

A Priest Before A Name:
Rediscovering The Ministry Of Christ In The "Priestly" Office Of Pastor
First Draft!

The boy went across the patio to bed... He could hear the whispering of prayers in the other room; he felt cheated and disappointed because he had missed something... But very soon he went to sleep. He dreamed that the priest whom they had shot that morning was back in the house...

He woke and there was the crack, crack on the knocker on the outer door. His father wasn't in bed and there was complete silence in the other room. Hours must have past. He lay listening. He was frightened, but after a short interval the knocking began again, and nobody stirred anywhere in the house... Slowly he made his way across the patio towards the other door. A stranger stood in the street, a tall pale thin man with a rather sour mouth, who carried a small suitcase. He named the boy's mother and asked if this were the senora's house.

"Yes," the boy said, "but she is asleep..."

The stranger said, "I have only just landed. I came up the river tonight. I thought perhaps... I have an introduction for the senora from a great friend of hers."

"She is asleep," the boy repeated.

"If you would let me in," the man said with an odd frightened smile, and suddenly, lowering his voice he said to the boy, "I am a priest."

"You?" the boy exclaimed.

"Yes," he said gently. "My name is Father—"

But the boy had already swung the door open and put his lips to his hand before the other could give himself a name.¹

And so the story ends, the dramatic conclusion of Graham Greene's novel *The Power and the Glory*, much the same way that it began—by the introduction of a priest *with no name* into a context that longs for a priest. "My name is Father...." said the stranger at the door. And that was all that needed to be said in order to arouse the loyalty and affection of a young boy-- the man's name was of no consequence, but the office was everything!

To be sure, evangelical Protestant's will rightly want to preserve the integrity of the office with a proper concern for the moral and even doctrinal credentials of the persons filling the pastoral office. "The name," at least in terms of character and beliefs, IS important (c.f. 1 Tim. 3). But what if, relative to our understanding of the power of God acting through ministry, we turn Graham Green's "priest with no name" on its head? What if, as is closer to the reality of today's low-church evangelical Protestantism, the office is of no real consequence, but the man's name, as in certain personality, is everything? Is it not the case that for most evangelical Protestants, efficacy in ministry is more often than not associated with the power of a certain personality or celebrity status as the ultimate credential? And isn't it true that the disposition to "revere" (as in "Reverend") is less a predicate of "Pastoral office" as it is a predicate of one or another "pastoral celebrity?"

¹ Excerpt from Graham Greene's, *The Power and the Glory, Part 4* (NYC:NY, Penguin Books in association with William Heinemann, 1940) p.221-222

All too often today, the power of the pastorate is measured against market standards *vis-à-vis* the demands of spiritually rationalized thirsts for personal consumption, corporate growth and cultural popularity rather than against anything theologically intrinsic about a sacred office. In such a context, a new sort of legalism emerges, where the minister is left under the law of certain populist expectations suspiciously absent a divine mandate or definition deserving the title “reverend.” What is the pastor’s job? Who is his boss? And what eventually happens to the pastor adrift in a sea of populist expectations without a confessional anchor pertaining to a vocational definition? In short, at what expense do we lose the “priest” for the “person” in the office of pastor—both pertaining to the efficacy of the office itself, and even the spiritual and vocational health of those who fill it—when by a totalitarian populism, the office of pastor is cleansed of the “priest?”

To be sure, the drama of Greene’s novel is set into the context of an anti-clerical cleansing in the southern Mexican state of Tabasco during the late 1930s. At the hands of a totalitarian regime set against the Catholic religion, all the priests who haven’t been executed either apostatized or fled to neighboring states -- except one quite unlikely hero. I say “unlikely” because the protagonist of Greene’s story is none other than an unnamed priest, even renowned as “the whiskey priest,” whose *person* is weak in every respect *except* his reluctant faith in the efficacy of the priestly office itself. And as it turns out, the office is of greater importance than the man—which it seems is the meta-narrative of Greene’s story—even such a man, however sinful and weak, who emerges as the martyred hero NOT by virtue of his own qualities, but by virtue of the qualities inherent to his sacred office.

Indeed, throughout the novel, the disparity between the man and the office is maintained in vivid proportions wherein the office itself, as representing the mediated presence of Christ amidst a desperate people, is dignified in its efficacy even in spite of the person who fills it.² And whatever else Graham Greene had in mind in writing this curious novel, one is left longing for a priest! It pertains then to a theology of the pastorate and pastoral identity that we want to concern ourselves with in this essay. More specifically, we will want to rediscover the “priestly” in “pastoral” as to understand how it is that the power of Christ is being mediated in, with and through a sacred office, less a personality, through a Biblical informed and regulated ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral presence. And like Graham Green’s young boy at the door, might we too discover a renewed longing for that office that Martin Luther once described as “a service or ministry proceeding from Christ to us, and not from us to Christ.”³

² Again, my point is not to suggest that the person filling the office is inconsequential, for this would devalue the whole point of 1 Timothy 3 for instance, and the admonitions in 1 Tim.4:15, 1 Tim.5:22 and 2 Tim.2:15 all of which take the person filling the office very seriously, lest the office itself is devalued and/or shamed.

³ Quoted by Rolf Preus, in “Ministers: What Is Their Job? Who Is Their Boss? Why Do We Need Them?” November 16, 1991. c.f. www.christforus.org/Papers/Content/ministers.html

The premise then of this essay is that if not by a totalitarian regime, there is yet another priestly cleansing of an all-together different sort today—one that is less top down by the totalitarian “big brother” and more bottom up by a totalitarian populism driven by its egalitarian core values of being entertained, appeased and democratized. Herein we are properly reminded of the warning by the apostle Paul when he acknowledged that during the last days (those days between the first and second coming of Christ) “the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires” (2Tim. 4:3). Here again, we are also reminded of the masterful and often quoted introduction to *Amusing Ourselves To Death* by Neil Postman, where two very different visions of the future are contrasted— one that envisions a kind of oppression by the totalitarian big brother, the other, a kind of oppression by the populist core values of ease, entertainment and popularity—of George Orwell’s *1984* and Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* respectively:

Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance. Orwell feared we would become a captive culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture... As Huxley remarked in *Brave New World Revisited*, the civil libertarians and rationalists who are ever on the alert to oppose tyranny “failed to take into account man’s almost infinite appetite for distractions.” In *1984*, Huxley added, people are controlled by inflicting pain. IN *Brave New World*, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure. In short, Orwell feared that what we hate will ruin us. Huxley feared that what we love will ruin us.⁴

If then Greene portrays Orwell’s greatest fear applied to the priesthood, the premise of this essay is to address the possibility of Huxley’s greatest fear applied to the priesthood. Is there a crisis in pastoral identity? If but anecdotally, the numbers suggests that there is—where almost a quarter of all current pastors in the US have been fired or forced to resign, where the average pastoral career lasts only fourteen years (which is less than half of what it was not long ago), and where fifty percent of all current pastors have considered leaving the pastoral ministry in just a three month period.⁵ More principally, an increasing number of people are taking issue with the clergy-lay distinction of ordination all together.⁶ And whereas many do recognize the distinction, the essential distinction between the

⁴ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves To Death, Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (Penguin Books: NY,NY, 1985) p. vii-viii.

⁵ John C. LaRue, "Forced Exits: A Too-Common Ministry Hazard," *Your Church*, Mar/Apr 1996, p. 72, www.christianitytoday.com/cbg/features/report/6y2072.html, George Barna, 1996 Index of Leading Spiritual Indicators, “Quiet Waters Ministries, Renewing Christian Leaders” website at www.qwaters.org/whythisministry.html.

