.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

followers of Christ possess.<sup>6</sup> It is significant that in this chapter there are two of the five passages in the New Testament which speak of the Royal Priesthood of Believers -- verse five as well as verse nine.

Verse nine is based on terms and expressions of the Old Testament Scriptures, not of the original Hebrew version, but the Greek translation, the Septuagint. Kittel says: "According to all knowledge available today, the word ἱεράτευμα occurs only in the Septuagint and in literature which is based on the LXX."<sup>7</sup> A comparison of this verse with the Old Testament passages shows that

γένος ἐκλεκτῶν points back to Isaiah 43:20 πρῶτῶν τῶν γενῶν μου τῶ ἐκλεκτῶν . βασιλείου ἱεράτευμα is found in Exodus 19:6 ὑμεῖς δὲ ἔσεσθε μοι βασιλείου ἱεράτευμα . βασιλείου ἱεράτευμα, ἔθνος ἅγιον, λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν reechoes the words of Moses which God told him to speak on Mount Sinai: Exodus 19:5,6 ἔσεσθέ μοι λαὸς περιούσιος ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν ἐθνῶν. ἐμὴ γὰρ ἐστὶν πάντα ἡγῆ. ὑμεῖς δὲ ἔσεσθέ μοι βασιλείου ἱεράτευμα καὶ ἔθνος ἅγιον . Moses used the same expressions when he repeated the Law in the Book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy 7:6 reads

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<sup>6</sup>Arndt, loc. cit.

<sup>7</sup>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: Verlag von W. Kohlhammer, 1938), Dritter Band, p. 249.

ὅτι λαὸς ἅγιος εἶ Κυρίου τῷ Θεῷ σου, καὶ σε προεῖλατο Κύριος ὁ Θεός σου, εἶναί σε αὐτῷ λαὸν περιούσιον . Again in Deuteronomy 14:2 he states ὅτι λαὸς ἅγιος εἶ Κυρίου τῷ Θεῷ σου, καὶ σε ἔξελέξατο Κύριος ὁ Θεός σου γενέσθαι σε αὐτῷ λαὸν περιούσιον . Deuteronomy 26:18 reads καὶ Κύριος εἵλατό σε σήμερον γενέσθαι σὲ αὐτῷ λαὸν περιούσιον . In Malachi 3:17 the Lord tells the prophet: καὶ ἔσονται μοι, λέγει Κύριος παντοκράτωρ, εἰς ἡμέραν, ἣν ἐγὼ ποιῶ εἰς περιποίησιν . The words ὅπως τὰς ἁγίας ἐξαγγείλητε τοῦ ἐκ σκότους ὑμᾶς καλέσαντος εἰς τὸ θαυμαστὸν αὐτοῦ φῶς may be traced back to Isaiah 43:21 λαὸν μου, ὃν περιεποίησάν με τὰς ἀρετὰς μου διηγεῖσθαι .

Peter emphasizes that what had been said of God's chosen people in Old Testament times applies with still greater force to the Christians of the New Testament.<sup>8</sup> Exodus 19:5,6 particularly is a good example of the Old Testament teaching on the Royal Priesthood of Believers. These words were addressed to all the believers in Israel and not only to the Levitical priesthood. For the priesthood of believers existed already in the days of the Patriarchs, at a time when there was not as yet a Levitical

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<sup>8</sup>Walter E. Buszin, "The Doctrine of the Universal Priesthood and Its Influence Upon the Liturgies and Music of the Lutheran Church," Valparaiso University Pamphlet Series, No. 2 (June 1, 1946), p. 99 f.

priesthood.<sup>9</sup> Professor Buszin says:

As priests, all true Israelites were to give instruction to their children (Deuteronomy 4:9,10; 6:7,20ff.;;) and sacrifice the paschal lamb. (Exodus 12). This priesthood was a gift of God, not something one could work for and merit, for we read: "I have given your priest's office unto you as a service of gift. (Numbers 18:7)<sup>10</sup>

It would be well to look at these terms which Peter, quoting from the Old Testament, ascribes to the believers. First of all *γένος ἐκλεκτόν*. Christians by virtue of God's love have been elected to be a people which no longer belongs to this world.<sup>11</sup> *γένος* implies that all the individual members are sons of a common Father and are therefore brethren (Acts 13:16).<sup>12</sup> Schott<sup>13</sup> justly remarks that this is predicated of the Christians as an already present condition. *ἐκλεκτόν* shows that this is an act complete in God Himself. He has selected us.

*ἔθνος ἅγιον* implies that the believers are wholly

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>11</sup>John Ed. Huther, "Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the General Epistles of James, Peter, John, and Jude," Meyer's Commentary on the New Testament, translated from the Third Edition of the German by Paton J. Gloag, D. B. Croon, and Clarke H. Irwin; American Editor, Timothy Dwight (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, Publishers, 1887), p. 252.

<sup>12</sup>J. H. A. Hart, "The First Epistle General of Peter," The Expositors Greek New Testament (New York: George H. Doran Company, n. d.), V, 57.

<sup>13</sup>Huther, loc. cit.

set apart for God as exclusively His own.<sup>14</sup> Christians are a multitude of people having the same nature.<sup>15</sup> Wuest<sup>16</sup> describes *λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν* as a unique, private ownership, a personal ownership of the saints by God. Each saint is God's unique possession just as if that saint were the only human being in existence. Concerning *περιποίησιν* the Pulpit Commentary states:

The literal meaning of the Greek verb used by St. Peter is "a people for acquisition," or "for keeping safe," the verb having the sense of "gaining, acquiring," and also that of preserving, keeping for one's self.".....Acts 20:28 the Church of God which He purchased *ἢν περιποίησάτο* with His own blood."<sup>17</sup>

Titus 2:14 also expresses this thought.

Our Savior, Jesus Christ, gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a people for His own possession,  
*λαὸν περιούσιον* zealous of good works.

By the use of *γένος, ἔθνος, λαός* in this text Christians are spoken of as a community united together in itself. Although the believers may be of different races and nations, the names employed by the Apostle Peter point

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<sup>14</sup>Joseph Henry Thayer, A Greek - English Lexicon of the New Testament (New York, Cincinnati, Chicago: American Book Company, 1889), p. 7.

<sup>15</sup>Kenneth Wuest, First Peter in the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1942), p. 56.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>17</sup>B. C. Gaffin, "The First Epistle of Peter," The Pulpit Commentary, edited by H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (New York and Toronto: Funk and Wagnalls Company), p. 272.

to the fact that they belong to God. God has joined them to Himself to form one people.<sup>18</sup> Galations 3:28 also bears this out: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." In this connection Kantonen makes an interesting observation. He shows that the term λαός is the source of the words laity and layman.<sup>19</sup> In his book, Resurgence of the Gospel, he states:

Subsequent corruption of the apostolic doctrine has led to the view that laymen are on a lower spiritual level than priests. In the New Testament to be a member of the laity of Christ's people is to be a member of a royal priesthood.<sup>20</sup>

In verse nine Peter refers to the believers also as ἱεράτευμα. This word is a collective term signifying a class or a group of priests. In the English, however, "priesthood" also may mean the office of a priest. But for this meaning Luke uses ἱερατεία (Luke 1:9).<sup>21</sup> Since ἱεράτευμα means "priesthood" or "class of priests" and is thereby a collective term, it can be seen that therein

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<sup>18</sup>Huther, op. cit., p. 253.

<sup>19</sup>T. A. Kantonen, Resurgence of the Gospel (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1948), p. 148.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Arndt, op. cit., p. 244.

the Una Sancta ecclesia finds expression.<sup>22</sup> Peter is addressing the Christians, the members of the ecclesia referred to in 1:1, when he says: "Ye are a Royal Priesthood." To the Galatians Paul puts it in these words: "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:26). Any Christian, therefore, is a member of the priesthood of believers. The bond that unites them is invisible -- faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>23</sup> Luther in his sermons and other writings very definitely emphasized the fact that all Christians are members of the priesthood. In An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility Luther interprets Romans 13:4, "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office," with special reference to the Royal Priesthood of Believers:

A cobbler, a smith, a farmer, each has the work and office of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests bishops, and every one by means of his own work or office must benefit and serve every other, that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, even as all members of the body serve one another.<sup>24</sup>

Again, in the same treatise, Luther says: "Through baptism

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Martin Luther, "An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate," Works of Martin Luther, translated by Charles M. Jacobs (The Philadelphia Edition; Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1943), II, 69.

all of us are consecrated to the priesthood."<sup>25</sup> Also in his interpretation of Hosea 4:6, given in 1530, Luther remarked: "He is truly a priest, who possesses the correct knowledge and understanding of God and a sound comprehension of the Scriptures."<sup>26</sup>

But in verse nine Peter speaks of the priesthood as a βασιλείον ἱεράτευμα . There have been many and various interpretations and opinions concerning the word βασιλείον in its relation to ἱεράτευμα. Luther took the dual view, meaning that βασιλείον ἱεράτευμα signifies that all Christians are kings and priests. In A Treatise on Christian Liberty, he writes:

As to the kingship, every Christian is by faith so exalted above all things that by a spiritual power he is lord of all things without exception, so that nothing can do him any harm whatever, nay, all things are made subject to him and compelled to serve him to his salvation.<sup>27</sup>

In the same essay he enlarges on the dual view of kings and priests with a rather unique presentation. In the Old Testament God sanctified to Himself every first born male.

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>26</sup>Martin Luther, "Auslegung des Alten Testaments," Dr. Martin Luther's Sämmtliche Schriften, edited by John Georg Walch (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1887), VI, 1044.

<sup>27</sup>Martin Luther, "A Treatise on Christian Liberty," Works of Martin Luther, translated by W. A. Lambert (Philadelphia Edition; Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1943), II, 324.

