

The Royal Priesthood

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A Royal Priesthood Proclaiming God's Praise

To proclaim God's praise—that is the purpose of this convention. That is the purpose of our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. That is the purpose of our districts, of our congregations, and of the more than 400,000 individual Christians comprising our Wisconsin Synod.

In proclaiming God's praise as individual Christians, as congregations, as districts, and as a Synod we are functioning as royal priests. We are exercising our rights and privileges as people whose lives are dedicated “unto him that loved us, and washed us from our -sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father” (Re 1:5.6).

We identify ourselves as Lutheran Christians. Martin Luther was God's instrument in reforming the Christian Church. When we think of the Reformation, most of us will think first of all of God's grace in restoring the biblical doctrine of justification to the church through Martin Luther. According to this doctrine God justifies, or forgives, sinners freely by His grace for Christ's sake. This forgiveness becomes ours *through faith*. The doctrine of justification is the cardinal doctrine of the Christian religion. It has been called the doctrine by which the church stands or falls.

Closely related to the doctrine of justification is the doctrine of the universal priesthood of all believers. The doctrine, too, was restored to the church by God through Martin Luther. According to this doctrine Jesus has made all those who believe in Him “kings and priests unto God and his Father,” as the Apostle John testifies (Re 1:6; cf. also 5:10 and 20:6).

The restoration of this teaching of the Bible produced a radical change in the structure and life of the church. It broke the power of the papacy. It exposed the fraudulence of the Antichrist's arrogant claim that the only way to God was through him and his priests.

Like the doctrine of justification, the doctrine of the universal priesthood of all believers is rich in comfort. It assures us that we who believe in Jesus can “come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (He 4:16). We can come to that throne of grace directly. We need no human intermediaries. We are a royal priesthood, whose chief purpose in life is to proclaim God's praise

As early as 1520 in his famous treatise, “The Freedom of a Christian”, Luther issued a ringing declaration of independence from the tyranny of Rome. He sounded a clarion call for a return to the biblical doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. He wrote, “All of us who believe in Christ are priests and kings in Christ, as 1 Pet. 2 :9 says: ‘You are a chosen race, God's own people, a royal priesthood, a priestly kingdom, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.’”¹

Elucidating the nature of our kingship, Luther wrote in that same treatise, “Every Christian is by faith so exalted above all things that, by virtue of a spiritual power, he is lord of all things without exception, so that nothing can do him any harm. As a matter of fact, all things are made subject to him and are compelled to serve him in obtaining salvation.”²

¹ LW 31: 354

² Ibid.

With respect to our priesthood, Luther insisted, “Not only are we the freest of kings, we are also priests forever, which is far more excellent than being kings, for as priests we are worthy to appear before God to pray for others and to teach one another divine things. These are the functions of priests, and they cannot be granted to any unbeliever. Thus Christ has made it possible for us, provided we believe in him, to be not only his brethren, co-heirs, and fellow-kings, but also his fellow priests.”³

Luther sums up these divine truths which the Holy Spirit led him to rediscover in the Scriptures in these words: “Who then can comprehend the lofty dignity of the Christian? By virtue of his royal power he rules over all things, death, life, and sin, and through his priestly glory is omnipotent with God because he does the things which God asks and desires... To this glory a man attains, certainly not by any works of his, but by faith alone.”⁴

Three years later in another treatise which was entitled “Concerning the Ministry,” and which he addressed to the senate in Prague, Luther again emphasized this truth. “All Christians are priests, and all priests are Christians,” he asserted.⁵

In his commentary on Psalm 110, published in 1539, he returned to this subject once more and declared, “Every baptized Christian is, and ought to be, called a priest, just as much as St. Peter or St. Paul. Thus we all, as I have said before, have become priest’s children through Baptism. Therefore it should be understood that the name ‘priest’ ought to be the common possession of believers just as much as the name ‘Christian’ or ‘child of God.’”⁶

This doctrine of the royal priesthood of all Christians is part and parcel of our heritage as Lutherans. If we are to retain this heritage, it is vital that we diligently search the Scriptures so as to grasp this truth more fully and apply it more faithfully in our daily lives. For we do not hold to this doctrine merely because Luther taught it, but because it is the teaching of the Bible.

We shall divide our study into two parts. The first part, **A Royal Priesthood by God’s Grace**, will deal with the basis and nature of our royal priesthood. In the second part, **A Royal Priesthood to God’s Glory**, we shall consider the aim and purpose of our royal priesthood. It is our assignment to explore these truths in this essay in a general way. The specific application will be made in the three satellite essays that are to follow. They will show how we as royal priests proclaim God’s praises in the church, in the home, and in the world.

A Royal Priesthood by God’s Grace

The expression “royal priesthood” immediately brings to mind the familiar passage in 1 Peter.2:9,10, “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God’s which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.” Luther, you remember, cited this passage as the basis for his assertion, “All of us who believe in Christ are kings and priests.”⁷ Because this is the key passage for the doctrine of the universal priesthood of believers, it is deserving of careful study.

It is important to note, first of all, to whom Peter is addressing words. His salutation at the beginning of this epistle indicates that he is writing to Christians in Asia Minor, the land called Turkey today. He calls them “God’s elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood” (1:1,2, NIV). He goes on to describe them as people to whom God has given a “new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade” (1:3,4, NIV). He reminds them that through faith they

³ LW 31: 355

⁴ LW 31: 355ff.

⁵ LW 40: 19

⁶ LW 13:330ff.

⁷ LW 31:354

“are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time” (1: 5 NIV), despite the fact that now for a little while their faith might be tested in all kinds of trials. “Though you have not seen him,” he says, “you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1:8,9, NIV). Then he encourages these Christians to live their Christian faith. “Just as he who called you is holy,” he says, “so be holy in all you do” (1:15, NIV).

In the second chapter Peter urges his readers to crave pure spiritual milk so that by it they may grow in their salvation. He exhorts them to draw closer to Christ, the living Stone, which is the God-appointed precious Cornerstone of the church. He reminds them that they, too, have been added as living stones to this spiritual building. God’s purpose, he says, is that they might be “a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (2:5. NIV)

Citing a passage from the prophet Isaiah (28:16). Peter assures them that those who put their trust in this Stone will never be put to shame. “Now to you who believe,” he notes, “this stone is precious” (2:7 NIV). But to “those who do not believe” the words of the Old Testament prophets apply that the stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner (Ps 118:22). It is “a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall” (2:8. NIV; cf. Is 8:14).

Here Peter is therefore contrasting those who believe in Jesus with those who do not believe. He is addressing himself to the believers when he says, “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people.” He directs these words to the whole body of believers, not to a special, elite group of them. He is not speaking to a special order in the church, not to a select few. Nowhere in this epistle has there been a hint that Peter is addressing the clergy and excluding the laity when he writes, “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood,” and again, “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God” (2:5,9. NIV)

The point Peter is making is that all who believe in Jesus constitute one holy, special people. They live as “strangers and pilgrims” among the unbelievers (1:1; 2:11). They may be separated from one another by barriers of race, language, culture, education, social position, and distance. They may even, as in our day, be separated from one another by denominational fences. Nevertheless, all Christians are united by their faith in Christ into one race, one priesthood, one nation, one people. They are the *Una Sancta* the one holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints.

Christians are a priesthood, that is, a body or group of priests. The repetition of this thought (v.5 and v. 9) gives special emphasis to it. God has placed believers as living stones into His spiritual house, the church, for this very purpose. They are “to be a holy priesthood” (v. 5).

We Christians are priests of God through faith in Christ Jesus, our great High Priest, who has made us a holy priesthood. He is the antitype of the Levitical priests of the Old Testament. In Israel the priesthood was restricted to the house of Aaron, who belonged to the tribe of Levi. It was the special right of the Aaronic priests to draw near to God (Ex 19:22; Lv 10:3). They stood before Him and served Him in the tabernacle and later in the temple (2 Chr 29:11).

The priests of the Old Testament were called “holy” because they were separated by God from the rest of the people for special service in His sanctuary. They served as mediators between God and the people. Hebrews 5:1 says, “Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins” (NIV).

Only the priests were permitted to enter the Holy Place of the tabernacle or temple, and only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, where God dwelt between the cherubim. Even he could enter this innermost sanctuary only once a year on the great Day of Atonement. And then, when he went behind the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, he had to take incense with him so that its smoke would cover the mercy seat and he would not die (Lv 16:13).

