

THE EQUIPPING CHURCH: RECAPTURING GOD'S VISION
FOR THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS.
A BIBLICAL, HISTORICAL, AND REFORMED PERSPECTIVE.

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ABSTRACT

The Equipping Church: Recapturing God's Vision for the Priesthood of All Believers.

A Biblical, Historical, and Reformed Perspective

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Many protestant versions of believers' royal priesthood, including the Christian Reformed Church in North America, are missionally inadequate: priestly functions are often monopolized by the Ministerial Priesthood,¹ which leads to the defrocking of the ministry of the priesthood of all believers.

In essence, the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is treated as though it is a true, factual, and fascinating piece of Christian doctrine, but is not always practically lived out in local congregations. We believe in it in theory, but not in practice.

A biblical and missional understanding of the church must root the priesthood of all believers in baptism, the initiatory rite that ordains all people into priestly service in the world.

A proper re-framing of the priesthood of all believers will serve as the catalyst for a more robust ecclesiology and will be the impetus for the royal priesthood to commit to their earthly vocation to be witnesses of Christ in the world.

Content Reader: Dr. David Rylaarsdam

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¹ In the case of the CRCNA, there are four offices of the Ministerial Priesthood: Minister of the Word, Elder, Deacon, and Commissioned Pastor.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
PART ONE: THE ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, TEMPLE & SACRIFICES IN SCRIPTURE	
INTRODUCTION	2
CHAPTER 1: GOD’S DESIGN	7
PART TWO: THE ROYAL PRIESTHOOD ACROSS HUMAN HISTORY	
CHAPTER 2: THE EARLY CHURCH	39
CHAPTER 3: THE REFORMATION & POST-REFORMATION	55
CHAPTER 4: DENOMINATIONAL POLITY & PRACTICE	68
CHAPTER 5: THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CHURCH	103
PART THREE: RE-ROOTING & REFORMING THE ROYAL PRIESTHOOD	
CHAPTER 6: A BIBLICAL VISION FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH	115
CHAPTER 7: GETTING PRACTICAL: DEVELOPING A CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT THAT EQUIPS THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS	125
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION: THE CHURCH: MISSION, FUNCTION AND CONVICTION	164
BIBLIOGRAPHY	169

PART ONE

THE ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, TEMPLE & SACRIFICES IN SCRIPTURE

INTRODUCTION

So off went the Emperor in procession under his splendid canopy. Everyone in the streets and the windows said, "Oh, how fine are the Emperor's new clothes! Don't they fit him to perfection? And see his long train!" Nobody would confess that he couldn't see anything, for that would prove him either unfit for his position, or a fool. No costume the Emperor had worn before was ever such a complete success.

*"But he hasn't got anything on," a little child said.
"Did you ever hear such innocent prattle?" said its father.
And one person whispered to another what the child had said,
"He hasn't anything on. A child says he hasn't anything on."
"But he hasn't got anything on!" the whole town cried out at last.*

*The Emperor shivered, for he suspected they were right. But he thought,
"This procession has got to go on." So he walked more proudly than ever, as his
noblemen held high the train that wasn't there at all.¹*

I have long felt the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is treated as biblically authoritative, spiritually sound, and worthy of every Christian's affirmation but, then, in reality not lived out. It is embraced in form but rejected in function. We call it a vital component of our faith, but reject it in practice.

In my view, the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers (PoAB) is treated as though it is a true, factual, and fascinating piece of Christian doctrine but a rather silly thing to try and live out. A chasm has emerged between orthodoxy (what we profess we believe) and orthopraxy (what we practice and live out). As this project explores, even though the Reformation largely became a movement because of this doctrine, it still did very little to impact the practice of the PoAB. Ultimately, this is a matter of incoherent doctrine. Incoherence between our theology and the practice of the PoAB has implications for many facts of ecclesiology. As we will see, the PoAB is related to issues of leadership, offices, preaching, baptism, the Lord's Supper, discipleship, authority,

¹ Hans Christian Andersen, "The Emperor's New Clothes," accessed February 25, 2019, http://www.andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheEmperorsNewClothes_e.html.

spiritual gifts, and so on. Ecclesiology is the theological crisis of our day. The crisis of the fourth century church was the doctrine of the Trinity. In the fifth century it was Christology. In the sixteenth century it was soteriology. Today, we are facing an ongoing crisis of ecclesiology. We must consider the ways our theology is lived out with respect to the aforementioned issues within a church (*ekklesia*), the body of Christ, steeped in a hyper individualistic twenty-first century culture.

As this project will explore more fully, faith formation is always rooted in the ordinary, day-to-day (but always deeply spiritual) liturgical practices that cultivate and form our identity in Christ and are rooted in our baptism ordination. This project invites consideration of how we, as a body of believers, can model liturgical practices that cause us to form our identity as the royal priesthood.

Since the Christian Reformed Church of North America (CRCNA) is rooted in the Reformation, it might be assumed that the denomination would champion the doctrine of the PoAB. However, the CRCNA's polity and practice seem to implicitly reject the doctrine. In 2017, the CRCNA (along with other protestant denominations) celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. CRCNA periodicals like *The Banner* and *CTS Forum* wrote special articles to commemorate the anniversary. *The Forum* had an issue on the Five Solae. However, nowhere did any article deal with the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers (PoAB). This is a curious omission because, according to Kevin J. Vanhoozer, the PoAB is the natural climax of the five solae; in fact, he calls this doctrine the “summa of all Protestant Theology.”² The 500th anniversary of the

² Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 136.

Reformation came and went in the CRCNA without any consideration for the very topic upon which the Reformation was hinged.³

While the Old Testament (OT) shows God's original intent and design for His people with regard to this doctrine, its expression in the Christian Church is found in the New Testament (NT). As such, with regard to the doctrine of the PoAB, the first-century church functioned in its purest form. That is not to say the early church did not have problems; Paul's epistles made it very clear that it did. That said, the normative practices of the first century church were the natural expression of the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit upon His people. Many of their practices were grounded in the timeless principles and teachings of God's Word that stand forever. This thesis will demonstrate that the PoAB is a biblical principle of God's people found throughout Scripture, both Old and New Testaments. This thesis will also draw on the wisdom of the church at various points in history regarding how to understand the live the POAB.

My intent in this project is to lay out what truly is prescriptive when it comes to the doctrine of the PoAB and, thus, cannot be disregarded, discarded, disproved, or discredited. These are matters of Christian faith that are true in all times and all places. These are fundamental principles that highlight how the Lord builds His church. In other words, if the body of Christ is not functioning this way, we are rejecting what is truly prescriptive from God's Word. This distinction between descriptive practices of the NT church and the prescriptive practices of the church for all time is the critical aim of this project. My ultimate goal in developing this paper is to equip pastors, ministry leaders,

³ Oddly enough, even the Wall Street Journal had a special article on the doctrine of the PoAB in May of 2017 while the CRCNA gave no mention of it. See Alec Ryrie, "The Protestant Legacy of Liberty," accessed February 26, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-protestant-legacy-of-liberty-1493908537>.

and the royal priestly community with both the biblical framework as well as practical tools for championing the PoAB.

This dissertation will focus on eight key topics:

Part One explores the concepts of the royal priesthood, temple, and sacrifices in Scripture. Chapter 1 will explore the Biblical teachings of the PoAB, outlining God's original design, what went wrong, and the New Covenant priesthood fulfilled in the work of Christ. This section will also provide biblical evidence for baptism being the ordination ceremony into the royal priesthood.

Part Two surveys the royal priesthood across human history. Chapter 2 is devoted to recounting the steps of the post-NT early church, detailing the sequence of events throughout church history where a chasm begins to emerge between orthodoxy (faith) and orthopraxy (practice). Chapter 3 explores the context and impetus for the sixteenth century Reformation and how it is rooted in this doctrine, but how, regrettably, with regard to the doctrine of the PoAB the Reformation was short-lived. Chapter 4 explores the denominational polity and practice of my denomination, the Christian Reformed Church of North America (CRCNA), outlining our historical perspective, polity, and practice of this doctrine within our denomination and how particular parts of our polity may contribute to the problem of the chasm that exists between faith and practice. Chapter 5 explores the current-day major trends and practices of the Christian church in North America with regard to the PoAB, highlighting the myths that have emerged throughout the centuries and have a stronghold on the modern-day church in North America and the majority of the world.

Part Three considers how the church might re-root and reform the royal priesthood. The last three chapters of the project summarize prior points and provide practical, tangible steps for pastors, ministry leaders, and the priestly community toward uniting faith with practice concerning the doctrine of the PoAB. Chapter 6 is devoted to recapturing and restoring the essence of God’s intent for His church with regard to church practice in a modern-day context. This section seeks to outline what is prescriptive within God’s Word for how the church ought to function in the world. Chapter 7 seeks to explore the very practical question, ‘If all this is true, what does it look like within the local church?’ While the first six chapters serve more as a historical and theological treatise on the topic, this chapter is devoted to providing practical, tangible examples on how we can reconnect *faith* with *practice*. It is meant to be a resource guide to pastors, council members, and ministry leaders in their various contexts. Chapter 8 will recount God’s purpose for His church, defining the mission of His church, how it is called to function, and our motivation on picking up the mantle to follow God’s call.

This project proposes significant changes to the way the doctrine of the PoAB is practically lived out within in the church today. Altering the ways in which the institutional church functions is no menial task. The time has come for the body of Christ to come face to face with the chasm between faith and practice to help us understand more fully our role as part of the royal priesthood. My hope in this project is simple: that the Lord would use it as a tool to bring His church back to her biblical roots with regard to this doctrine.

CHAPTER 1: GOD’S DESIGN

“The Protestant Church is the church of the
universal priesthood – or it is nothing.”
--Hans Martin Barth¹

“The priestly people need a ministering priesthood to nourish and sustain it. Men and women are not ordained to this ministerial priesthood in order to take priesthood away from the people, but in order to nourish and sustain the priesthood of the people.”
-- Lesslie Newbigin²

This chapter will lay the biblical foundation for God’s original design for the priesthood of all believers (PoAB), what went wrong, and God’s redemptive plan, citing both Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT) texts but focusing primarily on two central NT texts upon which the doctrine of the PoAB rests: Romans 12:1 and 1 Peter 2:4-9 (cf. Rev. 1:6; 5:10). I will show that Jesus is the anointed Melchizedekian priest-king and that every Christian holds the office of the royal priesthood. My NT analysis will also demonstrate that baptism is a Christian’s ordination ceremony into the royal priesthood. Two of the most comprehensive resources on biblical foundations of the

¹ Hans-Martin Barth, *Einander Priester sein* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 103.

² Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 235.

PoAB are Paul Dabin's nearly five-hundred-page theological treatise on this topic³ as well as Hank Voss' *The Priesthood of all Believers and the Missio Dei*.⁴

Wilhelm Richebacher claims that "there is no participation in Christ without participation in His mission to the world."⁵ Stephen Holmes echoes this sentiment, stating, "The fundamental difference between asserting that God *has* a mission and asserting that God *is missionary* is that in the former case the mission may be incidental, disconnected from who God is; in the latter case, mission is one of the perfections of God, as adequate a description of who He is as love, omnipotence, or eternity."⁶ Both Holmes and Newbigin state that if it is fundamentally true that the royal priesthood worships a missionary God, then they, too, are called to be missionary. It not as though this is simply a divinely-inspired-but-optional vocational goal. It is the very essence and purpose of the priesthood. Thus, the royal priesthood is the believers' sharing in God's redemptive plan, inherited by faith through baptism ordination. Baptism is the sign and seal that a Christian belongs to Christ⁷ and is enfolded into his family, the church.⁸ In the gospel of John alone God refers to himself over forty times as a sending God. The doctrine of the PoAB insists that every Christian is on mission. Without obeying the Great Commission, the gathered royal priesthood are not the church but rather just a group of disobedient Christians spending time together. That means the church, and every royal priest comprising it, are by definition *missionaries*. However, the reigning model is

³ Paul Dabin, *El Sacerdocio Real de los Laicos y la Accion Catolica*. Translated by Juan Carlos Zuretti and Luis Aned. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Difusion, 1939).

⁴ Hank Voss, *The Priesthood of All Believers* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016).

⁵ Wilhelm Richebacher, "Missio Dei: The Basis of Mission Theology or a Wrong Path?," *International Review of Mission* 92, no. 367 (October 2003): 589.

⁶ Stephen Holmes, "Trinitarian Missiology." *International Journal of Systematic Theology* (06 January 2006), 89.

⁷ See Rom 6:3; Col 2:12; Mk 10:38

⁸ See 1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:26-28

to view missionaries as God's super-servants who left their families and travelled to third-world countries to proclaim the good news of God.⁹ For those left behind, their part was to fund and pray for the mission in those godless areas. However, as stated by pastor and theologian Charles Spurgeon, "Every Christian is either a missionary or an imposter."¹⁰ He can say this knowing that Jesus' Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20 was not given just to the apostles, but to the disciples (the royal priesthood).

The church and, consequently, our view of the doctrine of the PoAB doesn't always have the Great Commission in mind. Darrell L. Guder says the following about the church and its mission: "...the ecclesiological mindset [most Christians] inherit tend to define the church in terms of the benefits it provides its own members."¹¹ Similarly, we have limited church to a place we go rather than something we are. The Christian family was not made to be an introverted, exclusive clan, but rather to be one body, one bride, and one missional Church. As stated by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ."¹² Additionally, he expressly believed that the church "...is God's final revelation [of His divine self] as Christ existing in community."¹³ Rather than view the church's personal task as the promulgation of the kingdom of God, it has resorted to the minimalistic exercise of the tending and care of those solely and exclusively under its care.

⁹ Larry Osborne, *Mission Creep* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014).

¹⁰ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Sword and the Trowel* (Reprint, Charleston, SC: Forgotten Books, 2015), 127.

¹¹ Darrell Guder, "The Church as Missional Community" in *The Community of the Word* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 124.

¹² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1954), 21.

¹³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being: Transcendental Philosophy and Ontology in Systematic Theology*, trans. Hans Richard Reuter (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 112.

In order to have a more robust understanding of the role of the royal priesthood, the church today needs a serious course correction in missional focus undergirded by clarity, alignment, and unification of said mission. Once we are able to identify the end goal, we will be better equipped to not only hit the mark, but also to determine when we fall off the missional trail. With respect to corporate worship, one could properly characterize the multiple reigning views of it with four illustrations.

First, when the corporate gathering is seen as a cruise liner, the Christian asks what this facility or resource can do for them. The concern is for the quality of particular amenities (preaching, worship, and other programs). The mission of God is abandoned for the benefits associated with being one of the ninety-nine already in the sheep pen (Lk 15).

A second illustration is seeing the corporate gathering as a Battleship. Though improving on the cruise liner analogy in several ways, this also has a fatal flaw. Namely, instead of viewing the surrounding culture and community as the mission that must be infiltrated for the kingdom of God, we pin it as the enemy that must be either abolished or avoided at all costs.

A third option is to view the corporate gathering as unnecessary, seeing the church as a sail boat. This is the view that when Christ spoke of the *ecclesia*, the Greek word translated as church in English, he was describing nothing more than the experience of encountering God personally and enjoying the rich benefits of a personal knowledge of his love and goodness in one's life. In this view, the corporate gathering and interaction with God's people is not essential to human flourishing.

A fourth illustration is seeing the corporate gathering as an aircraft carrier. This metaphor represents the view that the corporate gathering or in this case, the aircraft carrier, is not the mission in and of itself. It is where the sent are able to re-fuel, replenish, and find comfort and rest after a mission. It is also the place where they are able to re-evaluate, re-focus, and re-strategize for the mission once more as they prepare once again to engage in God's kingdom mission. Of course, the word-picture of an air craft carrier seeks to serve as the proper view of the church as missional community.

Churches that want to penetrate the world for the kingdom of God no doubt think highly of the corporate worship gathering, but with one essential distinction: they see the corporate gathering as the starting point, not the epitome or essence of what it means to be the church. The church is so much larger than what happens on Sundays. Much of this paper is dedicated to help pastors and ministry leaders consider the ways in which their congregation has bought into the holy person myth and the holy place myth so that they may see God's great commission as something that was given to the royal PoAB and not simply to the clergy.

The following metaphor further illuminates the idea of the church on mission. The 4077th Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (M.A.S.H) redefines its ultimate purpose ever so slightly and deems it more necessary to tend solely for the injured soldiers already under its care. This action would change the course of the unit, since its main purpose was to serve as a fully functional hospital in areas outside the four walls of the hospital tent. Even though the wounded within the camp are continuing to receive aid, its primary mission has been grievously abandoned. Similarly, the church can easily undergo a reductionism that results in the care of its own members to the abandonment of its

primary mission laid out by Christ in the Great Commission. As stated by Kurt Frederickson, “being a called and chosen people is not an excuse to sit back and revel in one’s good fortune. There is work to be done, priestly work. The church is called to a life of holiness and service.”¹⁴

The church may not and cannot abandon its mission. John Wesley once stated that to turn Christianity into a social religion is ultimately, “...to destroy it.”¹⁵ Likewise, to turn Christianity into a strictly humanitarian religion produces the same result. The church and the church alone, comprised of the royal priesthood, exists for the Great Commission. Unlike any other agency, the church cannot simply abandon the Great Commission for other endeavors that captivate the affection and attention of its constituency. Likewise, the church cannot accept a diminished role of simply winning the souls of individuals then focusing exclusively on the private and domestic aspects of life. The church defines an entire way of being which is expressed and revealed in Jesus Christ – a gospel hermeneutic in the hearts and lives of people who aspire to live according to Christ in all that they think, say, and do and, thus, engage in Christ’s kingdom mission. These people should want more than anything else for the gospel to flourish in their lives and communities.

This section is devoted to outlining God’s original design for His people, citing central biblical texts upon which this doctrine rests.

¹⁴ Frederickson and Lee, *That Their Work Will Be a Joy*, 36.

¹⁵ John Wesley, “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount,” accessed March 4, 2019. <https://www.umcmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/Sermon-21-Upon-Our-Lords-Sermon-on-the-Mount-1>.

God's Plan – What Went Wrong?

It is significant to consider the fact that, though God's redemptive plan was finally realized in the NT through the atoning work of Christ, this was God's plan from the beginning. Psalm 110:4 proclaims, "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" and God speaks in Exodus 19:5-6 saying, "Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests."

The story of the royal priesthood truly begins at the very beginning. While the first explicit mention of any priest in the Bible is found in the book of Genesis 14:18-24, the story of King Melchizedek, Adam is also portrayed as a priest-king in Genesis 1. There, human beings are shown as the crown of God's beautiful creation. Not only that, they were given the distinct responsibility to "rule" and "subdue" the earth (Genesis 1:26). These are the same terms ascribed to earthly kings and political leaders in the OT (see Ps 72:8, 110:2; Is 14:6, Ez 34:4). Genesis 1 expresses the responsibility of Adam, and later Eve, to make the earth a habitable home. Certainly, Genesis 1 reveals one of the central purposes for humanity as image-bearers of God was that they would exercise royal rule (i.e. kingship). One of the fundamental ideas behind God's Plan in the Garden of Eden is the idea that all human work is a *calling* from God.¹⁶ Immediately after God's work in fashioning his world, he commissions workers to carry on the work he has started. This work was not brought into our human story after the fall. Rather, it was a part of the blessedness of the Garden. Work was part of paradise. Adam functioned as

¹⁶ The Latin word *vocare*, meaning "to call," is at the root of our common word "vocation."

both King (to “rule”) and Custodian (to “subdue”) of the creation God had made. We are called to function as vice-regents of God’s creation.

Adam also functioned as a priest in the Garden of Eden. G.K. Beale presents fourteen signs that Israel’s later tabernacle and temple are reflections on God’s first temple, the Garden of Eden. For example, like the temple, Eden is a place of resting in God.¹⁷ Moreover, the Hebrew words “cultivate [*abad*] and keep [*somra*]” in Genesis 1 are used elsewhere in the OT to refer to priests keeping service in the tabernacle.¹⁸ Adam is portrayed as an “archetypal priest” who served in God’s primal temple.¹⁹

In the creation narrative, God specifically endowed humans with the privilege and responsibility of using their multifaceted gifts and abilities to serve as an instrument of blessing to others. In this way, each person has a unique contribution to make as channels of God’s grace for one another. God intended for all of his people to receive the gift of ministry to be appropriated and passed on to others. With this cultural mandate, God’s image-bearers are commissioned and sent into the world to cultivate it, be fruitful and multiply, and contribute to human flourishing. In doing so, humans function as laborers for God and, as Paul eventually says, “co-laborers with Christ” (1 Cor 3:9).

Melchizedek also functioned as a priest-king. He is the first and only man in the OT who explicitly receives both titles (Gen 14:18). He is mentioned again in Psalm 110 where the Lord makes a promise to David’s greater Son saying, “You are a priest forever

¹⁷ The interior walls of the temple were carved with images of the Garden of Eden. Cf. 1 Kings

¹⁸ G.K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 68. See also Numbers 3:7-8; 8:25-26; 18:5-6; 1 Chronicles 23:32; Ezekiel 44:14

¹⁹ Ibid.

according to the order of Melchizedek.” Psalm 110 is perhaps the most significant text for the royal priesthood, since it is cited as many as thirty three times in the NT alone.²⁰

Foreshadowing Christ, King Melchizedek brings out bread and wine and serves it to Abram. This is a clear picture of the New Covenant meal, called the Lord's Supper or Communion. The symbolism of the story is critical. On the other side of Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, the story of Melchizedek is seen within the lens of Christ's atoning work. The Melchizedekian Priesthood is fulfilled in Christ. Hebrews 7:17, echoing Ps 110, points to Christ and says, “You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.”

The order of Melchizedek occurs prior to the Levitical priesthood, pointing to God's ultimate intent to have a *nation* of priest or, as we now refer to it, a priesthood of all believers. To fully understand God original intent for the priesthood, the next section examines the Levitical priesthood and how it relates to the people of Israel.

Israel's Rebellion

While Genesis gives of the first glimpse of a priest, there is no mention of a priesthood (a community of priests) in the OT until the book of Exodus. In Exodus 19:5-6 we read, “Now, therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be a special treasure unto me above all people; for all the earth is mine: and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” This divine declaration reveals God desired all of his people to be royal priests in the world: God's original intent was that all of the children of Israel would be priests, not just a select few. God wanted a holy nation that would show forth his glory to all creation. “Israel would be a nation among

²⁰ David Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1973), 15, 163-66.

nations; a model or prototype to show the world what living for the one true God could be like.”²¹ Functionally, God’s intent was to have a community of priests who would be set apart in order to minister to God, to one another, and to a world far from God. What God wanted from Israel was a whole nation of priestly ministers: “They would Minister to God, to one another, and to the Nations around them...This was God's vision!”²²

Tragically, the very next chapter of Exodus shows the people were afraid and did not want the responsibility of their priestly ministry:

Now all the people witnessed the thundering's, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, "You speak with us and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die." But Moses said to the people; "Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that his fear may be before you, so that you may not sin." But the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near the thick Darkness where God was (Exodus 20:18-21).

Unfortunately, God's people did not want the responsibility to function as a royal priesthood. They wanted their own mediator, their own priest, and their own advocate. They wanted one who could stand in the gap between them and God, someone who could speak to God on their behalf as well as listen to God on their behalf.

This is not the only time the people of Israel rejected God’s original intent. They also rejected their roles of prophets and kings. In Numbers 11:29, Moses states, “I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets,” while in the book of 1 Samuel 8:1-22, the people of Israel make demands to have their own earthly king: “Appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nation.”

Since the people of Israel rejected God’s original design for them to function as a royal priesthood, God creates a holding pattern in Exodus 28. He calls out one tribe, Levi,

²¹ Milt Rodriguez, *The Priesthood of All Believers* (The Rebuilders, 2004), 31.

²² Ibid., 32.

from the twelve tribes of Israel to be set apart for the purpose of the priesthood. They were to function in the way God had originally intended for the entire nation of Israel, as a tribe of priests, mediating between God, one another, and humanity. The Levitical priesthood continued to function until the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.

Jesus' Ministry as Priest

While the people of Israel rejected God's plan for them, Jesus' life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension leading to Pentecost culminates in the New Covenant lived out in lives of God's people. Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of the temple, the priesthood, and the sacrifice. He has all the functions and powers of ministry in himself.²³

In the OT, the priest served as an advocate for the people before God. A priest was not someone who only spoke directly to the people of Israel, but was one who spoke on their behalf to God. The priest always had his back to the people, not because the people were not important but because his job was to speak for the people. His job was to feel their pain, bear their burdens, and besiege heaven for them, pray for them, and offer sacrifices for them.

Jesus is like us in the sense that he has endured suffering and shame. He knows our pain. He knows our weakness. Like a priest, he suffered with and only behalf of the people. But Jesus is unlike us in that he remained sinless in every way. He bore our sin on the cross so that we could be set free. Christ is the ultimate priest. As priest, Jesus stood in our place and sacrificially bore our burdens and sin upon Himself as a willing sacrifice

²³ For the sake of this dissertation, we will only review Jesus ministry (and, subsequently, the Christian's ministry) as priest. See appendix for Jesus' ministry as Prophet and King and the Christians' ministry as Prophet and King.

(see Eph 5:2; Heb 9:26-27, 10:12) and, in doing so, He cleanses us of our sin (1 Jn 1:7) and brings us into God's presence (Eph 2:18).

Every Christian is a Priest

God's Word speaks a radical, astounding, counterintuitive message to Christians, indicating that the role of royal priest has now been granted to them. Though pastors and elders are uniquely commissioned to build up the body into spiritual maturity and to equip the PoAB for good work (Eph 4:11-13), all Christians are part of the royal priesthood, with direct access to Christ, the great High Priest (Heb 4:14-16). Peter highlights that, as followers of Christ, Christians have been made both kings and priests – a royal priesthood – so that “we may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness” (1 Peter 2:9). Thus, the Holy Spirit equips believers to speak the truth in love, call out one another in grace-filled admonition, and to minister as Christ to others – even if he or she lacks any specialized title as pastor, elder, deacon, or ministry leader. Once again, this is not to undermine the vocation of pastor, but to recognize that the design of God is for every believer to function in such a way that it requires the full functioning of the body of Christ.²⁴ As stated by author and Pastor Timothy Keller in *Center Church*,

This understanding of the general office helps prevent the church from becoming a top-down, conservative, innovation-allergic bureaucracy. It helps us understand the church as an energetic grassroots movement that produces life-changing and world-changing ministry—all without dependence on the control and planning of a hierarchy of leaders.²⁵

The PoAB are led by the Holy Spirit to both communicate and to discern the truth of God's Word to both Christians and unbelievers (1 John 2:20, 27). This is modeled in

²⁴ See Romans 7:4; 8:10; 12:5; 1 Corinthians 10:16; 12:12; 12:27; Ephesians 4:12; Colossians 3:15

²⁵ Timothy Keller, *Center Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 346.

scriptures command for Christians to instruct one another (Rom 15:14), and to encourage other believers in the faith (Heb 3:13). Likewise, in Colossians 4:5-6 Paul instructs every Christian to walk in wisdom and ensure their speech is always both gracious and wise, seasoned with salt, so that they may be prepared to give an answer to unbelievers, Likewise, in 1 Peter 3:15 Peter charges the royal priesthood to give cogent reasons for their faith to nonbelievers. Behind each of these letters is the assumption that the Word of God is dwelling richly within every believer (Col 3:16) and that they are always ready (2 Tim 4:2) to preach the Word, offer a reproof, rebuke, exhortation, and whatever else is necessary for the sake of the Gospel, always with complete patience. Paul exhorted the Corinthian Christians to communicate God's Word in all aspects of life in such a way that people may come to salvation (1 Cor 9:19-23; 10:31-11:1).

Additionally, priests have both the privilege and the responsibility to minister to one another through mutual admonition, confession and prayer. God's vision for the church was not that we would simply confess our sins to a professional minister/priest, but to confess our sins to one another and to pray for one another (Jas 5:16), and to exhort one another so that no one becomes hardened by sin (Heb 3:13). The church is a relational people – in relationship with God who saves us through His son, and in relationship with each other who share in God's salvation. This focus on people-in-relationship is evident in the ways in which scripture speaks about fellowship. The Greek word for church (ekklesia) arises from the verb to call (kaleo) and the preposition out of (ek). Thus, ekklesia simply means called out ones and/or God's assembled people. The identity of a Christian is someone who is called in three ways all at once – by God, to one another, and for the world. But if we treat the church as a place we go to, rather than

something that we are, it is going to be extremely difficult to function as a relational people marked by the one-another's of scripture. Depending on how you want to count, there are roughly sixty commands listed in scripture on how we are called as brothers and sisters in Christ to live into one another's lives. A sampling of these include:

“Be devoted to one another in love” (Rom 12:10); “Honor one another above yourselves” (Rom 12:10); “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins” (1 Pt 4:8); “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law” (Rom 13:8); “You yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another” (Rom 15:4); “Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2); “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love” (Eph 4:2); “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (Jn 15:12-13).

If we are not practicing the one another's of scripture, I would suggest that biblically speaking we are not really practicing Christianity. We have to readily admit that it is virtually impossible to live out the one another's if the corporate worship gathering is the full extent of a Christian's understanding of what the church is. It's not until we turn towards one another in relational ministry that we invoke the image of God. Repeatedly scripture tells us that the key to spiritual growth is relationships.

“Where two or [more] gather in my name, there am I with them” (Mt 18:20)

“Iron sharpens iron, and so one [person] sharpens another” (Prov 27:17)

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Heb 10:24-25)

Scripture is drenched with this God-given, inherent theme of meeting together in the unity of the Spirit. There is perhaps no greater example of the church being marked by the one-another’s of scripture than the book of James. Consider how he ends his letter: “Brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins” (Jms 5:19-20). Within the entire letter, James assumes the reader will know when someone wanders from the truth and that they are in a close enough relationship with a wandering person to help them come back. That does not happen with a world of casual acquaintances. It only happens in the context of what James has been talking about for the last five chapters: intentionally living out the one another’s of scripture.

