

## STUDY 17

# The Priesthood of Believers

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### INTRODUCTION

A cursory survey of church history and ecclesiology indicates that the teaching of the priesthood of every/all believers may well be a multifunctional, utilitarian doctrine. It has been used to assert the liberty and independence of the believer from church councils and creeds and gives one the right to interpret the scriptures for oneself and to determine what should or should not be believed. It has been used to argue that there is no need for a clergy or, to the contrary, that such should be permitted. It is a useful doctrine for arguing the rights and wrongs of ordination to ministry and who should be ordained if ordination is accepted. The doctrine is appealed to by those seeking to understand the true nature of apostolic succession. It is helpful in arguing against hierarchical church structures, sacerdotalism and sacramentalism, and it is commonly thought to imply that anyone can perform any function in the life of the church. It has even been used to argue for adult and not infant baptism.<sup>1</sup>

So what does the New Testament teach concerning the priesthood of each/all believers and how should the teaching impact on our ecclesiological and doxological praxis?

### CHRIST, THE NEW PRIEST, THE PERFECT SACRIFICE

The writer of Hebrews makes it clear that the Levitical priesthood was always deficient in that the sacrifices offered could never take away sins (Heb. 10:4). In order to 'make perfect those who approach' him (v. 1), God raised up 'another priest . . . according to the order of Melchizedek' (7:11). Jesus, this new priest, 'has appeared

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<sup>1</sup> The following references may help to see how some Christian groups apply the teaching in the life of their worshipping communities. See Reference List for details.

The Catholic interpretation can be found in the appropriate Decrees of Vatican II in Walter M. Abbott (1967).

Alan Sell (1991) is particularly helpful in comparing Reformed, Anglican/Episcopalian and Baptist views. See esp. chs 2 & 4.8.

Bill Leonard (1989) is an interesting document that is fairly typical of the position taken by a number of evangelical groups.

## The Priesthood of Believers

once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself' (9:26). He is both priest and sacrifice and his priestly ministry has far-reaching implications.

Hans Küng comments:

The writer of the letter makes it unmistakably clear to any who might hanker after the ritual of the past that Christ has fulfilled and done away with the priesthood of the Old Testament . . . The significance of these ideas for the New Testament is that all human priesthood has been fulfilled and finished by the unique, final, unrepeatable and hence unlimited sacrifice of the one continuing and eternal high priest (Küng 1968: pp. 365f.).

In the light of this it is surprising that the New Testament speaks of a priesthood of believers (1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). It would seem that this priesthood must be significantly different from that of the Old Testament institutional priesthood and so needs careful definition.

### OLD TESTAMENT INSTITUTIONAL PRIESTHOOD

The primary function of the Old Testament priest (MT  $\text{הַכֹּהֵן}$  LXX and NT  $\text{ιερεὺς}$ ) was to offer sacrifices to atone for sin and appease the wrath of God. A new or continuing priesthood need not, cannot, and must not attempt to perform such a function as any attempt to do so would denigrate the work of Christ and incur the condemnation of God.

A second function of the Old Testament priest was that of mediator. There is no specific term for 'mediator' in the Hebrew or Aramaic texts of the Old Testament but the idea of mediation between God and humanity, and humanity and God, is present and important. Job's complaint to his friends illustrates in part the nature of the mediatorial role:

. . . he is not a mortal, as I am, that I might answer him, that we should come to trial together. There is no umpire between us, who might lay his hand on us both (Job 9:32f.).

English translations differ—'there is no umpire' (RSV, NRSV, NASB); 'mediator' (NKJV); or 'someone to arbitrate' (NIV). The Greek LXX has  $\text{μεσίτης}$  (mediator) while the Hebrew MT uses the hiphil participle of the verb  $\text{הִכָּרַעַ$  . . . (decide, adjudge) to express the idea.

We see that the mediator is someone who stands in between, in this case acting as an arbitrator. In its simplest form a mediator may be an envoy or someone who negotiates a relationship. Küng (1968: p. 367) says that the Rabbis:

. . . by using the Hebrew expression '*sarsor*' (that is, a broker or middleman) [made] the middleman more than a mediator; he becomes an agent . . . someone who is personally involved, has authority and can take initiatives.

