

A Priest Before A Name:
*Rediscovering The Classic Notion Of The Always-Present Ministry Of Christ
In The “Priestly” Office Of Pastor*

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 dramatic conclusion of Graham Greene's novel *The Power and the Glory* ends 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 to arouse the loyalty and affection of a young boy-- the man's name was of no consequence, but the office was everything!

Imagine today such a response by the run of the mill protestant evangelical where personality and celebrity status is more often than not the credentialing emphases, and where “success” is measured against the market standards of growth and popularity rather than against any theological standard intrinsic to a sacred office-- not to mention the pastoral scandals. In such a context, the ministry is centered on the person who ministers, less on Christ who ministers through the sacred office set apart by the ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral care in order for the gospel and even Christ himself to be mediated by the Holy Spirit. As Luther once noted, "This office [the office of the ministry] is a service or ministry proceeding from Christ to us, and not from us to Christ."² And yet,

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

² 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

any today have turned this order completely around. 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 have 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, made renown 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 as the man, however sinful and weak, 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.³ And whatever else Graham Greene had in mind in writing this curious novel, one is left longing for a priest. I suspect this is especially true for those who hold to the office of pastor today, wherein the *power and glory* of Green’s novel is located in the office itself as related to Christ’s ministry, less the persons filling it, much to the delight of any who labor under the populist expectations of contemporary ministry.

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 a totalitarian “big brother” and more bottom up by a totalitarian egalitarianism driven by its populist core values of being entertained, appeased and democratized. We are reminded even 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). We might also be reminded of the masterful and often quoted introduction to *Amusing Ourselves To*

³ My point will not be 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, 1Tim.5:22 and 2Tim.2:15 all of which take the person filling the office very seriously, lest the office itself is devalued and/or shamed.

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 appose 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. And if Greene dramatized the possible extinction of the priesthood altogether across a land, the present concern is to address the possible loss of the sacred, or what Mircea Eliade describes as the “fascinating mystery” of an *hierophany* as here applied to the pastoral office, however prolific the office itself might remain within a land. That the protestant church today is in fact being cleansed of a high regard for the office of pastor leading to a crisis in calling and vocation in pastoral ministry— we should consider but a few sobering statistics.⁵ For what does it mean:

- That 23 percent of all current pastors in the United States have been fired or forced to resign in the past.⁶
- That in one denomination, 45 percent of the pastors who were fired left the ministry altogether.⁷
- That 34 percent of all pastors presently serve congregations that forced their previous pastor to resign.⁸
- That the average pastoral career lasts only fourteen years—less than half of what it was not long ago.⁹
- That 1,500 pastors leave their assignments every month in the United States because of conflict, burnout, or moral failure.¹⁰

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

⁵ The following statistics taken from “Strike the Shepherd, Scatter the Flock,” by Ken Sande and can be accessed on the website *byFAith Online, the Web magazine of the Presbyterian Church in America*:

www.byfaithonline.com/partner/Article_Display_Page/0,,PTID323422|CHID664022|CIID1825498,00.html

⁶ 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

⁷ Charles Willis, "Forced Terminations of Pastors, Staff Leveling Off," www.lifeway.com/about_pr08011.asp .

⁸ John C. LaRue, *Forced Exits...*

⁹ George Barna, *1996 Index of Leading Spiritual Indicators*.

¹⁰ *Focus on the Family*, 1998.

- That 50% of current pastors have considered leaving the pastoral ministry in just a three month period, and where 50% of those who enter full time ministry drop out within five years,
- That 70% have a lower self-image than when they entered the ministry,
- And that 90% of pastors feel they are inadequately trained to cope with today's ministry needs,¹¹

These are but a few of the sobering “signs of the times” concerning the state of pastoral ministry. And they arguably point to a crisis in pastoral identity and expectations. In other words, it is not as if the western landscape is being cleansed of pastors, but that the pastoral office is being cleansed of its sacred, even priestly, vocational identity in regards to the pastorate. And it is happening not overtly, but covertly and by the very core values that we most celebrate in a post-enlightenment culture. It is the pastorate as an office ordained of God being neutered of its sacred theology that we want to concern ourselves. For in the words of Andrew Purves, “arguably the major problem that pastoral theology faces today 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.”¹²

We should say on the outset that we are not here espousing an entirely anti-egalitarian notion of the ministry in so far as Romans 5 and 1Cor 12-14 would speak of everyone in the church being enabled by the Holy Spirit to offer services to the church, even as the *missional* church is accomplished by the Holy Spirit working in, with and through a diversity of giftedness as organically united in Christ in order to carry out the great commission. The Great Commission is given to the church corporate, less any single individual or office within the church! Nor should we espouse, as some do, that church growth ought not to some extent be the goal of an apostolic inspired church. Even a cursory reading of *The Acts of the Apostles* leaves one quite ambitious for the glory of God to fill the nations, even as this involves a necessary expansion through church growth—just consider Acts 1:8 for instance!¹³ Even more basic than a strategic outline for the apostolic commission, it has been rightly argued that the church is inherently *missional* in so far as she is a “divine partaker of the divine nature.” Concerning then John 20:21, Darrel Guder has noted about a *missional* theology of the church, “such an ecclesiology pays particularly close attention to the “as” and the “so” in John's *missional* summary: *As my Father has sent me,*

¹¹ C.f. “Quiet Waters Ministries, Renewing Christian Leaders” website at www.qwaters.org/whythisministry.html. It was also reported that 85,000 pastors feel burned out, discouraged and demoralized, and where over 15,000 pastors are typically fired in a year. (The Statistics are from across denominational lines and have been gleaned from various sources, such as Pastor to Pastor, Focus on the Family, Ministries Today, Charisma Magazine, and TNT Ministries.

¹² Andrew Purves, *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001) p. 47.

¹³ “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

so I send you. God's incarnational action in history provides the church the content of its witness and defines how it is to be carried out.”¹⁴

The concern then is when egalitarian values so dominate a theology or practice of the church, that it in effect cleanses the church of her sacred, even sacramental, identity in so far as Christ's special presence by the Holy Spirit mediated in, with and through the ministry of the church, and especially the unique (as distinguished from ordinary) calling of the pastoral office. It concerns the office of pastor in word, sacrament and pastoral care, that we are concerned, if per chance to justify the title *Reverend*.

In order to rediscover a *sacred* theology of the pastoral ministry as pertaining especially to the sacramental and mediated presence of Christ especially, we will first consider a biblical survey related especially to the various historic options regarding the offices in the church, with special attention given to the office of pastor, however understood. Not only will this enable us to get a “lay of the land” so to speak, but it will enable us to provide a Biblical warrant for a more priestly, or shall we even say “sacramental” understanding of the office of pastor in a way that is clearly demarcated from other so called “lower views.” For if there has been a resurgence of the classic Anabaptist doctrine of a church espousing no ordained ministry,¹⁵ we will also want to recognize the various positions concerning the offices in the church that have perhaps inadvertently diminished the unique calling and theology concerning the pastoral office that can be expressed in reformed contexts as well.

Secondly, having surveyed a biblical analysis of the various historic positions of the office of pastor, we will briefly survey church history and especially the much neglected pastoral theology of Martin Bucer in order to clearly illustrate a Christocentric, albeit sacramentally understood, view of the pastoral office. In so doing, we will perhaps rediscover something of what John Calvin, meant when he said that to lose a high regard for the pastorate is to lose that which is “*necessary to preserve the church on earth in a greater way than the sun, food, and drink are necessary to nourish and sustain the present life.*”¹⁶ Or according to Andrew Purves in his recently published, *Pastoral Theology In Reconstruction, Christology And Ministry*, we will rediscover something of a basic theological structure for pastoral theology as related especially to “two primary categories.”

The first is Christological, derived in part from Athanasius, in which Jesus Christ is understood to be both the Word and act of God addressing us and the word and act of humankind addressing God. The second is Calvin's doctrine of our union with Christ. By the work of the Holy Spirit we are joined to Christ's mission from and to the Father, thereby to share in his ministry. Thus the

¹⁴ Darrell L. Guder, "The Church as Missional Community" Abstract Prepared for the 13th Annual Wheaton Theology Conference April 15-17, 2004 Wheaton College, Illinois.

¹⁵ Cf. Geoffrey Thomas, "The Pastoral Ministry" in *Practical Theology and the Ministry of the Church, 1952-1984*, ed. Harvie M. Conn (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1990, 69-74.

¹⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes*, of the Christian Religion, F L. Battles, trans., J. T McNeill, ed., Philadelphia, 1960, vol. 2, p. 1055)Book IV: 3:2, p. 1055.

ministry of God in, through and as Jesus Christ is the proper foundation for the understanding and practice of ministry. This is not a new idea, but rather the classical teaching of the church. It stands over and against more recent perspectives in pastoral theology that begin with the human experience on its own terms.

And in the rediscovery of a priestly theology of the pastoral ministry, classically understood, we will again discover what Mircea Eliade once described as “something sacred that shows itself to us” in so far as Christ is by the Holy Spirit united to the office of pastor in order to be in our midst. We will discover the pastoral office as “applied Christology.” And especially concerning Christ’s present ascended ministry, it could be said that in the pastoral office, we are confronted by that “sacred” and “mysterious act... the manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world, even if in objects that are an integral part of our natural “profane” world.”¹⁷

Theories of Pastoral Office Explored

Is there a distinct office of pastor in the Bible? And if so, how is it to be distinguished both in comparison to the general status of Christian and from other offices in the church? And if so, what does this point to in terms of the pastor’s unique calling and responsibility in the church? And how would we know?