In turn, the eldest son highly prized the birthright, for it had a two-fold honor, that of priesthood, and that of kingship. This was a spiritual kingship and also a type of Christ, Whose kingdom is not of this world, but Who reigns in heavenly and spiritual things and consecrates them. When our Lord was born of the Virgin Mary, He also, as the eldest Son, had the birthright and thereby obtained these two prerogatives -- that of priesthood and that of kingship. Jesus imparts these to all who believe on Him, according to the law of marriage by which the wife owns whatever belongs to the husband.<sup>28</sup>

Stoeckhardt also maintains that βασιλείου τραπεζουμια contains the concept of "kings and priests." The Old Testament phrase (Exodus 19:6) מְלִיכִים וְכֹהֲנִים (a kingdom of priests) which in the septuagint is translated "royal priesthood," Stoeckhardt interprets as ascribing a dual status to the Christian -- that of a king and of a priest.<sup>29</sup> De Wette explains the expression as meaning "a priesthood which is sovereign, which possess freedom, and is subject to no one except God."<sup>30</sup> Lenski follows practically the same line of thought. He says that the be-

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 323.

<sup>29</sup>Arndt, op. cit., p. 244.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.



וְיִשְׂרָאֵל אֱלֹהֵינוּ . Concerning the ex-  
 pression אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ , Kittel says: "The ex-  
 pression 'Kingdom of Priests' may be traced back to an  
 epoch in which it may well have implied that all Israelites  
 are priests; they constitute a kingdom which consists of  
 priests."<sup>35</sup> In other words, the believers, according to  
 this passage, are the Royal Priesthood only because they  
 belong to the one family of the children of God, not be-  
 cause they themselves are sovereign. It is God, the King,  
 Who governs and animates all things. In the βασιλείου  
 ἱεράτευμα the priestly character is the leading role.<sup>36</sup>  
 This, then, is the idea which the Old Testament phrase  
 suggests: a kingdom in which all the subjects are priests.  
 Findlay also takes βασιλείου as an adjective signify-  
 ing "being the property of a king."<sup>37</sup> The words seem to  
 present this picture: "As a royal army is an army belong-  
 ing to a king, so a royal priesthood is a class of priests  
 that owes its allegiance to a king, in this case to Christ,

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<sup>35</sup>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, loc. cit.

<sup>36</sup>G. F. C. Fronmüller, "The Epistle General of Peter," A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, translated from the Second Revised German Edition, with additions original and selected by J. Isidor Mombert, edited by John Peter Lange and Philip Schaff (New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1869), p. 34.

<sup>37</sup>Arndt, loc. cit.

the Son of God, true God Himself."<sup>38</sup> But in *βασιλείου ἱεράτευμα*, Findlay also includes the idea of service -- "a priesthood in the service of a king."<sup>39</sup> Huther in Meyer's commentary agrees with this and quotes Weiss who says that the believers are a "priesthood serving Jehovah the King, just as we speak of the royal household."<sup>40</sup>

Another opinion that has been advanced on the

*ἱεράτευμα* is this:

The *ἱεράτευμα* is royal because it belongs to the King, Who has chosen it as His own possession, and, because therefore, it shares in His glory; not because the *ἱεράτευμα* are themselves kings and shall reign upon earth.<sup>41</sup>

If sharing in His glory is taken in the sense of being sovereign with Him and reigning with Him, then it is not within the meaning of this passage. But if it is taken in the sense that as subjects of Christ in His kingdom we bask in the glory of His love, in contrast with the state of the unbelievers, then sharing in His glory fits in with the concept of verse nine.

Therefore, on the bases of the possession and service

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 246.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 244.

<sup>40</sup>Huther, op. cit., p. 252, quoting Weiss, p. 125

<sup>41</sup>Charles Bigg, "The Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude," International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), LXI, 134.

idea in the βασιλείου one must take issue with Selwyn who holds the dual view. He tries to back his interpretation with the following arguments: 1) Since in II Maccabees 2:17 βασιλείου is a noun and is found side by side with ἱεράτευμα he claims that he is justified in translating βασιλείου ἱεράτευμα as found in I Peter 2:9 and in Exodus 19:6, "a kingdom, a priesthood."<sup>42</sup> But in so doing he fails to evaluate properly the fact that the two words are joined by "and" in the II Maccabees 2:17 passage.<sup>43</sup> 2) He also bases his arguments on the position of words in I Peter 2:9. Since βασιλείου is before ἱεράτευμα, instead of following it (as the other adjectives in verse nine follow the nouns they modify), he claims that the word is not an adjective but a noun.<sup>44</sup> Again, this cannot be stressed, for Peter could be influenced by the relative position of the words in Exodus 19:6. Furthermore, Selwyn's argument on the basis of the word order can also be turned against him. For it can be held that the rhythm of the passage would be destroyed if there would be two unconnected nouns in a sentence in which there was a series of phrases containing a noun plus an adjective.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Arndt, op. cit., p. 245.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

Since βασιλείου is an adjective in I Peter 2:9, the dual view, kings and priests, held by Luther and Stoeckhardt, also does not reach the meaning of verse nine. Luther's analogy of receiving Christ's birthright of a king and a priest through faith cannot be used to interpret this text. Lenski and De Wette, who hold that priests possess sovereignty also do not express what is in the text, for, as before stated, βασιλείου ἑαυτοῦ means that Christ is the King and that the Christians are all priests, serving Him in His Kingdom.

But Peter did not stop after stating that the high position and privilege of every Christian is to be a member of the Royal Priesthood. For with every privilege there is also an obligation. The Apostle concludes this verse by saying that the members of the Royal Priesthood are "to show forth the praises of Him Who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous Light."

For the word ἀρετῆς the King James translation reads "praises." Thayer defines it as excellences, perfections, and quotes Gerhard as saying that the ἀρετῆς are the attributes "which shine forth in our gratuitous calling and in the whole work of our salvation."<sup>46</sup> To Fronmüller the ἀρετῆς emphasized God's omnipotence and mercy. He remarks:

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<sup>46</sup>Thayer, op. cit., p. 73.

The connection suggests more particularly His omnipotence which removes every obstacle, and His mercy which condescends to the most degraded slave of sin. The last attribute in particular, was expressed in the appearing of Christ. Believing congregations should be both the trumpets and the mirrors thereof.<sup>47</sup>

means to publish, to tell out, to give wide-spread publicity to what takes place within. This is to be done by the entire community of believers.<sup>48</sup>

Every believer has been made a member of the Royal Priesthood for a purpose -- to take part in an holy propaganda. This is the theme of the purpose clause of verse nine:

God has done great things for you; He has taken you out of the desert of darkness and death and brought you into the garden of life and light. Shout this from the housetops and tell the people that what He has done for you He is eager to do for others, in fact, for all.<sup>49</sup>

Peter is challenging the Royal Priesthood of Believers to a sacred mission. In reference to this, Kantonen graphically describes a Christian's call to sacred service:

Whenever He (Christ) spoke in lofty terms about Himself and His Messianic vocation, He proceeded forthwith to speak in the same lofty terms about His people and their vocation. Did He say: "I am the Light of the world?" Yes, but He also said: "You are the lights of the world." Did He say that He performed mighty works which should lead people

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<sup>47</sup>Fronmuller, op. cit., p. 35.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Arndt, op. cit., p. 247.

to trust Him? Yes, but He also said: "Greater works than these shall he (the believer) do." Did He say that the Father had sent Him into the world to carry out a great mission? Yes, but He also said, "As the Father hath sent Me, even so I send you." And when His own historical mission was completed, He actually did entrust the entire work of the Kingdom on earth to His people: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation." "Go and make disciples of all nations."<sup>50</sup>

Luther very effectively brings the application down to the individual member of the Royal Priesthood:

I will, therefore, give myself as a sort of Christ, to my neighbor, as Christ has given Himself to me, and will do nothing in this life except what I see will be needful, advantageous, and wholesome for my neighbor, since by faith I abound in all good things in Christ.....And as our heavenly Father has freely helped us in Christ, so ought we freely to help our neighbor by our body and works, and each should become to the other a sort of Christ, so that we may be mutually Christ's, and that the same Christ may be in all of us, that is, that we may be truly Christians.<sup>51</sup>

In presenting this evangelical program to the priesthood, Peter vividly describes the contrast between the believer's and the unbeliever's relation to God. *σκοτους* means darkness. This word pictures the whole unhappy sinful condition of the natural and unregenerate man. Perhaps the Apostle uses *σκοτους* with special reference to the former heathenism of the readers.<sup>52</sup> *φως*, completely

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<sup>50</sup>Kantonen, op. cit., p. 150.

<sup>51</sup>Martin Luther, "To The Leipzig Goat," Works of Luther, translated by A. Steimle (The Philadelphia Edition; Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1930), III, 282 f.

<sup>52</sup>Huther, op. cit., p. 253.

the opposite of *σκότους*, means light, and probably refers to the fact that God has transferred them from the darkness of sin and despair into the light of His redeeming love and joy. So Luther teaches in his Commentary of the First General Epistle of Peter:

And this is the way in which your preaching is to be discharged, that one brother proclaim to another the powerful work of God: how ye have been ransomed from sin, death, hell, and all evil, by Him, and have been called to eternal life. Thus shall you also instruct others how they may come also to the same light.<sup>53</sup>

From a study of this passage, one can readily see the glorious state of a believer in Jesus Christ. God by His grace has chosen and selected sinful persons, by the redemption has purchased them to be His personal property, has brought them into His Kingdom in which every member is a Royal Priest, has given them the privilege of serving Him, and has placed before them the challenge to share with and publish these mercies to, all people. As was stated in the Introduction, it was the principle of the Royal Priesthood that produced such a tremendous effect in the spread of Christianity the first century after Christ. Kantonen shows the power, program, and goal of the Priesthood of Believers for the present century:

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<sup>53</sup>Martin Luther, The First Epistle of St. Peter, The Second Epistle of St. Peter, The Epistle of St. Jude, a translation, preface by L. H. Gillett (Harlem, New York: 1859), p. 109.