It was the work of the Old Testament priests to bring sacrifices to God. These were of two basic kinds, sin or guilt offerings, and thank offerings. The sin offerings were bloody. Blood had to be shed to make

atonement for the soul (Lv 17:11). “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (He 9:22, NIV). Of course, the blood of the bulls and goats the Old Testament priests offered could not in itself take away sins (He 10:4). It had this effect only because of the command and promise of God. It pointed ahead as a type to the blood that would be shed by Christ, the spotless Lamb of God, who was, as we sing in the words of an ancient hymn, “Himself the Victim and Himself the Priest.”⁸

As our “great High Priest” (He 4:14), Jesus entered with His own blood into the heavenly Holy of Holies and obtained eternal redemption for us sinners (He 9:12). He entered heaven itself to appear in God’s presence as our Mediator and Redeemer (He 9:24). Now all of us who believe in Him have full forgiveness for all our sins. Sin no longer separates us from God. No longer do the words apply to us, “Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear” (Is 59:2). Now, through faith in our Savior Jesus Christ, we are all priests, who can draw near to God without fear. We can approach the throne of grace boldly and confidently (He 4:16).

The Epistle to the Hebrews explains in detail that Christ, the antitype, is a far greater priest than the Old Testament types. The sacrifices of the Levitical priests had to be repeated. Day after day, morning and evening, the smoke of the sacrifices that they offered ascended to heaven. But Jesus offered one sacrifice for sins for all time and then sat down at the right hand of God (He 10:12).

Because the Old Testament priests were themselves sinners, they first had to make atonement for their own sins. Only then could they make atonement for the sins of the people (He 7:27). But Christ our perfect High Priest had no sin. “Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself” (He 7:26,27, NIV).

While the Levitical priests of the Old Testament served only for a limited time since they died and others took their place, Christ’s priesthood is eternal and unchangeable (He 7:23,24), He always lives to intercede for us (He 7:25).

There was a difference also in the way Christ and the Levitical priests received their priesthood. Aaron and his descendants became priests by the Law of God, but Christ was made a priest by a special oath sworn by God. Psalm 110 tells us, “The Lord hath sworn and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” (Ps 110:4; cf. He 7:20f).

The fact that Christ is a priest like Melchizedek also points to the superiority of His priesthood over that of the Old Testament priests. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews elaborates on this point in the seventh chapter of his letter.

Melchizedek was a priest of the most high God hundreds of years before the Lord established the Aaronitic priesthood in the Law He gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai. He was also a king. He ruled over Salem, which was later called Jerusalem. In Genesis 14 we are told how Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek when he returned from defeating the four kings of the east who had carried off his nephew Lot. The writer to the Hebrews emphasizes that this indicates the superiority of Melchizedek’s priesthood to that of the Levitical priests, who were descendants of Abraham.

Melchizedek was a type of Christ. His name means “king of righteousness,” and “Salem” the name of his city, means “peace.” Jesus is the true King of Righteousness (Jr 23:6), and His people enjoy perfect peace.

Like Melchizedek, Jesus is both a king and a priest. In this respect He is different from the priests of Israel. But, like Melchizedek, Christ holds both offices. He is not only a priest, but also a king.

Furthermore, as our High Priest Jesus is the mediator of a better covenant than the covenant of the Law, which God established with Israel on Sinai (He 8:6-13). He is the mediator of the covenant of the Gospel. This was the covenant of which God spoke when He said through Jeremiah, “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me, from

⁸ “Draw Nigh and Take the Body of the Lord,” *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 307:1.

the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin not more” (Jer 31:33,34). The covenant of the Gospel “was established upon better promises” than the covenant of the Law (He 8:6).

At Sinai God had given Israel the promise, “If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure, unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Ex 19:6). This was a conditional promise, and Israel miserably failed to meet these conditions. As a nation it did not fulfill its obligations under this bilateral covenant. As a people they rebelled against the Lord and disobeyed His commandments.

But the fulfillment of the covenant which God has established with us through Christ is not dependent on what we do. It is, like the covenant God made with Abraham (Gn 17), a unilateral covenant. It is an outright promise that God makes to us. It is unconditional, with no strings attached. It is a covenant of grace.

Through Isaiah the Lord graciously extends an invitation to all to enjoy the blessings of His Gospel covenant: “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost . . . Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my unfailing kindnesses promised to David” (Is 55:1,31 NIV). To all who accept this gracious invitation He says, “You will be called priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers of our God (Is 61:6, NIV).

It is this promise that Peter is referring to when he says, “You are a holy priesthood.” This is our high status. This is our noble office. Through faith in Christ we now share in the blessings of God’s covenant of grace.

These blessings are ours because Christ, our great High Priest, has won them for us. We hold the exalted position of being holy priests because He has conferred it on us. Think of it—we are holy priests! We are holy because God, according to His promise, has for Jesus’ sake forgiven our iniquity. He no longer remembers our sin. The same God who demands, “Be ye holy, for I am holy” (1 Pe 1:16), has declared us holy. He sent His own dear Son to sanctify and cleanse the church “with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:26,27).

How unstinting, how amazing is the grace of God! We are holy, not because our lives are perfect, but solely because God in His rich grace covers all our unrighteousness with the spotless robe of Christ’s perfect righteousness. Without any merit or worthiness on our part He imputes or credits Christ’s impeccable righteousness to us.

But Peter describes our priesthood not only as holy (2:5), but also as royal (2:9). It is royal or kingly because we are not only priests, but also kings. This is a priesthood that is made up of kings. Like Jesus who was a priest after the order of Melchizedek, all who believe in Him are both priests and kings. They enjoy the dignity, honor, glory, authority, and power that accrue to kings.

Jesus is a king. He established His kingdom by His innocent sufferings and death and by His triumphant resurrection and ascension into heaven. He now sits at God’s right hand and reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords (Re 19:16). Although men do not yet see Him ruling in glory and majesty, the day is coming, as He told Caiaphas, when they will “see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven” (Mt 26:64).

In His grace Jesus now shares the trophies of His victory with us, His brothers and sisters in the family of God (Mt 12:50). Listen to His precious promise: “To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Re 3:21, NIV).

In the vision which John records in the twentieth chapter of the Book of Revelation he tells us, “I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years” (Re 20:4).

Christ's kingdom is, as we know, a spiritual, not an earthly kingdom. It is not of this world (Jn 18:36). It does not come visibly; He lives and reigns in men's hearts (Lk 17:21).

The kingship of all who are co-regents with Christ is therefore also a spiritual reign. It is a rule exercised, like Christ's, through the Gospel, the means by which Jesus enters men's hearts and delivers them from the dominion of the devil. As kings who reign together with Christ we Christians have power over sin and Satan, over death and hell.

When Peter says, "You are a royal priesthood," he is pointing to our dual office. We are both priests and kings. The Apostle John likewise applies both of these lofty titles to Christ's followers as he sings a doxology to Him "that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father" (Re 1:6). We note also that the saints in heaven glorify the Lamb for the dual dignity He has bestowed on them as they sing the new song of the redeemed: "Thou wast slain, and has redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings an! priests: and we shall reign on the earth" (Re 5:9,10).

As has been indicated, Peter was drawing on the Lord's words in Exodus 19:6 for the thought that God's people are a royal priesthood. God had said, "Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests." But also the other lofty titles that Peter applies to us Christians in verse 9, "a chosen generation, "an holy nation," "a peculiar people," are taken from the Old Testament, not in the form of direct quotations, but as allusions.

Peter designates us first of all as "a chosen generation. We are people whom God has elected or chosen as His own. In his farewell to Israel Moses reminded them, "The Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth" (Dt 7:6). He pointed out that God did not choose them for any reason other than His grace. He told them, "The Lord did not set his love upon you nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were fewest of all people: but because the Lord loved you" (Dt 7:7). Through the prophet Isaiah God repeatedly impressed on Israel that He had chosen them (Is 43:10,20; 44:1,2; 45:4).

As God chose Abraham and his descendants and made them His special people, so He has chosen all of us who believe in Christ. We are His spiritual people, so He has chosen all of us who believe in Christ. We are His spiritual Israel. Those who believe are the true children of Abraham (Ga 3:7; Rm 9:6). Paul writes to the Ephesians, "He [that is, God] chose us in him (namely, in Christ) before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves" (Eph 1:4-6).

God's election is a matter of grace, pure grace. From eternity, before we ever existed, He chose us individually, set His love on us and determined to make us His own. Then in the fulness of time He redeemed us with the blood of His Son. Now He is carrying out His decree. He has called us by the Gospel, worked faith in our hearts, and is preserving that faith as He graciously guides us to our heavenly goal. Yes, indeed, we Christians, though we are scattered throughout the world as strangers and pilgrims here on earth, are a chosen generation!

"An holy nation"—this is another noble title that Peter accords to us. The attribute "holy" corresponds to the holiness he ascribed to our priesthood in verse 5. A holy nation is again something that God, according to Exodus 19:6, wanted Old Testament Israel to be: "Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." But what Israel as a nation failed to be, the New Testament church has in fact become. It is a holy nation, separated from all that is sinful and unholy. It is this in the eyes of God because the blood of His Son has washed away all its unrighteousness and sin. God has imputed Christ's holiness to it. Now the Savior, who lives in our hearts by faith, sanctifies us through His Spirit so that day by day we grow in holiness and righteousness. As priestly people who daily serve the thrice holy God, we reflect and radiate His holiness in our lives. Though we still have many faults and blemishes, we struggle against our sinful flesh and strive to conform our lives ever more perfectly to that which is our true nature as a holy people.