As Lee Iron’s has noted, “The Protestant Reformation brought about a significant and radical change in the organization and government of the institutional church.” On the one hand, “the medieval hierarchicalism of Roman Catholic ministerial orders was swept aside.” On the other hand, one is likewise struck with the fact that “in the midst of such a reactionary revolution... the Reformers did not abandon the concept of a ministerial order as an office distinct from the general office of the priesthood of all believers.” And yet, as again noted by Lee Iron’s, “More than four centuries after the Reformation, however, we are not so clear about the nature of ecclesiastical office. Even Presbyterians, who claim the reformers as their spiritual and theological forefathers, do not always have a clear grasp of the importance and biblical sanction for the distinction between clergy and laity.”¹⁸ And to be sure, many have attempted to distinguish the various historical positions even within the reformed tradition,¹⁹ Our present interest will not be to distinguish the various positions by the number of offices proposed, but in the various distinctive views pertaining to the office of pastoral calling specifically, albeit as compared and

¹⁷ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane, The Nature of Religion and the significance of religious myth, symbolism and ritual within life and culture* (Harvest/HBJ Books: NY, 1957) p. 11

¹⁸ Lee Iron’s, *Theories of Presbyterian Eldership, A Study in Presbyterian Polity* can be located at: www.upper-register.com/other_studies/eldership.html, n.p.

¹⁹ 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 I have simply reworked Iron’s and Murray’s categories to include two more that are distinguishable and clarify what I believe to be two important additions to the categories of both—the “no office” view of many contemporary evangelicals and the “two office” view of pastor and ruling deacon represented in various historical contexts as well.

contrasted to other offices in the church. With then the office of pastor in view, one could distinguish in both church history and contemporary writings at least four distinct views.²⁰ They are:

View 1: No Pastoral Office or “Everyone A Minister”

As quoted by Ian Murray, Paul Benjamin celebrates that “the idea of every Christian being a minister of Christ is finally dawning upon the American mind. During a long night, growth has been thwarted by the ‘one minister — one congregation’ concept of ministry.²¹ 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.²² It is a view perhaps most brazenly, expressed by Frank Viola who argues with others that the concept of clergy and ordination stem from the fall as influenced through history by pagan practices.

With the fall came an implicit desire in man to have a physical leader to bring him to God. For this reason, human societies throughout history have consistently created a special spiritual caste of religious icons. The medicine man, the shaman, the rhapsodist, the miracle worker, the witch-doctor, the soothsayer, the wise-man, and the priest have all been with us since Adam’s blunder.

He further states:

The Pastor is the dominating focal point, mainstay, and centerpiece of the modern church. He is the embodiment of Protestant Christianity. But here is the profound irony. There is not a single verse in the entire NT that supports the existence of the modern day Pastor! He simply did not exist in the early church. ²³

Under this view, there well may be a “professional,” but his/her role is to equip the rest of the congregations to be pastors. It is merely a reinstatement of the classic Anabaptist position, and is of course increasingly popular given the democratization of ministry that has accompanied the post-

²⁰ The reader may wish at this time to review 1 Tim. 3, 1 Timothy 5:17, Acts 20 especially, as the following views will all interact to some degree with these passages but will not be fully quoted here.

²¹ Paul Benjamin, *The Equipping Ministry* (Standard Publishing: Cincinnati, 1978), pp. 15—16. Quoted in Ian Murray, *The Problem of the Eldership*.

²² 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).

²³ From an article excerpted from Frank Viola, *Pagan Christianity: The Origins of Our Modern Church Practices*. Article can be read at www.ptmin.org/pagan/htm

enlightenment American context.²⁴ There is therefore in this view an “anti-clerical” sentiment, even skepticism about the doctrine of “ordination” as related to the apostolic foundation whatsoever.

The biblical difficulties with this position are many, not least of which is the failure to treat seriously the biblical case against self-appointed and unauthorized ministry of word and sacrament, which then begs for some means of authorization after some established pattern of sound doctrine and piety. And so for instance, both Peter and John cautions against receiving any teacher that cannot be approved in the apostolic teachings lest false teachers bring great harm to the church (2 Peter 2:1-2, 2 John 1:10). The church is exhorted to remove such ones from teaching who cannot be approved (Titus 1:11), even as Paul warns the church that there will be many who will want to be teachers/pastors who will not be qualified (1Tim.1:7). Those who do teach are exhorted to teach according to a “standard of sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1, 2 Tim.1:13). And evidently, this “standard” was according to the principle of succession passed down by the apostles (2Tim.2:2). These and other examples all presume that there is some means wherein the church can demarcate between the true and the false, the called and the not-called, as pertaining to the pastoral ministry—a means whereby those truly called can be “appointed” and visibly set apart for all in the church to recognize. And of course, this brings us to a second difficulty for those who do not hold to selective ordination.

There is throughout the biblical witness the language of “appoint” wherein the recipient is passive. It is used to describe the authorization process and applied to the office of *episkopos* especially (bishops/pastor) even while being named among the “elders” (*presbuteros*).²⁵ And this appointment is related to the “laying on of hands” ceremony that was first instituted by the apostles in Acts 8:18 and continued by the presbytery (1Tim.4:14 and 2Tim.1:6), such as to clearly evidence the Biblical idea of ordination into the ministry. By the “laying on of hands,” no clearer sign could be had that the ministry of the word was not something a person commits to himself, but is committed to him by the church in the principle of succession to the apostles. Their authority was not that of an apostle to build the church in its foundational aspects of revelation. Rather their authority was like Timothy, one qualified to pass down the faith to others, having been passed down from the apostles ultimately (2 Tim.2:1-3, 3:14ff).

And finally, this position, as we will see later, doesn’t read the Bible as a whole, as to view the Old Testament precedence for distinguishing “clergy” as applied to a priestly office and “representative lay rulers” as applied to governing elders.

Therefore, whereas the scripture will recognize the propriety of believers to encourage and

²⁴ For the historic Anabaptist view, see J.L. Ainslie, *The 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)

²⁵ c.f. Acts 20:28, Titus 1:5, 1Cor.12:28, 2Cor.5:19, 1tim.12, 1tim.2:7, 2Tim.1:11.

instruct one another in an unauthorized manner (Heb. 10:24), we also discover that not all Christians are called to teach and preach on behalf of the church, even as there was a means used by the church to distinguish between those who were and were not authorized to teach. In other words, when a person is committed to the charge of pastor, their “person” is subsumed under the sacred office, wherein they are exhorted not to teach their private and personal opinions, but to teach and pastor according to those accepted teachings that belong to the sacred tradition of the church. We are left only with self-appointed persons entrusted with the task that was once given to the church to make disciples (Mt. 28). It is about Paul’s command to Timothy to “guard the gospel” as deposited not to any one individual but to the church of the living God, “the pillar and bulwark of the truth” that the doctrine of ordination is concerned. This distinction between lay exhortation and the authorized ministry of the word was well articulated by Jonathan Edwards in the seventeenth century for instance:

Teaching is spoken of in Scripture as an act of authority (1 Tim. 2:12). In order to a man's preaching, special authority must be committed to him, (Rom. 10:15) "How shall they preach except they be sent?" No man but a minister duly appointed to that sacred calling ought to follow teaching and exhorting as a calling, or so as to neglect that which is proper calling. Having an office of a teacher in the church of God implies two things: 1. As being invested with the authority of a teacher; and 2. As being called to the business of a teacher to make it the business of his life. Therefore, that man who is not a minister, taking either of these upon him, invades the office of a minister. It will be a very dangerous thing for lay-men, in either of these respects to invade the office of a minister. If this be common among us, we shall be in danger of having a stop put to the work of God.²⁶

Assuming then that there is an “appointed” (ordained) office of teaching and pastoral care that is passed down to the church after the pattern of apostolic teaching, we are of course led to consider the topic of pastoral office itself, and especially as distinguished from any other office. The following positions all assumed the doctrine of ordination, but then have differing positions about how to distinguish the offices. Again, our concern is to distinguish a Biblical theology of the office of pastor, as distinct from all other offices perhaps, and then according to a unique theological description.

View 2: One Office of Elder, One Function Shared by All

This view believes in the single office of “elder” but there is no functions that are to be distinguished and separated within that office, just circumstantially determined as to what a particular elder does at a given time and place (E.g. 1 Timothy 3:1ff is said to describe all elders.). Contrary to the next view even (view 3 below), there are no “elders” that are more apt to teach than others, all elders

²⁶ Jonathan Edwards, "Of errors connected with lay-exhorting" *Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Banner of Truth Edition) Vol. 2, p. 417.

are apt to teach as determined circumstantially rather than as driven from any unique office. The “teaching and ruling” functions are equally shared by all elders. Recently, this view is argued by Alexander Strauch and Robert Withnow.²⁷ As noted by Ian Murray:

We should not, its upholders say, speak of ‘teaching elders’ and ‘ruling elders’, because, it is argued, all elders have the same basic duties: all may teach and preach. If they do not do so regularly in the congregation it is by their voluntary choice; they choose to give way to others who are better trained or who have more popular gifts... It would appear that this third view is akin to that held by the Christian Brethren. There may be many teachers and preachers in one church and it can be left to local circumstances to determine how the work is divided among them.

Here again, there is an ant-clericalism, albeit expressed within the office of elder generally. Whereas this view has been expressed formally as noted already, it can also be expressed even if inadvertently and in more subtle ways as well by those who would hold to other “higher” views of the office. For instance, Mark R. Brown relates this about the opposition he once encountered from elders in his congregation under a so called “3 office view” (see below):

To recognize distinctions in calling and functions between the pastor and other elders was seen by them as evidence of clericalism, hierarchy, and arrogance. For example, the dissident elders were offended when I would encourage young men to consider a call to the ministry. To them this was a put down. They felt I was falsely assuming ministerial prerogatives to myself. They wanted a rotating pulpit, the right to baptize and administer communion on the basis of their calling as elders.’