What James indicates as the primary ingredients of being the church to one another is the principle that the church is the family of God where each Christian needs to be genuinely known, lovingly supported, and honestly challenged.

Genuinely Known

If the church is viewed as a place to be and not a family to be a part of, suddenly the church feels more like a house than a home. Being known is powerful. There is a sense of comfort and belonging that comes with it. Isaiah 43:1 says, “But now says the LORD, He who created you, He who formed you: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I

have called you by name, and you are mine!” The church is a community where each Christian needs to be genuinely known.

Lovingly Supported

The church needs to be a place where: when things are tough, instead of talking about us, they lovingly come alongside of us and support us. God says the church is a family where we are called to support one another, especially in those moments of disagreement and potential discord. It is essential to the Christian life. It is only possible if we find ourselves within a context where relationships can be formed.

Honestly Challenged

We are a community where, early on, we can prompt and challenge one another when our life is off track. This is only possible if all three are at play: within the context of being lovingly supported and genuinely known you can be honestly challenged. Only then will we have the spiritual and relational equity to make such a bold declaration to challenge a sibling in the faith in hope that they will be brought back. This is why it takes the church to raise a Christian, which is why the church cannot be relegated to a place where one goes once a week, but must be seen within the biblical motif of a relational people marked by the one-another’s of scripture where people are fully loved and fully known, lovingly supported, and honestly challenged in faith. After all, confession is hard enough as it is. We need to be known. We need to know that when life happens when we least expect it we can find ourselves in a place where we can confide in others and share our burdens.

Ironically enough, in the church we tend to do things differently than this. Both Catholics and Protestants do the same three things – we confess to the Pastor/Priest; we confess personally; and we confess corporately to God in worship. But all three forms of

confession are virtually anonymous and disregard the principle of the church being marked by the one another's of scripture. For this reason, author and emeritus President of Calvin Theological Seminary Neal Plantinga calls the protestant form of confession "gossip."²⁶ James writes, "therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working" (Jms 5:16). The one-another's of scripture are the litmus test of whether you are going to church or being the church, a community where you are genuinely known, lovingly supported, and can be honestly challenged in the faith. When a church is serving one another as God in Christ served us, it demonstrates that we really are the family of God. In this, the words of Christ find fulfillment: "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (Jn 13:35).

The PoAB, then, have both the privilege and responsibility to offer themselves daily as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God (Rom 12:1-2), and continually offering sacrifices to God through doing good and sharing what we have (Heb 13:15-16). The PoAB insists that the distinct responsibility to teach, train, admonish, rebuke, correct, and train in righteousness is the burden and privilege of every person who has been endowed with the Holy Spirit – namely, every single Christian (1 Jn 2:20, 27).

Not unlike the Levitical priesthood where priests served as ambassadors of God to people and people to God, to say that a Christian is a priest also means that every Christian is an ambassador for Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 5:20). Peter is the one who ties the temple motif to the PoAB when he says, "As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are

²⁶ Neal Plantinga, course lecture notes from "Intro to Hermeneutics" at Calvin Seminary, Grand Rapids, MI, September 2010.

being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pt 2:4-5). Paul continues in this theme when he says, “Therefore, we are Christ’s ambassadors, and God through us is calling you” (2 Cor 5:20). Not only that, every priest now has access to Christ. The apostle Paul writes, “For through [Christ] we have access in one Spirit to the Father” (Eph 2:18).²⁷ Finally, every priest is now the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. Paul tells us, “You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you” (Rom 8:9). Elsewhere Paul writes, “Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Cor 3:16²⁸). Since the message is so radical, he says the same thing two more times three chapters later, just for good measure (1 Cor 6:16, 19). The New Testament is filled with references that every believer is filled with the spirit, highlighting their priestly ministry in Christ.²⁹

Baptism: Commissioning of the Royal Priest and the Royal Priesthood

Jesus’ ministry as high priest is further illustrated by his public baptismal ordination revealed in Matthew 3:13-17.³⁰ NT authors identify Jesus’ baptism, as well as all Christian baptisms, as the ordination ceremony into priestly service. The author of Hebrews writes,

“Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:19-22 cf. Psalm 110).

²⁷ See also Ephesians 3:12; Hebrews 10:19-22; Romans 5:2; John 10:9; John 14:9.

²⁸ Cf. 2 Cor 6:16, which quotes Ezekiel’s version of Leviticus 26.

²⁹ See also Acts 6:5; Ephesians 5:18; Romans 8:11; John 16:13; Galatians 5:18; 5:22; Romans 8:9; 8:15; Galatians 4:6; 1 John 2:27 to name a few.

³⁰ Peter Leithart, *Priesthood of the Plebs* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 112.

At His baptism, Jesus was washed in the water, received the Spirit's anointing, and was commissioned into the ministry of His Father. These are mirrored ordination rituals of the Aaronic Levitical covenant. In the Levitical Priesthood before the Priests could begin their service, they had to be consecrated. To consecrate literally means to set apart or dedicate something (or someone) for a particular purpose. Before Aaron and his sons could begin their ministry, they needed to be consecrated to the Lord's service. Moses took the priests and anointed them with oil, sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice on them and their garments, and they had to wash in water for the next seven days.

Yet, Jesus' ministry serves as the fulfillment of the Aaronic priesthood and the new royal priesthood "forever after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 6:20). Thus, at his baptism Jesus is not anointed and ordained into a Levitical priesthood, but as the eschatological great High priest. This is further evidenced by the words of God the Father. He uses a benediction that combines the coronation of Psalm (2:7 and 110) with Isaiah's ordination song of the priestly '*ebed Yahweh* (Isa. 42:7). Both Jesus' baptism in Matthew 3:16-17 and Hebrews 5:5-8 use this same pairing of OT passages to reveal Jesus' ordination and anointing as the High-Priestly King. The reference to Psalm 2:7 and the echo of Isaiah 42:1-7 shows that this is a royal-prophetic commissioning. The overall aim of Matthew for quoting Isaiah is, as Beaton writes, "to demonstrate that Jesus is indeed the Servant of Isaiah 42."³¹

While in the Levitical priesthood, priests would receive the blood from animal sacrifices, in the new covenant our baptism is a sign and seal of Christ's blood being

³¹ Richard Beaton, *Isaiah's Christ in Matthew's Gospel* (*Isaiah's Christ in Matthew's Gospel* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 196.

poured out for us. OT priests would wash their bodies as a sign of cleansing; in the new covenant the water of baptism signifies a washing away of our sins by the blood of Christ. Additionally, while in the Levitical Priesthood priests would be anointed with oil,³² representing how the Holy Spirit was poured out, upon, in, and through the priesthood for their task that God has prepared for them to do, in the new covenant Christians are promised the gift of the Holy Spirit in baptism. Therefore, Christians are consecrated and ordained as a priest through the act of baptism.

Christian baptism, like Christ's baptism, is an anointing ceremony into the royal priesthood. Like Christ, they participate in priestly ministries. By the grace of God, they are equipped and empowered to function as priests for the sake of God's Kingdom. Therefore, just as the people of Israel were redeemed for a unique purpose to engage in temple service to God, one another, and the world, the grace of God manifested to us through our baptism calls every one of us into ministry, serving God in the world that He loves. Martin Luther helps clarify what this means: "Whoever comes out of the water of baptism can boast that he is already a consecrated priest!"³³

While Jesus' baptism represented His public ordination to this royal-priestly work, His death also establishes the PoAB.³⁴ The ripping of the inner veil of the temple from top to bottom (Mt 27:51) reveals the priestly ministry, service, and access to God has been granted to all of Jesus' siblings as well.³⁵ As stated by Hagner, "The death of

³² Oil always symbolizes the Holy Spirit in scriptures

³³ Martin Luther, "An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate 1520," accessed February 26, 2019, <http://www.wright.edu/~christopher.oldstone-moore/luth.htm>.

³⁴ Donald Hagner, *Matthew 14-28* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 849.

³⁵ Daniel M. Gurtner, *The Torn Veil* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 143.

Jesus establishes the priesthood of all believers.”³⁶ As stated by Gurtner, “Its rendering then permits accessibility to God in a manner not seen since Genesis 3.”³⁷

In baptism, a person is united to Christ and his church. Adopted into the family of God, Christians are given a new obligation as ordained members of Christ’s royal priesthood. Baptism is ordination into the priesthood.³⁸ To be a baptized Christian is to be called into ministry.

According to the NT, God proclaims five amazing graces upon us at our baptism: we belong to Jesus (Romans 6:3; Colossians 2:12; Mark 10:38); we belong to Jesus’ community, the church (1 Cor. 12:13; Galatians 3:26-28); and in community, we receive the promise of The Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 1 Cor. 6:11), forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38, 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Hebrews 10:22), and new life/new birth (June 3:5; Titus 3:5). This grace received through baptism is for the purpose of ministry and service to God’s Kingdom. Each Christian belongs to Christ and is tasked with participation in God’s redemptive plan (Rom 6). Christians are given the Holy Spirit who gives gifts to every priest, so all baptized can do works of ministry for the building up of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12; Eph 4:12). This is the Bible’s radical vision for the church.

The Royal Priesthood – Cast or Caste?

In the NT, none of the language associated with the royal priesthood ever applies the term to a specialized caste of priestly professionals within the body of Christ. Given the first century context, this concept was likely viewed as more scandalous and more radical than it even does today. James Dunn notes that a new religion without any priests,

³⁶ Donald Hagner, *Matthew 14-28* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 849.

³⁷ Gurtner, *The Torn Veil*, 144.

³⁸ Voss, 11.

sacrifices, or even a geographic temple-meeting-place “must have seemed like a plain contradiction in terms, even an absurdity to most [members of the first century].”³⁹

Part of this dissertation is championing the doctrine of the PoAB in such a way that God’s people are empowered to fulfill their missional commission. One of the key questions connected to that goal is determining both the legitimacy, or lack thereof, of the twenty-first century model with clergy and the possible implications of developing such a model of Christian ministry.

While all of scripture is “God-breathed and useful for teaching, correcting, and training in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16-17),” Ephesians is the NT letter that, perhaps more than any other, highlights the nature of and purpose of the church. Alan Hirsch calls it “the spiritual template for the church in all ages.”⁴⁰ Eugene Peterson says,

It provides our best access to what is involved in the formation of the church... This is the only writing in the NT that provides us with such a detailed and lively account of the inside and underground workings of the complex and various profusion of “church” that we encounter and try to make sense of.⁴¹

In other words, Paul’s testimony on the church is not simply a description of best practices in a particular time and place. It is the prescriptive DNA and code of Christ’s church for all times and places. To the extent that Paul’s theological paradigm is embraced and enacted accordingly is the extent to which the fruit and realization of these purposes will be seen.

With respect to the royal priesthood, consider an example given by Kevin Vanhoozer in his “Evangelicalism and the Church.” He suggests a helpful metaphor for the church stating that the PoAB could also be considered in terms of the “playerhood of

³⁹ James Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 548.

⁴⁰ Hirsch, 4.

⁴¹ Eugene Peterson, *Practice Resurrection* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 14-15

all believers...every member of the church is a player: a spirit-endowed agent with a role to play, a gift to contribute.”⁴² Following this analogy, the apostles or, as we say today, office-bearers would be the player-coaches. In Ephesians 4, Paul says they are the ones who are tasked with “equipping [the priesthood] for the work of ministry (*diakonos*), for the building up of the body of Christ” so that the body of Christ might be equipped/perfected (*katartizo*) (v. 12).

One thing that is abundantly clear through the biblical teachings of Peter, Paul, and the author of Hebrews is that they left no room for a priestly caste within the priestly cast. Each and every member of God’s family is called, commissioned, consecrated, and ordained to offer spiritual sacrifices, minister within the living temple, and proclaim the glory of Jesus to the world as priests. Ministry (*diakonos*) is the distinct birthright of the entire body of Christ.

Spiritual Sacrifices, the Temple, and the Holy Priesthood

The first-century NT doctrine of the royal priesthood is rooted in the OT threefold concept of the priesthood, the temple, and the sacrifice. God’s message to Christians is this: Through Christ, the anointed one, every believer is a priest, called to offer acceptable sacrifices in a temple being built by God. The apostle Peter provides the clearest biblical example of this conceptual triad in 1 Peter 2 when he weaves together “spiritual sacrifices” (1 Pt 2:5), the “temple” (2:4-8), and the “holy priesthood” (2:5, 9). It is worth noting that there has been near unanimous acceptance of this doctrine across the Christian church for almost 2000 years⁴³ and that Paul (Romans, Philippians, Ephesians,

⁴² Kevin Vanhoozer, “Evangelicalism and the Church” in *The Futures of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Press, 2003), 86-87.

⁴³ Voss, 29.

and 2 Timothy), Peter (1 Peter), and the author of Hebrews all harmonize in their teaching concerning the eschatological temple, priesthood, and sacrifice. Considering the OT implications between priests and the temple, Peter makes three incredible claims about Christians in the NT. First, while in the OT only Levitical priests could make sacrifices, in the NT all believers can offer up spiritual sacrifices holy and pleasing to God.⁴⁴ Second, while in the OT the temple was made by human hands and sanctified by God, in the NT the temple is the royal priesthood; Christians are the living stones made by God Himself. Finally, the OT Levitical priesthood was charged with mediating between God and humanity but in the NT, all believers can now proclaim God's wonderful acts to the world. Their identity as "a royal priesthood and holy nation" is found through Jesus' priesthood (1 Pt 2:9). In other words, the prerequisite for serving in Christ's priestly ministry no longer rests upon the Levitical ancestry but upon belief in Jesus and the Christians baptism ordination (1 Pet 1:5, 7-9, 21; 2:6-7; 4:19; 5:9). Just as the Levitical priesthood were redeemed for a unique purpose to engage in temple service to God, one another, and the world, the grace of God manifested to Christians in baptism calls every one of them into ministry, serving God in the world that He loves. Martin Luther's words help clarify what this means: "Whoever comes out of the water of baptism can boast that he is already a consecrated priest!"⁴⁵

The Priesthood

The first of Peter's three priestly concepts is that of the priesthood. As a holy and priestly family, Christians are now called to function as mediators between God and His people in the world. There are no passive priests in God's house. Their chief function is

⁴⁴ Menial in that they were insufficient and did nothing to pay down the principal of our sin-debt.

⁴⁵ Martin Luther, "An Open Letter."

to proclaim God's good news to the world. Reformer Martin Luther expresses this thought when he says, "we see that the first and foremost duty we Christians should perform [as priests] is to proclaim the wonderful deeds of God."⁴⁶

Christians perform these priestly duties in a number of ways. First, to say that a Christian is a priest means that every Christian represents Christ. According to Peter, the task of the royal priesthood is to "declare the virtues of God" (1 Pt 2:9). Christians offer spiritual sacrifices to God, especially service and proclamation of the Good News. Second, every priest now has access to Christ. The apostle Paul writes, "For through Christ we have access in one Spirit to the Father" (Eph 2:18).⁴⁷ Finally, every priest is now the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. Paul tells us, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Cor 3:16).⁴⁸ The NT is filled with references that every believer is filled with the spirit, highlighting their priestly ministry in Christ.⁴⁹ Peter continues to explain specific functions that are tied to the priesthood. Namely, offering sacrifices (1 Peter 2:5), proclaiming God's Word (2:9, 12; 3:15), speaking on behalf of God (4:11), and serving in God's strength (4:11) are all priestly functions to be carried out by all believers.

Peter's emphasis upon the priesthood of all believers is further evidence by how he starts his epistle addressing his readers this way: "To the elect [of God] ... according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification for the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood" (1 Pt 1:1-2). As stated by Gupta in his

⁴⁶ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works* (LW) 30:64-66. All citations from the works of Martin Luther are from *Luther's Works*. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut T. Lehmann, and Christopher Boyd Brown. 56 vols (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955-1986.)

⁴⁷ Ephesians 2:18. See also Ephesians 3:12; Hebrews 10:19-22; Romans 5:2; John 10:9; John 14:9.

⁴⁸ He renders the same declaration two more times three chapters later (1 Cor 6:16, 19)

⁴⁹ See also Acts 6:5; Ephesians 5:18; Romans 8:11; John 16:13; Galatians 5:18; 5:22; Romans 8:9; 8:15; Galatians 4:6; 1 John 2:27 to name a few.

“Spiritual House,” “the idea of consecration/sanctification...implies the notion of being set apart for a particular task.”⁵⁰ Peter uses further evidence of this when he refers to the purpose of our task “for obedience to Christ Jesus” and then the startling metaphor of being “sprinkled with blood.” This metaphor can only be understood in light of the OT consecration of Aaron and his sons when they were ordained into holy priesthood (Ex 29:1, 21; Lev 8:30). So from the very beginning of Peter’s letter he is seeking to shape the perspective of his readers to understand that, in the same way the tribe of Levi was ordained and consecrated into the priesthood, so too now every Christian has been set apart and ordained for holy ministry.

Paul, too, identifies as part of the royal priesthood, engaged in offering acceptable sacrifices to God and explains that all believers share in that same function (Rom 1:9, 15:16). This would have produced an obvious question among Jewish readers of how Paul, from the tribe of Benjamin (Rom 11:1, Phil 3:5), could claim to be a priest when this was the exclusive prerogative of the tribe of Levi. The answer is simple: Paul, along with Peter, believed that the OT cultic ministry was fulfilled in Christ. Paul saw himself, as well as all other believers, as a member of the royal priesthood as promised in Isaiah (61:6). This further illustrates that the NT priesthood is one given to every Christian by virtue of their baptism ordination. According to Hank Voss, “to those who through faith now have priestly access to God, to those who have identified themselves with Jesus’ death, burial, and current priestly ministry, to these believers, Paul begins [Romans] with a priestly [commission].”⁵¹

⁵⁰ Nijay Gupta, “A Spiritual House of Royal Priests, Chosen and Honored.” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 36 (2009), 62.

⁵¹ Voss, *The Priesthood of All Believers*. 44.

In view of the above, it is clear to see that all NT believers possessed a priestly identity. They were identified as the royal priesthood and commanded by God to proclaim the good news to the gentiles (1 Pt 2:9, 12; 3:15). This priestly calling was not simply relegated to the professionals. Jesus, Peter, Paul, among other NT writers make it abundantly clear that every believer is called to function as a priest, ordained and commissioned to engage in priestly ministry.

The Temple

The second of the priestly motifs by Peter is that of the temple. Just as Levitical priests approached the most “Holy Place” (Ex 26:33-34; Ex 28, 38-39) in the OT, Christians are now to draw near to Jesus, the Anointed, the chief cornerstone (Is 28:16; Ps 118:22; Mt 21:42; Mk 12:10; Lk 20:17, Acts 4:11; Eph 2:20; 1 Pt 2:6-6) of the new temple being built by God (Eph 2:20; 4:12, 16; 1 Cor 14:26; Mt 18:18). But this temple is not like anything the world has ever seen. Christians are the living stones in the house that God is building (1 Pt 2:5; Rom 12:1). As stated by Hank Voss: “The concept of believers as the new temple of God, the place where God’s Spirit dwells, was a fundamental component of the apostolic instruction...All believers have priestly access to God through Jesus Christ. They are now members of the household of God being built into a holy temple where Jesus is the Cornerstone.”⁵²

Peter is not the only one to describe believers as a living temple. Paul and the author of Hebrews also apply the same principle. In addition, Jesus, Peter, and Paul all use the same OT Temple Psalm (118) to indicate that Christ is the chief cornerstone of the long-awaited living temple. Perhaps the most comprehensive application of this

⁵² Ibid., 30-31.

principle comes in 2 Corinthians 6:16 when Paul writes: "...we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." Here Paul is referencing four OT quotations, highlighting that church, the body of Christ, is now a type of new Levitical priestly people.⁵³ The only difference is that in the OT the Levitical priesthood could enter into the Holy of Holies only once a year. Now, every believer is a priest, comprising of the holy temple made of living stones, endowed with the Holy Spirit every moment of every day. In other words, there are no more sanctified objects in the NT, only sanctified people.

Temple-people (i.e. the royal priesthood) are called to do temple-service (i.e. acts of ministry) by building up the living stones that make up the temple (1 Pt 2). The royal priesthood⁵⁴ are called to do "...acts of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain until of the faith" (Eph 4:12). Therefore, the purpose of highlighting God's design for Christians to function as temple-people is to recognize that we are anointed with the task of works of ministry for the sake of God's Kingdom. The NT identifies a smorgasbord of tasks and ministries for members of the living temple. To list only a few, all temple servants are called to: minister to one another (Romans 12:1-8), build up the body (Ephesians 4:12), teach one another (James 5:16), forgive one another (Matthew 18:18), intercede for one another (Colossians 4:3), to use their spiritual gifts for service (1 Peter 4:10-11), to proclaim the glorious deeds of God (1 Peter 2:9), and to

⁵³ Leviticus 26:11 is referenced in 2 Corinthians 6:16-17; Isaiah 52:11 is referenced in 2 Corinthians 6:17, words which are addressed to Israel as priests! Ezekiel 20:34 is referenced in 2 Corinthians 6:16; 2 Samuel 7:14 is referenced in 2 Corinthians 6:18.

⁵⁴ Whom Paul calls "saints"

proclaim the good news to the world (Philippians 2:14-18). Again, this is the distinct calling of every Christian.

Interestingly enough, the Greek language provides a clear understanding of the intimate relationship between priests (*hiereus*) and the temple (*hieron*). While the temple is the manifestation of God's presence on earth, the implications of this reality in the NT are incredible. Consider how in the OT the people of Israel would have to travel hundreds of miles in order to experience God's presence. And even when they arrived, only the priests alone were privileged to serve in Yahweh's temple. All of this changes in the NT. It is abundantly clear that all NT believers identified as the "temple-people" of God. Once again indicating that there were no sanctified buildings or acts of ministry, only sanctified people, anointed to engage in works of ministry for the sake of God's Kingdom.

The Sacrifice

The third and final term referenced by Peter is that of a sacrifice. If it is true that all Christians function as "a royal priesthood" of "living stones" that comprise of "God's temple," then they are also called to make "spiritual sacrifices." Hans Kung says it this way:

If then all believers have, in this particular way, to offer sacrifices through Christ, that means that all believers have a priestly function, of a completely new kind, through Christ the one high priest and mediator. The abolition of a special priestly caste and its replacement by the priesthood of the one new and eternal high priest has as its strange and yet logical consequence the fact that all believers share in a universal priesthood.⁵⁵

This is the impetus for Peter's description of Christians as priests, temples, and sacrifices. God calls all believers for the ministry of proclaiming the Good News to the

⁵⁵ Hans Kung, *The Church* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 370.

world. They not only serve a priestly function or task. It is the very essence of their identity, who they are in Christ. In other words, there is never a time when Christians ‘take off’ the garb of the priesthood, hence the impetus from Jesus, Peter, Paul, and the author of Hebrews to insist upon the Christian’s calling to make a “daily sacrifice” (Rom 12:1; 1 Pt 2:5; Heb 10:11).

Peter also specifically lists examples of how Christians make spiritual sacrifices. While likely not meant to be exhaustive in scope, it does provide a proper reference for the type of activities each and every believer is called to engage in. Peter’s list of acts of ministry include, but are not limited to, proclaiming God’s Word (1 Peter 2:9), bearing witness to God’s glory (2:12), engaging in holy conduct (3:1), living holy lives before God (1 Peter 3:12), being constantly prepared to give an account of God’s work within their own life (3:15), and all for the sake of winning those who are lost for the sake of Christ (2:9, 12; 3:1).

Peter’s words are harmonious with Jesus, Paul, and the author of Hebrews, highlighting the missional nature of the royal priesthood upon every believer. For instance, Hebrews expects the priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices (Hebrews 13:15-16) via sharing/word (*koinonia*) and deed (*agathopoios*) ministry. Peter, Paul, and the author of Hebrews highlight the role and function of the royal priesthood by stating their spiritual sacrifices are a means by which believers can testify to God’s grace, proclaim the good news, and win the lost for the sake of Christ.

In summary, believers are part of the royal priesthood by way of their baptismal ordination. Their tasks are threefold: to minister to the Father through worship and praise; to minister to one another through mutual edification and building up the body of Christ;

and to minister to the world through the priestly role of witness and proclamation to the world living in darkness. Through Christ, the anointed one, every believer is part of a holy priesthood, called to offer acceptable sacrifices in a temple made up of living stones being built by God. For the NT believer, this was the air they breathed. It was a new age when the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon all men and women, suddenly giving each Christian access to God, to act as temple servants. Given the priesthood motif and its understanding in the first Century, each Christian understood that their primary function was temple service to God via word and deed ministry, especially the proclamation of good news to the lost.

PART TWO

THE ROYAL PRIESTHOOD ACROSS HUMAN HISTORY

CHAPTER 2:

THE EARLY CHURCH

“Or are you ignorant that to you also, that is, to all of the Church of God and to the people of believers, the priesthood was given? ... you have a priesthood because you are a ‘priestly nation,’ and for this reason ‘you ought to offer an offering of praise to God,’ an offering of prayers, an offering of mercy, an offering of purity, an offering of justice, an offering of holiness.”

-- Origen (d. ca. 254), *Homilies on Leviticus*, 9.1.3¹

“One could not be but impressed by the prominence which the doctrine of the priesthood of the faithful held in the minds of the patristic writers.”

-- Bishop Laurence Ryan (d. 2003)²

In order to understand the practical nature of the PoAB, it is important to consider both the biblical evidence as well as the significant historical developments from the beginning of the church to present day. In other words, current practices must be weighed against the guiding principles of God’s Word and the historical developments of Christ’s church.

The three chapters in this section describe a number of turning points in the life of the church with regard to the PoAB. Broadly speaking, these paradigm shifts trace how this NT doctrine fared from the early church until just before the Protestant Reformation.

¹ Origen, “Homily 9” in *Homilies on Leviticus 1-16*, accessed February 26, 2019, <https://muse.jhu.edu/chapter/740539>.

² Quoted in Voss, 103.

During each of these time periods, the church has undergone significant changes and has been forced to question not only the practical outpourings of this doctrine, but its very ecclesial identity.

Defrocking the Royal Priesthood – A Historical Analysis

One of the reasons the gospel spread so quickly in the first century was because believers saw themselves as a priests. It was the average Christian using the spiritual gift of hospitality, which brought the empire to its knees, converting it from paganism to Christianity. Consider how the last pagan emperor of Rome, Julian, like many emperors before him, hated Christianity. He was disturbed by the fact that Christianity was spreading throughout the entire Roman Empire like wildfire despite his best efforts to stop it. People were coming to Christianity in droves; Julian responded to the Christian movement writing:

“Do we not observe how the benevolence of Christians to random strangers has done the most to advance their cause? It is disgraceful that the Christians support not only their poor, but ours as well, while everyone is able to see that our own people lack aid from us.”³

These Christians knew that they were commissioned to function as the royal priesthood to a world in desperate need of God’s redemption and, as a result, much of the Roman Empire was converted to Christ because of average Christians with a clear sense of calling in the world.

However, by the end of the second century everything begins to slowly change and the PoAB begins to fall apart or be defrocked (to defrock is to remove one’s priestly credentials). This has been the grand narrative regarding the PoAB between the second

³ D. Brendan Nagle and Stanley M. Burstein, *The Ancient World* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ; Prentice Hall, 1995), 314-315.

and sixteenth centuries. Kenan Osborne describes the PoAB development this way: “Disempowering might not be the correct term, however, and some authors prefer terms such as disenfranchising, displacement, denigrating, diminishment, etc...the overwhelming usage of terms which include a prefix of ‘dis’ or ‘de’ and therefore a negative prefix are clear.”⁴ This section provides a birds-eye view into the gradual descent of the PoAB from the second to sixteenth century.

Pre-Nicaea (100-300)

Evidence from the second century Church is so limited that many scholars have called it the “tunnel period.”⁵ It is extremely difficult to determine with accuracy precisely what happened in this period, which makes it even more difficult to determine how or why it happened that way. Yet a few positive assertions can be made about this period regarding the early church. First, there were already a variety of different expressions forming with regard to how churches were functioning. Second, this eventually led to more standard forms of organization within the church.

An argument could be made that different varieties of church expressions were already forming during the NT period. For example, there are clear distinctions between the churches in Jerusalem and the churches that Paul reflects on in his epistles. This trend grew exponentially throughout the second and third centuries.

With regard to the PoAB, the first references made in the post-NT period are by Solomon in approximately 105 A.D.⁶, then Justin Martyr’s description of believers as a

⁴ Kenan Osborne, *Ministry* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1993), 115.

⁵ See, for example, H. Burn-Murdoch, *Church, Continuity & Unity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 79.

⁶ See Colin Bulley, *The Priesthood of Some Believers* (London: Paternoster, 2000), 65, 159.

“priestly race” in 165,⁷ and then again by Irenaeus in 200 when he says that all Christians share a place in the “priestly order” just like the Lord’s disciples.⁸ From these men, among others, we see that the PoAB is alive and well across the entire Roman Empire.

“Lay” People and the Split Priesthood [The Emergence of the Holy People]

That is not to say the early church was without trouble. By the end of the first century, questions surrounding the PoAB began to emerge. Perhaps one of the very first questions came in AD 96 when Clement of Rome became the first person to describe believers as “lay-persons,” distinguishing them from religious leaders. He writes,

For to the high priest the proper services have been given, and to the priests the proper office has been assigned, and upon the Levites the proper ministries have been imposed. The layman [laikos anthropos] is bound by the layman’s [laikos] rules. Let each of you brothers, give thanks to God with your own group/rank [tagmati], maintaining a good conscience, not overstepping the designated rule of his ministry...⁹

Clement is the first person to use the term *laikos* in a religious sense, suggesting two different ranks (*tagmata*)¹⁰ among believers. While scripture does distinguish between those who equip the rest of the body and those who are equipped (Eph. 4:1-12), nowhere in scripture is the *laikos* distinction made. Though Clement was a proponent of the PoAB, insisting that all believers should engage in priestly witness, his terminology is what is problematic here.¹¹ Little did he know that his delineation between two different ranks of believers would continue to increase throughout the following centuries. The question

⁷ Alexander Faivre, *The Emergence of the Laity in the Early Church* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990), 31.

