

## **A Biblical Assessment of Luther's View on Priesthood of All Believers and the Office of Ministry.**

### **Abstract:**

*Based on the biblical teaching that we are a universal priesthood and members are priests, many infer all members can be Pastors. The endless debate on the women ordination to ministry calls for a correct biblical understanding of pastoral ministry within the priesthood of all believers. Luther's view can be of help when it has been assessed from the biblical perspective.*

**Key Words:** royal priesthood, priesthood of all believers, office, pastoral ministry.

### **Introduction**

The 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation served as a turning point in Christian history. It prompted socio-cultural, political, and religious upheavals. The contribution of Luther in the Protestant theology and practice is widely recognized, and its lingering effect is still felt today. But questions have been raised about the relationship between priesthood of all believers and office of ministry in his writings, and how his view on priesthood of all believers and the office of ministry is assessed from a biblical perspective. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to determine if Luther's view has a biblical support and therefore should form a basis for the Church's theology on ministry and practice today.

The paper starts with an overview of the formation and crystallization of Luther's teaching on priesthood of all the believers. But concomitant with it is his view on pastoral ministry. Then the paper proceeds with a biblical evaluation of

Luther's view of priesthood of all believers and pastoral ministry, through analysis of related biblical texts, from the Old Testament (Ex 19:6; 23:22 [LXX]; Isa 61:6) and the New Testament (1 Pet 2:5,9; Rev 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).

## **Development**

Luther's theological views did not end with the nailing of his 95 theses on the door of the church in Wittenberg in October 1517. He was on his way to speak against what he called three walls which Roman Catholics erected round themselves: (1) distinction between the temporal power and the spiritual power, the latter being higher, (2) Papacy's exclusive prerogative to interpret Scriptures, and (3) Papacy's exclusive prerogative to call a Council.<sup>1</sup>

Generally, his view on the priesthood of all believers is set against the first wall. "It has been devised that the Pope, bishops, priests, and monks are called the spiritual estate, princes, lords, artificers, and peasants are the temporal estate."<sup>2</sup> Luther's response was clear,

All Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them, save of office alone. As St. Paul says (1 Cor. xii.), we are all one body, though each member does its own work, to serve the others. This is because we have one baptism, one Gospel, one faith, and are all Christians alike; for baptism, Gospel, and faith, these alone make spiritual and Christian people.

Thus we are all consecrated as priests by baptism, as St. Peter says: "Ye are a royal priesthood, a holy

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<sup>1</sup> Luther, "Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation," trans. C. A. Buchheim, accessed 27 October 2017, [http://sjsu.edu/people/cynthia.rostankowski/courseHUM1BS17/Lecture\\_26%20Luther\\_Lotzer\\_CCalvin.pdf](http://sjsu.edu/people/cynthia.rostankowski/courseHUM1BS17/Lecture_26%20Luther_Lotzer_CCalvin.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Luther, "Address to the Nobility."

nation" (1 Peter ii. 9); and in the book of Revelations: "and hast made us unto our God (by Thy blood) kings and priests" (Rev. v. 10).<sup>3</sup>

Luther understood that priesthood of all believers was inseparably connected with the office of ministry. Cameron A. MacKenzie further explains,

By 1520, Luther was clearly operating from an evangelical perspective, and his theology was developing rapidly in response to his papal opponents. This opposition was not only theoretical but also practical, so Luther often wrote in order to justify a course of action. These circumstances led him to new understandings of the priesthood of all believers, the ministry, and ordination.<sup>4</sup>

Luther's view on priesthood of all believers and the office of ministry spread overtime.<sup>5</sup> Stephen Squires' doctoral study on the subject indicates a systematic development in four phases:<sup>6</sup>

- (1) Early development of his concept on universal priesthood (1517 -1520)
- (2) Universal priesthood and the office of ministry (1521 – 1523)
- (3) Challenges to the office and the universal priesthood (1524 – 1529)

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<sup>3</sup> Luther, "Address to the Nobility."

<sup>4</sup> Cameron A. Mackenzie, "The 'Early' Luther on Priesthood of All Believers, Office of the Ministry, and Ordination," accessed 17 October, 2017, <http://www.ctsfw.net/media/pdfs/mackenzieearlyluther.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Squires, "Absolutism and the Universal Priesthood: From Luther to Spener," Doctor of Theology Dissertation, Boston University, 2013, 53.