⁶ The view is expressed by Marjorie Warkentin Paul Stevens, Richard Hanson, Frank Viola, Harold Camping, F. W. Grant, Alexander Hay, and a whole host of others. C.f. Marjorie Warkentin, *Ordination: A Biblical-Historical View* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), R. Paul Stevens, *The Other Six Days: Vocation, Work, and Ministry in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) Harold Camping’s, *The End of the Church... and After*, Frank Viola, *Rethinking the Wineskin*, (Brandon: Present Testimony Ministry, 2001) F.W. Grant, *Nicolaitanism or the Rise and Growth of Clerisy* (Bedford: MWTB) Walter Klassen, “New Presbyter is Old Priest Writ Large,” *Concern* 17, 1969, p. 5. See also W. Klassen, J.L. Burkholder, and John Yoder, *The Relation of Elders to the Priesthood of Believers* (Washington: Sojourner’s Book Service, 1969). For the historic Anabaptist view, see J.L. Ainslie, *The*

office of “pastor” in relation to other offices in the church (such as the office of “elder”) is likewise being challenged, both theologically and/or practically.⁷ And of course, there are the myriad of questions that so many pastors find themselves asking these days where the reality of a crisis in pastoral identity is suggested if put for the lack of any observable consensus about what pastors actually do? Some would observe pastors serving the social/political process, others as therapists, others as corporate entrepreneurs, and others again as preacher/scholars, and others still again as spiritual shepherds. Is there anything theological that would disqualify any one of these paradigms? Is there anything theological that would harmonize them?

A response to any or all of these observations and questions begs for a pastoral identity, which in turn begs for a *theology of the pastorate*! Accordingly, Andrew Purves has argued that the problem is not “the lack of skills, or even the lack of piety, among clergy but the lack of an adequate theological foundation for pastoral ministry by which they can understand their work to be profoundly rooted in God’s redemptive and eschatological purpose.”⁸

The purpose of this essay is to construct a pastoral theology by means of a redemptive-historical analysis of the Bible. The result will be to distinguish the pastoral office from all other ecclesial vocations within the church by its distinctively “priestly” aspects, albeit in a mediatorial relation to the ultimate priesthood of Jesus Christ.

A Redemptive Historical Analysis of the Pastoral Office:

Any attempt at constructing a pastoral theology is immediately faced with an exegetical dilemma if counting on a kind of “proof-text” methodology. For in the words of Edmund Clowney, “we cannot turn to the New Testament to find a little black book of church order!”⁹ In the writings of the New Testament, much is assumed in the living tradition of a community of faith who was by no means new to the planet by the time of the 1st century context. It would be impossible to read the apostolic testimony and not observe how intentionally the canonical authors interpreted the events surrounding Christ’s coming and the expansion of the Christian church in light of the prior events and teachings of the Old Testament. And of course, this was no less the case concerning the meaning of “church,” even

Doctrines of Ministerial Order in the Reformed Churches of the 16th and 17th Centuries (Edinburgh, 1940). As applied today, see Peter Hoover’s *The Secret of the Strength: What Would the Anabaptists Tell This Generation?* (Shippensburg: Benchmark Press, 1998)

⁷ C.f. Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership, An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Lewis and Roth: Littleton, Colorado, 1988) who basically argues for the biblical warrant supporting only one office in the church (elder), who is then responsible for the whole range of pastoral and governing duties equally. For a good synopsis of the various historic way of relating the pastor to other offices, see Lee Irons, *Theories of Eldership: A Study in Presbyterian Polity*, Ian Murray, “The Problem of the Eldership and Its Wider Implications,” *Banner of Truth Magazine*, Issue 395-396, August-September, 1996

⁸ Andrew Purves, *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001) p. 47.

⁹ Ibid, p. 43.

describing the church in exact language taken directly from descriptions of the corporate Israel of old.¹⁰ As noted by Edmund Clowney, “in church order, therefore, as in doctrine, we must begin with the Old Testament revelation. Only from the Old Testament as background and foundation can we understand the new form of the people of God ordered by the incarnate Christ.”

“The government of the New Testament church developed out of the Old Testament background. This follows from the way in which Christ orders his assembly from the beginning. As Christ reveals himself as the Messiah, it is not a coincidence that he re-establishes an “assembly” upon the apostolic foundation of the “twelve.” The church throughout the New Testament is clearly aware of its calling as the new and true Israel (1Pet.2:9-10, Eph. 2:12-13, 19-20, Rom.9:1-6). Jesus therefore teaches “continuity as well as renewal.”¹¹

If then according to the hermeneutic method of a redemptive-historical analysis, what is most revealing in a pastoral theology is the continuity between the Old and New Testaments regarding the ordained office of the “Levitical priesthood” and the “pastor” respectively, and as distinct from the lay-office of governing elders! This was, for instance, historically affirmed in church history in *The Form of Presbyterian Church-Government*, appended to most editions of the Westminster Confession:

As there were in the Jewish church elders of the people joined with the priests and Levites in the government of the church; so Christ, who hath instituted government, and governors ecclesiastical in the church, hath furnished some in his church, beside the minister of the word, with gifts for government, and with commission to execute the same when called thereunto, who are to join with the minister in the government of the church. Which officers reformed churches commonly call Elders¹²

Accordingly, Jack Kinneer rightly observes, “it is evident that the Westminster divines regarded the New Covenant ministry as a fulfillment and continuation of the priestly ministry of the Old Covenant to a considerable extent.” Kinneer further comments, “during the Protestant reformation, the idea of the priesthood of all believers was used effectively to counter the claims of the Roman Church about its priesthood. And yet, this did not lead to a rejection of a special ministry in the church, but rather to a reform of that ministry... In their justification of the special ministry of the New Covenant and in particular the pastoral ministry, the Reformers and their successors appealed to the

¹⁰ Revelations 21:3-4 speaks of the consummation of the church using language from Leviticus 26 concerning Israel. Likewise, Paul teaches that “we (corporate church) are the temple of God” and immediately applies the promises and exhortations once given to the Old Covenant church to the New Covenant church (2 Cor. 6:16-18, see then Exek. 37:26, Is. 52:11, 2 Sam. 7:14.). Paul likewise associates the formation of the New Covenant church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets as nothing less than the formation of the “dwelling place of God” and “tabernacle in Eph. 2 & 4. Peter understood the church in terms of a *royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people* after the pattern of Exodus 19:3-6 and Isaiah 61:6. For the church as the New Covenant temple of God, see Preston Graham, “A Sacramental Theology of the Gospel, Rediscovering the Saving Presence of God In The Church” in *The Assembling Of Ourselves Together: Ecclesiology In The 21st Century*, John Vance edited, (Rock Tavern, NY: WPC Books, 2005).

¹¹ Edmund Clowney, “A Brief For Church Governors”, *Order in the Offices, Essays Defining the Roles of Church Officers*, Mark Brown, editor (Duncansville, PA: Classic Presbyterian Government Resources, 1993) p. 45 and 49 respectively.

¹² It is here made clear that the redemptive historical continuity between the Old Testament Levitical priesthood and the office of pastor is in fact assumed in order to interpret “office” out of Romans 12:8 and 1 Cor. 15:12!

priesthood of the Old Covenant as providing a model.”¹³ Very briefly therefore, a biblical-theological understanding of the pastorate moving from the Old Testament to New Testament context would want to consider the following.

In the Old Covenant context, one could observe in Exodus 18:13ff the institution of a distinct and separate *lay* office of elders in order to preserve the priestly/prophetic office executed by Moses in the governance of the emerging Old Testament congregation, even as the whole event is repeated in various other Old Testament contexts as well.¹⁴ The circumstances were such that Moses and especially his priestly role of mediating between God and the people was being overwhelmed and thwarted by the governing aspects of congregational life. We are told for instance that Moses was acting “in session” alone while all the people stood around him from morning until evening? And most alarming to Jethro (his observant father-in-law who happened to be a seasoned Midianite priest), all of this was to the detriment of his other roles pertaining to “representing the people before God... (and) bringing their cases before God, teaching them the statutes and instructions and making known to them the way they are to go and the things they are to do.” (vs. 19) For this reason, the decision was made to:

look for able men among all the people, men who fear God, are trustworthy, and hate dishonest gain; set such men over them as officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Let them sit as judges for the people at all times; let them bring every important case to you, but decide every minor case themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you.