It introduces Christian love as the dominant motive in every occupation and judges every enterprise from that point of view. It transforms the negatives of religion into positives, enabling Luther, for example, to interpret "Thou shalt not steal" as implying: work and earn your own living so that you may have something to give to the needy; to be idle is to rob your needy neighbor. It puts an end to compartmentalization and makes the service motive, as over against the profit motive, a Christian responsibility in every situation. It acknowledges that the world is evil, but instead of counseling escape or retreat, it summons every Christian to be an outlet for the leavening influence of the Kingdom. It provides the social program of the Church with its most effective method, not the construction of utopias or futile frontal attacks upon established systems, but the same personal witnessing by word and act to the life-changing power of the Gospel, which enabled the primitive church to win its victories. To use one of Luther's most telling metaphors, it calls every Christian to be the disguise under which God can enter even where He is not openly welcomed.<sup>54</sup>

In conclusion, perhaps it would be in place to make several observations. In the first place, the participle *καλέσαντος* taken from *καλέω* means the effectual calling of God, the conversion of a sinner. This verb is never used in the New Testament in respect to calling a person into the holy ministry. The only passage that may be debated is Galatians 1:15,16. In these verses Paul is telling the Galatians that God *καλέσας* him through His grace "to reveal His Son *ἐν ἐμοί*, that I may preach the gospel to the Gentiles." There are some who translate *ἐν ἐμοί* "through me." They interpret the passage with the idea that God called Paul into the ministry to reveal His Son through

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<sup>54</sup>Kantonen, *op. cit.*, p. 169 f.

him. However, the context of the whole chapter is God revealing His Son to Paul, converting him, not of Paul going out to convert the Gentiles.

Another observation that can be made from I Peter 2:9 is that the Royal Priesthood of Believers is a "group concept." Though each Christian is an individual priest before God, there is no room for individualism or isolationism. Peter speaks of the Royal Priesthood as a class of priests. Even in Revelation, where the emphasis is on the individual priests, the Holy Writer is speaking to them as a group. This seems to bear out the common responsibility that each member has to the group itself and to the world. A Christian is never alone. Whatever difficulty or suffering he must face, Christ and all the saints are at his side.<sup>55</sup> "Since Christ bears our own burdens, we are free to bear the burdens of the brethren."<sup>56</sup> Whatever a believer does, in whatsoever position he may be, he is serving others in behalf of and also as a representative of the Royal Priesthood of Believers. Kantonen sums up the "group concept" of the Royal Priesthood of Believers with these words:

It is a dynamic nucleus for the integration of human life. It binds people together. It unites the followers of Christ into a household of faith for worship and for work together. To say that a Christian is an individual answerable only to God is simply un-

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<sup>55</sup>Kantonen, op. cit., p. 164.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 163.

true. God has set him to live out his life not in isolated privacy, but within divinely appointed frameworks of living. He is never a mere private individual. He cannot escape being a member. Just as he is a member of a home, of a community, and of a nation, so in the matter of religion he is a member of the church.....<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 173.

Peter refers to the believers also as a *ἑκκλησία* (church). I Peter 2:15 reads *καὶ ὑμεῖς ὡς λίθοι ζῶντες* (and you as living stones). *ἑκκλησία* is used in the same sense in I Peter 2:9: *ὡς ἑκκλησία ἁγία* (as a holy church). This text also is quite well established. In only three instances are there variant readings, and these do not alter the basic meaning of the text. The first variation is with the word *ἑκκλησία* being read *ἐκκλησία* in some manuscripts, as well as the Vulgate read *ἐκκλησία* from the verb *ἐκκλησιάζω* to build upon a foundation. Tischendorf supports this reading. But *ἑκκλησία* is favored by B, K<sup>2</sup>, the Byzantine text, and many other manuscripts. Hort and Weiss have this reading in their editions.<sup>1</sup> The weight of evidence is about equal for both readings. Nestle, in using his edition upon Hort,

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<sup>1</sup> Greek New Testament, edited with Critical Apparatus by Dr. Richard Westcott, newly revised by Dr. Edwin Nestle (Sixteenth Edition) New York: American Bible Society, 1936, p. 285.

## CHAPTER III

### I PETER 2:5

Peter refers to the believers also as a *ἱερότευμα ἅγιον*. I Peter 2:5 reads *καὶ αὐτοὶ ὡς λίθοι ῥῶντες οἰκοδομεῖσθε οἶκος πνευματικὸς εἰς ἱερότευμα ἅγιον, ἀνεγέγκαι πνευματικῆς θυσίας εὐπροσδέκτου θεῷ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ*. This text also is quite well established. In only three instances are there variant readings, and these do not alter the basic meaning of the text. The first variance is with the word *οἰκοδομεῖσθε* taken from the verb *οἰκοδομέω* to build. Manuscripts *A*, *C*, and others, as well as the Vulgate read *ἐποικοδομεῖσθε* from the verb *ἐποικοδομέω* to build upon (a foundation). Tischendorf supports this reading. But *οἰκοδομεῖσθε* is favored by *B*, *N*<sup>s</sup>, the Byzantine text, and many other manuscripts. Hort and Weiss have this reading in their editions.<sup>1</sup> The weight of evidence is about equal for both readings. Nestle, in basing his edition upon Hort,

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<sup>1</sup>Greek New Testament, edited with Critical Apparatus by Dr. Eberhard Nestle, newly revised by Dr. Erwin Nestle (Sixteenth Edition; New York: American Bible Society, 1936), p. 585.

Tischendorf, and Weiss, follows the majority principle. Therefore he uses the  $\delta\iota\kappa\omicron\delta\omicron\mu\epsilon\iota\sigma\theta\epsilon$  reading.

Another variant reading is in regard to the usage of  $\epsilon\iota\varsigma$ .  $P$ , The Byzantine text, minuscule 33, and very many other manuscripts omit  $\epsilon\iota\varsigma$ . The Syriac translation (Revision of Bishop Thomas of Charkel 616 A. D.) and most of the Vulgate editions also favor the omission of  $\epsilon\iota\varsigma$ . Tischendorf holds this view.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the Hescychian or Egyptian type of text ( $\mathfrak{H}$ ) includes the reading of  $\epsilon\iota\varsigma$ .<sup>3</sup> Since the Egyptian text includes the better manuscripts, such as  $B$  and  $X$ , the weight of evidence supports the usage of  $\epsilon\iota\varsigma$ . The final variant reading is the insertion of  $\tau\hat{\omega}$  between  $\epsilon\upsilon\pi\omicron\sigma\delta\epsilon\kappa\tau\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$  and  $\theta\epsilon\omega$ .  $P$ , the Byzantine text, and most other manuscripts include  $\tau\hat{\omega}$  in their reading of I Peter 2:5. Origen also quotes this passage with the  $\tau\hat{\omega}$  before  $\theta\epsilon\omega$ . Von Soden printed  $\tau\hat{\omega}$   $\theta\epsilon\omega$  in his first critical apparatus, which he considered as of almost equal importance with his text.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the better Egyptian text omits  $\tau\hat{\omega}$ .

The background of this passage is stated in the previous chapter on I Peter 2:9. In time of tribulation Peter is exhorting the Christians to let themselves be built upon

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 585.

their foundation, Christ. In this passage Peter is giving another description of the Christian's calling. In doing so, he refers to the difference between the Old Testament Church and the New Testament covenant. The purpose of this text is to show that in the New Testament there has been fulfilled what aforesaid had been promised to the Old Testament Church, but had appeared in her only in a typical and incomplete way. Israel had a House of God; the Christian Church is called to be itself that House of God. That House was built of inanimate stones, this of living stones; it is a Spiritual House. Israel was to be a holy priesthood, but the Old Testament writings show that the people placed a greater emphasis on the temple priesthood. The Christian Church is called to be a *ἱεράτευμα ἁγίων* in this sense, that each individual is called upon to perform the work of a priest. In the Old Testament the priests offered beasts. In the New Testament covenant the holy priesthood offers spiritual sacrifices.<sup>5</sup> This is the scope of I Peter 2:5.

Peter begins this verse with the words *καὶ αὐτοί*. He thereby places the Christian side by side with Christ. For in the previous verse the Apostle speaks of Christ as a *λίθον ἰσχυρῶτα, ὅπου ἀνθρώπων ἀποδεδοκιμασμένον*

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<sup>5</sup>William Arndt, "Royal Priesthood I Peter 2:9," Concordia Theological Monthly, XII (April 1948), 241.

παρὰ δὲ θεῷ ἐκλεκτὸν ἔντιμον. As He is a Living Stone, so also are they living stones thru Him.<sup>6</sup> Caffin sums it up: "Christians are living stones by virtue of their union with the one living Stone."<sup>7</sup> Jesus' words: "Because I live, ye shall live also," (John 14:19) interpret Isaiah 51:1, "Look ye unto the rock whence ye were hewn."

The Apostle continues with οἰκοδομεῖσθε. This verb form, standing alone could be either present indicative or imperative, middle or passive. Hart prefers to use οἰκοδομεῖσθε as a present indicative rather than an imperative.<sup>8</sup> He believes that Peter habitually uses the aorist for his imperatives, even when one might expect the present.<sup>9</sup> With οἰκοδομεῖσθε as a present indicative verse five would then read: "As living stones, you are building yourselves up." But this does not fit in with the context of the chapter. Peter is exhorting the believers to remain steadfast in spite of the trials and temptations.

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 246.

<sup>7</sup>B. C. Caffin, "The First Epistle of Peter," The Pulpit Commentary, edited by H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (New York and Toronto: Funk and Wagnalls Company), p. 69.