<sup>6</sup> Squires, 53 – 129.

(4) Continued development of the office of ministry and universal priesthood (1530 – 1546).

In his treatise, “Answer to the Hyperchristian, Hyperspiritual, and Hyperlearned Book by Goat Emser in Leipzig – Including Some Thoughts Regarding His Companion, the Fool Murner,” Luther shares his understanding of Petrine universal priesthood as spiritual priesthood: “When St. Peter says, ‘We are all priests’ [I Pet. 2:9], he says this is said in the spiritual sense and not in the literal one.”<sup>7</sup> But Luther’s remarks on priesthood of all believers and the office of the ministry can be examined from his “Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation” (1520), and “Right and Power of a Christian Congregation or Community to Judge all Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers, Established and Proved from Scripture” (1523).<sup>8</sup>

The year 1520 saw the publication of one of his fundamental principles of the reformation: the universal priesthood. According to C. A. Buchheim, “in the ‘address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation [1520],’ Luther attacked the corruptions of the Church and the abuses of its authority, and asserted the right of the layman to spiritual independence.”<sup>9</sup> Luther’s treatise, “Right and Power of a Christian Congregation or Community to Judge all Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers, Established and Proved from Scripture,”

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<sup>7</sup> Martin Luther, “Answer to the Hyperchristian, Hyperspiritual, and Hyperlearned Book by Goat Emser in Leipzig – Including Some Thoughts Regarding His Companion, the Fool Murner,” in Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings,” ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 75.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Luther, “Right and Power of a Christian Congregation or Community to Judge all Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers, Established and Proved from Scripture,” trans. Albert T.W. Steinhaeuser, accessed 15 November 2017, <https://www.checkluther.com/wp-content/uploads/1523-The-Right-and-Power-of-a-Christian-Congregation-or-Community-to-Judge-etc.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> C. A. Buckheim, trans. “Martin Luther, *Address To The Nobility of the German Nation* (1520),” accessed 27 October 2017, [http://sjsu.edu/people/cynthia.rostankowski/courseHUM1BS17/Lecture\\_26%20Luther\\_Lotzer\\_CCalvin.pdf](http://sjsu.edu/people/cynthia.rostankowski/courseHUM1BS17/Lecture_26%20Luther_Lotzer_CCalvin.pdf)

made its way in 1523. Cameron A. MacKenzie traces how it came about and what it contains:

[Luther] addressed this treatise originally to the town of Leisnig that had adopted the Reformation in the spring of 1522 but was having difficulty implementing it because the right of patronage, which included both the right to name parish priests and certain claims on parish revenues, belonged to the nearby Cistercian monastery. In order to justify implementing the Reformation in their town, therefore, Leisnig's leaders requested Luther to prepare a biblical rationale for their proceeding on their own to call their own pastors, reorganize their finances, and reform their worship. The result was actually three writings – one devoted to each of these topics. This one, of course, is devoted to the question of whether the people of Leisnig had the right to appoint and dismiss their own clergy – to which Luther responds with a resounding “Yes.”<sup>10</sup>

## **Priesthood of All Believers and Office of Ministry**

### **All priests - Equality in Status.**

For Luther, of the three walls erected by the Roman Catholic Church, the first to be demolished was the one that is related to the distinction between laity (spiritual) and clergy (temporal).<sup>11</sup> The Christian Church is a spiritual estate, that is, it is about relationship with God. All members are in the same situation: all under the law, and in need of Savior.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, all Christians are born priests. Luther made clear the

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<sup>10</sup> Cameron A. Mackenzie, “The ‘Early’ Luther on Priesthood of All Believers, Office of the Ministry, and Ordination,” accessed 17 October, 2017, <http://www.ctsfw.net/media/pdfs/mackenzieearlyluther.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Mullett, *Martin Luther* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 104.