⁸ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4.8.

⁹ Clement, *1 Clement* 40:5-41:1 (AF3 99) in *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, edited by Michael Holmes (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007).

¹⁰ Interestingly enough, the only use of the Greek *tagmata* in scripture is in 1 Corinthians 15 in reference to Christ’s second coming and drawing those who belong to Him.

¹¹ Clement of Rome learned his terminology from the Roman Social Stratification: “Laos” meaning “crowds” or “gathering of common people” (plebs) cf. Louw Nida 87.64

here was not that Clement used priestly language to describe the religious leaders of the day. As stated previously, even the apostle Paul drew distinctions between leaders and the royal priesthood. The concern is that this distinction served to exclude other members of the body while engaging in priestly ministry. As stated by Voss, "...as centuries wear on, the eschatological nature of the whole priestly body fades farther and farther into the background. In its place, a reductionist priestly typology limits Levitical types to clergy."¹²

Temple Trouble [The Emergence of the Holy Place]

The second challenge that emerges in the second century is the first time the church is referenced as a building, rather than the called out people of God. Like Clement's first use of the term laypersons, he is also the first person to reference a Christian meeting place as the church (*ekklesia*) stating, "Women and men are to go to church (*ekklesia*) decently attired."¹³ However, every use of the word "church" (*ekklesia*) in scripture is in reference to people.

This was not the case for the first century church. In scripture, there is a clear pattern in which you see the early church gathering together in homes for worship. As Christian fellowships grew in size, some started to remodel their homes.¹⁴ In fact, one of the most fascinating finds of archaeology from the 2nd Century is in modern Syria where the house of Dura-Europos was found. This home has been marked as the earliest identifiable Christian gathering place for corporate worship. Interestingly, it was simply a

¹² Voss, *The Priesthood of All Believers*. 108.

¹³ Clement, *The Instructor* (Book 3, Chapter 11).

¹⁴ Graydon Snyder, *Ante Pacem* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2018), 67. These restructured homes are called *domus ecclesiae*.

private home that was remodeled as a Christian gathering place around AD 232.¹⁵ Even for more large-scale, corporate assemblies, Christians would simply find themselves worshipping in the open courts of the temple and Solomon's porch (Acts 2:46a, 5:12).

Though the act of conducting public worship services in designated buildings is not anti-biblical, this move marked a new paradigm within the collective psyche of God's people. Namely, God's house became less of an eschatological reference to the living stones of Christ's one body, many parts (1 Pt 2:5-9, 1 Cor 3:16, Eph 2:18-22), and more a reference to the OT narrative of God's presence being manifested within a brick and mortar building. Looking further through the pages of human history, this trend continues with unintended consequences. By the middle of the fourth century, the majority trend within the Christian church moves from worshipping in homes to meeting in buildings set aside for worship. The trouble, then, is not the meeting place, but in using the term *ekklesia* in reference to a building, rather than to the people of God.

Holy Acts of Ministry

After erecting special meeting places set aside for corporate worship, the obvious question was, "Who shall serve within the holy place?" The answer to that question was abundantly clear in the OT: only Aaron's priestly caste was able to possess that privilege. This, after all, was the defining function of the Levitical priesthood. In the NT, now that Christ's Melchizedekian royal priesthood has been established, Peter explains who is qualified to serve in the temple:

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: ¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Pt 4:10-11)

¹⁵ Frank Viola and David Barna, *Pagan Christianity* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2002), 15.

Thus, according to Peter, Paul, and other NT writers, there is no such thing as a “lay-person” within the body of Christ (1 Pt 2, 4; Eph 2, 4; Heb 11). Rather, God’s whole flock are priests, called to engage in priestly ministry.

The NT view of the temple was not a building made of stones but a living organism comprised of living stones. Once again, the issue related to worshipping in a building set aside for corporate worship is not the issue. However, one can see how its use and development throughout the centuries has led to a particular method of thought that has defrocked the priesthood and attributed to the growth and development of a priestly caste.

The Convergence [Holy Acts Conducted by Holy People Within the Holy Place]

In 258 AD, all three issues would collide when Cyprian of Carthage became the first person to argue that bishops held a special priesthood (the holy person), within the church building (the holy place), to preside over the Eucharist (the holy/official acts of ministry).¹⁶ Shortly thereafter, Eusebius becomes the first person to specifically call the building (rather than the people) “God’s temple.”¹⁷ Very early on in the history of the Christian church, a troubling trend emerges, what Hans Thummel refers to as a “turning point” within the Christian community.¹⁸ Already by the middle of the third century, temple service was primarily associated with the confines of the four walls of the brick and mortar church/temple, rather than with the NT model in which God is building a

¹⁶ Bryan Alan Stewart, “Priests of My People: Levitical Paradigms for Christian Ministers in the Third and Fourth Century Churches” (PhD diss, University of Virginia, 2007), 176-211. See also “Official Acts of Ministry” in Chapter 4.

¹⁷ Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*. Translated by J. E. L. Oulton. Vol. 265. LCL (New York: Harvard University Press, 1932), 10.4, 395-45.

¹⁸ Hans Georg Thummel, “Versammlungstaum, Kirche, Temepl” In *Gemeinde ohne Tempel*, edited by Beate Ego, Armin Lange, and Peter Pilhofer (Tubigen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 499.

temple of living stones. While every use of the word “church” (ekklesia) in scripture is in reference to people, the Holy Place becomes the new space for church leaders to develop a priestly caste, rather than the NT model where God is developing a kingdom of priests. In this new space, the priestly caste is able to conduct special acts that only they can provide, as a means of delivering God’s grace to His people, rather than the NT model where God commends the royal priesthood to make spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. As a result of the convergence, a sacred versus secular divide emerges within the collective psyche of God’s people. Stewart summarizes this point well:

With regard to the architectural and artistic developments, a sacred space and the emergence of a more materially defined identity would invite a new understanding of the Church as Culture. It would facilitate a re-conceptualization of the role and function of one who presides over the emerging sacred space and objects as a “priest.”¹⁹

Nuance is needed here. While the rise of Christian meeting places conducted for corporate worship, composed by a set apart group of persons is not inherently wrong (much is potentially good), its uncritical acceptance over the course of the centuries has atrophied the rich and holistic new covenant perspective that promulgates all believers as a royal priesthood. As stated by Voss, “the medieval reduction of temple service to an exclusive clerical caste was a far cry from the apostolic vision of a royal priesthood offering priestly sacrifices in an eschatological temple.”²⁰ While erecting special buildings for worship, run by a priestly caste who perform holy acts of ministry was an important issue in the third century, there are more issues to be considered.

¹⁹ Bryan A. Stewart, *Priests of my People* (New York: Peter Lang Inc., 2015), 23.

²⁰ Voss, *The Priesthood of All Believers*. 112.

The “Third” Priesthood

In 220 AD, Tertullian stated that all believers were “priests of the spiritual temple,” further noting that a Christian’s ordination into the priesthood occurs at their baptism.²¹ Thirty years later, Origen would follow his lead and state that all faithful Christians could serve as “high priests” by sharing in Christ’s priesthood.²² But theirs were not the reigning view among Christians in the third century. For Cyprian, the bishop was the people’s priest who was solely responsible for conducting officially set aside acts of ministry.²³ The bishop was the one who had exclusive powers to assign unique sacrificial powers to other clergy through the laying on of hands.²⁴ In fact, Cyprian is not once recorded calling bishops priests. He always assigns them a third, set apart, term, *sacerdotos*.²⁵ This new ministerial priesthood has exclusive power to mediate God’s forgiveness to God’s people and offer sacrifices to God on behalf of His people. He is now a quintessential mediator between God and His people—a type of *Levitical* priest.

Already by the middle of the third century, the PoAB goes from one universal priestly office to three – the office of layperson, the office of priest, and the office of Bishop (*sacerdotos*) which is the exclusive priesthood who conducts exclusive sacrifices on behalf of God and His people. As stated by Voss, “Cyprian reduced Peter’s concept of the spiritual sacrifices of the royal priesthood to an almost exclusive emphasis on the Eucharistic president, [Bishop].”²⁶ This development serves perhaps as the most

²¹ Faivre, 45-51.

²² Note: Origen was the last significant “lay” leader and preacher for over 1000 years. His clerical ordination came shortly before his death.

²³ Bulley, 115-118.

²⁴ Interestingly, one of the “Official Acts of Ministry” within the CRCNA, to be conducted solely by Ministers of the Word, is the ordination of office-bearers by the laying on of hands.

²⁵ Cyprian of Carthage, “Epistle 64” accessed February 26, 2019, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/050664.htm>.

²⁶ Voss, 59.

significant landmarks in the history of the Christian church on this topic, moving from a priestly race to a priestly class.

The Constantinian Era & the Edict of Toleration (A.D. 300-460)

It is odd to think that the Christianization of the most powerful nation in the known world could have served as the catalyst for even greater atrophy of the PoAB. Yet the situation which met the reformers by the sixteenth century was not a unified nation of priests, but what Leithart called “a sea of baptized pagans.”²⁷

The *ekklesia* moved from baptized priests to baptized laypersons. Witnessed by Constantine’s *Edict of Toleration*, the adverse effect upon the doctrine of the PoAB is revealed in three ways: First, the gradual disassociation of baptism from priestly ordination. Second, the addition of a fourth Christian priesthood²⁸, and third, further development of a split between what is sacred and secular. While this edict legalized Christianity and, of course, meant the end of all persecution of the church, it also had unintentional consequences with regard to the PoAB.

Baptism vs. Priestly Ordination

One Hundred years prior to the Edict of Toleration, Tertullian rigorously defended the biblical principle that baptism was the Christian’s entrance into their priestly ministry.²⁹ Baptism was the ordination service that set them apart to function as a royal priesthood and holy nation. In the same way that Aaron and his sons were ordained

²⁷ Leithart, 102-108.

²⁸ Delineations of spiritual “power” also mirror the influence of the metastasizing Roman Empire: now the State not only influences the church but infiltrates it. The question is worth asking: Who, indeed, has converted whom?

²⁹ Tertullian, *Writings of Tertullian*, translated by S. Thellwall and Peter Holmes (Buffalo, NY: The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885-1896), electronic edition.5.9 (ANF 3:448).

in the OT as a sign of their priesthood, so too in the NT it is the sign of baptism that ordains all Christians into priestly ministry. As priests, baptized believers are called to live lives of holiness, offering their bodies daily as their spiritual worship to God, and proclaiming the good news of God's grace to the lost.

However, after Constantine's Edict of Toleration was the Christianization of the Roman Empire. As a result, by 529 Emperor Justinian decreed that anyone within the empire who failed to have their household's infants baptized would be executed. While personally a proponent of the covenant baptism of children, Constantine's edict of toleration developed into an unhappy marriage between church and state that led to the decommissioning of the baptismal priesthood. It was no longer viewed as the ordination ceremony of God's people into the royal priesthood, but an imperial decree to be conducted by all, punishable by death. In his *The Pastor*, Eugene Peterson makes a fitting comparison while humorously lamenting that his first "convert" was a boy he beat up, pinned on the ground, and forced to say, "I believe in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior!"³⁰

This is further witnessed in the decommissioning of the royal priesthood's call to proclamation. When an entire empire is Christianized by order of decree, the priestly proclamation of the royal priesthood is no longer necessary. As stated by Voss, "To be born a Roman citizen was to be born a Christian."³¹ While in the age of the NT proclamation was a central function of the royal priesthood, now it was no longer perceived as a necessary function. As a result, both the ordination ceremony of baptism

³⁰ Eugene Peterson, *The Pastor* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2012), Chapter 6.

³¹ Voss, 125.

and the primary task of the priesthood through proclamation were effectively removed, simultaneously.

The “Fourth” Priesthood

While the second and third centuries saw the rise and development of the second (lay-persons and priests) and then third (sacerdotes/Bishops) priesthood, Kenan Osborne’s research reveals that the royal priesthood was further defrocked during the Constantinian era with the development of a “fourth” priesthood, the development of the Emperor/King priesthood.³² By A.D. 337, Constantine becomes the first Christian Emperor of Rome, and assumes all ecclesiastical responsibility.³³ Osborne develops this theme further by showing the three models of the priesthood that develop after the Constantinian era, all of which have four distinct priestly classes:³⁴

<u>Papacy</u>	<u>Kingship</u>	<u>Dual Rite</u>	
1. Pope (Clergy)	1. Emperor/King	1a. Emperor/King	1b. Pope (Clergy)
2. Emperor/King	2. Pope (Clergy)		
3. Monks/Priests	3. Monks/Priests	3. Monks/Priests	
4. Lay-persons	4. Lay-persons	4. Lay-persons	

While these structures may not be inherently problematic, the bigger issue came with how people came to understand these roles relative to the royal priesthood. This development also sets the stage for later issues related to church and state.

³² K. Osborne, 163-232.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 200-232.

The Growing “Sacred vs. Secular” Divide

By Constantine’s time, the pattern of dividing what was sacred from what was secular continued to grow. Eusebius provides the proof when he writes,

Two ways of living were thus given by the law of Christ to his church:
The one...devotes itself to the service of God alone...performing the duty of the priesthood to Almighty God for the whole race, not with sacrifices of bulls and blood...but with right principles of true holiness...such then is the perfect form of the Christian life...”

In other words, this is the most noble and “sacred” life of the ministerial priesthood.

“...And the other more humble, more human, permits men to join in pure nuptials and to produce children, to undertake government, to give orders to soldiers fighting for right...and other more secular interests...and a kind of secondary grade of piety is attributed to them.”³⁵

In other words, aside from what is previously described as the “sacred” life, all others are free to engage in the “secular” life of laypersons.

Once again, one can trace the steps of human history from this point to witness the gradual dualism that continues to emerge between the sacred and secular. For instance, monasticism continued to rise through the fourth to sixteenth centuries. Whereas discipleship was intended to be a characteristic of the entire royal priesthood, it increasingly becomes the exclusive task and prerogative of the “perfect form of the Christian life” through monastics, monks, priests, and other religious leaders.

The Rise of Roman Catholicism

When Roman Catholicism evolved in the fourth through sixth centuries, it started to organize; to write ordinances and regulations and to develop Canon Law, the operational policy governing the Catholic Church, with special focus on three distinct

³⁵ Eusebius, *Proof of the Gospel*. Translated by William John Ferrar (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 48-50.

topics (the ministerial priesthood, the church building, and sacred acts conducted by the ministerial priesthood in the church building). Canon Law states, "...a church is a sacred building dedicated to Divine worship for the use of all the faithful and the public exercise of religion."³⁶

By the end of the fifth century, efforts to organize the church into an institutional hierarchy were in full swing. Though its practical development in churches has already been underway for over two centuries, by approximately AD 500, Dionysius becomes the first person recorded to use the term "hierarchy" of church leaders.³⁷ In this way, he simply provided the nomenclature connected to how the church was already functioning. By 604 A.D., the starting point of the Medieval Period, Gregory the Great cements a three-fold view of the priesthood, comprising of laity, monks, and clergy. This view dominated the church's view until the sixteenth Century.³⁸

From the seventh to thirteenth century, a pattern emerges where laity increasingly become spectators rather than participants in the priesthood³⁹ and the divide between what is sacred and what is secular continues to exacerbate itself.⁴⁰ The clergy become the priests who offer spiritual sacrifices on behalf of God's people to God, namely through mass.⁴¹ What follows is a series of significant events through the Medieval Period that reflect a gradual progression of defrocking the royal priesthood.

³⁶ Peter F. Anson, *Churches - Their Plan and Furnishing* (Self-published, CreateSpace, 2015), 3.

³⁷ Voss, Appendix.

³⁸ There was a brief shift in the thirteenth and fourteenth Centuries. See: K. Osborne, 221-23.

³⁹ David Orr, *The Gift of the Priesthood of the Faithful* (Rome: Pontificium Athenaeum S. Anselmi, 1991), 198-199.

⁴⁰ Martin Luther writes about this in *LW* 44:243-400.

⁴¹ See Edward Kilmartin, "Mass Benefits," *Eucharist in the West*. Edited by Robert Daly (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1998), 112-115.

In A.D. 750, Roman Catholic leaders write the “Gelasian Sacramentary,” a supplement to Canon Law, and a book on Christian liturgy.⁴² While openly stating its desired emphasis on the royal priesthood, it has a clear emphasis on the ministerial priesthood. The result is a material culture that, for centuries to come, continues to reduce the emphasis on the royal priesthood, and an increases the emphasis on the ministerial priesthood. Thirty-five years later a second book, the “Gregorian Sacramentary,” is written, with even less emphasis upon the royal priesthood than the first.⁴³

Meanwhile in Germany and France, a similar pattern is developing, where Rabanus Maurus becomes the first to suggest that a second outpouring of the Holy Spirit occurs during the ordination of clergy.⁴⁴ Moreover, Paschasius is the first to contend that hierarchical priests alone have the spiritual power and authority to change bread and wine into the body of Christ, a belief now referred to as “transubstantiation.”⁴⁵

By the turn of the eleventh century in AD 1087, Pope Gregory the VII gives all remaining priestly functions from the laity over to the ministerial priesthood. In 1164, Bishop Lombard adds ministerial ordination as one of the seven sacraments of the church, and in 1216, Pope Innocent III claims that the rights of the royal priesthood are primarily located in the papacy. These are only a few of the major movements that inspire the Reformation at the turn of the sixteenth century.

⁴² New Catholic Encyclopedia, “Gelasian Sacramentary,” accessed February 26, 2019, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/gelasian-sacramentary>.

⁴³ Orr, 96-132.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 195-198.

⁴⁵ Voss, The Priesthood of All Believers. Chapter 4.

Pre-Reformation (AD 1218 to 1500)

While the Roman Catholic Church was the religious superpower in Rome, in other parts of the world a resurgence toward emphasizing the PoAB was emerging. In 1218,⁴⁶ Peter Waldo, a French religious leader who founded the Waldensian movement, advocated that the rights of the priestly ministry were based on the believer's ordination in their baptism. He also believed that every Christian should have access to scripture in their own language, which caused him to organize the first vernacular translation of scripture in Western Europe.⁴⁷ In Italy, St. Thomas Aquinas (AD 1225-1274), a Dominican Friar and Catholic Priest, argued that all Christians shared in the priesthood.⁴⁸ In AD 1384, a Dutch Roman Catholic Deacon and Preacher by the name of Gerard Groote founds the "Brethren of the Common Life," a movement that has profound influence upon the life and ministry of Martin Luther, especially his views on the PoAB.⁴⁹ This time period includes pre-Reformers like John Wycliffe (1384) and Walter Brut (1405) in England,⁵⁰ and John Hus (1415) and Jacob of Mies (1429) in Prague,⁵¹ all of which argued for a resurgence toward religious practices that involved the royal priesthood, arguing that the church consists not of a hierarchy but of the whole body of Christ.

⁴⁶ Only two years after Pope Innocent III claimed that the rights of the royal priesthood were located in the papacy.

⁴⁷ Ibid., Chapter 5.

⁴⁸ Ibid., Chapter 4.

⁴⁹ Encyclopedia Britannica, "Brethren of the Common Life," accessed March 4, 2019, available. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Brethren-of-the-Common-Life>.

⁵⁰ Malcolm B. Yarnell, *Royal Priesthood in the English Reformation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), Chapters 1 and 2.

⁵¹ *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1908), 1315.

CHAPTER 3:

THE REFORMATION & POST REFORMATION

“Not only are we the freest of kings, we are also priests forever, which is far more excellent than being kings, for as priests we are worthy to appear before God to pray for others and to teach one another divine things. These are the functions of priests...”
-- Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520)¹

“Holy Scripture...writes of not more than one spiritual priesthood...[it] makes all of us equal priests, as has been said, but the churchly priesthood which we now separate from laymen in the whole world, and which alone we call priesthood, is called “ministry” [ministerium], “servitude” [servitus], “dispensation” [dispensatio], “episcopate” [episcopatus], and “presbytery” [presbyterium] in Scripture. Nowhere is it called “priesthood” [sacerdocium] or “spiritual” [spiritualis].”
-- Martin Luther, *LW* 39: 154²

By the turn of the sixteenth century, the ecclesiastical world is divided into three hierarchical priesthoods: the clergy, monastics, and laity. These three orders were the dominant theme in the church from the fifth through the sixteenth century.³ All of that began to change in 1517.

Reforming the Royal Priesthood – The Short-Lived Reformation

On October 31, 1517, this 900-year-old practice was challenged by a German monk by the name of Martin Luther, who wrote his ninety-five theses in Wittenberg

¹ Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520) (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2013), 16.

² Luther, *LW*, 39:154.

³ This is unlike the 4th Century where there were four hierarchical priesthoods.

Germany.⁴ This paper contained ninety-five reasons why the Roman Catholic Church and the pope were on the wrong path. Martin Luther taught that all believers have the right to read and understand the scripture for themselves. This idea was predicated on the doctrine of the PoAB. Perhaps more than any other person (outside biblical authors), Martin Luther is the theologian of the royal priesthood. In fact, even more than Peter, Paul, and the author of Hebrews, Luther has contributed to the doctrine's conceptual development within local churches.

There were two issues, in particular, that Luther contended. The first was the apparent sacred/secular divide that was running rampant within the church. The second, connected to the first, was the lay/clergy divide as it connects to the priesthood. Luther rejected the notion of a “churchly priesthood” within the one royal priesthood.⁵ Luther writes,

Holy Scripture...writes of not more than one spiritual priesthood...[it] makes all of us equal priests, as has been said, but the “churchly priesthood” which we now separate from laymen in the whole world, and which alone we call priesthood, is called “ministry [ministerium], “servitude” [servitus], “dispensation” [dispensation], “episcopate” [episcopatus], and “presbytery” [presbyterium] in Scripture. Nowhere is it called “priesthood” [sacerdocium] or “spiritual” [spiritualis].⁶

Later he writes, “For priests, the baptized, and Christians are all one and the same...when St. Peter says here: “You are a royal priesthood,” this is tantamount to saying: “You are Christians.”⁷ In other words, there are not unique, separate, hierarchical priesthoods. There are only unique ministries or services within the royal priesthood—one body,

⁴ Through reformer Philip Melancthon, folklore suggests he nailed these 95 theses to the door of All Saints Church in Wittenberg, but it is highly speculated.

⁵ Luther, *LW* 39:152.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 30:63, 64.

many parts. For Luther, to be a Christian is to be a royal priest. Luther's proposal of one spiritual priesthood was revolutionary and led to massive changes in the church.

Reforming Baptism

During the Constantinian and Medieval Periods, the biblical significance of baptism had been altered significantly. But Luther challenged social convention by repeatedly emphasizing that there was only one priesthood (Christ's royal priesthood) and, equally important, only one priestly ordination (baptism). Luther writes, "we are all consecrated priests through baptism."⁸ In 1521, there was a famous debate between Martin Luther and Luther's former teacher, Jerome Emser. The debate was on the topic of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The question was whether Jesus' message was for the royal priesthood or for the apostles/clergy only. In the debate, Emser prays for his brother, stating, "tell him, holy Lord Jesus Christ, that you did not speak to the laymen but only to your apostles...tell him that you did not speak to the common people..."⁹

Luther had struck a nerve. He continued to contend that believers were priests, sourced in their baptism. But what was perhaps even more scandalous was Luther's view on what the priesthood could do. He writes, "All Christians have the authority, the command, and the obligation to preach, come before God, pray [intercede] for others, and to offer themselves as a sacrifice to God."¹⁰

⁸ Ibid., 44:127.

⁹ Ludwig Enders, *Luther and Emser* (Halle, Germany, 1889), 2:141; Also Luther, *LW* 39:232.

¹⁰ Luther, *LW* 30:53.

Reforming Vocation & Discipleship (All Sacred, No Secular)

For Luther, the royal priesthood was not simply a theological construct. He thought this theological reality ought to inform our everyday lives and practices. The spiritual service to God, previously limited to the ministerial priesthood, is a ministry commended to every believer. While the Reformation is often viewed as a conflict about doctrine – justification, grace and works, and indulgences – what captured the imagination of the people in Europe during the Reformation was not simply the finer points of doctrine, but the earthly notion of lay-people being engaged in priestly ministry – that all good work is holy, sacred work, and that all God’s workers were holy, sacred workers. Christian laborers, priests, businessmen and women, stay-at-home parents, farmers – all of them engaged in holy, sacred, and distinctly priestly ministry. The scandal and the allure of the Reformation was the idea that a farmer in the field and a mother changing poop diapers were engaged in practices that were equally *spiritual* to the work of the Pope. Luther stated that, like the Pope, all believers have a holy “Beruf,” a spiritual vocation in which they serve the Lord.¹¹ Luther contended that the doctrine of the PoAB was not simply a religious idea but a fundamental truth.

Reforming the Priestly Ministry

Luther took this idea one step further. He not only elevated the status of laypersons to priests, but he also targeted the holy place and the official acts within the holy place. Luther writes,

This is the way to distinguish between the office of preaching, or the ministry, and the general priesthood of all baptized Christians. The preaching office is no more

¹¹ Luther, *LW* 36:78; Karlfried Froehlich, “Luther on Vocation” in *Harvesting Martin Luther’s Reflections on Theology, Ethics, and the Church*, edited by Timothy J. Wengert, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 121-133.

than a public service which happens to be conferred upon someone by the entire congregation, all the members of which are priests. But you may ask: “Wherein does this priesthood of Christians consists, and what are their priestly works?” The answer is as follows...teaching, sacrificing, and praying.¹²

He again states, “[true priesthood] embraces these three things: to offer spiritual sacrifices, to pray for the congregation, and to preach. He who can do this is a priest.”¹³

At least four other times Luther confers these three specific tasks – preaching, prayer, and offering spiritual sacrifices – to the priesthood of all believers.¹⁴ Elsewhere he also adds baptism,¹⁵ celebrating communion,¹⁶ binding and loosing sins,¹⁷ and judging doctrine.¹⁸ Within the sixteenth century Roman Catholic Church, all seven priestly functions were practices that were given only to the ministerial priesthood.

That is not to say that Luther was opposed to good order or apostolic authority within corporate worship. While Luther contended that the first and most important duty of every believer/priest was the holy office of preaching, teaching, and proclamation, he also noted that only certain people who have been appointed by the congregation should preach during congregational worship.¹⁹ The same was true of baptism and communion. He opined that every believer, by virtue of their baptism and priestly ordination, could administer these priestly functions. Nevertheless, for the sake of good order in the church, these functions should ordinarily be exercised by a member of the body who had been publically commissioned to do so. Luther gives myriad examples of when it would be

¹² Martin Luther, “Commentary on Psalm 110” in *Reading the Psalms with Luther* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2017).

¹³ Luther, *LW* 30:55.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 36, 40, 41, and 52.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 39:14; 40:23-24; 41:151-44:128.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 36: 116; 39:14; 40:24-25; 41:152.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 35:12; 39:86; 40:25-28; 41:153.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 36:150; 39:305; 40:31-34; 44:135.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 52:139.

appropriate for a member of the royal priesthood (i.e. any believer) to preach, or administer baptism or the Eucharist, especially noting that all daily activities including breakfast, lunch, and dinner, sitting with the family at home, speaking with others, as well as daily devotions are opportunities to preach, teach, proclaim the gospel, and be reminded of the promises in baptism and the Eucharist.²⁰

Though this is discussed at greater length later in this paper, it is worth noting here that Luther's perspective is what guides the examples given in Chapter 7, identifying both personal and corporate rhythms of life that develop a culture and environment that equips the priesthood. By removing the sacred/secular divide, Luther was quick to elevate the work of believers outside of corporate worship on Sundays without undermining corporate worship itself. He did not devalue the ministry of ministerial priesthood; it was instead a proper and biblical elevation of every believer whose body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. As stated by Lee and Frederickson, "it is God's choice to convey the riches of gospel treasure through ordinary and sometimes cracked pots"²¹ By the power of the Holy Spirit, Luther restored this biblical principle to the church in the sixteenth century.

Resistance & Proofs of Delegitimizing the PoAB

Unfortunately, it was not as though Luther's push for resurgence toward a more biblical understanding of the royal priesthood was without resistance. In fact, one could argue that the Reformation had six wonderful years before it fell back into their pre-reformation state. It is arguable that the events following the Reformation have had as strong an impact on the church today as the Reformation itself. Three issues are identified

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Kurt Frederickson and Cameron Lee, *That Their Work Will Be a Joy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 53.

below. First, the Peasants' War served as a quintessential trump card for all of Luther's critics as to why the PoAB is too dangerous. Second, the Enlightenment's focus on the *self* led to perversions of Luther's doctrine, which, like the Peasants' War, led to a defensive posturing of institutional churches up to present day. Finally, the lack of any systematic summary of this doctrine also led to a return to what was known before the Reformation.

The Peasants' War

In 1525,²² the Peasants' War broke out in Germany, viewed by many to be a revolutionary war inspired by Luther himself. Though Luther vehemently disavowed any association with the peasants (which the peasants viewed as an act of betrayal), his teaching concerning the PoAB fueled their revolutionary fire. Walter Altmann correctly claims the PoAB is a political doctrine as much as it is a theological one.²³ Luther wrote a manifesto called "The Twelve Articles" which built upon his teaching on the PoAB, providing practical implications within the political realm.²⁴ Less than five years later the continent's first-ever written declaration of human rights inspired a revolutionary war.

Part and parcel with Luther's teachings on the PoAB was the tantamount task of loving your neighbor. As a result, a monumental social movement was underway, where men and women were inspired to identify societal evils and to stand against them, leading to reform. Theologian Karl Barth went as far to contend that Luther's exposition on the PoAB contributed, more than anything else in history, to the birth of modern

²² Only six years after Luther posted his 95 theses.