<sup>8</sup>J. H. A. Hart, "The First Epistle General of Peter," The Expositors Greek New Testament (New York: George H. Doran Company, n. d.), V, 55.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

In that case one would hardly use the indicative. Huther regarded  $\sigma\acute{\iota}\kappa\omicron\varsigma\omicron\sigma\mu\epsilon\iota\sigma\theta\epsilon$  as a present imperative passive, "be ye built up."<sup>10</sup> This has merit, for the imperative seems to be the best usage for this verb in relation to the thought in the previous verses. Furthermore, the passive shows that it is God alone who is the Cause and Power of a person's life in Christ. Fronmüller takes  $\sigma\acute{\iota}\kappa\omicron\varsigma\omicron\sigma\mu\epsilon\iota\sigma\theta\epsilon$  as a present middle imperative in a reflexive sense.<sup>11</sup> This also would fit in the context. Since Christ is so excellent a Corner Stone, on which rests the entire Spiritual Temple of God, build yourselves up upon Him. Luther favors the use of the middle voice. In his interpretation of I Peter 2:5 he says:

How can we build ourselves up? By the Gospel and that which is preached. The builders are the preachers; the Christians who hear the Gospel are they who are built and the stones which are to be fitted on this corner stone; so that we are to

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<sup>10</sup>John Ed. Huther, "Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the General Epistles of James, Peter, John, and Jude," Meyer's Commentary on the New Testament, translated from the Third Edition of the German by Paton J. Gloag, D. B. Croon, and Clarke H. Irwin; American Editor, Timothy Dwight (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, Publishers, 1887), p. 246.

<sup>11</sup>G. F. C. Fronmüller, "The Epistle General of Peter," A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, translated from the Second Revised German Edition, with additions original and selected by J. Isidor Mombert, edited by John Peter Lange and Philip Schaff (New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1869), p. 32.

repose our confidence on Him, and let our hearts stand and rest upon Him.<sup>12</sup>

In other words, when God brings His gospel to the believers, and they in turn grow in their love and trust in Him, they are letting themselves be built up upon Him. Whether οἰκοδομεῖσθε is middle or passive is controversial.

Actually, it makes little difference, for both are shades of the same principle. In the phrase ὡς λίθοι ἵσταντες οἰκοδομεῖσθε Peter again strikes the "group concept." He thinks of the believers both as individuals and as individuals connected with each other, being built up together upon Christ.<sup>13</sup>

The Apostle now says that the believers are to be οἶκος πνευματικός. It must be noted, however, that Peter in this passage is not showing the various progressions in the life of a Christian -- first living stones, then a spiritual house, and finally a holy priesthood. These concepts are all in apposition to each other. The writer is here presenting a picture of the Holy Christian Church on

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<sup>12</sup>Martin Luther, The First Epistle of St. Peter, The Second Epistle of St. Peter, The Epistle of St. Jude, a translation, preface by E. H. Gillett (Harlem, New York: 1859), p. 88.

<sup>13</sup>Nathaniel Marshman Williams, "Commentary on the Epistles of Peter," An American Commentary on the New Testament, edited by Alvah Hovey (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 188), VI, 26.

earth in its various aspects and emphases. The believer is to note each phase of the Church and grow in it.

In his commentary, The General Epistles, James, Peter, and Judas, Moffat interprets οἶκος πνευματικός :

Spiritual is equivalent to "not made with hands" and there may be an allusion to the Latin vivus in the adjective living, for vivus, when applied to a stone, meant a stone that had not been worked by hand. Hebrew thought also associated the building of a house with a family as in I Samuel 2:35 where to "build up a sure house for David" was to ensure a succession of children; indeed the Targum on Psalm 118:22 reads "the youth which the builders rejected."<sup>14</sup>

However, to associate the building of a house with a family does not fit in the context of verse five, even if adapted to refer to a spiritual family. Lenski takes issue with Moffatt's opinion and says:

In this passage οἶκος does not mean a dwelling for a family; all priests do not dwell in one residence, and still less do they offer up sacrifices in their residences. Both the reference to "priesthood" and to "sacrifices" make this house a temple or sanctuary in which God dwells and receives these sacrifices.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, to say that πνευματικός is equivalent to "not made with hands" may be a fine observation, but it does not go far enough. The house is πνευματικός because the

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<sup>14</sup>James Moffatt, "The General Epistles, James, Peter, and Judas," The Moffatt New Testament Commentary (New York and London: Harper and Brothers Publishers), p. 114 f.

<sup>15</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1938), p. 90.

Spirit of God made it from λίθοι ζῶντες, in contra-  
distinction to the temple which was built from dead ones.

The Spirit of God stamped His nature and life upon the  
stones which compose the Holy Christian Church.<sup>16</sup> On  
Peter's comparison of the Old Testament Church with the  
New Testament Church by the words οἶκος πνευματικός,

Caffin comments:

The Church is the antitype of the temple -- a build-  
ing not material, but spiritual, consisting, not of  
dead stones, but of sanctified souls, resting on no  
earthly foundation, but on that Rock which is Christ.<sup>17</sup>

The text now states εἰς ἱεράτευμα ἅγιον. The  
living stones which are built into the house, are also the  
body of priests who minister in the house, and the priests  
must be holy.<sup>18</sup> This is the high point of the comparison.  
Peter addresses the members of the Christian congregations  
(1:1) and reminds them of their calling εἰς ἱεράτευμα  
ἅγιον. In the New Testament Church the believers them-  
selves are members of God's holy priesthood. In Exodus 19:6  
and in I Peter 2:9 ἅγιον is the adjective of ἔθνος,

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<sup>16</sup>Huther, op. cit., p. 247.

<sup>17</sup>Caffin, op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>18</sup>Charles Bigg, "The Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude," International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), LXI, 129.

not of ἱεράτευμα . There the ἱεράτευμα is described as a βασιλείου ἱεράτευμα . In verse five, however, the ἱεράτευμα is described as ἅγιον probably because its origin is in the Holy Ghost and to emphasize its holiness of service.

In the Old Testament the priest served in the temple, entered the holy place, and went into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. The priesthood was a high office and to be a member of it was a great privilege. A priest's relation to God was more intimate than that of the ordinary people. He was their mediator, who represented Israel at the throne of mercy. In the New Testament, every believer, because he is a member of an holy priesthood, can go directly to God, in prayer, pleadings, praise, and thanksgiving. There is no mediator required. Furthermore, like the Old Testament priesthood, the New Testament holy priesthood is to partake in holy service for the benefit of others.<sup>19</sup> The laity as well as the clergy are to be active in this respect. All are to offer up holy sacrifices.

Bishop Lightfoot, however, considers the conception of the Holy Priesthood of believers as an ideal, which one should be very cautious to apply. He warns:

This conception is strictly an ideal, which we must ever hold before our eyes.....but which nevertheless

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<sup>19</sup>Arndt, op. cit., p. 247.

cannot supersede the necessary wants of human society; and if crudely and hastily applied, will lead only to signal failure. As appointed days and set places are indispensable to her efficiency, so also the Church could not fulfill the set purposes for which she exists without rulers and teachers, without a ministry of reconciliation, in short, without an order of men who may in some sense be designated a priesthood.<sup>20</sup>

Bishop Lightfoot is under the impression that the Holy Priesthood may rule out the holy ministry and the teachers. He also seems to identify the ministry with a special order of priesthood.

The question then amounts to this: What is the difference between the laity and the clergy? It should be noted that the clergyman as well as the layman is a member of the Holy Priesthood. Also, the clergy is not a higher class, but merely a special office of the Holy Priesthood. The clergyman performs a special function, that of publicly preaching the Word and administering the Sacraments, as a representative and as an expression of the Holy Priesthood of Believers.<sup>21</sup> Teachers and preachers then are not ruled out by the Universal Priesthood, and the ministry of reconciliation is actually the ministry of the believers. This Luther emphasizes:

Therefore they are all priests, as we call them, as many of us as are Christians. But the priests, as we call them, are ministers chosen from among us, who do

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<sup>20</sup>Caffin, op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>21</sup>Arndt, loc. cit.

all that they do in our name. And the priesthood is nothing but a ministry, as we learn from I Corinthians 4: "Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ, and the dispensers of the mysteries of God."<sup>22</sup>

In respect to designating the clergy as a priesthood, as Lightfoot suggests, Luther points out the New Testament never speaks of pastors and teachers as special priests, because of their office. Luther replied to Emser's defense of the Roman Catholic teaching of such a two-fold priesthood, by saying, in part:

The Scriptures make us all priests alike, as I have said, but the churchy priesthood which is now universally distinguished from the laity and alone called a priesthood, in the Scriptures is called ministerium, servitus, dispensatio, episcopatus, presbyterium, and at no place sacerdotium or spiritualis.<sup>23</sup>

Peter concludes verse five by elaborating on the priesthood concept: ἀνερέγκαι ἰεροματικῆς θυσίας εὐπροσέκτους δεῦρ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. ἀνερέγκαι is the first aorist infinitive of ἀναφέρω to carry up (to the altar), to offer up. Again, Peter draws upon his Old Testament background. The verb ἀναφέρω suggests the pic-

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<sup>22</sup>Martin Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," Works of Martin Luther, translated by Albert T. Steinhauser (The Philadelphia Edition; Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1943), II, 279.

<sup>23</sup>Martin Luther, "Dr. Martin Luther's Answer To The Superchristian, Superspiritual, and Superlearned Book of God Emser of Leipzig, With a Glance At His Comrade Murner," Works of Martin Luther, translated by A. Steimle (The Philadelphia Edition; Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1930), III, 310.

ture of a priest bearing the sacrifice up to the brazen altar. The latter was four and one-half feet high and was approached by an incline up which the priest carried the sacrifice. Literally ἀναφέρειν means to carry up.<sup>24</sup> However, these sacrifices are no longer necessary since Christ, the great High Priest, offered Himself, the All-Sufficient Sacrifice, upon the altar of the cross.<sup>25</sup>

Yet Peter says that there are still to be sacrifices in the Church, but he does not explain what they are. For this one must go to parallel passages in the Scriptures. Revelation 8:34 refers to the sacrifice of prayer. "And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand." As the burning of incense was connected with the sacrifice of the Old Testament, so is the incense of prayer in the New Testament Church. In referring to this spiritual sacrifice Luther says:

Thus Christ has obtained for us if we believe on Him, that we are not only His brethren,..... but also fellow-priests with Him, who may boldly come into the presence of God in the spirit of faith and cry, "Abba, Father!", pray for one

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<sup>24</sup>Kenneth Wuest, First Peter in the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1942), p. 53.