For the present purpose, the significant point is that the “priestly” aspects of Moses’ office were specifically highlighted and delimited in distinction from the ruling aspects of his office that were then shared in by lay-elders. And again, the circumstances are noteworthy in that they will be suspiciously repeated in successive contexts wherein the institution of lay-elders are carefully presented as to preserve the priestly aspects of ministry characteristic of a separate office of clergy-elder.¹⁵ The resulting ecclesial “order” in the Old Covenant community was at the very least to maintain the office of priest in distinction from the office of governing elders albeit “jointly” responsible for acting together “in session” in order to govern the Old Covenant congregation. So for instance, 2 Chronicles 19:8 documents how “in Jerusalem, Jehoshaphat appointed certain Levites and priests together with heads of families of Israel, to give judgment for the LORD and to decide disputed cases.” Together, it is said that “they assumed their seat at Jerusalem.”

¹³ Jack Dennis Kinneer, “Priesthood in the Ministry” p. 183, in *Order in the Church*, Mark Brown, etc. 181ff c.f. John Calvin, *Institutes...*, IV, IV. and Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Patristic Roots of Reformed Worship* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1975).

¹⁴ c.f., Numbers 11:16ff, and Dt. 1:9ff

¹⁵ Numbers 11:16ff, and Dt. 1:9ff. This is also evidenced by the use of such language as “appoint” and “choose” in vs. 24-26 that is throughout the Hebrew associated with divine ordination (c.f. Dt. 4:37, 7:7, 10:15, Josh 8:3, 1 Sam.2:28).

By way of a comparison and contrast, the lay-elders focused upon the governing aspects and grew naturally out of the patriarchic family system and continued through the Mosaic period even into the exile. This office was set apart in its “uniquely representative” nature as a lay-office and was therefore “selected by the people and speaking and acting on their behalf.”¹⁶ The lay-elder office was “regarded by the principle of representation as the whole congregation of Israel.”¹⁷ As observed by Edmund Clowney, “following the Exile, an aristocratic nobility seems to have continued the functions of a national eldership in Israel, even as Nehemiah lists nobles who are “heads of their fathers houses.”¹⁸ And significantly, there was, according to Rayburn, “no evidence that the ministry of Word or the teaching of the law was ever assigned to this office or that the ability to teach had any bearing on qualifications for it,”¹⁹ Accordingly, Clowney also observe how “it is plain that these elders did not become prophets; they were not of those who are raised up ‘like unto Moses.’ Neither would they become teaching priests or Levites. Yet they received the Spirit for their task of administration and judgment.”²⁰

As distinct and separate from the office of “lay-elder” the priestly office after the type of Moses continued throughout the Old Testament context as well. Most especially the two-fold pattern of Moses ascending and descending the mountain of God in Exodus is continued by the Levitical priesthood the temple of God. The two fold ascending-descending, or a human-Godward and God-humanward activity is therefore related to the ministry of sacrament and word respectively, which as we will see forever defines the priestly-pastoral office! As such, the priestly-office of the Old Covenant context was uniquely qualified and entrusted with the ministry of word and sacrament as recorded in such places as Dt. 33:9-10 where it is said about the Levitical priesthood:

They observed your word, and kept your covenant. They teach Jacob your ordinances, and Israel your law; they place incense before you, and whole burnt offerings on your altar.

To be sure, the priest and Levites shared with the elders the responsibilities of judgment and rule with special responsibilities for difficult cases which required their expertise in the Scriptures.²¹ And yet, these responsibilities were adjunct to their primary calling as ministers of the word and sacrament and as the superintendents of Israel’s worship.²² As per the unique role of mediating between God and humanity, the priests were *not* chosen from among the family system per se, but were set apart by God from the tribe of Levi. They were of a “separate and distinct membership” according

¹⁶ C.f. Ex. 17:5-6, 19:7, 24:1-11, Lev. 4:13-15, Dt.21:1-9, 1Sam.8:43, 2Sam5:3, 1Kgs 20:7-8.

¹⁷ C.f. Ex.12:3, 6, 21, 1Kgs 8:1, 2, 3, 5, 14, 22, 55, 62, 65. For instance, these lay-elders were seen requesting a king on behalf of the people in 1Sam.8:4, and acting on behalf of Israel in covenant making in 2 Sam.5:3, Ex.24:1ff.

¹⁸ Clowney, p. 47-48. c.f. Ezra 8, Neh.7

¹⁹ c.f. Ezek. 7:26, Jer. 18:18.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ cf. Dt.17:8-13, 21:5, 1Chron.23:4.

²² Rayburn, p. 225-226. cf. Lev. 1:5ff, Ezek. 7:26, Ezra 7:10-11, Neh.8:7-9, 15:11ff, 1Chron 15:11ff, 16:4ff.

to Rayburn and therefore “did not share the characteristically representative character of the eldership... the priesthood was organized according to a set of regulations which pertained to itself alone.” They were in short claimed by God as his own ministers in Israel and were granted a direct ministerial authority not assigned to elders.²³

Here again, whatever else can be said from the Old Testament, there was most definitely a distinction between the clergy and the laity.²⁴ The role of the clergy was primarily given to the temple and especially the public ministry of the word and the administration of the temple sacraments in order to mediate a divine and sacramental blessing to the people.²⁵ And as noted already, this whole continuing arrangement was patterned after the once and for all ministry of Moses in comparison to the “lay-elder” ministers that were appointed in Exodus 18.

Before turning to the New Covenant context of the church, we should stop and consider more carefully this very important Old Testament pattern that is already exposed concerning the theological nature of God’s salvation as being executed through the “priestly” succession from Moses to the Levites.²⁶ Again, this pattern concerns a “once and for all” aspect of salvation history related to God’s presence by the Holy Spirit that is continually applied and experienced by God’s liturgical presence in the Holy Spirit acting through Word, Sacrament and pastoral care that centered upon the tabernacle! About this, Thomas Torrance has observed that the “once and for all event” of God’s salvation in the exodus was accomplished through the mediation of Moses directly, but then was “remembered and participated in by the liturgy of the Old Covenant as mediated through the priesthood in a secondary sense.”²⁷ God was in the midst of them, albeit as mediated through the office of the Priest! And yet, not as to compromise the once and for all historical reality as related to God’s special revelation.

Accordingly, Torrance explains:

Over against Moses, and in secondary status, Aaron is regarded as the liturgical priest who carries out in continual cultic witness the actual mediation that came through Moses. In this way, the cult was a liturgical extension into the history of Israel and her worship of the once and for all events of Exodus and Sinai... That which took place once and for all in the lawgiving and covenantal atonement is enshrined in the liturgy of the Tabernacle. But it is extended cultically into the life and history of Israel in such a way as to make clear that the priestly sacrifices and oblations are carried out as liturgical witness to the divine glory and obedience to God’s proclamation of his own Name in grace and judgment, in mercy and truth.²⁸

²³ cf. Num.3:5-13, Num.6:22-27, Dt. 18:2, 5.

²⁴ cf. Isa 24:2, Hos 4:9, Ps.132:9, 16, Jer. 26:7.

²⁵ Dt. 31:9-11, Neh.8:1-3, 13Num.6:23, 24, 25, 26.