When defined in this way, 'it is only the glorified Jesus who becomes in the full sense a mediator'.

The doctrine of the priesthood of believers should not be understood as saying that a Christian can act as a mediator/agent between God and man, or man and God, for

## The Priesthood of Believers

there is but ‘one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human’ (1 Tim. 2:5). Christ acting as our high priest has reconciled both Jew and Gentile to God ‘through the cross’ so that the ‘new humanity’ has ‘access in one Spirit to the Father’ (Eph. 2:14–18). On the basis of Christ’s mediatorial work the writer of Hebrews issues the following invitation, ‘Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need’ (Heb. 4:14–16).

To act as a mediator by standing between God and man is to deny the sole and perfect mediatorial work of Christ. It is a not very subtle attempt to exercise power and control over others.

### THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS—NEW TESTAMENT FOUNDATIONS (1 PET. 2:5, 9; REV. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6)

Baptism . . . is the Sacrament of the general or corporate priesthood of the Church, for it is through Baptism that we are incorporated into the Body of Christ and are inserted into the ministry of His body. All who are baptised into Christ are baptised into the Royal Priesthood . . . (Torrance 1993: p. 74).

To understand this ‘priesthood of all believers’ the following texts need careful consideration:

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:4–5).

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Pet. 2:9–10).

Christ himself is both the living stone and the foundation stone of the building (vv. 4, 7). Believers derive life from Christ and as living stones are built into a spiritual house (οἶκος πνευματικός). While Paul speaks of the church as a temple (ναός, 1 Cor. 3:16f.; Eph. 2:21), Peter is referring to ‘the “house” as a Christian “house,” a community belonging uniquely to God and to Jesus Christ’ (Michaels 1988: p. 100). The ‘spiritual house’ is indwelt by the Spirit; it is surely a temple (p. 271).

The ‘living stones’ are not only a part of the building but they also serve as a ‘holy priesthood’. The Petrine idea of priesthood is built on Exodus 19 and Isaiah 61:

Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation . . . (Exod. 19:5–6).

. . . but you shall be called priests of the LORD, you shall be named ministers of our God (Isa. 61:6).

Peter implies that the Christian community is an eschatological fulfillment of these passages. This is indeed radical as he is writing not to a Jewish but to a Gentile

## The Priesthood of Believers

community that he describes in terms of those who were ‘not a people’, but who are now ‘God’s people’. They had ‘not received mercy’, but now ‘have received mercy’ (1 Pet. 2:10; cf. Hosea 2:23).

Michaels says that:

The heart of [1 Pet.] vv 4–10 is a midrash based primarily on Isa 28:16 [the promise of a foundation stone] and secondarily on several other biblical texts. Its effect is to assign to the Gentile community to which Peter is writing an essentially Jewish identity and responsibility (Michaels 1988: p. 95).

Those who believe in Christ—Jew or Gentile—are a ‘chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation’, and God’s own people (1 Pet. 2:9). What Israel the nation failed to do, the new household of God is called to do in its priestly role. There is both continuity and discontinuity with the Exodus promise. The new priestly kingdom and holy nation extends beyond Israel in the flesh to include the Gentiles and together they are referred to by Paul as the ‘Israel of God’ (Gal. 6:16). Christ and his people ‘are the true latter-day temple, who finally are able to fulfil the commission of extending God’s glory from the sanctuary’ (Beale 2004: p. 331).

While we still agree with Küng (1968: p. 365) who said, ‘that all human priesthood has been fulfilled and finished’, we may wish that his definition of priesthood were a little more specific as it is clear that the priesthood of believers being spoken of here is of the same nature as that bestowed on Israel by God in Exodus 19:6.

This priesthood is further defined as a ‘holy priesthood’ (ἱεράτευμα ἅγιον, 1 Pet. 2:5), meaning that it is set apart exclusively for the service of Yahweh.