<sup>25</sup>Caffin, loc. cit.

another and do all things which we see done and prefigured in the outward and visible works of priests.<sup>26</sup>

Hebrews 13:15 points to the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving as one of the duties in the program of the Holy Priesthood of Believers. "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name." Hebrews 13:16 reminds the Priesthood of the sacrifice of alms. "But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." Like Hebrews 13:16, Philippians 4:8 brings out the sacrifice of doing good. "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." Luke 9:23 are the words of Jesus about the sacrifice of taking up one's cross daily. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." The Apostle John speaks of the sacrifice of giving one's life for the brethren. I John 3:16 reads, "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and

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<sup>26</sup>Martin Luther, "A Treatise on Christian Liberty," Works of Martin Luther, translated by W. A. Lambert (Philadelphia Edition; Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1943), II, 325.

we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." In Romans 12:1 Paul sums up the entire work of the Holy Priesthood of Believers: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." As Christ, the High Priest, gave Himself to God, so are the members of the Holy Priesthood to give themselves to God as their reasonable service. In his interpretation of Isaiah 60:18 Luther expounds the spiritual sacrifice concept:

The altar is Christ; the priests, however, are those who teach the Gospel. These slaughter and kill everything whereof the world boasts, likewise all carnal wisdom and justice.....As a result, we all, each and everyone of us, are priests, for we daily mortify our old Adam, as is stated in Romans 12:1.<sup>27</sup>

In his Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Peter, Luther expresses the same thought in his interpretation of 2:5.

For this stubborn nature in flesh and blood must be slain by the Gospel; thus do we permit ourselves to be offered upon the cross and die. Herein is exercised the true priest's office, in that we sacrifice to God that wicked rogue, the corrupt old dolt (of our nature); if the world does it not, we must do it ourselves, but it must in the end be all removed, whatever we have of the old Adam.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Martin Luther, "Auslegung des Alten Testaments," Dr. Martin Luther's Sämmtliche Schriften, edited by John Georg Walch (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1897), VI, 779.

<sup>28</sup>Luther, The First Epistle of St. Peter, The Second Epistle of St. Peter, The Epistle of St. Jude, op. cit., p. 92.

These spiritual sacrifices, offered by the Holy Priesthood of Believers are *εὐπροσδέκτος δυνὸς διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ*. The sacrifices that are offered up by the Priesthood, are offered through Christ, the High Priest. Only through Him are they acceptable to God. For God looks at the believers' sacrifice through the Sacrifice of the High Priest. Luther says:

Since Christ is the Corner Stone whereon we are laid, it must be only through Him that we are to treat with God.....for God does not look upon my cross even though I torture myself to death, but he looks upon Christ through whom my works are acceptable before God, which otherwise would not be worthy an alms of a straw's value.<sup>29</sup>

From the study of I Peter 2:5 one can readily see that Peter is here emphasizing the service aspect of the Priesthood of Believers. The comparison with the Old Testament priesthood brings this out. For to be a priest is essentially to be consecrated to serve. Kantonen sums it up:

When the love of God in Christ has taken a man of his own hands, then, in the words of Nels Ferré: "the will to live has become a will to love; the will to power, a will to fellowship; the will to superiority, a will to service; the will to social recognition, a will to responsibility and concern."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>30</sup>T. A. Kantonen, Resurgence of the Gospel, (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1948), p. 146, quoting Nels Ferré, Return to Christianity (New York: Harper, 1943), p. 17.

## CHAPTER IV

### REVELATION 1:6

The Book of Revelation has the remaining three passages in the New Testament which specifically speak of the Priesthood of Believers. The first reference is in the opening chapter where verse six reads: *καὶ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν ἱερείς τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων. ἀμήν*. But before one proceeds into the study of the background and exegesis of this verse, it is necessary to establish the text. The mechanical apparatus in Nestle's text lists a number of variant readings for this verse. The first variance is with the word *ἐποίησεν*. 046, minuscule 69, and a few other manuscripts favor *πνιήσαντι*. However, since Nestle does not list the Hort, Tischendorf, or Weiss editions with this variant reading, one can take for granted that they favor *ἐποίησεν*. The Egyptian text, which includes *Ἄ*, also favors *ἐποίησεν*, while 046 is a part of the less important Byzantine text.

At this point perhaps it would be in place to list the manuscripts which contain The Revelation either in its

entirety or in part. There are the four uncials:  $\aleph^s$ , A, C, P ; a group headed by 046; and the great mass of minuscules.

$P^{47}$  is very important for The Revelation. It allies itself more with the first group than with either of the others. However, these five manuscripts show a good deal of divergence among themselves.<sup>1</sup>

$\eta\mu\alpha\varsigma$  is also challenged by other readings. A , minuscule 42 and other manuscripts support the reading  $\eta\mu\iota\nu$  . On the other hand, the original Bible version of Jerome, manuscript C , and minuscule 2329 favor  $\eta\mu\omega\nu$  . A marginal reading of Westcott and Hort also regard  $\eta\mu\omega\nu$  as of almost equal importance with  $\eta\mu\alpha\varsigma$  .<sup>2</sup> Though manuscripts A and C carry much weight in supporting  $\eta\mu\iota\nu$  and  $\eta\mu\omega\nu$  , there is even better evidence that attests  $\eta\mu\alpha\varsigma$  .  $\aleph^s$  , the Byzantine text (which includes 046), P, the Clementia 1592 edition of the Vulgate, as well as many other manuscripts favor  $\eta\mu\alpha\varsigma$  .<sup>3</sup>  $P^{47}$  does not come into consideration, for it contains the Revelation only

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<sup>1</sup>Frederic Kenyon, Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts (New York and London: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1941), p. 127.

<sup>2</sup>Greek New Testament, edited with Critical Apparatus by Dr. Eberhard Nestle, newly revised by Dr. Erwin Nestle (Sixteenth Edition; New York, American Bible Society, 1936), p. 613.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

from chapters nine to seventeen.<sup>4</sup>

The next word that is contested is βασιλείαν . 046, minuscule 69, and other manuscripts have the βασιλείαν reading. P, minuscule 1, and other manuscripts favor βασιλείς και . This will be referred to at greater length later in the paper. But the reading which Nestle chose, βασιλείαν , is strongly attested by X, A, C .<sup>5</sup> The understanding is that whatever manuscripts are not listed with a variance support the reading of his text.

There are also a few minor variant readings concerning ἱεραῖς . Minuscules 42 and 69 plus other manuscripts favor the reading ἱεράτευμα . But ἱεραῖς is well established by the evidence of X, A, C, P and 046.

τῶν αἰώνων is the last reading that is challenged in verse six. A, P, and a few other manuscripts, as well as the Westcott and Hort edition omit these words. X, C, and 046 include τῶν αἰώνων in their texts. The evidence seems to be equally distributed, perhaps slightly favoring the inclusion of τῶν αἰώνων . Since the Tischendorf and the Weiss editions support τῶν αἰώνων , Nestle places these words in his text.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 613.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

Tradition says that the Apostle John is the author of the book of Revelation. It is true that in Chapter 1:1 the writer calls himself God's servant, John, without assuming the designation of apostle. But since he wrote to the seven congregations of Asia Minor as one having unusual authority, there is no reason to question this tradition.<sup>7</sup> At the time of writing John was in exile on the island of Patmos in the Southeastern Aegean Sea, off the coast of Asia Minor. He was banished to this treeless and rocky spot "for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus," chapter 1:9.<sup>8</sup> Halley points to the persecutions of the Christians as the background for The Revelation:

The book was written in the lurid light of burning martyrs. John lived thru the first two of the ten Imperial persecutions, and into the third. In Nero's persecution, 64 AD, vast multitudes were crucified... burned to death....In this persecution Paul and Peter had been put to death, and possibly some of the other Apostles. John alone was left. In the persecution of Domitian, which had sent John to Patmos, 40,000 Christians had suffered martyrdom. In that dark hour John saw Visions of coming dawn.<sup>9</sup>

As was stated before, The Revelation was addressed to the seven congregations in Asia Minor. Because of the per-

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<sup>7</sup>Paul E. Kretzmann, "The Epistles of the Apostle Paul. The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles. The Book of Revelation," Popular Commentary of the New Testament (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1922), II, 589.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Henry Hampton Halley, Pocket Bible Handbook (Sixteenth Edition; Chicago: Henry H. Halley, 1944), p. 523.

secutions, it was designed to meet an immediate need. But like all other New Testament books it has a message for all Christendom. Its purpose is to comfort and encourage the Christians in the face of trials and temptations and to show that the Kingdom of Christ will overpower the forces of hell and bring glory everlasting to all believers.<sup>10</sup>

Revelation 1:6 is a part of the first blessing and greeting which John addressed to the seven churches in Asia (1:4). In fact, verse six coupled with verse five is the first doxology of the book. As Gaebelin says:

This inspired outburst of Praise is the true Glory song of the true Church. It contains the blessed fundamentals of the Gospel of Grace, what He has done for us and what He has made us, and what we shall be with Him.<sup>11</sup>

In verse six John speaks of the Royal Priesthood of Believers by saying: *καὶ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν, ἱερατεῖς τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ εὐδοκῶν*. In order to determine the meaning of these words in their relation to the Priesthood of Believers, it is necessary first to investigate the clause: *καὶ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν*. What does John mean when he describes the Christians as a "kingdom?" What is the concept of *βασιλεία* according to the New Testament? Some take *βασιλεία* as equivalent to the

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<sup>10</sup>Kretzmann, op. cit., p. 590.

<sup>11</sup>Arno C. Gaebelin, The Revelation (New York City: Publication Office "Our Hope," 446 Fourth Avenue, 1915), p. 29.