In Psalm 110:3 David describes God's people as dressed "in the beauties of holiness." This is a reference to the beautiful priestly garments God commanded Moses to make for Aaron and his sons (Ex 28:2-43). They are described as "holy" and "for glory and for beauty" (Ex 28:2). Such garments, David says, are worn by Christ's people.

And what are they? Luther explains that they are "nothing else than the beautiful, divine, and various gifts of the Holy Spirit."⁹ Christians, Luther says, "must be completely holy priests and possess holy adornment; for He who ordains Christians as priests is a Person different from anyone else. He is the one High Priest Jesus Christ . . . The chrism, anointing, and priestly ordination He bestows is quite different; it is the Holy Spirit who adorns them in glory and holiness and clothes them in His power and with His gifts. It is He who must dwell in the people who are to be priests before God."¹⁰

"A peculiar people" is still another lofty title Peter applies to Jesus' disciples to indicate their dignity and nobility. This is one of the expressions in the King James Version that is probably generally misunderstood. Much better is the NIV rendering, "a people belonging to God." The thought is that God has purchased us to be His own personal possession. This title again reflects God's promise to Israel in Exodus 19, "If ye will obey my voice indeed and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine" (Ex 19:5).

We belong to God because He bought us. "Ye are bought with a price," Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians (1 Cor 6:20). We know the price our heavenly Father paid for us. He redeemed us, not with gold or silver, but with the holy, precious blood of His only-begotten Son (1:18,19). Paul reminds Titus of this, too, recalling for him that our Savior, Jesus Christ, "gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own" (Tt 2:14, NIV). In this way God fulfilled the promise He had made through Malachi, "They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels" (Mal 3:17).

Moses says, "The Lord's portion is his people: Jacob is the lot of his inheritance . . . He kept him as the apple of his eye" (Dt 32:9,10). What love, what grace God has shown to us, His spiritual Jacob! He sacrificed His dearest treasure to purchase us for Himself, and He has promised, "I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jr 31:33; 2 Cor 6:16). We will be His special treasure not only in time, but for all eternity (Re 21:3).

Peter continues by reminding us of a further demonstration of God's love. He "called us out of darkness into his marvelous light." Darkness represents hopelessness and despair. When we were without Christ, before we came to faith, we had no hope and were without God in the world (Eph 2:12). Because of our sins we deserved to be hurled into the outer darkness of hell, where there is only weeping and gnashing of teeth.

But God called us by the Gospel. His mighty Word worked faith in our hearts. That was a miracle as stupendous as that which He performed on the first day of creation. Paul compares these two events when he recalls for the Corinthians that "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). As a result of God's gracious call, we are now "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God."

Peter concludes this section by reminding his readers, who were for the most part former Gentiles, "Once you were not a people, but how you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (2:10, NIV). With these words he once again alludes to the Old Testament. Through the prophet Hosea God had said, "I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God" (Ho 2: 23).

When Israel proved unfaithful to the Lord and became guilty of spiritual adultery, God showered His mercy on the Gentiles. He made people who were not of Abraham's blood Abraham's seed. He had foretold this through Moses, saying, "They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me

⁹ LW 13:294.

¹⁰ LW 13: 295.

to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation” (Dt 32:21).

That God has grafted Gentiles like you and me, who were wild branches, into the olive tree of His church, that He has made us, who were not His people, into a people who belong to Him, is an act of grace, sheer grace. Who were your ancestors? Probably they were similar to mine-pagans who worshipped such non-existent Teutonic idols as Woden, Thor, and Freya.

And what are we now? “A chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God!” Of these four terms, “priesthood” receives the emphasis, as we can see from the fact that Peter repeats it, having mentioned it previously in verse 5, and from the fact that the function which he ascribes to us is that of priests, namely, to show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. With these words he points out the aim and purpose of our priesthood. As royal priests we are to magnify God’s glory.

A Royal Priesthood to God’s Glory

The function of priests is to offer sacrifices, to make intercessions and prayers, and to pronounce benedictions. These were the functions of the Levitical priests. They are the functions of Christ as our great High Priest, and they are our functions as royal priests.

Daily the Levitical priests offered the sacrifices prescribed in the Law of Moses. As was mentioned previously, in addition to the sin or guilt offerings, they offered sacrifices of Thanksgiving. The former were propitiatory, the latter eucharistic.

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession defines a propitiatory sacrifice as “a work which makes satisfaction for guilt and punishment, i.e., one that reconciles God, or appeases God’s wrath, or which merits the remission of sins for others.”¹¹ It defines a eucharistic sacrifice, on the other hand, as one “which does not merit the remission of sins or reconciliation but is rendered by those who have been reconciled, in order that we may give thanks or return gratitude for the remission of sins that has been received or for other benefits received.”¹²

The Apology also points out that there has in fact been “only one propitiatory sacrifice in the world, namely, the death of Christ.”¹³ It cites the Epistle to the Hebrews, which says, “It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins” (10:4). As we have pointed out earlier, according to the same epistle, “we are sanctified by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (10:10). The Levitical propitiatory sacrifices were propitiatory because they pointed ahead to the sacrifice that the promised Savior would make for the sins of the world. Isaiah referred to this sacrifice when he foretold that the Lord would make His righteous Servant’s soul “an offering for sin” (Is 53:10).

Because Christ’s sacrifice was a perfect, final, and all-sufficient propitiation for sin, there is no more need for sacrifices of this type. Rome’s claim that in the mass the priest offers Christ’s body and blood to God in an unbloody propitiatory sacrifice both for the living and the dead is a blasphemous insult to the Savior’s work. This claim, which was boldly enunciated by the Council of Trent,¹⁴ has not been revoked. On the contrary, the Second Vatican Council restated and reemphasized it. It declared, “As often as the sacrifice of the cross in which Christ, our passover, has been sacrificed’ (1 Cor 5:7) is celebrated on an altar, the work of our redemption is carried on.”¹⁵ It asserted that priests are appointed “to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.”¹⁶ Such a priesthood does not serve to glorify God. It robs Him of His glory.

Peter specifies very clearly what our function as a royal priesthood is. He says that we are “to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (2:5). We Christians have been born again through the Spirit On 3:5). We have been filled with the Spirit, who dwells in us (1 Cor 3:16). We are “a spiritual house”

¹¹ Art. XXIV, 19; *Trig.*, 389.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Art. XXIV, 22; *Trig.*, 391.

¹⁴ Cf. Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, Sess. XXII, Chap. II and Canons III and IV.

¹⁵ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Chap. I, 3.

¹⁶ Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, Chap. I, 3.

and spiritual priests, whose sacrifices are also spiritual. These sacrifices originate with the Spirit, are brought through the Spirit, and are permeated with the Spirit. Peter calls these sacrifices “Spiritual,” as the Apology of the Augsburg Confession explains, because the word “spiritual” “refers to the movements of the Holy Ghost in us.”¹⁷

These are not sacrifices to atone for sins, but sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving for the salvation that our Savior, Jesus Christ, has won for us. They flow from grateful hearts and pour forth from thankful lips. The Epistle to the Hebrews exhorts us, “By him (namely, Jesus) therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name” (He 13:15). In joyful faith we will lift our voices to God “in psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs, giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 5:19,20). We will worship Him “in spirit and in truth” (Jn 4:24), that is, in the words of the Apology, “from the heart, with heartfelt fear and cordial faith.”¹⁸

But also the good works which we Christians do out of thankful love are sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise. In the first chapter of his First Epistle Peter admonishes us, “Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do” (1:15, NIV). He encourages us, “Love one another deeply, with all your hearts” (1:22, NIV). He begins the second chapter with the exhortation, “Rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, and slander of every kind” (2:1; NIV). The writer to the Hebrews expressly describes our good works as sacrifices: “Do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased” (He 13:16).

Paul speaks similarly. He begins the hortatory section of his letter to the Romans with the admonition, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer yourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship” (Rm 12:1 NIV). In grateful appreciation for God’s mercy we will dedicate our whole life to God’s service. We will joyfully place all our members, our eyes and ears, mouth and tongue, hands and feet, together with all our talents and powers, our gold and silver into the service of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us (Ga 2:20). Whether we eat, or drink, or whatsoever we do, we will do all to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31).