It is also called a ‘royal priesthood’ (1 Pet. 2:9) or should that be translated ‘a king’s house, a priesthood’? The expression needs further consideration. In Peter, the Greek text exactly follows the Greek Septuagint reading of Exodus 19:6 (βασιλείον ἱεράτευμα) rather than the Hebrew text. The two words have been read as an adjective and a noun and translated as ‘royal priesthood’ or it could be ‘a king’s priesthood’ but this reverses the relationship of the two words used in the Hebrew text where we find the noun ‘kingdom’ (hk...l...m“mæ) instead of an adjective. The Hebrew

text has usually been translated as a ‘kingdom of priests’. If the LXX and Peter are intending *basileios* to be an adjective acting as a noun, then it could be read as ‘king’s house’ so that the new community in Jesus is being described as a chosen race—a ‘king’s house’ and a ‘priesthood’ (in place of ‘royal priesthood’)—a holy nation and God’s people (Michaels 1988: pp. 108f.; Kelly 1969: pp. 96ff.). It has been shown that the LXX reading has been commonly translated as containing two nouns, ‘kings and priests’ in a number of pre-Christian texts (Best 1978: pp. 107f.; Aune 1997: p. 47). This gives grounds for translating Peter in the same way.

The apostle John, also with Exodus 19:6 in mind, writes, ‘To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests [βασιλείαν, ἱερεῖς] serving his God and Father . . .’ (Rev. 1:5–6). In chapter 5 he continues, ‘you have made them to be a kingdom and priests [βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερεῖς] serving our God, and they will reign on earth’ (5:10).

Aune (1997: pp. 47f.) comments that in Revelation 5:10 John, ‘is thinking in terms of two privileges of the people of God rather than just one’, that is, they are a

## The Priesthood of Believers

kingdom and they are priests. John further extends the thought at 20:6 where he says, 'they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him a thousand years'. The priesthood is now 'of Christ' as well as 'of God' and the priests are no longer just 'a kingdom' but now they participate in the reign of Christ.

### THE NATURE OF THE NEW PRIESTLY MINISTRY

If both Peter and John draw on Exodus 19:6 and apply it to the church then we might expect the present priesthood of believers to be akin to that anticipated of Israel.

Without exception, all who are baptised into Christ are incorporated into what Peter calls a chosen race, a king's house and a priesthood. They are built into a spiritual house where they commence priestly ministry: they 'offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' (1 Pet. 2:5). Such sacrifices are primarily acts of worship. These acts of worship take many different forms. Some may be discerned from the following references.

Paul claims to be 'a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service [ἱερουργίῳ] of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit' (Rom. 15:16). He understands the fruit of his own preaching, 'the offering of the Gentiles', to be an act of worship. Paul does not refer anywhere else to Christian ministry in terms of priesthood. Note that Paul serves the 'gospel of God' in contrast to the law and hence his priesthood is of a different nature to that of the Old Testament institutional priest. Dunn (1988: p. 860), quoting Wenschkewitz, points out that there is 'no question of Paul acting as a priest in a special way distinct from the ministry of his several communities; he "does not stand as mediator between the community and God," and his priestly ministry neither diminishes nor renders unnecessary the priestly ministry of all believers'.

In proclaiming the gospel, not as some lone ranger but as an apostle of the church of God and of Jesus Christ, Paul is fulfilling the purpose of the elect who are chosen so that they 'may proclaim the mighty acts' of God who has saved us through Christ (1 Pet. 2:9). This then is at the one time the church's priestly ministry both to God and to the world:

For this the Church was founded: that by spreading the kingdom of Christ everywhere for the glory of God the Father, she might bring all men to share in Christ's saving redemption . . . (Abbott 1967: p. 491).

As members of the body of Christ, Paul encouraged believers to present their 'bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God'. He saw this as 'spiritual worship' or 'reasonable worship' (λογικὴν λατρείαν) in the sense of it being proper for the human creature (Rom. 12:1). Dunn (1988: p. 711) illustrates the idea by quoting the Greek philosopher Epictetus, 'If I were a nightingale, I should be singing as a nightingale; if a swan, as a swan. But as it is, I am a rational being (λογικός εἶμι), therefore I must be singing hymns of praise to God'.

Dunn (1988: p. 710) points out the contrast being made by Paul, 'the thought of sacrifice has been transposed across a double line—from cultic ritual to everyday life, from a previous epoch characterized by daily offering of animals to one characterized

## The Priesthood of Believers

by a whole-person commitment lived out in daily existence’.