Christian Church. Others say that in the preaching of Jesus and of John it means reign or rule, and that it is frequently a nomen actionis.<sup>12</sup> The Septuagint often uses

βασιλεία in the sense of rule or reign:

In Judith 1:1 the author says: "In the twelfth year of the reign (βασιλείας) of Nabuchodonosor" etc. It is evident that "realm" would be an altogether unsuitable rendering of βασιλεία. A passage containing the same meaning of the term is Esther 3:6: "And he (i. e., Haman) resolved to destroy all the Jews under the rule (ὕπὸ τῆς βασιλείαν) of Artaxerxes." If the preposition were ἐν, the meaning "realm" would be indicated; but ὑπὸ compels us to translate "reign." In I Macc. 1:10 Antiochus Epiphanes is said to have become king in the 137th year of the reign (βασιλείας) of Greeks (Ἑλλήνων, without the article). The translation "kingdom" is out of the question because there was no kingdom of the Greeks; but Syria and Egypt were ruled over by Greeks.<sup>13</sup>

However, βασιλεία occurs in the Septuagint also in the meaning of realm. For example, Dr. Goodspeed's translation of I Maccabees 1:16 reads:

When his rule appeared to Antioch to be established, he conceived the idea of becoming king of the land of Egypt, so that he might reign over the two kingdoms.

Here the word βασιλεία is used in both meanings, that of "realm" as well as "rule".<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>William Arndt, "The New Testament Teaching on the Kingdom of God," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXI (January 1950), 9.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

The New Testament often refers to βασιλεία in the sense of realm. In Matthew 13:41 and Revelation 16:10 βασιλεία is spoken of as a community of subjects: "The Son of man shall send forth his angels and they shall gather out of his kingdom (συνλέξουσιν ἐκ τῆς βασιλείας ) all things that offend, and them which do iniquity." (Matthew 13:41). "And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness and they gnawed their tongues for pain." (Revelation 16:10). Also, when the New Testament uses the phrase "entering into the kingdom," it refers to the "realm" meaning of βασιλεία. "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom." (ἔλθης εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν σου. Luke 23:42). Kittel lists some of the passages which speak of the "Eintritt ins Gottesreich." The verb in these passages is either εἰσερχεσθαι or εἰσπορεύεσθαι : Matthew 5:20; 7:21; 18:3; 19:23 f.; 23:13; Mark 9:47; John 3:5; II Peter 1:11.<sup>15</sup>

While βασιλεία often is used in the sense of "realm" in the New Testament, it is also true that it quite frequently occurs in the meaning of "rule" or "reign." Luke 19:12 and 15 bear this out:

He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom( λαβεῖν

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<sup>15</sup>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: Verlag von W. Kohlhammer, 1933), Erster Band, p. 589.

ἑαυτῷ βασιλείαν ) and to return.....  
 And it came to pass that when he was returned,  
 having received the kingdom ( λαβόντα τὴν βασιλείαν )  
 then he commanded the servants to be called unto  
 Him.....

In the Lord's Prayer "Thy Kingdom come" ( ἔλθ' ἄγε ἡ βασιλεία σου Matthew 6:10) refers to God's gracious rule. It is this use of βασιλεία as "rule" which the New Testament writers have in mind when they speak of the kingdom as near, coming near, or that it should come. Concerning this Kittel says:

Wenn das Gottesreich, wie sich schon aus dem Sprachgebrauch ergibt, den Zustand und der Königsherrschaft bedeutet, so zeigt sich das folgerichtig in der Einzelbeschreibung dieses Zustandes. Die beherrschende Aussage ist, dass das Gottesreich nahe ist, genahet ist, zu uns gelangt ist, kommt, in Erscheinung treten wird, kommen soll, ἤγγικεν Matthew 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:15; Matthew 10:7; Luke 10:9.11; ἔγγυς ἐστίν Luke 21:31; ἔρχομένη Mark 11:10; ἔρχεται Luke 17:20; ἐφθασεν Matthew 12:28; Luke 11:20; κέλλει ἀναφαίνεσθαι Luke 19:11; ἔλθ' ἄγε Matthew 6:10; Luke 11:2.16

Since βασιλεία occurs in the New Testament in the sense of "rule" and also of "realm," it follows that its meaning in a given place must be determined by the context. However, Zahn points out:

Since the two thoughts, although conceptually they can be differentiated, can hardly be regarded as two distinct notions, in many instances the meaning we assign to the term is merely the more prominent, not the exclusive one.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 585.

<sup>17</sup>Arndt, op. cit., p. 11, quoting Zahn, Grundriss der neutestamentlichen Theologie, p. 7.

But in viewing the contexts in which βασιλεία is found in the New Testament, it seems that the "reign" aspect of βασιλεία is emphasized more often than the "realm."

A word is now in place on the relationship between βασιλεία and ἐκκλησία. According to the concrete sense of βασιλεία (the "realm" emphasis), there is a very thin line of difference between the two concepts. Both are the same in regard to the fact that they exist already in this world. The believers are members of the βασιλεία and of the ἐκκλησία even while they are yet on earth. This is what Jesus meant when He told the Pharisees: "For behold, the Kingdom of God is among you." ( ἐν τῷ ὑμῶν Luke 17:21) Nevertheless, there is a distinction between the two concepts when one remembers that βασιλεία suggests the thought of a nation, people, ruled over by a king, while ἐκκλησία refers to the assembly, group, or meeting of people.<sup>18</sup>

The most obvious difference between the two terms is that βασιλεία according to its abstract meaning is "rule" or "reign," while ἐκκλησία only has a concrete meaning, "assembly."<sup>19</sup> But there is yet another distinction.

βασιλεία has an eschatological emphasis. This Kittel points out: Die Verwirklichung der Gottesherrschaft ist

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

Zukunft. Und diese Zukunft bestimmt den Menschen in seiner Gegenwart."<sup>20</sup> The following passages are just a few in the New Testament which show the eschatological aspect of βασιλεία :

II Timothy 4:1: I charge thee, therefore, before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, Who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and his kingdom. II Timothy 4:18: The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom.

The most notable eschatological emphasis of βασιλεία is in the portrayal of the Judgment scene in Matthew 25. Here the righteous are described as inheriting the kingdom. βασιλεία then is the Church triumphant. Here on earth it is an indication of the complete fullness and glory that the believers will receive at Judgment and in eternity.

The word βασιλεία occurs also in the study of Revelation 1:6 where the writer says that Christ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν ἱερέων. Barnes follows the King James version in translating these words "kings and priests." He pictures the Christians as having the exalted rank and dignity of kings, and that they in common with the Savior will reign triumphant over all enemies, since they have

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<sup>20</sup>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament,  
op. cit., p. 588.

gained the victory over sin, death, and hell.<sup>21</sup> Yet, on the basis of the studies made previously, the reading of "kings" in Revelation 1:6 cannot be held by the better manuscripts. Neither is "kings" an adequate translation of βασιλείαν, even though it is a scriptural truth that Christians will reign with Jesus. In Meyer's Commentary Dürstlerdieck draws attention to the impossibility of the "kings" translation on the basis of the text. He says in part:

.....upon grammatical considerations, the words could not signify that the redeemed are a "kingdom" in the sense of "a people of kings," as ἱερατεύουσα is a "people of priests" or a "royal power opposed to the world." (If this idea is to be reached, we must read either ἡμεῖς, or, in conflict with all the testimonies, with the Rec., ἡμεῖς βασιλεῖς )...<sup>22</sup>

According to the concept of βασιλεία, Christ has made the believers His kingdom. They constitute His realm. The American Commentary favors this interpretation and states: "Believers are spoken of collectively as a "kingdom," in the sense in which that word is so often used

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<sup>21</sup>Albert Barnes, "Book of Revelation," Notes on the New Testament (London: Blackie & Son, Paternoster Buildings, E. C.), XI, 46.

<sup>22</sup>Friedrich Dürstlerdieck, "Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John," Meyer's Commentary, translated and edited by Henry E. Jacobs (New York and London: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1886), p. 104.

in the New Testament."<sup>23</sup> Each believer is a member of Christ's kingdom. Thereby he is also under God's gracious rule. For it is God's rule which brings a person into the kingdom and continues to govern him there. This agrees with verses five and six which praise Christ for what He has done. In Colossians 1:13 Paul reminds the Christians that it is God Who brought them into the kingdom: ὅς ἐρρύσατο ἡμᾶς ..... καὶ μετέστησεν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς ἀγάπης αὐτοῦ. In I Thessalonians 2:12 Paul states that God calls the Christians into the kingdom: ..... μαρτυρούμενοι εἰς τὸ περιπατεῖν ὑμᾶς ἀξίως τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ καλοῦντος ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν αὐτοῦ βασιλείαν. This kingdom man receives with faith and repentance. This point Kittel emphasizes:

Dem Menschen, der vor Gott und seine Herrschaft gestellt wird, gilt der Ruf zur Umkehr. Wo der Mensch diesem Ruf in Glauben, dh im Gehorsam folgt, da bekommt er es zu tun mit dem Gottesreich, das ohne sein Zutun kommt da wird das Evangelium eine ihn treffende frohe Botschaft.<sup>24</sup>

Jesus describes the faith which is necessary for entering His kingdom, as becoming like little children. In Mark 10:15 he warns: ὅς ἂν μὴ δέξῃται τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ Θεοῦ ὡς παιδίου, οὐ μὴ εἰσελεύσῃ εἰς αὐτήν.

<sup>23</sup>Justin A. Smith, "Commentary on the Revelation," An American Commentary, edited by Alvah Hovey (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1888), VII, 30.

<sup>24</sup>Theologisches Worterbuch zum Neuen Testament, loc. cit.