In Psalm 110 David speaks about the willing service which the Lord’s priestly people will render to Him. An English translation of Luther’s rendering of the third verse reads, “After Thy victory, Thy people will willingly make sacrifice to Thee in holy adornment,”¹⁹ Luther’s description of the service and sacrifice of God’s New Testament people is classic:

When people learn to know Christ through the Gospel, when they believe that they obtain God’s forgiveness of their sins through Christ and become acceptable to God for Christ’s sake, the right service of God develops as a consequence within the heart. Where such a faith exists, the Holy Spirit also works in the heart, as we have said before, so that a man develops such a desire and love for God that he wants to obey Him. Such a man begins to fear God with all his heart, he trusts Him under all conditions of his life, he calls upon Him in all his needs, he is steadfast in the confession of His Word, by his life he praises God before all the world, and for His sake he suffers and bears whatever God is pleased to send him. Such are genuine and true forms of service, and they please God very well because they are done with faith in Christ. They proceed from within the heart, which has now become “a new creation” in Christ, as St. Paul calls it in Galatians 6:15.²⁰

Luther points out that the whole system of the Old Testament has been set aside. Its regulations were established temporarily for the Jews. Its ceremonies, he says, “were intended to be understood as pictures or symbols, to remind those people of the promise of Christ until He came to establish the right service of worship

¹⁷ Art. XXIV, 26; *Trig*, 391.

¹⁸ Art. XXIV, 27; *Trig*, 393.

¹⁹ LW 13: 284. Luther’s translation of the verse is: “*Nach deinem Sieg wird dir dein Volk williglich opfern in heiligem Schmuck.*”

²⁰ LW 13: 293.

of God which the Law typified. Therefore the old form of worship stopped of itself when Christ came to create a new form of service and new servants of God through the Gospel.”²¹

In the Apology Melancthon lists as sacrifices of praise “the preaching of the Gospel, faith, prayer, thanksgiving, confession, the afflictions of saints, yea, all good works of saints.”²² It was such sacrifices that the Lord was speaking about in Malachi 1:11, where He says, “From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name and a pure offering.”

Melancthon’s explanation of these words deserves to be heard. He writes:

The very words of the prophet express his meaning. For they first say this, namely, that the name of the Lord will be great. This is accomplished by the preaching of the Gospel. For through this the name of Christ is made known, and the mercy of the Father, promised in Christ, is recognized. The preaching of the Gospel produces faith in those who receive the Gospel. They call upon God, they give thanks to God, they bear afflictions for their confession, they produce good works for the glory of Christ. Thus the name of the Lord becomes great among the Gentiles. Therefore incense and a pure offering signify . . . all those sacrifices through which the name of the Lord becomes great, namely, faith, invocation, the preaching of the Gospel, confession, etc.²³

All of the spiritual sacrifices that we Christians offer will be, Peter says, “acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (2:5). Despite the fact that because of our Old Adam a great deal of unwillingness, sluggishness, indifference, disinclination, pride, and selfishness is attached to our good works, and despite the fact that God desires only pure and perfect sacrifices, nevertheless, for Christ’s sake He forgives all the imperfections of our deeds and is pleased to accept them.

The rights and privileges of our priesthood are synonymous with our priestly office and service. As God’s royal priests all of us who believe in Christ have the privilege and responsibility to show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light (2:10). We show forth His praises by preaching the Gospel, both with our lips and our lives.

Melancthon in the Apology explains that “the priesthood of the New Testament is the ministry of the Spirit as St. Paul teaches 2 Cor. 3,6 which “tenders to others the and the Sacraments, that by means of these they may conceive faith and the Holy Ghost and be mortified and quickened.”²⁴

In this connection Malachi 3:3 is pertinent. It states, “And he shall purify the sons of Levi and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering of righteousness.” Again we quote Melancthon’s explanation in the Apology: “The sacrifices of the sons of Levi, *i.e.*, of those teaching in the New Testament, are the preaching of the Gospel, and the good fruits of preaching, as Paul says, Rom. 15,16: Ministering the Gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost *i.e.*, that the Gentiles might be offerings acceptable to God by faith.”²⁵

The priesthood of the New Testament is universal. It belongs to all believers. All of them are royal priests. All of them, therefore, also possess the ministry of the Spirit, the authority and right to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments. Jesus gave the Great Commission not only to the apostles, but to all His disciples, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19, NIV). Every Christian possesses the Ministry of the Keys, which is “the peculiar authority of the Church, given by Christ to His Church on earth, to forgive the sins of penitent sinners unto them but to retain the sins of the impenitent as long as they do not repent.”²⁶

²¹ Ibid.

²² Art XXIV, 25; *Trig*, 391.

²³ Apology, Art. XXIV, 32; *Trig*, 395.

²⁴ Art. XXIV, 59; *Trig*, 405.

²⁵ Art. XXIV, 34; *Trig*, 395.

²⁶ Dr. Martin Luther’s Small Catechism, (Milwaukee, Northwestern, 1956), p. 13.

In his 1521 treatise, “The Misuse of the Mass,” Luther quotes 2 Corinthians 3:6, “Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament, not of the letter, but of the spirit,” and then explains, “These words St. Paul spoke to all Christians, that he might make ministers of the Spirit out of all of them. A minister of the Spirit preaches grace, forgiveness of sins, just as a minister of the letter preaches the words of the law. The latter function belongs to Moses, the former to Christ. Peter speaks to all Christians: “That you may declare the might of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9). Since all Christians are called out of darkness, each one is bound to declare the might of Him who has called him.”²⁷

The Treatise appended to the Smalcald Articles points out that “wherever the Church is, there is the authority to administer the Gospel.” It makes the point that “the keys have been given to the Church, and not merely to certain persons, Matt. 18:20: Where two or three are gathered together in My name, etc.” As proof it cites Peter’s words, “Ye are a royal priesthood,” and asserts that “these words pertain to the true Church.”²⁸

A subject that arises quite naturally in this connection is the question: What is the relationship between the royal priesthood of all believers and the public ministry? As has been said, the royal priesthood, which includes the Ministry of the Keys and the authority to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments, is the common possession of all Christians. But this does not mean that all have the authority and right to use these Keys publicly. The word “publicly” in this context is a kind of technical expression that means “in the name and on behalf of one’s fellow Christians.” Such public teaching or preaching is restricted to those who have been called or delegated by their fellow Christians to do this in their name. In Romans 10:15 Paul asks, “How shall they preach except they be sent?”

Luther, therefore, writes “Although we are all equally priests, we cannot all publicly minister and teach. We ought not do so even if we could.”²⁹ Again he says, “Although we are all priests, this does not mean that all of us can preach, teach, and rule.”³⁰ The Augsburg Confession accordingly asserts, “No one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called.”³¹

Christians function as royal priests, however, when they exercise their right to call pastors and teachers and when they support the public ministry of the Gospel in their midst. The Treatise appended to the Smalcald Articles points out that the church “has the right to elect and ordain ministers since it alone has the priesthood.”³²

Furthermore, in the Holy Scriptures God has set down the qualifications for those who aspire to the office of the public ministry (1 Tm 3; Tt 1). One of the qualifications is the ability to teach. Not all who possess the universal priesthood possess the qualifications for the public ministry, which God has established for the welfare of His church (1 Cor 12:28; Ac 20:28). Those who serve in the various forms of the public ministry are special gifts of Christ to His church (Eph 4:11,12).

If all Christians were to take it upon themselves to preach and teach publicly and to administer the sacraments, chaos and confusion would reign. As Luther points out, “It is precisely because they all have the right and power to preach that it becomes necessary to keep order.”³³ The office of the public ministry does not abolish the universal priesthood. It is a special, divinely instituted office through which Christians exercise their priesthood. There are, of course, also many other ways in which they function as royal priests.

Luther writes about the office of the public ministry:

This office cannot be attended to by all the members of a congregation. Neither is it fitting that each household do its own baptizing and celebrating of the Sacrament. Hence it is necessary to select and ordain those who can preach and teach, who study the Scriptures, and who are able to defend them.

²⁷ LW 36: 149.

²⁸ Tract. 67-69; *Trig*, 523-525.

²⁹ LW 31: 356.

³⁰ LW 13: 332.

³¹ Art. XIV; *Trig*, 49.

³² Tract., 69; *Trig*, 525.

³³ LW 36: 149.

They deal with the Sacraments by the authority of the congregation, so that it is possible to know who is baptized and everything is done in an orderly fashion. If everyone were to preach to his neighbor or if they did things for one another without orderly procedure, it would take a long time indeed to establish a congregation. Such functions, however, do not pertain to the priesthood as such but belong to the public office which is performed in behalf of all those who are priests, that is, Christians.³⁴

In summary, then, the distinction between the office of preaching, or the public ministry, and the general priesthood of all believers is, as Luther puts it, that “the preaching office is no more than a public service which happens to be conferred upon someone by the entire congregation, all members of which are priests.”³⁵

We Christians exercise our royal priesthood individually by personally telling others about our Savior, and we exercise it jointly with our fellow Christians by establishing, maintaining, and supporting the public ministry in our congregations and in our Synod. It is the purpose of our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, as a gathering of Christians, “to serve all people in God’s world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ on the basis of the Holy Scriptures.”