²⁶ This description is taken from a previously published context. Cf. Preston Graham, “A Sacramental Theology of the Gospel, Rediscovering the Saving Presence of God In The Church” in *The Assembling Of Ourselves Together: Ecclesiology In The 21st Century*, John Vance edited, (Rock Tavern, NY: WPC Books, 2005)

²⁷ T. F. Torrance, *Royal Priesthood*, (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd LTD, 1955), p. 4. Looking forward to the New Covenant, Torrance will relate this to the once and for all incarnational ministry of Christ on the one hand, and the ascended ministry of Christ by the Holy Spirit acting through the church on the other hand.

²⁸ *Royal Priesthood*, p. 4.

Forever then under the Old Covenant, the meaning of salvation is contained in what was accomplished and revealed through Moses, as the only rule of faith and practice. But this salvation was applied continually via the same human-Godward and God-humanward priestly actions of Moses as were continued through “Aaron’s supreme function as high priest, bearing the iniquity of the people (Ex.28:38, Lev.10:17, Num.18:23) when he ascended into the Holy of Holies once a year on the day of atonement” only then to return from behind the veil to the waiting congregation with the blessed “peace be unto you” to put the name of God upon them in benediction (Num.6:22ff).” As noted by Torrance, “that which took place once and for all in the lawgiving and covenantal atonement is enshrined in the liturgy of the Tabernacle.”²⁹

Herein, we have the emergence of a pastoral theology—one that distinguishes the pastoral office in succession to Moses in the Old Testament, and to the special presence of God that was being mediated through the temple office of word, sacrament and pastoral care by means of the continuation of a *mediatorial* priesthood. The priestly role was both “God-humanward” and “human-Godward” as pertaining to a covenantal transaction that was set apart by the presence of the “glory-spirit” in their midst. And the focus is not on the personalities per se and whatever charisma this might include, but on the essential nature of the Levitical *office* itself, as carefully regulated by certain qualifications and standards relative to the temple administration of the Old Covenant. These same principles will be observed in the New Testament as well in relation to Christ’s once and for all priestly ministry as continued in, with and through the pastoral office in succession to the apostles.

Turning then to the 1st century context, one cannot help but notice the same two-fold office of clergy-priest and lay-elder that together formed the Jewish Sanhedrin throughout the Gospels and Acts (Mt. 21:23, 26:3; Acts 6:12). At the same time, the term “elder” was employed as a generic designation for all the members of the Sanhedrin, some of whom were priests and/or scribes and others lay-governors.³⁰ No doubt therefore, in 1st century Judaism, the idea of God’s mediated presence *vis-a-vie* the temple was being transacted still through the two-fold offices of clergy-priest and lay-elders.

Transitioning then to the New Covenant context of the 1st century, we are met with many curious teachings by Christ concerning a continuation of his ministry via the Holy Spirit acting in, with and through a succession of office! More precisely, in anticipation of his heavenly ascension, Christ set

²⁹ *Royal Priesthood*, p. 4.

³⁰ Robert Rayburn, “Ministers, Elders, and Deacons”, Cf. Mt.26:27, Acts 5:21.. See *theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, VI(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 659-61. Note also Edmund Clowney, “A Brief For Church Governors...”, p. 48. Clowney observes how “each Jewish community had its council of elders or presbytery (Luke 7:3). This then makes sense of Luke’s description of the officials who accost Christ in the temple as “the chief priests and the scribes with the elders” (Luke 20:1). It is significant to notice that this is the same order that is ordinarily used in the New Testament for stating the members of the Sanhedrin (Mk.11:27, 14:43, 15:1, Mt.27:41). To be sure, the order is sometimes varied (Mk.8:31, 14:53, Mt.16:21, Acts 4:5) and the scribes are sometimes omitted (Mt.21:23, 26:3, 27:1, 3, 12, 20; 28:11-12, Acts 4:8, 23, 23:14; 25:15). And there are even times when elders and scribes are mentioned together (Acts 6:12). And yet, like the Old Testament, the “elders” are called “elders of the people” (Mt. 21:23, 26:3, 47, 27:1)

up the expectation of his continued earthly descent by means of the Holy Spirit acting in the apostolic and post-apostolic pastoral offices respectively. In John 14:18 Christ emphatically states about a post-ascension context, “I will not leave you orphaned, *I am coming to you...* I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (vs. 25-26). To be sure, this teaching anticipated the Pentecost. But more to the present point, after the Pentecost the idea that Christ continues to “fill all in all” by means of the establishment of a New Covenant “temple” or “dwelling place of God” (c.f. Eph. 1:22-23, 2:20ff) is explicitly related to the ascension/descent pattern of Christ acting through the Holy Spirit in, with and through the apostolic and then post-apostolic offices in Ephesians 4. In other words, according to Ephesians, Christ’s presence is presently being mediated in the new covenant temple of God, but not individualistically and democratically, but rather by means of apostolic succession. Here again, we should remember what else Christ said in John, as to anticipate again the teachings of Paul in Ephesians.

In John 20, the principle of succession of office is clearly in view when Jesus spoke of his continued presence the coming of the Holy Spirit, even the same Spirit that in vs. 22 Christ “breathed” upon the apostles wherein it was said “receive the Holy Spirit.” Immediately following this incident, Jesus said to the apostles, *If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained* (vs. 22-23). Clearly, this was a unique authority granted to those who would fill a unique office. And whereas it is doubtful that Christ was giving the apostles, and those who would succeed them, the authority in and of themselves to forgive sins, he was most clearly applying to their office the authority to mediate Christ’s ministry in, with and through them by the Holy Spirit, albeit always contingent upon God’s sovereign will!

This anticipated succession of Christ’s “once and for all” priestly ministry by means of a continuing priesthood is precisely what Ephesians is all about in chapter 4. For again, having made the case that Christ was present to “fill all in all” in the New Covenant assembly on chapter 1, even that which was described as the temple of God and “God’s dwelling place” in chapter 2, Paul then applies the exact same language of “fill all in all” in chapter 4 to the manner in which the ascended Christ “descends” by the Holy Spirit acting through the apostolic *and then* post-apostolic office of “evangelist, pastor and teacher” (which is most likely referencing a single office, albeit three functions). Paul continues by making the case for the gospel that assumes a New covenant “temple that is being *joined together*” upon the foundation of the apostles, being “built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God” (c.f. Eph. 4:12,16 compared to 2:20ff). It can be argued that this language of “building” and “joining together” is probably a reference to the pastor’s role of mediating the presence of Christ in order to form the New Covenant temple-churches upon the apostolic teachings via the ministry of word (God-

humanward), sacrament (Human-God ward), as these are both related to the ongoing pastoral care of Christ in, with and through the church being mediated by the pastoral office!³¹

In a very real sense therefore, albeit as accomplished by Christ acting by means of the Holy Spirit in the office of apostle and then pastors, Christ's earlier proclamation concerning his presence and ministry acting through a continuing office holds true—that *whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me...*" Luke 10:16). To be sure, this must always be qualified as to distinguish between the sovereign and infallible activity of the Holy Spirit, and the dependent and fallible instrumentality of the pastor such that ultimately, it is not the power inherent to the pastoral office, but the power of Christ acting through the Holy Spirit that saves—thus a qualification against sacerdotalism! And yet, it can be said with the apostle Paul as predicated upon the sovereign activity of the Holy Spirit in, with and through the pastor office, the calling to pastoral ministry is so *that...*

I might win more of them... 19

I might win those outside the law... 21

I might by all means save some... 22

Concerning these statements, John Calvin affirms: "Now this is a great thing that Paul claims for himself, when he calls their conversion *his work*, for it is in a manner a new creation of the soul." And yet, Calvin further explains:

God is the efficient cause, while man, with his preaching, is an instrument that can do nothing of itself, we must always speak of the efficacy of the ministry in such a manner that the entire praise of the work may be reserved for God alone. But in some cases, when the ministry is spoken of, man is compared with God, and then that statement holds good — *He that planteth is nothing, and he that watereth is nothing*; for what can be left to a man if he is brought into competition with God? Hence Scripture represents ministers as nothing in comparison with God; but when the ministry is simply treated of without any comparison with God, then, as in this passage, its efficacy is honorably made mention of, with signal encomiums. For, in that case, the question is not, what man can do of himself without God, but, on the contrary, God himself, who is the author, is conjoined with the instrument, and the Spirit's influence with man's labor. In other words, the question is not, what man himself accomplishes by his own power, but what God effects through his hands.³²

³¹ συναρμολογουμένη, see also Ephesians 2:20, 4:16. According then to Louw and Nida, this word can be used synonymously with "assemble," arrange, structure or even "organize." In 1 Cor. 12:20 for instance, God is said to "structure (συνκεράννυμι) the body of Christ as to give some greater honor than others.. And perhaps most significantly, Titus 1:5 applies the verb ἐπιδιορθόω to mean "set in order" or even "organize" as to establish a church by means of the training and appointment of elders according to the pattern set in place by the apostles. Louw & Nida, #62.3,4,5. C.f. T. David Gordon's "Equipping" Ministry in Ephesians 4?", *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (March, 1994). Therefore, this language is related to what Paul means by the "pattern of sound words" related to his instructions to his young protégé, Timothy "in order that" he might "know how *one ought* to conduct oneself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:14-15). This "pattern" is clearly related to Paul's teachings on instructions for ordination (1 Tim 3), worship (1 Tim 2) and doctrine (1 Tim 1) as no doubt being worked out in an assembled context? Therefore,, the idea related to the "whole structure" being "joined together" upon the apostolic foundation spoken of in Ephesians would most likely refer to the unique ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral care that is later explained to Timothy.

³² John Calvin, *The Commentaries Of John Calvin On The First Epistle Of Paul The Apostle To The Corinthians, A New Translation, From The Original Latin, And Collated With The Author's French Version. By The Rev. John Pringle* (n.p.).

In relation then to other offices in the church, one can again after the pattern of the Old Covenant discern at least two offices, one priestly-pastoral and the other lay-elder, this notwithstanding the obvious fact that in the apostolic and post-apostolic context, the term “priest” is conspicuously absent. This was perhaps to distinguish from the 1st century Sanhedrin context and to preserve the exclusive once and for all sufficiency of Christ’s priesthood even if acting continually through the pastoral office. That being said, whenever “elders” are mentioned together with another office in the apostolic assembly, the language of “priest” is replaced with “apostles and elders” such that the implication is clear—whatever role the “priests” performed under the Old Covenant as related to word and sacrament, it was being continued in the New Covenant after the ascension of Christ being performed by the apostles and later “pastors.”³³

Later in the New Testament context, it seems likely that this same pattern is expressed using the term “deacon” for the governing office of elder, albeit as the term “elder” is applied to both the pastoral and governing offices that work together jointly in the governance of the church. So for instance, the term “deacon” was almost certainly applied to the office of “lay-elder” in Paul’s salutation to the Philippians, where only one other office is formally mentioned together with the “pastor” (Philip. 1:1). This also makes best sense of use of “deacon” in 1 Timothy 3 as compared then with 1 Timothy 5:17. Accordingly, the two offices of “pastor” and “deacon” in chapter three most likely correspond to the general designation of “elder” in 1 Tim. 5:17, a term that is applicable to both offices noted earlier as pertaining to the “pastor-elder” who is “apt to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2) and thus “labor in the word and doctrine” (5:17) in contrast to the “deacon-elder” who is distinguished as an office that “rule(s) well” (5:17). In sum, the same two-fold functions as existed in the Sanhedrin existed in the New Covenant, albeit designated “pastor-elder” and “deacon-elder” to accentuate perhaps the New Covenant context of ministry in continuity with the Old Covenant context.

And finally, it could be observed how this whole arrangement was originally established in Acts 6, a context that is conspicuously reminiscent of the circumstances in Exodus 18 as repeated throughout the Old Covenant in order to preserve the word-sacrament activity of the priestly office. Here again, the apostles are concerned that “it is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables” (Acts 6:2). And to be sure, the issues well exceeded a mere problem in administration and distribution, as it pertained to the ongoing theological dispute between Hellenist and Hebrews regarding the meaning of covenant participation and church membership applicable then to diaconal assistance (Acts 6:1). The solution was again to “select from among” the people “men of good standing full of the Spirit and wisdom” who would then assume the primary role of governance within the church in order

³³ T. F. Torrance, *The Eldership in the Reformed Church*, p. 10. (Cf. Acts 15:2, 15:4, 15:22-23, 16:4.)

that the apostles would devote themselves to prayer and to serving the word” (Acts 6:4) And with this citation, we come full circle. Wherein in the establishment of the New Covenant temple after the “greater Moses” as fulfilled in Christ, we see again the succession of Christ acting through the apostolic, and later post-apostolic office of pastor being carefully preserved by the re-institution of lay-elders according to the principle of representation of the people.

The Teaching of Church History:

A review of Church history and especially the history of theologizing about the pastoral ministry will expose a consistent pattern of relating Christ’s mediated presence to the pastoral office. It is true, that as noted by Andrew Purves, “pastoral theology began as an incidental discipline” such that “theological reflection on pastoral ministry appears to have developed in response to needs that emerged.” And yet, by 590 with the publications of Pope Gregory the Great’s *Book of Pastoral Rule* wherein “we can observed that there was there was something like a comprehensive pastoral care textbook... for he church.³⁴ Following then the trajectory told by Purves, one could move from the more incidental works of Gregory of Nazianzus (*In Defense of His Flight To Pontus...*, d. 389) to John Chrysostom’s *Six Books on the Priesthood* (d.407) to then Pope Gregory the Great’s monumental work-- and what one discovers is that in various ways, the authors are struggling to understand not whether or not the office is sacred as distinguished by Christ’s mediated presence, but in what sense is Christ present as pertaining then to the circumstances at hand.

We see in Chrysostom, for instance, what is clearly a sacramental conception of the office of pastor emanating from his Antiochene Christology.³⁵ Speaking of the priesthood, he could say such things as “the work of the priesthood is done on earth but it is ranked among heavenly ordinances” and “through them (the sacraments) we (the priest) put on Christ and are united with the Son of God and become limbs obedient to that blessed Head.” As Purves has summarized, “God confirms in heaven according to Chrysostom what priest do on earth.”³⁶ In this respect, there is the positive contribution of Chrysostom in so far as to see the importance of the pastoral office for the salvation plan of God related to Christ’s mediated presence on earth. And yet, it would seem as well that Chrysostom negated the distinction between the work of the Holy Spirit and the priest, in saying things like “they (the priests) are the ones—they and no others—who are in charge of spiritual travail and responsible

³⁴ Purves, *Classical Tradition*, p.5 and 6 respectively.

³⁵ C.f, Purves, *Classical Tradition*. P. 41.

³⁶ Chrysostom’s quote taken from St. John Chrysostom, *Six Books on the Priesthood*, trans. Graham Neville (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984) 70;III.4 as quoted by Purves in *Classical Tradition*, p. 45. Purves also cites as proof Chrysostom 72;III.5.

for the birth that comes through baptism.”³⁷ And so at this point, Purves rightly criticizes Chrysostom from a protestant perspective “insofar as he replaces the priesthood of Christ with the priesthood of the pastor/priest.” The question is then raised by Purves, “what, however should Protestantism today put in its place?”³⁸ The answer, it seems, is cogently realized in the reformed tradition by Luther and Calvin, but is perhaps best articulated during the reformation era by Martin Bucer.