The biblical difficulties of this view will be more fully exposed by the arguments that are often made for the next two positions such that I will not say much here. It will therefore suffice to note that this view fails to take seriously the Old Testament precedence for a two office system corresponding to the Levitical priesthood and the representative elders respectively as later institutionalized in both the Sanhedrin during the days of Christ and in New Covenant church based on the teaching of the apostles (see below). This position will also read I Timothy 3:1ff regarding the office of “bishop” as applying to all elders generally. The language, “apt to teach--” as a peculiar qualification-- is generally negated by this view. It likewise negates the distinction between the services of “governments” and “teachers” in scripture (c.f. Romans 12:8, *he that ruleth, with diligence, (KJV)* and I Corinthians 12:28, *And God hath set some in the church... governments, (KJV)*). But again, the difficulties of this view are best exposed in the biblical justification that is proposed for the next two views.

²⁷ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership, An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Lewis and Roth: Littleton, Colorado, 1988). He writes, “The one-man-professional-ministry concept is totally unsuited for the body of Christ. Outwardly it may be successful, but in reality it is harmful to the sanctification of the members of Christ’s body.” (p.16). See also Thomas Witherow’s who wrote: “So a member of the eldership ought not to have his tongue tied by legislation. It should be left to his own good sense when to speak and when to be silent. Even if he were sometimes to speak weakly and out of season, greater calamities might happen.” Quote taken from “The New Testament Elder” in the *British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, 1873 (J. Nisbet: Edinburgh, 1873), p. 227

View 3: One Office of Elder, Two Functions pertaining to different “classes” (as distinguished from office)

According to Ian Murray,

This is the view which believes the New Testament office of elder (Gk: presbuteros) is one office, but that it contains within it two distinct groups or classes of men: those in one group both preach and participate in the government and oversight of the people; those in the other only rule and govern. In rank and authority the two groups are equal, they differ only in function: some are teaching elders (traditionally called ‘ministers’), while the remainder (often simply called ‘elders’) are only sharers in the government of the church. (c.f. 1Tim.5:17)

This view is more or less the view historically espoused by Samuel Miller, James Henley Thornwell and others during the 19th century American debates and popularly known as the “two and a half office view” in the PCA denomination today. It consists of the one office of teaching and ruling elder, albeit two functions, together with the deacon office (thus “2 1/2” offices). At the very least, the parity between the ‘teaching’ and ‘ruling’ elders are observed “in session” if not in preaching and administering the sacraments. The crucial text is 1Tim.5:17 as applied to 1Tim.3:1ff. Here again, the use of “bishop” (*episkopos*) is thought to be used synonymously with “elder” in the New Testament, even as by 1Tim. 5:17 it is recognized that some are *more* apt to teach than others. Others will read Acts 20:28 and the use of *episkopos* to then be synonymous in office with the earlier use of the term *presbyterous* (rather than to see the *episkopos* as one office distinct from ruling office albeit both *presbyterous*—see below in view 4b).

It is true that within this view, there can be a variation of expressions, ranging from emphasizing the egalitarian nature of the “elder” in a way as to practically negate the unique role of the pastor, to emphasizing the unique role of the pastor as to practically never allow ruling elders to preach or administer the sacraments. And yet, the obvious question this raises is this: if every elder is distinguished NOT by a distinct “office” but only “aptness,” then why do all the policies within this view allow a ruling elder to preach, even if in extraordinary circumstances, but then not allow ruling elders to administer the sacraments? In other words, according to this view, “those who share in the rule of the church may be called elders(presbyters), bishops, or church governors” (PCA), and yet, as succinctly summarized by Lee Irons:

Of necessity, therefore, the qualifications of the bishop (1 Tim. 3:1-7) must apply to both ruling elders and ministers. All ruling elders must therefore be "apt to teach." What, then, distinguishes the ruling elder from a minister of the Word? Even more importantly, what biblical warrant do we have for distinguishing them?... And if 1 Tim. 5:17 is the only exegetical basis for making a distinction at all, how can we justify the specific distinctions found in our church orders? How can we require that a ruling elder be re-ordained in order to become a preaching elder? On

what biblical basis could we continue to refuse ruling elders to administer the sacraments or to pronounce the benediction?

The inconsistencies in practice seem obvious, unless of course one “borrow” something of the theology that is espoused in the next view wherein the pastoral office is considered unique in its sacramental or “priestly” nature. But here again, perhaps the greater issues of this view according to Robert Raymond “lies in its unwitting diminishing of the special calling of the minister, viewing him as it does first and fundamentally as an elder, albeit one who has been given the additional responsibility of teaching, rather than as a minister of the Word who additionally but incidentally shares in the rule of the church with the elders.”²⁸

The biblical difficulties with this position are twofold:

First, the whole scheme is predicated upon only one text, 1 Timothy 5:17. And yet, as Ian Murray has well noted, to interpret this passage in this manner has posed serious exegetical questions throughout church history. He notes, “The fact is that because there is no unanimity among the exegetes on 1 Timothy 5:17, it has to be hazardous to use it as a proof-text for divided functions in the absence of supporting evidence. For instance, the NIV translation (that supports this interpretation contra other translations) represents the same minority view that was rejected by the Westminster Assembly. Moreover, regarding the controversy over 1 Timothy 5:17 being applied to the single office of “bishop” (1 Timothy 3:1-7), Murray has observed:

*The case that 1 Timothy 5:17 does not speak of two classes of elders would appear to be strengthened by what we read in chapter 3 of the same epistle. There is no hint at all in the third chapter that Paul envisages two classes of elder, on the contrary, aptness or ability to teach (1 Tim. 3:2) is set out as a qualification for the office. The inference has to be that men with no such ability are not to be made elders at all.*²⁹

The second exegetical difficulty of this position is the apparent disregard for the redemptive historical context of the New Covenant church. 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.” He continues,

“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

²⁸ Robert Rayburn, “Ministers, Elders, and Deacons” in *Order in the Offices: Essays Defining the Roles of Church Officers*, Mark Brown ed. (Classic Presbyterian Government Resources: Duncansville, Pa., 1993. p. 232

²⁹ Ian Murray, *Problem of the Eldership*, n.p.

(1Pet.2:9-10, Eph. 2:12-13, 19-20, Rom.9:1-6). Jesus therefore teaches “continuity as well as renewal.”³⁰

That the Old Testament context played a significant role in the formation of the New Covenant church is perhaps the leading exegetical observation that is constructively expressed in the so called 2 office (vs. 1 office, 2 functions ordinarily) views that we are now led to consider.

View 4: Two office views: Pastoral office-clergy and Governing office-laity

This view argues that there is not one office, even if sub-divided as in view 3 above, but rather two distinct offices as pertaining to the pastoral and governing office respectively. As to the number of other offices in addition to these two, there is some variance (see below). But what this view shares in common is the clergy-laity distinction as applied to two separate offices—word/sacrament and governing respectively. This view was espoused John Calvin and can be traced through the Scottish and Westminster Tradition, into the 19th century through Smyth and Hodge during the 19th century debates.³¹ As noted by Murray, “this view accepts two groups of men called to the spiritual oversight of the church but it says they do not hold the same office. Hence the refusal of the Westminster divines to allow any of the proof-texts relating to elders/presbyters (clergy) to be used to support the work of those whom they preferred to call, ‘other church governors’.

The difference here is more than a difference in function. The presbyters/elders (clergy-pastor) are the principal leaders of the church in spiritual things. Others may assist them in the oversight and the title ‘elder’ is allowed to them chiefly on the grounds of sixteenth-century usage.³² In so far as the pastoral office is a distinct office, it carries with it a distinct theology as to ground it in its unique

³⁰ 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.

³¹ For a nice summary and defense of, see Lee Iron’s “Theories of the Eldership.” For John Calvin, see *The Register of the Company of Pastors of Geneva in the Time of Calvin*, ed. and transl. by Philip Edgcumbe Hughes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), pp. 41f. “The Ecclesiastical Ordinances, the foundation of the whole organization and discipline of the church of Geneva, were promulgated by the General Council on 20 November 1541, scarcely more than two months after Calvin’s return to Geneva.” *The Register*, p. 35 n1, Scottish Tradition see, *The First Book of Discipline* (1560), *The Second Book of Discipline* (1578), *Book of Discipline* (1587) all of which contained in David W. Hall and Joseph H. Hall, *Paradigms in Polity: Classic Readings in Reformed and Presbyterian Church Government* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 224f. For the Westminster Tradition, see *The Form of Presbyterian Church-Government*, in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1958 (originally 1646)), p. 402. For the 19th Century American context, see Charles Hodge, *Discussions in Church Polity* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1878), pp. 264f. For a more recent discussion and especially pertaining to the 2 office, (pastor, ruling-deacon) view that is summarized here as “view 4c”, see T. F. Torrance, *The Eldership in the Reformed Church*, (Hansel Press: Edinburgh, 1984).

³² Given that the office of “elder” as distinguished from pastor, and given that there was also recognized the office of “deacon” and “teacher—the 1 Timothy 3:1ff passage pertaining to “bishop” was applied to the pastoral office, even as the 3:8ff passage was applied to the deacon. Therefore, the scripture warrant for the office of “elder” as distinct from “pastor” and “deacon” was located in passages like Romans 12:8 (*he that ruleth, with diligence, KJV*) and 1 Corinthians 12:28 (*And God hath set some in the church... governments, KJV*).

redemptive purpose in the ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral care. And yet, while holding unanimously to the “clergy-laity” distinction as pertaining to the office of “pastor and governor” respectively, those within this fourth view have held to this view in at least two historic ways as deserving recognition.

View 4a: Three Office view: The Elder-Pastor(clergy), the Elder Assistant(laity) plus deacon (mercy ministry and distribution).