When we exercise our priesthood in this way, whether individually or jointly, we are proclaiming God’s praises. We are functioning as royal priests to the glory of God. To quote Luther, “Whatever we do, our teaching and our life ought to shine like a beacon of light to the greater knowledge, honor, and praise of God.”³⁶

But praying and making intercession for others is also a function of priests. Jesus prayed (He 5:12; Jn 17). As our High Priest He makes intercession for us (Rm 8:34; He 7:25; 9:24). He is our Advocate with the Father (1 Jn 2:1). He reminds the Father of the atonement He has made for us and pleads our case. He prays that we may continue in the faith and be preserved in grace unto our end.

As royal priests all Christians have the privilege and duty to pray and to make Intercession for others. Paul urges that “supplications” prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men” (1 To 2:1). Luther notes that when “a young child who is baptized prays the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer each morning and evening at the table, it is a true prayer; and God hears him. Such a child prays as a Christian priest, born in Baptism and ordained by Christ.”³⁷

We can come to our heavenly Father and pray with all boldness and confidence because we are His dear children through faith in Christ Jesus. He has invited us to pray and promised that He will hear us. When, then, our intercessions are heard, those for whom we have made them will praise and glorify God. In this way also we exercise our royal priesthood to the glory of God.

A third function of priests is to bless in the name of God. Melchizedek blessed Abraham (Gn 14:19,20), that is, he promised him God’s grace, help, and protection.³⁸ God instructed Aaron and his sons to bless Israel (Nu 6:23-27). Jesus performed this priestly function when He blessed His disciples (Lk 24:50, 51; Jn 20:19,21). Through Him, as God promised Abraham, all families of the earth will be blessed (Gn 12:3, 22:18). What is that blessing? Luther explains “By His Word and preaching He proclaims God’s grace and promises us the forgiveness of our sins. Thereby He bestows on us the true priestly benediction.”³⁹

Peter now admonishes us as priests, “Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing” (1 Pe 3:9, NIV). Jesus bids us to love our enemies and to bless those who curse us (Mt 5:44). Paul urges, “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse” (Rm 12:14, NIV).

To bless means to act as God’s representative in conferring His blessing on others. It means to assure them of God’s grace and forgiveness-in Christ. Jesus has given us the authority to forgive sins. He says, “Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them” (Jn 20:23). To bless is really, therefore, to preach the

³⁴ LW 13: 334.

³⁵ LW 13: 332.

³⁶ LW 13: 295.

³⁷ LW 13: 334.

³⁸ Cf. Luther, LW 13: 318.

³⁹ LW 13: 321.

Gospel. Citing Malachi 2:7, a passage in which a priest is called “a messenger of God,” Luther says, “The preaching of the Gospel is really the true priestly office.”⁴⁰

“God is love” (1 Jn 4:8), and He wants all to be saved. He wants all people to be blessed forever. When we, then, as royal priests, bless in His name, our blessing redounds to His glory, for those who are saved will praise Him eternally.

As priests and kings it is our privilege and joy to proclaim God’s praises here on earth. This is the chief aim and purpose of our life, for the Lord our God says, “This people have I formed for myself: they shall show forth my praise” (Is 43:21). It is our greatest delight to thank Him for His grace and mercy and to tell others of His wonderful deeds, namely, that Christ has swallowed up death, devoured hell, overcome the devil, and opened the gates to Paradise for all.

Here on earth our praises are, to be sure, often hesitant, faltering, and weak. We stutter and stammer. We grope for words and pass up opportunities. But in the world to come our proclamation of God’s praise will be perfect. It will be unrestrained, uninterrupted, and unending. There we will stand in God’s presence continually, dressed in the white robes of Christ’s righteousness and exercising the eternal priesthood He has conferred on us. There we will reign with Christ as kings and lords, sharing in the glory of His eternal kingdom and joyfully acclaiming Him as King of kings and Lord of lords.

The Apostle John caught a glimpse of that glory. He heard the redeemed in heaven sing to the Lamb, “Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests” (Re 5:9,10). Uniting their voices with thousands upon thousands of angels, the choir of saints chants His praises, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing” (Re 5:12).

What joy that will be when we join that choir! And what an inspiration the anticipation of this joy is for us to proclaim the praises of our High Priest and King here on earth until in God’s appointed hour we join every creature in heaven and on the earth and under the earth in singing an unceasing, eternal hymn of praise: “Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever!” (Re 5:13). Amen!

A Royal Priesthood as it Functions in the Church

A Satellite Essay

“You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation’, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him Who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9). These words were written to all of us, lay priests and clergy priests. We all are royal priests called to declare God’s praises. In this paper we want to look at A Royal Priesthood as it Functions in the Church.

What is the role of the “lay priest” in the church?

As Christians each of us has been called to serve various priestly functions on behalf of the church of our day. We are to pray on behalf of our fellow-believers: “Pray for each other so that you may be healed” (James 5:1 We are to bring our sacrifices—our offerings of time, talent, and treasure—for the good of the Church: “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). We are to be examples in fulfilling the will of Christ: “Brothers, if a man is trapped in some sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently Carry each other’s burden and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:1-10). As priests of God, we gather together with other priests to encourage and prod one another along: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and counsel one another with all wisdom” (Colossians 3:16). “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.. Let us not give up meeting

⁴⁰ LW 13: 317.

together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Each Christian priest has received particular gifts from the Holy Spirit for the upbuilding of Christ’s Church. And each priest has been placed where, the Holy Spirit sees those gifts are needed: “Now to each man the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each man, just as He determines” (I Corinthians 12:7-11). God asks each of us to faithfully use the gifts He has given: “Each one should use whatever spiritual gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:10).

Each Christian is always to be faithfully serving God and his fellow Christians with his particular gifts. In addition, at any time as it sees the need, the Christian congregation can call a priest for special service. Often such service will fall into the area of “the public ministry” as the church asks a person to assume a particular responsibility or assist in meeting a specific need. Acts 6 is a good example of this. When the Apostles found too much of their time being taken up by serving tables, they suggested that deacons be chosen to take on the responsibility. And the congregation did just that. Providing it keeps to the qualifications spelled out in Scripture, the Christian congregation can call lay priests to assist and even take full responsibility in specific areas of the public ministry. Examples of this would be Sunday School teachers, elders who make sick calls or delinquent visitations, evangelists, or a person called to give Communion to the pastor.

Lay priests serving faithfully in the church will have the affect that the body of Christ is built up. Hence God’s praise will be declared and increased in our world.

What is the role of the “clergy priest” in the church?

Some Christian priests are called by their fellow-Christians for a specific service or ministry in the church. Paul, for example, writes: “I have become its (the church’s servant (minister) by the commission God gave me to present to you the Word of God in its fulness” (Colossians.1:25). This is the public ministry. Pastors and teachers are its most common form. For lack of a better term, in this paper I’ve labelled such public ministers as “clergy priests.”

Clergy priests are to serve in whatever capacity they have been called. Those called as Christian Day School teachers are to teach the children intrusted to their care. Those called as pastors are to be shepherds of the congregation. All those called to the public ministry are to be faithful to the duties assigned them.

Pastors have been given a number of responsibilities. They are to “preach the Word,” rightly applying it to the congregation in their care. By means of the word, they are to “correct, rebuke, and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction” (1 Timothy 4:2). They are to faithfully administer the Sacraments. They are to be “able to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2), so they can be teaching their people to observe all things whatsoever Christ has commanded. Paul tells us God gives “pastors and teachers to prepare God’s people for works of service” (Ephesians 4:11-12).

In this paper, we want to look especially at the responsibility to teach the saints, so they can do their work. The work of the lay priests is not work that comes naturally—or easily—to them. Since the Christian is by nature sinful and is made new in Jesus Christ, he has a lot to learn once he comes to faith. He has to learn how to pray properly; he has to learn how a priest acts toward his fellow-believers; he has to learn how to visit the sick or admonish the erring. The pastor has been called to give such instruction and guidance.

A pastor, therefore, has been given a leadership role by God. “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers” (1 Peter 5:2). He is to lead the flock, so each fulfils his calling as a priest of God. God promised: “I will give you pastors according to Mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding” (Jeremiah 3:15). Pastors are to lead, first of all, by personal example: “Not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:3). A faithful, zealous Christian pastor teaches by the way he serves the Lord. A pastor is to lead also by the attitude of openness, love, and objectivity he displays. Such a pastor does not intimidate the lay priest or make him feel his ideas or contributions are of no real importance. A pastor leads by making a conscious effort to involve the lay priests in the Lord’s work. It

would be well for a pastor to set as a goal active participation by each lay priest in his congregation; in other words, a meaningful job for each member. The pastor leads also by communicating a sense of urgency, but not impatience. The Lord's work requires urgency. We must work now, for "night is coming when no one can work" (John 9:4). And yet certainly the Christian pastor must show patience and bear with the limitations and the weaknesses of lay priests as they struggle toward spiritual maturity.