It is true that most of the reformers were, shall we say, nervous about the term “priest” as applied to the pastorate. Martin Luther, for instance, wrote, “We neither can nor ought to give the name priest to those who are in charge of the Word and sacrament among the people. The reason they have been called priests is either because of the custom of the heathen people or as a vestige of the Jewish nation. The result is injurious to the church.”³⁹ Nor did John Calvin like the word “priest” to refer to ministers.⁴⁰ In so many words, Luther and Calvin were concerned with the use of “priest” such as to *not* distinguish between the sovereign activity of the Holy Spirit acting as the sole *agent* of grace in salvation, and the pastor as a *means* or *instrument* of the Holy Spirits work of grace. In other words, Calvin would speak of the benefits of Christ being made available to us by the “secret operation of the Holy Spirit.”⁴¹ Concerning then the ascended ministry of Christ that “He might fill all things” in the Church, Calvin applied it specifically to the office of ministers saying:

The mode of filling is this: By the ministers to whom he has committed this office, and given grace to discharge it, he dispenses and distributes his gifts to the Church, and thus exhibits himself as in a manner actually present by exerting the energy of his Spirit in this his institution, so as to prevent it from being vain or fruitless.⁴²

Here again that Christ “exhibits himself as in a manner actually present” was a far cry from any conception of the office of pastor neutered its “priestly” or shall we even say “sacramental” aspects, if by this we mean the mediated presence of Christ on earth. Accordingly, Calvin affirms, “nor could the office be more highly eulogized than when he said, *He that heareth you heareth me, and he that despiseth you despiseth me* (Luke 10:16).⁴³

However eloquently Calvin and Luther spoke of the office of minister, they never addressed the topic in a separate treatise in its own right. Perhaps then of all the classical reformed sources one could turn for a pastoral theology, it is perhaps most unfortunate that so little attention has been given to Martin Bucer of Strasburg and especially his *On The True Pastoral Care* and the only systematic

³⁷ Chrysostom, *Six Books*, 73:III.6, Quoted in *Classical Tradition*, p. 46.

³⁸ Purves, *Classical Tradition*, p. 46.

³⁹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*... 40, 35.

⁴⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Westminster Press, 1960), Bk. 4, Ch. 8, No. 14

⁴¹ *Institutes*, Book 3, Section 1.

⁴² C.f. *Institutes*, Book 4.3.2 where Calvin applied Eph. 4:10, that Christ “Ascended up far above all heaven t that he might fill all things” to the office of pastor.

⁴³ *Institutes*, 4.3.3.

treatise on pastoral care during the reformation period.⁴⁴ As recognized by Purves, Bucer's text is the "principle Reformation text on pastoral theology" and "makes a significant contribution toward developing the theological identity of pastoral work within Protestantism."⁴⁵ And again, David F. Wright credits Bucer's theology of the pastorate as "surely one of the noblest pastoral treatise to come out of the whole Reformation movement."⁴⁶

While it is true that Bucer followed the reformation pattern of nervousness about the term "priest" as applicable to the pastoral ministry, Bucer's theology of the pastorate is every bit as "priestly" a theology IF by this it is meant that Christ, in his ascended state, is present and acting through the Holy Spirit in the office of the pastor as an essential aspect of salvation on earth in the present age. And so on the one hand, against a sacerdotalist understanding of the priestly function of the pastor, Bucer once wrote, "

People have been led by them [Roman Catholic priest] into thinking that if they have been baptized and take part in the common ceremonies, and do not interfere in the affairs of the so-called priests, then they belong to the church and congregation of Christ, even though they may never really have come to know Christ our Lord and live in open sin, relying for their comfort in God not on Christ, but on the ceremonies of the so-called priests, their own good works, and the merits of dead saints.⁴⁷

In so far then as Chrysostom could establish an unequivocal relationship between the work of Christ and the work of the pastor in some immediate and necessary manner, Bucer will qualify as to make room for the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit as predicated upon divine election. And yet, contrary to the Anabaptist, and might we say most contemporary protestant evangelicals under the doctrine "everyone a minister," Bucer was prolific in his defense of the pastorate as uniquely set apart for the purpose of mediating the presence of Christ in our midst the pastoral office. His argument was basically this:

First, Bucer makes the case for Christ being present in, with and through the church in his ascended state of ministry. For instance, he wrote, "Christ alone rules in his church. This rule in his church is held and led by our Lord Christ personally and by His Spirit".⁴⁸ He further cites John 14:23,

⁴⁴ Perhaps mostly due to it's never being translated into English. A literal translation of its full title is *On The True Pastoral Care and the Correct Shepherd-Service: How this is to be established and carried out in the Church of Christ* (Translation of Title provided by Andrew Purves *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition*, p.83. See also Purves nice summation as to why Bucer has not received the attention that is due on pp. 76. In lieu of a published English translation, all citations and quotes are but "paraphrases" taken from an unpublished manuscript in English. It is hoped that this paper will soon be adapted as an introduction to a published English translation.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 76.

⁴⁶ Quoted by Purves, *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition*, p. 76. Quote taken from David F. Wright, "Martin Bucer 1591-1551: Ecumenical Theologian," in Wright, trans. And ed. *Common Places of Martin Bucer* (Abingdon, England: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1972), 21.

⁴⁷ Bucer, p. 2.

⁴⁸ Jer.23:5-6, Luke 1:31-33, John 17:1-2, Eph.5:28-32.

Mt.18:20, 28:20 to say that “Christ the Lord is always himself present with his church” and further explains that “He [Christ] is and dwells where he has left behind, but nonetheless truly and actually... for the Lord is never absent from his church, but is always personally present, personally doing and performing everything in all things.”⁴⁹

Second, Bucer argued that for Christ’s presence to be real, it must be mediated as through the pastoral office. He specified that through the “management of the church, our Lord Jesus carries out his pastoral office and the work of our salvation in his church through his ordained ministers.” And as if not already plain enough, he further explains:

As we have already said, our dear Lord is really present in his church, ruling, leading and feeding it himself. But he effects and carries out this his rule and the feeding of his lambs in such a way as to remain always in his heavenly nature (ascension), that is, in his divine and intangible state, because he has left this world. Therefore it has pleased him to exercise his rule, protection and care of us who are still in this world with and through the ministry of his word which he does outwardly and tangibly through his ministers and instruments.⁵⁰

Here again, following the reformation clarification of Christ’s presence in the Lord’s supper as not to be physical but spiritual as accomplished by the Holy Spirit, it would seem that Bucer makes the same distinction as applied to Christ’s presence in the sacred office of pastor as in the Lord’s supper, not by any literal and corporeal transformation, but by the advent of Christ in the Holy Spirit, not necessarily and not necessarily immediately, but truly or even “really” as the mediatorial office of Christ.

And third, as scriptural proof to a theology of Christ’s presence in and through the pastorate, Bucer will comment on a significant number of passages: For instance, on John 15:16 he notes “that the Lord has ordained his ministers of the Word, so that they might obtain a lasting fruit among the people, that is, people’s salvation.” And on John 20:21-23, “note how our Lord has been sent by the Father, and in the same way sends his ministers, gives them his Spirit and authority to forgive and retain sins, that is, to accept for salvation or reject for damnation.” And again on 1 Cor.3:5-7, “note that people come to faith through the ministers of Christ, although the work is certainly of God.” And finally, on Mt.16:19, Mt.10:20, “note that the work of the church’s ministry is necessary for the Lord to work in man’s heart and innermost being. And in all this these ministers of the church are servants of Christ and stewards of the secret things of God (1Cor.4:1), that is of Christ’s salvation and of the Holy Spirit not merely of the letter...”⁵¹ Here again, without encroachment upon the “secret things of God” as pertaining to his sovereignty in salvation, Bucer exalts not the person, but the office filled by persons such as to be sacred in the midst of the profane.