Ian Murray has nicely summarized this view as follows: “The first office is that of the eldership proper, and in this office *all* elders are preachers and pastors. According to this position, the traditional Protestant minister, and he only, does the work of the New Testament elder for, it is claimed, in strict New Testament usage no one should be designated an elder/presbyter who is not called to preach. So the call to the eldership is identical with the call to the ministry. But this second understanding, held by many Presbyterians, allows for a second office, made up of men who happen to be called ‘elders’ although the actual term does not belong to them in the usage of the New Testament churches.”³³

In other words, while the term “elder” may be applied to the governing office, it is applied only in so far as it is to assist the “elder proper” in this duty. The title itself is not derived from New Testament scripture, but from the common use of the term in the 16th century. The Biblical justification is twofold, as consisting of the Old Testament precedence of “Jewish elders of the people joined to the priests and Levites in the government of the church” used then as justification for interpreting Romans 12:8 (*he that ruleth, with diligence, KJV*) and I Corinthians 12:28 (*And God hath set some in the church... governments, KJV*) as a reference to this governing office as carried on during the New Testament. This view is often called the “three office view” (to include the deacon office as distinct from the elder and elder assistant). Charles Hodge argued for this view as follows:

If a man is a presbyter, he is a bishop, and if he is a bishop, he is a presbyter.... But according to the Scriptures, a bishop is and must be a teacher; he must be "apt to teach." ... To maintain therefore that ruling elders and ministers are of the same order, that they have the same presbyterate, is to maintain that elders are ministers of the word and sacraments.³⁴

The issue of 1Tim.5:17 (“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the Word and doctrine.”) and its implication concerning two types of elders is resolved in various ways, but the most common as articulated by Lee Irons is “to reply that the term *presbyteros* is ambiguous.”³⁵ Some, like Lee Irons’s would argue that *presbyteros* is not a technical term, but if it is referring to an office, it could be a reference to “ministers into two groups: those pastors who have served well in the past but are now retired (perfect participle), and those who are

³³ Ian Murray, *The Problem of the Eldership...* n.p.

³⁴ Charles Hodge, *Discussions in Church Polity* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1878) p., 268ff.

³⁵ Lee Irons, *Theories of Eldership: A Study in Presbyterian Polity*, n.p.

presently making their living by laboring in the Word and doctrine (present participle).”³⁶ Others, like Clowney, follows NT scholar Joachim Jeremias in reading I Tim. 5:17 in the context of the care of older women who are widows such as to be a reference to “older men” even as nearly all older men would have served in a governing capacity as related to the household. The reference then to those who teach is a reference to “older men” who are also “pastors.” There are of course other explanations as well, all with the intent of reading I Tim.3:1ff as exclusively pertaining to the office of pastor, and “deacon” as pertaining to the office of mercy and distribution in the church.

As was often repeated by the adherents of the so called two and a half view, the problem with the three office view (4a) is that the office of governing was justified on flimsy grounds, if not justified in I Tim.3:1ff as pertaining to I Tim.5:17. According to Murray for instance:

This view (speaking of three office view) accepts that in the New Testament there were men who assisted in rule and government yet were not “presbyters.” The justification for such non-presbyter ‘rulers’ was found (as we have noted in the case of the Westminster divines) in Romans 12:8, where he says, ‘he that ruleth with diligence’. But Romans 12:8 and the parallel reference to the gift of ‘governments’ in I Corinthians 12:28, scarcely demonstrates the existence of an office distinct from the eldership. The silence of the New Testament in this respect surely constitutes a problem and it was this which led the well-known opponent of the two and a half office view (one office, to functions concerning pastor and elder), James Henley Thornwell, to charge that if the existence of the non-preaching ruler was justified on such a flimsy basis, then Presbyterianism was guilty of accepting an office which had no clear New Testament authority: ‘To say that a Ruling Elder [in Presbyterian churches] is not entitled to the appellation of Presbyter . . . is just to say that the fundamental principle of our polity is a human institution.’³⁷

In other words, to hang the existence of an entire office on what appears to be a somewhat serendipitous reference in Romans 12 and I Cor 12 along side of other services, some of which are clearly not referencing an ordained office in the church, significantly weakens the biblical warrant for the office of ruling elder altogether! This then brings us to another option with the “two office” view of pastor-clergy and governing-laity respectively, albeit held in a different way.

View 4b: Two Office View of Elder Pastor(clergy) and Elder-Governing Deacon (laity) and no third office— (E.g. No third office of deacon, where duties of mercy and distribution are under the elders guidance carried out by non-office (non-ordained) leadership within the laity like for instance “Phoebe” in Romans 15.)

The concerns posed against the three office raises the question, is there another option other than the so called “three office view--” one that both considers the strengths of the three office view wherein the office of “pastor elder” and “ruling elder” are clearly distinguished, and yet not as to loose

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ian Murray, *Problem with the Eldership...* Quoting from *Collected Writings of J. H. Thornwell*, vol. 4 (1875; repr. Banner of Truth: Edinburgh 1974), p. 115

the Biblical justification for the office of ruling elder in so doing? In view 4b, the confusion is resolved by recognizing the term “elders” (especially as it was passed down from the Old Testament and expanded under the Sanhedrin context), as containing both the *offices* (not just functions) of pastor-elder and ruling-deacon, corresponding then to a plain reading of 1 Timothy 3:1ff and 3:8ff respectively. This position has been represented by the views of George Gillispie, James Bannerman, J. N. D. Kelly and T. F. Torrance.³⁸ For instance, T F Torrance writes: “It would seem to be the case that our elders now fulfill a ministry which in the New Testament itself is ascribed to deacons. In other words, the best, and indeed the only biblical evidence for the ministry fulfilled by our elders is found in New Testament teaching about deacons, supplemented by what we learn from Early Church documents... It might be said, then, that what we call ‘elders’ are really ‘elder-deacons’.”³⁹

First, it is argued that it makes perfect sense of the redemptive historical observation, especially as being realized in the Sanhedrin in the first century. That is, in the Sanhedrin during the time of Christ as passed down from the Old Testament context, there was a distinction between the clergy and lay elders. As noted by Clowney:

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).⁴⁰

Second, this view reads 1 Tim 5:17 as corresponding to a board of elders (like the Sanhedrin) as then pertaining to the post-apostolic offices of “bishop/pastor” and “elder deacon” in 1 Tim 3:1ff and 3:8ff, even as this is supported by the two-office language that is used by Paul in his salutation in Philippians, where only two formal offices are mentioned, the offices of “bishop” (corresponding to 1 Tim.3:1ff) and “deacon” corresponding to 1 Tim. 3:8ff). In other words, the “elders who rule well”

³⁸ The biblical proof that is most often noted is the observation that where there IS a description of offices in the New Testament, there are only two that are ever mentioned together, such as in the salutory address in Philippians 1:1 (bishops and deacons) as corresponding perfectly with the qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 of bishop and deacons respectively, even as this corresponds to the two-fold designation in Acts 6, especially if one holds that the pastoral office is in succession to the apostolic office, albeit in a non-foundationist capacity such as to not continue in a revelatory capacity, but only as to assist in illumination when accompanied by the Holy Spirit and grounded in scripture. And if understood to be referenced in 1 Timothy 5:17, then they both would be “elders” in a general sense.

³⁹ T. F. Torrance, *The Eldership in the Reformed Church*, p. 10

⁴⁰ Edmund Clowney, “A Brief For Church Governors...”, p. 48.

reference in 1 Timothy 5:17 refers to the “deacon-elder” (3;8ff) and the elder who “labors in the Word and doctrine” pertains to the bishop-elder(3:1).

It is also noted, thirdly, that the two-fold distinction makes perfect sense of Acts 6, highly reminiscent of Exodus 18 and later Numbers 11:16ff, and Dt. 1:9ff (see below) , and the appointment of representatives from among the people to assist with the government of the church in order to preserve the unique calling of the apostles in their labor of word, as to anticipate the apostolic succession of the ministry of word in the office of pastor, as distinct from the ruling deacon. This then explains Acts 20:28, where the term “bishop” (*episkopos*) is applied to pastors in the context of assembling together the “elders” in vs. 17.

Like view 4a, the Old Testament precedence for the distinction of at least two offices is crucial according to view 4b, as corresponding to the Levitical priesthood and the representative elders respectively (see below). And yet, the absence of a third, “diaconal”, office in the Old Testament, together with the scant New Testament support for the office of ruling elder according to view 4a is likewise coupled with the concessions that were made even by Westminster, that if there is an office of “ruling elder”, it most likely corresponded to the “deacon” of the New Testament. As documented by T. F. Torrance: “Two significant points emerged in the Westminster discussion that should be noted. (a) 'Elders' could be read into these New Testament passages only on the assumption that the Early Church had instituted something analogous to the 'elders of the people' (*seniores plebis*) found in the Old Testament; and (b) the Church officials that they called 'other Church governors', as even George Gillespie admitted, probably corresponded to 'deacons' in the Early Church.”⁴¹

The Biblical Basis for a “priestly” office of pastor summarized:

By now, the reader can surely appreciate the sentiment of Edmund Clowney who once noted, “to ask only how many offices there are is to invite confusion.”⁴² And to be sure, part of the problem is that, again in the words of Clowney, “we cannot turn to the New Testament to find a “little black book” of church order!”⁴³ But even if we could, this would be to avoid the real issue anyway. The real issue “is not the number of offices but whether all those who exercise ruling authority in the church must have the gifts of the public ministry of the Word.” This is just another way of asking: “does the office of pastor exist as distinct office from any other?” Or again, as Ian Murray has astutely observed, the real debate is whether or not the pastor is distinguishable from any other service merely by *function*, or by *office*, and if according to office, under what theological distinctive (rather than a distinctive in function as according to skills alone). Whereas the two office view will want to define the pastoral office by a