Is the royal priesthood functioning in our churches as God wants?

I'm sure any honest assessment would have to answer: "Not always. That's for sure!" I feel we remain a very clergy-orientated church. I'm sure we've barely begun to tap the potential our lay priests represent. Statistics would seem to confirm this, too. Our Synod is growing, less than 1% a year (actually 0.6% last year). That means that, statistically, the year's effort of 167 members of our Synod resulted in a net gain of one new person. If our lay priests are actively and wisely being used, it seems the results should be higher than that.

Several things seem to hold us back from full involvement of our laypeople. One thing, I think, is our heritage. We came out of the German background of "I bin der Herr Pastor." The German pastor spoke -usually very sternly with great authority-and that was the end of the conversation. That heritage lingers on. It is reinforced by these words from The Ministry of the Keys as it presently stands in our Catechism: "I believe that when the called ministers of Christ deal with us according to His divine command (especially when they exclude manifestly impenitent sinners from the Christian congregation, and again, when they absolve those who repent of their sins and are willing to amend), this is as valid and certain, in heaven also as if Christ, our dear Lord, dealt with us Himself." There seems a great reluctance sometimes to let anything infringe on what we consider the rights and privileges of the called and ordained servant of the Word in the public ministry. Even something like the congregational president serving as chairman of the Church Council is considered by some an infringement on the rightful authority of the pastor.

A second reason we seem to hold back on full involvement of our laypeople is that we are concerned about preserving a proper respect for the public ministry. That's good. Scripture says: "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you" (Hebrews 13:17). We live in an age when there's little respect for anything. And certainly respect for the public ministry is being undermined by things like the ordination of women or homosexuals, mail-order ordination certificates, and theological strife. There is reason to be concerned about preserving respect for the public ministry. But such concern becomes counterproductive if it causes us to repress our lay priests or limit the useful service they could be offering to the Lord.

There's a third reason we hold back on fully involving our laypeople. Many a pastor has started out with good intentions, I'm sure, only to be disappointed again and again. In time pastors are tempted to say: "If I want it done, I guess I'll have to do it myself." Our lay priests have at times been guilty of letting down on their job and failing to live up to their responsibilities. Moreover, lay priests have sometimes failed to show initiative or take responsible action. I'm sure that few pastors would refuse a sincere offer of needed help if they felt the person could be counted on to carry through on his offer. Volunteers are seldom turned down in the church.

Are there things we can do to improve the way the royal priesthood is functioning in our churches?

Certainly there are! We don't need a radical overthrow of existing structures either. And certainly we don't need pastors and teachers neglecting their other important responsibilities as shepherds of the flock. But we do need an increased consciousness of the priesthood of all believers. And we do need increased effort at training and using our lay people.

Perhaps we also need a little more imagination in thinking of useful ways our laypeople could be used in the church. For example, has anyone among us trained a layman to help with hospital visits or shut-in calls? Or what about adopting the idea of sponsors for all new adult members? What about trained laymen conducting Bible classes for friends or neighbors in their home?

There are things we can do. Some are little things like letting go of various tasks. The pastor or Church Council should make sure an individual understands what responsibility is being given to him and then they should allow him to carry through. A detailed and up-to-date Congregational Manual of the duties and responsibilities of all officers and committees will help toward this. Let the lay priest have the responsibility and authority to do his job.

The District and Synod with their various boards and committees can help too. We have numerous mailings and newsletters that come to our congregations. Many of these could also go directly to congregational officers or the responsible laymen. President Naumann's Newsletter could go to the congregational president, for example. (I've been told that letter has to be read "with discretion," but shouldn't we assume that our congregational presidents have discretion, too?) The District Mission Board newsletter could go to the entire Church Council of every mission. Even now many of the newsletters, such as the Evangelism Newsletter or the Stewardship Counselor's monthly report, are offered to whomever the pastor or Church Council ask to be included on the mailing list. We should take them up on their offer and include our lay leaders.

Good materials are available to involve laymen more and more in the congregation's work—materials such as the *Talk About the Savior* evangelism manual or the *Stewardship Workbook*. We need to use these materials and the methods they suggest. Especially important I feel is the need for on-the-job training and patient, one-step-at-a-time development of the layperson's abilities and confidence.

The lay priests in our congregations love their Lord and want to serve Him. Are we repressing—and perhaps frustrating—them? Or are we training them so they can serve their Lord well?

May God give us a faithful priesthood, with each priest busy declaring God's praise.

A Royal Priesthood Showing Forth God's Praise in the Home

A Satellite Essay

I returned home from an evangelism call somewhat dejected by a lack of success. It seemed the old powers of persuasion just weren't working. I sat down at the supper table in the middle of a conversation between my two oldest sons. Danny was telling Matthew "I'm stronger than you." To which Matthew, a boy of keen perception and judgment, replied, "But you're not stronger than Dad. No one's stronger than Dad." Sure that we had reached the ultimate in absolute truth, I was surprised to hear Dan say, Oh, yes, there is." My heart joined Matthew's voice in asking the inevitable, "Who?" The answer was short and swift—"God."

I went back out after supper to make another call. Riding in the car, I thought over the supper table conversation. God is stronger than I. How true! Here I had been caught relying on my power of persuasion rather than on His power in the Word. All those readily memorized passages came to mind. I was ashamed and, at the same time, encouraged. Silently, I asked forgiveness; I asked for His power and blessing upon the upcoming call; and I thanked Him for those two "little priests" in my home who had ministered to me by showing forth His praise in their ever unique way.

The Christian home is a place where there are many opportunities for those who have been called out of darkness into His marvelous light to show forth His praises and fulfill their calling as priests.

His praise on our lips

Perhaps the most common way to speak His praise is to speak His Word and share with one another "what great things God hath done for me." This will often take the form of family devotions.

Devotions require devotion—a Spirit-given devotion to Christ which desires to spend a few moments in praise of Him who spent His life in service to us—a devotion to duty on the part of the head of the house, the home's "chief priest", so that he willingly and faithfully fulfills the aforementioned roles by leading the members(s) of his household in hearing and praising "the wonderful works of God."

The things which are most important to us are the things on which we spend our time or our money: the lawn, woodworking, basketball, the piano, etc. Devotions take little or nothing in the way of money, but they do

take time. They take time away from all those other things. But when all things come to a screeching halt for the sake of the one Lord, then Christ is made all-important and the praise of God is truly shown.

There is little praise when time is spent on everything but family devotions; when no one is a “Mary” and everyone is a “Martha”; when Dad has a garden and must get it sprinkled and Mom has some clothes that must get unwrinkled; when Sis bought some clothes and must see if they fit, and Junior got a new bike and must go and prove it. On the other hand, His praise is seen as each member of the family pauses at the sound of His invitation: “Come, for all things are now ready.”

After a rate increase for classified advertising, the Columbia newspaper ran little blurbs throughout each edition of the paper that said, “It doesn’t cost to advertise in the Record, it pays.” The home that spends time exploring the wonders of the Word and joining in prayer and praise will find the same to be true of family devotions.

The Great High Priest had a special family: “My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God and do it” (Luke 8,21). With this family He shared the glory of His Father in the morning, afternoon and evening. He spoke the praise of Him who loved them to the extent that He gave them His only Son, on a hill, in a house, and from a boat. He drew illustrations from the birds, the trees, the animals, and the harvest. Similarly, He calls upon His priests in the home to teach God’s Word “diligently unto the children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Deut 6:7).

There are special times for speaking God’s praises like the time for family devotions. But every moment, in which the priests of the home are together, is a special time for glorifying God. In the house, when one hears “1,2,3,4,5,6,7, all good people go to heaven,” one may take time to speak in praise of Christ who alone makes us good in God’s eyes and worthy of heaven. When walking, one may take time to speak of the Parable of the Sower, the different types of ground, and the Holy Spirit whose power has broken up the ground in our hearts. When thou liest down to rest at the end of a hard day, one may take time to speak to one’s wife the praises of Him who will eventually end all our labors and bring us to eternal rest. When one wakes up, one may take time to speak the praises of Him who “kept the family members from all harm and danger.” A husband and wife may find opportunity to share Christ with each other over a cup of coffee after the children are off to school, after they retire to Florida, or over a glass of orange juice. What a blessing when a family is a family of priests showing forth His praise at every opportunity. Husband and wife sharing their joy in Jesus; parents telling their children of their gracious God; and the children, as we have pointed out, sharing the Savior in their own unique way by both the questions they ask and the statements they make.

Praise God at a special time in family devotions. Praise Him at all times. Could we say the latter is even more important than the first? It is then that Christ comes into our homes, not as a speeding bullet that makes an equally speedy exit, but as buckshot that sprays the whole day with His presence and power. May the priests in our homes praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost with a steady stream of praise rather than one short spurt, and make the words, “It is meet, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks unto Thee, O Lord, holy Father, almighty, everlasting God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord . . . therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Thy glorious name, “confession of the life rather than an admission of the lips.