⁴⁹ Bucer, p. 9-11.

⁵⁰ Bucer, p. 3. c.f.Mt. 28:18-20, Lk.24:45-47.

⁵¹ Bucer, p. 11-12.

In summary then, Bucer, while steering clear of making the pastoral office itself the “agent of God’s grace” such then to usurp the sovereign role of the Holy Spirit acting when and where he pleases, Bucer nevertheless affirms the pastoral office as a mediating “means of grace” when accompanied by the Holy Spirit. He summarily concludes his theology of Christ’s presence in and through the pastoral ministry by declaring:

1. The power of the church’s ministry belongs not to the ministers, but to Christ the Lord. But this they certainly do not accomplish by their own powers, but through the power and work of the Lord. Of themselves they could not think of doing such a thing, but God equips them for ministry, to that end the Lord gives them his Spirit and understanding of the scriptures, his Spirit speaks through them, it is his power, his Spirit and his work, it is he who gives success... All power and the whole work in this matter belong to Christ our dear Lord; but ministers are his instruments, through whom he effects and fulfills this work of his in his elect

In other words for Bucer, efficacy in ministry was attributed to Christ in the Holy Spirit who is mediated in, with and through the priestly “office,” less anything inherent to one or another “name” (as related to the power of a given personality or celebrity status)!

2. From this we must go on to learn how harmful and pernicious those people are who teach that this ministry of the church is of no importance, a merely outward activity which does not contribute in any particular way to our salvation, and without which it is quite possible to become a Christian and receive God’s gifts.⁵²

For Bucer, the natural conclusion from the first point is his second point, namely, that the priestly ministry of the pastorate is an essential element of the gospel, no less in the New Covenant context as in the Old Covenant context. Whereas the language of “apostolic succession” was not explicit by Bucer, the concept of an office being derived ultimately from Christ through the apostles was explicit.

3. “So the Lord simply wants to maintain this order whereby he performs the work of our conversion, redemption and the whole salvation in us through his ministers. The first of those ministers he called himself, the others he calls, ordains and appoints through the ministry of his church.” ⁵³

And so, while the point of this essay has not been to refute the reformers concern against a sacerdotal priesthood in the church, it has sought to rediscover biblically what even the reformers recognized as the “priestly” identity of the pastor as distinct from the lay-elder, if but to preserve something of it’s sacred calling. The dynamic relationship between Christ and the mediated presence of

⁵² Bucer, p. 15.

⁵³ Bucer, p. 16.

Christ by Holy Spirit acting in and through the pastor office has been more recently noted by Andrew Purves as well:

The ministry of the Church is, by the Holy Spirit, a sharing in God's ministry to and for us in, through and as Jesus Christ... Pastoral theology then before it is a theology of what the church or the pastor does, is axiomatically and first of all a theology of the pasturing God, a theology of the living gospel of Jesus Christ.⁵⁴

Inferences:

Whereas it has not been the primary purpose of this essay to say much by way of application, one could envision a priestly theology of the pastorate as related to at least three pastoral issues—a pastoral identity, a pastoral calling and a pastoral job description. And of course, all three are inter-related.

First, with respect to pastoral identity, we have noted that a Biblical conception of ministry is less “personality” focused, especially in relation to what we trust in for efficacy unto salvation and gospel transformation. In so far as the pastor faithfully executes all things “God-humanward” and “human-Godward” as pertaining to word, sacrament and pastoral care and oversight, it could be said that Christ is in the midst of us by means of the pastor. And yet, this is a very different spirituality than the spirituality that wants to celebrate and even place confidence in the power of this or that personality in the church. This seems to be at the heart of the apostle Paul's warning to the Corinthian church against a celebrity driven spirituality.

*What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. **6** I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. (1 Cor.3:5)*

As then related to our confidence in ministry, there are basically two options, assuming that our ultimate confidence is in God for ministry-- either God working through personality or God working through office. The former will place a greater emphasis upon this or that personal characteristics whereas the latter will emphasize this or that "means of grace" that are inherent to the office of word, sacrament, pastoral care. Listen then to what Paul said about efficacy in ministry:

*When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. **2** For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. **3** And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. **4** My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, **5** so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God. (1 Cor.2:1f)*

⁵⁴ Andrew Purves, *Reconstructing Pastoral Theology: A Christological Foundation* p. 34

In other words, Paul's confidence was in the Holy Spirit acting in, with and through the *office* of apostle by means of the instruments of grace in word, sacrament and pastoral authority. This is of course significant-- in that the pastor is often confronted with personal shortcomings both in terms of "personality" and "morality." And yet, thank God, the efficacy of the gospel does not reside in these things, but in the Holy Spirit who mediates Christ through the church, and especially, by means of the pastor office that is in succession to the apostolic office. This is why "ordination" is such a big deal. It is the Biblical process wherein a calling to the office is discerned within the confessional context of the church whereby we can be more assured of our calling, not in ourselves, but in the God acting in the office of pastor. Here again, we remember the basis of confidence that was enjoined upon Timothy,

Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders. 1 Tim. 4:14

In short, ministers should think less of themselves and more of the power of God acting in, with and through the means of grace of their office unto salvation. In so doing, pastors can both, and at the same time, confess weaknesses while boasting of Christ's power working in and through them!

And he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.
2 Cor. 12:9

A priestly pastoral identity should also impact congregations. It will mean taking personality traits and pastoral and sermonic style much less seriously, and taking the functions of the office of pastor as can be executed by any number of personalities much more seriously. This would lead to a greater emphasis on a pastors qualifications and abilities in relation to word, sacrament and pastoral care and less on a pastors personal mannerism in so far as they are beside the point of ones morality and/or spirituality. Such an emphasis will diminish the long-term harmful effects of *celebrityism* in the church, both as destructive to pastors in so far as it tempts them to take pride in themselves with all kinds of negative implications for their own walk of faith, but also as destructive to congregations that will tend to face a severe crisis in identity in every pastoral transition and mess up. And as we have seen throughout redemptive history, a priestly pastoral identity will tend to result in a much greater role for lay-elders and key leaders than merely to sit and act as a members of an executive boards on behalf of the church. In order to preserve the special ministry of word and sacrament as pertaining to pastoral care, more counseling and more governing and more mediation could be done by lay-elders so that more time is allotted to the pastors to handle those cases of counseling that require greater training in the word, or more opportunity to develop liturgy and worship that is both vernacular sensitive and God

centered such as to be truly sacramental, or more time to developing a vision that can interpret the church's "God-humanward-"human-Godward" mission in the world into effective strategies, etc.