<sup>12</sup> Mackenzie, “The ‘Early’ Luther on Priesthood of All Believers, Office of the Ministry, and Ordination.”

concept that “none of us is born an apostle, preacher, teacher, pastor; there all of us are born solely priests.”<sup>13</sup>

### **Priestly Authority to All Christians.**

That Luther views supreme authority as belonging to Christians is also seen in his understanding of the administration of the word of God and the sacraments: these are a vocation by the clergy who are “exercising an authority that belongs in the first instance to every Christian.”<sup>14</sup> In reaction to his papal opponents, Luther went as far as to say “in the New Testament every Christian has this authority to forgive sins.”<sup>15</sup> Equally, being a priest, every Christian can baptize.<sup>16</sup>

### **Priestly Authority of All members Has Biblical Mandate:**

For no one can deny that every Christian has God’s Word and is taught of God and anointed by Him to the priesthood. Thus Christ says in John 6:45, “They shall all be taught of God.” And in Psalm 45:7, “God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.” By “fellows” are meant Christians, Christ’s brethren, consecrated to be priests with Him. As Peter also says in 1 Peter 2:9, “Ye are a royal priesthood, that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you into his marvelous light.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says* (Saint Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 1959), 1140, quoted in Art Lindsey, “The Priesthood of All Believers.”

<sup>14</sup> WA 6:409.7-10 (MacKenzie, “The ‘Early’ Luther on Priesthood of All Believers, Office of the Ministry, and Ordination,”)

<sup>15</sup> *Sermon on the Sacrement of Penance* (1517). *LW*, 35:22,13.

<sup>16</sup> Martin Luther, “Address to the Nobility.”

<sup>17</sup> Martin Luther, “The Right and Power of a Christian Congregation or Community to Judge all Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers, Established and Proved from Scripture,” trans. Albert T.W. Steinhäuser, accessed 17 October, 2017, <https://www.checkluther.com/wp-content/uploads/1523-The-Right-and-Power-of-a-Christian-Congregation-or-Community-to-Judge-etc..pdf>

## **All Priests - Difference of Office**

At the same time, there is a clear functional difference between Christians. There are occasions for service. All Christians, “do not all have the same work to do.”<sup>18</sup> In this sense, pastoral ministry is an office. However, the office does not grant a special status. Rather, it is special calling or work, in which a Pastor is exercising spiritual power on behalf of others.<sup>19</sup> This is evident in Luther’s own statement: “but within the royal priesthood we have to think of a special qualification of priesthood resulting in an ordained ministry within the church.”<sup>20</sup>

The ordained ministry in the Church is needed because of the importance of the preaching of the Gospel:

Now the certain mark of the Christian congregation is the preaching of the Gospel in its purity. For as one can tell by the army standard, as by a sure sign, what leader and what army have taken the field, so one may surely know by the Gospel where Christ and His army are stationed. Of this we have God’s sure promise in Isaiah 55:10. “My word,” He says, “that goeth forth out of my mouth, shall not return unto me void; but as the rain cometh down from heaven and watereth the earth, so shall my word accomplish all things whereto I send it.” Hence we are certain that where the Gospel is preached, there must be Christians, no matter how few in number or how sinful and frail they be; just as where the Gospel is not preached and the doctrines of men hold sway, there can be no Christians but only

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<sup>18</sup> WA 6.408.26-30. (MacKenzie, “The ‘Early’ Luther on Priesthood of All Believers, Office of the Ministry, and Ordination.”)

<sup>19</sup> Martin Luther, “Address to the Nobility.”

<sup>20</sup> T. F. Torrance, *Royal Priesthood: A Theology of Ordained Ministry*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: T & T Clark, 1993), 36.

heathens, no matter how great their numbers or how saintly and good their lives.<sup>21</sup>

Consequently, there is need of preachers:

“A Christian congregation, however, should not and cannot be without the Word of God. It follows therefore logically enough from the foregoing, that it must have teachers and preachers to administer this Word. . . . and since we ought not to tempt God to send down anew preachers from heaven: therefore we must do as the Scriptures say, and call and appoint from among ourselves men who are found fit for this work, and whom God has enlightened with understanding and endowed with the requisite gifts.”<sup>22</sup>

A preacher (minister) should be called by the congregation for that ministry:

If there is no Christian congregation, a Christian ought to preach to the heathens. But, on the other hand, when the Christian is in a place where there are Christians, who have the same power and right as he, he should not thrust himself forward, but should rather let himself be called and drawn forth to preach and teach in the stead and by the commission of the rest.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Martin Luther, “The Right and Power of a Christian Congregation or Community to Judge all Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers, Established and Proved from Scripture,” translated by Albert T.W. Steinhäuser, accessed 27 October 2017,