Prayer

The priests in the home will often lift up “their hearts unto the Lord,” as they pray consistently, continually, and with one another and for one another. In this way, He, to whom all prayers are addressed is praised.

If you have watched a basketball game lately, you may have seen the person who made the basket turn around and start pointing to another player. In this way, he tells the crowd that the basket wasn’t of his own doing, but was accomplished only with the assistance of the person to whom he is pointing. Prayers not only speak to God, but they speak to the whole family, as they point to Him as the One through whose “assistance”

we have all things spiritual and physical; our living water and daily bread; our Garment and our clothes; our eternal mansion and our temporal house. Prayer reflects the spirit of the Psalmist who wrote, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory for Thy mercy, and for Thy truth's sake" (Psalm 115:1).

God is praised by our prayers as we show Him to be the Lord of our life and ask Him to guide our decisions and as we look upon Him as our Helper in every need upon whom we prayerfully cast all our cares. Surely, His praise is heard more loudly as husband and wife turn to Him for more than to "be our Guest" at the dinner table and as children ask Him for more than to "bless Mommy and Daddy." Although, for such prayers, the writer is most grateful to his little "priests" and is led to praise the Lord who has brought his children to know that He hears and answers prayers.

His praise in our life

Someone once said, "A picture is worth a thousand words." Someone else once said (I think it was a member of my congregation), "I'd rather see a sermon than hear one." Those who have been called to light, desire to "walk as children of light" (Eph 5:8). They seek to do all to the glory of God. In so doing they lead other members of the family, who see their good works, to glorify their Father in heaven. They praise the Father by their actions as they show Him to be real and the sanctifying power of His Spirit to be authentic.

God's praise may be seen in the individual family relationships: Where husband takes the position of the head of the house, loving his wife as Christ loved the church; where the wife submits to her husband as unto the Lord and seeks to be the "virtuous woman of Proverbs 31; where parents regard their children as gifts of God; and where children "honor, serve and obey" their parents and "hold them in love and esteem." The result is that God is praised by each person's actions and that God is praised for these actions.

The wife who thus praised God by her actions evoked praise to God, on the part of her husband, for her actions: "Lord, I thank You for my wife. I praise Your plan and providence that brought us together." Similarly, children who live in a society filled with divorce, separation, wife-abuse, and broken homes will silently be led to praise God time and again when they see the love of Christ in the relationship of their own father and mother-which love may be seen in the way you hug her rather than slug her.

God's praise may be shown forth in the individual's relationship to God and His Word. The daughter that discovers her mother in prayer, the son that finds his dad with his nose in the Bible just as often as he has his beak in the paper, the parent that comes upon the child reading a Bible Story Book or forsaking the music of the Eagles and the Byrds (otherwise known as fowl music) to listen to a choir sing hymns, will see God's praise and, in turn, offer God praise.

God's praise is encouraged by individual actions within the sphere of family life. Over the past couple years, I have seen a husband turn down a generous promotion so that he could remain in one of our missions and serve His Lord where he believed the Lord wanted him to remain. I have seen a wife refuse a vacation her husband offered her (an opportunity to see her family whom she had not seen in a long time), so that she could be present to play the piano at the installation of her mission's first resident pastor; I have seen teens sever relationships with boyfriends and girlfriends who were adamant in their unbelief.

"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." One person might claim these people were foolish, weird, fanatical, or??? One person might see them as people devoted to principles. I see them, even as I pray the members of their household see them, as people who live in Christ because Christ lives in them; and as people who praise God by their lives; and as people on account of whom I am led to praise God.

From the clothes one wears to the manner in which the home is decorated to the TV shows that are watched; from the Hannahs who sew their coats to the Josephs that flee immorality to the Davids (big and little) that, with God's help, tackle their "giant problems"; in all these ways one may well praise God within the family and lead the others to join right in.

Praise when there is no praise

The Christian home is not always a happy home. God's priests are not perfect and are not always showing forth His praise. Mom gripes about the mess she always has to clean up, Dad gripes about the mess she hasn't cleaned up, and the children show they are of the same flesh and blood by practicing penmanship on the wall, by trying to create their own version of the universal flood while at sea in the bathtub, by remembering those things which are personally profitable to remember and forgetting those things which are personally advantageous to forget, by rushing from the table to the sink and out the door before the final "Amen" of the devotion is able to diffuse into the air.

One day, when I saw Daniel give brother Matthew a "knuckle sandwich", I took him aside and asked, "Why did you do that?" To which he replied, nearly in tears, "Jesus said I could." Since that statement called for a broader leap of faith than I could muster, I asked, "What did Jesus exactly say?" Danny replied, "He said 'Do unto others as we would have them do to us.'" I asked, "Now, what will you do if Matthew hits you again?" "Hit him back." Like son, like father, like everyone else in the family! Our knowledge of God's will and His Word is not perfect. We also listen to Old Adam when we turn one ear to the devil, the other to the world, listen to their stereophonic temptations and then dance to their rhythm. As we said, a Christian home is not always a happy home. God's priests are not perfect and are not always showing forth His praise. In fact, a good many things that occur in a Christian home may be much more shameful and alarming than what has been mentioned.

But God's praise may be seen and His praise inspired by how one reacts to sin. One may react with longsuffering and patience. If the same sin occurs time and again, one may go and tell the person his or her fault in the spirit of meekness and love. In the case of children one might try either of the above or go to choice "C" which stands for chastisement. But here too one may show His praise as one chastises with the fairness, love and purpose of Christ.

God's praise will be seen in the reaction of the sinner. The sinner will confess his sin to his wife, to his or her parent, to her husband, to his or her son or daughter. The sinner will also seek God's forgiveness as he says, "I have sinned against heaven and against thee." Such action will lead the other members of the family to rejoice and praise God for the sinner that repents.

Finally, God's praise will be seen and inspired by how one reacts to repentance. Joseph will forgive his brothers. The father will forgive his prodigal son. The husband will forgive his wife even as Christ forgave the Church. All will want the sinner to know that Jesus also "has put away thy sin."

God's priests show forth His praise in the home. How are you doing? Can't find the energy to have family devotions? Can't find the strength of will to live as you should? Can't find the power to be longsuffering, to chastise with love, to be quick to forgive? Remember, as my little priest once said, "There's someone stronger than you." Ask Him for His help! You'll get it!

The Universal Priesthood of all Believers Showing Forth His Praises in the World

A Satellite Essay

The universal priesthood of all believers is to show forth His praises in the world. Now we accept the fact that the members of the universal priesthood are the lively stones with which God has built His Church. They constitute what we call the invisible church, the *Una Sancta*. This universal priesthood is found throughout the world, wherever the Gospel is proclaimed in Word and Sacrament. It is found under different structures, or it may exist with no outward, visible structure. Since the audience to whom this essay is directed is a group of God's priests who are united in doctrine and practice, and show this unity in their common union in that structured church organization which we call the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, it would be impractical for us to try to cover practical aspects of the priest showing forth praise in the world for any other than our own Wisconsin Synod members.

Believers are priests who are to show forth the praise of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. Where? In the world, that is, the congregation, the home, and also in the unbelieving world. It is this third sphere that is to be the subject of this essay. Still we cannot nicely and easily separate the church

from the world. The priests who are to show forth His praise are all members of the church, in the world but not of the world. Our church, even the outward structured church of which we are members, plays a large part in our showing forth the praise of God. It is our fortress, to which we run for comfort, strength and safety, when the Devil, the world, and our flesh have played their games on us and only God can help. It is also our base of operations, in which we saints are trained and equipped for battle, and from which we go forth to show the praises of our God.

How do priests praise? It was the twofold duty of the priests of the Old Testament to offer sacrifices for the people of God and to pray for the people of God. These priests were Old Testament shadow pictures of Christ, our Great High Priest, who offered Himself on the altar of the cross for all sins of all sinners, and Who is even now at the right hand of God making intercession for us. Our Great High Priest has not made us priests so that we should offer sacrifice for sins, for where there is remission of these, there is no more sacrifice for sins. As priests in the New Testament, we rather fulfill our priestly office by prayer for the sinner, and by showing forth the praise of God; telling sinners of the sacrifice He has already made for them.

How do Priests show forth praise? By telling, of course. But there is more involved, much more. If we want to praise someone, we can do it either directly or indirectly. Directly, we tell that person to his face of his virtues, the good he is or has done. Indirectly, we also praise that person, perhaps more, if we tell someone else about the virtues of that person, the good he has done. Praising God is no different. We can tell God, to His face, in our thoughts, words and actions, of His goodness and virtue. Of course, this only a member of the church can do. Without the constant renewing and strengthening of the Holy Ghost, our thoughts, words and actions will do just the opposite of praising God. With the Holy Ghost we can and do come before God, praising Him with hearts and hands and voices.