⁴¹ T. F. Torrance, *Eldership in the Church*

⁴² Edmund Clowney, “A Brief For Church Governors,,,”, p. 43

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 43.

theological distinctive, the one office-two function views will want to define the pastoral office by a distinctive in skills only. Or perhaps more significantly, we will want to inquire as to whether or not the pastoral office is unique by virtue of its relation to the ministry of the ascended Lord, or merely unique in that those who fill it are relatively speaking more “skilled” in teaching than others? Here again, the important thing to observe in both of the 4th positions (2 and 3 office descriptions) is the recognition of a distinct office of “pastor” (however many other offices their may be). In this sense, we are of course recognizing a “lay-clergy” distinction pertaining to ordination, and the discovery of a pastoral *theology* in its own right. And, according to Lee Irons,

If, as our Reformed fathers asserted, the ruling elder is a layman and not a minister of the Word and sacraments, then the clergy-laity distinction becomes charged with renewed significance. In a genuine three-office position, the distinctiveness and uniqueness of the minister becomes highlighted, whereas the two-office view tends to obscure the notion that he is a gift of the risen Christ to his church. It makes him merely a seminary-trained elder who therefore happens to be the one better equipped to do the preaching. The bottom line is that the two-office view and the three-office view have fundamentally different conceptions of the ministry. Lee Irons

In short, only view 4 expressly recognizes a distinct office in the pastoral service. And what is most revealing is that all expressions of the fourth view will explicitly employ a Biblical hermeneutic that recognizes continuity between the Old and New Testaments, between the office of “pastor” and the “Levitical priesthood”! This was, for instance, clearly expressed 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 Elders⁴⁴

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

⁴⁴ 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 1Cor.15:12!

Covenant and in particular the pastoral ministry, the Reformers and their successors appealed to the priesthood of the Old Covenant as providing a model.”⁴⁵

This is of course huge! For if the pastoral ministry is in fact derived historically after the pattern of the Levitical priesthood, there are all sorts of corresponding implications concerning a pastoral theology and practice! And so what is the Biblical evidence to support this claim? ⁴⁶ It would include the following observations moving from the Old into the New Testaments:

First, the New Testament does not depict a new religion in comparison to the Old, but the same religion being realized in its more consummate expressions in the comings of Christ. It would be impossible to read the apostolic testimony and not observe how they intentionally 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 as to describe the church in exact language taken directly from descriptions of the corporate Israel of old.⁴⁷ As then Clowney has noted, “The New Testament teaching concerning church order is given in the course of the unfolding of revelation in the apostolic age... 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.”⁴⁸

Robert Rayburn makes a good point as well when he observes: “A simple demonstration of the significance of the Old Testament materials for the determination of questions surrounding the nature and number of church offices is furnished by the fact that “elder” is an Old Testament title and office and is introduced without comment in the narrative of the establishment of the apostolic church (Acts

⁴⁵ Jack Dennis Kinner, “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).

⁴⁶ In Mark Brown ed. *Order in the Offices: Essays Defining the Roles of Church Officers* (Classic Presbyterian Government Resources: Duncansville, Pa., 1993) there are three very good descriptions of a redemptive-historical analysis: They are Edmund Clowney, “A Brief For Church Governors”, *Order in the Offices, Essays Defining the Roles of Church Officers*, p. 43ff, Jack Dennis Kinner, “Priesthood in the Ministry” p. 181ff, Robert Rayburn, “Ministers, Elders, and Deacons”,p. 223ff.

⁴⁷ 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).

⁴⁸ Edmund Clowney, “A Brief For Church Governors,” p. 45.

11:30). This strongly suggests that the office there referred to was simply the Old Testament office carried over into the new order.”⁴⁹

Second, it can certainly be observed that in the Old Testament, the precedence is set for a two-office view of priestly-pastor and governing-elder respectively. In Exodus 18:13ff, we have what amounts to an ancient ordination service. Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro (evidently an experienced “priest” and religious leader of the Medianites) observed an unhealthy situation in the young organization structure of his new community of faith as related to the exercise of spiritual government especially. He observed that, “Moses sat as judge for the people, while the people stood around him from morning until evening” (vs. 13). Assuming the importance of oversight, government, and the need for judgment with respect to disputes in their midst, Jethro’s seasoned recommendation to Moses was as follows:

You represent the people before God, and you should bring their cases before God; 20 teach them the statutes and instructions and make known to them the way they are to go and the things they are to do. 21 You should also 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. 22 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

Evidently, the task was too burdensome for one man to accomplish- it was to be shared jointly with others, albeit others who were in an assisting role to Moses and chosen from among the people. Whereas Moses was to focus on the priestly duties of representing God to the people and the people to God (vs 20), he was to organize a board of assisting rulers who would assist in the governing aspects of the ministry such as to preserve the priestly aspects as fulfilled by Moses. In short, there was evidenced already in this ancient redemptive historical context the institution of “pastor-priest” and “elder-servants”, of “clergy” (as especially appointed by God) and “laity” (as chosen from among the people). The question of course that all this raises is: “was the distinction maintained after Moses?” IN other words, was there a “succession” principle that maintained the clergy-laity distinction pertaining to the ordained ministry of priestly and governing ministry respectively? And what we observe is that there clearly was, in the institution of the Levitical priesthood as coupled with the institution of elder that was maintained throughout the history of the Old Covenant church!

For instance, that the Exodus event was in fact an ancient “ordination” of officers, albeit embryonic in nature, is evidence by the use of such language as “appoint” and “choose” in vs. 24-26 that is throughout the Hebrew associated with divine ordination.⁵⁰ And significantly, this event was

⁴⁹ Robert Rayburn, “Ministers, Elders, and Deacons”, *Order in the Offices*, Mark Brown, editor... P. 224. He also quotes James Bannerman, “The polity of the New Testament was founded upon the model of the Old Testament ecclesiastical government.” See Jame Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*, II (Edinburgh, 1960), 305. Cf. Dabney, “Theories of the Eldership,” 128-29.

⁵⁰ c.f. Dt. 4:37, 7:7, 10:15, Josh 8:3, 1Sam.2:28.

precedence setting for future ordination services.⁵¹ And what is especially noteworthy is that the circumstances that lead to the ordination of governing elders distinct from the priestly office is perfectly reminiscent of the circumstances in Exodus 18 in each of these instances, even as we will observe the same circumstances almost exactly in Acts 6 in the appointment of so called “deacons” in order to assist the apostles. And whereas the office of priest and governing elders were clearly distinct in the Old Testament, they sat together “in session” in order to govern the Old Covenant congregation is documented in 2 Chronicles 19:8 where it is noted that “in Jerusalem, Jehoshaphat appointed certain Levites and priests and heads of families of Israel, to give judgment for the LORD and to decide disputed cases. They had their seat at Jerusalem.”

Therefore, we have thus far discovered in the Old Testament the development of a two office assembly. One office consisted of the governing elder that grew naturally out of the patriarchic family system and continued through the Mosaic period and into the exile even. This office was set apart in its “uniquely representative” nature as laity according to Rayburn, “being selected by the people and speaking and acting on their behalf.”⁵² One can notice for instance how “frequently the body of elders is regarded by the principle of representation as the whole congregation of Israel.⁵³ They ask for a king on behalf of the people in 1Sam.8:4, and enter into covenant on behalf of Israel in 2 Sam.5:3, Ex.24:1ff. ⁵⁴ As then noted by 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.”⁵⁵

The primary function of the elder was to rule and judge between disputes, together with represent the people in matters with God.⁵⁶ There is, in other words, “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” according to Rayburn.⁵⁷ As again noted by Clowney, “it is plain that these elders do not become prophets; they are not of those who will be raised up “like unto Moses.” Neither were they teaching priests or Levites. Yet they received the Spirit for their task of administration and judgment, and initially the presence of the Spirit is manifested through ecstatic utterance.”⁵⁸

The second office is equally plain from a reading of the Old Testament as pertaining to a “separate and distinct office in the Old Testament church, to which was entrusted the ministry of word and

⁵¹ Numbers 11:16ff, and Dt. 1:9ff.

⁵² 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.

⁵³ C.f. Ex.12:3, 6, 21, 1Kgs 8:1, 2, 3, 5, 14, 22, 55, 62, 65.

⁵⁴ Rayburn, p. 225

⁵⁵ Clowney, p. 47-48. c.f. Ezra 8, Neh.7

⁵⁶ Dt.25:1, 7, 19:12, 22:13ff, Josh 20:4,6.

⁵⁷ c.f. Ezek. 7:26, Jer. 18:18.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

sacrament—the Levitical office and within it the priesthood (Dt. 33:9-10). According to Rayburn, “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.⁵⁹ However, this was adjunct to their primary calling as ministers of the word in both its forms—scripture and sacrament—and as superintendents of Israel’s worship.⁶⁰

Perhaps most significantly, 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 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 who were granted a direct ministerial authority not assigned to elders.”⁶¹ In other words, whatever else can be said from the Old Testament, there was most definitely a distinction between the clergy and the laity.⁶² 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.⁶³

Before turning to the New Covenant context of the church, we should, observe a 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.⁶⁴ The 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 and Sacrament in the tabernacle! In other words, as illustrated in the Mosaic context, God’s saving activity was related to the “Glory-Spirit” of God that led Israel through the wilderness, even the same “Glory-Spirit” that eventually settled upon the tabernacle in Exodus 40:34.

Concerning this pattern, 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

⁵⁹ cf. Dt. 17:8-13, 21:5, 1Chron.23:4.

⁶⁰ 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.