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, “The Right and Power of a Christian Congregation.” However, there is an exception to this:

Indeed, a Christian has such power that he may and should arise and teach, even among Christians, without being called of men, in case he finds the teacher in that place to be in error, provided that this be done in a becoming and decent manner. Such a case is plainly described by

Luther makes the pastoral-preaching ministry as the highest office in the Church: “the man to whom has been committed the office of preaching has committed to him the highest office in the Christian Church. He may then also baptize, say mass, and take full charge of the care of souls.”<sup>24</sup> But the latter ministries (baptizing, saying mass, caring of the souls) which are minor offices could be performed by others (i.e. chaplains and monks).<sup>25</sup>

## **Summary**

Luther’s statement in his treatise “Address to the Nobility,” can clearly summarize his view of the priesthood of all believers and its relationship with the office of the ministry:

between laymen and priests, princes and bishops, or, as they call it, between spiritual and temporal persons, the only real difference is one of office and function, and not of estate; for they are all of the same spiritual estate, true priests, bishops, and popes, though their functions are not the same—just as among priests and monks every man has not the same functions. And this, as I said above, St. Paul says (Rom. xii.; 1 Cor. xii.), and St. Peter (1 Peter ii.): “We, being many, are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another.” Christ’s body is not double or twofold, one temporal, the other spiritual. He is one Head, and He has one body. . . .

In the same way the temporal authorities hold the sword and the rod in their hands to punish the

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St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:30, where he says, “If anything be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace.” Notice what St. Paul does here. He commands the man who is teaching to hold his peace and to retire (among Christians!), and commands the hearer to arise, even without a call, because necessity knows no law (Ibid.).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

wicked and to protect the good. A cobbler, a smith, a peasant, every man, has the office and function of his calling, and yet all alike are consecrated priests and bishops, and every man should by his office or function be useful and beneficial to the rest, so that various kinds of work may all be united for the furtherance of body and soul, just as the members of the body all serve one another.  
...<sup>26</sup>

In his insistence on the universal priesthood, “Luther never lost sight of the fact that God had established the public pastoral office through the congregation's call and for its sake.”<sup>27</sup>

## **Biblical Assessment:**

### **Priesthood of All Believers and the Office of the Ministry**

#### **OT Priesthood**

P. Gerald Damsteegt rightly observes that “ever since sin entered into the world there have been priests.”<sup>28</sup> Prior to Sinai, the role of the priest has been played by the head of each family for his household.<sup>29</sup> That role has been particularly highlighted at Sinai and thereafter. As Raoul Dederen notes:

at the heart of the Hebrew religion was one's relationship with God, a relationship disrupted by sin. The necessity of maintaining this relationship made the priests and their ministrations immensely important. Theirs was the role of mediators between God and Israel. They attended

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<sup>26</sup> Martin Luther, “Address to the Nobility.”

<sup>27</sup> Eugene F. Klug, “Luther on the Ministry,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 47/4 (1983), 293.

<sup>28</sup> P. Gerald Damsteegt, “Priesthood of All Believers,” in *Prove All Things: A Response to Women in the Ministry*, ed. Mercedes H. Dyer (Berrien Spring: Adventist Heritage Ministries, 2000), 113.

<sup>29</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption*, 50.

to the solemn task of approaching God on behalf of the people. Priests did so not because they were innately better or holier than the rest of the nation but because that was the task that God, in his mercy, had entrusted to them. Their functions and responsibilities were evidence of the mercy of God toward his people and of the importance of maintaining an acceptable relationship with God.<sup>30</sup>

### **Priesthood As Office before Sinai.**

First-born males were sanctified for the Lord's service (Exod 13:1, 2, 12). Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, though outside the Israelite community, yet described as a person who had knowledge of God, and aside from being the priest-head of the family, was explicitly said to be "priest of Midian." (Exod 18:1)

The word "priest" used in this category occurs two times in Exodus 19 (vv. 22, 24), clearly indicating that there was priesthood among the Israelites even before the proclamation that the covenant nation which was about to be established at Sinai would be a "kingdom of priests" (19:6), and before the official inauguration of the Aaronic priesthood (Exod 28). Exodus 19:22 reads, "Also let the priests who come near the Lord consecrate themselves," and 19:24, "do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the Lord." Clearly, priests were distinguished from the people (Greek *laos* from which "lay" "laic" comes from), though the priests were integral part of God's people. According to C. Keil and F. Delitzsche, these priests were neither the sons of Aaron, nor the first-born, but "those who had hitherto discharged the duties of the priestly office according to natural right, and custom."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Raoul Dederen, "The Priesthood of 'All' Believers," in *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Nancy Vyhmeister (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998), 20.