²³ Walter Altmann, *Luther and Liberation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016), 4.

²⁴ Luther, *LW* 46:8-16.

democracy.²⁵ Alec Rylie, journalist from the Wall Street Journal, said the same thing in May of 2017 at the mark of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.²⁶ Certainly many men and women felt as though they were courageously following the lead of Luther. While Luther courageously wrote the 95 theses²⁷, calling out the religious and cultural ills of the day, followed up with his written declaration of human rights, the peasants' uprising was merely an act of following Luther's lead, calling out the concrete social and political ills of their day.

In many ways, this singular event did more to stunt the further development of the PoAB than anything else since. This event served as the definitive proof to Luther's skeptics as to why his teachings on this doctrine were dangerous. By 1534, Cardinal Thomas, an avid opponent of Luther, provided commentary on 1 Peter arguing that the royal priesthood was nothing more than metaphorical. A year later another Cardinal (also an opponent of Luther), John Fisher, contented that the "laity" were merely "priests only for themselves" with no mediator duties or responsibilities.²⁸ Fifteen years later, in 1547, King Henry VIII writes his "Defender of the Faith," explicitly denying Luther and his teachings on the PoAB.²⁹ Forty years after that, another priest, Alfonso Slameron, took Cardinal Thomas' views a little further by providing commentary on 1 Peter that the royal priesthood applies primarily to the Pope.³⁰ In 1621, yet another Cardinal by the

²⁵ Hans-Martin Barth, 44. (There he quotes Karl Barth). See also Stephen Strehle, *Egalitarian Spirit of Christianity* (New York: Transaction, 2009), 1-40.

²⁶ Rylie, "The Protestant Legacy of Liberty."

²⁷ Which many believed he courageously nailed on the door of the cathedral at Wittenberg as an act of defiance.

²⁸ Yarnell, *Royal Priesthood*, Chapter 3.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Paul Dabin, *Le Sacerdoce Royal des Fideles dans la Tradicion Ancienne et Moderne* (Paris: L'Edition Universelle), 367-373.

name of Robert Bellarmine argued against Luther's view of the priesthood.³¹ These are only a few of the developments that occurred shortly after the Peasants' War as a means of discrediting the ministry and teachings of Martin Luther by men seeking to preserve their own self-interests.³²

The Enlightenment – Perversions of the PoAB through Individualism

The other issue connected with the doctrine of the PoAB was the Enlightenment's focus on the self that led to perversions of Luther's doctrine. Kurt Andersen, an agnostic news columnist for the New York Times, wrote *Fantasyland: How America Went Haywire*, which recounts the last 500 years of our history, from the Reformation until now, and how, in Andersen's view, Luther's Reformation has done more to attribute to the blatant individualism that exists today than anything else. Whether he is correct to lay the blame at Luther's feet or not, the patterns that emerge from the Reformation until now are indisputable. Anderson writes,

Luther's main complaint had been about the church's sale of phony VIP passes to Heaven. "There is no divine authority," one of his theses pointed out, "for preaching that the soul flies out of the purgatory immediately [when] the money clinks in the bottom of the [offering plate]."³³

He insisted that clergymen have no "special access" to God or Jesus or truth. Everything a Christian needed to know was in the Bible. So every individual Christian believer could and should read and interpret scripture for him or herself. Every believer, Protestants said, was now a "priest."³⁴

Anderson later writes that it was precisely the cause of the doctrine of the PoAB that has turned America into the *Fantasyland* that it is today. He states,

³¹ Ibid., 386-390.

³² The Cardinals and King Henry VIII knew they would lose power if the PoAB was lived out.

³³ Kurt Anderson, *Fantasyland* (New York: Random House, 2017), 16.

³⁴ Ibid., 17.

Out of the new Protestant religion, a new Proto American attitude emerged during the 1500s. Millions of Ordinary People decided that they, each of them, had the right to decide what was true or untrue, regardless of what fantasy experts said. And furthermore, they believed, passionate fantastical belief was the key to everything. The footings for Fantasyland in America had been cast...when religious leaders lose their way, pious anybody's can and must decide the new and proved truth on their own – that is, by reading scripture, each individual determines the correct meaning of the Christian fantasies. The Protestants founding commitment to fierce, decentralized, do-it-yourself truth finding and spiritual purity naturally led to the continuous generation of the self-righteous sectarian spin-offs.³⁵

This argument is further supported when considering how the Enlightenment, like the Peasants War, was a movement that occurred right on the heels of the Reformation. While the Enlightenment brought about the exaltation of human reason, freedom of conscience, and religious liberty, it also regarded people as “emancipated autonomous individuals.”³⁶ Finally, men and women were set free to think and reason the way they wanted and to determine what was true for themselves. While Luther never contended that the NT doctrine of the PoAB was the justification for a totally and completely free, autonomous, self-determining priesthood, later theologians would not always be so discerning. To be clear, this is a distortion of Luther’s doctrine. Luther did not view the PoAB as a means of individualism; rather it was a spiritual reality that took place in community. Reformation scholar Timothy George explains it this way:

For Luther, the priesthood of all believers did not mean, "I am my own priest." It meant rather: In the community of saints, God has so tempered the body that we are all priests to each other. We stand before God and intercede for one another, we proclaim God's Word to one another and we celebrate God's presence among us in worship, praise and fellowship.³⁷

Paul Althaus, one of the great interpreters of Luther’s theology, is also helpful:

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 267.

³⁷ Timothy George, “The Priesthood of All Believers,” *First Things*, accessed February 26, 2019, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2016/10/the-priesthood-of-all-believers>.

Luther never understands the priesthood of all believers merely in the sense of the Christian's freedom to stand in a direct relationship to God without a human mediator. Rather, he constantly emphasizes the Christian's evangelical authority to come before God on behalf of the brethren and also of the world. The universal priesthood expresses not religious individualism but its exact opposite, the reality of the congregation as a community.³⁸

Methodist scholar and author Cyril Eastwood also laments the distortion of this evangelical imperative when he writes, "the common error that the phrase 'priesthood of all believers' is synonymous with 'private judgment' is most unfortunate and is certainly a misrepresentation...indeed, [John] Calvin himself fully realized that uncontrolled private judgment means subjectivism, eccentricity, anarchy, and chaos."³⁹

While Luther contended that the royal priesthood was given to the whole church of Christ, comprising of living stones, that did not stop the rise and development of individualism in the seventeenth to twenty-first century, and the PoAB receiving all the blame. That is why these two events are so significant to the development (or lack thereof) of the PoAB; both of them served as the proof needed to delegitimize the doctrine of the royal priesthood.

Exalted Clergy or Egalitarian Priests?

Though Luther wrote more than fifty different documents teaching about the PoAB,⁴⁰ he never developed a systematic view on it. In other words, while he consistently answered the *what* and *why*, he spent very little time addressing the *how*. As a result, two distortions of the PoAB appeared simultaneously: a hyper individualistic priesthood (explored above) and, on the other side, a strong defensive posture from the religious elites of the day to revert back to what was previously known and understood

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ See also Carlyle Marney, *Priests to Each Other* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1974).

⁴⁰ Voss, Chapter 5.

(i.e. the clerical priesthood). The former manifests itself in unfettered democracy and individualistic type of Christianity. Under the guise of seeking to champion the PoAB, it led to a relativistic, hyper-individualistic, anti-institutional, anti-authority, type of religious faith never before seen and a whole slew of other issues that continued to sanction schisms within the body of Christ. Many different factions often appear to be the natural offspring of a distortion of the PoAB.⁴¹ The latter manifests itself in an unhealthy hierarchy that often strips the royal priesthood of their missional identity. In this camp, often a defensive posture comes with anyone who dares trumpet the PoAB because, after all, the issues mentioned above are at stake which is, to them, the definitive proof that it is dangerous. The track record of the first camp gives credence and credibility for the second camp to make their justifications. The ends simply justify the means. In other words, institutional clericalism (hierarchism) is necessary in order to ensure we don't fall into the organic utopianism (independentism). Moreover, as we explored above, both the Peasants' War and the Enlightenment were used to delegitimize Luther's teachings and to keep the PoAB in check. From there, it was relatively easy for the sixteenth century church to revert back into the familiar model of the church before the Reformation. Frank Viola contends,

The Reformation recovered the truth of the priesthood of all believers. But it failed to restore the organic practices that embody this teaching. The Reformation view of the priesthood of all believers was individualistic, not corporate. It was restricted to soteriology (salvation) and didn't involve ecclesiology (the church). The Reformers claimed the ground of a believing priesthood, but they failed to occupy that ground.⁴²

⁴¹ This trend continues to this day. The sad reality is that the number of denominations, para-church organizations, factions, and non-Denominational gatherings have grown exponentially since the Reformation. Even the "Reformed" camp has an almost 500-year history of continued Denominational splits.

⁴² Viola, *Reimagining Church*, 58.

That is why Rodriguez can write, “even though the Bible was put in the hands of Believers, the ministry was not.”⁴³ Thus, even though Martin Luther championed the PoAB, it was a relatively short-lived reality that has had a reducing impact on the ecclesiological outlook of the church from the sixteenth century until now.

⁴³ Rodriguez, 18.

CHAPTER 4:

DENOMINATIONAL POLITY AND PRACTICE

Without [Guiding Principles] the church's "very sinews disintegrate and they are wholly deformed and scattered...but the point of such laws is that the people who are governed become accustomed to obedience to God and to right discipline."

-- John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.10.27-29

"Although it is useful and good for those who govern the churches to establish and set up a certain order among themselves for maintaining the body of the church, they ought always to guard against deviating from what Christ, our only Master, has ordained for us. Therefore, we reject all human innovations and all laws imposed on us, in our worship of God, which bind and force our conscience in any way. So we accept only what is proper to maintain harmony and unity and to keep all in obedience to God."

-- The Belgic Confession, Article 32

In order to have a proper understanding of the practical nature of the PoAB within the denomination in which I serve, it is necessary to explore the history and development of the Christian Reformed Church of North America (CRCNA), as well as its polity and Church Order. It is integral to recognize that practices with regard to the PoAB cannot be prescribed or supported by scripture in every detail. As stated by Henry DeMoor, "There is a measure of freedom in choosing laws, but they must be "edifying" and in tune with principles clearly taught in God's Word (4.10.32)."¹ Therefore, the task of the local

¹ Henry DeMoor, *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive, 2011), 13.

church is to continue to weigh current practices against the guiding principles of God's Word and the historical developments of Christ's church.

This section provides a brief description of this denomination's history as a church, how faith (orthodoxy) has been met with practice (orthopraxy) within the CRCNA, and then to provide a few ministerial red flags within our denomination with regard to the doctrine of the PoAB. As such, this chapter is devoted to providing a material basis for seeking change within the church order and polity of the CRCNA. There are elements within our denominational church order that, though unintentionally, attribute to the defrocking of the royal priesthood in the CRCNA today, namely a second *Ministerial* Ordination, Official Acts of Ministry, and the manner in which we both write and speak about the term call. We will conclude the chapter with an overview of how we can bridge the gap that exists between our faith and practice by avoiding the twin pitfalls of institutional clericalism (hierarchism) and organic utopianism (independentism).

Christian Reformed Church History

Post-Reformation & John Calvin

We will now turn our attention to the movement upon which our faith tradition, the CRCNA, was borne, led by John Calvin and other Reformers. John Calvin, like Luther before him, emphasized the believers' priestly union with Christ and their access to the Father in prayer and bible study. He also followed Luther's lead in connecting the doctrine of the PoAB to the concept of vocation.² Calvin also understood this responsibility in terms of the church's participation in the royal priesthood (as discussed in Chapter 1). All Christians are called to be representatives of Christ's redemptive

² Yarnell, *Reformation Development*, 68-90.

mission in the world. In his commentary on Hebrews, Calvin writes: “All believers...should seek to bring others into the church, strive to lead the wanderers back to the road, stretch forth a hand to the fallen and win over the outsiders.”³ In 1583, the Heidelberg Catechism was written (primarily by Zacharius Ursinus) and it, too, relates the royal priesthood directly to the priesthood of Christ.⁴

However, even John Calvin, a prominent second generation reformer, already seemed to be a bit more clerically oriented than Luther. While the Roman Catholic Church had seven sacraments⁵, Calvin, like Luther, argued that some were not sacraments. He writes a sacrament is “...is a seal by which God’s covenant or promise, is sealed...(also)...the Word of God must precede, to make a sacrament a sacrament...”⁶ Thus, Calvin’s view (and the view of the Protestant Church) is that scripture must offer a visible sign (i.e. water in baptism) and attach to it a promise of God (i.e. those baptized would be forgiven because their sins are washed away). However, even John Calvin advocated for a third sacrament (to be added with Baptism and the Lord’s Supper) and it is surprising given Luther’s teachings. His third sacrament would have been “Ministerial Ordination.”⁷ What’s more, Calvin referred to Christian buildings as “temples,” adding it to the vocabulary of Reformed denominations.⁸

³ Calvin, “Commentaries,” Hebrews 10:24 (Calvin Translation Society, April 2007).

⁴ Heidelberg Catechism, accessed February 26, 2019, <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/confessions/heidelberg-catechism>, Question & Answers 31 and 32.

⁵ Baptism, confirmation, communion, penance/confession, holy orders, marriage and extreme unction or last rites.

⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 1450.

⁷ Ibid., IV.xix.28.

⁸ Ibid., 207.

The History of the Christian Reformed Church

Though Martin Luther is often called the father of the Reformation, the CRCNA follows the specific writings of Calvin even more closely than Luther. Admittedly, Calvin was much more adept than Luther at providing a systematic framework for church order and polity. In fact, in the later stages of Luther's life he admitted that one of the mistakes he had made was ceremoniously burning the entire "Codex Iurus Canonici" (i.e. the Church Order), along with the papal bull, which excommunicated him from fellowship in the Catholic Church.⁹ Though Luther was correct to assert that the sixteenth century church order had issues, the tragedy of Luther's life was that many of the German congregations struggled to develop a positive church order and polity in its absence. By contract, the Christian Reformed Church (established in 1857) continues to gather together as a body of Christ with the task of providing good order in an attempt to maintain, as the Belgic Confession says, "harmony and unity and to keep all in obedience to God."¹⁰

However, very early in the development of the CRCNA (1906), it was decided how the denomination would engage the doctrine of the PoAB. Rather than to affirm the general priesthood, synod attributed the threefold office of prophet, priest, and king to the three (at the time) ministerial offices of the CRC – the pastor as prophet, the deacon as priest, and elder as king:

The official organs are threefold, prophet, priest, and king which was made also in paradise. All three offices were one in him. But he was this no longer when he fell. This is restored in Christ. In Him all three offices are one. The Apostles also at first were clothed with all three; but it appeared that in the long run they were incapable of performing all three. Hence the neglect in Acts 6. The imperfection

⁹ Voss, 221.

¹⁰ Belgic Confession, accessed February 26, 2019. <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/confessions/belgic-confession>, Article 32.

of the person, which the servants of the Lord are, caused the three offices to be separated. Now we find the prophetic office of Christ in the minister¹¹, in the elders the kingly office; and in the deacons the priestly office.¹²

This is a clear violation of scripture's teaching, a theological reconstruction of scripture to shore up our polity. Synod said as much forty-two years later,¹³ and while the CRCNA eventually reformed this view, there were no practical implications to that decision. We reclaimed the theological territory, but we have yet to fully occupy the practical and ecclesiological ground. The reform came and went without any changes with respect to our practices (*orthopraxy*). This continues to be the meta-idea of our denomination, the primordial concept on which everything else is built. Elements of our Church Order continue to be further developed based on this flawed interpretation of Christ's church. In many ways, with respect to this doctrine, we are still functioning as the CRCNA of 1906.

Occupying the Ecclesiological Ground: The CRCNA and The PoAB

Having recently celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Great Reformation, this section is intended to appeal to the big idea that stemmed from the Reformation and was popularized by Karl Barth – *semper reformanda est*: the church ought always to be reforming, according to the Word of God. This section will provide constructive commentary on what is perhaps the most significant event that has occurred in the CRCNA with respect to this doctrine: a study committee that was formed in the Synod of 1969.¹⁴ The following mandate was given: "Synod appoint a committee to study the

¹¹ It is no wonder many churches don't see pastors as leaders.

¹² Christian Reformed Church (CRC), "Synod Resources," accessed February 26, 2019, <https://www.crcna.org/resources/synod-resources>, *Acts of Synod* 1906, 303.

¹³ CRC, *Acts of Synod* 1948, 175.

¹⁴ The Synod is the annual General Assembly of appointed CRCNA Pastors and Elders (Note: Synod began to include appointed Deacons in 2015).

nature of ecclesiastical office and the meaning of ordination as taught in the Scripture and exhibited in the history of the church of Christ."¹⁵ Two years later they, were also tasked with dealing with the question of the status of the “lay-worker.” The committee very quickly realized that the precise status of the lay-worker could not be determined until the nature of ecclesiastical office-bears and the question of whether there was sufficient supporting biblical evidence for ministerial (or clerical) ordination were first clarified.¹⁶ Therefore, the study committee met together for four years exploring the following questions:

- 1) To whom does the exalted Christ delegate his authority (Matthew 28: 19f.) – to the church as a whole, to special offices within the church, or to both?,*
- 2) What is the nature of the authority involved in the special office in its relation to what is known as 'the office of all believers'?, and*
- 3) What is the relationship between the task and authority of the apostles and that of other offices (ministries) in the church?¹⁷*

Though the committee was not tasked with defining the precise status of 'the office of all believers (the PoAB),¹⁸ their biblical analysis of the nature of special ecclesiastical offices¹⁹ and the meaning of ministerial ordination provide a foundation to help us understand the CRCNA's faith and function with respect to this doctrine. The end result was an eighty-one-page report on “Ecclesiastical Office and Ordination.”²⁰ What follows is a commentary on that report, especially with respect to the thesis of this paper.

¹⁵ CRC, *Acts of Synod* 1969, 85 Article 121, C.

¹⁶ Ibid., Article 121, B.

¹⁷ They were also asked “*To delineate the comparison between its conclusions and articles 30, 31 of the Belgic Confession as well as the form for installation/ordination of office-bearers presently used in the CRCNA.*”

¹⁸ Perhaps this would be a good overture to CRCNA Synod

¹⁹ The CRC has four special ecclesiastical offices: Pastor, Elder, Deacon, and Commissioned Pastor.

²⁰ CRC, *Acts of Synod* 1973, 635-716.

The Meaning of Ordination

The first exercise conducted by the committee was to determine whether there is a biblical precedent for the use of the term ‘to ordain’ and the overall concept of ordination since, in our tradition, all pastors are ordained into their office as Minister of the Word. The committee states, “When one tries to make a word study on the word *ordain* in our English translations of the Bible, they are bound to be disappointed.” They continue,

There is no evidence that the English word “ordain” is meant to be an exact translation of a Hebrew or Greek word designative what we today commonly understand by ordination...there is greater evidence, however, for the use of the terms “to appoint” and/or “put in charge.”²¹

They give an in-depth analysis of the four main Greek words that are used in reference to ordination. *Titheemi* (to appoint, put in charge) is repeatedly used by Paul in reference to his appointment as an apostle “...not by men, but by Christ Jesus our Lord” (1 Tim 1:12, 2:7; 2 Tim 1:11; Gal 1:1). *Kathisteemi* (to put in place, appoint) is usually used to describe either a master putting a servant in charge of his household or someone being placed into governmental authority. *Cheirotoneoo* (to choose, elect by raising hands) is usually used to describe a popular election of an appointee. *Eklegomai* (to choose) is used in the selection of someone for a role specifically within the body of Christ. Evidently, the Bible uses numerous words to express the idea of appointing overseers and apostles, but never ordaining. As stated by the study committee: “The way in which these words are used does not indicate whether the congregations described in the NT had anything comparable to our ceremony of ordination.”²²

²¹ Ibid., 638.

²² Ibid., 640.

The next question explored within the topic of ordination was whether there are special ceremonies accompanying appointments in scripture which serve as a similar motif to that of ordination of clergy and special offices in the CRCNA. There are numerous times within the OT when particular persons as well as particular objects were anointed (set aside) for service to the Lord. For example: Priests received the priesthood with their “rights, duties and privileges” (Lev 7:36; 8:12). Kings were anointed and, in that moment, scripture says the Spirit of the Lord “came mightily” upon them (1 Sam 10:6, 10; 16: 13). In Israel, the anointing of a king signified that they were specifically chosen by God (1 Sam 10; 16:7, 12-13). And while only happening once, there is a command in scripture to anoint a prophet (1 Kgs 19: 16).

That said, while some may see this as the material basis for setting aside clergy for ordained ministry “...by an act of anointing which invests them with powers and qualifications not granted to others,”²³ that is no longer the case. All of these rites and rituals have now been fulfilled in Christ. After all, in the NT, Christ is the only one who is referred to as the “Anointed One.” As stated in the CRCNA report,

Nowhere do we read in the New Testament that apostles, evangelists, elders, deacons, or others were anointed [or ordained] for their specific offices...On the contrary, all believers are said to have been anointed (I John 2:20, 27; also II Corinthians 1:21, which should probably be understood as referring to a general anointing of believers rather than as an anointing of apostles only.²⁴

As stated in the Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 31, “Why is he called Christ, that is, anointed? Answer: Because he has been ordained by God the Father, and anointed with the Holy Spirit, to be our chief Prophet...our only High Priest...and our eternal King.”²⁵

²³ See *The New Catholic Encyclopedia Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1st edition; 19 volumes, edited by William McDonald (Columbus, OH: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), VII, 82ff.

²⁴ CRC, *Acts of Synod* 1973, 643.

²⁵ Heidelberg Catechism, Question & Answer 31.

As far as special office and ordination is concerned, Jesus Christ is the only one with such an honor. With respect to anointing with the Holy Spirit, all believers are recipients (Acts 2:38, 10:47; Rom 8:9, 11; 1 Cor 12:13; 1 Jn 2: 20). Even the apostle Paul, when he came under fire from other Christians who were seeking to delegitimize his ministry, Paul never used the language of ordination to bolster the defense of his apostolic ministry (see 1 Cor 10-13). The study committee summarizes their findings by stating,

“Word studies have not been helpful. There are no words in the Hebrew Old Testament or in the Greek New Testament that convey the kinds of conceptions which the church later associated with "ordination." The biblical words studied conveyed no meaning beyond that of appointing, putting in charge, or selecting for some duty or function...The New Testament does not instruct the church to anoint those who have been appointed to special tasks or "office" within the Christian community.”²⁶

As this dissertation has explored, scripture clearly indicates that our anointing comes at the moment of our baptism and this biblical principle is repeatedly affirmed through the historical church leaders like Tertullian, Origen, Augustine, Luther, Karl Barth, and others. Ironically, even Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions now contend that baptism is the one and only ordination ceremony into the royal priesthood.²⁷ Representing both the Orthodox and Roman Catholic positions, Susan Wood writes, “the priesthood of all believers is constituted by baptism.”²⁸ Baptism is the precise moment we are declared a royal priesthood.²⁹

²⁶ CRC, *Acts of Synod* 1973, 673.

²⁷ It seems ironic that Roman Catholics now have a higher view of baptism as a sign of ordination into the royal priesthood than Reformed protestants

²⁸ Susan K. Wood, *One Baptism* (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 2009), 12.

²⁹ CRCNA, “Service for Baptism (1991),” accessed February 26, 2019, <https://www.crcna.org/resources/church-resources/liturgical-forms-resources/baptism-children/service-baptism-1991-approved-1994>. “When we are baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the triune God seals our adoption as his children and writes his name invisibly on our foreheads: “You are a chosen

The Origin of Ministerial Ordination

While the concept of ministerial ordination was not a new one (Rabanus Maurus was the first to claim that a second outpouring of the Holy Spirit occurred at the ordination of clergy in 856), Martin Luther repeatedly fought against the concept of a dual priesthood [royal and ministerial], expressing that baptism is the one and only “ordination.”³⁰ While there are a number of reasons why ministerial ordination still has such a reigning effect on the history and polity of the CRCNA, the most significant and influential is the development of the King James Bible, the most popular bible translation for English speaking Christians for the last four centuries. That trend has only recently changed.

The King James Version of the Bible made a lasting impact on church polity. Before the KJV, the Geneva Bible (first published in 1560) was the preferred translation of English-speaking Protestants during the mid- to late-sixteenth century. However, at the turn of the seventeenth century, everything changed. While at the Hampton Court Conference (a meeting in January 1604 between King James and representatives of the Church of England), King James I made his negative views on the Geneva Bible clearly known to all stating, "I think that of all [English Bibles], that of Geneva is the worst."³¹ His distaste for the Geneva translation was not necessarily caused by the translation of text into English, but for its particular bent of translation as well as the annotations and commentary in the margins. It is important to recognize that the first generation of

people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God" (1 Pet. 2:9-10). By baptism, we have a new identity in Jesus Christ.”

³⁰ Martin Luther, “An Open Letter.”

³¹ Christadelphian Books, “Bible, King James Version,” accessed February 26, 2019, http://www.christadelphianbooks.org/agora/art_less/b31.html.

Calvinist Reformers produced the Geneva Bible. John Calvin and other Reformers were responsible for the majority of the annotations at the bottom of each page. As such, they were disliked by the majority of the ruling pro-authoritarian-government Anglicans of the Church of England, King James I most of all. He felt strongly that many of the annotations were "very partial, untrue, seditious, and savoring too much of dangerous and traitorous conceits..."³²

King James I also saw the Geneva's interpretations of biblical passages as "...anti-clerical republicanism."³³ His fears were rooted in a biblical translation implying that church hierarchy was unnecessary would lead to the thought that the need for a king as head of church and state could be questioned also. Already having witnessed the issues related to Presbyterian-Calvinist religious leaders influencing the rank and file's perception of church-state relations in Scotland, King James I wanted none of the same controversies in England. He knew that if annotations were in print, readers might believe these interpretations were correct and absolute, making it more difficult to change his subjects' minds about the meanings of particular passages.

The result was a new Bible translation with a new particular bent toward hierarchism that has continued to influence both individual Christians as well as their institutions for the last four centuries. One such example is the very use of the verb *to ordain*. As we explained above from the CRCNA study committee: "there is no evidence that the English word "ordain" is meant to be an exact translation of a Hebrew or Greek

³² Thomas Bayly Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials for High Treason* (London, 1816), 498.

³³ Julia Ipgrave, *Adam in Seventeenth Century Political Writing in England and New England* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2016), 14.

word designative what we today commonly understand by ordination...”³⁴ Despite that fact, the phrase “to ordain” is used forty-one times in the King James Bible, five times in the NT (Mk 3:14, Jn 15:16, Acts 1:22, Acts 10:42, Acts 13:48). In other words, the most powerful and prevalent reason why the term “to ordain” and the concept of ordination is a part of our twenty-first century Christian vocabulary is because of a poorly worded translation of the most widely used Bible in the seventeenth through twentieth century. Not only that, the very reason it was developed was in opposition to the Genevan Bible, written by Reformers with their “...anti-clerical republicanism.”³⁵ Conversely, the CRCNA 1973 study committee writes, “little can be gleaned from an examination of the words for office in the Old Testament or New Testament. In fact, it may safely be said that the writers of the Old and New Testament had no word for office as we understand it.”³⁶ From this we may clearly deduce that both the term “to ordain” and the concept of ordination are human constructs that are not rooted in scriptures script.

The Origin of Ministerial Office

Similar to the term “to ordain,” the concept and origin of ministerial office is also an interpretation of translators of the King James Bible. Consider, for example, that although the English word “office” is used 117 times in the King James Bible, in only seven cases is it a direct (rather than interpretive) translation of the Hebrew and Greek.³⁷ In the other 110 cases, there is no Hebrew or Greek word for the term “office,” nor is there any assumption, connotation, or implication of it. For example, the King James

³⁴ CRC, *Acts of Synod* 1973, 638.

³⁵ Ipgrave, 14. Though used less frequently, the NIV also followed the KJV with this interpretation of NT texts

³⁶ CRC, *Acts of Synod* 1973, 645.

³⁷ All seven correct translations are of Hebrew words in the Old Testament. Genesis 40:13; 41:13; Deuteronomy 17:9; 26:3; Psalm 109:8; Isaiah 22:19

translation of the Hebrew verb *kahan* (meaning “to act as priest”) is rendered “to minister in the priest's office.”³⁸

The King James Version’s interpretation of the Greek NT text is even more of a stretch. While the concept of ecclesiastical “office” is more familiar in congregations today, it was an avoided concept for writers of the NT. According to the CRCNA study committee,

In fact, the New Testament writers seemed purposely to avoid available Greek words which would connote what is commonly understood as office. These writers, for example, did not use such words as “archee” (office in the sense of precedence, ruling, being at the head) or “timee” (office in the sense of position or dignity) to designate ecclesiastical positions. As a general term for what we call office (namely, a certain type of service within the church), the word “diakonia” (service) is commonly used by the writers of the New Testament. This word never connotes exalted status or dignity. In view of the many terms for office available in Greek, the choice of this word by the New Testament writers tells us something significant about the way we are to understand the concept of office...

*The word for office in the King James Version is yet another unfortunate English translation of various Hebrew and Greek words that do not have the same meaning as the English word for office does today.*³⁹

A couple examples illustrate this point. First, the King James Version defines both *diakonia* (“ministry” or “service”) in Romans 11:13 and *praxis* (“function” or “practice”) in Romans 12:4 as *office*, while the RSV (Revised Standard Version) translates them as “ministry” and “function.” Moreover, there are three passages in scripture all of which have the same sentence structure: 1 Chronicles 6:10, 1 Chronicles 24:2, and Luke 1:8. The two OT passages use the Hebrew *kahan* (to serve as priest) and the NT uses the Greek *hierateuoo* (to serve as priest). However, all three have the same phrase in the King James Bible, translated “to execute the priest’s office.”