Daily life lived as service/worship (*λατρεία*) to God then contributes to the priestly ministry of the holy nation. Seemingly common acts become sweet oblations to God. For example, Paul refers to gifts given to him by the Philippians as ‘a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God’ (Phil. 4:18). The writer of Hebrews tells us, ‘Through him [Christ], then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God’ (Heb. 13:15–16). The idea of non-material sacrifices are not new and in the Old Testament: ‘prayer, thanksgiving, or a repentant heart (e.g., Pss 50:13–14, 23; 51:17; 141:2) . . . [are also referred to] metaphorically as sacrifices’ (Michaels 1988: p. 101). The concept is also found in Qumran where ‘worship in the spiritual temple consisted not of physical offerings, but of proclaiming God’s word and obedience out of a sincere heart (1QS 9.3–5; 4QFlor 1.6)’ (Beale 2004: p. 318).

We must note that spiritual sacrifices are ‘acceptable to God through Jesus Christ’ (1 Pet. 2:5). Calvin tells us:

We do not appear with our gifts in the presence of God without an intercessor. Christ is our Mediator, by whose intervention we offer ourselves and our all to the Father; he is our High Priest, who, having entered into the upper sanctuary, opens up an access for us; he is the altar on which we lay our gifts, that whatever we do attempt, we may attempt in him . . . (Calvin 4:18.17, p. 764).

Calvin has in mind Hebrews 13:10, ‘We have an altar from which those who officiate in the tent have no right to eat’. The Christian altar is Christ himself and/or his cross and there is a possible allusion to the Lord’s Supper. (It is now agreed that the text cannot be used as a basis for the idea of the Eucharist being a sacrifice.) For a full discussion see Ellingworth (1993: pp. 708ff.).

The individual, baptised into Christ and hence into the priesthood of all believers, worships and serves God in daily life, sharing in the proclamation of the gospel.

The believer’s priestly duty also involves ministry to the worshipping community. Paul reminds us that, ‘in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function’ (Rom. 12:4). Küng reminds us that:

. . . all the members of the body of Christ are important and play their part. They all have their own dignity and their own functions, on the basis again of a fundamental equality. Not even the head can say to the feet that it has no need of them. All have a service to each other, in mutual sympathy and affection, in joy and help (Küng 1968: pp. 370f.).

This ministry is to be conducted in accordance with the gifts imparted to the individual by the Holy Spirit ‘who apportions to each one individually as he wills’ (1 Cor. 12:11, RSV). The gifts are multiple, diverse in nature (1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12; Eph. 4:11) and their purpose is stated as follows:

. . . to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love (Eph. 4:12–16, RSV).

## The Priesthood of Believers

### THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS—SPECIAL MINISTRIES

Barrett insists that Paul, in speaking of gifts in Romans 12, ‘is thinking of people doing things, not of offices, that is, of recognized places in the community which must be filled, and confer on those who occupy them a special position of responsibility and authority’ (Barrett 1985: p. 32). This was certainly the case in the formative days of the early church but as Barrett (ch. 2 ‘Ministry’, pp. 28ff.) goes on to show, there was a rapid development of the idea of ministry in the New Testament as the church grew, necessitating various structures for the sake of teaching and pastoral care. As the need arose, ‘elders [πρεσβύτεροι]’, ‘deacons [διάκονοι]’ and ‘bishops [ἐπισκόποι]’ were appointed. By the time the Pastoral Epistles were written some of these ministries involved authority and power and some kind of financial advantage that could be abused, as the following passage shows. However, these terms were still not used for ministerial office (Barrett 1985: p. 40).

Now as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it—not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock (1 Pet. 5:1–3).

Early in the second century the above ministries were recognised as church offices (Barrett 1985: p. 95). That was a natural development and in no way contrary to the idea of a ‘priesthood of all believers’. Among other gifts, God gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers ‘to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ’ (Eph. 4:11–12) and, like Saul and Barnabas (Acts 13:2), others were soon set aside under the leading of the Holy Spirit to minister to the church according to their engifting. This ministry operates for, and within, ‘the corporate priesthood’.