<sup>31</sup> C. Keil and F. Delitzsche, *The Pentateuch* (Edinburg: T & T Clark), 2:103.

## **Priesthood of All in Exodus 19:6.**

The statement of Exodus 19:5-6 has been declared by God in the context of the establishment of the covenant between Him and the Israelites. It has a prophetic element that is predictive:<sup>32</sup> **“if** you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, **then** you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people. . . And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” The Masoretic text of Exodus 19:6 has *mamleket kohanim* (“kingdom of priests”), whereas Targum (Pseudo-Jonathan) version reads *mlkin ukhnm* (“[crowned] kings and [sanctified] priests”). The LXX reads *basileion hierateuma* (“royal priesthood”).

There are two options for the meaning of “kingdom of priests”: (1) kingdom composed of individual priests who individually have access to and serve God, and (2) kingdom with a collective priestly responsibility on behalf of all peoples toward God. Collective priestly responsibility of the nation may be intended.<sup>33</sup> That sense seems captured by the translators of the LXX on Exodus 19:6 and 23:22 (which is not in the Masoretic text). Its calling was “to be the vehicle of the knowledge and salvation of God to the nations of the earth.”<sup>34</sup> However, it is equally possible that individual priest is in mind, as corroborated by the Isaianic prophecy (61:6, “you shall be named the priests of the Lord; they shall call you the servants of our God”). Whatever the case, the predictive element remains. Their being priests (or in the royal priesthood) depends on their full obedience to God.

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<sup>32</sup> R. M. Davidson, “Interpreting the Old Testament Prophecy,” in *Understanding Scripture An Adventist Approach*, ed. G. W. Reid (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2006), 193.

<sup>33</sup> J. A. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood* (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 69-75.

<sup>34</sup> Keil and F. Delitzsche, 2:98.

## **Priesthood As Office in the General Priesthood at Sinai.**

After the giving of the ten commandments as basis for the covenant, Aaron and his children have been officially appointed as priests. “That he may minister to me as priest (*hierateuein moi*).” (28:1). “Israel continued to be a ‘kingdom of priests’ even though not every person officiated as a priest, because those who performed as priests represented the families and the nation.”<sup>35</sup> Aaron and his children were appointed priests among priests (or priests of priests).<sup>36</sup> The *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* further explains:

While the distinction between priests and people had to be clearly maintained in order that God’s utter holiness be recognized, similarities between priests and laity bring attention to the fact that all Israelites were priests in certain respects. Though they did not minister in the tabernacle or temple, they were priests in the land as a whole. For example, a rebellious city was to be offered as a burnt offering at the hand of all the laity (Deut 13:16; cf. [cf. cf.. compare] Deut 13:10). Likewise, the Israelites were to represent God before the nations (Ex 19:6; Is 42:6). So high priest, Levite and layperson each had priestly duties in their respective venues.<sup>37</sup>

Therefore, the priesthood as office is among the various roles in the kingdom of priests. “Despite these various leading roles [priests, elders, rulers, prophets, judges, kings], the nation of Israel remained a “kingdom of priests” because of the covenant God had made with His people. The covenant continued to be

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<sup>35</sup> Damsteegt, 114.

<sup>36</sup> Paul L. Schrieber, “Priests Among Priests: The Office of the Ministry in Light of the Old Testament,” *Concordia Journal* (July, 1988), 215 – 228.