³⁸ See Ex 28:3, 29:1, 29:44, 31:10, 35:19, 41; Lev 16:32; Num 3:3; Deut 10:6

³⁹ CRC, *Acts of Synod* 1973, 650.

The above survey shows that the biblical precedent for the use of ministerial “ordination” (as opposed to ordination of the general priesthood through the initiatory rite of baptism) and the term “ecclesiastical office” (as opposed to the concept of acts of service) are lacking. While that doesn’t mean they are anti-biblical, it does mean the terms need to be defined in ways that don’t contradict clear biblical teaching such as the PoAB. Unfortunately, both terms are linked to an unfortunate translation of the King James Bible, rooted in the desire of King James I to maintain authoritarian rule over the Church of England and many of his motives have left a mark on the 21st Century church.

Old & New Testament Offices

Aaron and his sons were the first officially appointed priests in Israel (Exodus 28). As we mentioned in Chapter 2, God’s original intent was for the whole nation of Israel to function as a community of priests. Exodus 19:6 says of the entire nation, "You shall be to me a kingdom of priests." However, due to Israel’s disobedience, God made a new plan, a separate group of functionaries in Israel separated out from the nation as priests. The task of the priesthood was to serve as a mediator between God and humanity. As a result, the role as priest was not over any human; they were to serve both God as well as humanity. This is an important distinction to remember throughout this section. According to the CRCNA study committee,

The task assigned to the priests was theirs and theirs alone. Anyone else who attempted to perform priestly duties did so at his peril (see I Samuel 13:8-13 and II Chronicles 26:18). The priest was to observe meticulously all the regulations for performing priestly duties which the Lord had given. Any priest who deviated from these regulations did so at his peril (see Leviticus 10: 1-2).⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Ibid., 651.

The CRCNA committee responds to whether a priestly caste must be preserved, writing “if Luther and Calvin were right in teaching the priesthood of all believers in the New Testament church, then to maintain a priestly caste within the family of God today is to tum back the clock of history.”⁴¹

All OT texts concerning the PoAB must be understood as pointing ahead to Christ as our ultimate High Priest. Those who served as priest’s in the OT provide us with three important reminders: first, the fall of humanity and the need for a Savior, second, Israel’s rejection of God’s redemptive plan to use them as a community of priests, and third, Christ being the great high priest, Savior, and Lord. According to the CRCNA study committee,

The proper New Testament response, therefore, is not to imitate the procedures outlined in the Old Testament, but rather to recognize the great difference which the coming of Christ and the outpouring of his Spirit have brought about. The New Testament knows of no class of priests other than the total number of those who constitute the church (cf. I Peter 2: 9, "But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood").⁴²

If what is stated above is true, then from the beginning of the NT a differentiation must be made with regard to how we view the priesthood. Never in the entire NT is the concept of office⁴³ explicitly mentioned. In fact, NT writers go out of their way to ensure that they do not conflate ministry and/or service (*diakonia*) with the concept of ordination or office.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Priestly office or otherwise

Ministerial Ordination & Office – Are There Consequences?

Two questions remain: first, the precise relationship between the religious leaders (i.e. the apostles) and the PoAB (i.e. the brethren), if any, within the NT, and second, the consequences of maintaining the ordination of clergy and the concept of ministerial office today with respect to the PoAB.

One thing is abundantly clear from the reading of NT texts: since the origin of the Christian church, a distinction was made between apostles and brethren. Consider, for example, how Matthias was added to the eleven (Acts 1: 22, 26) after Judas had defected. If the intent of the NT church was that there be absolutely no difference between the apostles and the PoAB, then Matthias would not have been needed in the apostleship. Later, yet another special group of seven men were appointed for the ministry of the distributing food (Acts 6: 1-6) so that the apostles would be released to preach the gospel and be devoted to the ministry of prayer. Clearly, they were able to distinguish roles within the body of Christ while still maintaining the PoAB.

In the NT, we also see non-apostles functioning in ways similar to the apostles. The first example is Stephen, one of the Seven deacons (cf. 21:8), who, like the Apostles (2:43; 3:4-8; 4:30; 5:12), performed “great wonders and miraculous signs” (6:8) and spoke with spiritual wisdom (cf. Lk 21:18) against his opponents (7:1- 53). The next example are those who were scattered abroad after the great persecution that broke out after the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1). According to Acts 8:4 (cf. 11:19-20), they “preached (*euangelizomenoi*) the word wherever they went.” One of them was Philip, who, like Stephen, was also one of the Seven (21:8). He preached (*keerussein*) Christ in a city in Samaria (8:5, 12), where he performed many miraculous signs (8:6), and even

baptized (8:12). Later he evangelized the Ethiopian eunuch (8:35) and baptized him (8). Afterwards Philip appeared at Azotus and preached the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea (8:40). Because of his preaching the gospel, Philip is referred to as an evangelist in 21:8.

What is clear from the examples given in the book of Acts is that all believers had unique gifts that they used freely for the full functioning of the body of Christ. This echoes the Apostle Paul's sentiments in Romans 12:4 when he says, "For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function. So we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another."⁴⁴

This is linked with the priestly lifestyle of all believers indicated in 12:1. Notice, however, Paul's distinguishing term. He does not use one of the more than thirty available Greek terms for office. Rather, he uses the Greek *praxis* meaning "practice." Elsewhere he uses *diakonia* meaning "ministry." Each believer is a priest. Each believer is endowed with the Holy Spirit. Each believer is called by God to function in such a way as to build up the body of Christ. However, the distinguishing marker is with regard to their particular function and/or contribution, not their office.

Along with Romans 12, both 1 Corinthians 12-13 and Ephesians 4 also reveal to us that individual members are called to use their peculiar gifts that the Lord has given them for the flourishing of the body of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 12:31, Paul counsels the church to follow "a still more excellent way" of Christian love. Thus, all members of Christ's church are called to make love their ultimate aim, and to use the gifts that God

⁴⁴ Paul says the same thing in 1 Corinthians 12:12-14.

has given them for the express purpose of contributing to the mutual up building, encouragement, and care of the church (14:1-4).

In Ephesians 4:11-12, Paul gives us a grounded principle in understanding the relationship between the apostles and the brethren. He writes, "And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophet, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers..." Why? For the express purpose of "...equipping the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ." From all of this we are able to learn, as the CRCNA study committee states, that:

There were a variety of ministries in the early church [and] these ministries did not function in exactly the same way as comparable ministries do in the church today, [and] there were ministries in that church which are not commonly found in the church today. The early church felt free to adjust its ministry to others as the need of the time demanded.⁴⁵

While there is a biblical precedent for distinguishing between the apostles and the general PoAB, what is the precise relationship? Clearly a distinction is being made by the biblical authors. Thus, as we read God's Word, we need to join together with both Luke (in Acts) and Paul (in Ephesians and 1 Corinthians), on the tightrope on which they have struck a balance. They have no trouble in making key distinctions among Christians in terms of their particular function or contribution. But neither do they associate any particular person with the concept of a higher office or ordination. According to the CRCNA study committee,

It seems best, therefore, not to think of any of these New Testament listings as constituting the entire "official" ministry of the church... [Therefore] when interpreting these roles, we should exercise extreme caution in deducing from Ephesians 4:11, or from any other listing of gifts and ministries in the New Testament, what the finalized structure of the "official" ministry of the New

⁴⁵ CRC, *Acts of Synod* 1973, 655.

Testament church was. These passages were evidently not intended to give us an exhaustive description of a finalized order of offices in the church.⁴⁶

The picture we get of the NT church is that of a fluid, living organism, in which all the members of the body are actively serving and complimenting one another. Very clearly, the church was ready and willing to make changes if necessary. Some churches, like the church in Corinth, were more organic in nature where there appeared to be no formal, organized church comprising of particular leaders ruling over the rest. For example, Paul's description of the church in Corinth in 1 Corinthians could raise the question whether there was any single person or group at all bearing that special responsibility. Meanwhile, other churches seem to show the starting signs toward greater degrees of organization, comprising of apostles (*apostolos*) and elders (*presbuteros*). The church in the book of Acts depicts a notable distinction between particular leaders (i.e. the apostles) and the PoAB (i.e. the brethren) in terms of special functions within the body of Christ.⁴⁷ Clearly the NT text provides certain timeless, universal guiding principles for all times and places and not a definitive prescribed organizational structure.

In the end, the CRCNA study committee concluded its report with the following statement:

The term for office in the NT is *diakonia* meaning "service" or "ministry" ... this comprehensive ministry is universal, committed to the whole church, not to a select group of individuals within the church. The task of ministry is shared by all and is not limited to a special, professional class. The ministry of the church is Christ's ministry, shared by all who are in Christ... The ministries of some believers are to be distinguished not in essence but in function from the comprehensive ministry shared by all believers, and distinctions among the special ministries themselves are also functional. There is therefore no essential distinction but only a functional one between ministers, elders, deacons, and, all

⁴⁶ Ibid., 657.

⁴⁷ See Acts 14:23 for example where Paul installs elders

other members of the church. There is a difference in manner of service, but all are commissioned to serve.⁴⁸

In summary, while there is ample evidence to support the concept of members of the body of Christ serving a variety of special functions and/or practices (*praxis*) and servant ministries (*diakonia*), there is insufficient biblical evidence to support the concept of a second ministerial ordination over and above the ordination given to every believer and received through baptism. While both the apostles and the brethren are equal in priesthood, some leaders have been appointed to equip the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12) and to ensure good order within the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 14:12). We must heed the sentiments of the CRCNA study committee when they wrote,

*When interpreting these roles, we should exercise extreme caution in deducing from Ephesians 4:11, or from any other listing of gifts and ministries in the New Testament, what the finalized structure of the "official" ministry of the New Testament church was.*⁴⁹

Likewise, as the study committee has already stated, the CRCNA version of "ordination" and the NT version "to appoint" are not the same. Even if they were the same, they are used in reference to the entire body of Christ appointed for specific tasks connected to their area of giftedness and the need of the Christian community, never to describe a special class or office of persons. Therefore, either way, our current practice is missing some essential elements. Additionally, the only proper reference to the concept of ordination in the NT is in reference to our baptism which is the clearest proof that all Christians are ordained (Mt 3:11, 13-17; Jn 1:29-34; Acts 18:25; Gal 3:27; Rom 6:3).

⁴⁸ CRC, *Acts of Synod* 1973, 713.

⁴⁹ CRC, *Acts of Synod* 1973, 657.

Thus, to set up a second service of ordination is confusing at the least and biblically impermissible at the most.⁵⁰

Causes for Concern in the CRCNA

One of the frequent claims of Reformed denominations, in general, is that they have never been completely purged of sacramentalism and that the clergy-laity distinction undermines the PoAB. This state of affairs is unfortunate, but not altogether unfounded. The fundamental question we will answer at the end of this chapter is: how can we conduct ourselves in such a way that we both maintain good order in worship where ministry is regulated by the church and its leaders (1 Cor 14:26-40) while also championing the doctrine of the PoAB, and avoid the twin pitfalls of institutional clericalism (hierarchism) and organic utopianism (independentism)? This section will present a number of topics within the CRCNA Church Order that undermine the doctrine of the PoAB and, therefore, ought to be reevaluated. We will end with suggested revisions to church order that will provide a proper re-framing of the doctrine of the PoAB which will serve as a catalyst for a more robust ecclesiology in the CRCNA.

Ministerial Ordination

The implications of the CRCNA's use of the concept of a second *ministerial* ordination is particularly troublesome for an ecclesiology rooted in the PoAB. The challenges connected to its theology, particularly its ecclesiology, are rooted in its use of this term. While it may be more fitting to use words such as *commissioned* or *appointed*

⁵⁰ It is important to note that the study committee stated that "[Ministerial] Ordination should be understood as the appointment of certain members of the church for particular ministries that are strategic for the accomplishment of the church's total ministry." Ibid., 63-64. This statement was "adopted" by Synod in 1973 (and remains today).

to highlight the unique function of specific members, we use a term (“to ordain”) that is also equated with our baptismal ordination. For example, the Reformed marks of the church – preaching, sacraments, and church discipline – seem to be the exclusive domain of the ordained.⁵¹ This seems to imply, intentionally or not, that all believers are not called to take active engagement of these marks. The CRCNA’s seemingly narrow understanding of these ecclesiastical categories (reflected in our Church Order)⁵² have crippled a robust living of the PoAB, making the royal priesthood passive recipients of the marks of the church, rather than active, reflective agents of God’s grace to one another and to the world. The unintentional consequences of the terminology of ordination has caused the local CRCNA church’s expressions to function more like a group of pew sitting recipients of grace through a priestly caste who are consecrated for special ordained ministry where only they, and they alone, perform official acts of ministry. This seems to be the very antithesis to the concept of the PoAB in the NT. While Jesus, Peter, Paul, the author of Hebrews, Tertullian, Luther, Karl Barth, and Lesslie Newbigin (to name a few) all contended that the primary role of the PoAB is proclamation, we have reduced it down to this: Only within the confines of the local church building may the Minister of the Word perform the tasks of preaching and administering sacraments. These “Holy Things” that happen in the “Holy Place” are the exclusive domain of the “Holy Person.” This is a dramatic reduction of the robust ecclesiology professed in scripture where every believer, called by God, is commissioned to “proclaim (*exangello*) the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into his

⁵¹ Or, as Pastors are often referred to as in the CRCNA – the *Dominee* (from the Latin vocative for “Master”).

⁵² Over 90 percent of the Church Order is related to functions of the Ordained Ministry and the Official Acts of Ordained Ministry within the Worship Service.

marvelous light” (1 Pt 2:9, derived from Is 43:21). Martin Luther explained that “A priest must be God’s messenger...the first and foremost duty we Christians should perform is to proclaim the wonderful deeds of God.”⁵³ While this dissertation will later provide a more robust ecclesiology concerning the marks of the church, it is worth noting here how the CRCNA Church Order has diminished the original scope of God’s redemptive plan in working through the royal priesthood.

Official Acts of Ministry

Official Acts of Ministry is simply the fruit of the meta-narrative borne out of Synod of 1906, namely ministerial ordination and the development of the priestly caste. Official Acts of Ministry are defined in Supplement, Article 18 of the CRCNA Church Order, and again in Supplement, Article 53, and adopted in the Synod of 2001 where certain acts of ministry were set apart from the rest. Article 18 states,

Official Acts of Ministry: Certain acts of ministry – among them:

- a. The Preaching of the Word,*
- b. The Administration of the Sacraments,*
- c. The pronouncement of the greeting and the benediction in the worship service for the people,*
- d. The ordination and installation and laying of hands of office-bearers,*
- e. The reception into full membership and formal excommunication from fellowship of members – Are part of the ministry of Church to his followers and are entrusted to the church and, within the church, to its ordained leaders.⁵⁴*

While there is a biblical precedent for maintaining good order in corporate worship and that the administration of ministry should be regulated by the church and its leaders (1 Cor 14:26-40), it is unhelpful and unprofitable to institute a special series of acts to be conducted by a special caste over and above the ministry of the royal

⁵³ Luther, *LW* 30:64-66

⁵⁴ CRC, *Acts of Synod* 2001, 504.

priesthood. Therefore, I believe it theologically confusing and ecclesiologically burdensome to have “Official Acts of Ministry.”⁵⁵

It is helpful to compare Official Acts of Ministry, which are associated with ordination against the model presented in the NT. When it came to preaching in the NT, any person the apostles appointed to preach could do so.⁵⁶ The most frequently used Greek word in the NT associated with the concept of preaching is *keerussein*. Overall, however, the NT uses thirty-two different terms (in addition to *keerussein*) to describe the preaching ministry.⁵⁷ While an in-depth study of all thirty-three of these terms would provide an even more accurate depiction of who was able to preach and teach in the early church, this dissertation will explore the two most common terms – *kerysso* and *euangelizo* (seventy-six occurrences in the NT).

Keerussein, in each of its sixty-one uses in the NT, is used for “proclaim” or “preach” in the public square. From them, here is a brief list of persons who were responsible from the preaching ministry: John the Baptist (Mt 3:1; Mk 1:4, 7; Lk 3:3; Acts 10:37), Jesus (Mt 4:17, 23, 9:35), the apostles (Mk 3:14; Mt 10:7; Lk 9:2; Mt 10:27; Lk 12:3; Mk 6:12), the apostle Paul (Acts 9:20), Silvanus and Timothy (2 Cor 1:19; 2 Tm 4:2), as well as the angel of the Lord (Rev 5:2). While this list alone might grant preaching as an official act of ministry given that only Jesus, the angels, and specially elected apostles were granted authority to do so, the list is incomplete. The following people also preached in Jesus name: an unnamed leper healed by Jesus (Mk 1:45), an

⁵⁵ CRC, *Agenda for Synod* 1999, 281-303 and CRC, *Acts of Synod* 2001, 269-291.

⁵⁶ Even this requires a burden of proof given that passages like Acts 8:4 do not explicitly mention that the anonymous “they” received any apostolic permission to go about preaching the good news.

⁵⁷ Kittel, Gerhard, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), Volume III, 703.

unnamed demoniac, healed by Jesus (Mk 5:20, Lk 8:39), Philip (Acts 8:5), as well as the undefined “they” and “those scattered” (Mk 7:36) all zealously preached Christ. While the NT use of *keerussein* is less than *euangelizo*, it clearly reveals that there are numerous instances when people outside those formally appointed by the apostles performed this important ministry. *Euangelizo*, used fifty-four times in the NT⁵⁸, is the most frequently used Greek verb connected to the preaching ministry. It is important to note that it is often used as a synonym for *keerussein* (see Lk 9:2 compared with 9:6). As previously mentioned, both best describe the ministry of preaching or the proclamation of the gospel.

In addition to the obvious names responsible for the preaching ministry, like John the Baptist, Jesus, the disciples, the apostles, the apostle Paul, Barnabas, as well as appointed evangelists, many others were said to have engaged in the activity called *euangelizo*: Philip, one of the seven (Acts 8:12, 35, and 40), the undefined “those scattered” who spread the word among the Jews (Acts 11:19), the unnamed men of Cyprus and Cyrene who “went about preaching the Good News of the Lord Jesus” to the gentiles (Acts 11:20), an unnamed group who stayed with Paul and Barnabas for the express purpose of preaching (Acts 15:25), as well as “all those who were scattered” because of the persecution following the death of Stephen (Acts 8:4 and James 1:1-2) all went about preaching the Word. Thus, like *keerussein*, the use of *euangelizo* also reveals that the preaching ministry was given to more than simply those who were formally trained and selected as preachers.

⁵⁸ According to Logos Bible Software, the noun “enangeion” occurs 134 times. The verb “euangeizo” occurs 54 times.

A similar consideration of baptism is necessary. Perhaps the most significant, and well known, passage in the Gospels for administration of baptism is the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:18-20a. It is here that Jesus specifically tells His disciples to both baptize and to teach: “Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.” Note how Jesus’ command is addressed to disciples and not to the apostles. In obedience to this command, on the day of Pentecost, Peter proclaims, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38). The response to Peter’s invitation at Pentecost was astounding: “those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41). Unfortunately, however, Luke does not tell us who, specifically, administered these three thousand baptisms. It is worth noting, however, that if we choose to adhere strictly to the perspective that only the twelve apostles physically administered each baptism, then each apostle baptized at least 250 people each that day.

Considering that there are easily over 100 references to baptism in the NT, there is ample evidence to show how the NT church administered this sacrament. Like the ministry of preaching, perhaps G.R. Beasley-Murray is correct when he writes,

To insist that the Apostles personally conducted every baptism in the primitive Church is an absurdity that no one, so far as I am aware, has asked us to believe. Apart from the physical impossibility of the Twelve visiting so many places at once, the narrative of Acts excludes it; for in chapter 11 we read of unknown Hellenist Christians, scattered by the persecution at Stephen’s death, evangelizing in Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, and in the last-named place “the hand of the Lord was with them and a great multitude that believed turned to the Lord.”⁵⁹

⁵⁹ G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973), 113.

In short, we may easily conclude that the NT does not teach that baptism was administered, solely, by elected apostles, nor is this practice consistent with post-NT early church practices. In fact, the Synod said as much in their 2001 report when they wrote,

“It may be observed at this point that, on the basis of the parallel between circumcision and baptism, it would be natural for Jewish Christians to expect that no specifically appointed office-bearer in the church was needed to administer baptism. For the Old Testament nowhere indicates that circumcision could only be performed by a priest or other special functionary.”⁶⁰

Unlike the topic of preaching and baptism, both of which are explicitly mentioned more than 100 times each, the NT accounts of celebrations of the Lord’s Supper are much sparser. Jesus is the first recorded in scripture to administer the Lord’s Supper (Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:14-23). However, these accounts do not contain instructions or guiding principles for how others are to properly administer the Lord’s Supper in the future. If the question of *who* and *how* are so significant, we may also consider that Paul’s instructions in 1 Corinthians 11 gives no advice or indication for who or how. Rather, he simply implies that it should be celebrated with relative frequency by all Christians. Interestingly enough, even when Paul engages the myriad of issues within the church in Corinth regarding the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 10:16-17, 21, and 11:23-28), he gives no advice on who ought to be the official administrator(s) of the sacrament, nor how it should be performed in the future. However, that is not to say the NT does not give guiding principles on this topic. The very omission of specific instructions regarding who or how provides a clue. Consider further that Paul does not even give Timothy any specific instructions on who may, or how, to administer the

⁶⁰ CRC, *Agenda for Synod* 1999, 303 and CRC, *Acts of Synod* 2001, 291.

Lord's Supper, while giving clear and specific instructions with regard to preaching, teaching, correcting, training, reading the Scriptures publicly, among other topics. Clearly Paul has a vested interest in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper being an act that is both edifying for the body and conducted in good order, but he doesn't appear concerned about who physically administers the sacrament within the body of Christ.

In addition, while there is a difference of opinion about what is specifically being addressed in Acts 2:42-46, the expression "the breaking of bread" in these passages clearly refers to the early church celebrating the Lord's Supper in their homes. It says,

And they [the 3,000 just converted] devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (Acts 2:42) ... And day by day [all who believed], attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts (Acts 2:46).

Logic dictates that the apostles were not going from home to home administering the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in every household, ensuring it was conducted by an approved elected official. It seems, instead, the example from Acts permits Christians to celebrate the Lord's Supper in their homes without an official administrator present. This is further evidenced by the fact that there is no biblical or historical evidence pointing to the early church regularly meeting together corporately, in a large building, with elected officials administering the Lord's Supper. Rather, the celebration took place most frequently with a small Christian fellowship within homes,⁶¹ often without any elected apostles present. A vital distinction should be made: While elders (*presbuteros*) certainly burdened themselves with the responsibility of *overseeing* that the Lord's Supper was done in good order, scripture does not instruct, descriptively nor prescriptively, that it

⁶¹ See Acts 2:42, 46; 16:34; 20:7

ought to be administered exclusively by the apostles. The very origin of the Lord's Supper meal was within the backdrop of observing Passover with Jesus and his disciples (Mark 14:12-16, Matthew 26:17-19, Luke 22: 7-13). On the basis of the parallel between the Lord's Supper and Passover, it would only be natural for Jewish Christians to think that they could celebrate and affirm God's promises through the Lord's Supper among Christian family and friends, provided it was conducted in good order. Likewise, in the OT it was not the duty of the priest to administer the Passover, but the head of household within their homes (Exodus 12). This model continued into the NT while celebrating the Lord's Supper.

The final act of ministry to consider is the laying on of hands. There is a double negative in the CRCNA church order with regard to this topic. On the one hand, it is listed as an official act of ministry⁶², to be performed exclusively by the Minister of the Word. On the other hand, the CRCNA Synod of 1973 adopted the following statements:

The ceremony of the laying on of hands is not a sacrament but a symbolic act by 'which the church may publicly confirm its call and appointment to particular ministries. As such it is useful but not essential.' – Adopted

“To invite only ministers, and not elders also, to participate in the laying on of hands is a departure from the biblical example. Furthermore, there is no biblical warrant for limiting the laying on of hands to the occasion of setting apart for the particular ministry of the Word” – Adopted

“Because the Scriptures do not present...particular ministries of the church, and because ministries as described in Scripture are functional [not ordained] in character, the Bible leaves room for the church to adapt or modify its' particular ministries in order to carry out effectively its service to Christ and for Christ in 'all circumstances. – Adopted⁶³

More significantly, the NT provides a precedent with which to wrestle. For example, in Acts 6:3 the apostles proposed that believers in Jerusalem pick out seven men for specific

⁶² CRC, *Acts of Synod* 2001, 504.

⁶³ CRC, *Acts of Synod* 1973.

duties within the Jerusalem church. The end result is a ceremony involving the laying on of hands (6:6). Acts 13:3 records another laying on of hands. Both Paul and Barnabas were to be set apart for a special work to which the Holy Spirit called them: “then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.” The pronouns in this passage are unclear. Acts makes no specific mention of who was responsible for the laying on of hands. Then in 1 Timothy 4:14 we see that the *presbuteros* (elders) laid hands on Timothy. However, earlier in that same letter (1:6) Paul indicates that he, with his own hands, laid hands on Timothy. If anything, this letter is yet another indication that precisely *who* and *how* mattered far less than *that* it actually happened and that it was done in good order. Thus, rather than deciphering whose hands were used, what is known for certain is that scripture does not specifically prescribe who should take part in the laying on of hands. In fact, to allow only pastors to lay hands of blessing on believers seems to be a clear departure from the N.T. examples in the early church. Much like was said with respect to the Lord’s Supper, elders (*presbuteros*) certainly burdened themselves with the responsibility of overseeing that the laying on of hands was done in good order. However, scripture does not instruct that it ought to be participated exclusively by elected apostles.

While preaching of the Word and administration of Sacraments are certainly the main considerations when it comes to official acts of ministry, it would be a helpful exercise to explore every official act of ministry.⁶⁴ This dissertation will not specifically consider these but mentions them here with the reminder that none of the aforementioned

⁶⁴ This list includes: the pronouncement of the greeting and the benediction in the worship service for the people and the reception into full membership and formal excommunication from fellowship of members

acts of ministry are deemed as official within the NT church. Instead, they were regularly practiced by a wide variety of Christians, overseen by the apostles.

Why “Official Acts of Ministry?”

The rationale given for Official Acts of Ministry in the Revised Church Order Commentary of the CRCNA states: “These matters all stand related— some more, others less—to the official proclamation of the Word. And the ordained minister only is authorized in God’s providence to herald and proclaim His Word with authority as His representative.”⁶⁵ Central to this tradition is the belief that these acts require the authorization bestowed by (ministerial) ordination, by virtue of which a person both speaks on behalf of Christ and represents Christ to the congregation. The CRCNA Agenda (and Acts) for Synod 1999 states:

These actions are all liturgical acts, and in the worship service the ordained minister of the Word is the person who liturgically speaks for and represents Christ to the congregation. Thus, normally these are actions that would be performed by the ordained minister of the Word. Such an understanding is eminently fitting and appropriate.⁶⁶

But is it? The example given within the NT church was that all believers were to be ministering members of the church by virtue of their baptism. There is no biblical or historical evidence to indicate that only a few people, with a second ministerial ordination, were permitted to administer sacraments, preach, lay hands on others, or pronounce greetings. The development of the specially ordained ministers who endow special acts of ministry and of the sacraments only introduces an unhelpful and misleading difference between clergy and laity, and the gap between this dual priesthood will only be widened by its practice.

⁶⁵ DeMoor, 208.

⁶⁶ CRC, *Agenda for Synod 1999*, 287.

There Must Be Another Way!

At the beginning of this section, I supported the case for Supplement 18. C of the CRCNA Church Order which states:

These acts of ministry symbolize and strengthen the relationship among the Lord, leaders, and the people of God. Their use is a sacred trust given to leaders by the Lord for the purpose of strengthening the flock. Therefore, the administration of these acts should continue to be regulated by the church.

However, the question remains: how can we conduct ourselves in such a way that we both maintain good order in worship where ministry is regulated by the church and its leaders (1 Cor 14:26-40) while also championing the doctrine of the PoAB, and avoid the twin pitfalls of institutional clericalism (hierarchism) and organic utopianism (independentism)? This is the fundamental question our church order needs to answer.

A case can be made that a *presbuteros* (elder/overseer) is called to do just what their name implies, to *oversee*. They are called to function as mentors and guides to the flock, spiritual under-shepherds for the sake of Christ's Church, ensuring good order. The issue with our polity is that "Official Acts of Ministry" have resulted in the continued defrocking of the royal priesthood. Rather than strike the balance of avoiding both hierarchism and independentism, official acts have led to our denomination falling more into the former camp. In addition, it has caused further confusion with regard to *what* the official acts of ministry are, *who*, specifically, can conduct said ministry, and *why* specifically we have chosen these ministries and persons from amongst others. For example, why do we list the laying on of hands as an official act of ministry and not leading liturgy or corporate prayer? Why preaching, but not teaching or evangelism?

Properly functioning guiding principles (i.e. church order) could be established that ensure both proper direction of ministry and alignment with biblical principles. The

impetus for this is predicated on the primary role of the overseers of the church. As mentioned above, their vital function stands right in their definition, to *oversee*. Consider this revision of CRCNA Church Order for the role of overseer [changes are italicized]:

As tasked by God, overseers (elders and pastors) shall not cause or allow any practice, activity, or decision that is not done in good order or is, in any way, contrary to biblical principles, contrary to the Church Order of the CRCNA, or contrary to their vows. In all areas of ministry (including, but not limited to, teaching, preaching, evangelism, administering sacraments, prayers, worship, liturgies, leadership, as well as all of church life), the overseers shall not fail to uphold orthodox standards of biblical teaching.

We recognize that all acts of ministry symbolize and strengthen the relationship among the Lord and the people of God. Their daily use is a sacred trust given to the church by the Lord for the purpose of strengthening the flock. Therefore, all acts of ministry should continue to be overseen by the church for the purpose of good order and the proper functioning of the body of Christ.