Second, to emphasize the "priest before the name" is for the persons who are pastors to consider the pastorate as a "calling" less a "career"—which then is to resist an entitlements mentality as related to the pastorate. To be sure, it is appropriate that those called to the pastoral ministry are enabled to make a living by it.⁵⁵ And yet to enter the office except by a "vow of poverty" in the sense that the pastor is not in it for the money or "entitlements" is it seems crucial to maintaining the integrity of the noble aspiration after the pattern of Christ. For instance, quite interestingly in I Cor. 9, after summarize the things that an apostle is "entitled to" by virtue of the honor due his office, (and by succession principle, the pastoral ministry), Paul makes an amazing concession, *Nevertheless, I have made no use of any of these rights.*

Far from being "a job," the pastoral ministry was sacred calling! Paul, in so many words, was willing if need to be to say, "I will do my work regardless of what you pay me, regardless of what you do for me!" Paul in fact will go on to say that although he is free with respect to receiving the things he is entitled to as an apostle, he has "nevertheless" freely made himself "a slave to all..." (vs. 19) But why? What was so precious about the noble dream of the pastorate that all personal rights and privileges were rendered null and void in comparison. Paul's answer: *I do anything for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.* (vs. 23) And as we have seen already, for Paul, the pastorate was an essential element of the gospel, even if needing to be qualified as predicated in order to preserve the reformation rejection of Roman Catholic sacerdotalism.⁵⁶

Third, relative to a pastoral job description, a priestly understanding of ministry will impact the whole *modus of operandi* in ministry that focuses on a holistic job description in ministry through word, sacrament and pastoral care. In other words, the pastor is less "specialist" as an academic and more a "generalist" as a practitioner so as to integrate word, sacrament and pastoral care in relation to Christ as prophet, priest and king respectively. Among other things, this will mean that the pastor is less eccentric in terms of a single focus, or less cultural war oriented and/or politically active—all so that the pastor can be more representative of Christ whose "kingdom is not of this world." This is not to de-emphasize the pastors "outward" focus in reaching the world, it is to emphasize the *missional* nature of the temple-church in and of itself which assumes a greater confidence in God acting in, with and through the ministry of the church as defined by its integration of word, sacrament and fellowship—even as these things are offered indiscriminately to the whole world unto salvation! In the spirit of Walter Brueggemann's poet-pastor, the priestly role of the pastor is to facilitate the "ready, steady, surprising

⁵⁵ c.f. I Tim.5:17, Gal.6:6 and especially I Cor.9.

⁵⁶ see above and footnote # 79.

proposal that the real world in which God invites us to live is not the one made available by the rulers of this age. The preacher has an awesome opportunity to offer... an existence shaped by the news of the gospel... a voice that shatters settled reality and evokes new possibilities.”⁵⁷

In other words, a priestly understanding of the ministry will want to re-enact in every aspect of a pastors duties that “God-humanward” and “human-Godward” activity of the priest. I am reminded here of what Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky have described as “leadership from the balcony.”⁵⁸ In the case of the pastor the “balcony” is the vantage point of a transcendent God who looks at things from above, where Christ is seated, in order to bring transformation of perspective and conditions below! Heifetz and Linsky explain how “Every day people have problems for which they do, in fact, have the necessary know-how and procedures. We call these technical problems.” Perhaps these are the kind of problems that warrant good lay-elders and key leaders in the church. And yet, as continued by Heifetz and Linsky, “there are a whole host of problems that are not amendable to authoritative expertise or standard operating procedures... We call these adaptive challenges because they require new experiments, new discoveries, and adjustments from numerous places in the organization or community.”⁵⁹ In this sense, if the balcony is from the vantage point of God, the pastors role will enable us to ask the greater question, “what’s really going on here” according to the meta-narrative of redemptive history breaking into the lives of everyday people.

AS then pertaining to preaching, a priestly identity will impact pastoral function in sermons as to put much less stress on providing “sacred entertainment” by the power of personality and more stress on the degree to which a sermon is faithful to the a redemptive exposition. How would it change the pastors preparation and the peoples expectation, if the modern day sermon was measured after the Levitical model as described by Nehemiah: *they read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the people a sense of its meaning so that the people understood the reading (Neh.8:8)?* To be sure, the temptation for the modern preacher is to take oneself and therefore the accolades and critiques of their sermons too seriously as related to style and elocution, but to not take seriously enough perhaps what is the substance of a good sermon which is to give a reading from the sacred text and then give the people a sense as to what it means in relation to God’s redemption in their lives as ultimately fulfilled in Christ. In this sense, from the redemptive historical perspective, every sermon becomes an Emmaus Road experience—wherein in every genre of scripture, people are enabled to see Jesus!

In the case of pastoral visitation, the temptation is to consider the value of a visit based merely on what a pastor has to say or pray out of his/her person or personality. But notwithstanding the importance of being faithful in what we say or pray, a “priestly office” vs. “person” focused identity gives

⁵⁷ Walter Brueggemann in his *Finally comes the Poet, Daring Speech for Proclamation* p.3, p. 5.

⁵⁸ Ronald Heifetz, Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line, Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading.*

⁵⁹ Heifetz, p. 13.

new meaning to “just being there” in so far as the “office” of pastor is uniquely instituted to assure the people that God has not left them to their life circumstances alone.

Conclusion:

There is a particularly poignant scene in Graham Greene’s novel that is worth remembering. The “priest with no name” is praying. It is perhaps his finest moment while at the same time, his worst. The tension is intense. As told by Greene,

The priest sat on the floor, holding the brandy-flask. Presently he unscrewed the cap and put his mouth to it. The spirit didn’t do a thing for him—it might have been water. He put it down again and began some kind of a general confession, speaking in a whisper. He said, “I have committed fornication.” The formal phrase meant nothing at all: it was like a sentence in a newspaper: you couldn’t feel repentance over a think like that. He started again, “I have lain with a woman,” and tried to imagine the other priest asking him, “How many times” Was she married?” “No.” Without thinking what he was doing, he took another drink of brandy.

As the liquid touched his tongue he remembered his child coming in out of the glare: the sullen unhappy knowledgeable face. He said, “Oh God, help her. Damn me, I deserve it, but let her live for ever.” This was the love he should have felt for every soul in the world: all the fear and the wish to save concentrated unjustly on the one child. He began to weep; it was as if he had to watch her from the shore drown slowly because he had forgotten how to swim. He thought: This is what I should feel all the time for everyone, and he tried to turn his brain away towards the half-caste, the lieutenant, even a dentist he had once sat with for a few minutes, the child at the banana station, calling up a long succession of faces, pushing at his attention as if it were a heavy door which wouldn’t budge. For those were all in danger too. He prayed, “God help them,” but in a moment of prayer he switched back to his child beside the rubbish-dump, and he knew it was for her only that he prayed. Another failure.

*He prays,
"O God, forgive me—I am a proud, lustful, greedy man. I have loved authority too much. These people are martyrs—protecting me with their own lives. They deserve a martyr to care for them—not a man like me, who loves all the wrong things."*

After a while he began again; “I have been drunk—I don’t know how many times; there isn’t a duty I haven’t neglected; I have been guilty of pride, lack of charity... “The words were becoming formal again, meaning nothing. For he had no confessor to turn his mind away from the formula to the fact.⁶⁰

There is a mystery here that must need exploring—how it is that the person filling the office is himself in need of the office. For in Green’s novel, we get the picture of a nameless priest, whose office is the mediator of confession and absolution, himself a “person” struggling in need of the office he inhabits! Perhaps this is symbolic of the state of things when the name is confused with the office, even as to replace the office itself. For devoid of the priestly office, we are in fact devoid of the mediated grace of God—this no less true of the person filling the office as the persons filling the church. Such is the danger then of loosing the priest with no name!

⁶⁰ Graham Greene, *The Power and the Glory*, p. 207-208.

How is it that the one who facilitates confession is himself in need of a facilitator? To be sure, the very construction of the question illustrates that the two must be kept distinct, as per the gist of this essay. The person and the office are distinct—and the efficacy of ministry is inherent to the office as Christ’s instrument by the Holy Spirit, albeit inhabited by a mere mortal, even sinful person. Herein we are led to our final conclusion—namely the danger to the minister himself (the person) in confusing the person with the office. For when it happens, that a mere mortal assumes for himself the efficacy of salvation, even if unconsciously, he looses for himself the grace of salvation mediated through his sacred office. Every person needs a priest, even if it is priest that is mediated in the office he fills himself. This is but another way of saying that the minister is in need of ministry, even if his counsel, sermons, absolutions spoken in his own voice are allowed to speak to his own soul. Pastor’s need the weight of sin and despair lifted as does everyone else. To confuse office with person is to loose the mediated presence of Christ for himself. Just as pastors are called to the ministry of a “priest with no name, it is never the case that the name filling the priestly office is without a priest himself!