Bultmann points out that:

*... the incipient regulation of the local congregations is determined by the congregation’s understanding of itself as an eschatological community ruled by the Spirit . . . The character of those having Spirit-gifts is determined by the fact that the eschatological congregation knows itself called into existence by the proclaimed word . . . and therefore gathers about the word, listening and also speaking (I Cor. 14). The Spirit-endowed, then, are primarily *proclaimers of the word*, and that fact stamps the character of the incipient churchly office from the outset . . .*

*In the fact that the activity of proclaiming the word, which we have seen really constitutes the Church . . . is not at first tied to an office, we have solid evidence that the Church at first knows no office or law by which it is constituted as the Church. What there is of office and law—the institution of congregational offices (presbyters and episkopoi)—does not constitute the Church, but regulates the practical side of congregational life (Bultman 1955: pp. 97f., 104).*

Bultmann (1955: p. 104) traces the development of ecclesiastical offices, showing how ‘proclaimers of the word’ became ‘officials’, and initial Spirit bestowed ‘*charisma*’ came to be ‘understood as an office—*charisma* conveyed by ordination’. Soon the ‘office’, regarded as ‘uninterrupted succession’ of apostolic authority, came to be seen as ‘*constitutive of the Church*’. ‘The Spirit is henceforth bound to the office and is transmitted by a sacramental act, ordination by the laying on of hands’ (p. 107).

## The Priesthood of Believers

The sacraments, ‘along with the word or even instead of the word’, were then understood to be ‘constitutive for the Church’. In time, the ‘Lord’s Supper’ was said to be ‘an institution of salvation which mediates the “medicine of immortality”’ and the presiding bishop ‘*becomes the priest* whose office gives him a quality which separates him from the rest of the congregation, making them laymen’ (pp. 109f.).

Sadly the nature of the ‘particular priesthood’ was misunderstood and distorted and abuses occurred. Even as early as Polycarp and Ignatius (c. 107 AD) some appointed to special ministries were exalting themselves above other believers and curtailing the ministry of the corporate priesthood. Ignatius wrote:

Do ye all follow your bishop, as Jesus Christ followed the Father, and the presbytery as the Apostles; and to the deacons pay respect, as to God’s commandment. Let no man do aught of things pertaining to the Church apart from the bishop. Let that be held a valid eucharist . . . which is under the bishop or one to whom he shall have committed it . . . It is not lawful . . . without the bishop either to baptise or to hold a love-feast; but whatsoever he shall approve, this is well-pleasing also to God; that everything which ye do may be sure and valid (*Smyrnaeans* 7.2–8.2 in Barrett 1985: p. 95).

Such abuse and misunderstanding in no way invalidates the idea of a ‘particular priesthood’ or special ministries but it calls for a biblical theology of the priesthood of believers and vigilance and oversight on the part of the corporate body of Christ.

### THE PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS—REFORMATION AND TODAY

Luther fought against the church of his day because it had imposed itself between God and man and on the basis of New Testament teaching he maintained that Christians had direct access to God without recourse to what he so delicately referred to as, ‘the tin gods and buffoons of this world, the pope with his priests’ (Luther 1955: p. 140). Küng (1968: p. 368), understanding that we are ever the same, warns that ‘The church is constantly in danger of making itself and its organs into mediators’.

As Luther contended with the Roman Catholic Church, there is no sense of priesthood as referring to a group of religious specialists as every Christian has access to God. However there will always be the temptation to think in hierarchical terms, especially when we talk of church ministry and speak in terms of laity and clergy.

Modern Catholicism has moved theologically much closer to the Reformation position. Today the Catholic church speaks of ‘the priesthood of all believers’ being the basis for apostolic ministry yet it still maintains the idea of an hierarchical ‘ministerial priesthood’ which is distinguished from the ‘priesthood of the laity’ in function by ‘special sacramental grace’ (Abbott 1967: pp. 492f., 528f., 587ff.).

Yet Vatican II declared that:

The idea of a priestly caste, an ingrown professional group, is excluded . . . The priest remains a ‘disciple of the Lord’; he belongs to the People of God; he is to be ‘as a brother among brothers’ vis-a-vis the laity. The priest, of course, has his special duties, his own way of life, and his special sacramental grace with a consequent definite quality of priestly holiness, but the virtues that are first listed in the Decree to be his are significantly those of any authentic Christian: ‘kindliness of heart, sincerity, strength of soul and constancy, assiduous regard for justice, and urbanity.’ And a



## The Priesthood of Believers

theme returning frequently—about ten times in the first part of the Decree—is ‘service,’ service of God and of the family of God (Abbott 1967: pp. 528f.).