This very simple change in Church Order has several benefits. First, it elevates the status of the PoAB. In recognizing that all have a vital contribution to make to the body of Christ and that each member of the body is distinct in their role, the church is free to appoint particular people to specific tasks and services based on the needs of the church and the giftedness of individuals. It does so without hindering the work of the elders and pastors in ensuring good order in the church. Church leaders are still responsible and accountable for ensuring good order. They are simply brought to their highest practice outlined in Ephesians 4:12 where they are called “...to equip Christ’s people for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ” rather than explicitly listing official acts of ministry that only the pastor and/or elder may perform. As such, there is only one official act of office-bearers that may not be delegated – *oversight*. In doing so, they are solely responsible to ensure good order for the sake of Christ’s church. Further, this provides incredible freedom and flexibility with regard to how the church meets its needs

in a local setting. This process is much more consistent with the heart of the church order, which states:

Whenever the churches would benefit from doing so, the specific application of the general principles derived from scripture ought to be changed...The Christian Reformed Church Order expresses this conviction in the following way: “These articles...have been so drafted and adopted by common consent, that they (if the profit of the Church demands otherwise) may and ought to be altered, augmented, or diminished.”⁶⁷

One example from scripture of this model of ministry at play is found in Acts 8:1-

5. Stephen has just been martyred for his faith and “all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.” Not long before this occurred, Jesus met with his disciples and exclaimed that they would share the good news to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the world.⁶⁸ However, that had not yet taken place. Most Christians remained in Jerusalem in their holy huddles. Though it would have been impossible to see at the time, this great persecution would serve as the mechanism by which God would commission the royal priesthood to share the gospel to the four corners of the world. We read in verses 4 and 5, “Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there.” With this we see what humanity intended for evil, God intended for good! In Acts 11:19-26 we catch a glimpse of how the early church avoided the twin pitfalls of hierarchism and independentism. In verse 19 Luke writes,

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, preaching the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

⁶⁷ CRC, “Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church” in *Acts of Synod 1920*, Article 86.

⁶⁸ Acts 1:8

Clearly these men were not apostles or church leaders. Luke has already indicated that these are the unnamed “scattered” followers of Jesus. Yet, they are “proclaiming the Messiah,” “spreading the word” and “preaching the good news about the Lord Jesus.” However, the story doesn’t end there either. It is not as though there were no systems of accountability, giving the impression of an independent free-for-all. In the very next verse, Barnabas, one of the apostles, come to center stage:

News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord... And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

This is just one of many examples in scripture where church leaders and apostles are still responsible and accountable for testing the spirits (1 John 4) and ensuring good order, but are not the ones explicitly *doing* all the ministry. They are simply brought to their highest practice where they are called “...to equip Christ’s people for the work of ministry” rather than explicitly listing official acts of ministry that only the apostles may perform.

CHAPTER 5:

THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CHURCH

*Does it surprise you that most of what we do in religious circles has no precedent in Scripture? This includes many of the activities with the church services [including] ordination of clergy...and the presence and nature of church buildings.*⁶⁹

- Frank Viola and George Barna, *Pagan Christianity*

In the process of replacing the old religions, Christianity became a religion.

– Alexander Schmemmann, Eastern Orthodox Priest, Teacher, and Writer⁷⁰

According to Frank Viola, “When Christianity was born, it was the only religion on the planet that had no sacred objects, no sacred persons, and no sacred spaces.”⁷¹ The Christian faith was wholly other. It was a home-centered movement that affirmed the radical message of scripture that new heavenly dwelling place of the Holy Spirit was not in a special building, nor in a special person, but within the hearts of every believer. As believers who come face to face with the doctrine of the PoAB we always have one of

⁶⁹ Viola and Barna, *Pagan Christianity*, Introduction.

⁷⁰ Frank C. Senn, *Christian Worship and its Cultural Setting* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1983),

41.

⁷¹ Viola and Barna, 14.

two options: we either have to have the audacity to take God at His Word, or we must reject the notion altogether. There is no other option available to us. Unfortunately, however, I think we have decided to split the difference. We have decided to take a firm stance in professing this doctrine as sound and authoritative, while in the same breath acting as though it does not exist. This chapter will explore three myths that are alive and well within the twenty-first century church and how they attribute to the apathy and decay of the doctrine of the PoAB. These myths have been discussed previously in this thesis in chapter 2. The first two are the Holy Person myth and the Holy Place myth. Both of these are rooted in an even more powerful and pervasive myth that, for centuries, has plagued the Christian church: the sacred versus secular myth.

The Sacred Versus Secular Myth

Much of the difficulty the Christian Church in North America faces today is the false distinction between the sacred and secular.⁷² The sacred is typically tied to what the Holy Person (i.e. Pastor/Priest) does at the Holy Place (i.e. the Brick and Mortar “Church/Sanctuary”). For instance, this is what the pastor does on Sunday mornings at church—specifically his prayers, petitions, praises, sermons, and even when he raises his hands. These are sacred, spiritual acts performed by God’s representative, in God’s House, to God’s people. With respect to this false distinction Viola writes, “[There is an] unbiblical disconnect of sacred versus secular. There is no such disconnect in Scripture. Meeting for “religions” purposes in a “religious” building merely reinforces this unscriptural mindset.”⁷³

⁷² Abraham Kuyper, *The Problem of Poverty*, trans. James W. Skillen (Sioux Center, IA: Dordt College Press, 2011), 112.

⁷³ Viola, 92.

The secular, meanwhile, is everything that happens Monday through Saturday – the regular mundaneness of work and life, caring for your children, changing diapers, going to school, serving in the community, paying your taxes, and so on.

Though perhaps unintentional or unwittingly, we divorce what we think is sacred from what we think is secular. However, there is no such distinction. According to Abraham Kuyper, “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, “mine!””⁷⁴

The biblical use of the term “call” (*kaleo*) tells a different story. In the NT letters in particular, the concept of call often describes God bringing men and women into a saving faith relationship with him.⁷⁵ Elsewhere scripture highlights the calling of the church to be engaged in the one-another’s of scripture as the body of Christ.⁷⁶ Not only that, the NT repeatedly uses the concept of call to highlight the various vocations of men and women who comprise of the church. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 7 Paul encourages his readers to recognize that it is not necessary to change their vocations in order to live their lives for God in a way that brings him honor and glory. In verse 17, Paul writes, “Only, let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches.” He makes similar statements in Romans 12:3 and 2 Corinthians 10:13. Paul uses the term “call” (*kaleo*) in all three of these letters to convey the message that Christians ought not abandon their various vocations for a more “spiritual” one, but ought to remain in the work to which God has called them. What we see from this example is that Paul is not referencing traditional

⁷⁴ Kuyper, 15.

⁷⁵ See Romans 8:30 and 1 Corinthians 1:9

⁷⁶ See Ephesians 1:1-4 and Colossians 3:15

church ministries here, but common social and economic tasks – “secular jobs,” we might say – and referring to them as both sacred and profoundly spiritual *callings*. The impetus is clear: just as God calls some to function as apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers, he also calls and equips men and women with talents and gifts for various kinds of works for the sake of His Kingdom.

Every believer must be reminded that the Holy Spirit is endowed in every person who bears the name of Jesus Christ and that everything we think, say, and do is a form of worship. The only question is what or who we worship. Worship is not limited to our Sunday gatherings, weeknight bible studies, or the prayers the pastor prays. Rather, every single person who claims Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior is, in fact, a Priest, called by God to do the work of God. Unfortunately, the majority of the Christian church in the twenty-first century has reduced the vessel for God’s eternal purpose down to via two means, the Holy Place myth and the Holy Person myth.

The Holy Place Myth

The choice of the term *ekklesia* as the designation of the Christian community suggests that NT believers had a very different view of the church than in the OT. Unlike the OT where the *Kabohd* (glory) of God resided within the four walls of a physical temple, the new holy place was neither an edifice nor an organization. They were a people, comprising of living stones – brought together by the Holy Spirit –bound to each other through Christ.⁷⁷ One of the striking marks of the early church was how, while all the other religions had a sacred, sanctified meeting place, the Christian community met in common spaces (typically homes). While Judaism and various pagan religions of the day

⁷⁷ See Stanley Grenz, *Created for Community* (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2015).

taught that you must have a sanctified place for divine worship, Christians affirmed that God is in the business of sanctifying people, not objects. The believing community is the temple (1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21-22). As stated by the apostle Peter, “you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:5). The testimony of the Christian church is that the Lord’s People, not the house they meet in, are God’s holy house. The church is not a building made from human hands. The Lord’s people are the living stones of God’s habitation. Whether Christians today meet together in homes, gymnasiums, theatres, or buildings specially erected for the gathering of God’s people, they are the means to the end goal of God’s people, the church, gathering together.

The Holy Place myth is the belief that real ministry happens in the context of the confines of the four walls of a church building. While very few Christians would admit to believing in this aloud, it is practically impossible in the twenty-first century to escape the concept of church without thinking about a building. The church building is so connected with the idea of church that we unconsciously equate the two as though they are the same. Concerning this issue, Viola writes in *Pagan Christianity?*,

Many contemporary Christians have a love affair with brick and mortar. The edifice complex is so ingrained in our thinking that if a group of believers begins to meet together, their first thoughts are toward securing a building. For how can a group of Christians rightfully claim to be a church without a building? (Or so the thinking goes.)⁷⁸

The “Holy Place” Myth is an easy trap to fall into because it is rooted in the story of our Redemptive History. This matter of thinking comes from an Old Covenant mindset (see Chapter 2). The people of Israel knew that the manifest presence of God was in His

⁷⁸ Viola and Barna, 10.

temple. That is why families of Israel would often travel hundreds of miles to go to the temple to meet with the priest, worship, sing praises, and offer sacrifices to God. After all, ancient Judaism was centered on three essential elements – the Temple, the Priesthood, and the Sacrifices (and Festivals), because the temple is where the glory (*kabod*) of God resided. When Christ came, he ended all three, fulfilling them in Himself. Viola writes,

He is the temple who embodies a new and living house made of living stones – ‘without hands.’ He is the priest who has established a new priesthood. And He is the perfect and finished sacrifice.⁷⁹

Thus, the Temple (i.e. the Holy Place) and the professional Priesthood (i.e. The Holy Person) both passed away through the work of Christ! Christ is the fulfillment of the temple, the priesthood, and the sacrifice. Apart from the incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, leading to Pentecost, this would still be the practice today.

In the New Covenant, however, the presence of the Holy Spirit no longer resides in the Most Holy Place in the Tabernacle or Temple. Now, the Holy Spirit indwells the heart of every believer! Hebrews 8 and 9 explore themes related to the Holy Place myth, stating: “When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands...For this reason, Christ is the mediator of a new covenant” (Hebrews 9:11, 15).

A careful distinction needs to be made on how the NT speaks about the local church. Consider, for example, Acts 16:40, in which Luke refers to the church that typically met in Lydia’s home. Likewise, most of Paul’s letters in the NT are written to

⁷⁹ Ibid., 11.

the church of Christ within a particular region – like the churches in Philippi, Corinth, Galatia, or Ephesus. Perhaps the most helpful distinction that Paul makes with regard to what he means by church comes at the end of his letter to the churches in Rome:

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well. Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. Greet also the church in their house (Rom 16:1-4).

What is significant is not that they are not meeting in a big building, but that Paul makes a careful distinction between the church and the house. “Greet also the church in their house” (Rom 16:14). Strikingly, nowhere in the NT’s 114 uses is the term church (*ekklesia*) used to refer to an actual building. The term *ekklesia*, in every single one of its 114 appearances in the NT, refers to God’s people, and not the building they inhabit.⁸⁰ In fact, there are precisely two instances in the NT when the word *church* is used a different way than what is stated above and both instances are remarkable. First, when Jesus was on earth He made some radical statements about the Jewish Temple. Perhaps the one that angered the religious leaders the most was His announcement that if the Temple was destroyed, He would rebuild it in three days (see John 2:19-21). He was referring to the real temple – his body– which was raised up on the third day (see Eph 2:6). Second, in Acts 6-7 Stephen corrected the religious leaders for treating the temple as the physical “house of God.” He explained that God does not dwell in temples made by human hands. (Acts 7:54-60). Ironically enough, both Jesus and Stephen were charged with the exact same crime – speaking against the temple (see Mk 14:58 and Acts 6:13-14) and were put

⁸⁰ The English word church is derived from the Greek word *kuriakon*, which means “called out by the Lord” and/or “belonging to the Lord.”

to death for it. Once again, throughout the NT, the term ekklesia always refers to the assembling of God's people, not a physical place. After all, you cannot go to something that you are. Referring to the church as a building, says Viola, "...would be like calling your wife a condominium or your mother a skyscraper..." since "...according to the New Testament, the church is the bride of Christ..."⁸¹

The NT uses many different images to depict the church. Consider how every single image is a living, biological entity: a body, a family, a bride, a new man, a living temple made of living stones, a vineyard, and an army.⁸² Every image reveals to us that the church is a living, breathing organism.⁸³ Perhaps the greatest image or metaphor to understand how the church is called to function is by looking into God Himself. As stated by Eugene Peterson, "Trinity is the most comprehensive and integrative framework that we have for understanding and participating in the Christian life."⁸⁴ The triune God is the answer to understanding the organic nature of the church. The church ought to serve as a window into a divine reality. Viola agrees with Peterson's claim when he writes, "Understanding the activity within the triune God was the key to grasping everything in the Christian life – including the church."⁸⁵ The church and the triune God ought to explain one another. Thus, the highest purpose of the church is to make the invisible Godhead visible through His body.

As a result of the person and work of Jesus on the cross, the presence of the Holy Spirit no longer resides in the Most Holy Place in the Tabernacle or Temple. Now, the

⁸¹ Viola and Barna, 11.

⁸² See Eph 2:15; Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 10:32; Col 3:11; 2 Cor 5:17.

⁸³ See Paul Meier, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004).

⁸⁴ Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 45.

⁸⁵ Viola, 33.

Holy Spirit indwells the heart of every believer. There are no more holy places, only holy people, ordained by God to do the work of ministry.

The Holy Person Myth

The Holy Person myth is the belief that there is precisely one priest [or holy person] at every Holy Place (maybe two or more if you attend an especially large Holy Place). The Holy Person Myth is the belief that the PoAB is a really good doctrine, but a silly thing to try and live out. Like the Holy Place myth, it is practically impossible in the twenty-first century to escape the concept of priestly ministry without thinking about the pastors. We have fallen victim of outsourcing ministry to the professionals. The pastor is so connected with the idea of priestly ministry that we unconsciously equate the two as though they are the same.

In the NT, you do not find a special priestly caste that was set apart to serve God. Instead, every believer recognizes that he or she was a priest unto God. As previously discussed, the Holy Person Myth stems from an Old Covenant, Levitical mindset. In the same way that God made a provision by making a remnant of priests through the Tribe of Levi to function as mediators between God and His people, today many of us still fall victim to the assumption that God calls out a remnant of people to function as priests. Despite the sixteenth century Reformation, its effect on the practical outpouring of the doctrine of the PoAB was short-lived. As stated by Viola, “they retained the priestly caste (the clergy) as well as the sacred buildings.”⁸⁶ We captured the theological territory, but failed to occupy the ground.

⁸⁶ Viola and Barna, 13.

Conclusion

In conclusion, consider how the CRCNA Church Order is developed in a very similar way to the myths just addressed. Section 1, along with its twenty-five articles, is tied to explanations on the Ministerial Offices of the Church [i.e. The Holy People]. Section 2, with its twenty-five articles, gives explanations on the Ministerial Assemblies of the Church [i.e. the Holy Place(s)], and Section 3 and 4, with its thirty-four articles, is devoted to the official Tasks and Activities of the Church [i.e. What only the ordained Holy People do in the Holy Place(s)]. Of all eighty-four articles, only four speak to the privileges, responsibilities, and ministry of the PoAB outside of the four walls of the corporate worship campus.⁸⁷

Within the Church Order of the CRCNA, the sacred/secular divide is able to take root due to not only what is said, but what is unsaid. Though unintentionally, it gives the impression that the only ministries that matter are what happens when the holy person is in the holy place, performing official acts of ministry. This is a serious reduction of God's design for His church. It is doubtful any fruitful or substantive changes will occur at the Synodical level by simply blaming the church order. What is required is the

⁸⁷ CRCNA, "Church Order and Its Supplements," 96-97. They are as follows:

Article 72 – Congregational Groups: "The council shall promote and supervise groups within the congregation for the study of God's Word, for prayer, and for the enhancement of fellowship, discipleship, and service."

Article 73 – The Great Commission: "In joyful obedience to the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations, the church is called to bear witness to Jesus Christ and his kingdom through word and deed."

Article 74a – The Ministry of the Congregation: "Each church shall proclaim the gospel to its community. The local church is to announce and demonstrate, through word and deed that God's reign has come; to live as an exhibit of God's healing and reconciling grace; and to extend to all the invitation to experience new life in Christ through repentance and faith."

Article 79 – The Responsibility of Members to One Another: "The members of the church are accountable to one another in their doctrine and life and have the responsibility to encourage and admonish one another in love"

difficult work of local congregations developing grass-roots movements that are devoted to the promulgation of the PoAB. It is only when local churches lead by example will we begin to see meaningful change. The message of the local church must be this: since Christ has risen victorious from the grave, all Christians have become ordained priests, the temple of God. Before His resurrection, He promised us his Holy Spirit (Jn 14:26 and 1 Cor 15:45). At Pentecost, this promise was fulfilled. The Holy Spirit now takes residence in believers, making them His Temple, His House, His Priesthood. It is precisely for this reason that the NT always reserves the word church (*ekklesia*) for the gathered people of God, the concept of ordination for baptized believers, and the word ministry (*diakonia*) for the full functioning of the entire body of Christ.

PART THREE

RE-ROOTING & REFORMING THE ROYAL PRIESTHOOD

CHAPTER 6:

A BIBLICAL VISION FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH

The last two chapters seek to summarize prior points and provide practical, tangible steps for pastors, ministry leaders, and the priestly community toward uniting faith with practice in regard to the doctrine of the PoAB. This chapter is devoted to recapturing the essence of God's vision for His church and how it may be applied in a modern-day context. That is to say, these are the features that are truly prescriptive in all times and places.

The Biblical Vision for the Local Church – Restoring the Original Blueprint of God

The Holy Spirit is not confined to a building, nor to particular Christians. The Holy Spirit, says scripture, is endowed in every believer. This means the same Holy Spirit who created the Universe, who knit you together in your mother's womb, who can perform miraculous signs and wonders, lives in every Christian. Thus, every Christian represents Christ, has access to Christ, and is endowed with the Holy Spirit. Every Christian is a priest, entrusted with a priestly ministry. Consider, for a moment, the intricate detail that goes into the building of the Tabernacle in the book of Exodus. Over ten chapters are devoted to a detailed explanation on how to build the tabernacle (Ex 25-31, 35-40). Such care and detail is taken because the tabernacle is where the glory

(*kabodh*) of the Lord resides. In the NT we learn that same spirit who resided in the temple now resides in every Christian.¹

The Royal Priesthood

By way of summary, there are at least three themes that emerge repeatedly from scripture regarding the royal priesthood. First, the royal priesthood is ultimately rooted in the church's relationship with Christ, the eschatological prophet, priest, and king. Second, the chief functions of the royal priesthood are to proclaim the word of God (through sharing the gospel with others and announcing the mighty acts of God), to offer themselves as spiritual sacrifices (through the totality of their lives), and to offer temple services (through building up the body of Christ through teaching, prayer, extending forgiveness, and using spiritual gifts). Finally, every single member of the royal priesthood is called to active ministry in the service of the gospel of Christ by virtue of their baptism. This is to say, there are no Holy People and there is no Holy Place. There is only "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pet 2:9).

God is Making a Community of Priests through Jesus, the High Priest

Chapter 1's survey of the biblical data demonstrated God's original intent for all of the children of Israel to be priests, and that this high calling would not simply be for a select few. God wanted an entire community to be set apart to show forth His glory to the world and to invite others to take up the call. This community of Priests was set apart to

¹ See, for example, 1 Corinthians 3:16,19; 6:16; 2 Timothy 1:14; Acts 6:5; Ephesians 5:18; Romans 8:9, 11, 15; Galatians 4:6; 5:18, 22; 1 John 2:27.

minister to God, to one another, and to the world. This is God's great vision. While the people of Israel ultimately rejected that call, God made a way to redeem it, by sending His one and only son into the world to redeem the world. Christ, the Great High Priest, made the Old Covenant obsolete to make way for the new.² Through the work of Christ, we are invited to live into the new royal priesthood. Today God has a nation of priests who are called to minister to Him, to one another, and to the world because of the life that dwells within them. All this was made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Every Christian has been called to be the church, to be his new priesthood, set apart and consecrated to be a glory to him before the whole earth, a holy nation that would show the world what God is like and how much he loves them. While this priesthood was designed long ago with the intent for the people of Israel to function this way, it is that much more glorious in knowing that we are living in the New Covenant.

Priests Bring People to God

God's people as priests are called to bring people to God through various means. By offering prayer, we stand before God and bring the world with us – our families, neighbors, friends and co-workers. In prayer, we bring to God the world's needs, the victims of storm and famine and oppression. We walk right up to throne of grace and intercede for them. Priests pray. They bring people to God. In fact, there is no greater task given to the royal priesthood than to intercede in prayer on behalf of another. Scripture implores us to devote ourselves (*proskartereite*) to prayer (Acts 1:14; 2:42, 46) and suggests gritty determination not to give up until God's responds (Lk 18:1-8). Paul says that prayer is grounded in a Christian's hope (Col 1:5) and the aim of priestly mission

² See Hebrews 8:7-9:17

(Col 1:22, 28). The royal priesthood is called to pray in confident expectation. As the royal priesthood, we are God's fellow workers. The greatest work a Christian can do is to pray for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Priests bring people to God by offering spiritual sacrifices. 1 Peter 2:5 says, "you are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices to God." All who have been baptized are called to offer spiritual sacrifices. Romans 12:1-2 clarifies this call when Paul issues this command (*latreia*): "So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering" (The Message).

In our work, our parenting, relationships, businesses, leisure time – indeed in all things, we offer our minds, our bodies, and our hearts to God. The author of Hebrews also shares this message in chapter 13:15: "through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name." In other words, our foremost priority as the royal priesthood is to offer spiritual sacrifices of praise. As stated by Rodriguez, "This is the ultimate service, function, responsibility, privilege, and blessing. There is no greater ministry than to minister to God in worship."³ This, of course, is not simply limited to the myth of the holy place. Our whole lives are to be an act of worship to our Lord and King. That is precisely why the apostle Paul says that we should present our "...bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Rom 12:1). Corporate worship has a vital function, of course. We praise God corporately in song, so praise will always be on our lips and in our

³ Rodriguez, 66.

hearts throughout the week in all we do. Regular worship helps inform and form us in our new role as priests under the Great High Priest.

Though our work does not equal who we are, our work is in no way, shape, or form divorced from faith. On the contrary, it is intricately linked. The doctrine of the PoAB indicates that every Christian is a priest and, thus, is engaged in priestly work. Part of our ongoing sanctification is not simply growing in Christlikeness, but also growing in having the heart of Christ, seeking to expand His Kingdom purposes right where we are.

Paul tells us that spiritual worship is life (Rom 12:1; Col 3:17, 23). It is not simply something we do occasionally, once or twice a week when we gather together in a building and sing songs. It is enveloped in all we think, do, and say. We do so by using spiritual gifts. These spiritual gifts belong to the body of Christ, His Church. They are not simply individual possessions. This further explains why it is God's will for all believers to function as priests and ministers to one another. We are, as Paul says, "...one body, many parts" (1 Cor 12:20). Paul also indicates that the role of apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds/pastors, and teacher is to "...equip Christ's people for the work of ministry, until we all reach until in the faith" (Eph 4:12).

So, while the role of pastors and leaders is to equip Christ's people for the work of ministry, it is the unique role and function of Christians to use their spiritual gifts in tandem with one another for the proper functioning of the full body of Christ. Every believer has their own unique gifts and ministry that has been given to them by God.⁴

⁴ This is most clearly taught in Romans 12, which highlights gifts of prophecy, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, and showing mercy, 1 Corinthians 12, which highlights the gifts of words of wisdom, words of knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, discerning of spirits, different tongues, interpretation of tongues, and Ephesians 4, which lists of gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers.⁴

Priests Bring God to People

Priests also bring God to people primarily through the testimony of our lives through word and deed. Priests bring God to people by how they live. We are God's holy presence in the world. However, the world is aching to see and experience holiness. People need to see human life shaped by love and peace and wisdom and joy. People need to see Christ living in us. Priests bring God to people not only by their way of life but also with their words. We let others know where our hope lies. We weave little testimonies into our conversations with people. We tell them our hopes and our loves. Most people are not going to know about God's love for them or what God wants for their lives, except we gently and persistently tell them, over the coffee cup at work, over the back fence at home.

When we bring God to people, we are also engaged in a ministry of reconciliation. We are joining the ministry of the High Priest Jesus. In 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, Paul writes, "...God has given to us the ministry of reconciliation... We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us." This was God's original intent for the people of Israel in Exodus 19:5-6: "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'" God has never stopped in choosing a priesthood that would function as "a society of people who would shine forth as a bright light in a dark place or a watchtower or lighthouse on the edge of a dark and foggy sea."⁵ Jesus was the one who

⁵ Rodriguez, 81.

called the church “the light of the world...a city set on a hill” (Mt 5:14). God desires to use His people as a redeeming influence upon the world that He loves.

The Role of the Pastor

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12: “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of ministry/service (*diakonos*), but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. The Spirit gives gifts for the common good...For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body.” Paul makes the same point in Ephesians 2:10 when he says that God has prepared in advance “good works” for believers to walk in as disciples. So, the Spirit is the great giver of spiritual gifts, and all believers have a gift (Eph.4:7) they can give to use as priests in the world. Paul explains the role of the ministry leaders two chapters later:

Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of ministry (service/*diakonia*), so that the body of Christ may be built up.... From Christ the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Eph 4:11-16)

Paul defines the role of the pastor very clearly. The pastors’ ministry is to equip the saints to do their ministry. It is easy to see how we have this completely upside-down in the Christian church today. To use a sports metaphor, the reigning view in our congregations today is to have the pastor typically function as a *player*, while the congregation usually functions as *fans* and/or recipients of their ministry. Paul makes a different distinction. Following the sports metaphor, Paul says it is the role of a pastor to function more as *coach* than *player*. In all five instances in the NT where Paul and Peter address the topic of the ecclesiastical leadership (Acts 20:28; Phil 1:1, 1 Tim 3:2, Ti 1:7, 1 Pt 2:25), the primary function is oversight (*episkopos*). Thus, pastors and church leaders

(the APEST) are called to equip Christ's people for the work of ministry and ensure that it is done in a way that is pleasing to God.

The church has failed to understand the vital difference between *overseeing* and explicitly *doing*. Oversight of ministry, not the doing of ministry itself, is the exclusive function of pastors and ecclesiastical office holders. This cannot be understated. While the most important responsibility of appointed leaders is to ensure that the gospel is understood within the royal priesthood, the real litmus test for a healthy congregation is whether the entirety of the royal priesthood is teaching, preaching, guarding, and proclaiming the gospel. If that is not occurring, then the APEST has failed in their unique function of oversight. The true measure of effective ministry is not by simply evaluating what the holy person does within the holy place, but in how believers come together to enact worship so that they may learn how to be the church, the royal priesthood, throughout the week as they live out their baptismal identity. Every Christian is a priest. Every Christian is a minister. Only when every member of the church is ministering is the body of Christ fully functioning (Eph. 4:14-15). It is God's spirit that makes it possible for each member to function that way. Lesslie Newbigin writes:

I hope I have made clear my belief that it is the whole Church which is called to be – in Christ – a royal priesthood, that every member of the body is called to the exercise of this priesthood, and that this priesthood is to be exercised in the daily life and work of Christians in the “secular” world...the office of a priest is to stand before God on behalf of people and to stand before people on behalf of God...The church gathers every Sunday, the day of the resurrection and of Pentecost, to renew its participation in Christ's priesthood. But the exercise of this priesthood is not within the walls of the Church but in the daily business of the world!⁶

⁶ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 35, 230.

In summary, the primary task of pastors and church leaders is to equip the saints for works of ministry (Eph. 4:12), while ensuring good order in the church (1 Cor 14:12), and setting a good example to others on how to model Christ in their own lives. They must “hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that they can encourage and equip others” (Ti 1:9). They should know scripture, which is “useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16-17) and pray continually for the church. They should remember that at all times if they would truly give spiritual leadership in the household of faith, they must be completely mastered by the Lord (1 Tim 3:2-7). This is the vision for leaders.

The Church

Practically speaking, if the pastor acts as if they are the only ones with gifts for ministry, we cripple the church, we make passive Christians, we make lame priests, and we hold the gifts of the Spirit hostage rather than encouraging people to use them. Newbigin is once again helpful in providing this distinction: “To those who are called to leadership...[you] are called to help us in renewing our priesthood.”⁷ Likewise, Karl Barth writes this concerning the vocational ministry of the elect (*elektos*) of God, “⁸ It is not that some of them who are specially endowed or commissioned for special service in the community are given this latter title, but all of them without difference or exception.”

The Church is a Holy Priesthood belonging to God

As a body of Christ, we share a new status. In the same way that God had chosen ancient Israel, so now the Spirit of God has called out His people, the church, to belong to

⁷ Lesslie Newbigin, “An X-ray to make God visible in the world”, *Reform* December 1990.

⁸ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2010), 152.

Him. This is no longer based upon a particular ethnic birthright, but through the Spirit who calls together a people from the entire world. As stated in Revelation 5:9, the church comprises of persons “from every tribe and language and people and nation.”