⁶¹ cf. Num.3:5-13, Num.6:22-27, Dt. 18:2, 5.

⁶² cf. Isa 24:2, Hos 4:9, Ps.132:9, 16, Jer. 26:7.

⁶³ Dt. 31:9-11, Neh.8:1-3, 13Num.6:23, 24, 25, 26.

⁶⁴ 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)

priesthood in a secondary sense.”⁶⁵ Even while salvation was an ongoing and dynamic reality by means of the priestly liturgy of the temple, it was a once and for all historical reality as related to the historically grounded “word-deed-word” pattern of God’s special revelation. Or, to state it differently, one can discern between a “revelatory Word” by the Holy Spirit as contained to the “once and for all” historical aspect and a “dynamic Word” by the Holy Spirit acting continually in the temple. E.g. The “Word” according to Moses was final and complete under the Old Covenant, even as the “Word” was effectually dynamic within the sacramental liturgy of the Aaronic temple. 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.⁶⁶

In other words, God was present to humanity (an incarnational aspect of God’s salvation) by the advent of the Holy Spirit acting through the Priesthood, both in its Mosaic (once and for all) context and in its Aaronic “continual” contexts. And yet at the same time, humanity was present to God (an ascended aspect of God’s salvation) as was accomplished by Moses (once and for all) and the Aaronic priesthood (continually). The two fold “God humanward” and “human Godward” aspects of the priestly ministry in the Old Covenant were accomplished (once and for all) by Moses to regulate and order the (continual) participation in the priestly ministry by the Aaronic priesthood of the Old Covenant temple! Here again, we see how Moses both ascended up unto the holy mountain shrouded in cloud and divine glory, even as he descended in the midst of the people while radiating the spiritual presence of God in their midst—both once and for all.

Forever then under the Old Covenant, the meaning of salvation is contained in what was accomplished by Moses. But then again, the same twofold priestly actions of Moses were observed continually when it is observed that “Aaron’s supreme function as high priest, bearing the iniquity of the people (Ex.28:38, Lev.10:17, Num.18:23) was to ascend 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

⁶⁵ 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.

⁶⁶ *Royal Priesthood*, p. 4.

enshrined in the liturgy of the Tabernacle.”⁶⁷

The above twofold aspects of incarnation and ascension—both “once and for all” and “continually”—expose how God was both the object and subject of Old Covenant worship! God was the one being worshipped, and was by means of His presence in and through the liturgy the one worshipping vicariously on behalf of fallen humanity. Concerning then the two aspects of the priesthood—one related to God’s salvation toward humanity (incarnation), and the other related to God’s obedience on behalf of humanity toward God (ascension). All in all, the whole liturgy was regarded by the Old Testament as an ordinance of grace accomplished by God and applied by God. It was God Himself who provided the sacrifice, and the whole action is described, therefore, in the form of a divinely appointed response to God’s Word.⁶⁸

Herein, we have the emergence of a pastoral theology—one that distinguishes the pastoral office uniquely related to Moses in the Old Testament, and to the special presence of God that was being mediated through the temple sacramentally. 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, but on the office as belonging to the temple administration. These same principles will be observed in the New Testament as recognized even throughout church history, including the reformers, albeit as to clarify against the sacerdotalism of the Roman church of their day.

Turning then to the New Testament context, and in a manner clearly reminiscent of the Old, Robert Rayburn has observed that in

The distinction of office and calling between priest and elder continued to be observed in the Judaism of the first century and receives frequent mention in the Gospels and Acts (Mt. 21:23, 26:3; Acts 6:12). At the same time, the term “elder” was also employed as a generic designation for all the members of the Sanhedrin, some of whom were priest and or scribes.⁶⁹

In other words, just as the once and for all priestly service of Moses went up to receive the covenant and came back down to deliver the covenant to the people, so too Jesus as the greater Moses is the one who descended and ascended to and from heaven to mediate the new covenant under his priestly administration under God.⁷⁰ Just as Moses received the law on the mountain, so Jesus taught the true meaning of the law from the mount (Mt. 5:1ff). Just as on the mountain, Moses was transfigured with glory, so too Jesus went up on the mountain and was transfigured there to speak with Moses and Elijah. In short, the parallels between Moses and Jesus are obvious. And therefore, just as

⁶⁷ *Royal Priesthood*, p. 4.

⁶⁸ Ex.25:22, Num.7:89.

⁶⁹ 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.

⁷⁰ John 3:11-13, 4:31:34.

Moses ministry was historically unique and sufficient relative to the accomplishment of the covenant, it was nonetheless continued and institutionalized in Aaron and the priesthood as to apply the covenant. And the same can be argued concerning the once and for all ministry of Christ as completed in the apostolic foundation of the church, as then continued through the pastoral office, or apostolic succession of “office” (vs. persons).

Of particular interest is the way in which the two-fold distinction of “priest and elder” throughout the Old Testament and into the first century Sanhedrin context of the gospels was replaced with another two-fold distinction between “bishop and elder-deacon” in the New Testament.⁷¹ .” Moreover, 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 was being performed by the apostles in the New Covenant context.⁷² And by the “laying on of hands” and the language of “appoint” as applied especially to the office of “bishop,” the “once and for all” ministry of the apostles on behalf of Christ in a foundational sense (cf. Eph. 1:28) is continued via the office of bishop (pastor), albeit in a non-foundational sense. Apart from the earlier observations concerning Acts 20:28, the idea of apostolic succession in the office of “pastor” in relation to the sacramental (priestly) presence of Christ in the church to effect salvation is nowhere more clearly revealed than in the argument of Ephesians.⁷³

According to Ephesians, Paul makes the case for the gospel that assumes the church “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.” And we notice especially that Paul explicitly references a “structure” that is being “*joined together*” such as to grow into a holy temple in the Lord,” even that which is “in Christ” being “built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God” (Eph. 2:20ff). That is to say that Christ’s advent in the Holy Spirit acting in the *visible* Church is being realized by means of the organized structure that was joined together according to the apostolic foundation. And then it is observed how this same language of “being joined together” is used again in Ephesians 4:16, this time as related to the descent of Christ in the Holy Spirit as applied to the post apostolic offices! Their purpose was again to “join together” the body of Christ— probably a reference to their role of “organizing” churches.⁷⁴

⁷¹ We see for instance the use of “priests” and “elders” together in Dt. 31:9, 2Sam.17:15, 19:11, Lam.1:19, 4:16, 1Mac.7:33, 14:28, 3Mac.6:1 as then continued in the first century Sanhedrin context as evidenced in Mt. 21:23, 26:3, 27:1, 3, 12, 20, 41, 28:12, Mk.11:27, 14:43, 14:43, 53, 15:1, Luke 20:1, 22:52, Acts 4:23, 23:14, 25:15.

⁷² Cf. Acts 15:2, 15:4, 15:22-23, 16:4.

⁷³ C.f., a comparison then of Ephesians 2:9ff with 4:8ff.

⁷⁴ συναρμολογουμένη, see also Ephesians 4:16. According then to Louw and Nida, this word can be used synonymously with “assemble,” arrange, structure or even “organize.” In 1Cor.12:20 for instance, God is said to “structure (συγκεράννυμι) 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

And finally, the Christocentric nature of a pastoral theology as relate to the above “temple formation” under the New Testament can be discerned in passages like 2 Corinthians 5. In this passage, Paul is describing the ministry of reconciliation that is “in Christ” (vs. 19), and then declares in vs. 20ff: “So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” Paul’s point in 2 Corinthians 5 is to clarify, in the first place, that pastoral ministry begins not with the pastor or congregation or even denomination, it begins with the activity of the triune God in, with and through the church. (John 20:21, 2Cor.5, etc) Paul states, “In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself... entrusting the message of reconciliation to us (apostles (foundation)... pastors (post foundation))... making his appeal through us.” In other words, to encounter an apostle acting in office was to encounter nothing less than “Christ’s ambassador,” even Christ as mediated to us so that if a person in Paul’s day were to pray, “God show yourself to me.” Paul’s answer would have been to direct them to Christ, even as Christ is present in, with and through the pastoral office in order to reconcile the world to God. In so far as the apostles were entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation, and in so far as this ministry involved the ministry of word, sacrament, and pastoral care as directed to the believing and unbelieving elect of God, *this ministry continues* as through those who succeed the apostles by means of being qualified according to the apostolic standards. Here again, we see the application of Ephesians 4, and especially the reference to Christ ascension ministry today by the Holy Spirit acting through the church and the pastoral office especially in order to “fill all in all.”

In summary therefore, just as a reformed hermeneutic will understand baptism, Lord’s Supper and Lord’s Day (1st day Sabbath) as replacing circumcision, temple sacrifice and 7th day Sabbath respectively, as to both be in continuity and discontinuity with the Old Covenant after the pattern of Christocentric fulfillment, so too this same logic is clearly observed as applied to the office of “apostle” for “priest”, as continued in the office of “pastor. Based upon the apostolic foundation, one can at the very least conclude that the construction of an assembly included instructions in “doctrine, sacraments and pastoral care, all of which was related to the “building of the temple” as executed throughout the ages through the office of bishop-pastor!⁷⁵ But to what degree has this been recognized in church

church by means of the training and appointment of elders. 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).

⁷⁵ This is perfectly illustrated when Paul speaks about 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). And would it surprise us that Paul’s “instructions” to Timothy covered such topics as instructions on ordination (1 Tim 3), worship (1Tim 2) and doctrine (1Tim 1) as no doubt being worked out in an assembled context? Surely then, the “whole structure” being “joined together” upon the apostolic foundation spoken of in Ephesians included such things! And as such, the “temple” being spoken of in Ephesians is both “spiritual” as to be animated into Christ by the Holy Spirit AND organized as to take on a definable and even “orthodox” form.

history? Is there a sacred “tradition” concerning a priestly, or sacramental, theology of the pastoral office as distinct from other offices recognized in a church historical trajectory? Here again, we will discover that there was, albeit nuanced in various ways to avoid Roman sacerdotalism.