However it is clear that some are thought to have greater access to God than others:

On the one hand, the Decree teaches unequivocally that the bishop fully possesses (in the sacramental order) the priesthood of Christ, while the priest participates in that priesthood in a derived and dependent manner. The bishop alone is the direct and immediate sign of Christ to his flock, while the priest is a sign, not directly of Christ the Priest, but of his bishop. In some way it is the bishop whom the priest immediately makes present to the community over which he presides . . . Hence the duty of loyalty and obedience that the priests have to the bishop (Abbott 1967: pp. 527f.).

Thus Christ is mediated via the bishop to the priest and then to the people. This results in some forms of ministry being claimed as the exclusive prerogative of the ordained priest or bishop (e.g. ministering the sacraments). Küng (1968: pp. 379f.) argues to the contrary, saying that, ‘the *entire* Church is given the power to baptize; *every* Christian has the power to baptize (and to teach)’.

For further clarification of the current Roman Catholic position see the ‘Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity’ and the ‘Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests’ (Abbott 1967: pp. 489ff.; 532ff.). See also Pannenburg (1998: pp. 374f., esp. n. 830).

### THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS— THE DANGER OF INDIVIDUALISM

It is to be noted that the word ‘priesthood’ (ἱερότευμα) in 1 Peter 2:5, 9 is a collective noun and the new community of God is being addressed rather than individuals. This point needs special emphasis today because of modern Christianity’s individualistic approach.

Althaus comments:

Luther never understands the priesthood of all believers merely in the ‘Protestant’ 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 (Althaus 1996: p. 314).

Ernest Best further clarifies the point:

. . . they are a body of priests; each is a priest . . . but never a priest in and by himself; it is only as a member of the corporate priesthood that he is such and he can only exercise his priesthood within the corporate existence of the church: the conception is not individualistic (Best 1971: p. 108).

Pannenburg (1998: p. 128) speaks of the ‘inference’ arising from reformation interpretation, ‘that the priestly function ascribed to all God’s people must also be that of each of its members’. He concludes that, ‘this deduction is not in view either in 1 Peter or in the corresponding sayings in Revelation (1:6 and 5:9–10)’.

## The Priesthood of Believers

Marney's viperous comment serves to highlight the seriousness of such misunderstanding:

It was a gross perversion of the gospel that inserted a bastard individualism here and then taught us that the believers' priesthood meant that 'every tub must set on its own bottom' (Marney 1974: p. 12, n. 25).

### CONCLUSION

I would like to conclude the paper with two quotations that may help us to remember the heart of the matter of the priesthood to which we all belong.

Küng comments:

The fundamental error of ecclesiologies which turn out, in fact, to be no more than hierarchologies (where *ecclesia*=*hierarchia*) was that they failed to realize that all who hold office are primarily . . . not dignitaries but believers, members of the fellowship of believers; and that compared with this fundamental Christian fact any office they may hold is of secondary not tertiary importance (Küng 1968: p. 363).

John Durham comments on Exodus 19:6:

The phrases 'special treasure', 'kingdom of priests,' and 'holy people' are closely related to one another . . . they each refer to the whole of the people who will pay attention to and follow the covenant . . . Israel as the 'special treasure' is Israel become uniquely Yahweh's prized possession by their commitment to him in covenant. Israel as a 'kingdom of priests' is Israel committed to the extension throughout the world of the ministry of Yahweh's Presence. jklmm [Kingdom] here is exactly what it appears to be, a noun in construct relationship with mynhk [priests], and it describes what Israel was always supposed to be: a kingdom run not by politicians depending upon strength and connivance but by priests depending on faith in Yahweh, a servant nation instead of a ruling nation. Israel as a 'holy people' then represents a third dimension of what it means to be committed in faith to Yahweh: they are to be a people set apart, different from all other people by what they are and are becoming—a display-people, a showcase to the world of how being in covenant with Yahweh changes a people (Durham 1987: p. 263).

This is the way of the 'priests of God and of Christ' (Rev. 20:6).  
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## The Priesthood of Believers

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Quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.