<sup>37</sup> Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman III, eds., “Priest,” *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), s.v. “Priest.”

relevant throughout the Old Testament era (Jud 2:30; 1 Kings 19:14; 2 Kings 17:15, 35, 36; Neh 13:19).<sup>38</sup>

## **New Testament Priesthood**

### **Exodus 19:6 as Background and Basis.**

Exodus 19:6 forms a background and basis for New Testament teaching on priesthood of all believers. The influence of the Septuagint translation of Exodus 19:6 seems evident in 1 Pet 2:9 (*basileion hierateuma*, “royal priesthood”). Actually, the word *hierateuma* (*hierateuma hagion*, “holy priesthood”) has already been introduced in 2:6. Peter’s statement is no longer predictive; it is a present reality: “you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people.” What Israel failed is now fully realized in the Church.

The texts of Revelation (1:6, *basileian, hiereis* [kingdom, priests]; 5:10, *basileis kai hiereis*, [kings and priests]), though closer to the Masoretic text than the LXX, use an aorist indicate tense (*epoiēsas*, “you have made [them priests]”). Looking back to the cross when God had made the covenant of blood with His people, John, like Peter, saw that what God had intended in Exodus 19:6 for Israel had now been realized in the church.<sup>39</sup>

### **All Born-Again Christians in the Priesthood.**

The New Testament teaches that “all born-again Christians belong to the priesthood.”<sup>40</sup> “Baptism is the anointing and consecration of every born-again believer as priest of Christ. It is the sign of our universal call.”<sup>41</sup> “By virtue of our union with Christ we partake of a priesthood that is derived from his. His

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<sup>38</sup> Damsteegt, 114.

<sup>39</sup> Revelation 20:6 is in future tense (*esountai hiereis tou theou kai tou Christou kai basileusousin met’ autou* [“they will be priests of God and Christ and they will reign with Him”]), for it obviously refers to what is going to happen during the Millenium.

<sup>40</sup> Dederen, 10.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 17.

priestly standing before God is imputed to every Christian believer.”<sup>42</sup>

### **Christ as (High) Priest.**

The death of Jesus on the cross abolished the sacrificial system and the ministry of the temple. Yet it is maintained that there is a continuation of OT priestly ministry in the NT, in the person of Jesus Christ (Heb 5:6; 7:11, 15; 8:4). “What in the past had been undertaken by priests and Levites on a continuous basis had now been fully achieved once for all in Jesus Christ, whose priesthood was seen as a continuation of the Old Testament priestly ministry.”<sup>43</sup>

### **Individual and Collective Priesthood.**

The idea of individual priesthood is clearly spelled out in the New Testament. Paul exhorts Christians, “that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is your reasonable service.*” (Rom 12:1). Equally, it is a collective priesthood. As Dederen states,

the priesthood is viewed in a collective sense as belonging to the whole body of believers. In every instance, whether in 1 Peter or Revelation, the words "priest" and "priesthood" are used collectively. The community of Christian believers, not just the individuals, is priestly. This is particularly plain in 1 Pet 2: 5 and 9 where the apostle uses "a body of priests (*hierateuma*)," in parallel with "a spiritual house," "a chosen race," and "God's people."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>43</sup> Damsteegt, 114, concurs, “this spiritual kingdom no longer had the offices of priest, high priest, or king, for Christ had become their Priest, High Priest, and King.”

<sup>44</sup> Dederen, 20.

## **Roles of the Priesthood.**

The NT talks about corporate priesthood where each member can have access to God, and in turn offer spiritual sacrifices.<sup>45</sup> Ellen G. White concurs, “The new believers represent their Lord Jesus Christ and function as priests by delivering the gospel message to all the world. This new priesthood is to lead people to the heavenly High Priest through the gospel.”<sup>46</sup>

**Role Distinction in the Royal Priesthood.** Ellen G. White makes a difference between ordained ministers (office) and believers in the gospel commission:

The Saviour's commission to the disciples included all the believers. It includes all believers in Christ to the end of time. It is a fatal mistake to suppose that the work of saving souls depends alone on the ordained minister. All to whom the heavenly inspiration has come are put in trust with the gospel. All who receive the life of Christ are ordained to work for the salvation of their fellow men.<sup>47</sup>

Additionally the need of leadership (eldership) in the royal priesthood is highlighted in the New Testament. God is the God of order (1 Cor 14:33). Damsteegt clarifies:

He [Christ] also provided a plan for a most efficient model of organization to protect the church against heresies, prevent confusion, and integrate the various gifts He has given church members to make the church into a powerful, well-organized army to invade the kingdom of Satan. This New

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ellen G. White, *Desire of the Ages* Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1898), 822.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

Testament model of leadership continues to use the Old Testament office of elder but gives it a more spiritual character.<sup>48</sup>

### **Discontinuity and Continuity of the Priesthood and the Pastoral Ministry.**

We have earlier mentioned the abolishment of the sacrificial system and the ministry of the temple, thus abolishing, at least in part, the priestly office. This is a reason why the word *hierateia* is not used for the office of the ministry in the New Testament. Instead, the New Testament has *presbuterion* (1 Tim 4:14). *Presbuteroi* are “elders,” appointed and ordained for the ministry as spiritual leaders of the Church (1 Tim 5:17, 22; Titus 1:5). Elsewhere, they are called *episkopoi* (“bishops, overseers,” 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:7) or *poimenes* (“pastors, shepherds,” Eph 4:11). The three words are used interchangeably, referring to same office (all three are used in 1 Peter 5:1-4), even though they indicate various features of their ministry.<sup>49</sup>

Nevertheless, we may also safely say that the office of the ministry continues, in certain aspects, with the Old Testament Priesthood. Both the priestly office in the Old Testament and the “presbytery” of the New Testament require qualifications from those who would hold the office (Lev 21:1-24; 1 Tim 3:1-6; Tit 1:6-9). But the continuity can be seen also in terms of their functions. As Schrieber spells out:

That it is possible to see the pastoral ministry in continuity in certain respects with the Old Testament priesthood is evident in the many functions both have in common. Both consist of

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<sup>48</sup> Damsteegt, 115.

<sup>49</sup> John MacArthur, “Biblical Eldership,”  
<https://www.gty.org/library/articles/GCCDD01/biblical-eldership>

men who are called into the office, (pastors, however, not by birth); both need to meet certain qualifications and restrictions; both receive their living from the people's contributions; both have concern for people in distress and sickness; both lead in public worship; both administer "sacrifices" of praise and thanksgiving; both administer "Sacraments"; both deal with confession and absolution; both are to lead sanctified lives; both pray for themselves and the people under their care; both teach and preach the Word of God publicly; and both bless in God's name and place God's name upon people.<sup>50</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Luther's view on priesthood of all believers is intimately tied up with his understanding and emphasis of the need of pastoral ministry.<sup>51</sup> Luther had in mind a pastoral ministry, distinct, well-defined, done by qualified persons, and needed by the church, yet called among the brethren and within the parameters of priesthood of all believers.

Klug's summary is to the point:

The term "ministry" thus has both a wide and a narrow sense. In the first sense it refers to the rights and duties in connection with the Gospel which belong by Christ's ordering to the totality of the spiritual priesthood of believers (I Pet. 2:9; Matt. 18: 17; John 20: 23; 1 Cor. 3:21 f.). Every Christian, young or old, man, woman, or child, possesses this ministry as a believing, baptized

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<sup>50</sup> Schrieber, 227.

<sup>51</sup> Against Luther's evolving view that every Christian, which was later changed to chaplain/monk, the NT implies that only ministers can baptize (1 Cor 1:12), and most likely conducting other church functions as holy communion.

child of God, who by his faith is a member of Christ's church and His royal priesthood, along with all the privileges and responsibilities that accompany that station. In the second sense, however, ministry is used in a narrow and the proper and primary sense in Scripture to refer to the office of the public pastoral ministry to which a qualified man is called and for which he is chosen, by God's will, through the Christian believers gathered at one place in a congregation.<sup>52</sup>

We conclude that Luther's view on the need of office of the ministry in the universal priesthood is in line with and is drawn from the biblical teaching on the same. Luther's view has enlightened us for a clearer and more correct understanding of the office of the ministry in the priesthood of all believers. As heirs of the Reformations,<sup>53</sup> we should not lose sight of it.

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<sup>52</sup> Klug, 194.

<sup>53</sup> See Hugh Dunton, Daniel Heinz, Dennis Porter, and Ronald Strasadowsky, eds., *Heirs of the Reformation: Be Story of Seventh-day Adventists in Europe*. Grantham, EnglandG: Stanborough Press, 1997.