As a Holy Priesthood unto God, Christians have both the privilege and responsibility to offer themselves daily as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God (Rom 12:1-2), and continually offering sacrifices to God through doing good and sharing what we have (Heb 13:15-16). To say that a Christian is a priest means that every Christian represents Christ, has access to Christ, and every priest is now the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. Whereas in Israel only a few were selected from the people to serve as Priests, in the church all of the people of God belong to the priestly order and the ministry of the priesthood is shared by all.

In summary, the biblical vision for the people of God is summarized in 1 Peter 2:4-5: “as you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” The biblical vision of God is not that ministry should be reduced down to what the Holy Man does within the Holy Place. There are no holy places any longer. God is in the business of sanctifying people, not objects or specific locations. Only when the entire body of Christ is ministering together is the spiritual house of living stones complete. This is the motif that should inform not only our theology, but specifically our ecclesiology and the way we seek to minister to the God, to one another, and to the world.

CHAPTER 7:

GETTING PRACTICAL: DEVELOPING A CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT THAT EQUIPS THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

*“How does the fountain flow? Deep and wide! The breadth of your ministry is tied to the
depth of your intimacy with Him.”*

- Terry Walling – author, mentor, and pastor¹

While Chapter 6 was devoted to recapturing the essence of God’s vision for His church and how it may be applied in a modern-day context, this chapter explores the practical question of what this looks like by providing practical examples, reconnecting our faith (*orthodoxy*) to our practice (*orthopraxy*). While it is not meant to be an exhaustive list, these examples will serve as resource guide to pastors, council members, and ministry leaders within their various contexts. This section is devoted to offering examples and insights from my ministry setting that has produced fruit in seeking to champion the PoAB.

Perhaps you’ve heard it been said, “*You are what you eat.*” In a similar vein, every day, we live and interact in both forming and de-forming environments. Within our home, our place of business, our communities, and even our congregations there are habits and patterns that we should either venerate or abandon. Practice forms us; Culture forms us; Experiences form us. I suppose you could say, “*You are what you eat, drink,*

¹ Walling, “Organic Leadership Development.”

see, taste, touch, and experience.” As leaders of the church, our unique vocation is to help others develop a uniquely Christian worldview and perspective that helps them to engage in habits and patterns that attribute to their identity as part of the royal priesthood.

In the same way that Jesus, Daniel, and others in scripture had spaces and practices for renewal, Christians need intentional traits, habits, patterns, and even physical environments to form their identity. A significant part of seeking to champion the doctrine of the PoAB is developing a culture that includes a radical reorientation toward our identity as members of Christ’s royal priesthood. Perhaps the most significant contribution pastors and ministry leaders can make is to help Christians consider the narratives that are at play in their lives and to equip fellow believers with tools to grow as a priesthood.

Christian rhythms of life refer to the structure you follow in your ongoing life and relationship with God. These are spiritual disciplines and activities that open us to God’s ongoing, transforming work, and the changes that only God can bring. One of the monastic practices that some Christians use today is the creation of a rule of life that allows for regular space to breathe and enjoy God, and to allow for time to practice some of the spiritual disciplines.

At the church I serve, we affirm that we should endeavor to maintain a deep and consistent liturgical life in the home. While liturgy can feel like a formal and religious word, it is a common part of everyday life. We thrive and depend upon consistent structures and patterns of living (liturgies). Rituals shape our desires and their imaginations. The rituals of our life reflect the organizing loves of our life. We find the most liturgy and ritual around the things we love the most. Christians are called to

develop liturgies around the love of God to serve as reminders of our identity — devotional practices that involve regular prayer, Scripture study, participation in corporate worship, community life, and mission. Our goal is to pattern our lives in line with the gospel story we desire to live into each day (Rom 12:1-2).

The question for any pastor or church leader is, specifically, *how* to equip God’s people to not only passively learn God’s grand story of redemption, but also to actively articulate it with their mouths and lives, to be a royal priestly presence with their entire lives and equip God’s people to disciple others and develop habits and patterns that form their identity in Christ. Pastors and ministry leaders can instruct their congregation on what this looks like with the use of practical examples and models. It is for this reason Newbigin charges leaders to “help [the royal priesthood] in *renewing* their own priesthood.”²

The section below includes a list of simple daily practices, examples, and insights. These rhythms of life can help celebrate and affirm the doctrine of the PoAB. From here, I invite you to explore the “Ten Ways to Equip the Royal Priesthood.” I have broken these examples down into two sections: one for *corporate practices* and another for *personal practices*. At the end, a series of organizational resources is provided to help pastors and church leaders organize their ministry around the biblical principles tied to the PoAB. For further exploration, additional resources may be found on “The Equipping Church” website.³

² Newbigin, “An X-Ray...,” 7.

³ Note: All of these examples have customizable resources which can be found online at: <https://justingcarruthers.wixsite.com/theequippingchurch>. There, you may also request access to: “The Equipping Church” Dropbox database.

Ten Ways to Equip the Royal Priesthood – Corporate Rhythms

The following section is devoted to providing pastors and church leaders practical examples to use corporately (on Sundays or otherwise) on how to help congregants cultivate habits that remind them of their baptismal identity as members of the royal priesthood.

1. Preaching, Teaching, and Vision Casting

Through preaching and teaching, pastors and ministry leaders can explain the various ways in which God calls the royal priesthood to use their gifts, talents, influence, position, authority, creative capacities, and labors to take part in God's work in the world. This is not an exclusive function of ecclesiastical office holders, rather it is the privilege and responsibility of the royal priesthood. All good work is holy work and all Christian workers are holy workers. Pastors and ministry workers can inspire the royal priesthood to live out their baptismal identity in and through their work in the world. Allow the Word of God to inform His people on how vocation is essential, not incidental, to the mission of God. Consider the following practical examples:

A) Preaching

A vital part of vocational stewardship is a broader vision that connects our work to our faith. Ephesians not only teaches that God has prepared good works for believers to participate in (2:10), but that the unique role of pastors and church leaders is to equip the saints for that work (4:11-12). Unfortunately, the average Christian sitting in a pew on Sundays hears very little from the pulpit regarding how their faith connects to their work. But pastors can explain the various ways in which God calls the royal priesthood to use

their gifts, talents, influence, position, authority, creative capacities, and labors to take part in God's work in the world. Not only that, but scripture also indicates that our work not only has implications on the earth, but also in the new age. As stated by Lesslie Newbigin:

Every faithful act of service, every honest labor to make the world a better place, which seemed to have been forever lost and forgotten in the rubble of history, will be seen on that day [at the final resurrection] to have contributed to the perfect fellowship of God's Kingdom ... all who committed their work in faithfulness to God will be by Him raised up to share in the new age, and will find that their labor was not lost, but that it has found its place in the completed kingdom.⁴

In view of Newbigin's statement, it is essential for pastors to communicate to their congregation that all good work is holy work and all Christian workers are holy workers. There is no sacred/secular divide. Pastors must educate the royal priesthood for vocational stewardship as well as inspire them to live out their baptismal identity in and through their work in the world. Allow the Word of God to inform His people on how vocation is essential, not incidental, to the mission of God.

Preaching is one of the ways Christians can discover God's vision for the royal priesthood. Author and consultant Will Mancini indicates that a source of a malnourished church identity is a lack of vision. He states, "Where there is no vision, the people cherish things in the lower room."⁵ He claims that there are three identifiable ways to measure whether a congregation is cherishing things in the "lower room:" place (the physical location/building that you meet in; i.e. the Holy Place), personality (the personality of the leadership within the church, particularly the Lead/Senior Pastor.; i.e. the Holy Person), and program(s) (the events and activities that occur on Sundays and throughout the week;

⁴ Lesslie Newbigin, *Signs Amid the Rubble* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 47.

⁵ Will Mancini, Course lecture notes from "Visionary Leadership" at Fuller Seminary, Pasadena, CA, November 2018.

i.e. what the Holy Person does within the Holy Place). These are not bad things in and of themselves, but they reveal how a lack of vision can fuel the fire for a divided sacred/secular mentality. What is required is to invite members of the congregation to, as Mancini puts it, the “Upper Room.”⁶ The royal priesthood needs a clear sense of purpose. They need to be rooted in their baptismal identity so they can see how God is at work in the world and how God intends to use them for His Kingdom.⁷

B) Teach the Priesthood of all Believers

What if pastors and ministry leaders encouraged and equipped people to be priests in their workplaces and in their families and in their neighborhoods? If we did, we would be helping to unleash a host of Spirit-filled priests into the world! Both my research and experience suggest that the average member in the pew has very little conception of what it means to be part of the royal priesthood. Consider taking the time to teach God’s biblical vision of the priesthood of all believers, highlighting God’s original design in the OT, what went wrong (Israel’s rebellion), how God’s original design was restored through Christ’s death and resurrection, and what that means for the Christian today. Debunk the myths of the “holy person” and the “holy place” and affirm that every Christian is a holy, sanctified priest who represents Christ, has access to Christ, and is endowed with the Holy Spirit. Identify the proper role of the pastor and office-bearers given within Ephesians 4:12-16 is to equip Christ’s people for the work of ministry, and

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ See also Will Mancini, “The Vision Frame Overview,” accessed February 26, 2019, <http://goddrea.ms/resources>.

remind them that all good work is holy work because all of God's workers are holy workers.⁸

C) Open the Pulpit

In the CRCNA, a strict interpretation of the CO is that one can only preach through one of three available means: by receiving official ordination as a "Minister of the Word" through Article 6, through the "exceptional gifts" route through Article 7,⁹ or, finally, by becoming a "Commissioned Pastor" through Articles 23-24.¹⁰ That said, there are also three other ways someone from the congregation may be able to exhort. First, students from an accredited seminary may receive a license to exhort through Article 22. Second, a congregation may enlist classis to give one of their members a license to exhort through Article 43. And finally, Article 53 says that an unlicensed person appointed by the consistory may read a sermon prepared by a Minister of the Word and approved by Council. These are the guiding principles of our church order in seeking to help elders and councils ensure that the Word of God is preached faithfully to congregations.¹¹ As always, my goal is to give examples that strictly adhere to the CO of the CRCNA. There are at least three different ways my church has opened the pulpit to the congregation while strictly adhering to Church Order.

The first way is through a sermon-prep meeting. The teaching pastor of the next service leads a time and presents what they have come up with for the weekend message.

⁸ Note: Find example PPT presentation on the royal priesthood on the equipping church website.

⁹ Which is almost never used

¹⁰ Christian Reformed Church, "Church Order and Its Supplements."

¹¹ There is a clause in the Church Order that stipulates "There is no higher assembly than a local Council" in Ibid., Article 53a. That said, my understanding is that a Council that permits a person to exhort without licensure by classis is in violation of Church Order.

Sometimes they might already have an outline and other times they might just know what the passage or topic is they will be speaking on. The goal is two-fold. First, for the teacher to get ideas, illustrations, relevant passages, and insights from the people there. It also serves as a sounding board to check to make sure an outline, illustration, joke, or line of thinking makes sense. Second, it is a way to demystify the practice of developing a sermon and to receive input from others in a collaborative environment. Third, it helps connect the passage to the everyday lives of various congregants.

A second option is to help a person obtain access to the preaching ministry.¹² Perhaps you have found someone in your congregation whom you have identified with gifts in preaching and teaching. Perhaps, like the apostle Paul the Tentmaker, they already have a full time job and are in ministry outside of the local church. Seminary may not be a viable path. If that is the case, there are still avenues within the church order to have them receive their “License to Exhort.” Consider looking at the process outlined in Article 43 (license by Classis) so that they may be granted permission to exhort in your local congregation.

A third way to involve and collaborate on preaching is to use what we call the Preach It Early (PIE) plan. One of the reasons why Article 53 allows an unlicensed person to read a sermon is because this process allows elders to ensure what will be said/exhorted/preached is biblical, and distinctly reformed. This is a much more difficult issue to address if you need to call out improper teaching after a message is already given so the allowance to read an already approved sermon was implemented. At our church, we started a process called Preach It Early. We did this the first time with our seminary

¹² In the CRCNA this would be to obtain a “license to exhort”

interns. We invited them to preach in front of a live audience five to ten days before they delivered the message. Like the Sermon Prep Group it got more members involved in the process. Not only that, it provided the distinct benefits of ensuring that the sermon was truly ready to go when Sunday came. Not only that, the sermons get better before they were actually delivered, not after by giving the preach time to practice and train as a communicator in front of a team ready to provide encouragement and feedback.¹³

2. Decentralize the “One-Another” Ministries

As further detailed in Chapter 6, if pastors and ministry leaders act as if they are the only ones with gifts for ministry, we cripple the church, we make passive Christians, we make lame priests, and we hold the gifts of the Spirit hostage rather than encouraging people to use them. While most traditions have only office-bearers bear the privilege and responsibility of caring for the congregation, ministry leaders ought to consider the ways in which they can equip the PoAB for every good work. Consider a couple examples:

A) Small Groups

Acts 2:42 says, “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” What we see in scripture is that the most regular, ordinary and mundane act of the church was also the most beautifully profound – a devotion to one another and to God’s Word and prayer, often centered around a meal with sacramental overtones. As the royal priesthood broke bread together, they were reminded of the body and blood of their Lord and Savior, their deep-rooted

¹³ Online: Check out examples of a sample sermon, Vision Frame video, three ways to open the preaching ministry, a customizable PowerPoint presentation to teach your congregation about the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, and more.

assurance, and the joy that they have found in Christ. In the same way, they were reminded that they were not only united with Christ, but also with one another. Living with this sacramental vision made the royal priesthood attentive to the God-sightings in daily life and this, in turn, inspired them to tell others of the Good News of the Gospel. Whether your congregation has a midweek ministry or small groups that meet in homes, pastors and ministry leaders ought to teach congregation to live out the “one-another’s” of scripture where real ministry can take place.

Connected to the theme of “one-another’s” is the vital ministry of church discipline. Depending on how you count, there are sixty-six commands in the NT for how believers ought to treat one another. All of these examples find their expression under the umbrella of church discipline. Church discipline has very little to do with church officers. Their work is essential to the proper functioning of the body of Christ, but their portion is only a tiny fraction of what God intends when He speaks of discipline. The practice of church discipline – consisting of mutual accountability and confrontation, confession, forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration – is meant to reveal the beauty of God’s grace in and through the royal priesthood. As we choose to confront and forgive one another, we function as a window into a divine reality when Christ both confronted and forgave us. As detailed in Chapter 6, Christians need to be genuinely known and lovingly supported and only within this context may they also be honestly challenged in the faith. The first two steps are vital investments in order for members to be able to make the necessary withdrawals when Christ-like admonition may be necessary.

Likewise, a death in family, financial crisis, loss of job, marriage issues, miscarriage, or any other transition someone may be going through rarely comes with

forewarnings. In order for us to be attentive to the needs of the body of Christ, we need a space where real ministry can take place. The challenge with corporate worship gatherings is that they are relatively one-sided. Living out the one-another's does not happen in pews facing forward. It happens in circles. Therefore, pastors and ministry leader's intent on cultivating an environment where the royal priesthood lives out the one another's of scripture should develop a small group strategy.¹⁴

B) Care Teams

At the congregation where I serve, we developed a Congregational Care Team (CCT) ministry. This was a team of gifted caregivers who functioned as the first line of defense for caring ministry within our congregation. While the vast majority of congregations utilize a model where visitation and caring visits are the exclusive domain of office-bearers (Elders, Deacons, and Pastors), we felt that placed an unnecessary and unfortunate message that real caring ministry is only conducted by the "Holy People." Early on, we discovered that hypothesis was true when a distinct minority of persons were vehemently opposed to the idea of lay caring ministry, citing that the visit only counted if it was from an elder or pastor. Therefore, our Council made two decisions. First, anyone who wants an elder visit will get one. Second, we will move forward with our CCT ministry. Three years in there are exactly zero people who are still opposed to our care team ministry. In fact, most of them prefer only meeting with their care team ministers. In order to make this mission a reality, we knew there were two other commitments we had to make. First, the congregational care team needed to be

¹⁴ Online: Explore an example of a sermon-based small group ministry.

comprised of men and women who would commit to intense, and ongoing, training for the ministry we were asking them to do. We learned and practiced how to pray, be present, and how to not think of ourselves as rescuers. Second, the members we would ask to take part in this ministry must be people who have the corresponding gifts and talents necessary for this ministry. Third, we as a church would commission/ordain them in front of the entire congregation as one of the main channels of pastoral care. They were not a substitute team because the real team (elders and pastors) could or would not be there. Rather, in light of the suffering service of Christ (Phil 2:5-7), we recognize that it is especially appropriate for spiritual siblings to respond to God's love with humble service (*diakonos*) toward one another (*allelon*). As the royal priesthood serves one another, they are serving Christ Himself (Mt 25:40, 10:40-42). Through the care team model and the intentional equipping of the royal priesthood for pastoral care, we were able to break free of the old paradigm with its implicit message that only pastors, elders, and deacons are called to tend to the needy and live out the one-another's of scripture.¹⁵

3. The Sacraments – Baptism and the Lord's Supper

As you celebrate the sacrament of baptism, those moments can serve as inauguration ceremonies for those being baptized, as well as a reminder for the community of believers witnessing the precise nature of their baptismal identity as a royal priesthood, unleashed by the Holy Spirit and equipped to use their gifts in the world. Pastors can start by making the meaning of their baptism clear! Let them vividly see their ordination into the royal priesthood clearly through their baptism! Likewise, pastors and ministry leaders

¹⁵ Online: Explore an example of a care team ministry.

can allow God's people to make the connection that the Lord's Supper is a meal for the royal priesthood, nourishing them with faith, hope, love and courage, it is a means of assurance that the Holy Spirit is present as they are called to serve others, and it is a reminder that in the same way God has reconciled us to Himself, we too are engaged in the priestly ministry of offering the ministry of peace and reconciliation to others.

Consider a few practical examples:

A) The Sacrament of Baptism

Baptism is truly a cause for celebration. If it is true that it is our baptism calls us to the work of ministry, perhaps we can make that more clear as they are conducted. Baptisms in the early church made this abundantly clear, not only with words, but also with oil. Before a person went into the water, they would anoint the person with oil. Likewise, after the person came out of the water, they would once again be anointed with oil. In the Levitical Priesthood, priests would be anointed with oil. Oil always symbolizes the Holy Spirit in scriptures. The Holy Spirit would be poured out, upon, in, and through the priesthood for their task. Every prophet, priest, and king would be anointed with oil at their ceremony of inauguration. Similarly, in baptism, we too are promised the gift of the Holy Spirit. We are anointed as prophet, priest, and king. We, like Christ, participate in those ministries. By the grace of God, we are equipped and empowered to function as priests for the sake of God's Kingdom. Therefore, just as the people of Israel were redeemed for a unique purpose, the grace of God manifested to us in baptism calls every one of us into ministry.

As we celebrate the sacrament of baptism as a body of believers, those moments can serve as inauguration ceremonies for those being baptized, as well as a reminder for

those witnessing the baptism. Baptism makes the call and ordination of God's people to use their gifts in the world vivid and clear.

B) The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

Pastors and church leaders can allow God's people to make the connection that the Lord's Supper is a meal for the royal priesthood, nourishing them with faith, hope, love and courage, a means of assurance that the Holy Spirit is present as they are called to serve others, and a reminder that in the same way God has reconciled us to Himself, we too are engaged in the priestly ministry of offering the ministry of peace and reconciliation to others. Acts 2:42 says, "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." What we see in scripture is that the most regular, ordinary and mundane act of the church was also the most beautifully profound – a devotion to God's Word and Prayer, centered around a meal with sacramental overtones. In the ancient Near East, eating together was an act of fellowship and friendship. Covenants were ratified with a meal (Acts 1:4). As the royal priesthood broke bread together, they were reminded of the body of blood of their Lord and Savior, their deep-rooted assurance, and the joy that they have found in Christ. In the same way, they were reminded that they were not only united with Christ, but also with one another. Living with this sacramental vision made the priesthood attentive to the God-sightings in daily life and this, in turn, inspired them to tell others of the Good News of the Gospel. Whether a congregation has a midweek ministry with a meal or small groups that meet in homes, pastors and ministry leaders ought to consider teaching their leaders how to lead a short liturgy that grounds them in the sign and seal of God's

promises through the Lord's Supper.¹⁶ Author Robert Banks writes, "The most visible and profound way in which the community gives physical expression to its fellowship is the common meal."¹⁷

Accordingly, there is no greater way to give visible expression to how we function as a body of believers than through the breaking of the same loaf and drinking from the cup together. When we do so, we are remembering the covenant that God has established us in Christ and the new identity that we have in Him (Lk 22:29-30). We are uniting and joining hands in the praise of God the Father and the gratitude for one another. While in the Reformed tradition of the CRCNA we only observe the sacrament of the Lord's Supper as a token meal in corporate worship where Elders are present, there are still a variety of ways in which the body of Christ can eat and drink together with sacramental overtones, that also remind us of the promises of God and our mutual commitment to one another. Pastors and ministry leaders ought to consider the ways in which they can educate, equip, and inspire their congregation to proclaim the hope of the gospel, and offer mercy and forgiveness to one another, through the Lord's Supper.¹⁸

4. Art and Architecture in Corporate Worship

Another way to help people remember their baptismal calling as royal priests is with the simple use of design and architecture within the building where the church

¹⁶ The Church Order of the CRCNA is clear that the "sacrament" may not be performed without the performance of a licensed Minister of the Word and observance by Elders. That does not mean churches cannot consider the ways to provide liturgies with sacramental overtones. This is a continued practice to this day in the Netherlands. Time is not an issue. Fellowship is. North American efficiency leaves us in the pew.

¹⁷ Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community* (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), 83.

¹⁸ Online: Explore a few example liturgical forms that help the royal priesthood see their baptismal identity through the sacraments.

(*ekklesia*) meets for corporate worship. A very practical way to remind the *ekklesia* of their baptismal identity is to place the baptismal font in a prominent place in the worship center. Perhaps at the central door where people enter to worship. Or in a social gathering place. In the Dominican Monastery in Rio de Janeiro there is a baptismal font hewn out of stone, placed by the main entry door with running water. The point is to place the baptismal font somewhere where there is lots of traffic so that the body of believers may see it as they enter the community of grace every week. As they enter for corporate worship, let them see it as a reminder of their identity. As they exit to go out into the world, let them see it as a reminder of their calling to go into the world to be royal priests.

Another form of reminding the *ekklesia* of their identity as a royal priesthood is to use images, artwork, architectural designs, and dedicated spaces within the corporate worship and social spaces. Many congregations have walls where missionaries or church members are showcased through photos so that members and guests can learn about the ministry of which they are a part. Some walls even have prayer boxes on the wall as a means of encouraging them in their journey. While these are great ideas, a Vocational Mission Wall highlighting the various vocations members are part of and how their vocation is tied to God's mission could affirm and inspire the congregation by recognizing vocational achievements.

Whether on a Vocational Mission Wall, through a newsletter, email, article, or verbal announcement, pastors and church leaders can consider the ways within the congregation that they can recognize members of their congregation who are connecting their baptismal identity as the royal priesthood within their vocations. Consider how men and women, as well as boys and girls, are connecting to God's redemptive work (God's

saving and reconciling action), creative work (connecting art and beauty with God's work in the world), providential work (God's daily provision and common grace for sustaining life), justice work (establishing and maintaining justice in society), compassionate work (providing comfort, healing, and rest), stewardly work (using time, talent, and treasure in ways that honor God as the owner of all things), and revelatory work (enlightening the truth and principles of God in the world). These very simple acts stand in the face of the Holy Person myth and the sacred/secular divide. In recognizing vocational achievements, church leaders may give testament to their longing to champion the doctrine of the PoAB.¹⁹

5. Showcase Models of Vocational Stewardship

In addition to serving as advocates of the kingdom, pastors must showcase models of vocational stewardship. Christian men and women can be the living, breathing models of vocational stewardship to others. By telling their stories, all three educational models finally align. Their stories can help their peers in the congregation gain a vision for what is possible. In fact, I would contend theirs are the only voices that can do all three simultaneously. Serving as a model is important also because publically celebrated actions are often duplicated. They can educate others by modeling an integration of their faith into their vocational lives. They can equip others by giving living, breathing examples of how this is played out in the real world. In so doing, they can inspire others to take on the mantle of faith and to have the courage to follow suit, all by simply showcasing what the Lord has done in their life. Consider an example:

¹⁹ Online: To see examples of baptismal fonts strategically located in a prominent place in the worship center, artwork that communicates our identity as a royal priesthood and examples of vocational mission walls, see the examples of art & architecture in worship on "The Equipping Church" website.

A) “God’s Story, Our Story” Faith & Life Testimonies

At the church where I am privileged to serve, we weave little testimonies into our conversations with people. We tell them about our hopes and our loves. Most people are not going to know about God’s love for them or what God wants for their lives, except when we gently and persistently tell them, over the coffee cup at work, over the back fence at home, and through the seemingly random and mundane every-day interactions of life. One of the specific ways we make room for this practice in a corporate worship setting is through the “God’s Story, Our Story” faith-and-life testimonies of our members. At least once a month we record a member giving their testimony of what God has done in their lives. Now that we have been doing this for the last few years, it is just as I had hoped – more and more men and women are growing in the courage of their convictions, stepping forward to share their faith and life testimonies both within and, even more importantly, outside of the four walls of our corporate worship setting. “We are not our own but belong to God, body and soul”²⁰ and, as such, we are commissioned to let our light shine before others so that they may see our good deeds and glorify God (Mt 5:16). Only recently, we have taken this idea one step further and have been sharing “God’s Story, Our Story” vocational testimonies, giving members an opportunity to witness the ways in which God is at work within the homes and workplaces, once again reminding our congregation that all of God’s workers are holy workers.²¹

6. Weddings and Funerals

²⁰ Heidelberg Catechism, Question & Answer 1.

²¹ See Example #7 for more details. To see examples of “God’s Story, Our Story” vocational stewardship video testimonials, go to our website.

If you are a pastor or ministry leader, chances are you have the privilege of conducting marriage ceremonies and funerals from time to time. Perhaps you have never considered these ceremonies to be an opportunity to celebrate and affirm the royal priesthood. Well, it is!

A) Weddings

Marriage is another opportunity to celebrate and affirm the PoAB. A biblical model for marriage is informed by the radical thought that a couple can live out their calling as priests better together than they could apart. Their marriage is a choice to live out their baptism ordination together. The apostle Paul sees the union of husband and wife as a symbol of the union between Christ and his church (Eph. 5:31-32). That is one of the great beauties of marriage – it is a window into that divine reality meant to point to Christ’s covenant relationship with His church. Marriage was established by God in order to advance His Kingdom. Ultimately, what Christian couples are truly saying is that their marriage will serve as a beacon, a signpost, pointing to God’s redemption. Their marriage will be the fragrance of Jesus. As they serve one another by denying their own wants and needs for the other, they point to Christ who denied himself by serving us on the cross. When they forgive each other, they point to Christ’s forgiveness. And when they make your vows, they are pointing to Christ’s vow to stand in the gap for us until the end of eternity. Whenever I am asked to officiate a marriage ceremony, I give them this paradigm. I express to them that this is what I will make clear in their pre-marital counseling as well as at their marriage ceremony. Marriage is the choice to live out their baptism ordination together!

B) Funerals

Likewise, as families mourn the loss of loved ones, a funeral may be an appropriate time to reflect on all that God has done through the life and ministry of the loved one who has “fought the good fight” and is now with the Lord hearing, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

7. Commissioning Services for God’s People in Their Various Vocations

In my tradition, the only commissioning service typically recognized is the ministerial ordination of a pastor, or the commissioning of a missionary. This conveys the singular message to our congregation that the only ordained priest (and, thus, the only ordained priestly ministry) is that of the pastor. Pastors would do well to commission members of our church, in their various vocations, to function as priests. This could take on several different forms. For example, a pastor might ask a nurse in the congregation to give a testimony during the corporate worship service, describing how she is trying to be a royal priestly nurse, describing the joys and challenges of serving God in her vocation. After her testimony, we have all office-bearers (elders, deacons, and pastors) come forward, along with every medical professional – doctors, nurses, ambulatory services, and staff – to come forward. We would commission them with the laying on of hands and prayer. Consider commissioning all educators, administrators and students in the fall. Commission healthcare workers during flu season, servicemen and women before deployment, police officers before busy and challenging seasons like Christmas and long weekends, and politicians during elections or near the end of legislative terms.

There is one caution. It is essential to be expansive in the vocations you choose to publicly acknowledge and lift up. Consider making room for people who may feel forgotten in vocational commissioning ceremonies: retirees, the underemployed or unemployed, youth and young adults who are not attending school – men and women who are not in the vocational workforce, but continue to contribute to the congregation, family, and community in a variety of ways. Vocational stewardship is a biblical principle. However, in the same way that the sacred/secular divide is a pitfall to avoid, so is the implicit message to idolatry our work. It is important to be cognizant of both pitfalls.

That said, every year our church does a number of commissionings with different vocations. We have found the experience profoundly meaningful, as men and women have shared how the commissioning cause them to think more deeply about their ministry as priest in their vocational callings. Not only that, the commissioning service caused them to grow in courage as they felt called by God and sent by His church to carry out their mission. This, of course, is an essential component of the church's call through the Great Commission – believers, in their various vocations, called by God to promulgate His Kingdom in the world that He loves (Mt 28:16, Eph 4:1-16, 1 Pet 2:1-9). CEOs, farmers, doctors, retired/unpaid servants, nurses, pastors, teachers, and stay-at-home parents (and spiritual parents) all called to do the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith. If pastors and church leaders fail to see all vocations as a vital part of God's commission, they will fail to adequately appreciate, support, and lead members of their congregation to use their gifts as members of the royal priesthood, participating in God's Kingdom.