A Christocentric Theology of Pastoral Ministry Classically Illustrated:

Turning our attention to pastoral theology in relation to church history especially, Thomas Oden has rightly lamented the demise of a pastoral theology in so far as it coincides with the loss of a classical definition being “steadily accommodated to a series of psychotherapies” such as to fall into a “pervasive amnesia toward its own classical pastoral past.”⁷⁶ As proof to his claim, Oden compared data obtained from the indexes of leading books on pastoral theology from the 19th and 20th centuries respectively. The comparison is quite revealing, as the turn of the century reflected a transition from an overwhelming dependence upon the classical tradition (citations included Cyprian, Tertullian, Chrysostom, Augustine, Gregory, Luther, Calvin, Baxter, Herbert, Taylor) in 19th century pastoral theology to an overwhelming dependence on key psychologists and psychotherapists during the 20th century pastoral “theology” (citations were of Freud, Jung, Rogers, Fromm, Sullivan, Berne).⁷⁷ And yet, Andrew Purves has also lamented that even Oden in his *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (1983) “sets his presentation within a functionalist paradigm, even defining pastoral theology in terms of what the minister “does” as distinguished from a decidedly theological and even Christological foundation.⁷⁸ Thus, Andrew Purves declares how “ministry today is skill-driven rather than theology-driven, and seems to incorporate little of the dynamically practical nature of theology insofar as it speaks about who God is and what God does.

By way then of a corrective, Purves seeks to affirm a pastoral theology whereby “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.” We are exhorted therefore “to focus on the profound interrelationship that must obtain between, on the one hand, those truths and realities about God that the church brings to expression through Christian doctrine and, on the other, pastoral care.”⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Thomas Oden, *The Care of Souls in the Classic Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) p. 28.

⁷⁷ The 19th century pastoral writers cited by Oden were Shedd (Presbyterian 1879), Fairbairn (Scottish Presb. 1875), Hoppin (Congregationalist 1884), Bridges (Church of England, 1829), Koestlin (Luthern, 1895), Gladden (Congregationalist, 1891), Kidder (Methodist 1871). The 20th century writers were Hiltner, Clinebell, Oates, Wise, Tournier, Stollberg, Nuttin). Amazingly, not one 20th century writer referenced or cited even one classical writer in pastoral theology according to Oden.

⁷⁸ Andrew Purves, *Reconstructing a Pastoral Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004) p. xx. We can observe also that most evangelical seminaries offerings of Doctor of Ministry programs reveals the same “functionalist” paradigm today For instance, the D. Min. degree at GCTS is distinguished by pastoral functions less a pastoral theology...

⁷⁹ Purves, *Reconstructing...*, p. 33-34)

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 observe that there was there was something like a comprehensive pastoral care textbook... for the church."⁸⁰ 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.⁸¹ 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 priests do on earth."⁸² 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 for the birth that comes through baptism."⁸³ 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?"⁸⁴ 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 for the obvious reason of speaking against sacerdotalism in order to preserve

⁸⁰ Purves, *Classical Tradition*, p.5 and 6 respectively.

⁸¹ C.f, Purves, *Classical Tradition*. P. 41.

⁸² 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.

⁸³ Chrysostom, *Six Books*, 73:III.6, Quoted in *Classical Tradition*, p. 46.

⁸⁴ Purves, *Classical Tradition*, p. 46.

the exclusive and once and for all nature of Christ's ultimate priesthood on behalf of all believers acting through the Holy Spirit. Martin Luther, for instance, did not like the word "priest" to define the Protestant minister. He 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."⁸⁵ Nor did John Calvin like the word "priest" to refer to ministers.⁸⁶ And in so far as the title is concerned, and its association with sacerdotalism, we should take no issue with any of this, for it has to be acknowledge that the title "priest" IS conspicuously missing in the New Testament witness. 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 activity of the pastor as a *means* or *instrument* of grace that as utilized by the Holy Spirit, not necessarily and not necessarily immediately. In short, Calvin spoke of the benefits of Christ being made available to us by the *secret* operation of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁷ Moreover, they were rightly concerned to distinguish that the office of pastor is not "priestly" if by this it was meant that a new sacrifice was being accomplished at the hands of the minister. In this sense, we could agree with Rolf Preus that "the office of the ministry is not a priestly office. It is a ministerial office. It does not benefit the church because of sacrifices it has to offer. This is the error of the Roman sacrificial system, and why Luther and the Reformers called it an abomination. The office of the ministry benefits the church because through it Christ saves sinners by his holy word."⁸⁸

And yet, their concern over the term "priest" coming out of the Roman Catholic context was clearly not then a rejection of a unique, essential and mediating role of the pastor in relation to God's plan of salvation either. They, for instance, strongly denounced the *sitzrecht* (the sitter's right) theology of the Anabaptist that every believer has the right to function in a ministers role. Luther, for instance, wrote: "the *Sitzrecht* was from the pit of hell."⁸⁹ Nor did the reformers deny the mediating nature of the office of pastor in so far as Christ, in his ascended ministry, is present through the pastoral office, in a unique way even, in order to transact his redemptive purposes in the present age. 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:

⁸⁵ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works...* 40, 35.

⁸⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Westminster Press, 1960), Bk. 4, Ch. 8, No. 14

⁸⁷ *Institutes*, Book 3, Section 1.

⁸⁸ Rolf Preus, *Ministers: What is their job? Who is their Boss? Why do we need them?* Located on the web at www.christforus.org/Papers/Content/ministers.html

⁸⁹ Quoted in Peter Hoover's *The Secret of the Strength: What Would the Anabaptists Tell This Generation?* (Shippensburg: Benchmark Press, 1998) pp. 58-59.

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.⁹⁰

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).⁹¹

In other words, we could say that Calvin, with Luther, viewed the pastorate in a *sacramental* way, as holding to the same qualifications in principle as could be applied to the sacraments. In so far as Christ is present in the sacraments, Christ is present in the pastorate, no less, no more, all cautions notwithstanding pertaining to the Roman Catholic accesses. As then related to the efficacy of the office of pastor in relation to the gospel, Calvin again was quite nuanced, as to preserve both the “once and for all” aspects of Christ’s ministry, the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in the application of the gospel, and yet the extraordinary spiritual power that is at work in and through the pastoral office unto salvation. In other words, for Paul the pastorate, as being accomplished through the apostolic office, was essential to the gospel! Three times in I Corinthians 9, Paul makes the bold assertion:

So that I might win more of them... 19
So that I might win those outside the law... 21
So that 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.”

Concerning then the efficacy of the office and the gospel, 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

⁹⁰ 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.

⁹¹ *Institutes*, 4.3.3.

question is not, what man himself accomplishes by his own power, but what God effects through his hands.⁹²

In short, through the apostolic office as succeeded by the pastoral office, the gospel is transacted by a divine “presence--” a presence via the church in the office of “pastor,” albeit necessarily related to the apostolic informed instruments of word, sacrament and pastoral care. This theological and dynamic relationship between Christ as mediated by the agency of the Holy Spirit by means of 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.⁹³

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 treatise on pastoral care during the reformation period.⁹⁴ 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.”⁹⁵ 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.”⁹⁶

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” (or sacramental) a theology IF by this it is meant that Christ in his ascended state, is present and acting through the Holy Spirit through the office of the pastor as an essential aspect of salvation on earth in the

⁹² 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.).

⁹³ Andrew Purves, *Reconstructing Pastoral Theology: A Christological Foundation* p. 34

⁹⁴ 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.

⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 76.

⁹⁶ 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.

present age. And so on the one hand, against a sacerdotalist understanding of the priestly function of the pastor, Bucer 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.⁹⁷

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 affirmation of “everyone a minister”, Bucer was prolific in his defense of the pastorate as essentially the mediated 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”.⁹⁸ He further cites John 14:23, 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 with his people until the end of the world—although not in a tangible sense or in the way of this world, which 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.”⁹⁹

In sum, after the ascension of Christ, we are not left with “no presence,” as inaugurated by the advent of Christ in the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Rather, Christ remains in the midst of us by means of the church and her ministry—a very real and special presence by the Holy Spirit in all the mystery that surrounds a Trinitarian theology. For even as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one. In so far as the church is in union with Christ by the Holy Spirit, so too Christ is present through the church!¹⁰⁰

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

⁹⁷ Bucer, p. 2.

⁹⁸ Jer.23:5-6, Luke 1:31-33, John 17:1-2, Eph.5:28-32.

⁹⁹ Bucer, p. 9-11.

¹⁰⁰ For a more thorough defense and explanation, 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). Cf. Andrew Purves, *Reconstruction...*

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.¹⁰¹

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.

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...”¹⁰² 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, to borrow Mircea Eliade’s nomenclature.

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.

¹⁰¹ Bucer, p. 3. c.f.Mt. 28:18-20, Lk.24:45-47.

¹⁰² Bucer, p. 11-12.

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...

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. ...

3. 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.¹⁰³

Whereas the language of “apostolic succession” was not explicit by Bucer, the concept of an office being derived ultimately from Christ through the apostles, as to mediate the continued ministry of Christ in our midst, is. He again concludes, “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.”¹⁰⁴ Bucer clearly implies a Biblical-theological foundation for pastoral ministry today wherein the succession principle is in view, if not all together traced out. And yet, this is not to say that such a trajectory of succession as pertaining to the “priestly” aspects of the office of pastor can’t be observed in scripture as already noted.

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

¹⁰³ Bucer, p. 15.

¹⁰⁴ Bucer, p. 16.