It is also true that in the βασιλεία God conducts His rule through people. In this respect one can say that the believers partake of His rule. Dusterdieck says: "The redeemed are the 'kingdom' of God, the subjects, and of course, also the blessed sharers in God's kingdom."<sup>25</sup> Yet, in verse six the βασιλεία concept gives the believers sovereignty only in a derived and secondary sense. Nowhere in the New Testament is the believer expressly called "king." Kittel remarks:

So eindeutig und einhellig das nt.liche Zeugnis von dieser autobasileia Jesu Christi ist, so zurückhaltend ist das NT nun begreiflicherweise in der Gleichsetzung der βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ mit den Christusgläubigen. Nur eine einzige hierher gehörige Stelle ist überhaupt zu finden: Christus ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν Apk. 1:6. Es bedarf keiner näheren Erläuterung und Begründung, dass die Christen als βασιλεία nur im abgeleiteten, dh von Christus abgeleiteten Sinne verstanden werden dürfen.<sup>26</sup>

Revelation 5:10 will deal further with the royal power and dignity of Christians.

In verse six John adds that Christ has made the believers *ἱερατεῖς*. Charles states: "Our text then means that Christ has made us a kingdom, each member of which is a

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<sup>25</sup>Dusterdieck, loc. cit.

<sup>26</sup>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, op. cit., p. 592.

priest unto God."<sup>27</sup> In addressing the seven churches in Asia Minor John emphasizes that each individual is a priest unto God and his Father. In I Peter 2:5 and 9 the words emphasize that the Church collectively is called a Priesthood, although the individual idea is also implied.<sup>28</sup> In Revelation 1:6 the writer uses the concrete plural. He individualizes: every one of us is a priest. This is a holy kingdom.<sup>29</sup> In other words, this is the same principle of the Priesthood of Believers as that spoken of in I Peter 2:5 and 9, the difference being only in the point of emphasis. Dusterdieck observes:

"Priests unto God" are the redeemed of Christ, and invested with the kingdom.....But the priesthood of all the redeemed lies in this, that they come immediately to God, offer to Him their prayers, and further give themselves peculiarly to Him in holy obedience and spiritual service.<sup>30</sup>

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27R. H. Charles, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John," I, The International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), p. 16.

28A. Plummer, "Revelation," The Pulpit Commentary, edited by Joseph S. Exell and H. D. M. Spence (New York and London; Funk & Wagnalls Company), p. 70.

29R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation (Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1943), p. 47.

30Dusterdieck, op. cit., p. 104 f.

CHAPTER V

REVELATION 5:10

The fourth scripture passage in the New Testament which specifically refers to the Royal Priesthood is Revelation 5:10 καὶ ἐποίησας αὐτοὺς τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερεῖς, καὶ βασιλεύσουσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. Like the other texts this verse is also challenged by variant readings. The first word that is contested is αὐτοὺς . In its place the Clementina Edition of the Vulgate, 1592, has ἡμᾶς . The sixth century Church Father, Primasius, quotes Revelation 5:10 with the word, ἡμᾶς , in his writing on the Apocalypse. However, all the leading manuscripts support αὐτοὺς .<sup>1</sup> The next variance is with the word βασιλείαν . The Byzantine text, P , and most manuscripts favor βασιλείᾳς . Von Soden's text of 1913 also contains βασιλείᾳς . But here again the better manuscripts, such as A, C, support βασιλείαν .<sup>2</sup> ἱερεῖς is another word in

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<sup>1</sup>Greek New Testament, edited with Critical Apparatus by Dr. Eberhard Nestle, newly revised by Dr. Erwin Nestle (Sixteenth Edition; New York: American Bible Society, 1936), p. 623.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

verse ten that must be established. *ἱερατεῖαν* occurs in the  $\aleph$  manuscript.<sup>3</sup> However, *A*, which in Revelation is considered equally important as  $\aleph$ , plus *C*, *P*, *O46*, support *ἱερατεῖαν*. The final variance in verse six concerns *βασιλεύσουσιν*. *A*, *O46*, minuscule 104, and very many manuscripts favor *βασιλεύσουσιν*. The Clementina Edition of the Vulgate, 1592, and the Westcott and Hort Edition give the reading, *βασιλεύσομεν*. Those that support *βασιλεύσουσιν* are  $\aleph$ , *P*, minuscule 1, other manuscripts, and the Wordsworth - White Edition of the original Bible version of Jerome.<sup>4</sup> *βασιλεύσουσιν* and *βασιλεύσομεν* seem to be equally well attested. Nestle does not refer to *C* as supporting either reading. Since Nestle prefers *βασιλεύσουσιν* it can be taken for granted that both the Tischendorf and the Weiss editions contain the *βασιλεύσομεν* reading.

This text with verse nine is a doxology. The four beasts and the twenty-four elders have just fallen down before the throne of the Lamb, worshipping and praising Him because He alone was worthy to open the book of life and to loose the seals. John describes the doxology as "a new song," because it is sung by the "new creation," the

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

redeemed.<sup>5</sup> Christ's redemptive work has made them "new creatures." This fact is born out by the song itself. *ἑσφάγησ, ἠγάπησας* and *ἑποίησας* are all aorists and refer to that event which once occurred, the crucifying of the Lord (*ἑσφάγησ*). In the "new song" this one fact is described according to its effect: *ἠγάπησας κ.τ.λ.* and *ἑποίησας*.<sup>6</sup> This passage is similar to that of 1:6, but is distinguished from it by the *καί* before *ἑρεῖς*, and immediately afterwards by the addition of *βασιλεύσουσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς*. The general scope of verse ten is that Christ has purchased His people to become His kingdom in which they are all priests, and in which He has invested them all with regal authority.<sup>7</sup>

The concepts of *βασιλεία* and *ἑρεῖς*, which the writer repeats in this verse, have been discussed previously. However, Revelation 5:10 emphasizes the sovereignty of the members of the Royal Priesthood, *βασιλεύσουσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς*. Other portions in Revelation also speak of

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<sup>5</sup>William Milligan, "The Book of Revelation," The Expositor's Bible, edited by W. Robertson Nicoll (Toronto: Willard Tract Depository and Bible Depot, 1889), p. 82.

<sup>6</sup>Friedrich Dürstler, "Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John," Meyer's Commentary, translated and edited by Henry E. Jacobs (New York and London: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1886), p. 213.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 214.

the reigning of believers: 1:10; 20:4.6; 22:5. There are some who see in this sovereignty of believers the idea that Christianity will become so predominant in the world, that the believers gradually will gain more and more positions of power and influence, and finally have control of the governments. Barnes advances this viewpoint:

The dominion on the earth will be given to the saints; that is, there will be such a prevalence of true religion and the redeemed will be so much in the ascendancy, that the affairs of the nations will be in their hands.<sup>8</sup>

The Lutheran Commentary says that it is best to refer this "reigning" to the time of the Millennium.<sup>9</sup> But one cannot hold this opinion on the basis of the future, (βασιλεύουσιν. Actually, the two readings, βασιλεύουσιν or βασιλεύουσι have little difference. They merely state the result of Christ's redemption. The text reads: "He made them a kingdom," not, "He shall make them a kingdom."<sup>10</sup>

βασιλεύουσιν shows the seriousness and responsibility of belonging to God's kingdom. In order to be a member of

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<sup>8</sup>Albert Barnes, "Book of Revelation," Notes on the New Testament (London: Blackie & Son, Paternoster Buildings, E. C.), XI, 137.

<sup>9</sup>Revere F. Weidner, "Annotations on the Revelation of St. John the Divine," The Lutheran Commentary, edited by Henry Eyster Jacobs (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1898), XII, 81.

<sup>10</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation (Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1943), p. 208.

the βασιλεία there must be a complete change of heart in the individual. He must give his entire self to the rule of Christ. Kittel stresses the importance of this when he says:

Es gilt, die Einladung zum Gottesreich in μετάνοια anzunehmen, dh um seinetwillen allen anderen Dingen dieser Welt, Reichtum und Ruhm bei den Menschen, den Abschied zu geben, es also nicht zu machen, wie die zum Hochzeitsmahl Geladenen, die allerlei Verhinderungen vorschützen. (Matthew 22:1-14..Luke 14:16-24.)<sup>11</sup>

Again he draws attention to the complete singleness of purpose that God requires of every person in the βασιλεία :

Jedenfalls bedeutet der Blick, der wirkliche Blick auf das Gottesreich schwerste Entscheidung, strengste Auslese der Wenigen aus der Masse der Vielen (Mt. 22:14). Ein scharfes Entweder/Oder verlangt unerbittliche Entscheidung: "Wer die Hand an den Pflug legt und zurückblickt, ist nicht geschickt zum Gottesreich." Luke 9:62).<sup>12</sup>

All this is necessary in order to reign, for

βασιλεύουσιν implies a positive program and activity on the part of every member of the kingdom -- the fruits of faith. In this respect the kingdom of Christ is different from an ordinary kingdom. Subjects of such a kingdom do not rule, except a comparatively few representatives of the government. In Christ's kingdom, every subject is His representative, through Whose power he rules. Though the New

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<sup>11</sup>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: Verlag von. W. Kohlhammer, 1933), Erster Band, p. 589, f.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 589.

Testament has never expressly called a Christian, "king," yet this verse shows that a Christian does possess a certain sovereignty from God. Here we have a sufficient scriptural basis for the term "royal priesthood." Over what does a Christian rule? In what respect is he sovereign? The believer "reigns upon earth" over sin, death, and the devil. Lange states:

Even now you must no longer serve the world, with Christ you may overcome the flesh, the world and the devil; your position as rulers will hereafter become more manifest to yourselves and to the world.<sup>13</sup>

To the Corinthians (I Corinthians 4:8) Paul writes that they should reign over their personal ambitions to be "puffed up for against one another": "For now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you." In Romans 5:17 he writes about the ability to subdue personal passions, which result in death: "For if by one man's offense death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ." Again, in Romans 8:37 he states that Christians are more than conquerors over trials and temptations: "Nay, in all

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<sup>13</sup>John Peter Lange, "The Revelation of John," A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, translated from the German by Melina Moore, edited by John Peter Lange and Philip Schaff (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1874), p. 34.

these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." In his writings Luther rejoiced over this sovereignty of the believers, but he emphasized that it is only of a spiritual nature. He comments in his Treatise on Christian Liberty:

The power that we speak of is spiritual; it rules in the midst of enemies, and is mighty in the midst of oppression, which means nothing else than that strength is made perfect in weakness, and that in all things I can find profit unto salvation, so that the cross and death itself are compelled to serve me and to work together with me for my salvation. This is a splendid prerogative and hard to attain, and a true omnipotent power, a spiritual dominion, in which there is nothing so good and nothing so evil, but that it shall work together for good to me, if only I believe. And yet, since faith alone suffices for salvation, I have need of nothing, except that faith exercise the power and dominion of its own liberty. Lo, this is the inestimable power and liberty of Christians.<sup>14</sup>

By means of this faith to which Luther refers, the believer is able to "reign upon earth." John stresses the importance of this fact in his first Epistle:

For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. "ho is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God. I John 5:4,5.