8. Public Prayers for the Royal Priesthood / Vocation-Based Prayers

Pastors and ministry leaders can affirm the commissioning's of God's people by praying for the royal priesthood regularly during public worship. Such prayers both encourage and challenge members as they offer their lives as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. Men and women are in need of constant reminders for how their faith and life intersect. Consider employing the following practices:

A) Congregational Prayers

During the weekly Sunday service, consider praying specifically for a handful of members, by name and vocation, asking God to empower them as they seek to live out their commissioned contribution to God's Kingdom.

B) Vocation-Based Prayers

Beyond a commissioning service for the community, pastors can affirm the commissioning's of God's people by praying for the royal PoAB regularly during public worship. Such prayers both encourage and challenge members as they offer their lives as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. After all, men and women are in need of constant reminders for how their faith and life intersect. Therefore, it is imperative that pastors make this clear as congregations gather together in corporate worship. Since it is essential, pastors could consider employing both congregational prayers and vocation-based prayers. During the weekly Sunday service, pastors should consider praying specifically for a handful of members, by name and vocation, asking God to empower them as they seek to live out their commissioned contribution to God's Kingdom. If you are part of a larger congregation, consider composing prayers that focus on specific vocational groups. Some congregations have been known to bring a symbolic object from

that career on the stage (such as a tool for the trade of carpenters and plumbers, a hair dryer for beauticians, or a textbook for educators and students).

9. Equip Staff and Key Leaders to Equip Others

If you want to have a compounding effect upon equipping your congregation to connect vocational stewardship to their baptismal identity, choose to start by equipping yourself, your council, staff, and key volunteer leaders within your congregation. Amy Sherman goes as far to say that “...any church serious about vocational stewardship needs to designate a specific individual or team, paid or unpaid, that devotes time and energy to the work of equipping [the priesthood].” So choose to equip and empower your key leaders to lead the charge in equipping the congregation for vocational stewardship through training & adult education, coaching and customized vocational development, gifts assessments and inventories, and more.

Church leaders can develop a systematic approach to helping the royal priesthood discover and develop their gifts and talents and to achieve clarity on how they connect with God’s priorities and the needs of the world. In doing so, they can help people connect their gifts, passions, and vocational settings to God’s redemptive work in the world. If you want to have a compounding effect upon equipping your congregation to connect vocational stewardship to their baptismal identity, choose to start by equipping yourself, your Council, staff, and key volunteer leaders within your congregation. Once pastors and key leaders are trained for equipping others, you are now ready to equip others to connect their faith with their work in a way that meets the personal and vocational needs of each member of your congregation.

The church I serve uses spiritual gifts inventories to help our members discern their areas of giftedness and to use them. Part of the basic identity of a Christian is to discern one's gifts and use them. So helping people to discern their spiritual gifts and skills should be a basic ministry of any congregation. Note that these assessments are important but are often insufficient in that they are only the first step in equipping for vocational stewardship. Also, some are not helpful in that their recommendations focus exclusively on service within the church building. As a result, those assessments do not help congregants see how their baptismal identity and the unique gifts God has given them apply to their daily work or any other activity outside the four walls of the church building. When people are interested in joining a church community, leaders should promise that they will help people discern their gifts and discern how they can use those gifts in their homes and offices and in the congregation – and then follow through on said promises.

10. Develop a Customized Plan

Above are just nine practical ideas to use in seeking to equip the royal priesthood. But truth be told the single most effective process you can engage in with your team is to consider developing your own action plan. There are no “silver bullet” strategies. Imagine following this assignment: Gather together a team of key ministry leaders and teach them about the biblical principles surrounding the PoAB. Afterwards, make time to create an action plan that would result in meeting the challenge of equipping and developing the royal priesthood within your unique local context. It is inspiring. It is challenging. And it is a lot of fun!

Ten Ways to Equip the Royal Priesthood – Personal Rhythms

The following section is devoted to providing pastors and church leaders practical examples to encourage your congregation to use personally throughout the week on how to help congregants cultivate habits that remind them of their baptismal identity as members of the royal priesthood.

1. Simple Daily Practices – Remembering Your Baptism

Reformer Martin Luther crossed himself every day to remind himself of his baptism. He did so because he said it was both his greatest comfort as well as his greatest challenge to know his baptismal identity in Christ.²² It was a comfort because it was full of grace, a reminder of belonging to Jesus Christ who forgives our sins and gives life. It was also a challenge because it reminded him of his vocational commission. It reminded him to ask himself each day whether he was serving God as a priest in the world and living up to his baptism. The action of crossing yourself is far less important than the reminder that it gives. But for Luther it was precisely the action that caused him to contemplate and meditate on both God's grace as well as His purpose for his life. Though I do not cross myself every morning, I use other practices that help remind me of my baptismal identity.

For a few years I would start my morning the same way. I would pick up my phone and check through all of my phone applications. I would review how my stocks are doing in the market, check my email and Facebook, scour my news feed, review the highlights and scores of my favorite sports teams, and see if I had any new text messages.

²² Martin Luther, *The Small Catechism (An Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism)*. (Mankato, MN: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 2001), 26.

Though I did not know it at the time, I was engaging in liturgical rhythms that were affecting my life and informing my identity. Once I recognized this, I put an end to that practice. In its place, we submitted a new simple, daily practice – morning prayer. We pray for our day and always end with the same line: “Lord, please help us to enact our calling as priests today. Amen!” This very simple act served as a compass, a spiritual recalibration, every morning. I was reminded that before I did anything at all, God was already at work and that He invited me, a royal priest, to take part in His ongoing redemptive plan.

My wife and I also looked for other ways to help remind us of our baptismal identity. For example, in my office I have a poster that reads, “My commission is to equip Christ’s people for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ, until we all reach unity of the faith.” I read it every morning before I get to work. This practical reminder informs how I function as a pastor, what I do and what I do not do.

Moreover, in my home, my wife and I have a poster atop our door frame that reads: “My calling as a Christian – Acts 20:24 – ‘I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.’” Furthermore, in our kitchen, my wife has a number of bible verses posted on our cupboards and shelves connected to our missional identity. Through these small practices, we are forming a familial culture. The signs, the posters, the practices – in my office and in our home – speak of our baptismal identity and commission from Christ.

2. Baptism Birthdays

At the church I serve, we affirm that the whole process of a child's spiritual formation flows from the reality of their baptismal identity. To baptize our children means that we take responsibility to ensure that the name Christian has more significance and weight than our surnames that are on our kids' birth certificates. Baptismal identity means all instruction and formation flows from an assurance of the prior gracious reality of God's promises, which have claimed them. A baptismal identity is a covenantal identity, which means that they belong to Christ and his church and are called to be royal priests. This baptismal identity frames their life even before they can understand and comprehend it.

Since my wife and I do not want our children to forget their identity, we are always looking for ways to creatively remember and celebrate our calling in Christ. One such example I came across from my mentor and seminary professor Dr. David Rylaarsdam, is celebrating Baptism Birthdays.²³ This practice makes sense because baptism is all about our new birth. Our baptism affirms our new life in Christ. Consider the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."

Therefore, because baptism marks our new birth in Christ, each year everyone in my family now has two birthdays. This practice is an easy sell to our kids since they now get twice as much cake and twice as many special days. On our baptism birthdays, before we eat our cake, we have a very short liturgy that reminds everyone present (not just the

²³ Personal conversation, January 2019.

birthday boy/girl) of our baptism²⁴, the promises made in our baptism, and the new identity we have in and through our baptism as a royal priesthood. In short, I remind all of my children (with special focus on the child whose baptism birthday it is) of the promises they received in their baptism and their calling to serve God and others.²⁵

3. Ministry Matching – Connecting Beyond the Four Walls

At the church that I am privileged to pastor, we always have a series of Serve Projects on our website that are available for any of our small groups to take part in. But on top of that, we are always looking for opportunities for our members to be connected to ministries and agencies outside of the four walls of our church that correspond with our member's unique passions, gifts, and talents. In that way, we hope to function as a bridge between our church (the royal priesthood) and our community (and the ministries and agencies within it). For example, we have connected business leaders in our congregation to an organization called Partners Worldwide where Christian businesspersons and entrepreneurs in third world countries with limited access to capital and, equally important, professional counsel on how to build a business, have found coaches and advocates. This is extremely powerful on a number of fronts. We are connecting our people to ministries that correspond to their unique gifts and passions. Christian entrepreneurs are given the necessary resources to build sustainable businesses. These businesses have an impact on the community thin which they are placed by building capital, giving others means of employments, and inspiring others to take similar

²⁴ As a covenantal church that baptizes believers children, none of our children remember their baptism. They were all under 2 months old.

²⁵ Online: You will find an example guide for how to celebrate baptism birthdays.

action. Perhaps the most amazing of all, the only level of engagement by the local congregation was simply functioning as the bridge between member and agency.

There are also non-profit agencies that do this as well. Love Inc. is perhaps the largest and most connected ministry that connects people's gifts to needs within communities. Pastors and ministry leaders should look for ways that their congregation can function in effective equipping ministry matching.

4. Meals with Sacramental Overtones

There are many ways people could develop short liturgies to keep grounded in a baptismal identity and the promises received through the sign and seal of Communion. Families in a congregation could participate in a daily remembering of the Lord's Supper. While the sacrament is still celebrated as a corporate body as often as you do it, families can, daily, remember the covenant they have with God in Christ. In that way they are participating in the shared memory of what Jesus has done for them and may, daily, proclaim their identity as His adopted children, holy and dearly loved, commissioned into loving service of the Lord.²⁶ While baptism is the biblical model for our initiation into the Christian covenant, the Lord's Supper serves as a daily reaffirmation of our commitment to Christ and, even more, of His commitment to His people.²⁷ Imagine if every day every child was reminded of these promises from God's Word. That is why Paul instructs us by saying, "Do this, whenever you eat it, in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:25). Luke also shares the NT model in Acts 2:46 which says, "they worshiped together at the Temple

²⁶ Barna Research suggests that few families still eat together regularly and even fewer take time for family devotions. See Barna Group, "6 Tech Habits Changing the American Home," accessed February 26, 2019, <https://www.barna.com/research/6-tech-habits-changing-american-home/>.

²⁷ The two are intricately linked. In Exodus 24, for example, the covenant ratification ceremony comprises of people sprinkled with blood (baptism) and then Moses and the elders went up the mountain for a meal with God (L.S.) to conclude the ceremony.

each day, met in homes for the breaking of bread, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity – all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved.”

5. Lectio Divina (Divine Reading)

The most significant contribution of Martin Luther’s Reformation and contribution to the doctrine of the PoAB was his insistence that Scripture is the place where the Lord speaks to all believers.²⁸ It is Luther who reminds us that everything the heart and soul does (“hearing, speaking, composing, meditating, etc.”) is an act of prayer and service to God, rooted in our baptismal identity.²⁹ Through baptism, God’s people are ordained to share in Christ’s status as readers of God’s Word. No wonder he was insistent upon putting the bible back in the hands of every Christian.

Especially in an age when the reading of God’s Word is on a downward trend in churches across North America, consider ways in which you can equip and inspire your congregation to engage in the daily practice of reading scripture and Lectio Divina. At our church we want the Word of God to be central not only in the corporate worship services, but also within our members’ homes. For that reason, we provide annual reading plans with social media and email reminders for our members to stay on track, all of our small groups are sermon-based (but Bible-centered), and we have provided a vision-frame that starts with a commitment to God’s Word and prayer. When I accepted a call to the church that I serve, I even challenged my congregation to starting bringing their own bibles to corporate worship by committing to shave my head if at least two thirds of them

²⁸ Jaroslav Pelikan, “The Bible and the Word of God” in *Luther the Expositor*, 48-70 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 50.

²⁹ Luther, *LW* 52:139.

participated. To their and my delight, they were successful and the hair came off. Studies from Barna³⁰ and Lifeway Research³¹ show incredibly low Bible literacy and usage among Christians and the downward trend has been relentless over the last three decades. Pastors and church leaders ought to think of creative ways to encourage the royal priesthood to actively engage in daily divine reading of God's Word.

6. PI² – Pray, Invest, Invite

The most essential function of the royal priesthood is that they bring God to people. We bring God to people by how we live. We live godly lives. We are God's holy presence in the world. But the world is aching to see and experience holiness (Rom 8:19-24). People need to see human life shaped by love and peace and wisdom and joy. People need to see Christ living in us. In grateful response to all that God has done, we are called to a life of proclaiming all that God has done. God desires for us to "go and make disciples" (Mt 28:19). As a community of faith, we believe evangelism should be natural, not contrived. Our hope and prayer is for every member of our church to engage in a process we call PI²: Pray, Invest, and Invite." Each member of our church is encouraged first to pray daily for four people in their life who do not know Jesus, to pray for open doors, boldness when a door opens, and clarity to speak. Second, they are encouraged to invest in their PI² list. That is, they are encouraged to build authentic relationships with these four people. Third, they are stimulated to invite them to the next appropriate level of commitment (to church, bible study, go out for coffee, to trust Jesus). As Paul tells Timothy, we want our members to "be ready in season and out of season" (2 Tim 4:2).

³⁰ <https://www.barna.com/research/state-of-the-bible-2018-seven-top-findings/>

³¹ <https://lifewayresearch.com/2017/04/25/lifeway-research-americans-are-fond-of-the-bible-dont-actually-read-it/>

Every moment of every day, be ready to pray for, invest in, and invite those who do not yet know Jesus to experience the joy that you have found.

7. The Ministry of Daily Forgiveness & Reconciliation

In addition to daily remembrance through family meals, the sacred act of forgiveness and reconciliation is another reminder of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper that can be practiced throughout the week. Jesus said to His disciples, "do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:24). The Lord's Supper, like baptism, points the forgiveness of sins purchased by Christ on the cross. Likewise, the daily ministry of forgiveness is our living, breathing participation in the covenant promises lived out in the Lord's Supper. In the act of forgiveness, we are called to remember the way in which we needed Christ's forgiveness, the covenant he made with us, the communion we receive through reconciliation, along with the anticipation we have when Christ returns to make all things new. Consider the ways in which you can educate, equip, and inspire your congregation to consider how the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is actively lived out through the weekly ministry of forgiveness and reconciliation.³²

8. Daily Intercessory Prayer

Encourage your congregation to pray for their enemies – by name. Prayer for your enemies is one of the deepest forms of love, because it means that you actually have to really want for something good happen to them. It means sitting in the presence of God

³² Since this is meant to be a daily exercise, our congregation stopped reading the "Preparatory" form the week before. We did not like the message it sent where the ministry of forgiveness seemed only to be necessary immediately before observing the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Instead, we have challenged our congregation to "observe" the Lord's Supper daily.

and interceding with God on behalf of that person. Perhaps you would pray for their conversion, or for God to soften their heart. Perhaps you would pray that they would be stopped in their downward spiral of sin. A perfect example of this intercessory prayer is in Luke 23:34 when Jesus hung on the cross and prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” Another example found in Acts 7:59-60 when Stephen was being stoned to death, he prayed, “Father, receive my spirit,” (Ps. 31:5; Lk 23:46) fell on his knees and he cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” These are profound examples of loving your enemies and praying for those who persecute you. The amazing thing about this type of prayer is that it is absolutely impossible to hate someone you regularly lift up to God in prayer. Therefore, the royal priesthood ought to be encouraged: If there is someone you simply cannot forgive, start by praying for them. This is a vivid reminder that only those who have been overwhelmed by the grace of God will have the power to throw off all bitterness and resentment and unforgiveness and walk in the way of peace. Of course, it does not mean it will be easy. But now you will have the perspective to do to others what God has done infinitely more for you. One of the ways my family focuses on the cost of God’s mercy is by remembering that if you refuse to forgive a person who has hurt you terribly, then your standard is higher than God’s standard. Jesus, when He taught us how to pray, says “forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us” (Lk 11:4). If we can understand the monumental debt that God has paid through Christ for us, now we will have the perspective to forgive our neighbor who sins against us.

9. Daily Reminders – Focusing on the Cost of God’s Mercy

The apostle Paul writes, “God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” [2 Corinthians 5:21]. He who knew no sin became sin for us. He died the sinner’s death so that we could have life. This is the gospel standard – “Forgive others as in Christ God forgave you.” This is a vivid reminder that only those who have been overwhelmed by the grace of God will have the power to throw off all bitterness and resentment and unforgiveness and walk in the way of peace. Of course, it doesn’t mean it will be easy. But now we will have the perspective to do to others what God has done infinitely more for us. That is why Jesus taught us how to pray: “Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.” If we can understand the monumental debt that God has paid through Christ for us, now we will have the perspective to forgive our neighbor who sins against us.

10. Personal Witness & Proclamation

Witness is the primary activity of the Holy Spirit in the world (Lk 4:18). While the Holy Spirit bears witness to Christ, for the glory of the Father, the role of the royal priesthood is to participate in the activity of the Holy Spirit that is already at work. As is detailed in the NT, a central component of the royal priesthood is the ministry of witness and proclamation to one another, but especially to the world that does not yet know the name of Jesus. 1 Peter details this vocation in 2:9 when he says, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood...that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness and into his marvelous light.”³³ Based on this text, Martin Luther explained that the Christian “must be God’s messenger...to proclaim the wonderful deeds

³³ Also see Isaiah 43:21(LXX).

of God.”³⁴ He further explains how royal priesthood ought to be engaged in the ministry of witness and public proclamation during breakfast, lunch, and dinner, sitting at home, on the road, at the work place – all are opportunities to preach, teach, and proclaim the gospel.³⁵ We are called to live in such a way as to live out of that reality in our spheres of influence; to influence our culture and community for God's Kingdom – seeking to advance the common good; generating generosity, increasing philanthropy, mercy and justice; advocating for the poor, marginalized, and voiceless. This is the work of the gospel!

Once again, above are just ten practical ideas to use in seeking to equip the royal priesthood within their homes. But truth be told the single most effective process an adult, parents, and/or a family can engage in is to develop a customized family action plan. Imagine following this assignment: Sit down with your family to create an action plan that would result in meeting the challenge of reminding yourselves of your identity and the royal priesthood. It is inspiring. It is challenging. And it is a lot of fun!

Organizational Resources

While there are literally thousands of resources out there, I have chosen to provide just a handful of possible follow-up steps. In the short time I have been in ministry, these developments have done more to impact our church functioning as an equipping church than anything else:

³⁴ Luther, *LW* 30:64-66.

³⁵ Luther, *LW* 52:139.

1. Selection of Office Bearers

One way to model the royal PoAB is by selecting office bearers who already model royal priestly ministry in their own lives. Ephesians 4:11-12 indicates that the task of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers is to equip others for works of service – in other words, they must equip all the baptized members to serve God as royal priests in the world. Therefore, we have chosen to find and develop people who have already shown that they are model royal priests. These people are already discipling people in their home, they know how faith and work can be integrated, they bring people to God in prayer, and they bring God to people through their testimonies. Moreover, the potential office-bearers are not only genuine models of the royal priesthood; they also know how to mentor and equip other priests.

2. Ministry Plumb Lines

Wayne Cordeiro has said “methods are many, principles are few; methods always change, principles never do.”³⁶ Perhaps the most formative exercise we have conducted to date as a church in seeking to champion the doctrine of the royal PoAB is the development of ministry plumb lines. A plumb line is a simple but accurate tool used for determining whether something is vertical or upright. Rarely do congregations have to choose between a good thing and a bad thing. It is typically in choosing between two good things where obstacles occur. Mission and ministry plumb lines are used and developed in order to function much like a carpenter’s or mason’s plumb line. They ensure that decisions within the body of Christ line up with your collective mission, vision, values. Practically speaking, plumb lines identify misalignment by reflecting the

³⁶ Attributed to Cordeiro in Mallory, 170.

embraced truths and values as well as expected behaviors. These are a list of principles that clearly describe what you believe and what you will do as a result of that said belief. They communicate how a community operates as a result of their collective values.

One example of a plumb line that we use at the church I serve is believing that “Every Christian is a priest.” The corresponding behavior is,

Therefore, we will not delegate ministry simply to the professionals. We will often respond to ideas from our members like this: “That’s a great idea! Why don’t you run with it?” and champion ministries that utilize the distinct gifts and talents of member of our congregation.

These plumb lines impact our actions and decisions on day-to-day business and big picture approaches to ministry. In our context, once we committed to these maxims things began to change. One example of the change that began was with our small group ministries. When I arrive at my first church we had a program called Revive Family Community Night. Each Wednesday we would invite anyone and everyone onto our campus for a meal and then everyone would go to their respective classrooms. There was something for the whole family: programs for children and youth as well as small group studies for adults. I, along with the other pastor (Lambert) serving at our church, would lead the adult small groups. However, the moment we affirmed the plumb line that stipulates “Everyone is a Priest – Therefore we do not simply delegate ministry to the professionals” Lambert and I realized that is exactly what we were doing. The program we were running was doing very little to refute the Holy Man myth or the Holy Place myth. In fact, we were communicating the opposite message: people were coming to our campus to learn from the professionals and then go home. We did not even utilize a message to our members for how they should connect what they are learning to their baptismal identities throughout the week. Therefore, we scrapped Revive and started

from scratch, asking ourselves how we could better align ourselves to our mission to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

In its place, we developed a sermon-based Life Group program that was overseen by staff but entirely run by our members. Certain members host the groups in their homes (Life Group Hosts) while others facilitate group discussion (Life Group Leaders). The church staff is tasked with working to “...equip the saints for the work of ministry for the building up of the body of Christ until we all reach unity of the faith” (Eph 4:12). We provide training, resources, and meet one-on-one with our leaders who are on the front lines of ministry.

3. Developing Ligaments

There is an interesting application about connection that comes from Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus. He has just finished telling leaders how they ought to “Equip Christ’s people for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12) and then he provides a helpful word-picture on how that can be accomplished: “from the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (4:16).

Oftentimes we are so engaged in flurry of activity that we fail to consider how it all comes together. All the body parts are moving independently, but there are no ligaments holding them together. Ligaments are connections and they are developed by two corresponding means: vision (the why) and systems (the how). Perhaps you are part of a congregation that has a strong sense of mission (the what), but effectiveness falls flat and enthusiasm is waning. Perhaps it is because your body is missing its ligaments.

Depending on the size and complexity of the congregation you serve, systems become a critical link to connection vision with mission.

4. The Action Plan Assignment

The single most effective process you can engage in with your team is to teach the timeless biblical principles of the PoAB and, from there, to consider developing an action plan to develop an equipping church that seeks to champion the resurgence toward promulgating the PoAB in the lives of their congregation. Gather together a team of key Ministry Leaders to create an action plan that would result in a church meeting the challenge of equipping and developing the royal priesthood. Create a dream scenario where money is no object and ministry knows no bounds. Provide your team the opportunity to truly dream about what could be without the restrictions of finance or tradition. It is important to take note on the front end that this is not a committee meeting where you would seek to find a consensus from the group on topics we will discuss. This is also not an implementation team that will take all of our ideas and run with them. This is a dream team. The goal is to hear a variety of individual voices and opinions, throw them on a white board, and see what sticks. That means there are no bad or crazy ideas, and no topics that are off-limits. The drawback is that not everything you share will be implemented. However, the benefit is you can say whatever you want without hesitation (provided it is spoken in Christian love, of course).³⁷

³⁷ Online: You will find an example guide for “The Action Plan Assignment” as well as (as stated above) an example PPT presentation on teaching the PoAB.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION: THE CHURCH: MISSION, FUNCTION, AND CONVICTION

Understanding the doctrine of the PoAB and how it connects to our faith lived out on a daily basis is predicated on understanding the essence of the church. The church is a formed (justified) and forming (sanctifying) community focused on remembering and rehearsing the words and deeds of Jesus Christ. Specifically, a member of the royal priesthood and, thus, a member of Christ's church, is marked by: mission, which means being a community of worship that is deeply involved in the concerns of the Great Commission; function, in that it is sustained in the exercise of the PoAB; and conviction, meaning it is motivated by the hope of the gospel.

Mission – The Marks of a Church on Mission

As we explored in Chapter 1 more fully, the church's mission is undergirded by a root conviction: Christians follow Christ because he is Lord of all and worthy of worship. The royal priesthood gathers together as the church to acknowledge that we live by the prodigal grace and boundless kindness of a God who made it all, sustains it all, and redeemed it all. That reality informs the thoughts, actions, and words of every believer as they seek to live for him. Every believer shares in God's redemptive plan, inherited by faith through their baptism ordination. As such, Christians are sent to participate in God's kingdom mission.

Function – Sustained in the Exercise of the Priesthood of All Believers

As we learned in Chapter 6, pastors and office-bearers have been issued a unique calling in the life of Christ's church. If Christ is the good shepherd, pastors ought to be astute under-shepherds seeking to reflect their priestly calling to reflect Christ in words

and works, and to encourage, equip, and edify the flock to do the same. As stated by Henri Nouwen, this means leadership ultimately “...means being led...” by Christ.¹

One of the most significant challenges for churches in the twenty-first century North American context is connected to a type of over-functioning of its pastors. This phenomenon is revealed in a variety of ways. As stated in Frederickson and Lee’s *That Their Work will be a Joy*, “instead of being spiritual leaders, pastors become spiritual proxies: the pastor’s reputation becomes a substitute for the congregation’s own spiritual growth.”² This might be reflective of pastors who are working diligently and faithfully, but are missing a significant functional purpose of the office of pastor: the promulgation of the PoAB. As such, one of the most significant aspirations for pastors ought to be the counter-intuitive and yet biblical model of decentralizing the work and ministry of the church.

The royal priesthood must be reminded that the Holy Spirit is endowed in every person who bears the name of Jesus Christ and that everything we think, say, and do is a form of worship. Every single person who claims Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior is, in fact, a Priest, called by God to do the work of God. It is one thing to talk about this. It is another altogether to establish the ministry of a church this way so that every Christian truly knows that they are priests in the same ways pastors are.

The task of a pastor is not to explicitly meet all of the needs and felt needs of the church and community, but to incarnate the various functions of Christ’s church in such a way that it is activated to kingdom mission and service. As stated by Frederickson and

¹ Henri Nouwen , *In the Name of Jesus* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 75.

² Frederickson and Lee, *That Their Work Will Be a Joy*, 36.

Lee, "...being a called and chosen people is not an excuse to sit back and revel in one's good fortune. There is work to be done, priestly work. The church is called to a life of holiness and service."³ The office of pastor is to lead the church in fulfilling that calling, of which all members are a part. If a pastor chooses explicitly to do all of the ministry or feels compelled to do so, the pastor is not only going to experience burnout but, worse, is negating the biblical principle of the PoAB and thereby limiting the Spirit in the hearts and lives of the men and women who have been equipped by God to serve. It is not just a bad idea; it is bad stewardship. It is then the responsibility of the congregation to remind one another of the reality that they are, in fact, endowed with the Holy Spirit and, therefore, all called to participate in the transformational work of Christ's kingdom mission. The distinct challenge that we face is confronting what we say we believe and what we actually do, or, as Lee and Frederickson state: "...do we practice what we preach? Do our policies and behaviors reflect what we say we believe?"⁴

Conviction – Motivated by the Hope of the Gospel

There is a book in the Bible that for centuries has fascinated Christians, seekers, and skeptics alike – the book of Revelation. Readers are mesmerized by the mark of the beast, the 666, the 144,000, the beast and the woman, and so on. Even though its contents have resulted in many dissenting viewpoints in the church, one thing is abundantly clear: God wins! Since every Christian is identified as an "...heir of God and co heir with Christ," the church and all of her members partake in God's victory (Rom 8:17). Knowing that God wins changes everything. It means Christians need not fear or lose

³ Frederickson and Lee, *That Their Work Will be a Joy*, 36.

⁴ Frederickson and Lee, *That Their Work Will Be a Joy*, 39.

heart in the first, second, or third-quarter of the game we call life. Regardless of the circumstances we may face, we know that God is ultimately in control.

In Matthew 16:18 Jesus says, “The gates of hell will not prevail against my church as I build it.” Growing up reading that passage, I always thought it meant that whatever Satan and his minions threw my way, somehow I would survive it, as if survival was the ultimate goal for the Christian. Upon further reflection, the Christian can realize that Jesus is not saying whatever the enemy throws her way, she will somehow be able to sustain it. Rather, Jesus is saying whenever the church marches toward the enemy, he will not be able to withstand it. The gates of hell will not be able to stand upon the onslaught of Christ’s sent ones that is the church.

Christians affirm the reality that they serve a God who owns it all and has redeemed it all through the shed blood of his son on the cross. God’s plan, God’s will, and God’s power will prevail. Thus, members of the royal priesthood can move forward with confidence in knowing the final score. In any and all issues they may face, big or small, they know that ultimately God is in control. As Christ has called his church to pray saying, “Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10), they can remain confident that the kingdom of Jesus, along with his bride, the church, will go on unshaken. Thus, when we pray daily “thy Kingdom come,” we are anticipating the promise that the kingdoms of this world will become, finally, and decisively, and outwardly the kingdom of God.

As Jesus states in Matthew, “The gates of hell will not prevail against my church as I build it!” When we as the church have the courage to get out of the saltshaker, we can rest assured that God will, in fact, prevail. God made his children not because he

needed glory, but to make them capable of reflecting his glory. He made his church capable of entering into the joy that he already shares as Triune God. As God is three and yet one, the royal priesthood is intent on building redemptive relationships centered on the reading of God's Word, prayer, mutual encouragement and edification, and service to God's world. As the doctrine of the PoAB insists, believers are called to cultivate ordinary, day-to-day (but always deeply spiritual) liturgical practices that cultivate and form our identity in Christ and are rooted in our baptism ordination. This is how we, as a body of believers, can model liturgical practices that cause us to form our identity as the royal priesthood for the life of the world. That reality gives members of the royal priesthood confidence to move forward boldly into a world in desperate need of its gospel light. We are God's representatives, endowed with the Holy Spirit, commissioned to offer ourselves daily as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God. As we step forward as the royal priesthood, commissioned into loving service to God, his people, and the world he loves, we need not fear because we know that God's kingdom will never fail!

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