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."¹⁰⁵

We get the picture of a nameless priest, whose office is the mediator of confession and absolution, himself a "person" struggling in need of a "priest." It perhaps perfectly summarizes, if not in the same manner hopefully, the tension that is often lost in contemporary Protestantism. Not only do pastors need pastors (the person.. the office), but the office needs definition and meaning apart from the persons filling it—lest it is reduced to a mere personality. For as Greene masterfully illustrates, just as the person who fills the office is in need of a confessor on earth, we must never reduce the office to a personality either. And what is it that this office is about? It has been said that pastors are by the nature of their calling, generalists.¹⁰⁶ And in a culture that celebrates the "specialist," this is often taken as a demeaning statement. And yet, if relating all things human to all things divine—well then this is the pastors specialty.

Again as illustrated by the above scene, pastor is someone who on the one hand is in perfect solidarity with the world by his own sins, and yet called to an office that transcends the world in mediating grace. Of course, the ultimate confessor-priest is Christ, who as one without sin was in perfect solidarity with humanity in being credited with their sins, even as this enabled him to bring our confessions to God, and by his own perfections being credited to us by faith, to bring God's absolution to us. Moreover, we have seen the reformation stress that the efficacy of the office of pastor is never dependent of the efficacy of the chief pastor being sovereignty dispense by the Holy Spirit, even if through the pastoral office. But it concerns this very same *human-Godward* and *God-humanward* activity of confession and absolution respectively that is ultimately accomplished by Christ, passed down through the apostles, albeit in the power of the Holy Spirit that is in union with Christ, that the priestly office of "pastor" concerns itself. It pertains to both law and grace, proclamation and prayer, transcendence and imminence regarding word and sacrament, and the many other such polarities that make the pastoral

¹⁰⁵ Graham Greene, *The Power and the Glory*, p. 207-208.

¹⁰⁶ Purves, *Classical...* p. 8.

office what it is, that is the pastors specialty, albeit involved in the messy stuff of life—both his/her own and the people being served.

In other words, the “priestly” identity of the pastoral office suggests that the specialty of pastoral ministry is all things pertaining “God-humanward” and “human-Godward” as inherent to a pastoral theology, albeit distinguished covenantally from the Old Covenant Levitical priesthood. Theologically rooted in applied Christology, and especially related to the ascended ministry of Christ by the Holy Spirit in, with and through the church, the pastor is called to stand the gap between theology and practice, between confession and ethics, between God and earth—and herein lies the sacred identity. To be sure, “skills” and “training” will be relevant, less personality. And yet as noted by Purves, the sum effect of the pastor’s work is to be “concerned always with the gospel of God’s redemption in and through Jesus Christ... pastoral work by definition connects the gospel story—the truth and realities of God’s saving economy—with the actual lives and situations of people. Biblical and theological perspectives guide all pastoral work, and these perspectives properly rooted in the gospel of salvation are discovered to be inherently pastoral” even if wide ranging.¹⁰⁷

Here again, we are reminded of Mircea Eliade’s, *The Sacred and the Profane*, and most especially an attempt to examine the ontological meaning of religion and religious experience. As we have noted already, it is observed that in religion, the sacred distinguishes itself from the profane by what Eliade terms a “hierophany” or manifestation of the sacred even if by means of the profane. The “sacred” is said to manifest a break into the profane both in space and time wherein space becomes sacred as to have a meaning and reality beyond itself.

Of course, from a redemptive historical perspective in the Christian sense, we believe that Christ alone is the ultimate and even “once and for all” “hierophany” to borrow Eliade’s term, even as this was foreshadowed in the theophanies of old. And yet the attempt here has been to document the biblical-theological reality of a penultimate “hierophany” continually in the sacred office of the pastor, albeit as Eliade has noted, by means of the “profane” persons that fill it. In this sense, we can speak of the office of pastor much the way we speak of the sacraments from a reformed perspective, wherein the “miracle” is not in the transformation of the profane in any corporal sense, as to change the person of the pastor inherently. Rather the miracle is that by the Holy Spirit the office being filled by common persons (much like the sacraments are filled by common elements), is set apart for its holy use in order to transact God’s sacred redemption by means of the spiritual presence of Christ in the Holy Spirit.

The result of this event is none other than the construction of what Eliade has defined as the “axis mundi” in the everyday experience of those who encounter the pastor when acting in office. By “axis mundi” we encounter something of the “sacred” that is presented in, with and through the office

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. p. 2-3.

of pastor as to represent a kind of “sacred pillar” that breaks into the “homogeneity of space” as to “symbolize an opening from heaven to earth, and vice versa” and whereby “communication with heaven is expressed by one or another of certain images, all of which refer to the axis mundi.”¹⁰⁸ Applied then to the pastoral office, we have documented in both Scripture and church history a priestly (or sacramental) theology of the pastoral office. Of course, the application of this theology is still wanting. But if a practical theology of the pastorate were to be constructed, it would need to respect this “God-humanward” and “human-Godward” dynamic it would seem, or the pastoral office as at least one aspect of the “axis mundi” that is fundamental to the nature of the church as “temple.” What then might we identify as related to the practice of pastoral ministry, as to emphasize “the priest before the name?”

First, the pastor as “axis mundi” should remind the person who fills the pastoral office that it is not ultimate about his/her person, but rather “a priest before a name.” For one, this will mean de-emphasizing the personal skills to some degree of the person holding the office of pastor. For instance, it will put more stress on pastoral presence and the construction of the sacred in prayer and proclamation—whose efficacy is less tied to personal charm and charisma and more tied to a sacred and apostolic confession. It imparts meaning to “being there.” And when asked to pray at a meal or in an assembly, it is less “what you pray” (although this is of course important), and more that it is you that it is your office that is there praying—as to be Christ’s presence albeit in mediated manner. It is the desire for axis mundi in that place that the pastor is there to construct by the sacred office.

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.¹⁰⁹ 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

¹⁰⁸ Mircea Eliade, *op. cit.* 37

¹⁰⁹ c.f. I Tim.5:17, Gal.6:6 and especially I Cor.9.

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.¹¹⁰

Third, to give greater emphasis to “the priest without a name” and especially in so far as the pastoral office being the “axis mundi” is to remember that in the mundane of everyday life there is an opportunity for transformation. I am reminded here of what Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky have described as “leadership from the balcony.”¹¹¹ 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. But there is 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.”¹¹² If then the balcony is from the vantage point of God, the pastor's 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. Again, Heifetz and Linsky call this “getting off the dance floor and going to the balcony,” an image that captures the mental activity of stepping back in the midst of action.”¹¹³ Whether in pastor visitations, counseling, preaching, organizational leadership, crisis intervention even, the pastor as “axis mundi” will want to help us see the “subtleties that normally go right by us” from a gospel perspective. It means helping people see the whole picture even as you take part in the action being observed.

Here again, Walter Brueggemann in his *Finally comes the Poet, Daring Speech for Proclamation* has also spoken to this issue of the God-human aspect of the pastor. Concerning what he describes as the “poet-pastor,” the role is to facilitate the “ready, steady, surprising 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.”¹¹⁴ In sum the priestly identity of the pastor, especially in so far as “axis mundi” is concerned is help us to see the reality behind the reality. The poet sees the

¹¹⁰ see above and footnote # 79.

¹¹¹ Ronald Heifetz, Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line, Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading.*

¹¹² Heifetz, p. 13.

¹¹³ Ibid. p.51.

¹¹⁴ Walter Brueggemann in his *Finally comes the Poet, Daring Speech for Proclamation* p.3, p. 5.

despair or beauty that lies just beneath the veneer of the ordinary, even as it is happening in the mundane lives of ordinary people!

Poets look beneath the surface of things! It is, for instance, as Craig Barnes once noted in a classroom lecture concerning the woman who asks for prayer that she will be a partner in law firm, the pastor knows she will never be ultimately satisfied as partner, but knows that the real journey is finding her identity in Christ, and is lead to pray with her for this to happen. Or when the father expressed anxiety for a daughter's desire to go on a missions trip, and the pastor is called to help him identify the underlying issue of a father clinging to his daughter-- perhaps exposing his own identity in being his daughters protector which in turn prevents his daughter from being consecrated to God—and the pastor prays with the father that his daughter will be consecrated to God. Or, again, it concerns the wedding party who is rightly overwhelmed by the moment while standing in awe of the bride walking down the aisle to join her long awaiting groom and the pastor, while giving words to the joy of the party, also interprets their awe in the eschatological story of the church in procession to her lover in Revelations.

Finally, to emphasize the “priest before the name” is to consider the human-Godward aspects of the “axis mundi” or “priestly” identity of the pastorate. The theologizing of the pastor is never a theology in isolation of the messiness of life. And in so doing, the pastor and his theology is opening itself up to all sorts of complexities, dreams, failed goals, traumas, expectations and disillusionments. Even as the pastor listens to all the words that pertain to this messiness, all week long, he is transformed by them, or shall we say his office is transformed by them, as to be expressed in the holy conversation of liturgy. It is in liturgy, in writing it and explaining it, that the peoples voice is given expression in song and sermons. It is the liturgical ministry of the pastorate, wherein the peoples' words and the holy words all mix together, that out of this sacred mix pastors find their words. This is again what Brueggemann means by the “poetry” of pastoral ministry.

In these, and many other ways, a priestly theology of the pastor is to remind both pastors and those who are pastured, that the priest IS before the name. It is to discover in the office of pastor the very presence of Christ, not as attached to the person per se, but to the office, in so far as the office is the externalization of Christ in our midst, albeit always predicated upon the sovereign grace of God working through the Holy Spirit as received by faith alone! Again in the words of Martin Bucer, it is to rediscover the high and noble calling of “pastor-- that while *“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.”*

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