One can readily see that Revelation 5:10 pictures the lofty dignity of the Christian. As before stated, every

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<sup>14</sup>Martin Luther, "A Treatise on Christian Liberty," Works of Martin Luther, translated by W. A. Lambert (Philadelphia Edition; Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1943), II, 324.

believer has a sovereign power by which he rules over death, life, sin. Every believer has a priestly glory which is all powerful with God; for the Lord does the things which is asked of Him, as it is written: "He will fulfill the desire of them that fear Him; He will also hear their cry, and will save them."<sup>15</sup>

And yet, one cannot help but note that this verse is not a doxology to the sovereignty of the believer, but a song of praise and adoration to the Lamb. For by His grace He has redeemed the Christian, brought them into the kingdom made them priests, enabled them to overcome sin and Satan, and thereby gave them power to reign upon earth.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 325.

<sup>16</sup>A. Plummer, "Revelation," The Pulpit Commentary, edited by Joseph S. Exell and H. D. M. Spence (New York and London: Funk & Wagnalls Company), p. 66.

## CHAPTER VI

### REVELATION 20:6

Revelation 20:6 is the final scripture passage in the New Testament which has a reference to the Priesthood of Believers. It reads: μακάριος καὶ ἅγιος ὁ ἔχων μέρος ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει τῇ πρώτῃ· ἐπὶ τούτων ὁ δεύτερος θάνατος οὐκ ἔχει ἐξουσίαν, ἀλλ' ἔσονται ἱερεῖς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ βασιλεύσουσιν μετ' αὐτοῦ [τά] χίλια ἔτη. This text is well established, since it contains only one minor variance. In the concluding words of this verse manuscripts <sup>s</sup>, 046, and others, besides the Tischendorf edition, insert τὰ before χίλια ἔτη. However, A, the Byzantine text, and very many other manuscripts, plus the Weiss edition omit the τὰ. Nestle indicates that both views are equally well attested by placing the τὰ in brackets in his text.<sup>1</sup> Either reading does not change the meaning of the verse.

The context from which this verse is taken is well

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<sup>1</sup>Greek New Testament, edited with Critical Apparatus by Dr. Eberhard Nestle, newly revised by Dr. Erwin Nestle (Sixteenth Edition; New York: American Bible Society, 1936), p. 651.

known. Revelation 20:1-6 speaks of an angel coming down from heaven and binding Satan in the bottomless pit for a thousand years. After this is fulfilled, he will be loosed for a little season. The writer then saw the souls of the martyrs and of those who did not worship the beast. They lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. He speaks of this as the first resurrection. Those who partook of the first resurrection need have no fear of the second death, for they are blessed, holy, priests, and shall reign with Christ a thousand years.

It is not surprising that on such poetic imagery there have been various and controversial interpretations. For example, some commentaries refer the "1000 years" to the Millennium. The International Critical Commentary states that the priesthood mentioned in verse six does not apply to the general Priesthood of Believers, but only to the priesthood of the martyrs. They will be admitted into the Millennial Kingdom and have the special duty to evangelize the nations.<sup>2</sup> Barnes also maintains that the "1000 years" is to be interpreted as the Millennium, during which time Christ will descend from heaven and personally reign upon

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<sup>2</sup>R. H. Charles, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John," II, The International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), p. 185.

earth, probably from Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup> But this is not in harmony with Jesus' words: "My Kingdom is not of this world." (John 18:36)

Fuerbringer takes a much saner view. He defines the "1000 years" as a fixed period of time, the New Testament era. During this time the devil is bound up so as not to hinder the conversion of the heathen.<sup>4</sup> Lenski also agrees with this when he states that the "1000 years" cover the entire New Testament period from the incarnation of Christ to Satan's final plunge into hell.<sup>5</sup> Plummer has a rather thought-provoking interpretation of the "1000 years". He opines that "1000 years" is not a quantity, a time element, but that it is qualitative, showing completeness. Satan has been bound completely. In other words, Christians need have no fear, because Satan's power over them has been completely limited by Christ's redemption.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Albert Barnes, "Book of Revelation," Notes on the New Testament (London: Blackie & Son, Paternoster Buildings, E. C.), XI, 463.

<sup>4</sup>L. Fuerbringer, The Revelation of St. John, lecture notes taken by one of his students and mimeographed by permission, but not corrected or revised by him (St. Louis: Concordia Mimeograph Company, n.d.), p. 35.

<sup>5</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation (Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1943), p. 546.

<sup>6</sup>A. Plummer, "Revelation," The Pulpit Commentary, edited by Joseph S. Exell and H. D. M. Spence (New York and London: Funk & Wagnalls Company), p. 472.

Another point under controversy is the exegesis of "first resurrection." Barnes again follows the Millennialistic viewpoint. He states that in the Millennium the righteous dead will be raised and will become Christ's attendants in the government of the world.<sup>7</sup> The International Critical Commentary also supports the Millennialistic interpretation.<sup>8</sup> But Lenski<sup>9</sup> and Fuerbringer<sup>10</sup> again reject that method of exegesis. They say that the "first resurrection" is to be taken spiritually and symbolically, for it refers to the death of the believer, whose soul goes to heaven in glory. Plummer makes an interesting observation by saying that the "first resurrection" refers to the conversion of the believer from the death of sin to the glorious life of the gospel of Christ.<sup>11</sup>

These opinions, just stated, are an indication of the many differences that exist on the interpretation of these verses. This applies also to the entire chapter. Because the exegesis here is so controversial, it is better not to use verse six as a *sedes doctrina* for the Priesthood of Believers. In general, all one can say is that the writer

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<sup>7</sup>Barnes, op. cit., p. 463.

<sup>8</sup>R. H. Charles, loc. cit.

<sup>9</sup>Lenski, op. cit., p. 586.

<sup>10</sup>Fuerbringer, op. cit., p. 35.

<sup>11</sup>Plummer, op. cit., p. 472.

is comforting the troubled Christian by showing him his blessed, glorious status before God.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

The passages which were investigated in this thesis presented the basic principles of the Royal Priesthood of Believers. These Scripture texts clearly point out that every believer in Jesus Christ is a member of the Priesthood of Believers. Therefore, every believer has the right and the privilege to go directly to God in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. He needs no mediating priest to receive for him the forgiveness of sins.

But the emphasis in the concept of the Royal Priesthood of Believers is especially the obligation and challenge to Christian service. I Peter 2:5 states that the members of the "holy priesthood" are to "offer up spiritual sacrifices." Romans 12:1 identifies this with the believers' attitude and action of offering up their bodies in service as living sacrifices to the Savior. Every believer, man, woman, or child, has the duty of helping, encouraging, and serving one another in the Priesthood. However, the believers' sphere of activity extends even much farther than the immediate fellowship with those of the household of

faith. I Peter 2:9 shows that every member of the Royal Priesthood of Believers is to do mission work, "to publish forth the praises of Him."

In this respect it is well to comment on the relationship of the Royal Priesthood of Believers to the position of pastor of a congregation. A clergyman is also a member of the Priesthood of Believers, chosen by them to carry out publicly certain functions of their ministry -- administering the Word and Sacraments. In other words, the common idea and practice that the pastor is to do the work of the congregation, and if fortunate, to get a few laymen to help him is actually a wrong conception of the Royal Priesthood of Believers.

The minister is to be simply a colonel of the regiment. The real fighting is to be done by the men in the ranks who carry the guns. No ideal could be more non-Christian or more irrational than that the religious colonel is engaged to do the fighting for his men, while they sit at ease. And yet, perhaps, there is one idea current which is more absurd still, that is, that there is to be no fighting at all, but that the colonel is paid to spend his time solacting his regiment, or giving it gentle educative instruction not destined even to result in any downright, manly effort on the part of the whole regiment to do anything against the enemy.<sup>1</sup>

A concentrated and consecrated life of service is then necessary on the part of every member of the Royal Priest-

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<sup>1</sup>T. A. Kantonen, Resurgence of the Gospel (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1948), p. 172, quoting John R. Mott, Liberating the Lay Forces of Christianity (New York: Macmillan, 1932), p. 42.

hood of Believers. The comparison of the functions of the Priesthood with that of fighting an enemy is a very real one and shows the serious responsibility and challenge which confronts every believer. Kantonen observes:

We face something worse than a pagan world, one which does not know Christ. Ours is a generation involved in the deeper tragedy of having perverted to destructive ends the spiritual energies released by Christ. To call an apostate Christian culture barbaric is to slander the barbarians.<sup>2</sup>

It is quite evident that in order to meet the needs of the world, the principle of the Royal Priesthood of Believers reaches out into the social activities of the people, the political realm, the economic order, and into every vocation of society. In whatever activity a Christian is engaged, he, as a member of the Priesthood of Believers, witnesses for Christ and thereby radiates a spiritual reality and influence.<sup>3</sup>

In conclusion, one must add that God has promised the believers success in their work as members of the Royal Priesthood. While I Peter 2:9 and Revelation 1:6 specify that every believer is a priest in the kingdom of God, Revelation 5:10 and 20:6 state that the members of such a Royal Priesthood actually reign upon earth. By being placed under the rule of God, every believer in carrying out his

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 177.



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