But direct praise of God in our private devotional life seldom gives opportunity to show forth the praise of God beyond the sphere of our own family. So we unite with our fellow priests in praising God directly in public worship. In this, we not only praise God directly, but also indirectly to our fellow believers in the church, and, at the same time, we are witnessing to the community around us that there is a God who is worthy of our praise, a God who is important enough to us that out of love we give Him time for praise, and time as praise.

Still, most of our praise of God in the world will be done indirectly, that is, not by telling God, "How great Thou art," but by telling the unbelieving world "How great He is." This we do with our lips and our life.

One of the highest forms of praise is imitation. Since we are flesh born of flesh, we cannot be like God. By nature we are dead in trespasses and sins. But we have been born again of water and of the Spirit. We have been made the children of God. "Like father, like son" the world says. The world expects the child of God to be a "chip off the ol' block", and God has provided His children with a guide for living as His children. The child loves the father, and the child of God will love God. "If ye love Me, keep My commandments," says God. Just as a good son is the praise of his father, so the child of God living a God-pleasing life according to God's commandments does, by his very living, show forth the praises of God in the world. Let us see how our knowledge of these commandments guides us in indirectly praising God with our lives.

For example, if we fear, love and trust in God above all things, won't that show in our priorities in life? What method will we choose for achieving a promotion? Surely, Joseph's status would have been a bit more secure, may even have improved, if he had been a little less rigid, if he had been willing to lie down on the job. But his priority was God. Remember, he proclaimed it was against God that he would have sinned. How do we plan to attain financial security? Financial security? Solomon had it! Remember how he got it? Not by choosing it first. It was a matter of priorities. He requested wisdom to fulfill his God-given position in the world. His choice resulted in showing forth the praise of God in the world.

Can our priorities concerning our families ever give us occasion to show forth our love for God? Remember Abraham: Can you imagine the thoughts of those who were left at the foot of the mountain when they found out what Abraham was willing to do with his long promised and dearly loved son? Can you imagine the thoughts of the world around us when they find out that we are willing to sacrifice our child's chance for an

athletic scholarship by sending him to a school which doesn't offer such a well-rounded interscholastic sports program, just a well-rounded, Christ-centered education?

In the Second Commandment we are commanded to use God's name in honor and love. As praising priests, can our witness to the world be very effective when it is the witness of silence in the presence of a neighbor who abuses the name of our precious Lord? Have we become so caught up in our day in protecting and respecting the civil rights of others that we are willing even to let our Lord's name be treated so vulgarly? Is a silent witness the best our Old Adam will let us do?

Our regular church attendance, our proper respect for authority, our concern for our neighbor's life, property, and good name are all praise of imitation, indirect praise of God. We could go right down the line citing examples from the commandments showing how we can show forth the praise of God indirectly by imitating Him.

And how often don't we fail! That is where our church becomes our fortress, to which we flee for comfort, strength and safety. How comforting for the sinner-priest to come to God's house; to confess "I a poor miserable sinner confess unto Thee all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended Thee and justly deserved Thy temporal and eternal punishment"; and then to hear our gracious God speak to us through a fellow sinner-priest who is God's called minister: "I announce the grace of God unto all of you, and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins." How strengthened we are, when we have this forgiveness sealed to us with the body and blood of our Savior given to us under the bread and wine of the sacrament.

Now our church becomes also a base of operation from which we again go forth into the world to show forth the praises of our God. If the imitation of God in our life can show forth His praise, then, how much more will not the imitation of God's love for sinners show forth His praise. If God's love in forgiving me means that much to me, and it means everything, then will I not praise Him by telling others of His forgiving love? Will God's love for me, a sinner, not be reflected by me in love for my fellow sinners? God has called me, a miserable, unlovable and unloving sinner to be part of His chosen priesthood. What amazing grace! Can I now selfishly keep the gifts the Holy Ghost has given to me as a chosen priest to and for myself? God says I can't. My faith and love will show itself in the fruits of faith and love (James 2). With all the practical deeds of love that my faith can produce, is not the most obvious one that I tell my fellow sinner of God's forgiving love for him and me? Believers (priests) will confess Christ the Savior to the unbelievers, so that they too may become believers and hence priests.

That is the prime purpose of our being priests in the world. What else can these words mean: "That ye should show forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light"? (1 Peter 2:9) Having been called out of spiritual darkness, sin, and despair into the marvelous light of Christ Jesus, the believer, a priest, will now strive with all of his new might to proclaim God's saving love to those who sit in darkness, that they might come into the same light. All priests have this purpose, "to show forth the praises." We cannot accept the rights and glorious privileges of priests, and then reject the duties of priests.

Still the question remains: How shall the priest show forth the praises of God in this more narrow sense? What shall I proclaim? God is such a vast complex concept. What shall I say about Him to others? Here again, the church becomes our base of operation, a place for training and equipping priests. The church should provide the priests opportunity to "Study to show thyself approved, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed" (2 Tim 2:15). Study the Word. The power of proclamation is in the word of proclamation. Only through the Word, the Gospel, will men be brought to knowledge of and faith in their Savior, and hence be made priests and lively stones in the Church.

When we look at the world, we see the schemes, plans, programs and techniques that the mass media has developed to "sell". It's enough to scare a priest. We don't have to run scared. We aren't selling anything. We're giving something away. We are not selling a prescription or recipe for heaven. We are proclaiming an event—God's saving activity by which He has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. Here again,

the church becomes a base of operation; a place where the priests can be trained, not to sell, but to proclaim the Gospel message of God's Word to people in our own time.

Where shall the priest proclaim? Jesus' command was "to all nations". The individual priest cannot expect to proclaim the praise of God in all the world by Himself. He must begin somewhere. Jesus told the apostles where and how to begin: "Ye shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the world" (Acts 1:8). His way is still the best way. Let each priest begin in Jerusalem, that is where he is at. Just as, later on, "they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:1), so in our day, our members are being scattered abroad perhaps more for economic reasons, rather than as a result of persecution. Nonetheless, let them who are "scattered abroad" go everywhere "preaching the word" and those that are not scattered abroad keep preaching in Jerusalem. The priests who do this, will I think quite naturally also support the priests in other parts of the world, who are "showing forth God's praises" in countries and climates that he cannot personally reach.

Since every believer is, by his very reborn nature, such a missionary priest with the duty to proclaim, there should be a great deal of proclaiming going on. Yet there is not as much as might be expected. What is wrong? Are there a lot of inactive priests, retired priests, priests expecting only to praise God with their lives, and not with their lips? The real problem is, again, that all the priests are sinner-priests; 100% holy priests, 100% sinful men. The new man in every one of us is in a constant daily battle with our old Adam. The new man wants to proclaim God's praise; the old Adam says: "That's what we pay the preacher for! The new man arms himself with the words and promises of God and relies on the Holy Ghost; the old Adam says: "I never know what to say." The new man loves his neighbor and is concerned for his soul; the old Adam says: "What he does is his business." The new man knows Jesus is the only name by which we might be saved; the old Adam says: "He already has his own religion." Excuses for not fulfilling our duties as priests are cheap. The privilege of being a priest is precious. Pray God, we never lose that privilege.

How shall we reverse this tendency to neglect priestly duties? First, let us remember that the old Adam who constantly tries to keep us from our priestly duties can be brought under control. That is the significance of our Baptism for our daily lives as priests, "that the old Adam in us should be drowned and die with all sinful lusts, and that again a new man should daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever" (Luther's Catechism, Baptism IV).

As we daily drown the Old Adam, the new man will seek out ways to sharpen the skills needed for communicating the Gospel. The most logical place to look for this is in the church, because the church is the base of operations, not only the place from which we go forth into the world to show forth His praises, but also the place in which the priests are trained and equipped to be priests, to show forth His praise. The church is the place where the priest can expect to be trained and equipped for that priestly work of showing forth praise that we commonly call evangelism. Are our churches doing that? Or do we find in our churches the tendency of having an inactive flock, with one super-active supersheep instead of a shepherd; instead of an army of priests, a mute congregation and one super-priest trying to perform the duties of all the priests? Do we find evangelism committees equipping all the priests, or being satisfied to equip a small core of priests, and letting the rest remain unequipped, inactive and uninformed priests? Members of the royal priesthood have joined together in congregations for that very purpose, that they might strengthen one another. They have chosen leaders with special qualifications that they might be trained and equipped to proclaim the praise of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. If our congregations fail to equip priests to "show forth His praise" in the world, then our congregations have failed.

If the tasks and duties and responsibilities we have as priests seem great, and they are great; and if we seem weak and inadequate, and we are weak and inadequate, then let us not forget that other privilege of a priest that we have hardly touched on. The priest has the glorious privilege of praying, of speaking to God, not through an intermediary, but directly. Let us all be faithful priests, fervently praying our God that He give us both the will and the means to "show forth His praises in the world", knowing that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us.

